

GĪTĀ SĀDHANA SOPĀNA
Steps to Self-Realization
As Taught in the Bhagavad Gītā

By
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This book is dedicated to
My revered Guru
Śrī Śrī Swamī Satchidānandendra Sarasvati

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PREFACE

The present text is the outcome of some fifty years of Gītā study, contemplation and practice by his H.H. Śrī Swāmī Ātmānandendra Sarasvati. He is the direct disciple of ‘The Sage of Holenarsipur,’ H. H. Śrī Swāmī Satchidānandendra Sarasvati. The Gītā Sādhana Sopāna neither appeals to any particular commentary nor to any other outside authority, but comes to its conclusions merely from a close examination of the verses of the Gītā itself. The text, as its title suggests, consists of an extensive presentation of exactly how a true seeker of Self-Realization is to proceed, wherein the performance of actions (*karmas*), done in a particular fashion, rather than their mere renunciation, are shown to be the means to our final and complete release from saṃsāra.

In Advaita Vedānta, the Bhagavad Gītā has been called Sādhana Prasthāna, the approach to Vedānta where the emphasis is on spiritual practice and this is so because, unlike the other two Prasthānas (the Upaniṣads and the Brahma Sūtras), the Gītā primarily deals with the practical spiritual disciplines necessary to attain Self-Realization. For those aspirants who are not merely interested in studying Advaita Vedānta, learning its concepts and intellectually appreciating its perspectives, but who actually want to make progress on the spiritual path, and therefore, sincerely want to know what exactly are the spiritual disciplines, how they are related to one another and precisely how they are to be practiced and in what order, for this type of seeker this text will

become an invaluable resource. It sheds new light on topics where before there was mostly confusion and contradictory presentations available. The *Gītā Sādhana Sopāna* presents a wonderful display of unique and thought provoking ideas concerning the actual details of the practices and the Final Goal as taught in the *Gītā*. The true meaning of the word Yoga, how the spiritual disciplines telescope one into the other, and what exactly is the real nature of a Wise-Man (*Jñāni*), these and other topics, are all addressed in ways that most readers and even *Gītā* scholars are not likely to be familiar with.

A short word about how this text, the *Gītā Sādhana Sopāna*, has taken its present form may be helpful to the reader. Originally, Śrī Swāmī Ātmānandendra Sarasvati had no intention of writing a book about the spiritual disciplines taught in the *Gītā*. He merely started writing down his ideas and at some point those ideas were typed into a rough manuscript. Over the years He added new ideas and expanded on some topics that He had only briefly touched upon previously by writing in the margins of the text or by inserting many hand written notes into the rough manuscript. There still remained many areas where Śrī Swāmīji felt that additional work was needed, both in elaborating certain difficult parts of the text and also in presenting His ideas in a more flowing and coherent manner. Rather than addressing such issues as trying to clarify the difficult points or attempting to make the text flow in a more orderly manner, the present *Gītā Sādhana Sopāna* is merely the outcome of an attempt to take the original typed manuscript, with all its addendums

and hand written notes, and put it into a form that is as readable, understandable, and informative as possible, within the constraints of and in harmony with the ideas contained in the unfinished original manuscript. Nor have we, the editors, tried to change the style of writing, nor the format of the text which is divided into two parts. Part I first gives a wide ranging overview, and while it may seem that some of the ideas and topics presented are disconnected with the main import of the text, and certain interesting facts seem to be presented out of context while discussing other subject matters, this should not be an obstacle to the reader who is trying to discern the main thrust of thought that is going to be presented in a more rigorous manner in Part II and which deals more specifically with the Steps to Self-Realization.

This situation may challenge the reader more than had Śrī Swāmīji written the text at one time and we could now present it in a totally finished and systematic way. However we are confident that, in spite of these issues, any extra effort required on the part of the reader will be found to be more than worthwhile. It should also be noted that the text is filled with numerous citations from various verses of the Bhagavad Gītā and presupposes the reader's familiarity with the text as a whole and the classical Indian philosophical traditions in general. We recommend for those who are not extremely conversant with these topics that while reading this text a copy of the Gītā with translation be readily available in order to consult the referenced verses.

For those of us who have been earnestly trying to correctly understand the nature of the spiritual disciplines and their result, Vedāntic Knowledge, as envisioned in Advaita Vedānta, Śrī Swāmī Ātmānandendra Sarasvati's Gītā Sādhana Sopāna — Steps to Self-Realization As Taught In The Bhagavad Gītā, presents us with a truly profound and revelatory account in which Vedāntic knowledge is not some sort of subtle intellectualism nor is it to be attained by a special modification of the mind (*akhaṇḍa ākāra vṛtti*) nor by any special trance state (*samādhi*). Vedāntic Knowledge, as explained by Śrī Swāmīji, is something that can be attained only by an unswerving Devotion, *Bhakti*, to the Supreme Being alone. A Bhakti so sublime that, due to the Grace of that Supreme Being, even the idea 'I am a Bhakta' will have merged. We are hopeful that after a careful study of the Gītā Sādhana Sopāna, this text will be appreciated not only as a significant contribution to our understanding of the Bhagavad Gītā, but more importantly, that it will come to be seen as an extremely significant aid and guide for those who are truly pursuing the goal of Self-Realization, as we get to stand on the shoulders of a Spiritual Giant, Śrī Swāmī Ātmānandendra Sarasvati. However, even if this Gītā Sādhana Sopāna were to merely have the effect of stimulating a few of its readers to further their efforts in understanding the true purport of the Bhagavad Gītā, we feel confident that Śrī Swāmīji would also consider that result as quite satisfactory and His efforts not at all in vain.

Part I:

Background and General Considerations

1.1 A common understanding regarding the teaching of the Gītā

The Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, as commonly understood, teaches four separate and distinct paths that all lead to the same goal of Liberation:

- The Path of Knowledge (*Jñāna Yoga*)
- The Path of Meditation (*Dhyāna Yoga*)
- The Path of Devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*)
- The Path of Action (*Karma Yoga*)

In addition, the text is thought to contain a number of subsidiary disciplines, or *Yogas*, such as the process of discrimination (*Buddhi Yoga*) the process of controlling the mind (*Rāja Yoga*) the process of renunciation (*Sannyāsa Yoga*) and the process of repetitive effort (*Abhyāsa Yoga*). On the basis of popular discourses and influenced probably by the colophons appearing at the end of each chapter in many printed versions of the Gītā, some have claimed that each chapter contains one particular type of Yoga. For example, “the Yoga of Arjuna’s Despondency” regarding the first chapter, “*Sāṃkhya Yoga*” in the second chapter, and so on. Some idea or word in the particular chapter seems to be the guide for such nomenclature. A well-known Saint has put forth the opinion that by one or all of these *Yogas* one can attain Liberation and thereby

suggesting that each one of these *Yogas* is an independent and parallel practice for reaching the final goal.

Such a concept seems to derive some support from the text itself. For example, in the Bhagavad Gītā it looks as though Sāṃkhya was taught as being different from *Yoga* (B.G. 2.39) and in the 3rd chapter, the Lord, Sri Krishna, mentions that in the past he has dictated Two Paths: One for the *Sāṃkhyas*, the path of *Jñāna Yoga*; and one for the *Yogis*, the path of karma Yoga. Yet in verse 6.2 we are told that “what is declared as *Sannyāsa*, know that to be Yoga.” In the beginning of the 5th chapter, in answer to Arjuna’s question, the Lord assures him that both *Yoga* and Sāṃkhya lead to the same goal and it is only the ignorant that consider the two to be different (B.G.5.2-5). In the 9th chapter there is the recognition of devotees who worship the Lord by constant singing, etc., and other devotees who meditate on Him with knowledge, perhaps also suggesting independent paths to the goal. Again in the 13th chapter, it is said, “some realize the Self in the Self by the Self by means of contemplation, others by Sāṃkhya, and still others by karma, or even by listening alone to what others have taught them” (B.G. 13.24-25). It is easy to see how these verses seem to suggest that there are many paths taught in the Gītā and that each one, independently, has the capacity to lead us to the final goal of Liberation. We shall try to demonstrate, as the text proceeds, that this is a serious misreading of the Gītā.

1.2 Doubts regarding terms used in the Gītā

In the Bhagavad Gītā verse 5.2 the unity of Sāṃkhya and *Yoga* is insisted upon. Do these terms have the same meaning as the philosophical systems that go by these names? Apart from the possible confusion that might result from a superficial examination of the above mentioned verse, some of the individual words employed in the text itself carry different meanings in different contexts and more than one word seems to have been used to indicate the same thing, thus opening up the possibility for further confusion. Some words like *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Samādhi*, etc., have associations with popular Indian philosophical systems. This has prompted the proponents of these various systems to claim that the particular path referred to in the Bhagavad Gītā by a particular word commonly appearing in that school of thought has in fact been borrowed from that school and used by the author of the Gītā.

For example, the description of the *guṇas* the qualities of nature (*prakṛti*) primordial nature, and its relation to *puruṣa* one's Real Self, as well as the five elements needed for karma, resembles what has been propounded in the Sāṃkhya philosophical system. Similarly, the preparation for contemplation (*dhyāna*) mentioned in the beginning of the 6th chapter of the Gītā resembles the tenets of the Patañjali school of Yoga. And these arguments gets further support from the fact that the name Kapila, who is reputed to be the originator of the Sāṃkhya school, appears in the Gītā as one of the Divine Manifestations of the Supreme Being (B.G. 10.26). Hence, some

scholars have been prompted to claim that the Bhagavad Gītā was originally a small text of the Sāṃkhya school and was enlarged and modified later by the interpolation of the concept of Devotion into the original. Adding to the confusion, some scholars have argued that there is influence from the Bible to be found in the Gītā. Some advocates of this idea have even gone so far as to prepare comprehensive lists of parallel and similar expressions in the Gītā and Christian theology. We even come across speculation that Vyāsa was in fact a Hebrew scholar during the early period of Christianity in Kerala where the religion is said to have arrived in the 1st century A.D. and that he composed the poem in Sanskrit on the model of the Bible for the benefit of the locals. Claims are also not lacking that the Gītā borrowed the concept of Devotion from Buddhism presumably from texts like the Lankāvatāra Sūtra.

With reference to the above surmises a general rebuttal can be made as follows: When one finds parallel concepts found in various scriptural and philosophical texts, no right thinking person need be surprised if similar or even identical views or expressions appear either in those texts or in the common pronouncements of two different Sages, each being completely unfamiliar with and unrelated to the other. Truth is One and reveals itself in its real nature to the wise, though each one of them, after having received their revelation, may differ in the way they narrate it, translating their insights through their own mind and expressing, within the limitations of language, an experience which is beyond all words. Hence, if two

great religious leaders express similar views concerning Reality the question of borrowing or plagiarism need not necessarily be assumed.

1.3 Examination of various views

That the Vedic religion stood in no need to borrow the concept of Devotion has been well established by a number of researchers, therefore, there is no particular purpose to be served here in reviving the topic again. Although the Upaniṣads, with a few exceptions such as the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, do not specifically use the word *Bhakti* (devotion), the concepts of devotion and surrender are clearly seen even in the Ṛg Veda. The interested reader can consult Prof. Hiriyanṇa's discussion of Bhakti in the Vedas is his work Outlines of Indian Philosophy (1932). Since the Gītā follows the Vedic tradition closely, anyone who is approaching the teaching of the Gītā without any preconceived ideas need not be concerned that the Divine Teacher of this sacred song nor its author, traditionally taken as Vyāsa, had to borrow ideas from either the Sāṃkhya school, the Yoga school, Christianity, or any of the Buddhist schools. Especially because the Sāṃkhya system was somewhat antagonistic to the Vedic tradition and Buddhism is absolutely opposed to the Vedas.

When examining the Sāṃkhya system it should be seen in the first instance that nobody is certain which particular text of the Sāṃkhya school constitutes the original source text for the system. Doubts have been expressed that the set of aphorisms commonly ascribed

to the sage Kapila may have been the composition of Vijñāna Bhikṣu. From a verse in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata, it looks as though long before Kapila, the original system was there and he, considered as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, only revived it. And even though the commentary entitled, Yukti Dipika, mentions the names of a number of thinkers of the Sāṃkhya school, some of whom also get mentioned in texts like the Mahābhārata, the ancient texts of these authors are now all lost to us. In addition, among the extant texts available to us, controversy exists as to which of the two, the Sāṃkhya Kārikas of Īśvarakṛṣṇa or the Aphorisms of Kapila, is the earlier one. Some doubts even exist as to whether or not the name Kapila referred to a female scholar, the mother of Āsurī, as one of the well-known thinkers of the school.

As to the observation that both of these texts, the Sāṃkhya Kārikas and the Aphorisms of Kapila, have been influenced by Vedānta, there seems to be little doubt. From the description of the Sāṃkhya school appearing in various places in the Mahābhārata, the influence of Monistic Vedānta gets further support. Various other texts, such as the Caraka Samhitā, the Śuśruta Samhitā, and some Smṛtis and Purāṇas like Bhāgavata, have taken notice of the teachings of the Sāṃkhya school and have also mentioned a number of *Sāṃkhya* teachers. Chinese sources report that there were 18 Sāṃkhya schools ('Early Sāṃkhya', quoted on page 1353 of Vol. 2 of History of Dharma Śāstra). On a careful examination of the vast literature that is still available to us, it may be extremely difficult to assert whether the Sāṃkhya school was

originally a materialistic philosophy (*Pradhāna Vāda*), denying God and religion or to view it as system more similar to Vedānta. At this point it becomes anyone's guess whether the Sāṃkhya, in its original form, contained Vedānta concepts into which a materialistic philosophy was incorporated or whether the school was an atheistic system into which Vedāntic concepts were interpolated later. While many such theories get started on certain weak assumptions, they are, at least up till now, not based on any firm indubitable evidence. Even conceding that the Sāṃkhya school can lay claim to antiquity why it should necessarily be presumed to have preceded the Bhagavad Gītā is any one's guess in as much as the Gītā's exact dating is still being disputed among scholars.

The difficulty in understanding the correct nature of some of these ancient systems can be illustrated from an examination of the word *anvīkṣi*:

Anvīkṣi (investigation, penetration) — one of the earliest terms used in Indian literature to designate the concept of philosophy.

The ancient laws of India have included this among the subjects for study and practice by the rulers and the expression is understood to include *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, and *Lokāyata* philosophies as mentioned in Kautilya's Artha Śāstra, wherein he eulogies it as "...most beneficial to the world. It keeps the mind steady and firm in weal and woe alike and bestows excellence of foresight, speech, and action. It is light to all kinds of knowledge, receptacle of all virtues" (Kautilya's Artha Śāstra, Translation by

Dr. R. Śāmaśāstry). While some commentators have interpreted the term as referring to logic, others have described it as referring to the knowledge of the Inner Self, *Adhyātma Vidyā*. And still others have explained it as the logic that leads to the knowledge of the Self. Taking the term as referring to the *Lokāyata* Philosophy would imply atheism or materialism and because of its being grouped with the other two schools of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, one can surmise that even the Yoga school, in its ancient form, may have been also atheistic.

On the same ground, it is doubtful whether the extant Yoga Sūtras attributed to Patañjali, constitute the original source material for the Yoga philosophy. For example, in some early texts we come across a system of Yoga with only six limbs. For these philosophical systems to get established and accepted in their final forms, it is reasonable to expect that many previous efforts laid the foundation and the accepted present version is more or less a codified whole of the earlier fragments. For instance, the extant Vedānta Sūtras are reported to have been preceded by a few earlier attempts. We see mention being made of two Brahma Sūtras, that perhaps were earlier to the Vedānta Sūtras as we know it today in the celebrated commentaries by Bhagavān Śāṅkarācārya. This fact becomes reinforced by an examination of Śāṅkarācārya's commentaries on verse 13.4 of the Gītā and on Gaṇḍapāda Karika 2.32.

Turning our attention to Buddhism, it should be noted that there still exists controversy regarding precisely what it was that Gautama Buddha actually taught. In a

commentary on the text “Sarva Darśana Saṅgraha,” it is stated that “Vātsyāyana taught this *vidyā*, which is *Nyāya Vidyā* based on perception, Scriptures, and inference” What is now being accepted in the name of that religion and as the Buddha’s Philosophy is a version, developed by way of various logical systems and *yogic* practices put forth by much later advocates of Buddhism. The first literary work, now available, appeared after a considerable lapse of time after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha. In what is considered as the core teaching of the Buddha, the main insistence seems to be on social ethics, concerning the mechanics of and the relief from suffering (*duḥkha*). This gives rise to the doubt as to whether this was all that he taught to his disciples or was there something more. And this doubt can be extended to the revelation concerning God and other spiritual matters, these issues being lost in the course of time, ignored or merely dismissed as being too metaphysical in nature, before they were actually recorded. Whatever the case may be some evidence has been adduced to show the similarity between Sāṃkhya and Buddhism and that both of them could have had a common source in the Upaniṣads. H.P. Śāstri has even suggested the possible origin for Buddhism in Sāṃkhya philosophy, based on some evidence that two teachers of Gautama Buddha, Arāda Kalana and Uddaka Rāmaputta, were strong votaries of Sāṃkhya philosophy. This theory may have been based on a description of a discussion, found in the “Buddha Carita” of Asvagoṣa, between the Buddha and Arāda, whose views seem to resemble the tenets found in Sāṃkhya. It should also be

kept in mind that the historicity of Aśvaghoṣa is also not beyond question.

Regardless of what final conclusions are made regarding Buddhism, the claim that atheistic Buddhism could have been the source of Devotion for the Vedic religion can be held in abeyance for the time being as a mere flight of imagination. On the contrary, basing his statement on Taranath's account of Buddhism in Tibet, Dr. Kern has this to say: "He (Nāgārjuna) was a pupil of the Brāhmaṇa Rāhulabhadra, who himself was a Mahāyānist. This Brāhmaṇa was much indebted to the sage Kṛṣṇa and still more to Gaṇeśa. This quasi-historical notice, reduced to its less allegorical expression, means that Mahāyānism is much indebted to the Bhagavad Gītā and more even to Śaivism" (Manual of Indian Buddhism pg. 122). In the text *Doctrines of Maitreya Nātha*, Prof. G. Tucci has stated the following: "It (the Mahāyāna Sūtras prior to Nāgārjuna) is an enormous literature which shows how characteristic Hindu ideas were creeping into Buddhism!". Again, "External, Brahminical, influence in the rise of Mahāyāna has been surmised by some scholars, e.g. Kern, Max Muller, Keith, Stcherbatsky and others." (Prof. T.V.R. Murthy, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, pg. 81). Gautama Buddha himself, according to Buddhist sources, was not the first Buddha nor were anti-Vedic concepts propounded by him for the first time.

1.4 Gītā and other systems

One notices that in the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, as well as in the great epic, the Mahābhārata, we find certain concepts, which are also seen in Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā philosophies. An extraordinary feature of the Gītā is to accept in general these concepts, to enlarge upon their scope so as to be in harmony with the Vedāntic tradition, providing a place for them where they fit in, and transcending them when their purpose has been served. For example, the concepts contained in the Mīmāṃsā philosophy get noticed in the Gītā most evidently in its relation to Vedic karma. The Gītā, along with the Mīmāṃsakas, accepts the need for the performance of the Obligatory Duties, while summarily rejecting the Sāṃkhya point of view that all Vedic karma must be given up as it involves injury to and the killing of animals. The Mīmāṃsakas base their insistence on the performance of karma, on *Dharma* (righteous action), and in matters concerning what constitutes Dharma and Adharma (unrighteous action), the scriptures alone are to be taken as authority. Naturally, sacrifices, charity, and austerities, the first in particular, get special stress in the Mīmāṃsā school. The Vedas, just like it is for the Mīmāṃsakas, are the foundation for Vedānta also and it is therefore not surprising that Vedic karmas, in the form of sacrifice, charity, and austerity receives special importance in the Gītā (B.G.18.5). While in verses such as 3.10 and 3.13–15, the word *Yajña*, sacrifice, seems to lean toward the Mīmāṃsā view, at other places, the word sacrifice, *yajña*, gets a much larger scope, (B.G. 3.9) in which

the word *yajña* signifies the Supreme Reality ('*Yajña* is indeed *Viṣṇu*', *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 1.7.4) and all actions should be done for the sake of that. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* 3.8, the need for the inescapable performance of *karma* as part of ones daily obligatory duties is evident. But in other places the concept of *karma* receives attention in relation to some other practice where the inadequacy of *karma* has been made clear, however efficacious it was stated to be in other places notwithstanding (*B.G.* 7.28, 11.49, 4.20–23).

The need to desist from desire prompted *karma*, *kāmya* *karma*, is common to both the *Gītā* and the *Mīmāṃsā* school. One branch of *Mīmāṃsā* does not accept at all the type of Liberation envisaged in *Vedānta*. The other branch asserts that the mere performance of "daily duties" or "incidental obligatory duties" (*nitya* and *naimittika* *karmas*), in order to escape from the penalty that accrues from their non-performance, will lead to Liberation after death. This they claim is due to the fact that the performance of these "obligatory duties" will act as penances, expiation, and atonement for all past sins. Though in verse 7.28 (*B.G.*) there seems to be an echo of this sentiment, actually this verse does not assure us that our present good deeds have the capacity to wash away the effects of all of the evil deeds performed in uncountable past lives. Although the *Gītā* rejects both these branches of *Mīmāṃsā*, the need for the performance of "obligatory duties," in a sense of surrender to the Lord is accepted as a means for the purification of the mind but not beyond that (*B.G.* 2.42, 9.21, 10.10, 18.6, 23, 27, 28).

The Sāṃkhya view is that the knowledge of the Manifest, the *Vyakta*, the Un-manifest, the *Avyakta*, and the Knower of these, the *Jñātā*, will cause Liberation. The Sāṃkhya philosophy bases itself on the premise that the universe is real as it is perceivable by the senses. Next, and this is a core concept of the school, as its name itself indicates, is the concept of *Pradhāna* or the “Un-manifest nature” which is said to be consisting of the three qualities, the three *Guṇas*, in a state of equilibrium and which exists independently, is eternal and is that which modifies itself into the visible universe. The Gītā is in agreement with this school to the extent that it accepts, merely for the purpose of teaching, the Un-manifest nature consisting of the three *Guṇas*, and it is from this Un-manifest nature that the visible universe emerges (B.G.7.13, 8.18). But in the Gītā, unlike Sāṃkhya philosophy, *prakṛti* is taken to be *Māyā*, illusion, and does not exist independent of the Lord under whose Oversight it has to create (B.G. 8.20, 9.10, 15.11). The Lord is beyond both the Manifest Universe and the Un-manifest nature. Nature (*prakṛti*) being inert and unconscious cannot become the cause of the Manifest Universe. It is only when it is in the presence of the Eternally Conscious Lord that the universe can manifest. Both the Manifest and the Un-manifest are classified in the Gītā as the Lower *Prakṛti*, consisting of the five elements, the mind, the intellect and the ego (B.G. 7.4) and the Individual Being, responsible for the life-functions, the *Jīva*, is referred to as the Higher *Prakṛti* (B.G. 7.5). Through these two grades of nature, *prakṛti*, the Lord is said to be the Cause of the

universe (B.G. 7.6). According to the Gītā, all the objects in the universe, both Manifest and Un-manifest, are to be included in what is denoted by the term Field, *Kṣetra* (B.G.13.1), and this includes everything that is different from the Knower of the Field, *Kṣetrajña* (B.G.13.5–6). As per the teaching of the Gītā, it is the seeming association of the Field and the Field Knower, which conjures up the entire creation (B.G. 13.26). Nature (*prakṛti*) consisting of the three guṇas, is the sole agent responsible for all actions and the Puruṣa, the Knower of the Field, is said to be the “enjoyer” of the results of those actions because of its apparent association with the three guṇas (B.G. 13.26). All the while the Puruṣa, in his real nature, remains as the Changeless Witness of all the activities of the three guṇas (B.G.13.29–33). Even though the Puruṣa is not the agent of any activity (B.G.18.16), He seems to be so as a result of ignorance by which He is seemingly associated with the body, etc., which are merely the effects of nature, *prakṛti*, made up of the three guṇas.

Unlike the Sāṃkhya school, the Gītā teaches that because the Lord resides equally in every being, as their very Self, He is Imperishable even though all the beings made of nature, the three guṇas, must perish (B.G.13.27). The Lord has to be separated from nature, which is a product of ignorance, through the correct and complete knowledge of the Field and the Field Knower (B.G. 13.28). In short, even though Gītā accommodates Sāṃkhya to the extent of accepting its views on the guṇas and the need for discrimination between the Puruṣa and *prakṛti*, it rejects completely the Sāṃkhya concept

of an independently existing nature, prakṛti, which transforms itself into the universe in spite of remaining eternal. Sāṃkhya also rejects the need for performing any enjoined Vedic karmas while the Gītā insists they are essential for purification of the mind and that abandoning them should be considered to be the outcome of *tamas*, darkness, and ignorance (B.G. 18.7). While the Gītā recognizes an Ultimate Puruṣa (B.G.15.17–18) and the goal as envisioned in the Gītā is attaining the Transcendental Reality called *Brahman*, the Sāṃkhya ideal includes no such Ultimate Puruṣa and envisions only a state of *Kaivalya* in which an Individual Puruṣa, who is thought to be one among many other Puruṣas, gets detached from a real prakṛti.

Nor should the Gītā teaching be seen as an unqualified acceptance of the Yoga philosophy. In line with the Sāṃkhya philosophy, the dualistic Yoga school also believes that all the ills of Saṃsāra arise as a result of the combination of a real prakṛti and an Individual Puruṣa. The special features of the Yoga philosophy is their acceptance of a Separate God, Īśvara, and the teaching of the Eight-Limbed Practice which culminates in the ultimate state and goal of the whole practice, Samādhi, which is a particular type of Yogic trance. It is in this state, the Yogi's claim, that the individual Puruṣa remains detached from prakṛti, as a result of the complete cessation of all mental modifications. While in the Gītā, the external practices like the place and posture for meditation are seen to be made use of, particularly in the beginning of chapter 6, the process of getting liberated

through the suppression of mental modifications is conspicuous by its absence. On the contrary, the decision of the Gītā is that a permanent suppression of the mental modifications is impossible of achievement (B.G. 3.33). If you go into it you will have to come out of it. As long as the mind remains as such, filled with countless latent tendencies, *vāsanās*, its control is said to be next to impossible (B.G. 6.34–35). As long as one has desires for achieving and enjoying the results of his actions (*karmas*) purity and one-pointedness of the mind cannot be achieved (B.G. 2.44–53). True stability can arise only when the mind finally merges in the Self and it is only then that the knowledge arises that the Self is the only Reality and that the whole universe is illusory, so that all desires disappear completely and permanently. It is at this stage that all the limiting adjuncts of the body, senses, mind, ego, etc., would have been dissolved in Self alone (B.G. 6.18). It is in this state that we are told that all unhappiness disappears (B.G. 6.27). It is through this Vedāntic realization that the Self of all of us is in fact the Lord Himself that one finally reaches the Eternal Incomparable Bliss (B.G. 4.28–29) This state cannot be attained by merely suppressing the mental modifications as taught in the Yoga philosophy. While in the Yoga school, the mind can be fixed on a variety of objects, the Gītā wants us to leave aside even the deities and says that the best of the Yogis is the one who meditates exclusively on *Vāsudeva*, The Light That Pervades All as the Self of every being (B.G. 6.47). From the above we can see that to view the Gītā as merely teaching a

bit of Sāṃkhya philosophy in one place, a bit of Yoga philosophy in another place, and also containing a sprinkling of Vedāntic concepts here and there would result in a complete distortion and misreading of the text.

The great thinker Lokamānya Tilak has already provided us with a detailed discussion on the relationship between the Gītā and the Bhāgavata Mata. The philosophy of the Bhāgavatas refers to an ancient religious school based on certain Pañca Rātra texts and should not be confused with the famous and much later text called the Bhāgavata Puraṇa. However, one important point of divergence between the Gītā and the Bhāgavata doctrine needs to be pointed out. It was the belief of the Bhāgavatas that the individual has actually come out of the Lord and that by continuous meditation on and service to Him, throughout ones life, one can, through His grace, reach Him after death. While the Gītā does accept constant remembrance and working for the Lord (B.G. 8.7, 9.22), so that the ultimate thought at the time of leaving the body is of Him, it should be understood that such an instruction is only from the perspective of a specific meditative process, *upāsanā*. In so far as the Gītā is concerned, Liberation can happen only by the attainment of the Lord (B.G. 8.16) and this type of Liberation is possible even while still in the body without the need to wait for death. Since the experience of such a realized being is that the Self alone is existing and the body, etc., never existed, for Him there is no such state as death or Liberation after death.

1.5 Conclusion regarding the other systems of philosophy

From the short discussion above it should be clear that the mere resemblance of words in the Gītā with terms found in other systems of Indian philosophical thought need not delude anyone into thinking that the former had to borrow ideas from any one of them. The ancient origin of the Gītā and its being an integral part of Bhārata, the nucleus on which the great epic, the Mahābhārata, in its extant form grew, has been established beyond any doubt by scholars like Lokamānya Tilak, Telāng, and Vaidya. So, it may not be stretching one's imagination too far to claim that certain technical words and ideas originally appeared in the Gītā, in the same context in which they are seen now, and the respective formulators of the various Indian philosophical systems, *Darśanas*, picked these technical terms and expressions from the Gītā and used them to form the nuclei from which they developed their own systems in detail. They were able to make use of the similarity of expressions and terms so as to derive authority from the already extant and famous text.

Secondly, merely on the basis of similarity of words hasty conclusions should not be drawn if the truth of the matter is to be determined correctly. Even if it is conceded that everyone starts with his own preconceived ideas and reads those ideas into the text, it is not unreasonable to demand that such a bias does not blatantly transgress the scope or the obvious intent of the text itself. However, even great authorities are found to force their own meanings into the text, and at the same time

accuse others of the same fault. For instance, the main objection of Tilak against the traditional commentators, including Bhagavān Śaṅkarācārya, is twisting the text to suit their own purposes. But he has not hesitated to do the same for the word Yoga were he takes it to mean karma Yoga exclusively, even in contexts where such an understanding would be patently wrong. An example of this twisting may be seen in his explanation of verse 6.3 (B.G.) where the word Yoga, in the phrase, ‘For he who has ascended to Yoga, renunciation of all karma is said to be the means’, obviously cannot be referring to karma Yoga. Similarly, the champions of Patañjali Yoga hold that Yoga in the Gītā refers to their system and chapter 6 of the text is a source of special support for them. Even Hatha Yoga has not failed to claim this chapter for itself. Nearly half of the text “Jñāneśvari” is an elaboration of chapter 6 of the Bhagavad Gītā and mostly in the light of Hatha Yoga. A complete understanding of the Gītā will leave no doubt as to where the correct import of this chapter lies and also that the divergence in interpretations and claims, contradicting the spirit of the Gītā, have crept in primarily because of a piece-meal examination of the text as opposed to taking the text as a whole.

1.6 Only one Yoga taught in the Gītā

There should not be much divergence of opinion with regard to two aspects of the Gītā. First, the word, Yoga, is used in the Gītā in a secondary sense when it appears in reference to some practice, and when that practice helps the practitioner to unite himself with the

Lord. For example, it is possible to meditate on anything, but the word *Dhyāna*, meditation, to entitle itself to be called Dhyāna Yoga, will have to be meditation on the Lord and this meditation has to be a means to reach Him. Secondly, in its primary sense, the term Yoga as contained in the Gītā refers to something singular as indicated by the Lord in verses 4.1, 4.22, 4.42, and 18.75. The debate, in that case, should only be as to what exactly is the nature of that “One Yoga” and not about how many there are. To settle this issue, many people have talked of the importance of the Six Cardinal Principles, as elaborated by the Mīmāṃsaka philosophers, for the interpretation of a particular text. It is felt that the Mīmāṃsīc criterion known as ‘frequency’, *abhyāsa*, as applied to the appearance of certain words in the Gītā, has not received the importance that it deserves. Many writers are content in merely applying the single test of examining the “commencement-and-conclusion” of the text so as to determine its final purport.

Let us take the word Yoga. Here we should not complicate our understanding by taking all the meanings of the word, as given in lexicons, like Amarakoṣa (3.3.22) or even in the Great Epic, the Mahābhārata itself, which uses the word Yoga to even have the meaning of Astrology, etc., The words Yoga, Yogam, and Yogi, not considering such cognate expressions as Yukta, appear in 41 places in the Gītā, of which 21 references are found in chapter 6 alone. If one were to include the word Yoga in association with all other words the total would be 107. This suggests that according to the Mīmāṃsā criterion

known as frequency the 6th chapter should hold the key for the correct understanding of the word Yoga. This idea is confirmed when Arjuna wails, “Oh Madhusūdana, in this Yoga, which you have narrated to be obtained through equanimity, I do not find certitude, the mind being fickle” (B.G. 6.33).

When the word Yoga is used in conjunction with some other word, the frequency is as follows:

Sāṃkhya Yoga	once (B.G. 5.4)
Jñāna Yoga	twice (B.G. 3.3, 16.1)
Dhyāna Yoga	once (B.G. 6.5)
Karma Yoga	five times (B.G. 3.3, 3.7, 5.2 twice, 13.25)
Bhakti Yoga	once (B.G. 14.26)
Buddhi Yoga	three times (B.G. 2.49, 10.10, 18.57)
Buddhi Yukta	twice (B.G. 2.50, 2.51)
Sannyāsa Yoga	once (B.G. 9.28)
Brahma Yoga	once (B.G. 5.21)
Ātma Yoga	once (B.G. 11.47)
Ananya Yoga	once (B.G. 13.10)
Abhyāsa Yoga	once (B.G. 8.8)
Avikampa Yoga	once (B.G. 10.7)

Considering the frequent appearance of the word Yoga in association with a qualifier, as contrasted with the bare word, it is proper to conclude that the principle practice for the attainment of God is denoted by the bare, unaccompanied word, Yoga. While the other expressions, where another word is conjoined with the word Yoga, that also is called Yoga in a secondary sense because they are all complementary to the real Yoga at their proper level of practice.

The 4th chapter opens with the tradition of Yoga to show that the teaching is ancient and that what was now being narrated to Arjuna was not being narrated for the first time. Its first verse (B.G. 4.1) and also the last verse (B.G. 4.42), contains the word Yoga in the singular, as having been narrated to the Sun from whom the teaching has come down to the Royal Seers. By qualifying the word Yoga with the word this, *imam*, in the first two verses of the chapter the implication is that the teaching in the form of Yoga must be contained in the immediately preceding chapters. It should be noted that in spite of the expression “*Rāja Yoga*” being used by some commentators to describe the “Yoga of the Gītā,” specifically that which is taught in the 6th chapter, the phrase “*Rāja Yoga*” is conspicuous by its absence in the text itself, although the expressions *Rāja Vidyā*, Royal Knowledge, and *Rāja Guhyam*, Royal Secret, do appear in chapter 9.

In verse 4 of chapter 3 (B.G), it is said that *naiṣkarmya*, the stage of non-action, cannot be attained merely by not commencing work nor can *siddhi*, perfection of the stage of non-action, be achieved by merely renouncing karma. But on the contrary, in verse 49 of chapter 18, the Lord assures us that *naiṣkarmya siddhi* will be attained by *sannyāsa* alone. The two assertions can be reconciled only if we accept that renunciation of all karma is possible of achievement only under a certain set of special conditions. Not commencing work is passivity, which is definitely not *Sannyāsa* and is said to result in *tamas*, sloth. The Lord says, “Let there be no attachment

in you for inaction” (B.G. 2.47). It is also said that merely giving up work would be a lapse of ones duty. Both are therefore said to be impediments for the attainment of knowledge. It is clear that the word Sannyāsa in these two verses, namely Bhagavad Gītā 3.4 and 18.49, should be associated with a certain set of specific conditions so that it leads to naiṣkarmya siddhi, the perfection of the stage of non-action. Verse 41 of chapter 4 requires that all karma must be deposited, renounced, *sannyasta*, in the Lord through Yoga by linking all karmas to Him at all stages. The conditions that make karma a means towards the attainment of naiṣkarmya (the sannyāsa or renouncing of karma) are detachment toward everything that is not-Self, control over the senses and the mind, and a complete absence of all selfish aims.

The attainment of naiṣkarmya, non-action, has been divided into two parts (B.G. 6.3):

- 1 - The desire to achieve it.
- 2 - Its perfection. (for which the means are different).

That this is not an easy process becomes obvious from the declaration of the Lord that only “One among thousands even tries for perfection, *siddhi*, and even among those rare ones who have attained perfection, *siddhi*, only a few come to know the Lord as He truly is” (B.G. 7.3).

The Accomplished One is called an Ārūḍha in verse 6.3 (B.G.), and attaining this stage is not just the giving up of activities, karmas, since passivity

stands condemned in the Gītā. That is why there is an insistence on the importance of knowing exactly what it is that “constitutes action, what constitutes inaction, and what are the prohibited actions” (B.G. 4.17). As can be understood from verses 45 and 46, supported by verses 49 and 40, of chapter 18, the word non-action should be understood to mean performing actions in such a way that they become equivalent to non-action. This is to be achieved by performing all actions with absolutely no attachment and as worship of the Lord from whom all inspiration for action arises in every being and by whom everything is pervaded (B.G. 18.46). Such a person who can perform karma with this dexterity is extolled as one who is accomplished in Yoga (B.G. 2.50, 4.18). This is the one who is called Wise amongst men and the one who has accomplished all his duties, even while he may be seemingly engaged in a minimum of activities.

From verse 4 of chapter 6 (B.G.), it is seen that the description of an Ārūḍha, one who is accomplished in Yoga, is exactly the same as the description as that of the one who has attained naiṣkarmya, meaning a lack of any attachment to the senses or with any activity and complete abandonment of all volitions. This indicates that the one who has attained naiṣkarmya referred to in verse 18.49 (B.G.), is the same as the one who is said to be “Accomplished in Yoga” mentioned in verses 6.3–4 (B.G.). Hence, the word Yoga in the Gītā is to be understood as naiṣkarmya, actionlessness, the attitude of the dexterous performance of action giving up all attachment to activities at every stage, from the volition,

the very thought to perform the action, right up to the enjoyment of the fruit of that action. Another conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the *Yoga Ārūḍha*, is the one who has Ascended to Yoga, and it refers to the same person who has accomplished *naiṣkarmya*, and who is also called a *Jñāna Niṣṭha*, one who is Established in Knowledge. He is the one who is entitled to know the Truth because its culmination, described in verse 18.50 (B.G.) as *Parā Jñāna Niṣṭhā*, the Supreme Culmination of Establishment in Knowledge, is the final attainment of Brahman.

In this context of having knowledge alone as the only goal, it should be mentioned that according to the *Gītā*, the only cause of being deluded is the shrouding of ones own awareness of the true nature of the Self because of Ignorance. This Ignorance, along with its effect, the unquenchable desires situated in our senses, mind, and intellect is completely annihilated by its opposite, Knowledge. It is this Knowledge that illumines the Supreme Reality, like the bright sunshine that has removed all darkness (B.G. 5.16). From the above cited verses it is clear that it is the vision of the aspirant that is clouded over and not Reality itself. Some people have argued that this shrouding is actually the shrouding of Reality itself and not our own vision. They quote phrases from the *Gītā* like “Enveloped by Yoga Māyā,” etc., as their proof. But such a reading will invalidate the clear statements of the *Gītā* that what is in fact shrouded is ones own knowledge. If Reality were to be in fact shrouded, assurances, such as knowledge has the capacity to destroy

ignorance and to illumine Reality, will stand contradicted, in that knowledge cannot actually create or remove anything, including a shrouding over Reality. When we are told that desires are born out of this ignorance what is implied is that this ignorance must be situated in us, and that is where the shrouding is taking place. Hence, to arrive at the correct understanding of verse 7.25 (B.G.), containing the phrase, covered by *Yogamāyā*, we have to read the second quarter of the first line of the verse with the second half of the verse. The verse would then read as follows: “The ignorant (*mūḍhaḥ*) people (*lokaḥ*) covered by *Yogamāyā*, do not know Me as Indestructible and Unborn.” This would be in line with the earlier verse 7.13 (B.G.) where the delusion of the whole world by which people do not know the Indestructible, is attributed to the *Guṇas* and in the next verse itself, this is made clear by the statement, “This Divine *Māyā* of the nature of *Guṇas* is hard to cross over.” It is only with this understanding that the shrouding of Ignorance is in fact in me, and not in the Lord, that an aspirant will make efforts to get rid it. This also leaves no doubt that the removal of ignorance, which resides within us, will have to be removed dependent on our own efforts. All hope of salvation will be obliterated if we understand that Reality itself is actually being shrouded or covered over. In discussing the definition of Yoga, we can also examine verses 2.28–48, 6.20 (B.G.), as well as 6.14–18 (B.G.), where *karmaphala tyāga*, the abandonment of the fruit of action, is considered as Yoga in a secondary sense because this practice leads to the real Yoga in its primary sense.

To sum up, karmas cannot be given up, for that will merely lead to Tamas. Karma must be performed but its performance should become an aid to Liberation and not an obstacle that strengthens our bondage even further. That dexterous way of engaging oneself in karma and still not being conscious of performing it is called *naiṣkarmya* and the perfection of this state is called from different angles of vision *naiṣkarmya siddhi*, the perfection of actionlessness, *Jñāna Niṣṭhā*, establishment in Knowledge, or *Parābhakti*, Supreme Devotion. This is the state, which is the precursor to the attainment of the Knowledge of Brahman and final release from saṃsāra.

“Thus, maintaining oneself always in Yoga only, the Yogi freed from all defects, easily obtains the Highest, Incomparable Happiness known as contact with Brahman” (B.G. 6.28).

If on the other hand, the word Yoga is taken as merely indicating karma Yoga several contradictions arise. One seeming contradiction would be that while sannyāsa, renunciation, is said to be not merely giving up the Ritual Fire (B.G. 6.1), if the Yogi and the Sannyāsi should be treated as the same, as verse 2 of chapter 6 asks us to do, then a Sannyāsi also cannot give up the Ritual Fire. This would go against the Vedic scriptural teaching acknowledging the stage of sannyāsa as free from any duty to perform the Fire Ritual, and the Gītā is said to be the very quintessence of the Vedas. Similarly, in verse 6.3 (B.G.) the one who wants to attain to Yoga is said to be a *Muni*, a person for whom contemplation has become

a habit, thereby indicating that it is the mental attitude, which is the essential requirement for Yoga. Otherwise, Arjuna's anguish expressed in Bhagavad Gītā 6.33–34, becomes incomprehensible. His understanding of Yoga is that it equates to equanimity of the mind, in which sense alone the penultimate verse in chapter 6, in which a Yogis superiority is assured over those engaged in karma, becomes meaningful (B.G. 6.46). Besides, Arjuna has given his assurance that by the Lord's teaching his delusion, *moha*, has been removed (B.G. 11.1, 18.73).

To say that karma is an essential part of Yoga and then to declare that Yoga is superior to karma would be meaningless. This distinction between karma Yoga and Yoga is essential to understand Arjuna's question, as well as the Lord's answer at the beginning of chapter 5. Arjuna's question is about the choice between karma and renunciation (*sannyāsa*), both of which he says the Lord is praising. The Lord, in His reply, assured Arjuna that both karma Yoga and *sannyāsa* lead to the final Liberation and later the Lord enlarged the meaning of the words to mean Yoga and Sāṃkhya. In chapter 3, The Lord has mentioned that Sāṃkhya is for Jñānis. In the Bhagavad Gītā 2.39, He mentioned that the portion taught earlier was Sāṃkhya, by which expression, He was obviously referring to the knowledge of the Self and the discrimination between the Self and not-Self, delineated from verse 2.11 (B.G.) onward. This points to the fact that in the Lord's view, *sannyāsa*, renunciation, means Sāṃkhya (Knowledge of the Self), Jñāna Niṣṭhā (Establishment in Knowledge of the Self), or

naiṣkarmya siddhi (the perfection of actionlessness), the preparation for which is Yoga, since the Lord has said that there is nothing comparable in purity to knowledge, which is the *Yoga Saṃsiddhi*, the Culmination of Yoga (B.G. 4.38). That is why sannyāsa is well nigh impossible to one who is not a Yogi, while Bhagavān assures us that a *muni* accomplished in Yoga quickly attains Brahman (B.G. 5.6).

In verse 18.50 (B.G.) it is explained that it is only after attaining siddhi (which has been referred to as naiṣkarmya siddhi in the previous verse) that one can reach Brahman. The word sannyāsa found in verse 5.6 (B.G.) must also be equated with naiṣkarmya siddhi. The key word to be taken note of in this context is the word *muni*, the one to whom contemplation has become his second nature. The Lord says, “Establishing yourself in Yoga and giving up attachment, perform karma, oh Dhanañjaya, viewing both siddhi and otherwise equally, since equanimity is Yoga” (B.G. 2.48). If Yoga were to be understood as merely karma Yoga this special mention to perform karma with the qualification Yoga (both these being essential parts of karma Yoga) would be redundant. The pointer here is that Yoga with karma Yoga will lead to siddhi. In short, Sāṃkhya, the knowledge of the Self, should be reached by Yoga coupled with karma, while Sāṃkhya is sannyāsa since the identification with karma has ceased.

While discussing the six valid means to decide the import of this text, as adopted by the Purva Mīmāṃsakas it was seen that the chief import of the teaching of the

Gītā is the removal of grief, through the removal of delusion, *moha*. The Lord describes Yoga in exactly this way when He says that we should know Yoga to be the complete detachment from association with grief, *duḥkha samyoga viyoga*, indicating that the Yoga discussed in chapter 6 is the means for the attainment of the final goal taught in the Gītā (B.G. 6.23).

1.7 Necessity of discrimination (buddhi) and devotion (bhakti) in the perfection of Yoga (Yoga siddhi)

Another factor for consideration is that for reaching the culmination of the siddhi of Yoga, the association of buddhi is most essential. There should be no conflict in understanding the term buddhi as the discriminating intellect, the association with which is assured to cut the bondage of karma (B.G. 2.39), and karma, not coupled with buddhi is said to be inferior (B.G. 2.49). A correct appreciation of verse 2.49 (B.G.) is profitable in this connection. Every man acts guided by his innate nature, which he has inherited from his past actions. Thus, all actions proceed without any pre-thinking. Therefore, it would seem correct to assume that actions normally are carried on without first hankering for the results. On the contrary, when the karma is undertaken, if we are anticipating the fruit thereof, not only will such an attitude destroy the value of the karma, but, we can say that the person loses his human nature, being overcome with greed. What this means is that the performance of the action itself should be sufficient satisfaction, but if

in addition to that one would hanker after the result the person would be demanding a second payment for the act. This is the greed that is being referred to. Those who engage themselves in karma with an eye on the results are said to be the wretched ones (B.G. 2.49). Arjuna has earlier told the Lord that he has lost his nature because of this defect of wretchedness (*kārpaṇya doṣa*) (B.G. 2.7). Hence, the Lord's injunction to him is that he should have recourse to buddhi, discriminative wisdom. On the contrary, when karma is undertaken with the mind glued to the results, one can never hope to reach samādhi, the inward turning of the mind toward Ātman, as opposed to the normally extroverted and externally oriented mind (B.G. 2.44, 18.57).

However, this term buddhi should not be confused with a mere mental exercise, which, anybody endowed with a certain amount of intellectual acuteness can do and would require no special stress from the Lord on the need for specific qualifications. This buddhi, the discriminative faculty of the mind, is normally shrouded because of our preoccupation with ourselves and with the world outside. Instead, if the efforts are directed toward the Lord, He unmasks or releases this capacity of intuitive discrimination (B.G. 10.10). Unless this grace of the Lord descends on us, the capacity to discriminate between the good and the evil, right and wrong, the Eternal and the transient, the Real and the illusory, and ultimately Self and the not-Self, will not be in our grasp. This type of buddhi can be kindled only by the performance of karma in the splendid attitude of worshiping the Lord, when the

attachment to the karma and its results all drop away. When karma is undertaken in this exalted fashion, karmas both bad as well as good, cease to be a cause of bondage. This dexterity in karma is called Yoga (B.G. 2.50).

The second aspect, which has been ignored by many and decried by a few, is the place of devotion in the acquisition of Buddhi Yoga. As promised, in 10.10 (B.G.), those persons who are continuously in Yoga and who serve the Lord with love, entitle themselves for being endowed with this type of Buddhi. Without complete devotion, undistracted even to the extent of allowing the mind to wander to the day-to-day needs of life, (in as much as the Lord had already assured Arjuna that he Himself would provide all that was needed) (B.G. 9.22), and hoping to equip one's self with Buddhi Yoga is like the desire of a lame person desiring to leap across the ocean. The essence of 'Buddhi Yoga' is continuous discrimination between the Self and the not-Self. Unless the utterly illusory nature of samsāra and the authority of the Lord are realized, running after sense objects and pleasures will not cease and the not-Self will never be gotten rid of. Every person's mind is always oriented naturally toward the small 'I', which involves everything other than the real 'I'. Therefore, for the mind to rest on the real 'I', everything that is really not the 'I', but which is normally accepted as the real 'I', must be ruthlessly rejected. This can happen only when the dream nature of these elements constituting the 'non-I' is realized as such, thus weaning the mind away from them and allowing the mind to rest in God with devotion. This devotion coupled

with discriminative introspection, will serve as a direct aid in knowing God as He is, which will, with no time lag, unite the person to Him eternally (B.G. 10.7, 18.55). This is confirmed also in the last verse of chapter 6, where the best among Yogis is declared to be the one who serves the Lord with faith.

1.8 Conclusion regarding Yoga

We hope that the above discussion makes it clear that the word Yoga, when used without any qualifying prefix, refers to naiṣkarmya, actionlessness, except where the context evidently demands a different meaning. Two points have been declared as being pivotal for the attainment of Actionlessness'. The first is that passivity will not lead to actionlessness, naiṣkarmya, the obvious reason being that passivity, being the cause of *tamas*, will take the person away from knowledge. Nor can one reach the culmination of naiṣkarmya by merely dropping karmas before reaching the stage when their performance becomes immaterial and inconsequential. Hence, contrary to the apparent literal meaning, the real import of naiṣkarmya or sannyāsa, renunciation, is the performance of karma with absolutely no attachment, so that even while the karma is in progress, no feeling of agency for it arises in the person. Both non-commencement of karma, as well as the giving up of karma, constitute confused and deceitful conduct, since not a minute passes without a person having to perform the bodily functions, and worse still, even when the functional senses are quiet, the mind may be furiously active (B.G. 3.5–6). So,

continued action alone (*nirantara karma*), in conjunction with discrimination, *buddhi*, can lead to the state of non-action, *naiṣkarmya*, as opposed to merely withdrawing from action.

The second point is to understand the necessity of devotion to the Lord at all stages of the activity, starting from the volition to do an action right up to the point of enjoying the fruit of that action. A complete detachment is imperative and this becomes possible only when the karma is performed as worship to the Lord. This shows that performing karma not anticipating the result, which is known as *niškāma karma* (not desiring the fruit of the karma) is not the same as *naiṣkarmya* (actionlessness) though for various reasons some later commentators have tried to establish such an identity. By not desiring the fruit of the karma one is prevented from losing one's nature as a human being and becoming what the Lord calls *kārpaṇyam*, wretched, but the result of the actions will still have to be gone through whether they are performed with a desire for the fruit or not. In contrast to performing action without a desire for the fruit, *naiṣkarmya karma* takes away even the result of the action because now the sense of agency has left and therefore even the idea of taking rebirth for the enjoyment of that karma is out of the question.

The insistence is therefore on the absence in the mind of any identification with the action or the fruit of it, rather than the mere physical renunciation of action (B.G. 5.13, 6.4–24). It should be clear that the emphasis is

on the freedom from the involvement of the mind, while the functional senses continue to act. The withdrawal of the senses from activity while the mind continues to be active is declared to be hypocrisy (B.G. 3.6). As long as the sense objects are present, the senses are bound to run after them, dragging the mind outward (B.G. 2.60).

So, it is by means of the mind alone, that either the senses have to be delinked from the mind, so that the channels feeding it will be dried up as the objects withdraw (B.G. 2.59), or the senses themselves are to be kept under control (B.G. 2.61, 3.7). The former is attempted by the discrimination that a particular *guṇa*, quality, in the sense organ seeks its counterpart in the object, which is natural for it. That being so, there is no need for us to get involved in the process at all (B.G. 2.64, 5.9, 5.27, 6.2). The latter is accomplished by the control of or detaching the senses from their objects (B.G. 3.7).

There is little doubt that no one is free from the drive to seek happiness, though, individually each may differ about the connotation of and the expectation from the word 'happiness'. Nobody need deny that an ordinary person, seeking happiness in sense objects, does in fact enjoy himself when the object sought is secured. But a little reflection by a discriminating person, will show that it is not in the nature of these objects to provide lasting happiness, since that type of happiness is neither uniform at all times to the same person nor universal to all persons to the same extent. Effort is needed to acquire that type of

happiness and what is secured will have to be protected because the fear of losing it will be constantly eating into the mind. When that happiness is lost or exhausted the resulting unhappiness becomes obvious. So, while sense objects may appear to produce happiness, in reality that type of happiness is no happiness at all. In fact, the happiness derived from sense-objects is declared in the Gītā to be the very “Womb of Unhappiness” (B.G. 5.22).

The control of mind is therefore essential for one pursuing Yoga because as long as the mind is being dragged outward in a thousand directions by desires, equanimity is impossible. Without equipoise Yoga is unattainable. One can thus understand the anguish of Arjuna, when he admits to the Lord, that he sees no way of maintaining stability in Yoga that has been taught in the form of equanimity (B.G. 6.33). Hence, the only way to attain Yoga is to take the mind away from worldly desires and to immerse it in and pickle it with devotion to the Lord.

In the 9th chapter, there is the mention of ‘Great Souls’ (*Mahātmās*), who knowing the Indestructible God, the ‘Cause of All Beings’, worship with one pointedness, they constantly sing about Him, submit to Him with unswerving devotion, and are constantly united with Him through Yoga. The Lord declares “some worship Him through Jñāna Yajña, The Sacrifice of Knowledge as the One Brahman. Others adopting some single substitute for Him do their worship and still others worship Him in manifold ways” (B.G. 9.14–15). In some places there

is a clear injunction to perform karma (B.G. 3.19–20), while in other places the karmas are decried as not helpful for attaining Samādhi, Equanimity of Mind (B.G. 2.42–44, 9.20–21). In some places attaining *Brahma Loka*, The World of the Creator, is praised while in other places, knowing God is said to be the cause of the final freedom from birth thus rejecting any other higher achievement, like attaining Brahma Loka, etc., (8.15–16). And again in some other places there is an indication that God alone can put one across the ocean of Saṃsāra (B.G. 10.2, 12.6–7, 18.66). At some places the text seems to indicate that Liberation can result while living and in other places it seems to indicate that it results after casting off the body.

With regard to the above seeming contradictions it should be noted that all of our previous actions, their fruits in the form of the present body, etc., referred to as *prārabdha karma*, agency, as well as the experience of the fruits of actions, are all things that one is aware of and therefore cannot be one's true nature. This conclusion rests on the experiential fact that the subject of experience cannot be the object of that experience. Those who have associated themselves with nature, *prakṛti*, the ignorant people, identify the so-called Wise-Man with the collection of the body, mind, etc., with which he has attained his Wisdom. While before this state, even the Wise-Man was aware of the collection of the body, senses, mind, ego, etc., but after the dawn of Wisdom, he is no longer even aware of them. Since there is only One Self, there is nothing other than Him to be aware of, nobody remains

as perceiver nor are there any instruments of knowledge with which he could be aware of some thing. Just as a person is aware of his waking body and its life functions that are going on before going to sleep, he is not aware of the body or its functions during his sleep even though they continue from the point of view of those still awake. This is the true meaning of naiṣkarmya, the true meaning of the one Yoga taught in the Gītā.

1.9 Examination of karma Yoga

The identification of the word Yoga with actionlessness, naiṣkarmya, may incite the ire of the champions of karma Yoga. In modern times, it is difficult to think of an equal to Lokamānya Tilak among the votaries of this view that Yoga only refers to karma Yoga, understood as desire-less action. He was a towering genius and his unmatched, all-round scholarship, could readily produce plenty of scriptural authority to back up his arguments. Therefore, in places where we reject his views, we do so do so without forfeiting our intense and great respect for him. He also has admitted that he was seeing more clearly than the earlier commentators, over whose shoulders he was standing. It is therefore with all humility that we are stating that his arguments appear to us to suffer from a primary defect; his inability to appreciate correctly the meaning of the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘renunciation,’ as taught in the Gītā. This fact becomes all the more obvious by observing his relentless preoccupation with attacking the idea of renunciation and even the concept of devotion.

Therefore, it may be worthwhile at this point to briefly examine the correct import of the term karma Yoga, as taught in the Gītā, although a more detailed discussion will follow as the text progresses. For understanding the relation of karma Yoga to Yoga, as discussed above, we do not have to strain ourselves to seek any other authority, in as much as the Gītā itself provides the answer. The Lord has dismissed a person as a hypocrite who has renounced actions externally but is still wrapped up in them mentally. As opposed to this, the Lord instructs us that whoever, controlling the senses through the mind so that the mind does not become subservient to their propensities, performs karma Yoga is eminent, he excels. In this context, the particular elements that stand out clearly can be stated as follows: First: all the senses should be brought completely under control and the desire to seek happiness in the sense objects must cease. Secondly: the mind should be completely detached from the functions of the senses, which continue to engage themselves in actions (B.G. 5.7–9). And finally, we must develop a total lack of attachment to the action at all of its stages (B.G.3.7). It should be noticed that the stress here is on Yoga, the karma being performed in such a way that it becomes an aid for uniting the practitioner with the Lord and not for taking the person away from Him.

What, therefore, is opposed to karma Yoga is not *karma sannyāsa*, the abandonment of actions, as both will lead to the same goal, as the Lord has assured Arjuna. This would be a contradictory instruction if they were

in fact opposed to each other. The Lord states that the opinion that they are opposed to each other is the opinion of ignorant people. But passivity, as we have been told, is the gateway to and the hallmark of *tamas*, ignorance and laziness, and such passivity is opposed to *karma Sannyāsa*, as well as *karma Yoga*.

All this discussion concerning the correct way to perform action, needless to say, belongs to the category of all those still in the grip of ignorance. It has to be made abundantly clear that the *Jñāni*, the Wise-Man, has no *karmas* at all, even while it is the body, etc., which are seen by the others still in ignorance, that continues to act. And, the body, senses, and mind that is attributed to the *Jñāni* continues to perform all *karmas* in an ideal fashion and as example for others, in that his previous efforts to purify himself have now become an irresistible effortless habit. Not only does this way of understanding the true nature of a Wise-Man not go against Lord's teachings, it, in fact, supports it and harmonizes the text in a way that other perspectives do not. While before the advent of knowledge, the *Jñāni* was aware that he was in the body and that he was instrumental in performing *karmas*, all the while making an effort to perform them without any attachment. After Knowledge (*Jñāna*) the detachment is complete and effortless. In the same fashion as the life-functions, such as breathing and circulating the blood, can continue during the state of deep sleep and the sleeping person is totally unaware of them, the obligatory duties are being done in a perfect fashion, without desire or hatred (*rāga*, *dveṣa*), by the collection of the body senses,

etc., in accordance with scriptural injunctions, while the Wise-Man himself is completely unaware of them.

Much has been made of the objection that if a Jñāni has no karma or obligatory duties to perform, instead of becoming a model for others to follow, he will set a bad example for people and inspire them to also give up their duties. This would be against the very injunction of the Lord contained in the 3rd chapter where he tells us that actions must be performed. The fact that the Wise Man has undergone the abandonment of all actions (*sarva karma sannyāsa*) would go against the scriptural injunction, as long as living he should do the *agni hotra* (fire sacrifice). As long as a person is entitled for karma and is able to perform it, he cannot give up the obligatory duties. If physical disability prevents him from engaging himself in these duties it is permissible that he casts them away. This is the only condition under which suicide would be seen as acceptable and in accordance with scriptural teaching. Since he has lost all obligations regarding *dharma* and *adharmā*, he would not be abiding by the requirements, such as maintaining the sacrificial fire, wearing a sacred tuft of hair, and wearing the sacred thread. In short, if you say a Jñāni is above all scriptural rules then if he behaves at all, he would behave like a mad man, ignoring all scriptural and societal rules or he may just remain inactive like a stone. Obviously, this cannot be a description of a Wise Man, a Jñāni.

In contradistinction, a person is extolled as a Sannyāsi and a Yogi, who performs karma as a duty, not depending

on its fruits, but definitely not one who has merely cast off karma either as a result of laziness or for fear of bodily exertion (B.G. 18.8). Nor does he become a Yogi merely by giving up duties and remaining inactive (B.G. 6.1). This type of casting off of karma will not lead to actionlessness, *naiṣkarmya*, nor will merely abandoning karma lead to *siddhi*, the perfection of Yoga (B.G. 3.4). Hence, the objection is against inaction or failure in duty, which is either *tāmasic* or *rājasic*, which will in no way contribute to Yoga, or *jñāna* (knowledge) (B.G. 18.7–8). This is opposed to the *sāttvic* renunciation of actions, wherein the action is performed but with no attachment. So, what is opposed is not karma Yoga and karma *sannyāsa* but rather karma Yoga and *tāmasic* or *rājasic* renunciation of actions.

This raises the question as to what really constitutes renunciation (*sannyāsa*) and knowledge (*jñāna*). To understand these terms properly, an examination becomes essential as to how karma (actions), scriptural or worldly, comes into effect. The Lord leaves no one in doubt regarding the complete absence of agency for any action in Self. The Lord says, “Whoever sees the Self as the doer, is a person whose mind is warped because of not having performed good deeds” (B.G. 18.16). He also says, “He alone sees, who sees on all sides, action solely performed by nature and sees also the Self as a non-performer” (B.G. 13.29). Similarly, he states “Whoever considers himself as an agent of karma is also deluded by the ego-sense, since it is only the three *guṇas* (the qualities of nature), in the form of the sense organs that

function in the corresponding Guṇas outside, in the form of the objects” (B.G. 3.27–29, 4.13). As a result, it is only when a person, not knowing his real nature, falsely identifies himself with the guṇas or prakṛti that he appears as an agent. This also includes the false identification with all the limiting adjuncts of the body, senses, mind, intellect, and ego, which are merely the products of previous actions. When falsely identifying with these, we seemingly take upon ourselves the burden of action, which actually is existing in nature, prakṛti, alone. Since such a confusion between what one’s nature really is and what one has accepted oneself to be can arise only due to a lack of discriminative correct knowledge of one’s own Self or true nature, it stands to reason that the correct knowledge actually means being in one’s own Self, bereft of knower, knowing, known, and not literally knowing something. Because no action is possible except when in association with nature, prakṛti, without falsely identifying with prakṛti, the Self (Ātman) cannot act and cannot know anything and will merely remain, as he is, the Non-Dual Reality. This is the ideal sannyāsa taught by the Gītā and that state has been described as the Ultimate Good (*niḥśreyasa*) (B.G. 5.2). This state, it is necessary to remember, is not the sannyāsa adopted at the last stage of life nor does it refer to the stage of life resorted to by those disinterested in worldly life, refusing to get into the trammels of the house-holder’s duties. Since this type of formal sannyāsa, renunciation, aims at achieving the ultimate sannyāsa, it is described as *vividiśā sannyāsa*, adopting the life of a formal renunciate

with the desire to attain knowledge. This understanding that the Wise-Man is the one who does nothing, sees nothing, and knows nothing and that anyone who does something, sees something, or knows something is not a Wise-Man may seem quite foreign to most students of the Gītā and will require some reflection and further clarification so as to fully appreciate this rather unique and profound perspective.

A cursory understanding of such an ideal state, in which all duality has ceased, may give the impression that a Wise-Man remains like a stone, or that he even ceases to exist, since nature, prakṛti, being absent, its effects, like the body, senses, mind, intellect, ego, etc., will also have to disappear and the bodily functions cannot go on. A corollary of this will be that there can be no Jñāni alive and so no one will be left to teach the knowledge of Ātman. It is obvious that this conclusion will contradict verse 34 of chapter 4 (B.G.), in which the Lord has assured us that the knowers of Ātman, as He really is, will teach a sincere seeker. Obviously this doubt and all of its offshoots can arise only when there is an intermixing of the Self and nature. All transactions, including teaching and learning, lie in the field of prakṛti, of which only a person who lacks the knowledge of Ātman can be aware, thus leading to a mutual mixing-up of one with the other.

The aggregate or collection of body, senses, etc., which are the effects of prakṛti, has been created as a result of the karmas of previous births and since, with

this present birth, those results have already begun to function they must play out. These activities that are now going on in our present birth are termed our '*prārabdha*' *karma*, meaning well-begun (already come about) and there is absolutely no way that we can change it. It cannot be prevented and can only waste itself through its enjoyment, as the arrow already shot has to die only after hitting the target. But the awareness of the *prārabdha*, or any conceptual knowledge for that matter, can be only in ignorant persons who are associated with *prakṛti*. It is also only the ignorant people who can identify the Jñāni with the collection of body, senses, etc., in which he attained Knowledge, while the Jñāni himself is aware of neither the body, etc., nor the act of seeing it nor its absence.

An illustration based on a common fact of daily experience will help bring out this subtle point more clearly. A waking person is aware of the body, etc., of someone who is in deep sleep and he identifies the life functions, which are going on in the body with the Self of the sleeping person. The actual experience of the sleeping person is that he is aware of neither his body nor that of the one seeing his body. While the onlookers in the waking state may impute the functions of the body to the person sleeping but for the sleeper himself he is blissfully unaware of the fact that those functions are even in progress. Similarly, when the ideal Sannyāsi is referred to from the point of view of Knowledge, just like the experience of the sleeping person in the illustration, in that experience of Ātman when all external awareness

is absolutely absent, including the awareness that he is not aware of anything, then he is merely remaining in his true nature. How can any transaction be possible in that state? On the contrary, the body, etc., which the Jñāni was associated with before attaining knowledge (jñāna), will continue to exist and function as long as its prārabdha lasts and which are seen by the ignorant and whom they identify as the Jñāni, the Wise-Man.

For the attainment of Knowledge, Jñāna, the aspirant would be continuously performing his duties, according to scriptural injunctions, in the correct manner and without any attachment in order to get mental purification and since such an attitude at some point had become an effortless habit with him, so that after jñāna the body, etc., will function naturally and ideally by the force of that acquired habit. In other words, what practices that were being done before with some effort are now going on effortlessly. In fact, more than a habit, which can at some point be given up, this type of effortlessness is without choice in that it has become his very nature. A beautiful consequence of this is that the aggregate of body, etc., with which the Jñāni is associated by the ignorant will behave in an ideal manner, free from all attachment and misconduct, thus providing a perfect model for the rest of the people, a state referred to in the Gītā as *lokasaṃgraha*, benefiting the world (B.G. 3.20–21).

Lokasaṃgraha, benefiting the world, is not an effort on the part of the Jñāni to make the world better or looking out for the world's good. It is just that his example itself is

what is known as the benefit to the world, lokasaṃgraha. It is in this context that the example of Janaka and others has been cited in the Gītā. Even this statement, it must be noted, is from the point of view of the ignorant, since there is no such thing as a righteous or wrong attitude for the Jñāni, who, being established in Ātman, is free from all duality and the pairs of opposites. The aggregate of body, etc., continues to do the correct karmas with the correct attitude because of the past habits, while the Jñāni himself is unaware that the karma is going on. He has no awareness or concern that his actions are helping others or that he is a model to be followed so that others may stay on the right path (B.G. 5.8–9). Regarding the scriptural evidence for this idea regarding the Wise Man we may briefly cite two verses for reflection from the Upaniṣads. ‘But when to Him all has become the Self alone, what will he see and with what, what will he hear and with what and what will he know and with what’, which clearly shows the wise Man does not know anything including karmas. And ‘The knower of Brahman is Brahman alone’, which clearly states that the Wise Man is the non-dual Brahman in which there are no distinctions such the knower, the knowing or the known. As this teaching is not easily grasped, we repeat, the real Wise Man, the Jñāni, is not conscious of the aggregate (*saṅghāta*) of the body, mind, or ego at all. Even though the body and senses are seeing differentiated objects of differing guṇas, to the Jñāni there is only the Universal Self, Ātman, and in spite of all the forms that the body and the senses perceive the Jñāni remains as the Unblemished

Brahman (B.G. 5.18.19). The Lord says, “All his karmas have been burnt by the fire of Knowledge” (B.G. 4.19). Thus, for the Jñāni the natural tendency for actions to sprout into fruits has been destroyed. In this light, the statement of the Supreme Wise-Man, the Lord Himself, becomes clear when he says that in spite of having created the social order based on birth and work, He should not be considered as its creator (B.G. 4.13). That task has been accomplished by an assumed body, while He remains in his Pristine Purity of Oneness, neither the creator nor the experiencer. The beauty of this viewpoint is that whoever makes an effort to perform karma in this way, just as the Lord does, that karma (action) becomes no-karma (no action) and will not become a cause for rebirth (B.G. 4.9).

1.10 The import of the Gītā

It is to attain this stage whereby karma becomes no-karma, that the Lord’s teachings are primarily directed. This attainment of the state of actionlessness in fact may be said to be the main import of the Gītā. There has been much discussion among students of the Gītā as to what exactly is its real import. Efforts have been primarily directed toward the principle called ‘commencement-and-conclusion’ included among the six cardinal principles of the Mīmāṃsā school used to determine the true import of a text. Some have advocated that the commencement should be placed at verse 1 of chapter 1 of the Gītā, since the whole teaching was caused by Arjuna’s despondency. They also say the conclusion of the teaching should be at

verse 73 of chapter 18 (B.G.), a verse that is neither the end of the text nor the teaching. Such a closure would seem to suit their theory, as Arjuna assures the Lord: “My illusion is gone, memory returned and I shall do as you direct” (B.G. 18.73), which shows that as a result of the teaching Arjuna wanted to act and not run away from action. Act he did but Arjuna could not have ignored the Lord’s warning in verse 18.63 (B.G.), where He asked him to do what he desired. Besides, the Lord has disowned all responsibility for actions, the agency for the action, as well as the relation between action and its result in verse 4.14 (B.G.). As the perfect Jñāni, why should the Lord embroil Himself in anybody else’s actions?

Above all Krishna, *Paramātmā* (the Supreme Self), has not merely asked Arjuna to fight but has requested him to do some other things as well, such as not being attached to the fruit of that activity or to the activity itself. In verses 2.18, 3.30, and 11.34 (B.G.), Krishna has asked Arjuna to fight, and in verses 2.31-36 (B.G.), He has elaborated on the consequences arising out of not fighting. In the first place we should note that it was not by the instigation of Paramātmā Krishna that Arjuna came to the battlefield. Having appeared in the front of the battlefield and then moving away from it would be most un-warrior-like, especially for a warrior of the stature of Arjuna. Secondly, fighting, at the outset represents all the sañcita karmas (accumulated actions) that were now accruing for Arjuna over which he had no control at all. Finally and most importantly, Paramātmā has asked Arjuna to do Yoga (B.G. 2.35–50, 11.10–12).

And one should not forget that the whole direction to fight is not literally against the opposing camp but to fight the annoying enemy, desire, within one's own self. That is the real fight (B.G. 3.43).

We have the important Mīmāṃsā verse which runs as follows:—

“Upakramopasamhārau abhyaso–apūrvatā phalam
Arthavādopattiśca liṅgam tātparya nirṇaye”

Which means that in determining the exact purport of a text the six indicators are:

1. Its commencement and its conclusion
2. The repetition of ideas
3. Something novel, not previously known
4. A benefit
5. The praise of that
6. Reasoning to support that idea

(This Mīmāṃsā Sūtra refers to the six principles used in that school of philosophy to determine the true and ultimate purport of a text.)

The argument above has assumed that the Lord wanted to turn Arjuna's mind toward action, which before the Lord's teaching was leaning toward sannyāsa. But this is not acceptable. There is no evidence in the Gītā for any such assumption. When Arjuna bemoans that it would be better to “eat what has been begged” (B.G. 2.5), the type of sannyāsa he has in mind is more an escape than a mode of living, albeit born of his incapability to see his

own dharma, as he himself admits. But there is a stronger argument against what has been stated above, that the purport of the Gītā is to engage in action. Even though the cause for the teaching was Arjuna's despondency, this introduction to the text was essential to link it with the rest of the great epic, the Māhābhārata, of which the Gītā is an integral part. Otherwise, if the teaching had started without this link it would be impossible to read the text as being related to the main book. Arjuna's despondency arose out of illusion (*moha*) and the teaching concerns itself with the clearing of this illusion and not describing Arjuna's state of mind or his justification for it. Therefore, if we confine our attention to the actual teaching, which is the subject of the text, then there should be no dispute that the commencement is with verse 2.11 (B.G.) and the conclusion of the teaching is at verse 18.66 (B.G.). Earlier than 2.11(B.G.), there is a description of Arjuna's state of mind and after verse 18.66 (B.G.), the portion deals with the qualifications for a person to be fit to receive the teaching. Taking these two verses as the starting point and conclusion for determining the import of the text as criteria provides a beauty to the understanding of the text itself. Verse 18.66 (B.G.) carries an assurance from the Lord, that by surrendering to Him through the abandonment of all not-Self, including the ego, all his sins will be removed. That the final import of the Gītā rests in knowledge alone has been mentioned previously in verses 4.37–38 (B.G.) and specifically in 4.36, where it is assured that by the raft of Knowledge alone, even the worst sinner will cross the ocean of saṃsāra.

We have seen earlier that all empirical transactions, which we may equate to sins in the form of dharma and adharma (righteousness and un-righteousness) for both are seen as sins for someone seeking liberation and this is because they both arise out of the mutual superimposition between the Self and the not-Self, which is called moha, misconception or confusion. In the last verse spoken by the Lord, 18.72 (B.G.), He enquires whether Arjuna has listened to the teaching completely with concentration and whether his ignorance and illusions have been cleared. Arjuna confirms that his moha, confusion, has been removed and memory returned. It is for this reason that we can confidently conclude that the complete teaching of the Gītā must be contained within verses 2.11 to 18.66 (B.G.).

It has been claimed by some that verse 18.66 (B.G.) is oriented towards devotion, bhakti, and does not fit into a presentation in which knowledge is taken as the Gītā's final purport. One cannot help remarking that this view arises out of a wrong appreciation of the true nature of knowledge and devotion as taught in the Gītā, the latter being seen as an essential prerequisite for the former. This aspect will receive further elaboration later on in the text. But one glaring misconception concerning the concept of devotion will need to be clarified in order to understand the following discussions. To treat verse 18.66 (B.G.) as if it were referring to bhakti is to divorce it completely from what the Lord intended and to misconstrue the very concept of bhakti itself. The verse, unequivocally, insists on getting rid of all dharmas, making no exception for

devotion (bhakti), which is no doubt a dharma also. As long as the ego functions, the identification with what is not 'I' will persist, including the primary identification with the ego itself, in which state alone one can feel 'I surrender'. It should not be too difficult to see that the feeling 'I surrender' is also a dharma. The maturity of the feeling of surrender depends on how subtle the object is with which the person has identification. Whatever that association is, however subtle it may be, it still remains as not-Self, a dharma. It entails the feeling of 'I' and implies not resting with the real One but with the many, depending on a particular association with the body, senses, mind, etc., that one has identified oneself with for the time being.

Hence, the first and main requirement for being able to surrender, so that it includes all dharmas, is to eliminate the ego. Since in that state alone, no feeling of agency for any karma can exist nor is there anyone to enjoy the result of any karma and in which state one can finally be freed from all sins, freed from dharma and adharma, either their undertaking or their enjoyment. It is to indicate this state, that the Lord has begun his teaching and it is this state with which his teaching ends. A state in which no life can exist and from which no life can come forth. Moha is the acceptance of the existence of and identification with any of the *upādhis*, limiting adjuncts, and is not a product of them. With the removal of such identification moha disappears, and taking with it it's effect sorrow, hence the Lord's advice in verse 18.66 "do not grieve (*mā śucaḥ*)" (B.G.), is in perfect harmony

with the beginning of the teaching contained in verse 2.11, “You should not grieve” (B.G.)

Unless such a state is one’s own nature it is going to be lost in the course of time, like any other acquired or superimposed condition. But, if that state is our own ever-attained nature, why are we all ignorant of it and why are we only aware of the world? If that state is complete happiness then why are we, without exception, finding sorrow? The answer is a lack of discrimination on our part between the Real and the unreal, the Self and the non-Self, resulting in our being ignorant of the Real and accepting the unreal as the Real. It follows that the goal for all those caught up in this confusion should be to know and directly experience the Real in us, which is our eternal nature and to discard the unreal, which is part of the nature that is outside of us, but in a state of indiscrimination we have accepted as really existing in us. To facilitate the correct understanding the Lord has commenced the teaching with the exposition of the true nature of the Self (B.G. 2.11–25), the Reality that alone exists and which forms the substratum for all superimpositions, which is said to be the cause of the appearance of many-ness.

Then the discussion turns toward the nature of the unreal: the body, senses, mind, and ego. When the unreal upādhis (limiting adjuncts) such as the body, senses, or mind seemingly exist, then identification with any of them, which are in fact, not-Self, not ‘I,’ will mean the assumption of the nature of that upādhi by one’s

Self, thereby inviting sorrow when sorrow in fact is completely absent. The feeling of grief for anything else must necessarily involve one's identification with the Upādhi, the limiting adjunct, in the form of *prāṇa*, the life force. Hence, the Lord declares that the knowers of the Self (*Puṇḍitāḥ*) do not worry about anything in which the life, *prāṇa*, subsists and from which life has ebbed out. This indicates that the cause of grief is nothing but the identification with the upādhis, the limiting adjuncts. The limiting adjuncts, being objects themselves, are in fact not endowed with any reality and are therefore not objects worthy of our grief, while the Self, being of the very nature of bliss, certainly is not a subject worthy for anyone's grief. Hence, when the cause of grief, the limiting adjuncts, and our identification with them, which itself is moha, confusion, is completely annihilated, then one is freed from Saṃsāra. This is precisely what the Lord intended to convey with his instruction beginning in 2.11 (B.G.). When we understand verse 2.11 in this way alone it will then be seen to be in perfect harmony with import of verse 18.66, the final conclusion of the teaching.

Even if an aspirant doesn't attain the experience of actionlessness, a Yogi is said to have transcended karmas and the results of Vedic injunctions. Here, by the word karmas scriptural activities are being indicated as mentioned in 2.42–43, 2.46 and other places such as 9th chapter (B.G.). Since the seeker's aim is to cultivate the mind and since such karmas as taught in the Vedic scriptural injunctions, what is to be done and not done,

are a hindrance in that process, it is therefore obvious that even from the beginning such karmas must be curbed. When the seeker gets more involved in wanting to know the nature of the Lord in relation to himself, he neither has the mind nor the time to seek the promised pleasurable results of Vedic karmas. Here, that *Jijñāsu*, the one who intensely desires to know the nature of the Lord, goes above scriptural karmas.

Again, we are told that among men one rare person seeks to reach siddhi (the desire to attain perfection). Among thousands of such rare seekers, an especially rare one, whose effort is steadfast, and who through accumulated effort has purified himself of the entire wail, woe, and dross in his mind, he reaches this siddhi, perfection. This is what qualifies him to realize the Lord as He is (B.G. 7.3). It is such a person who is fit to get the knowledge and that is indicated by the term *Arthārthi*, the ‘One whose sole object is the Truth alone’, in verse 7.16 (B.G.).

In Bhagavad Gītā verse 6.29, and elaborated in other verses of the chapter, it was revealed that by Dhyāna Yoga one can achieve a state of knowledge whereby it is seen that the Self is in every being and every being is in Self. Of all the Yogis who are struggling to get this knowledge, the one who deposits his mind in the Lord and is devoted to the Lord is considered the best (B.G. 6.47), thereby indicating that without devotion it is not possible to achieve perfection, siddhi, in Yoga or jñāna, knowledge. So, the way to know the Lord, without any

doubts, is to perform Yoga with the mind completely linked to the Lord. In addition, the scriptural knowledge that one may have of the Self should transmute itself into its direct intuition. In the 7th chapter, by delineating the higher and lower prakṛtis, natures, through which the Lord was shown as the ultimate cause for the creation and dissolution of the whole universe, it becomes obvious that the universe must be *Bhagavan-maya* (made up of the Lord). Here the word *maya* means ‘being full of’ or ‘not separate from Him.’ But to reach this stage of identifying the universe with the Lord, the mind must be weaned out of its craving to see each thing as an individualized being different from the Lord. The first step in such a practice should therefore be to see an element of the Lord in each being and see that all beings would cease to exist except on the authority and presence of the Lord. To facilitate this, the *Vibhūtis*, the Glories of the Lord, have been elaborately described in the Gītā and will be later discussed under the topic of *upāsanās*, meditations.

The type of discrimination used in verses 2.30 and 2.13 of the Gītā illustrate the approach to be used by an *Arthārthi*, the one solely devoted to the truth. In the first verse, 2.30 (B.G.), the indestructible nature of Ātman is shown and the ever-perishing nature of everything that is not the Self. The Lord concludes that the all-pervading consciousness in all things does not perish even though the non-Self is continuously changing and thus perishing. The other verse, 2.13 (B.G.), brings the exercise nearer to home. All of us are aware of how our bodies change continuously. The hapless mass that is born as a baby

grows into a child, becomes a youth, and then grows old. In all these states, each body was entirely different from the preceding or succeeding one, the previous one getting destroyed, or to put in it into popular parlance, dying. All of us feel and function as if the child was the one who became the youth, who is the same who has now grown old, and who will someday die. Hence, whatever the popular conception of death is, it is only another change in a series of continuous changes. So, the real discrimination is to eliminate the changing element, whose nature belongs to prakṛti and is outside of us, and to arrive ultimately at the unchanging One, as it is, that which permeates all of these, and who continuously witnesses its changes. The illusion of the continuity of the changing body arises chiefly because of the identification of the body with the unchanging 'I'. The nature of Ātman, the True Self, who has remained unchanged throughout, has been mixed with the not-Self (i.e., the changing body, etc.) and this produces the illusion of continuity in a thing that has been continuously changing.

This type of discrimination, this practice, goes by name of Concomitance-Exclusion (*anvaya-vyatireka*). Roughly, this practice enables us to isolate the changing elements during the changes from the unchangeable True Self, which endures throughout the changes.

This exercise will have to be done in two stages. The highest stage can be undertaken only by those who have gone through the earlier stage and they are entitled to be placed at the final phase of practice. These highest

practitioners are only engaged in establishing themselves in the unchanging Consciousness. If, as a result of past impressions (*saṃskāras*), some thought regarding the not-Self arises, their habit will be to dismiss it straight away. This is the highest stage referred to as Sāṃkhya or Yukta (a real Yogi). This is explained in both verses 6.25–26.

The preliminary stage, which in itself is not easy to practice, is meant for those aspirants who have not yet reached the highest stage and are not yet capable of practice as described above. These practitioners should first identify themselves with the gross adjuncts, that is, they should begin with their identification with the gross body and then very attentively and by discrimination supported by steadfastness, overcome this identification in order to graduate to the next and subtler changing element, i.e., the senses. Similarly, when by discrimination, the senses can also be dismissed; the identification is then shifted to the mind, the intellect, and then the ego to arrive at the same stage that the practitioners of the highest order have already reached. This preliminary stage of practice is clearly described in verses 3.42–43 (B.G.) and this same method is described in the Kāṭha Upaniṣad, where it states:

“The discriminating aspirant should merge speech and other organs in the mind, and that mind in the intellect. This intellect should be dissolved in the individual Self, and that again into the Peaceful Self (Śānta-Ātman) the real Ātman, free from all specific features.” (Ka.1.3.13)

1.11 Re-examination of the one Yoga taught in the Gītā

With this background, we can re-examine why we should take it that the Gītā has instructed us in only one Yoga, as exemplified in verses 4.1–3, 4.42, 6.16–17, 6.23, 6.33, 6.36, 6.44 and 18.75 (B.G.). The main purport of the teaching, which was termed Sāṃkhya, meaning enquiry leading to complete and correct Knowledge, is Yoga. Because at this stage the inquiry has completely eliminated all an-Ātma, not-Self, the sense of agency for all actions would have disappeared, naiṣkarmya. Since in the absence of identification with any item of not-Self, mutual superimposition between the Real Self and the Unreal not-Self becomes impossible. This stage is also referred to as naiṣkarmya siddhi (18.49 B.G.), which is declared to directly lead to the Absolute Brahman.

The similarities between the Gītā and the Upaniṣads (see also Viṣṇu Purāṇa 6.7.31) have been well noticed by researchers. The Gītā is popularly referred to as the ‘milk’ or ‘nectar’ of the Upaniṣads. Particular reference may be made to the Kāṭhapaniṣad, with which the Gītā exhibits a striking resemblance. In that Upaniṣad, Lord Yama, while answering the question of Naciketas, mentions Yoga as being the state in which “the senses have been completely brought under control” (Ka. 3.2, 3.7-8) by a process almost identical to that as mentioned in the concluding verses in chapter 3 of the Gītā.

This partly answers the other question with which we started our inquiry, i.e., whether the Gītā contains many

parallel paths, any or all of which form an independent path to reach the ultimate goal. Because the whole illusion and the ills of Saṃsāra arise only in a condition of non-discrimination, it stands to reason that discrimination alone will lead to the elimination of the illusion and that all other practices must lead to this discriminative state. Devoid of discrimination none can attain Knowledge, which in fact merely means the removal of our ignorance. This explains why the other practices found in the Gītā are also called Yoga only in a secondary sense, in that they lead to the Real Yoga in the primary sense and why in the beginning of chapter 5 of the Gītā both Sāṃkhya and Yoga are said to lead to the same goal. In other words these practices must telescope into each other, forming an unbroken sequence leading to the final discriminative practice and goal and they do not constitute independent paths in and of themselves.

A doubt naturally arises in this case as to why everybody should not resort to Sāṃkhya, discriminative wisdom alone, and why anybody should go through any other practice? Fortunately for us, Arjuna has already raised this doubt in verses 3.1 and 3.2 (B.G.), which the Lord has clarified leaving no scope for confusion. The reason is to be attributed to the previous karmas that we have brought with ourselves from the past. Depending on the composition of the three Guṇas constituting our nature we have certain innate propensities, which shroud our real nature and create for us a state of illusion and unhappiness (5.15 B.G.). All enquiries must necessarily be conducted in the mind and these inherited propensities

make the mind gross or distracted, depending upon whether the quality of Tamas or Rajas predominates. The very exalted nature of this most subtle discrimination demands a clean, stable, introvert, and subtle mind. Not being in possession of such a mind is the reason not all of us can take shelter under this type of discrimination directly. Unless we provide ourselves with a clean mind, by having done the previous preparation to cleanse it of all its dross and distractions (5.11, 6.12, 18.5 B.G.) this discriminative practice will not be possible. As the Gītā teaches:

“There, having taken his seat, he should apply himself to Yoga, making his mind one-pointed and controlling the activities of the mind and senses, one should apply himself to Yoga for the purification of the mind” (6.12 B.G.).

The dirt to be removed is of two kinds. First, a person may be completely oblivious to the need to put in any effort to get over Saṃsāra and even an occasional flash of such a need may be curbed by sloth. When by a stroke of good luck, some practice is resorted to, the effort may be directed in such a way that it will lead to an entirely opposite result because the mind is steeped in tamas.

Secondly, if the mind is not clogged with this tamas, ambitions may drag it in a thousand directions, not allowing it to settle on anything for any length of time nor with any amount of steadiness. Desires can be innumerable, each goading the person to involve himself in constant, but mostly unproductive or conflicting, activities. This is rajās.

It is evident that both *tamas*, in preventing one from undertaking the spiritual practices required and from comprehending anything about them in their correct perspective, and *rajas*, in creating distractions by way of desires, are clear obstacles for one wanting to get rid of *Samsāra*. As a matter of fact, these two are the gross fetters that bind us to *Samsāra*. Since *tamas* is characterized by inactivity and misapprehension of things, it is easy to see that it has to be overcome through activity, by which means one gets entangled in the tentacles of *rajas*. If a person does not act he gets immured in *tamas*, and if he acts he gets into the snare of *rajas*, thus apparently leading to a situation of being left with no good options. That is where the beauty of the teaching of the *Gītā* lies: work one must, but work should be an aid in relief from our bondage and not for prolonging it. Perhaps nowhere else in the whole of the world's philosophical literature, does one come to find the concept of action without desire for its fruits (*niṣkāma karma*) expounded as beautifully as in the *Gītā*. Since the bondage of *rajas* is rooted in the desire to obtain the results of *karma*, the only solution to subdue *rajas* is to perform *karma* without attachment to its fruit.

It is easy for a thinker to realize the rational behind the instruction not to be attached to the result of action. In the *Gītā* dexterity in *karma* has been declared to be *Yoga*. When a task has been well performed and efficiently completed the doer automatically gets a pleasant satisfaction, which in itself is a result of the performance that *karma*. To expect the fruit of the action also, in addition to this

tangible result of a pleasant satisfaction, will make us in fact ‘miserly’, (kripana), in that we would be demanding an unfair double return for the karma. In other words, the well-performed action contains its own satisfaction and that should be our sufficient reward. Secondly, even if a person has not reached the stage of performing all activities depending on the Lord completely (18.56 B.G.), and without attachment to the fruit of that activity, we can still take note of the fact that for the accomplishment of any work, five things are required: the body, the doer, the different aids (such as the senses), the life functions, and the Deity who presides over a particular sense organ, for instance, the Sun for the eye (B.G. 18.14-15). Since without the grace of the Deity work is impossible and that Deity becomes an indispensable factor in any karma. By noting this fact, a person should not expect the whole fruit of any activity of which he was not the sole-performer. For a common man, however, this may look impossible since without incentive for the fruit it seems that no rational person will engage himself in any activity. In this context, it should not be forgotten that the Gītā addresses itself to a sincere seeker, who only wants to transcend saṁsāra and definitely not to the person who is enmeshed in it and wants it to continue.

But whether we anticipate the result or not, in as much as anticipating the fruit is only to add to the natural defect in karmas to bind its doer to its result, the result will have to be experienced anyway. In order to experience all the results of innumerable karmas, one will have to go through repeated births, thus defeating the very purpose

of the exercise, which was to completely get rid of saṃsāra (18.12 B.G.).

In this context the Lord points out:

“There are three fruits of karma, in the form of the desirable, the undesirable, and the mixed, they accrue to those who have not renounced them, after going away from here, but never to Sannyāsins, the Renouncers” (18.12 B.G.).

While those who cast off the gross body, not renouncing the fruits of karma, have to be reborn in order to experience the fruits but those who have renounced the fruits of karma still have to enjoy the experiences of the present body, since this body is the product of the past karma and they have not entirely intuited the current body as non-existent. On the contrary, in the case of Sannyāsins, there is at no stage of the karma any identification with it, with the body performing it, or with the fruit of the karma; even though others may consider him as living, acting, or dying.

Even when the practitioner overcomes rajas, through desire-less actions, purity of mind (*sattva*) remains as the golden fetters, the bondage which is still lurking due to the desire to enjoy the happiness that one gets in that *sāttvic* state and to bask in the glory of his scriptural knowledge. This attachment cannot be avoided as long as the fruit of the karma is with us, and so the Lord has ordained that karma must be undertaken as His worship and surrendering the fruit of action, with all its

ramifications, at His feet and not having even a trace of attachment at any stage from the volition to do the action, the performance of the action, as well as the enjoyment of the result of that action (18.46 B.G.).

Since any desire for personal benefit should be completely absent, it is obvious that karmas involving desire (*kāmya karmas*) are to be eschewed and activity should be limited merely to obligatory duties that come in the natural course of events. Even these duties are to be performed with absolute absence of identification (18.56 B.G.), so that virtually or effectively they are no karmas at all (4.18 B.G.). It is to be noted that this is natural to a person who is the highest aspirant. He has reached this highest stage due to a constant discrimination and devotion, and it is not a deliberate attempt at casting away karma. Since these karmas are accepted as inescapable duties coming to our lot as a result of our past deeds, there is no mental torment regarding them; neither hatred because of the feeling that they are undesirable nor exhilaration because of the feeling of their being desirable (18.10 B.G.). Therefore, even the activities of others cease to evoke any reaction in such an aspirant, such as the desire to wreak vengeance. We should also note that when once the person exhibits no attachment to the fruits of karma, either anticipating its result or feeling exhilarated when actually experiencing such a result, then happenings in the external world will leave no impression on his mind. A type of non-attachment to the whole world ensues. Hence, the injunction: “Be free from the pairs of opposites always established in sattva,

not striving to acquire what is not possessed nor to hoard what is in possession” (2.45 B.G.).

As a matter of fact, the need to overcome the pairs of opposites, comfort and discomfort, respect and contempt, profit and loss, etc., pervades the whole of the *Gītā*, even to the extent of concluding that all the ills of the world are a direct product of these pairs of opposites: “O Bhārata! All beings in creation get confounded by the delusion of the pairs of opposites born of attachment and aversion” (7.27 B.G.).

This, in brief, is the state wherein the karmas are said to be no-karmas and is referred to as *naiṣkarmya* by the Lord. The culmination of *naiṣkarmya* is referred to as *naiṣkarmya siddhi* (in chapter 3 of the *Gītā*) or *Sāṃkhya* (in chapter 2 of the *Gītā*), or Establishment in Knowledge, *Jñāna Niṣṭhā* (in verse 18.50 of the *Gītā*). Verse 18.50 (B.G.) makes it very clear that this *naiṣkarmya siddhi* is very different from *niṣkāma karma* and that it is this *naiṣkarmya siddhi* that is the direct stepping-stone for the knowledge of Brahman. The function of *niṣkāma karma* is merely limited to the elimination of *Rajas*. In this context we can clearly see that what is taught in the *Gītā* is not renunciation of action but renunciation ‘in’ action. Therefore, those portions of the *Gītā* that appear like parallel *sādhana*s will be reconciled only if understood correctly wherein each *sādhana* is seen as telescoping one into the other (8.24–28, 4.26–27, etc., B.G.).

1.12 The import of verse 2.47 of the Gītā

For a Jñāni, there is the total absence of all actions, while for a Jñāna Niṣṭha (one whose aim is only Knowledge) (3.17–18 B.G.), the karma performed by him would be restricted to the minimum obligatory duties, with no attachment to those duties at any stage of its performance. This type of activity is in fact equivalent to non-karma or no karma at all. One might argue that since the ideal seems to be to not to perform any karma, and since it is better to avoid going near the mud instead of getting into it, getting splashed by it, and then having to wash it off later, it would be better to give up all karmas at the very outset. Since a person is asked not to anticipate the results of his actions, the contingency of getting bound to the karma would be obviated merely by abstaining from it altogether. The fallacy of this argument should be obvious. To a Jñāni the absence of all karma and to a Jñāna Niṣṭha a minimum of karma are natural states, without having to strain themselves to achieve that, their attachment to either the absence of all karma or the minimum of karma being completely absent. While for the ignorant, abandoning karmas arises from their volition, thus establishing attachment to that non-action and thus resulting in a reversion to tamas (3.4, 18.7–8 B.G.). This is unlike the Jñāni, to whom non-action is an effortless state.

Verse 2.47 of the Bhagavad Gītā is the beautiful cornerstone on which the edifice of karma Yoga stands. It can be divided into four quarters:

“You have the right to action alone
 But not to the fruit of that action at any time.
 Do not be the cause of the fruits of action
 And let not your attachment be to inaction.”

It can be seen that the four quarters of this verse correspond to the four stages implicit in the above discussion. The first injunction to Arjuna is that he is qualified for karma alone. The stress here is to show the danger of inaction and the benefit of overcoming *tamas* by action. The second quarter of the verse exhorts Arjuna to abstain from the hankering after the fruit of action, to overcome desire and *Rajas*. The third quarter of the verse, in essence, depicts the stage in which there is no reaction in the mind toward any activity of others and due to this state of actionlessness, *naiṣkarmya* we are able to transcend even *sattva*. This condition as stated in the third quarter of this verse can be appreciated from the point of view of Arjuna who can engage in this war legitimately and avenge the injustice heaped upon him and his brothers by the other party. This mental reaction, which would make him the cause of the result of others actions would go against the third quarter of the verse (*ma karma phala hetur bhūḥ*) even though such a result would inevitably accrue to Arjuna’s enemies whether Arjuna wanted to avenge their deeds or not. By harboring this mental reaction, he would have incurred an adverse result in a situation where he was not responsible for the result and in which, in truth, he had no part to play at all. The fourth stage as taught in the fourth quarter of this verse, indicates the absence of all karma, the state

of a Jñāni. It is a stage that we cannot attain by our own volition in the sense of intentionally giving up karmas. If we intentionally give up karmas and are attached to non-action, it will just lead us to tamas.

This understanding of verse 2.47 (B.G.), as it does not conform to most interpretations, may appear to be contradictory to verse 2.39 (B.G.), where the Lord promised to expound Yoga, having already explained Sāṃkhya. The word Yoga in that verse is normally understood to indicate karma Yoga, meaning merely the abandonment of the desire for the fruits of our actions, in which case some serious difficulties arise in understanding the text.

It is said in the Vedas that non-performance of obligatory karma will lead to a penalty (*pratyavāya*). It is also mentioned in the Śāstra that on the completion of some particular work, the result may not be to the same extent as assured by the Śāstra, and lastly, the result of any action will be proportional to the exertion with which the work is performed (compare verses 6.41 and 9.21 of the Gītā).

Verse 2.40 of the Gītā assures us that in this Yoga there is no chance of losing the benefit from what has been undertaken and there is no penalty (*pratyavāya*), and the performance of even a little of this Yoga will save one from the great fear of Saṃsāra. In verse 2.39 (B.G.) itself, it is assured that identification with this Yoga will remove the bondage of karma, an idea which reoccurs in verse 2.50 (B.G.) where it says that the association with

this Yoga will release one from both good and evil deeds. It is obvious that to achieve this it is not enough that one merely performs actions without anticipating the result, an activity, which itself at some stage, will have to be given up (2.51 B.G.).

On the contrary, such a result, i.e.; the release from both good and evil deeds, will be possible only if karma is undertaken in the spirit of naiṣkarmya, in which discrimination (*Buddhi Yukta*) plays a necessary role. One can easily see the implied necessity of being able to discriminate when the Lord assures Arjuna that He will release to him Buddhi Yoga. With this Discrimination (Buddhi) he will go to Him and this will happen to a Devotee only (10.10 B.G.). The Lord then proclaims that any karma performed without this Buddhi Yoga is far away from the goal and inferior (2.49 B.G.) and thus revealing the interdependence between karma Yoga in the sense of naiṣkarmya and Buddhi Yoga, both being based on devotion (*bhāvanā*), as pointed out in verse 2.66 (B.G.).

In the absence of this attitude of devotion, association with a discriminating intellect (Buddhi Yoga) and naiṣkarmya would not be possible. Hence, if Yoga in verse 2.39 (B.G.) is taken as merely karma Yoga, in the sense of not anticipating the fruit, the above-mentioned verses will not fit into the context without forcing or twisting their straightforward meanings. On the contrary, if Yoga is understood as discussed above, as naiṣkarmya, not only will continuity of thought be maintained but

also the decrying of karma in verses 2.42–46 and again in verses 2.52–53 will become perfectly understandable.

In this respect, verses 2.50–51 (B.G.) offer a clue. The repeated stress here is on discrimination. That being so, it would be appropriate to expect that the details of such discrimination, which constitute Yoga, would be provided immediately after the verse 2.39 (B.G.), where it was promised. Most likely, the Lord would have done so but for the three welcomed interruptions (from our point of view) by Arjuna in verses 2.54, 3.1, and 3.2 of the Gītā. In verse 3.2 (B.G.) Arjuna's question provided an occasion to elaborate on the need to perform karma which was merely stated as an unsupported injunction (*pratijñā*) in verse 2.47 (B.G.), having done this up to verse 3.16 (B.G.), the Lord then reverts to the characteristics of a Jñāni in verses 3.17 and 3.18 (B.G.) to restore the continuity of the subject that was begun while discussing the qualities of a person established in knowledge (*sthitaprajña*) at the end of chapter 2 of the Gītā. This is in spite of the fact that karma must not be given up willfully, rather the vision should be set on the goal of transcending this state where karma is needed. This goal should never be lost sight of.

The last section of chapter 2, which extolls (*arthavāda*) the Jñāna Niṣṭha, for one established in knowledge, may be seen not only in the context of exemplifying one of the six traditional principles for interpreting a text and thereby assisting us in deciding the final purport of the Gītā, but also to reveal the importance of Yoga and how

it leads to the final Knowledge (Jñāna). It is within this framework that the Lord repeats the injunction to perform karma unattached, a condition that is spontaneous for the Jñāna Nistha but will have to be accomplished by others with deliberate effort. To illustrate such an attitude of a Jñāna Nistha, the Lord cites the case of King Janaka and others who behaved perfectly while engaged in karma. The Lord also gives the example of Himself who is eternally perfect and without any egoistic motives but still performs karma as though indifferent, *udāsīvat*, which literally means one-seated-above. From verse 3.25 (B.G.) onward, Bhagavān starts to describe this Yoga, the aim of which is to absolve the doer of the effects of good and bad deeds. This raises a doubt in Arjuna's mind (3.36 B.G.). Nobody is unaware of the fact that wrong actions (sins) result in sorrow, and sorrow is something that no one wants. Still these wrong deeds continue. What power compels a person to embark on wrong deeds even against his will? The implication is clear: war is an evil deed, involving violence and killing and when directed against venerable elders, preceptors and relatives it is certainly heinous. In the beginning of chapter 2 Arjuna wanted to shift the responsibility to the Lord but that was not possible and now he wants an outside agency, perhaps some outside power, to shoulder this responsibility.

The Lord sets the record straight. No outside power is responsible for any of our deeds. The cause is our own desire, lurking within our self, in our senses, mind, and intellect, and covering our faculty of conscience, which when not covered over, will always warn us against wrong

deeds. That caution of the conscience is always overruled by our desires. Although the Gītā later mentions how a person engages himself in action guided solely by his innate nature, and therefore involuntarily, what is to be guarded against here is not the inescapable activity itself but the desire to involve one's self in evil deeds, overruling this whispered caution to desist. This, in fact, when seen from the proper perspective, is where the beauty of niṣkāma karma, the performance of actions not anticipating the fruit, comes into play. Having completed these explanations so as to remove Arjuna's doubts, the Lord then sums up what exactly the nature of Yoga is in verses 3.42-43 (B.G.). Here He describes the subtle discrimination between the Self and the not-Self. The practicing of this Yoga is different from that of Sāṃkhya, which is the final stage of discrimination, of which this Yoga is a preparation. It is on this account that Yoga was distinguished from Sāṃkhya in 2.39 (B.G.), while in verses 5.2-5 (B.G.) the course and the result of both Yoga and Sāṃkhya were declared to be the same. Verse 5.6 of the Gītā leaves no doubt that unless Yoga precedes Sāṃkhya, the latter is achieved only with the greatest of efforts. Even the possibility of achieving Sāṃkhya without going through Yoga must have been mentioned with the implication that a person had somehow already attained the highest purity of mind, the qualification needed for Sāṃkhya.

The conclusion will have to be that in this context Yoga means discrimination joined with karma Yoga, while Sāṃkhya is without karma and this gets confirmation

from verses 4.41–42 (B.G.) where the Lord says, “One established in Ātman, renouncing karmas through Yoga, cutting asunder doubts through knowledge, Dhanañjaya, he is not bound by karma. Therefore, tearing away doubts arising from the ignorance residing in your heart about yourself, by the Sword of Knowledge, engage yourself in Yoga.” This will lead to equanimity of mind, a condition essential for it to invert itself toward Ātman from its natural tendency to run with the senses toward the sense objects. The Lord also says, “Perform karma established in Yoga, renouncing attachment Dhanañjaya, viewing both achievement and non-achievement (*siddhi-asiddhyoḥ*) as the same. Equanimity is said to be Yoga” (2.48 B.G.). And again the Lord says, “One accomplished in Yoga, renouncing the fruits of karma, secures peace in the form of Jñāna Niṣṭhā” (B.G. 5.12).

Upon understanding the difference between the practice of Sāṃkhya and that of Yoga as indicated above, the need for association of karma Yoga with the practice of Yoga, naiṣkarmya becomes clear. In the stage of Sāṃkhya the mind is absolutely pure, enabling the practitioner to be established in Ātman, with no further aid. The practitioner at this stage has dismissed all an-Ātman, not-Self. In Yoga, however, discrimination has to proceed in stages demanding increasing grades of purity and clarity of mind, and the simultaneous performance of karma Yoga becomes essential to produce this purity as one advances on the ladder of practice. Thus, ‘Yogis are said to perform karma, giving up all attachment, for the purpose of inner purity’(B.G. 5.11).

It is hoped that this understanding of the word Yoga will clear up a few apparent contradictions, especially with regard to the Lord's reply in verse 5.2 (B.G.), a verse on which a lot of intellectual gymnastics has been exercised. The reply in this verse has to be understood naturally in the light of Arjuna's question. Having mentioned in verse 4.13 (B.G.) that in spite of the fact that the four classes of society are His creation, He, the Lord, should not be considered as their creator. He expands on this in the next two verses 4.14–15 (B.G.), ending with the repeated injunction that Arjuna should perform karma on the model of aspirants of the past, like King Janaka. This is in support of the Lord's decision in verse 2.47 (B.G.) that Arjuna is entitled to perform karma alone and his elaboration of the reasons for performing karma in chapter 3 of the Gītā. Taking all this into consideration it became abundantly clear to Arjuna that he must act and not shirk his duty. But the proper understanding of what constitutes action, inaction, and prohibited action is also required. And this is so because as the Lord reminds us "the ways of karma are profound and grasped only with great difficulty" (B.G. 4.17).

If, as was shown in chapter 3 of the Gītā, the Lord's model is to be followed then there is the assurance that by a proper understanding of His birth and work, which are subtle, a person will no longer have rebirth, knowing the Lord's karma is divine (B.G. 4.9). So, the Lord has advised that the correct way of doing actions is to do them in such a way that they become no action at all, even when one is engaged in them, as stated in the first

line of verse 4.20 of the Gītā. This is to be achieved through a process of abandoning identification with the result of the actions, being ever content, and not being dependent on anything for such a result, as stated in the second line of verse 4.20 of the Gītā. As if to reinforce that explanation, another definition of Yoga is given in 6.23 (B.G.) where the Lord says, “disassociation from the association with sorrow is Yoga.” There should be no doubt about the teaching that being established in one’s own Self is unlimited happiness or comfort. All sorrow consists of the association of the real ‘I’ with what is not-‘I’. If Yoga should be known as disassociation from sorrow, then obviously Yoga must mean divesting the real ‘I’ from all that is not-‘I’, and this is the state of *naiṣkarma*, actionlessness.

Having praised karma in such glorious terms, the Lord also says, in seeming contradiction, that the Wise-Ones call such a person a knower of *Ātman* if his volitions, desire, and karma are burnt by the fire of Knowledge (B.G. 4.19). Similarly, He says that for one immersed in his true Self, there is no duty to perform (B.G.3.17). In verse 4.21 of the Gītā, the suggestion seems to be that activity must be restricted only to the extent needed for the maintenance of the body. Later, He mentions that “Like the brilliant fire reducing fuel to ashes, the fire of Knowledge (*Jñāna*) destroys all actions” (B.G. 4.37). And again in chapter 2 of the Gītā the Lord stated that unless one’s mind is free from all scriptural activities its stabilization is unthinkable, meaning that stabilization can be acquired through the righteous or the prohibited karmas

performed only in a particular way. So, when it is stated in verse 4.36 (B.G.) that through the raft of Knowledge (Jñāna) all sins are destroyed, the obvious conclusion will be that Knowledge removes the effects of all actions, this same idea is also stated in verse 2.50 (B.G.). But it should be remembered that by the willful abandonment of karma neither naiṣkarmya (absence of actions) nor siddhi (the perfection of that) can be achieved (B.G. 3.4). The achievement of naiṣkarmya siddhi is only possible through its proper means, and it is that siddhi that is the precondition for reaching Brahman (B.G. 18.50). In fact, it is stated that without this siddhi overcoming illusion is impossible (B.G. 2.72). By all these pronouncements the Lord has praised Knowledge, comparing its purifying powers to which nothing else exists in the universe (B.G. 4.38). To attain this Knowledge one must withdraw from the ego because the sense of agency for any karma is caused by the identification with the ego and this identification is a delusion (B.G. 3.27). Finally, the Lord tells us that karma will not bind a person, whose doubts are torn asunder by Knowledge and who gives up karma by Yoga (B.G. 4.41).

This simultaneous injunction to do karma and the praise of the state of absence of karma was bound to create confusion in Arjuna's mind. So, Arjuna raises the question about karma and its renunciation (sannyāsa) in chapter 5 of the Gītā. The subsequent discussion shows that the Lord meant actionlessness or discriminative wisdom by the term renunciation and that by the term karma Yoga, He meant performance of karma with Yoga.

The term karma Yoga has attracted much attention by the upholders of those who feel that karma Yoga is the main purport of the Gītā, and they point to verse 5.2 (B.G.), where it says “karma Yoga is superior.” In verse 3.7 of the Gītā, the Lord has already employed this word to indicate the superiority of karma Yoga, when it is done through the organs of action, controlling them by the mind, and with complete absence of attachment. These are the prerequisites for karma Yoga to excel and are the products of discrimination as expounded at the end of chapter 3 of the Gītā. It is only by understanding the words in the manner in which we have described it, that the contradiction between karma Yoga and karma sannyāsa, the renunciation of action, can be reconciled, especially when both of them are said to lead to the same goal.

In chapter 6 of the Gītā in verse 8 we encounter both the words, Jñāna and Vijñāna (Knowledge and Experience), which points us to a Knowledge by knowing which “nothing remains to be known, since everything would have now been known as the Self alone, whether it be a clod of earth, a stone or even gold.” This of course echoes the Upaniṣadic teachings found in Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (1.1.3) and the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (6.1.3), wherein we find a discussion of a type of Knowledge that makes one omniscient. This, of course, does not mean such a Jñāni can reel off ready answers to any question on any subject on earth, but only that this particular Knowledge removes the very desire or even the possibility to know anything afterward. Corresponding to this, the Lord

assures us that what He is teaching is how to know Him completely, eliminating all doubts, by the unswerving practice of Yoga. Hence, to know the Lord, the practice of Yoga is essential. Verse 7.3 of the Gītā says that one among many attempts for siddhi and even among those who try and attain siddhi, only one perchance comes to know Him as He really is. Therefore, siddhi is essential to know Him as He really is. This understanding is in accordance with verses 18.49–50 (B.G.), where it is said that to reach Brahman, attainment of siddhi, meaning naiṣkarmya siddhi in this verse, is the essential stepping-stone. In the same manner, the siddhi referred to in verse 7.3 should also be understood as naiṣkarmya siddhi, the perfection of actionlessness. This is confirmed in the concluding verse of chapter 7, verse 7.30 where the Lord says, “...know Me, even at the time of parting from the world, with the mind accomplished in Yoga.”

This is also in harmony with verse 9.27 that teaches that any work undertaken must be done in a spirit of surrender to the Lord and that complete surrender is the culmination of Yoga, wherein sannyāsa, renunciation, has become the practitioners natural state. It is in this state where the bondage of activity finally ceases. This is confirmed in verse 9.28 where it is stated “You will be free from the bondage of the fruits of karma, both good and bad, and attaining Sannyāsa Yoga, you will be emancipated and reach Me.” In the same context we can refer to verse 10.10 (B.G.) where He says: ‘To them, those who are constantly steadfast, those who worship with affection, I give the Yoga of discrimination (buddhi Yoga), by which they come to Me’.

Thus, the assurance given in verse 2.40 (B.G.) that “Here there will be no loss of things begun,” and the contents of the previous verse 2.39 (B.G.) “Uniting yourself with this Yoga Buddhi, you will rid yourself of the bondage of karma,” can be reconciled once we understand the word Yoga to mean actionlessness. Later, Arjuna seeks clarification, presumably keeping in view his own interest on the fate of a yogi who cannot attain the Yoga siddhi, perfection of Yoga (B.G. 6.37). In that context, two declarations from the Lord are noteworthy: The first is that a Yogi, even if he does not reach the completion or attainment of Yoga siddhi he does not suffer either here or in the other worlds (B.G. 6.40). This confirms the earlier assurance that the Lord gave in verse 2.40 of the Gītā. The second is that he will enjoy the worlds meant for the meritorious ones for a long time and after which he will be born in the house of pure and prosperous parents. Normally, these worlds are achieved by people who have undertaken the appropriate karmas enjoined in the scriptures but these scriptural karmas were advised to be given-up by a person who desires to achieve equanimity of mind through Yoga. If such enjoyment can be won, even without those karmas, obviously the Lord is alluding to the spirit of verse 2.43 of the Gītā where it says that there are people solely intent on attaining heavenly enjoyments by means of Vedic rituals. However the Lord reminds us in verse 2.46 (B.G.) that, “for a knower of Brahman, Vedic karmas have become absolutely useless.” That is why in verse 6.44 of the Gītā it is stated even an enquirer into Yoga is said to surpass the scope of the Vedas.

The birth described in verse 6.41 of the Gītā as “being born in a family of pure and prosperous parents,” refers to the state of a Yogi whose sādhanā was interrupted in the early stages of practice. However, in the case of a Yogi who also could not complete the practice, but because of having reached a higher state of attainment than the previously mentioned Yogi, even that temptation in the form of wealth will not bother him. He will be born in the house of poor Yogis themselves, in which surroundings, he will, even without volition, automatically engage himself in furthering his Yoga practice to reach the siddhi which he had previously failed to do.

1.13 Graded spiritual practices (sādhana) of the Gītā

With this background, a second topic, which will get a more elaborate treatment further in the text, may be examined here. This discussion revolves around the attempt to demonstrate that all the ills of saṃsāra arise as a result of mixing up the qualities of the ever-present Ātman with those of the illusory an-Ātma, mixing the Self and the not-Self. This superimposition can take place only in a state of non-discrimination and the only solution, therefore, for the ills arising from this mix-up is discrimination. This in fact is the principle exercise that the Lord has primarily taught in the Gītā while all others practices lead only to this discriminative Knowledge. When, by this discrimination, all not-Self is eliminated, the practitioner comes to know his real nature as the Pure Ātman in which state, there is no illusion, no duality, no karma, and no sorrow.

That is why in verse 13.11 of the Gītā it is stated that “constant establishment in the Knowledge of the Inner Self with a view to comprehend the Knowledge of Reality alone, this is Knowledge.” The phrase ‘this is knowledge’ (*etat jñānam*) indicates the immediately preceding thing mentioned in this verse. It is then stated that everything else than this is Ignorance. This is the state of a Jñāna Niṣṭhā and in this context it should not be too difficult to understand that by the expression always engaged in ‘Knowledge of the Inner Self,’ what is meant is not the knowledge of some object, which is now to be continuously meditated upon, but rather the elimination of all external objects, including the ego, so as to invert the mind with the sole aim of seeing the Non-Dual Reality as it actually is.

So, it needs to be spelt out how each of the other exercises coalesces into the next stage, until the stage of Sāṃkhya, the discriminative Knowledge is reached. The details of the various stages in the exercise will follow. What will be attempted here is to show how each of the different practices do not form independent paths by themselves but rather how each stage of practice complements and leads to a higher stage in the sequence.

The first indication in this direction appears in verse 2.66 of the Gītā: “One who is not a yogi can not get Buddhi or devotion, without which there is no peace and how can bliss dawn on a person devoid of peace?” The fact that one, an adept in Yoga (Yukta), is the blissful one is stressed in verse 5.12 of the Gītā. For deriving the

capacity to undertake the finer discrimination (buddhi) or devotion, the primary consideration is Yoga, meaning the performance of karma as Yoga accompanied by discrimination so that it becomes naiṣkarmya. This also indicates that discrimination cannot be reached without devotion. The finale of karma Yoga is one's capacity to see the Lord as the fountain of all activity, as pervading every being as the One and whose every action has become His worship (B.G. 18.46, 10.8). When this state is reached the mind inverts itself from being sense-oriented, seeking comforts in their objects, into being God-oriented. Desires get curbed because such a person finds happiness within himself (B.G. 2.55, 3.17) and his mind starts resting in God. Seeing Him in everything and in every action, he develops nothing but love for God and compassion toward every other being. This, as taught in chapter 3 of the Gītā, is the basis of devotion and to one in this state the Lord releases Buddhi Yoga, the discriminative faculty, through which that blessed person will reach Him (B.G. 10.9–10). This means that for obtaining the capacity for discrimination, devotion is the precursor, just as for getting devotion, one has to be a Yukta, one who is accomplished in Yoga, one who has achieved Yoga.

Having explained the process of discrimination between the 'Field' and the 'Knower of the Field' in the very beginning of chapter 13 of the Gītā the Lord then in verse 13.18 assures us that "Knowing this, my devotee will become entitled to attain my own nature," indicating

thereby that one has to become a devotee first, so as to be able to engage himself in the unswerving discrimination of the ‘Knower of the Field’ from the ‘Field’ (*Kṣetrajña* from the *Kṣetra*). This idea is also implicit in verse 18.18 of the Gītā. Again, while concluding the teaching, the Lord says that by *Parā Jñāna Niṣṭhā* (keeping the highest knowledge as the goal), which is also called *naiṣkarmya siddhi*, one becomes entitled to reach Brahman through devotion (B.G. 18.55). Thus, this sequence in which action, meditation, devotion, and discrimination all having an integral part to play at their respective levels lead us to the goal of the attainment of Brahman. This attainment only means remaining as one’s own nature and is not the product of any activity. In spite of each step of the practice being indispensable at its stage, when its function has been accomplished that particular *sādhana* becomes redundant and no longer useful. It is not that the activities themselves drop-off, but in fact the activities will continue to be performed in an exemplary manner. Thus, for instance, while sacrifice, charity and austerity are essential for the purification of the mind (B.G. 18.5), they are inadequate for either the meditation on the glories of the Lord (*Vibhūti Upāsana*), which in its turn qualifies us for the meditation on the Cosmic form of the Lord as the whole universe (*Viśvarūpa Upāsana*) (B.G. 11.53) or for the meditation on Brahman as Om (*Akṣara Upāsana*) (B.G. 8.28). Here, in the context of these preliminary stages of *sādhana* we can consult verses 12.6–12, as well as 18.1–2, 18.11–12 and 18.50–55 of the Gītā.

1.14 The Method of Superimposition and Negation (Adhyāropa–Apavāda)

Before closing this first section, which attempts to lay out a general background and perspective from which to view the Gītā, one particular point will have to be examined in some detail so as to avoid many possible misinterpretations regarding the final import of the Gītā’s teaching and it concerns the actual method of Vedānta. While commenting on verse 13.13 of the Gītā, Bhagavān Śrī Śaṅkarācārya has cited an aphorism which he claims has come from someone who knows the true tradition of Vedānta:

“By superimposition and negation, that which is incomprehensible by the senses is brought within the purview of the senses’. This traditional method has been notably adopted in all the Upaniṣads when they teach the nature of the Self (Ātman).”

This traditional aphorism should be understood in the following manner:

For anything to be denoted by a word, at least one of the following characteristics should be present in that thing:

1. A substance, dravya,
(such as space, air, water, earth, etc.)
2. A member of a species, jāti, (such as a mango)
3. A quality, guṇa, (such as “blue” lotus)
4. Expressing a relation, sambadha,
(such as father to son)
5. Engagement in work, kriyā
(such as a cook cooking)

(Sometimes non-existence (*abhāva*) is added as the 6th characteristic by which words can be used.) Since none of these above characteristics can be attributed to Ātman, the true Self, no word can reach Him, so he is said to be Indescribable. Since we do not come across the existence of anything that cannot be denoted by a word or that is not perceivable by the senses or conceivable by the mind, the question then becomes how can we know Ātman at all? If it is something that is devoid of all qualities and thus beyond description by the use of any words and beyond any concepts that can be conceived of by the mind, how could Atman be known or taught in any manner at all?

Although this is the case, it is the experience of everyone that they cannot deny their own Self because the one denying will have to be there, will have to exist, before denying anything. The Self, as 'I', is the most intimate and best-known entity to everyone. On the contrary, the only valid proof for the existence of all perceivable objects is the perception of the perceiver himself, who naturally has to be there before the existence of the objects can be established. Later, we shall discuss how all things known to us, from external objects, right up to the ego, all of which are subject to constant change, are objects to Consciousness, and this Consciousness must necessarily be the unchanging Witness to all the changes that are occurring. Hence, nothing in the universe can have an existence independent of this Unchanging Consciousness, which is also the Real Self (Ātman) of us all.

Two conclusions emerge from this. First, there is only One thing which really exists always, variously called, Ātman, Brahman, Witness, Existence, Bliss, Consciousness, etc., and the apparent Universe, which consists of the field of objects and has to depend on the authority of Consciousness for its existence. As a result, Consciousness alone exists, there is no object, no perceiver, and no perception. The scriptures themselves declare that in this state ‘even the scriptures become no scriptures.’ Such a statement is made by the scriptures from the point of view of the Highest Truth, the Absolute viewpoint, and in this state there is no birth, no death, no bondage, no salvation, no time and therefore no change whatsoever.

But in the world, as commonly perceived, each of us sees millions of other sentient beings which we take to be other than ourselves, as well as a vast panorama of external insentient objects. Transactions are going on as if the Universe really existed and continuity is also seen in the form of work and its results, causation and its effects. There is a definite pattern in the world and a well-established relation between causes and their effects. The scriptures take into consideration and adopt this same common viewpoint since they also declare that certain works produce certain results, both here in this world or in the other world, to be experienced now or at a later time. If Consciousness alone is in existence, as the scriptures declare, how did the scriptures themselves originate and why? In addition, those very scriptures, which have denied the existence of the world, creation,

bondage, and salvation have also elaborately described the creation, bondage, the existence of Seekers, and process by which the Seekers must strive for salvation. It would be valid for anybody to point out the explicit contradiction in these two types of teachings and we would expect that satisfaction regarding these doubts have to come from the scriptures themselves.

It is our daily experience that everything may not be in the same form that it is perceived to be. Other than the fact that perception is selective and limiting, since the existence of objects need to be established through perception, which itself requires an object of perception to produce it, the exact correspondence between perception and its object can never be established. If we see something not really as it is, it is because of our defective vision or perhaps insufficient illumination. So, merely because we see a thing we cannot conclude that it should exist in the same form as we see it. Hence, the scriptures have taught us that when we are seeing multiplicity, where there is only Consciousness, we are seeing through a defective vision, which they call ignorance (*avidyā*). This vision of multiplicity, which is necessary for all empirical transactions, must be seen in relation to the vision of the scriptures. The common view shows us the world and all the changes that are taking place in it. One of our normal tendencies is to seek the cause of objects that we see before us. In accordance with this, right from the beginning of the history of philosophy, the question as to the cause of the Universe itself has troubled thinkers. This has been followed by other doubts, such as our

relationship to the world and the cause of this relationship (if in fact there is a relationship at all).

In order to answer these types of questions the scriptures have tentatively provided us with the process of creation, so that starting from the grossest, for example, the earth among the elements constituting the universe, and then continuing to seek the subtler cause of each thing, which itself is the cause of the next grosser thing. We are told that Earth is the effect of water, the cause of which is fire. This type of inquiry, which is not to be taken as a scientific cosmological account of how the Universe came into being, as it has another purpose, (i.e: to merely teach the non-dual nature of the Self) must be continued in the very order in which the creation has been described in the scriptures. In the end, the scriptures teach us that space, the subtlest of the elements, came out of Ātman. In order to see this our vision must turn inward or in other words we have to withdraw from our normal empirical point of view and adopt, for the time being, the scriptural perspective. While in our search for the cause, initially the quest was oriented outside, now it has turned within us, towards the True Self, which is in fact the real purpose of the scriptures in describing creation in the first place. The import of the scriptures has nothing to do with creation, or cause and effect. It is only by the constant gazing at Ātman, to the exclusion of everything else, that it can be intuited directly. When this is done, the purpose of the scripture in describing the creation is over, since everything else then vanishes except for that Universal Consciousness, in which no duality can ever exist. Then

the scriptures also vanish. ('Vedā avedā bhavanti'. The scripture becomes no scripture. Bṛ.Up.4.3.22) This is the negation part of the method of Vedānta, known as Superimposition and Negation.

But as long as we are in and aware of duality, our effort must be directed toward correcting our vision. To facilitate this scriptures make use of some concessions from the standpoint of the relative, worldly perspective. Assuming, for the purpose of teaching, that duality exists and restating our own state of ignorance, in order to bring about the true Knowledge of the Non-Dual Brahman. In other words, the teacher and the teaching has come down to our level and this same Non-Dual Brahman is first taught as being the cause of the universe. All extraneous qualities, such as being the cause, though not forming the true nature of Non-Dual Reality itself, is attributed to that Reality tentatively, merely as a skillful teaching device.

This concession of Brahman being the cause is from the point of view of a deliberate superimposition. It is an intentional attribution of qualities onto the One Reality, which is devoid of all qualities, entirely from the point of view of a spiritual practice (sādhana), which is ultimately to introvert our minds and turn our sight toward Ātman. Having reached that state, the state of the Non-Dual Self, the concessions that were being used for the purpose of teaching are removed, negated, in order to present Reality as it actually is. This negation is the goal, while the superimposition is the means to that goal. The means should not be carried over to the end. So,

it becomes essential when trying to determine the true purport of the Gītā to remember that a statement made from the standpoint of the Absolute Reality cannot be brought down to the level of an empirical transaction nor can statements at the empirical level of practices be extrapolated to the level of the Absolute Reality.

Perhaps the most famous examples of this process of deliberate superimposition followed by negation' (*Adhyāropa-Apavāda*) is the teaching, "Not this, not this" (*Neti, neti*), taught in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. In the Gītā we also come across the same exact methodology being used in various places. One example would be when it is stated in verse 12 of chapter 13, that the Supreme Reality is "Neither existent nor non-existent." We can also find another example of this method in chapter 2. In verse 2.14, Arjuna is instructed to put up with the effects of cold-and-heat, which produce comfort and discomfort in us, on the understanding that it is their nature to appear and vanish; they are therefore transient. When some external agency causes comfort, we should not be overly exhilarated because it will not last. That which has a beginning must end and must be impermanent. Anything that is incidental to some condition has to go when that condition itself is removed. Similarly, if something causes discomfort, it should not cause dejection also, based on the thought that that discomfort will not last and is certain to be followed by better situations. For example: If winter comes, can spring be far behind? This advice is obviously based on the assumption that there is in fact a body, which is affected by external circumstances

that are also accepted as existing. But these external things, the external circumstances, as well as the body are not permanent. They all have a beginning and an end. We experience many summers as well as many winters and daily we see others getting born or passing away. Whatever really exists should not be subject to destruction and whatever is subject to destruction does not really exist. This is exactly what the Lord affirms in verse 2.16, thus negating what was superimposed in verse 2.14 (B.G.). If neither the body nor the external causes of comfort or discomfort exist, how does the question of suffering even arise? We can also discover other examples of this method by analyzing verses such as 9.4–5, and 13.14–15 (B.G.).

Hence, it becomes necessary to distinguish statements that are from the point of view of the Absolute Highest Reality (*Paramārtha Dṛṣṭi*) from those statements that are pertaining to the empirical viewpoint (*vyavahāra dṛṣṭi*). Much of the doubt and confusion arises as a result of mixing these two viewpoints. For instance, in verse 18.17 of the Gītā, it is said that a person who has overcome the sense of agency for work and whose intellect is not attracted to the result of work, even if he destroys the whole world, he destroys nothing nor is he smeared with the effect of that destruction. This is evidently a statement made from the highest standpoint, that of a Wise-Man, a Jñāni, who anyway would not even be thinking of hurting anything, let alone destroying the whole world. Such statements are made only to extol something, in the present case Knowledge. For ordinary people, the effect

of karma has been depicted in the earlier verses, and for them if the effect of their karma is not experienced in this life it will not lose its hold on them even after death (B.G. 18.12). So, if an ordinary person seeks refuge in verse 18.17 of the Gītā for his wrong doings, it is not difficult to see what disaster would ensue. In brief, this method of Vedānta should be seen as so inclusive that at some point even the stages of sādhanā, the discrimination that is supposed to remove our ignorance, as well as the method of Vedānta itself are all relegated to the realm of a deliberate superimposition, which in the end must be negated. The only final truth is the Non-Dual Reality alone.

Practices of the Gītā

Keeping in mind these two critically important concepts of deliberate superimposition followed by negation as well as the Absolute point of view and the worldly point of view, the following discussion will now deal with the teaching of the Gītā, starting from the most preliminary to the highest stage of practice, which in fact requires a rearranged reading of the text itself. What this means is that we will make a departure from the traditional method of studying the Gītā whereby one goes through the text from beginning to end as though it were a literary text. In each individual chapter also, the sequential reading of the verses will not always be followed. The meaning or explanation of each and every word has not been attempted here (for example in the case of The Glories of the Lord (*Vibhūties*) detailed in chapter

10, no attempt has been made to explain why each one of the Vibhūties is considered a special manifestation in its class). The effort will be mainly confined to viewing the text as a whole from the point of view of a graded and telescoping spiritual practice (sādhana sopāna), so that an aspirant can try to fit himself into the appropriate stage of spiritual practice (sādhana) after ascertaining their individual capabilities and entitlements.

It is for this reason also that no attempt will be made to deal with various criticisms of the Gītā by Western writers such as Deussen, Garbe, Otto, or Barnett. Apart from the fact that many of these criticisms have already been dealt with extensively by other scholars, the attitude here will be that of a devoted aspirant who has no use for such hair splitting. And although one may feel the lack of an orderly and scientific treatment of each and every concept in the text, or an absence of effort in trying to decide which words or verses might be an interpolation into the text, we shall rest contented to accept the Gītā as it is; that it is a text written by a revered Sage (*Smṛiti*) and that its teachings are in perfect harmony with the Upaniṣads. However, in order to understand the spiritual practices taught in the Gītā properly, we will have to examine the text from a holistic point of view, in which the chapters and the verses in those chapters are examined in a non-sequential order, rather than reading the chapters and verses one after the other.

Part II: Steps to Self-Realization

2.1 Fearlessness (*Abhaya*) (The final Aim)

As stated previously, we will begin our examination of the spiritual steps presented in the Gītā by beginning with chapter 16 instead of the usual procedure of beginning with the first chapter.

In the Bhagavad Gītā verse 16.1 states:

Abhayam sattvasaṁsuddhirjñānayogavyavasthithiḥ |
Dānaṁ damaśca yajñaśca svādhyāyastapa ārjavam ||

*Fearlessness, purity of being,
establishment in knowledge and Yoga,
charity, self-restraint and sacrifice,
reciting sacred texts to oneself,
austerities, without hypocrisy.*

Contrary to the common experience of being afraid when one is alone, it is only in a state when nothing else, no other entity is present that a person can be truly free from all fear. But we are so much conditioned to being in the world that it is almost impossible for us to even envision that state of Absolute Non-Duality, that is the true state of mokṣa, in which fear alone can completely disappear, even the fear of losing that state.

It is the attainment of this state, called the Universal Self (Ātman), the One-Without-A-Second, that should be our aim. This state, if we are not to lose it having once attained it, will have to be our very own nature. As seen earlier, in spite of the fact that there is such a state of absolute fearlessness and happiness, which is our Real nature, we have deluded ourselves and have become afraid and unhappy because of our identification with limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*) like the body, senses, mind and ego. A limiting adjunct is something that gets attributed to something that doesn't really belong to it, for example, space seems to get the limitation of being called 'pot space' because of the 'limiting adjunct' of the pot, the pot is therefore called an upādhi of space. These upādhis are not part of us and identification with them causes us to have a mistaken notion about our Real Self. This element of not-Self can exist and become a limiting adjunct for the Self only in a state in which there is a lack of discrimination. Hence, the only way to get rid of the not-Self, and thereby eliminate the possibility of an apparent mutual superimposition between the Self and the not-Self, a superimposition that serves as the basis of all duality as well as the resultant fear, is through proper discrimination. It is by this discrimination that one must separate the Real Self from the unreal superimposed not-Self. When this separation has taken place, the not-Self cannot exist, since its existence apart from the Self (Ātman) is impossible and unimaginable.

2.2 Purification (*Sattvasaṁsuddhiḥ*)

(The precondition to reach the Final Aim)

But all of us cannot take recourse to such a sublime discriminative practice because our minds, being filled with passions and desires (rajas), sloth and incorrect appreciations (tamas), are not equipped or competent to do that. To enable the mind to discriminate properly therefore, it has to be drained of all that can be considered impurities, so that it can acquire the required stability, purity, introvert-ness, and subtlety required. It is clear from this that even the highest spiritual practice of discrimination requires previous spiritual practices that result in the purity of mind that qualifies one for this stage of spiritual practice.

2.3 Establishment in the Yoga of Knowledge

(*Jñāna Yoga Vyavasthiḥ*)

(The Final Means to Self-Realization)

The state of one's mind is the result of the cumulative effect of all actions. It is reasonable therefore to expect that the correct attitude towards those actions should help in cleansing the mind while the wrong attitude generates the opposite effect. Thus, arises the confusion as to what exactly constitutes the correct attitude. In this context, we shall denote the correct attitude by the word *dharma*. Different systems in the world, philosophical and ethical, have held conflicting views in regard to what precisely *dharma* is. Added to this is the frequently encountered opposition of the socialists and humanists in regards to religion. While one school of free thinkers advocates the

maximum good to the maximum number of people, the other schools question how the criterion can be fixed for the maximum good and what should constitute the maximum people. There is something to be said in favor of both sides. One may argue that whatever a person does will affect not only himself, but will also affect the society around him, thus initiating a chain-reaction, so that an individual's contribution may improve the tenor of social ethics, until someday the ideal can be reached where nothing but good will exist. This assumes that all people, or at the least the majority, will contribute toward this maximum good. However, the history of humanity has shown that until now this has been a mere dream. Apart from the lack of an absolute criterion for the maximum good, the problem arises as to who should be the judges to decide that such a maximum good has been reached by the maximum people. During any given period of time, no two sections of people agree on a standard definition of goodness. Besides, apart from different religions adopting different standards and criteria, as times change, even the same community alters their criteria regarding the concepts about what is good and what is not good, right and wrong, ethics and devilry; as a matter of fact, all values of life. What was once considered higher values of life gets deflated and yields its place to new values. If one adheres to old values he will be considered a reactionary or a conservative. If, on the contrary, a person anticipates new values before they gain currency, he may be hounded out of society. But later society may adopt the same values as him and lionize him as a martyr.

This concept of the maximum good to the maximum number of people has received such a severe drubbing in the hands of Lokmānya Tilak, the author of ‘Gītā Rahasya’, that no repetition or reinforcement is needed here. Consequently, the criteria for the correct attitude regarding our behavior must be sought elsewhere.

Fortunately in India, religion (dharma) has never been divorced from philosophy, which was always related to the conception of values and which was not merely a view on life, but rather a way of living. Philosophy did not mean a system based on speculation and cold logic, which could be demolished by more brilliant arguments. It was a guide for living, usefully here and happily hereafter. Even in the early portion of the Vedas, where one comes across prayers for granting purely mundane desires, it was always with a higher perspective in mind, aimed at the highest achievement of human endeavor: i.e., Liberation. In this context, the ancient Seers, after patient search, observation, and experience, formulated the four things to be achieved by an individual, called the four the *Puruṣārthas*: 1) *Dharma* – righteous conduct, 2) *Artha* – resources (wealth), 3) *Kāma* – desire and 4) *Mokṣa* – liberation or deliverance. When examined closely it can be seen that the sequence is deliberate and meaningful. We all must start by becoming *dharmic* (acting righteously) then the wealth (*artha*) that we earn will be used in a dharmic way. Then and only then, will our desires (*kāma*) shift to the desire for liberation. Contrary to the often-proclaimed idea, neither the Gītā nor Śrī Śaṅkarācārya advocated formal renunciation (*sannyāsa*

āśrama) as a general mode of life, not to mention the misconceptions regarding the very word renunciation (*sannyāsa*) itself. When renunciation refers to a particular stage in life, it is indicating a rare individual, endowed with exceptional qualities, so as to make him, after formal renunciation, an asset to society and not a drain on it. When the true *sannyāsa* is being referred to it is not indicating a particular stage of life but rather that the Self is ever free from actions.

Wealth and desires were not to be shunned as long as they were preceded by *dharma* and that they led to a desire for final liberation (*Mokṣa*). While dealing with the preparation for Yoga, the Lord advises the golden medium in everything, food (for all senses), recreation, activity, and the rest (B.G. 6.17). The Lord warns that Yoga is not for those who completely avoid these guidelines, just as it is also not for those who overindulge in these things. The Lord even seems to advise the enjoyment of sense objects while abandoning all desires as not being objectionable to the final stage of practice. This is a characteristic of ‘the one established in knowledge’ (*sthitaprajña*) asked about in 2.54 and later described in verse 2.71 of the Gītā. Similarly, while enumerating on the Lord’s glories (*vibhūties*), He declares that, “He is desire, not opposed to *dharma*” (B.G. 7.11).

There is, however, one extraordinary feature that was concurrent in all systems of India thought, including those

who were anti-Vedic and can be termed materialistic, such as the ideas of Ajita Keśakambali. The idea of self-effacement, in performing one's duty was present in all the Indian philosophical systems, Vedic or Non-Vedic. There was no scope for any self-centered activity, which attitude would automatically remove the urge in anybody to act in a way that would produce results that were detrimental to others. These two attitudes are exemplified in verses 3.9 and 6.32 of the Gītā.

Since dharma has been advocated as the cornerstone on which the social structure and personal achievements had to be built, the scriptures, which reveals dharma naturally, became the main common authority for the conduct of all sections of Vedic society. All actions had to be in accordance with the scriptures, the knowledge of which thus became very essential for its correct performance. Since actions had to be selfless, they had to be undertaken as Yoga, without any attachment, so as to form a link with the Lord. Being established in both the scriptural knowledge in accordance with which all karma was to be performed and with the spirit of selfless work as Yoga, purification of the mind would result. This purity of mind is the very basis for discrimination, which directly leads to the state of fearlessness (*abhaya*), Liberation. This sequence of steps (*Gītā sopāna*) of first living a dharmic life in accordance with the scripture and then doing those activities Selflessly as worship to the Supreme for the purification of the mind, so as to qualify it for discrimination and ultimately Liberation, is indicated in the first line of the first verse of chapter 16

and this same idea is also confirmed in the penultimate verse where the Lord concludes: “He, who acts as he likes, transgressing the Scriptures, cannot get siddhi, happiness, or fearlessness” (B.G. 16.23).

In the above verse, and in most other places in the Gītā, the word siddhi has been employed in the sense of naiṣkarmya siddhi, the perfection of actionlessness, or Jñāna Niṣṭhā, establishment in knowledge, which is the culmination of karma Yoga. In the absence of this type of siddhi, since the mind will be unavoidably distracted, there can be no true happiness or peace nor even the possibility to think of non-Duality or fearlessness (abhaya). This is the correct understanding of the word abhaya, which is not to be mistaken for mere bravery or dare-devilry. This understanding of the true meaning of the word abhaya can be sustained with confidence by an appeal to the scriptural authority of the Upaniṣads, which states “Of the sage (who is identified with the vital force), the east is the eastern vital force, the south the southern vital force, the west the western vital force, the north the northern vital force, the direction above the upper vital force, the direction below the nether vital force, and all the quarters, the different vital forces. “This Self is that which has been described as 'Not this, not this,' It is imperceptible, for It is never perceived; undecaying, for It never decays; unattached, for It is never attached; unfettered It never feels pain, and never suffers injury. You have attained that which is free from fear abhaya, fearlessness, O’ Janaka, said Yājñavalkya. Then King Janaka said to Revered Yājñavalkya, 'May That

which is free from fear be yours, for you have made That which is free from fear known to us. Salutations to you! Here is this (empire of) Videha, as well as myself at your service” (Br. Up 4.2.4). The same idea can be found again in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad verse 2.7.4, and this same idea is echoed in the Gītā verses 49 to 55 of chapter 18.

2.4.1 Complementary qualities for Self-Realization

To qualify for being established in Jñāna or Yoga some basic qualities must be first developed, without which the mind, being engrossed in worldly activities, will neither turn toward the scriptures nor wean itself from its ego-centric nature. According to the Scriptures to sustain our existence we have to draw energy from three places: 1. From ourselves, 2. From our society, and 3. From God. If we live without repaying our debts to these three sustaining energies we will not be replenishing the cycle of the universe and it will not run properly. The Lord has decried such a life as wasteful, thieving and partaking of sin (B.G. 3.12–13, 3.16). For returning this debt, three activities are declared as being obligatory.

The first debt is paid back by the performance of tapas (austerities). The purpose of the performance of austerities is to restore whatever energies we have drawn from our own self (B.G. 17.14–19). The purpose of tapas, moderation in food, solitude, silence, control of the senses and mind, is to restore what we have expended from ourselves (*svārtha*), that which is done for one’s own sake, and those activities are done for the sake of one’s own self.

The second debt is paid back by giving charity (*dāna*). Giving charity to the needy and deserving, at the appropriate time, with the feeling that what is being given is God's and has to be given, is what is known as the payment of debt to the society (*parārtha*), that which is done for the sake of society. Charity is to be differentiated from *dakṣiṇā*, which refers to that which is to be given to the priest of a Yajña (B.G. 17.13). In this case, the priest actually sells the effort, but the result of that effort will not go to him, but to the yajamāna, the one who has given the *dakṣiṇā*, the payment for the Sacrifice.

The third debt is paid back through the performance of sacrifice (*yajña*). In the Gītā the word sacrifice has a much wider connotation than merely indicating Vedic rituals such as the Fire Sacrifice (*agni hotra*). The Gītā has extended the meaning of this word to indicate “the performance of all actions as worship to God, surrendering them completely to Him, so they do not become a further source of bondage” (B.G. 3.9, 5.10, 18.46). The scriptures declare, “Verily, Yajña (sacrifice) is Viṣṇu.” Performance of karma in this spirit, surrendering the fruit to God, the Supreme Reality and Consciousness pervading the whole universe, (Viṣṇu mean that which pervades all) and as manifesting as the universe, will replenish what we draw from Him (*Paramārtha*), that which is done for the sake of the Supreme.

Besides the repayment of these three debts we find other qualities that have to be developed such as the

control of the senses (*dama*), and study of the scriptures (*svadhyāya*), which are essential for getting the full benefit of the above-mentioned activities: sacrifice, charity, and austerity. Without control of the senses actions will be rājasic or tāmasic, which will encourage demonic qualities (*āsurī vṛtti*), which leads one in the wrong direction. It is also evident that if the senses are not under control then efficient and proper performance of karma, in accordance with the scriptural rules, becomes impossible. Since the scriptures alone have become the deciding authority to ascertain what is appropriate to be done and what is not to be done (*dharma* and *adharma*), their constant study is essential so that the right karma is undertaken at the right time and in the proper manner (B.G.16.24). The need for cultivating qualities such as uprightness and simplicity (*ārjavam*), so as to not be overly ego-centric, needs no particular stress. All these above mentioned qualities are necessary to take the mind away from the world and toward God, so that the divine qualities (*daivī vṛtti*) leading to illumination will mature. The need for these qualities, so as to lead a healthy and useful life, even from a practical point of view, cannot be over exaggerated.

While the development of these divine qualities (*daivī vṛtti*) are no doubt necessary, it is equally important, perhaps even more so, that the demonic qualities (*āsurī vṛtti*) are eliminated since it is they that form the obstacles which prevent us from improving ourselves and progressing on the right path. While the divine qualities help us to get rid of our attachment to

our body, senses, mind, and ego, the demonic qualities strengthen our attachment to the body, senses, mind, and ego. In other words, the negative qualities have been called demonic because they actually strengthen our feelings of identification with that which we are not. The necessity of eradicating these negative qualities, so as to make progress towards liberation, is clearly brought out in verse 16.5 of the Gītā. Not only do these demonic qualities drag a person down towards Hell, but also when they are finally reborn, they will attain lower and lower births. This outcome is also a result of their hatred towards God as indicated in 16.18-20 (B.G.). It is essential to remember that the origin of all these adverse qualities lies in desire, anger, and greed, which are said to be the three gateways to Hell (B.G. 16.21). Those who make an effort to avoid these three negative qualities are actually working for their own welfare and will therefore achieve better births in the future (B.G. 16.22). These three negative qualities (desire, anger, and greed) can ultimately be reduced to the root problem of desire alone for it is that which drags the mind outward (B.G. 3.37). It is desire that is said to be the destroyer of both knowledge and intuition and it is this which constitutes the real enemy for any seeker of truth (B.G.3.43). The Lord has taken special trouble to examine in detail these negative qualities, which form the predominate qualities in most of us. The description of these demonic qualities seems to be tailor-made to describe the conditions that are now prevailing in the world. Remembering that it is much easier to stray into evil ways than to tread the path of noble qualities, we must make a conscious effort

to develop the correct qualities and curb the negative ones. Hence, the most fundamental and the very first step in the spiritual path is to examine these two sets of opposed qualities that are described in the 16th chapter very carefully. Having understood the nature of these two sets of qualities one must look into one's own Self with honesty and sincerity in order to ascertain which of these qualities are predominant and then make efforts to get rid of the negative qualities and increase the good ones.

2.4.2 Guṇas

At any particular time, all of us behave as we do because of the innate nature that we bring with us from our past lives (B.G. 18.60). Depending upon that nature (B.G. 17.2), some quality will be predominant in us that compels us to act in a certain fashion and from which performance we have no escape. It is this helplessness that prompts Arjuna to appeal to the Lord in anguish, to know what force compels people to resort to wrong deeds even against their wish, and even when they know that such a behavior will land them in misery. Nor can any control be effective, since even a Wise Man acts only in accordance with his nature (B.G. 3.33).

Depending on the predominant quality the senses run after those objects outside that possess the corresponding qualities. Hence, an analysis of the direction in which our attractions lie will reveal what qualities are predominant in us. This is the first step of the practice. To facilitate this, since it is a very important part of the spiritual practice, the characteristics of each of the three guṇas

have been described in great detail in verses 13.21, 14.12–18, and 18.39 (B.G.). The second step in this process, after having ascertained the tendency in us towards divine or demonic qualities is to find out in which direction the mind flows among the various objects of the senses. When, by constant introspection, it is seen which predominate quality, (guṇa) is guiding us, we can take corrective measures. When tamas is on the increase, we feel both the lack of discrimination and an absence of zeal to work. Because of tamas we take everything in a fashion contrary to the correct understanding. There ensues a tendency to sleep when we should be working. Since the main characteristic of tamas is laziness, the only remedy lies in engaging oneself in ceaseless activity, which, coupled with desire, will result in the characteristic of rajas. When rajas is on the increase, selfishness, avarice, and a constant search for activity will inevitably result in a mind that is bereft of peace. The mind will hover from one work to another without even waiting to complete the work from an earlier activity. Persistent effort in one direction will be lacking so that our activities will, for the most part, not be particularly fruitful. It should be obvious that this type rājasic behavior will not fetch us the peace that we are ultimately seeking. In this context, citing a few examples may be useful. The type of food that we consume through all of our senses affects our mind accordingly. While pure (sāttvic) food will develop the quality of sattva, the wrong type of food will definitely hinder such development. In the scriptures there is a description of how food eaten is digested into

three parts, the grossest being thrown out and the finest part converting itself into the mind. That is the reason why the scriptures have insisted on the purity of the food consumed so that the mind becomes pure (Chānd. Up. 7.26.2).

This first step is in fact one of the easiest parts of the spiritual practice. We can examine what type of food attracts us and what type of effect it produces in us. For instance, it is our common experience that stale food produces sleep, yet we see that many people are attracted to this type of food. We find many people relishing stale food, the smell of which is seen to be objectionable to many others. It is often seen that those who are prone to take very hot foods, containing a lot of garnishing and condiments tend to have a hot-tempered nature. As opposed to this, those who consume the optimum quantities of easily digestible food are seen to be balanced in their outlook and have the additional benefit of maintaining good health. This is what is meant when the Lord warns us that to attain Yoga, the correct amount of food, rest, sleep, work, and recreation are essential.

Similarly we see that it is the nature of some people to go out of their way to render some service to others. On the other hand, we often see people who are indifferent to the feelings of those in need and still others who actually derive pleasure and pride by intentionally and willfully creating difficulties and pain. As a matter of fact there is no activity that does not fall into one of these three categories: Sattva- that leads to purity and knowledge,

Rajas- that leads to activity and desire, or Tamas- that leads to laziness, sleep, or ignorance. One's personality is molded, to a large extent, by the cumulative effect of one's actions. Hence, it is necessary to be guarded in our actions so that the result is an improvement to us and not a degeneration. Some people are so careful about their speech that nothing escapes their mouth, a characteristic that will certainly not be pleasant for others. While other people can never seem to say anything that will not hurt others, even when they may not mean to do so. It is best to remember that such instances of pleasant speech or outbursts of abuse are not accidental or merely motivated by a particular occasion. The true cause is our habitual nature, of which often we are not even aware. Though it is to be conceded that on the spur of the moment what happens cannot be prevented, after the incident if the circumstances are analyzed objectively, we may discover that what had happened was not really unavoidable after all. Then remorse may overtake us and we may try to make amends for this damage and change our ways. But all this reasoning will be conspicuous by its absence at the moment when the incident had taken place and into which we plunged blindly. This is because the behavior is controlled by our inner nature that we have brought with ourselves due to previous actions and which has caused the present behavior. It is therefore, to ensure the development of the correct attitude, that so much care is taken in the Gītā to classify human activities into various guṇas.

As we have mentioned earlier, one of the three essential practices for purification is austerity (tapas). In all of our activities, whether they be actions of speech, body, or mind, Tapas is to be practiced (B.G. 17.14–19). For instance, austerity with regard to the body consists of the following characteristics: respect toward the Divine, the twice-born, the Wise-Ones, cleanliness, straightforwardness, and non-violence toward all beings. This is what is known as austerity of the body. Speech, when it does not cause disturbance to others, when it is true, palatable, and also good in the long run and when it includes the study of the scriptures and translation of such study into action, is known as austerity of speech. Keeping the mind clean and controlled and free from cunning, remaining calm, and quiet are all signs of austerity of the mind.

These three types of austerities should be undertaken without hankering after any return and with a quiet mind. When austerities are undertaken in this manner then it is said to be sāt̥tvic by the learned people and will lead to a better attitude. When austerities are undertaken courting flattery and respect and with pomp and showmanship, it is considered to be a rājasic austerity and will tend to be fickle in nature and will not yield a consistent result. When austerities are undertaken by those seized by the grip of ignorance, tamas, it results in either harm to one's self or to others and will take us towards destruction.

In the same way as austerities, so also sacrifice (yajña) and charity (dāna) must be performed so as to

enrich the content of our purity (sattva). In all these activities (sacrifices, charities, and austerities) the common feature, which may be considered as their very essence, is that they must be undertaken with the sense that they are one's duty and for the purpose of quieting and purifying the mind and with a complete absence of anticipation for the result of that activity either here or hereafter in another life. Similarly, knowledge, activity, and the agency for the activity have all been analyzed in the Gītā according to the Guṇas (B.G. 18.20–28). In addition, the intellect, steadfastness, and happiness have also been analyzed according to the Guṇas in verses 18.30–39. The qualification that these activities must be carried out in the spirit of Yoga, joining them to God, is unavoidable because as we have seen earlier all activities must be preceded by discrimination so as to eliminate the unhelpful ones and to cultivate the helpful qualities.

Such continuous introspection of all of our activities is imperative in order to ascertain which Guṇa is gaining prominence. For instance, if tamas is on the increase, naturally laziness will manifest and likewise rajas will show itself as restlessness. These are therefore cautionary signals to warn us against these two qualities (Guṇas) and to turn us toward purity (sattva) by making use of the yardsticks given in the text for corrective and remedial measures. While all the three Guṇas are always present, when one of them dominates the other two become suppressed. Hence, the only cause for the bondage of saṃsāra is the three Guṇas, as clearly stated in the following passage: “There is nothing on this Earth,

or the ones above, or even in the region of the Divine Beings that is not comprised of these three Guṇas of prakṛti” (B.G. 18.40).

Therefore, the crucial step in the process of freeing oneself from the shackles of saṃsāra is to transcend these three Guṇas because, in spite of purity (sattva) being essential for the generation of Knowledge (Jñāna), even that purity, that Guṇa, will continue to be a source of bondage to us.

Thus, the Lord assures us:

“One, who realizes that these Guṇas alone are performing karmas, and intuits Ātman beyond them, he attains My own nature. Whoever transcends these three Guṇas, which cause the body, goes beyond saṃsāra in the form of birth and death, age and sorrow, and attains Eternity” (B.G. 14.19–20).

The corollary of this should be evident. Since the whole gamut of activities, worldly, scriptural or even those leading to Liberation (Mokṣa), falls within the scope of the three Guṇas of prakṛti, the three qualities of nature, and must inevitably involve one of the these three Guṇas. From this perspective it is easy to see that any effort will not be adequate to relieve us from this saṃsāra. We can progress toward the goal through the performance of karma – incessant karma to overcome the tamas, we can perform those karmas with no desire for their fruit so as to cross over rajas, and finally we can perform karma totally detached and with no

identification, becoming predominantly sāt̥tvic. But the last traces of this sattva, however pure it may become, will still be an obstacle to Liberation and a source of rebirth. The only way therefore to wipe out the saṁsāra, is to surrender to Him, the Supreme Lord, the ‘Master of Prakṛti’ (B.G. 7.14, 10.11). This sequence clearly shows the indispensable value of devotion and surrender and how the performance of karma serves merely as a preparation for that final surrender.

The preceding discussion regarding the sequence of steps leading to the final surrender to the Supreme Being raises certain questions. If, as stated, when we act at any particular moment that action was not something about which we had any choice, and we are forced to act merely on the strength of our past dispositions then human beings will be reduced to mere machines, automatons, and the concept of human effort will have become meaningless. Since our present actions are predestined by our past actions, the future will automatically become the result of these current actions and will, therefore, become as inescapable as the present ones. This leaves no scope for choice, allowing no room for conscious effort, either to improve ourselves or to contribute to the welfare of the community around us. Under these circumstances, the whole series of exercises provided in the text will have become futile.

The above argument arises clearly from the tāmasic tendency to try escape from making any efforts and then to find some rational for not undertaking any efforts. This

approach should stand condemned as a total misreading of the Gītā. It is true that we function in a particular fashion controlled by our past deeds and since these past deeds have already been completed they cannot be revised. On account of the irrevocable relationship between cause and effect, in this case, action and its result, the present, is exactly what we are bound to go through, exactly as it is proceeding (B.G. 5.14). But this does not mean that we are mere tools in the hands of fate. The relief from the vice-grip of cause and effect and the choices available to us is clear. The Lord warned Arjuna that depending on the ego, if he thought that he was not going to fight he was under an illusion, since the warrior nature which he had inherited would compel him to fight. Fight he must, and fight he will, willingly or grudgingly, but there was a clear choice before him and that resided in his attitude towards the inevitable fighting. It is our attitude that forms the seed for the future, an attitude that we can therefore mold, even though our present action cannot be prevented. Therefore, the whole practice lies in the attempt to develop the correct attitude towards the actions, which we are performing inevitably, so that they do not become further sources of bondage, but rather become aids for the release from their clutches. The Gītā clearly shows that it is our inner attachments and aversions, in other words our attitude, that is capable of being transformed by efforts.

The Lord says, “The senses have attachments and aversions to their respective objects; none should be swayed by them. They indeed are the obstacles in men’s path” (B.G. 3.34).

Hence, we are not impelled to resort to endless deeds even against our will. In the spur of the moment, we may act impulsively but when discretion is warranted, we will our action, and at other times we thoughtlessly yield to the promptings of the sensuous self.

When seen in this light it becomes clear why certain restrictions and preconditions have been imposed on the performance of karma in the Gītā, appearing almost like a refrain. A few examples will be appended below to show how control of senses and mind, and complete absence of attachment are given as prerequisites for the performance of karma:

“You have your entitlement to karma alone and never to the fruits thereof” (B.G.2.47).

“Establishing yourself in Yoga, perform karma, abandoning all attachments” (B.G. 2.48).

“He alone is entitled for the final peace, who has rid himself of all desires, who has no ego-oriented thoughts, who has no identification with ‘I’ or ‘mine’” (B.G.2.71).

“He excels who, controlling the senses through the mind, continues to engage himself in karma unattached by practicing karma Yoga” (B.G. 3.7).

“Therefore, controlling senses, etc., destroy here that sinful, dreadful enemy (desire), which kills both Knowledge and Intuition (Direct Experience)” (B.G. 3.41).

“Yogis perform karma, by means of the body, mind, intellect, and senses, giving up attachment...” (B.G. 5.11).

2.5 Karma

A question that needs to be addressed in this context is that if all karmas have to be in accordance with any one of the three guṇas, and since the whole aim of the practice is to overcome the guṇas, prakṛti, how can karmas, which are essentially the activity of nature itself, contribute to the practice at all? The answer to this question constitutes the second step of the practice having already completed the first step, which is to ascertain our nature in terms of the guṇas by evaluating our various activities.

Since for all of us, and this includes even the so-called learned ones, identification with the body, senses, and mind is natural (here the word ‘natural’ indicates a state of non-discrimination that is common to everyone), all these items, body, senses and mind, being inert objects of consciousness, it is correct to expect that barring a few practitioners in a high state of attainment, tamas should be the predominant guṇa in all of us, in as much as we are all identifying with these inert objects, so this is the darkness, the tamas that we all have. The only difference being the extent to which the tamas keeps the other two guṇas under suppression, goading us to escape from our duty. Many may even try to convert this obvious failure in duty into a virtue by seemingly intelligent arguments and garbled quotations from the scriptures, forgetting that these are precisely the characteristics of tamas (B.G. 14.13). Therefore, in order to move in the direction of overcoming the guṇas the first step is to overcome tamas. This tamas must be overcome by incessant activity (*nirantara karma*).

The Lord says, “Not a moment can you exist without activity because all beings are being compelled into activity by the guṇas of prakṛti” (B.G. 3.5)

We may withdraw from external activity by withdrawing the organs of activity, but in such a state the mind becomes more furiously active, which is absolute hypocrisy (B.G. 3.6). Besides, even if we withdraw from activity externally, the maintenance of the body and its activities must go on, which will be impossible through complete passivity (B.G. 3.8). So, as long as the identification with the body is present complete abandonment of the activities is impossible (B.G. 18.11). The corollary of this will be that the absolute cessation of activity is possible only when the identification with the body ceases. While there is no duty to be performed for a Wise Man, a Jñāni, (B.G. 3.17–18) the withdrawal from activity by an ignorant person will be disastrous and hypocritical (B.G. 3.6).

This continuous engagement in activity, rajas, in order to overcome tamas, will of course land us in a state of unending desires, for each activity is prompted by a desire to get the result of that activity for one’s own enjoyment. Thus, by cultivating the habit of continuous activity, karma, the mind will restlessly seek for endless things to do and endless things to acquire because greed is the main characteristic of rajas. That greed will pitchfork the person into the jungle of desires and activity, a state in which a person will hardly be able to perform correctly even the work on hand. It will often be the case that

even before the work is properly begun the mind will jump to another activity so as to acquire another result. This uncultivated and rājasic mind will thus be distracted in a thousand directions, a state that is suicidal for the efficiency of our activities as well as peace and can never lead to real Yoga (B.G. 2.44).

We should come to understand that all desires sprout from and fuel rajas (B.G. 3.37). Since there is this inherent defect in every activity, in that it binds its doer to its result, one may legitimately raise the question as to why any karma should be undertaken at all and why has the Lord, more than once, enjoined us to perform karma? It can be seen that a substantial portion of chapter 3 of the Gītā is devoted to an eloquent argument for the necessity of the performance of karma. The answer to this question is that passivity, whereby we merely withdraw from actions, will inevitably lead one back to *tamas*. Hence, one must work but that work must be performed in a particular fashion so that rajas is not fed and fattened. Desires have their abode in the senses, mind, and intellect (B.G. 3.40). So, if our intention is that our desires should not multiply, rajas must be controlled even while the performance of karmas continue. Control of the senses, mind, and intellect thus becomes indispensable. This control, in fact, becomes possible only when at no stage in the performance of any activity even the least attachment to it or its result is entertained. While the injunction found in the first quarter of verse 2.47 of the Gītā (“Your entitlement is to activity, karma, alone”) was meant to awaken a person into activity, so as to overcome *tamas*. The next quarter

of verse 2.47 is an instruction concerning the method to overcome rajas, so that the activity no longer has any effect on us.

In accordance with the above advice, another apparent contradiction is thus cleared. The Lord has ordained that the criterion for what is to be done and what is not to be done is to be found in the scriptures alone (B.G. 16.24). He also criticizes those actions that ignore the scriptures and portrays them as being without restraint and also not producing siddhi, perfection, or happiness here in this world or any relief after in any other world. On the contrary, the Lord has warned us that unless the intellect, which is normally sullied by the desire for the fruits of scriptural activities, withdraws from that addiction the attainment of Yoga will not be achieved (B.G. 2.53), because desires are innumerable and those desiring them are also countless. The scriptures prescribe corresponding karmas, which serve as a means to attain those ends, and also as palliatives for the purging of the mind of its preoccupation with both the mere gross body and the world and to invert the mind from its natural inclination towards indulging in the sense objects.

The prescribing of scriptural activities is done mainly because without them people will naturally stray exclusively into worldly activities and will become completely entangled in their innate animal propensities. This does not mean that a person should embark on all scriptural activities or even any particular scriptural activity unless he truly wants the fruit of that karma. He

need not engage in any scriptural activities if, in fact, he is really free from his identification with his gross body and the gross world.

Hence, the direction to eschew scriptural activities should be understood to apply to those activities that are undertaken with the specific aim of getting some desired result, while the obligatory duties should never be given up but should be performed with a sense of duty, non-attachment to the fruit, and surrender to the Lord (B.G. 2.42–44, 18.5–6, 18.9). This conclusion is confirmed when the Lord contrasts a Brahma Jñāni with one interested in karmas by using the simile of the ocean and puddles of water: the puddles representing the need for karmas and the ocean representing the complete fulfillment of all desires. When one is already standing in the ocean, what use is a puddle of water and for one established in Brahman what is the use of Vedic karmas? It is from this viewpoint that the Lord directs Arjuna to overcome the *guṇas*, in which field alone the Vedas operate (B.G. 2.45). There is obviously no intention here to criticize the scriptures in general but there is a clear instruction to subdue our desires.

Thus, the performance of karma, not anticipating the results, which is called *niṣkāma karma*, is necessary to overcome *rajas* and thereby eliminate desires. There is one point that should be taken note of in this context and that is whether we anticipate the result or not, the result is bound to be credited into our account, like the inevitable smoke accompanying fire, the fruit being the

inseparable accompaniment of work (B.G. 18.48). This is the reason that the scriptures have described the fruit of karma as indestructible wherein the fruit is called *amṛta*, without death, never destroyed (Mu. Up. 1.1.8). All that happens from the performance of niṣkāma karma is to absolve us of the second guilt of having desire for the fruit in the first place, which we know will be a source of distraction for the mind.

Since, by niṣkāma karma, performing activity without desiring its fruit, one can overcome rajas, but one should not rest there, hoping that sattva, which is known to be the cause of knowledge, will liberate us. This is because the sattva guṇa also creates a subtle bondage in us, which at best can be described as golden handcuffs in the form of pride in scriptural knowledge, which by itself can become a strong type of bondage, since the ego at that stage, being very subtle, becomes extremely difficult to eliminate. And also because of attachment to the happiness that we derive from the sattva guṇa, a subtle type of bondage is also created (B.G. 14.6). But sattva is also included in prakṛti, nature, and when it is present even in the smallest trace liberation cannot occur. While performing karma without desire, one is still conscious of being its doer and he has a sense of agency with regard to that action. Hence, in order to be free from the sattva guṇa, a further effort is needed and that effort must take the form of ensuring that the collection of the body, senses, and mind continues to perform all activities that come their way, with no attachment to those activities at any stage. This includes the volition to do the action,

the very first thought that arises in us before an action is undertaken, as well as the action itself, and the result of the action.

The state that is envisioned here is described in the Gītā as follows:

“Giving up attachment to the fruits and the work; unattached, always content, independent, even though he is engaging in works, he does nothing at all” (B.G. 4.20).

It is when activities are performed with this mental attitude that those very activities no longer bind the doer to that activity. This teaching is what is being indicated in Gītā verses 4.22-23:

“Content with what is gained by chance, beyond dualities, rid of competitive spirit, the same in gain and loss, one is not bound in spite of working” (B.G. 4.22).

“With no attachment, free, established in Knowledge, all karmas when undertaken as sacrifice dissolve away completely” (B.G. 4.23).

Performing activities in this fashion, completely unaware of being in any way an agent for that action, the practitioner acquires the conviction that the guṇas alone are the cause for all activities as well as the agent for any activity, and that he has therefore no connection with any of them. At this stage, action itself loses its entire sting and in fact becomes no activity at all. This is the case because the very sense of being an agent has completely vanished. This is the true spirit and meaning

of the word sacrifice (yajña) that is found in verse 3.9 of the Gītā. It is with this deeper meaning that the word sacrifice is being described when Arjuna was told that karma performed, except in the spirit of sacrifice, will be binding. As cited above in verse 4.23 (B.G.), it is assured that “karma performed as sacrifice (in the above mentioned sense of complete detachment from the whole process of action) completely dissolves away all karma.”

2.6 Karma Yoga

Even though the word karma has been used above in the more technical sense, where it refers to scripturally enjoined activities, this connotation should be seen as partial and inadequate. The Gītā talks of any practice, any action, not just scriptural as being Yoga, only when that action becomes a means by which one is linked to God and when, as the term Yoga itself signifies, it leads to the unification with God. The performance of karma in this sense as Yoga is itself so difficult that it most often cannot be achieved except through its intermediary stages. The concept karma Yoga demands strict scrutiny because like many other aspects of the Gītā this term is also applied very loosely, even for all sorts of incessant worldly activities. In the context of karma Yoga there are two essential points that need to be remembered. Since the Gītā bases itself on the Vedic Scriptures, the karma that is being referred to in the Gītā is only with respect to scriptural duties. However the Gītā being a universal text for people not within the Vedic fold, they can perform all of their worldly duties with the same exact attitude

that the faithful are performing their scriptural duties. Secondly, karma, whether it is secular or scriptural, ceases only through its performance and not by its abandonment. While this has already been discussed above, the important point that is being stressed here is brought out in the *Gītā* as follows: "...Renouncing all karmas by the mind" (B.G. 5.13), and "...burning by the fire of Knowledge all undertakings, desires, and volitions (to do an action)" (B.G.4.19).

Since such a person as described above is established in the Self, *Ātman*, whose nature it is to be free from all activities, the very idea of duty or karma for that person does not arise at all (B.G. 3.17.). In this regard there could not be a better example than that of the Lord himself so as to illustrate the state of a *Jñāni*, a Wise Man, who in truth is not performing any karma at all. The Lord, the best *Jñāni* is completely free from the idea that He is the agent, or that He has the need to achieve anything by undertaking activities, or that He needs to shed anything by not doing them (B.G. 3.22-23).

The collection of the body, senses, mind, etc., appear to be associated with the *Jñāni*, and appear to be active, just as they were appearing before the dawn of *Jñāna*. However, the activities of the body, etc., should not be transferred to the *Jñāni*, because his real nature, is indeed the same as God, with whom He has become identical and should not be confused with the qualities of these seeming limiting adjuncts (B.G. 7.18, 7.24, and 9.11).

As the Gītā proclaims:

“In spite of the four classes of society having been created by Me, in accordance with the qualities of nature and actions, know Me to be the immutable non-doer” (B.G. 4.13).

While the ignorant draw all the activities of the guṇas over themselves, the Wise-One knows the difference between the functions of the guṇas and the One beyond the guṇas and does not get involved in the karma, having the conviction that guṇas in the form of the senses function with the corresponding guṇas in the form of the sense objects (B.G. 3.27-28).

When it is accepted that a person has to reap the result of his innumerable karmas we cannot expect that all of them can be experienced in one lifetime nor can it be claimed that by penance or rites of purification that all of them can be washed away. To experience the backlog of the results of such activities he will have to take more births in bodies that are appropriate for going through the enjoyment of the results of those activities. Good karma, being helpful to the rise of sattva, will lead to higher births (such as Divine beings), mixed karmas will result in a human birth, in which comfort and sorrow will be mixed, and evil and prohibited karmas will drag one to lower births, among animals, plants, and even inert objects (B.G. 14.18). So goes the cycle of Saṃsāra i.e.: performing karma, which is inescapable, and getting reborn to experience the result, and in the process performing even more karma. From a cursory

examination it would appear that we could never escape from the clutches of saṃsāra. The beauty of the Gītā, particularly its teaching concerning karma Yoga, lies in the fact that this practice can provide complete relief from the vice of this seemingly inescapable situation. As the very expression indicates karma Yoga converts karma into such a noble activity that it ceases to be the cause of bondage and becomes an aid to link oneself with the Lord.

It is the right attitude towards everything, which alone creates the required intellect (buddhi) needed to progress toward liberation from saṃsāra. This attitude presumes that everything must be seen in its proper perspective. This capacity is acquired by becoming more and more sāttvic, as rajas results in non-discrimination between dharma and adharma, between the prescribed duty and the prohibited action (B.G. 18.31), and tamas veils our vision to such an extent that we see everything in a form which is exactly the opposite of its real nature (B.G. 18.32). When a person has a predominance of these two qualities of rajas and tamas they are said to be persons with demonic tendencies because they function not caring for scriptural injunctions, leaning entirely on their own selfish nature, consisting of likes and dislikes (B.G. 16.7, 16.19–20, 16.23). These people attain lower and lower births and ultimately reach an inanimate state. Even while performing the correct karmas, they do it with vanity and for show, which carries them away from the Lord (B.G.16.17).

The primary cause for ignoring the scriptural authority is an insatiable desire for enjoying the sense objects. Since attachment and hatred are seated in the senses, one should not come under their sway (B.G. 3.34). Furthermore, even when scriptural activities are undertaken, not accompanied by these base qualities, they will still not be an aid in stabilizing the mind as long as they are performed with a desire for the result (B.G. 2.42-44). When desire accompanies karma, the result is transient as well as limited in scope (B.G. 7.23). At best, such activity will take a person with faith in the scriptures to higher worlds for experiencing their result, only to be thrown back to this mortal world when the effect of those scriptural activities are exhausted. This process is like going up and hurling down, being repeated in cycles, like being stuck on a circular pulley used for drawing water from a well (B.G. 9.21). Hence, these actions, even though sanctioned by scriptures, will not finally free us from saṃsāra. But this does not mean that the Sāṃkhya philosophical view that all Scriptural activity must be given up completely gets any support from the Gītā. The Gītā is unequivocal in advocating the performance of obligatory (*nitya*) and incidental (*naimittika*) karmas (B.G. 18.5, 3.9). The point to be noted here is that these scriptural activities, as well as our other activities, must be done in a spirit of complete absence of attachment and desire for the result. To put it shortly, the Gītā wants that:

- a. The Scripture must sanction all activities.
- b. Those karmas done, anticipating their fruits, as well as prohibited karmas must be given up, while obligatory karmas should not be abandoned as long as the sense of duty persists.

- c. Karmas must be undertaken with no attachment at any stage of the activity, from its very beginning, where it starts as a mere volition, right up to the enjoyment of the result of the action.
- d. This control of the senses and mind cannot be achieved merely on the strength of our own efforts. The only way to get this control is to surrender all our activities to the Lord (B.G. 3.32, 5.10), performing them as His worship (B.G. 18.46) so that one develops the capacity to recognize the absence of action even while the action is in progress (B.G. 4.18).

Hence, the apex of karma Yoga is a stage where karma does not adhere itself to its doer. To reach this state, the necessary intermediary stages to be passed through will have to be examined.

The first step can be understood in the light of the following Gītā verses:

“Perform karma, establishing yourself in Yoga, giving up all attachment” (B.G. 2.48)

“Performing obligatory karma, with the understanding that it has to be performed, giving up all attachment to the action and the result is considered sāt̥tvic abandonment” (B.G. 18.9).

This is necessary because sāt̥tvic tendencies help in developing Jñāna (B.G. 14.17). So, the first step in karma Yoga is performance of obligatory duties without attachment to the fruit. This is so because when there

is attachment to the result there will always be some anxiety as to whether or not we will get the desired result. In other words, since the desire for the fruit is there, anxiety, in the form of whether or not the karma will be fully completed and whether it was done exactly in accordance with the rules for such karma, will always accompany it. When, however, this expectation is absent on the clear understanding that this action is a duty, about which there is no choice at all, then the mental agony about its fruitful completion will vanish.

The Lord says, “Perform karma, established in Yoga, giving up all attachment, with an equanimity of mind, unconcerned about siddhi or asiddhi (victory or defeat) because equanimity is called Yoga” (B.G. 2.48).

In the above verse it is possible to provide a larger meaning for the Sanskrit word *siddhi*, which is usually translated as victory. As we have seen earlier, and as will be elaborated shortly, siddhi in the form of the culmination of naiṣkarmya is the very pinnacle of karma Yoga. Since this practice is begun with the highest state of karma Yoga in view, it is natural to take the word siddhi in this verse as referring not to victory but to naiṣkarmya siddhi. When a practice is started, such as karma Yoga, it is most understandable to expect it to reach its goal, in this case, naiṣkarmya siddhi, or the state in which Knowledge alone remains as one’s only goal. Hence, even if the *sādhaka* (spiritual practitioner) has a doubt whether his efforts will or will not carry him to this fruition he should not abandon the effort and this is

because his mind should react in the same way whether siddhi is reached or not. A person who is aiming to reach Yoga must never despair. However, if we do not take the term siddhi in this technical sense of naiṣkarmya siddhi, since this is the beginning of the practice, we can also take siddhi to mean merely the satisfactory completion of the karma in hand without it contradicting the context.

But, even without the agency of external circumstances which bring about the accomplishment or non-accomplishment of the fruit of our actions emotions can arise in the mind, like comfort and discomfort, happiness and sorrow, which can upset the mind, even when our concern over the satisfactory completion of the action does not cause us any anxiety. Where the mind sees comfort, attachment to that naturally arises. What the mind shuns becomes a source of hatred. Hence, as long as we attach importance to the pairs of opposites, such as comfort and discomfort, the least departure from our expectation can create agitation. So, the second step in karma Yoga is to eliminate all pairs of opposites, which arise as a result of the anticipation of the enjoyment of the fruit of action. Those who adopt the wrong attitude of always desiring the fruit while performing karma are said to lose their very nature as human beings because doing work for the purpose of obtaining results is, in fact, considered to be wretched (*kārpaṇya*) (B.G. 2.7, 2.49). The Sanskrit word *kārpaṇya* is normally understood as wretchedness but, there is an element of miserliness and trade involved in it (as the very derivation of the Sanskrit word would indicate). This means that the expectation of the return is

always greater than the effort put in, thus involving greed. It is this greed that is said to be the cause of snatching one's human nature away. The result of such an attitude is that the mind can never cultivate itself into a state of one-pointedness (B.G. 2.44). This, in turn, causes us to follow only that part of the scriptures that deal with desire-oriented karmas, and which therefore deal with the three guṇas only. Since the ultimate aim of the entire exercise is to transcend the three guṇas, constituting prakṛti, such desire-prompted karmas should not hold any attraction for us, and even the obligatory karmas must be undertaken with the attitude described in Gītā in verse 2.45: "Overcoming all pairs of opposites, always established in sattva, not hankering after acquisition of things or safeguarding what has been acquired, and above all, being extremely vigilant."

But whether we anticipate the result or not, the result of the karma will have to be gone through even though our lack of expectation will absolve us of the contingency of losing our nature as a result of trading in karma, i.e., expecting the result in exchange for doing our duty. The idea being that: I will make this little effort and I am expecting an even greater return in proportion to that effort. Nevertheless, the necessity of having to experience the results of our karma will follow us like a shadow. It is therefore vital to our sādhanā that the desires for the fruits of our karma do not form an inseparable companionship with us.

The Lord says, "That karma that not aided by intellect (buddhi) is far inferior to the one executed with intellect..."

Yoga is dexterity in activity, when by discriminating during the performance of the action, one shakes off all actions, both good and evil” (B.G. 2.49-50).

And again in the Gītā verse 2.39 the Lord says, “Imbued with this intellect of Yoga, you can ward off the shackles of karma.”

By the use of the word intellect, buddhi, it should be understood that discrimination is to be resorted to and that the Lord grants this type of intellect to one who is constantly immersed in Him (B.G. 10.10). This is the Yoga Buddhi by which one can shake off the bondage of karma. The third step of karma Yoga, therefore, is the application of intellect not only to ascertain what karma is to be performed and what has to be eschewed but also to practice it in a way which does not bind us or cause rebirth, but becomes an aid in transcending both birth and death.

Even in the context of one attempting to practice karma Yoga, in spite of a person being free from the trap of the desire for the result and the pairs of opposites, there still lingers a sense of duty: ‘I have to do this.’ Here, the ego is still very evident when a person is conscious of the fact that he is the executing agent for a particular action. It should now be clear that the state where-in the result of the karma does not accrue at all is different from the state of performing the karma not anticipating the result. While the latter can only help in overcoming rajas and move us toward sattva, the former is essential to remove the ego, the agent, completely.

The subtle and sāt̥tvic ego, which has been molded through the performance of karma fit for one's station in life and position in society in the form of worship of the Lord, from whom all beings get inspired and by whom all beings are pervaded, must be overcome (B.G. 18.46). Since at this stage, the seeker realizes that without dependence on the Lord's Consciousness, it is not possible to function at all because all activity flows forth depending on Him and therefore is due to His Grace (B.G. 18.56). The culmination of karma Yoga refers to a state in which neither the sense of duty or the idea of agency for action remains. Since he has transcended the pairs of opposites he neither has the desire to avoid certain activities seen as undesirable nor does he want to engage himself in any activity thought of as being desirable. At this stage the identification with ego remains as illusory only.

When as a result of past impressions, some action appears before him he completes it, without even willing to do so and with no identification with that action at any stage. This is unlike the normal behavior of others who, depending on ego, assume they have a choice in doing something or to avoid doing it. Therefore, while in the case of others, likes and dislikes inevitably creep into the activity (karma) but for the one who has reached the pinnacle of karma Yoga, these likes and dislikes are absolutely absent. Since karma is an inalienable part of our nature, carried on from past activities, the karma Yogi has the perfect attitude towards that karma and that is the reason those activities do not stain him (B.G. 18.47). From all this it becomes clear that such

a practitioner that has reached this stage of karma Yoga will not engage himself in any activities except for those that are inevitable. It is this stage that results in all actions becoming virtually no action at all, a state called sannyāsa (renunciation) or naiṣkarmya (actionlessness) in the Gītā. It is only after one has attained naiṣkarmya that it's perfection, naiṣkarmya siddhi, becomes possible.

This siddhi, the perfection of naiṣkarmya, is the pinnacle of karma Yoga, which includes five elements of karma (actions), meditation (upāsanā), devotion (bhakti), discrimination (viveka), and knowledge (jñāna).

1. Looked at from the point of view of karma, since action ceases to be a cause of bondage and becomes an aid in linking one with God, that karma becomes karma Yoga.
2. Looked at from the point of view of the seekers mind, which at all stages is immersed in God; it is a meditation that has become upāsanā Yoga because the meditation has now become totally linked to Him.
3. Because at this stage the dependence on the Lord is never more evident to him than now, his devotion has now become bhakti Yoga because it is exclusively yoked to God.
4. As the mind is no longer distracted by the not-Self, an-Ātma, and its functions are completely oriented toward God; it is also dhyāna Yoga (B.G. 6.1-2).
5. Because it is the main stepping-stone for the attainment of jñāna (knowledge) it is also called

jñāna Yoga in that this knowledge has been yoked to God (B.G. 18.50).

Since in this way the whole gamut of the practice that is presented in the Gītā to reach the ‘Final Bliss’ is encased in karma Yoga, it can be fully appreciated why the Lord has extolled performance of karma and how, when its performance is done in a particular way, it will lead us to total renunciation (sannyāsa). It is the perfection of this state that elevates a person to aspire for jñāna alone. Because the mind has drained itself of all desires and has thus become one-pointed, the seeker is ideally suited to climb the ladder to jñāna, reaching the apex of karma Yoga, known as jñāna niṣṭhā yogyatā (the fitness to keep knowledge alone as the goal). It is this type of devotee who is the ideal candidate for knowledge (jñāna) and who is being indicated in verse 7.16 (B.G.) by the Sanskrit word arthārthi, meaning the one who has the Supreme alone as his goal.

This state of freedom from all action, even while engaged in action, could not have been more beautifully described than the description we find in verses 4.19-22 of the Gītā:

“He, whose actions are devoid of desire and volition, the seeds of which have been burnt by jñāna, the seers call a Jñāni. Giving up all attachment to the result of karma, ever contented, independent, he does nothing at all even when he is engaged in activity. Without desires, with his senses and mind completely under control, giving up all acquisitions, engaged in the maintenance of the body,

these actions leave none of their dirt on him. Happy with whatever comes his way, unasked, overcoming all pairs of opposites, free from jealousy, keeping equanimity in gain or loss or otherwise, he is not bound even while acting.”

Taking all these above listed items together, the seeker completes a work that presents itself to him, without his volition for it, He is not expecting to get the fruit out of its completion nor does he despise the fact that he is engaging himself in an action. He is neither anxious about completing the action nor is he even worried about the possibility of its being not completed. Such is his freedom from expectation that he does not even aim to achieve the goal though he never loses sight of it.

In this context, verse 4.24 (B.G.) may also be discussed. While the Wise-Man, the Jñāni, established in Brahman does no action at all since everything has become Brahman alone for him, the Jñāna Niṣṭhā, who is different from a Jñāni, performs action without any identification with the idea that he is performing it and sees the Lord in all aspects of the action. Therefore, whatever things are involved in doing any particular activity the Jñāna Niṣṭha sees them all as Brahman.

“The means of the sacrificial offering is Brahman, Brahman is the oblation placed in the fire of Brahman and by Brahman is the sacrifice made. This one who sacrifices, who concentrates on the act that is Brahman, reaches Brahman alone” (B.G. 4.24).

2.7.1 Meditation on the Lord's Glories (Vibhūti Upāsanā)

Karma Yoga as presented above is seen to contain an element of all steps of the practice and becomes the basis for all spiritual sādhana. Since the Yogi performs karma, surrendering to the Lord at every stage of the karma, including the result, his mind gets trained to see the Lord in all facets of karma. To transmute this attitude of the mind into devotion (bhakti), meditation (upāsanā) has been enjoined in the Gītā. Broadly speaking, the meditative processes, the upāsanas, contained in the Gītā can be classified into three stages:

1. Seeing the Lord in all the individualized forms of his manifestations (Vibhūti Upāsanā).
2. Seeing the whole manifestation as existing in the Lord (Viśvarūpa Upāsanā).

Both of the above Upāsanās entail an imposition of some quality or form on the Lord but the last Upāsanā is distinguished from the above as follows:

3. Meditation on the Lord without attributing any quality or form to Him and in which we use the sacred letter 'Om' as a symbol of the Lord, free from all qualities (Akṣara Brahma Upāsanā).

The scriptures declare that God created the universe and entered into it (Ait. Up. 1.3.11,12; Br. Up 1.4.7; Ch. Up 6.3.2). Therefore, without His being in it nothing can exist. The Sanskrit word *bhūta* indicates a thing that has existence: derived from the root '*bhū*', existence,

indicating that all existence is dependent on Him. In spite of the fact that He is present in everything and everyone to the same extent (B.G. 13.27), in certain things His Divine Manifestations, known as Vibhūties, show themselves particularly in the forms of outstanding beauty, exceptional power, and sometimes as an extraordinary specimen of some particular group. Whatever striking quality is seen, it should be understood as revealing one of the Lord's special glories, Divine Manifestations (vibhūties). The Lord has announced that He is the source as well as the end of all beings and in whose hearts He resides as the Self, Ātman (B.G. 10.20). He declares: "I am the cause of everything and everything that is active is prompted by Me" (B.G. 10.8), and "The whole universe is manifested from a small part of Me" (B.G.10.42). Hence, the ideal way to meditate on Him is to view everything as originating from Him, existing in Him, and ultimately merging in Him. He is the innermost Ātman, the true Self who is the essence of every being. Without His presence nothing can exist. With the cultivation of this viewpoint, we will no longer see anything as bad, evil, or ugly since everything will have become fragrant, divine, beautiful, and good because He is inside of it. Of course, this is not to deny the distinction between ugly and beautiful, right and wrong, from the worldly point of view.

Since it is difficult to conceive the whole universe, in this fashion, as His manifestation the Lord goes on enumerating individual things, which generally strike us as outstanding specimens of their class. When such things are encountered in daily life we must immediately

recognize and associate this outstanding quality as being due to the special manifestation of His presence in it. The various vibhūties have been described in some detail in four places in the Gītā: chapters 7,9,10, and 15. In the beginning of chapter 7, it has been explained as to how the whole manifest universe is composed of the Inert or the Lower Prakṛti, (consisting of the five elements, the mind, the intellect, and the ego,) as well as the Higher, Eternal Prakṛti, (which sustains life in all beings). The universe is said to arise out of the Lord and to merge in Him and while it exists, that existence owes itself to the existence of the Lord. The differentiated beings that are appearing in the universe are portrayed through the simile of ‘gems strung on a string’ (B.G. 7.4-7). After this, the Gītā describes the various Divine Manifestations (vibhūties) in order to show how the very essence of every being is due to Him and by the withdrawal of His essence all beings will lose their very existence. For example, what makes a thing a fluid is its fluidity, by the removal of which it ceases to be fluid and that fluidity is His. The constant source of light and life to this world, the Sun and the Moon, owe their illumination to Him (this same idea occurs again in verse 15.12 when the Sun and the Moon are listed among universal phenomena as well as in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2, and Katha Upaniṣad 2.2.15). Devoid of this power of illumination both the Sun and the Moon lose their identity. The meditative process (upāsānā) that is being described here is instructing us to view the true nature of every individual being, its essential and inseparable characteristic, as being due to

Him and without His reality in it its very existence would be threatened.

Again in verse 9.15 of the Gītā, the meditation (upāsana) on the Lord by the sacrifice of knowledge is considered the highest. Those who cannot achieve this may have recourse to the worship of different deities, who are none but His own manifestation. It is then said that still others can meditate on Him considering all visible forms as His own form (B.G. 9.14-15). For instance, it is ideal to look at the whole progress of the sacrifice from beginning to the end as Him alone (B.G. 4.24). Or alternately each element of the sacrifice may be equated to Him. The Lord says, “I am the volition to perform the Yajña. I am the sacrifice, I am the incantation for offering the oblation and the oblation is also I. I alone am the sacred formula (*mantra*) and the clarified butter, the fire, and the process of offering” (B.G. 9.16). Similarly, He is the creator of the universe, the material cause from which the creation comes and He is the Vedas, which to know Him are the only means. ‘By means of all the Vedas, I alone am to be known’ (B.G.15.15). The creation and merger of the universe, the duties to be undertaken during its existence, and the fruits to be reaped from performing those duties are all His appearance only. Appearing as the Sun, He warms the ocean to form the clouds and it is He who discharges rain or withdraws the showers. His grace grants long life to divine beings and a brief life to mortals. He is the cause as well as the effect. In short, whatever happens in the universe, whatever we do, whatever we perceive, and whatever we experience, the

means and the result are nothing but Him (B.G. 9.16-19). The result of constant and complete meditation on Him is that He will ensure all of our daily needs, both their generation and their safeguarding (B.G. 9.22).

In verses 12-15 of chapter 15 of the Gītā, the vibhūties have been described in a slightly different form. We see the universe being sustained by various phenomena. The world wakes up to activity when the Sun rises and starts illumining the world. In the night, the Moon sheds soft soothing light to cool the earth, scorched by the Sun during the day, lulling the world to sleep and rest. The role that fire plays in the lives of human beings is impossible to exaggerate. The abilities of the Sun, the Moon, and the fire to perform their respective tasks are all drawn from the Lord. Another aspect of the Lord's power is that even though the world springs to activity with the dawn of the Sun, and the Sun shines on all equally, being indifferent to the activity of each individual, good, bad, or indifferent, and just as the nature of fire is to provide warmth to whosoever goes near it uniformly, the Sun and the fire expect nothing out of their beneficence and are not affected by the qualities of those near to them. The impartiality and informality of these phenomena, when looked at as the vibhūties of God, not only help to enlarge our vision but will aid us in overcoming the disparities and distinctions created by the vagaries of the guṇas and will bring us a step nearer to the Lord, who is free from all disparities (B.G. 5.19). When different deities are worshipped we are likely to forget that their ability to grant our wishes is on the authority that has

been delegated by Him. Since the effort to worship is common in both cases, whether it is oriented toward God or to other deities, the result to be obtained in the latter case is limited and short-lived while the worship of God grants permanent freedom from saṃsāra in the form of reaching Him (B.G. 7.23, 9.20-25, 15.19-20).

While in chapter 7 the upāsanā concentrates on the nature of things as arising from the reality of God, in chapter 15 the functions of all beings, divine or mortal, are seen as becoming possible only on the authority of the Lord. Earlier the idea to be gained is that the One reality as the Lord manifests itself as varied beings, and in chapter 15 the result of the upāsanā will be that we come to see that the world arises, subsists, and functions in Him alone. Nothing can happen except on His authority, so that all incidents that happen are sustained by Him and therefore no incident is not good for us, as the All Merciful Being does not wish any ill to anybody.

Another vibhūti mentioned in chapter 15 can profitably be enlarged upon here. What we eat may not be converted into nutrients in the body unless the Lord's force in the form of fire is present inside the physiological system so that we can digest the food. Verse 15.14 of the Gītā is recited by devotees before they start each meal and the beauty in this practice should be obvious. The scriptures have also spoken of the upāsanā (meditation) concerning the five fires (*pañcāgni vidyā*) where all activities of life, however carnal they may be when considered in common parlance, are to be converted into this type of upāsanā

(Bṛ. Up.6.2). If the food consumed is taken as an oblation to the Lord, situated inside as fire, instead of the process becoming an exercise in gluttony it can be sublimated into a noble act that serves the purpose of purifying the mind with no extra trouble.

In response to Arjuna's specific query as to how he should meditate on the Lord amongst His manifested endless forms there appears the largest description of the Vibhūties in the Gītā in chapter 10. Earlier, the Lord had said that He is the source of all beings and everybody engages himself in activity prompted by Him. Knowing Him thus, the Wise-Ones worship Him with this same understanding and with devotion. Hence, the best type of meditation on the Lord is to view Him as the Self (Ātman) that is established in the innermost recesses of every being. He is the cause of the universe because it is from Him that it has its' beginning, it is the existence of the universe because it is sustained by Him, and He is the end of the universe because all effects must return to their cause.

But those of us who find it too difficult to conceive of Him as pervading the whole universe may work our way up to this stage by thinking of Him in terms appreciating His individual manifestations. In verse 6.29 of the Gītā and elaborated in other verses of the chapter, it is stated that a Yogi seeing Brahman everywhere will realize that his Self (Ātman) is in every being and that every being is in his Self. Of all the Yogis wanting to attain this state, the one who merges his mind in God and

who is exclusively devoted to Him is considered to be the best of Yogis (B.G. 6.47). This suggests that without devotion it is not possible to achieve perfection in Yoga or to attain knowledge (jñāna). On the contrary, the way to know the Lord with no uncertainty is to practice Yoga with the mind completely linked to Him as a means to this knowledge (jñāna), which should translate itself into direct intuition (*viññāna*). By explaining the nature of the lower prakṛti and the higher prakṛti, through which the Lord is understood as the ultimate cause of the universe, it becomes obvious that the whole universe is nothing but Him since no effect can exist apart from its cause. But to reach this stage the mind must be weaned from its habit of seeing each differentiated being as having its own independent existence and to convert that vision into one whereby we see an element of God in each individual. If He were not present then that individual thing would become non-existent. We are used to seeing the good as well as the bad, the beautiful as well as the ugly, and the magnificent as well as the insignificant. While the noble things can be easily associated with God, we feel reluctant to identify Him with the others. To facilitate this natural tendency of the mind, the vibhūties have been elaborately described.

Even though divine beings may have the capacity to easily attain certain extraordinary things, like getting scriptural knowledge without the need to study, they also cannot know the Lord as He is since they, like us, are also prone to seek His origin, forgetting that He is the creator of the whole universe, including them, and that

He is birth-less, without a cause, and immutable and so they could never know his origin (B.G. 2.20). In other words, seeking a cause for the Lord is itself an illusion. Such pranks of the mind can be eliminated by the type of upāsanā mentioned in chapter 10, as its result is to realize that He, who has no origin, is the cause, sustainer, and the goal of everything in existence and He is untouched by any of these changes. The aim of this sādhanā, it will be seen, is to ignore the superficial appearances, differences, and diversities and to see the underlying Reality and Unity. The Lord concludes the 10th chapter in the same strain in which it began:

“I am the seed of all beings... No being, sentient or insentient, can exist without Me... There is no end to (the narrations of) My divine manifestations... Whatever glory, prosperity, or power is seen in beings, understand it to have sprung from a spark of My splendor... There is no need to speak elaborately, for, by a mere fraction of Me, I support the whole universe” (B.G. 10.39-41).

2.7.2 Meditation on the Lord’s Cosmic Form (Viśvarūpa Upāsanā)

While describing the Vibhūties in chapter 10 the Lord had said that He is Vāsudeva, Kṛiṣṇa, among the descendants of Vārṣṇi and that He was Dhanañjaya, Arjuna, amongst the Pāndavas, respectively the best of the teachers of knowledge (jñāna) and the best of those entitled to receive it. He also said in concluding that a mere fraction of Him sustains the whole universe, which of course did not exclude Arjuna. Arjuna’s wonder at

this is understandable. If the one sitting before him is Vāsudeva, then who is the All? (B.G.7.19). It must be possible to see the whole universe in Him, of whom a fraction sustains it. Can he see that Cosmic Form? Hence, Arjuna prays to the Lord to reveal that form to him, if the Lord considered him eligible to view it. The Lord acceded, with the assurance that He would grant the divine vision that would enable him to see it, since it cannot be seen through normal human eyes. Then ensues perhaps one of the finest and most picturesque descriptions of the concept of the Cosmic Form in all of world literature. Looking at this terrible form (terrible because the world was on the verge of a holocaust) wherein time was poised to swallow practically the whole world, Arjuna's knees buckled. His warrior-like valor, by which he commanded the charioteer, the Lord himself, to position his chariot in the front line of the assembled armies, vanished when he realized that the charioteer was none other than the Universal Lord. It was one thing to hear that form standing in front of him to announce that He was time (*kāla*) itself, prepared to devour the whole universe and an entirely different thing to face that horror. Can this be the person whom he had been considering his friend and companion?

In spite of his desire to see the Cosmic Form and the Lord granting that desire, why did Arjuna falter? Unless the seeker has trained himself to see the Lord everywhere, through the practice of vibhūti upāsana, the mind is bound to be overcome with the colossal nature of the Cosmic Form (Viśvarūpa). The normal microcosmic mind

cannot even conceive of this Form, what to speak about its capacity to see it. As a result of having practiced the meditation on the Divine Manifestations (*vibhūti upāsanā*), the normal mind can attain the ability to visualize this awe-inspiring form, a small fraction of which appears as the visible world. Without this preparation the mind will inevitably be shocked out of its composure. After having equipped oneself with the capacity to see the Lord in every individual thing, one should then cultivate the continuous habit of seeing everything, each individual thing, in the Lord, seeing everything no longer as an independent entity, a *vibhūti*, but as an integral part existing in Him.

There is a difference from and an advantage to the meditation (*upāsanā*) on the Cosmic Form as compared to the meditation on God's individual manifestations (*vibhūti upāsanā*). While the latter is like admiring the qualities of each item on a mountain, such as rocks, trees, etc., the meditation on the Cosmic Form is like looking at all the items residing on the mountain as a whole. Since the viewer cannot detach himself from the Cosmos, as he himself is in the Cosmos, at each moment he can feel what an insignificant form he is. This type of vision will divert the practitioner's mind from its natural ego-oriented state of thinking of ourselves to be very big and important and transform it into becoming centered on the divine.

Another benefit that comes from adopting the practice of seeing everything in the Lord can be seen from a slightly different angle. When Arjuna told the Lord that

he would not fight and sat quietly, the Lord, before He commenced His teaching, looked at him smilingly. Since the Lord knew how despondent this great warrior had become as a result of delusion (*moha*), it hardly looks like a situation wherein it would be appropriate for the Lord to be smiling at him. The seriousness of the discourse that follows gives us no clue that the Lord really did not take Arjuna's problem as important but Arjuna's earlier bemoanings provide us with such a clue. Arjuna had assumed that he has been assigned to kill the venerable ones, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and the other two great warriors, Karṇa and Jayadratha, who were all considered almost invincible.

Besides, the doubt was lurking in Arjuna's mind as to whether his side would win or would be wiped away by the opposite side. Even if the Pāṇdavas won, their hand would be smeared with the blood of all the elders, without whom the kingdom would not be worth living in (B.G. 2.3–5). His fear of the four warriors is justified, since Duryodhana is also relying on them, particularly for success (B.G. 1.8). Hence, when he seeks guidance from the Lord to tell him definitely which course he should adopt, he must be secretly hoping that the Lord would ask him to withdraw from this horrific act, and thus he would escape the problem (B.G. 2.7). In the answer to the unasked question about the four great warriors (Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, and Jayadratha) the Lord assures him that all the warriors have been killed even before an arrow has been shot and Arjuna is just an instrument in what the Lord has already accomplished.

While doing so, the Lord specifically names the four warriors as casualties. This accounts for the Lord's smile directed towards Arjuna before He begins His teaching. As the All-Powerful Force, the Lord had already decided on the course of the universe, which would take place with Arjuna cooperating with it or not, since the time had ripened for the destruction of the world. Instead of congratulating himself that fate had provided this opportunity for him to contribute in the working of the Cosmic Law, Arjuna was harboring unwarranted doubts and fears, depending on his ego and the feeling that he was the agent.

This explains why karma Yoga, which in its initial stages consists in doing all the prescribed karmas with no desire for the fruit and as an offering to the Supreme Being (*niṣkāma karma*), has to become the foundation on which we can gain the capacity to undertake these two types of meditations (*upāsana*). As we have seen earlier, in the final stages of karma Yoga the Yogi performs all karma without a trace of attachment and as worship to the Lord. Because the involvement of the ego at this stage has become impossible all the agitation regarding the appropriateness of embarking on the karma, the means to be adopted for performing that karma, or the result to be expected from it will have vanished. This also shows how the statements such as those contained in verses 11.33–34 (B.G.), which seem to suggest that a Yogi can kill everyone with no repercussions, can become a dangerous weapon in the hands of uncultured people wishing to rationalize their activities. So, the meditation

on the Cosmic Form demands a continuation of this attitude, developed through the meticulous practice of karma Yoga and vibhūti upāsana, not only by viewing all beings as existing essentially in the Lord, contained within His Cosmic Form, but also the continued conviction that whatever duty presents itself before any of us, at any particular time, that duty is to be completed with the spirit that we are just tools in the hands of God, who is the real doer. The duty is being performed with the mental attitude that it is His worship and as a contribution to His decision on the ultimate course of the universe.

Not everyone is qualified to perform this type of upāsana on the Cosmic Form right from the beginning. This is because it is definitely not easy to view the whole universe in the way described in the Gītā and because we are naturally conditioned to see a very limited portion of the whole universe. Some preparatory stages are therefore essential and these are explained in verses 7.8-11 of the Gītā. Constantly one should, with conscious effort, continue to cultivate the feeling that all beings are contained within the Cosmic Form. Even if that is not possible, there should be continuous unswerving repeated efforts made in that direction. And if that is not possible there should be a constant effort to perform all karma, surrendering them to the Lord, and finally, if one is not qualified to do even that, then one should at least try to surrender the fruits of our actions to Him.

2.7.3 Meditation on the Imperishable Brahman (Akṣara Brahma Upāsanā)

After the mind is equipped to see the Lord in everything and everything in the Lord, through the practice of the two meditations described above, a seeker can then turn his attention towards meditating on God without any attributes. (B.G. 8.13). This is called *Akṣara Brahma Upāsanā* in Sanskrit. It should be clarified in this context that there are not two Gods, one with attributes (the object of the earlier meditations) and a second God without attributes who is to be meditated upon later, or even that God possesses attributes which drop away at some point after some particular type of meditation (upāsanā).

It has already been discussed how through the Vedāntic method of deliberate superimposition and negation, (adhyāropa apavāda) the scriptures have attributed certain qualities to the One God, who is eternally without any attributes so as to facilitate particular types of meditations. While the earlier upāsanās aim at diverting the mind from its natural worldly propensities, the type of upāsanā that is being taught here is on God without any particular quality or form being ascribed to Him. The result of this type of upāsanā, Akṣara Brahma Upāsanā, when performed without desiring any fruit, is the stabilization of the God-oriented mind and it enables that mind to carry on with discrimination, which is also sometimes referred to as an upāsanā, a kind of meditation, in the Gītā, but with a different connotation.

Before discussing in more detail the meditation on God without qualities, it should be remembered that these three types of upāsana are completely dependent on the desire and effort of the seeker. Hence, the result of these particular activities, these three types of upāsana, like all activities, will not have an immediate visible result but a result that will have to be reaped at some point in the future. A seeker has the choice of doing these upāsanas, not doing them, or doing them with variations. But we should remember that knowledge is not like actions, as knowledge is solely dependent on the nature of the object to be known and whose nature is not capable of being altered by the efforts of the seeker. In other words knowledge is not dependent upon our activities. That fire is hot is a fact, knowledge. In order to be true knowledge must be in accordance with the fact as it is and is not dependent on us. Consequently, the result in the form of knowledge, discriminating knowledge to be more precise, will be fixed, immediate, and is not dependent on the efforts of the seeker. For instance, it is obvious that a person will engage himself in some activity if he is desirous of getting some result from that action and he believes that his effort has the capacity to produce that result that he desires. In the absence of such a desire there is no need for him to engage himself in that particular activity. If he wants a somewhat different result he can decide to alter the process and we can see that the whole exercise is completely dependent on him. But that is not the case when we want to acquire the exact knowledge of something actually existing. That type of knowledge

is entirely dependent on the object to be known and not on the seeker.

While we have already said that Akṣara Brahma Upāsanā, when performed with no desire for its fruit, stabilizes the mind and gives it the capacity to discriminate, this same type of meditation, mentioned in chapter 8, can be undertaken by a person who is desirous of its fruit, i.e. the scripturally promised fruit of attaining Brahma Loka, which is considered to be the highest divine world attainable. It is there that he has the faith that he may get liberated if he is able to attain the knowledge of Brahman in that world. If, on the contrary, he seeks liberation here in this world, the relief for that type of seeker is to be found in chapter 9. However, there are some advantages to be noted with regard to this desire prompted type of meditation on the Imperishable Brahman, the Akṣara Brahma, who is also termed Hiraṇyagarbha in the scriptures, or the ‘Subtle, Invisible Cause of Viṣva’, the cosmic form of the universe, by making use of the symbol ‘Om’. This is due to fact that the seeker, having concluded that in this life there are too many obstacles in the way of his attaining the knowledge of Brahman. Since it has been promised in the scriptures that if there are no insurmountable obstacles then it is easier to get the knowledge of Brahman in Brahma Loka and get liberated from saṃsāra at the end of the Kalpa (aeon), it would be more productive if he were to practice this type of Akṣara Brahma Upāsanā. There is no need for special mention that this Akṣara Upāsanā is not easy to undertake except under the able guidance of a learned

person well versed in its practice. Nevertheless, we will attempt to present a broad outline of the practice below in order to give the reader a general sense of what is involved in this specific type of upāsana. Certain types of Sannyāsis who do not aim at the Ultimate Knowledge and a type of Brahmācāris, called Naiṣṭhika Brahmācāri, life long celibates, who continue to stay with the preceptor even after the completion of their study and utilize their complete energy in the service of the teacher, opting for neither Sannyāsa nor a householder's life, may also resort to this type of Akṣara Upāsana.

The implicit rationale behind the usefulness of this type of upāsana rests on the understanding that the ultimate and only cause of this universe is Brahman and that apart from Brahman it can never exist. Hence, in essence, whatever we perceive as the universe is nothing but Brahman, on whom, name and form have been superimposed, giving rise to the illusion of the many in the One. Since Brahman pervades everything, there can be no real effect that came out of Brahman nor can there be any real cause-and-effect relation between Brahman and the world. In other words, the reality of what is perceived as the universe is in fact Brahman alone, which therefore, cannot be designated by any word nor conceived of by any concept, since language and concepts are all in the field of effects alone. Such a transcendental principle can thus never become an object for meditation. But the scriptures have provided certain substitutes and symbols through which meditation on Brahman is made possible.

The nearest substitute and most appropriate symbol of the Ultimate Brahman that is taught in the scriptures is through the medium of the sacred syllable ‘Om’. We should also appreciate the fact that not all scriptural meditations involving the syllable ‘Om’ refer to the meditation on Akṣara Brahman. Sometimes the syllable ‘Om’ forms a part (an *aṅga*) of a particular Vedic ritual and has nothing to do with the particular type of upāsana that we are discussing here. One example that demonstrates this use of the syllable ‘Om’ is when one is performing a specific Vedic sacrifice mentioned in the Sāma Veda, one should use the syllable ‘Om’ as a part of that Sacrifice. For those interested in the details, a few of these types of meditations can be found in the ancient scriptures such as the Chāndogya and Praśna Upaniṣads.

If through meritorious actions, a person has been able to atone for his earlier evils, desires, and hatreds, and if he is able to overcome the common illusion that one is actually obtaining happiness and comfort from the world, then and only then will he be able to curtail his desire for happiness from external things. At this stage of desirelessness there is no longer any obstacle for attaining the knowledge or direct intuition of the Transcendental Reality. As a result of the effort and during that state of purity, if the desire to know the Lord becomes extremely intense, this feeling will not be missed, even at the moment of death. Since such a seeker has no attachment to the body, etc., the seeker comes to know the real nature of the internal, the material, and the divine spheres, as well as the truth concerning sacrifice (*yajña*), all of which

are now seen to be existing in God (B.G. 7.28–30). The above elaboration provoked Arjuna to seek the details of the seven things mentioned in the three verses referred to above at the end of the 7th chapter; in reply to these the 8th chapter begins.

Among the seven categories mentioned in verses 7.28–30 of the Gītā, the category of the divine (*Adhidaivata*) or Puruṣa, the First Person, in this context refers to Brahma Loka, the goal of meditation on ‘Om.’ As the concluding portion of the 7th chapter prescribed, the very first requirement for this practice of meditation on ‘Om,’ also referred to as *Omkāra Upāsanā* (B.G. 8.13), is to get the senses under control and to rid oneself of all the pairs of opposites through the practice of Yoga. By the constant practice of looking inwards, the tendency to seek comfort in sense objects must be rejected so that even when the sense objects are in contact with the senses they do not drag the mind out to their objects. In the beginning of the practice of Omkāra meditation the concentration should be located in the heart, while mentally reciting the syllable ‘Om’. This should be done with complete devotion, meditating on God as the “the Omniscient, the Primeval, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, Subtler than the Subtlest, the Dispenser of the Fruits of Karma, the One who is of the nature of Pure Consciousness, beyond darkness, and any description” (B.G. 8.9). One can easily see that although this type of meditation is on the Higher Brahman (*Para Brahman*) the result is to reach only the Lower Brahman (*Apara Brahma*), since with regards to the Higher Brahman, being the real nature of everything

existing (B.G. 6.29), there can be no talk of reaching or returning from That. Therefore, in this type of upāsana, the concentration should be gradually elevated and also the vital force (*prāṇa*) should be elevated through the vertebral column, technically signified in the texts discussing these matters as the *suśumnā*, and the *prāṇa* should first be brought to the middle of the eye-brows and then from there to the *Brahma Randhra*, the top of the skull. Finally, for a person who has meditated thus, to the last breath, he is supposed to rise from the body at the time of death in a particular manner. The practice has to be so incessant and intense throughout that at the last moment of life the mind should be resting completely in Brahman, as ‘Om,’ with unalloyed devotion because the ultimate last thought just prior to the life force departing from of the body is said to decide the future course of the practitioner.

Even as the practitioner becomes aware of life separating from the body through the *Brahma Randhra* it is said that representatives of the Celestial Fire will be waiting for the *Sādhaka* in a subtle form to take him along the Sun’s rays, through the intermediate path to the Sun’s orb. There he should pray to the Sun to withdraw its external brilliance to one side, so that he can enter into its reality, the face of which is enveloped by its brilliance. The sacred chant that is to be recited at this moment is contained in *Īṣa Upaniṣad* in verse 15 and in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* in verse 5.14.1. As he has meditated upon the, so called, *Satya Puruṣa* and has attained the realization of his identity with that

Puruṣa and of the identity of that Puruṣa with himself, a small opening, the size of a hole appropriate for an axle in a wheel appears in the Sun's orb, through which he enters the Brahma Loka. Here he has become a part of the Universal Mind (Hiraṇyagarbha) and he enjoys, mentally, any comfort that he imagines. The result of this Vedic upāsana, which is intended only for those who have unquestioning faith in the scripture, lasts until the universal dissolution (*pralaya*). At the end of the aeon, during which time, if knowledge of Brahman dawns, the seeker gets to know the Lord as he is and gets liberated, along with the first created being Hiraṇyagarbha, which once again is referred to as the Universal Mind, the presiding deity of Brahma Loka. If on the other hand, he does not come to know the Lord and therefore does not reach Him during that period, he once again returns to this mortal world, when after the Pralaya, Universal Destruction, he gets created again (B.G. 8.16). This type of liberation, if he attains it, is called Successive Liberation (*Krama Mukti*) as opposed to Instant Liberation (*Sadyo Mukti*), which is the direct result of attaining knowledge (*jñāna*) here in this very life. It is to be noted that the mere reaching of Brahma Loka cannot ensure Liberation, even though verse 8.23 in the Gītā, where the Lord has described the two eschatological paths, seems to imply that those who go through the Bright Path to Brahma Loka do not have to return to this earth. The only true criterion for not returning is to know and reach the Lord in this life. The Lord mentions these two paths in verse 8.25, but adds an extra qualification in verse 8.15 for

final escape from rebirth and that is by “Reaching Me” as opposed to the state of return even from Brahma Loka. This is confirmed as follows:

“Oh Partha, I am easily reached by a Yogi who constantly associates himself with Me and who, with no distraction, continuously remembers Me. Such great souls, who attain Liberation, the highest achievement, by reaching Me, they will not get rebirth, which is an ocean of misery and is impermanent” (B.G. 8.14–15).

However, verse 16 of chapter 8 leaves no scope for any doubt that by merely reaching Brahma Loka it is not sufficient to put an end to this saṃsāra because even the sphere of Brahma Loka lasts only for 100,000 Yugas and then merges in the Un-manifest at the end of the Kalpa, which is known as Night of the Puruṣa. And once again the Universe gets recreated at the beginning of the next Kalpa, which is said to be the Dawn of the Puruṣa. It is at this time when all those who were in Brahma Loka but did not get the knowledge of the Lord, and therefore did not reach Him, will also have to return. All this is obviously within the scope of Saṃsāra (B.G. 8.18–19). The only condition to get away from it is to reach the ultimate source of it all, which is unknowable, and beyond even the Un-Manifest, neither getting created with the universe nor dissolving with it (B.G. 8.20). That source is beyond Brahma Loka and attaining Him through unwavering devotion there is absolutely no return (B.G. 8.21).

Verses 8.23-26 of the Gītā deal with the two paths after the death of the physical body. The Bright Path leading to the so-called state of non-return, during that particular Kalpa, as was seen in our earlier discussion, while the Dark Path ends in certain return. A Yogi, who knows all this, namely the method to reach the two states as well as the fact that the final non-return is possible by neither of them and can only be gotten through knowing the Lord, either here in this life or in Brahma Loka, will not be deluded by the desire to even reach that Brahma Loka, knowing full well that there is possibility for return even from that abode. On the contrary, he will, by the constant practice of Yoga strive here in this very life to reach the Highest Abode, which transcends even time and all other effects and from which no return is possible. This same idea is also suggested in verse 7.29 when the Lord says:

“Those who, depending upon Me, attempt for freedom from old age and death know the All-Pervading, the *Adhyātma*, and the whole range of karma.”

The last term mentioned in this verse, ‘the whole range of karma’, refers to the Dark Path from which there is certain return, and the middle term, ‘Adhyātma’, is referring to the Bright Path, which leads to Brahma Loka but still there is a possible return. The first term mentioned, ‘The All-Pervading’ refers to the Higher Brahman, reaching which alone we are guaranteed to finally not return. Since the last thought of a person prior to death is the result of what he has been mulching over all throughout his life, the Lord teaches that one should

“continuously dedicate his mind and intellect to Me, then he will be able to reach Me alone without any doubts” (B.G. 8.7). Again, the Lord says, “Keep the mind only on Me, establish the intellect in Me alone, then without doubt you will rest in Me” (B.G. 12.8). Lest the word “Me” should create any confusion, the Lord explains in verse 8.8 that the word “Me” refers to the Divine, Supreme Puruṣa and this was confirmed to be the Highest Attainment, easily reached by persons who constantly keep their mind only on Him, remembering only Him, constantly united in Yoga, they do not get reborn into this impermanent ocean of sorrow (B.G. 8.14–15). In verse 8.15, these people are described as Great Souls, *Mahātmas*. This idea is repeated in the Gītā verse 7.19: “Mahātmas, those extremely rare ones, who after many lives, surrender to Me, Vāsudeva, as the All”.

Each practice can be seen to yield a specific result. For example, knowing the method of properly reciting the scriptures and in association with auxiliary texts, the constant recitation of the Vedas produces a certain amount of merit. A slightly higher merit can be acquired by those who perform sacrifices (*yajñas*) mentioned in the Vedas. Better still will be the merit received by those who undergo special austerities (*tapas*) or provide charity to those deserving it at the appropriate time with the understanding that what is being given is a duty, one must give charity, and not for bargaining for anything in return. However, all this merit (*puṇya*) that is thus accumulated will last only as long as the effect of the particular action that produced it lasts. But the Lord

instructs us that all of this merit derived from any karma will be exceeded by the Yogi who has come to know the Omnipresent, the All, the *Sarvam*, who is Vāsudeva, “the All is Vāsudeva” (B.G. 7.19). He thus attains the Higher Brahman, the ultimate cause of the Universe (B.G. 8.28). To repeat, the path of non-return discussed in chapter 8 of the *Gītā* should be understood as leading to non-return as long as that particular aeon lasts. This is different from the absolute non-return that occurs to the Knower of the Lord. For the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (3.2.9) clearly states that the knower of the Lord has become the Lord’s own Self. ‘*Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*, the knower of the absolute is the absolute’.

The concluding verse of the 8th chapter constitutes the purport of the entire chapter and from a wider angle it contains the purport of the whole text: One must get final release through the knowledge of the Lord and not by attempting to reach *Brahma Loka*. This idea is confirmed from an examination of the commencement of the chapter also. Arjuna poses seven questions, beginning with the Higher Brahman. The Lord replies in the same order that the questions were asked, the Higher Brahman getting first priority. Every time Arjuna is in a quandary, he beseeched the Lord to advise him, not concerning the immediate relief, but on the final benefit (*śreyas*) and that *śreyas* can only be attained by Knowledge (B.G. 2.7, 3.2, 5.1).

There is a word in verse 8.28 that should not be lost sight of as it points us to the true intention of the

verse. The word *idam* in the verse can either be taken as qualifying the word *sarvam*, which is understood to mean the All, the result of the efforts mentioned in the first half of the verse; or it can, as is often the case, be taken to refer to the answers to the seven questions, with which the chapter is introduced. But as we understand it, the word Sarvam, meaning here Vāsudeva, will not only be nearer to the context of the verses but will also be in consonance with the previous chapter with which chapter 8 is connected. When carefully examined we can see that the beginning verse of chapter 9 provides the clue for determining the precise meaning of the word *idam* used in verse 8.28. The very first word in that verse, which is also *idam*, refers to the Supreme Knowledge, by the attainment of which Arjuna is assured liberation from all evil. That liberation can, according to the 8th chapter, happen only with the attainment of the knowledge of the Lord. This word *idam*, which was mentioned in the first verse, now takes on a specific meaning, i.e. knowledge. So, if we take the same meaning that is clear in verse 9.1 and apply it to verse 8.28 the verse will fit into the chapter ideally. Then we can understand the verse to mean:

“The meritorious fruits of the Vedas, of sacrifices, penances, and charity (karmas by which one will not be delivered), will be transcended by the Yogi, by this knowledge (*idam*) of Vāsudeva (the All) and he thus reaches the Supreme Primal State” (B.G. 8.28).

2.8 Devotion (Bhakti Yoga)

If in the Gītā one aspect has to be chosen as pervading the whole text, unhesitatingly, the choice would have to fall on devotion. Not a single aspect of spiritual practice, sādhana, is bereft of it, not a stage of attainment is divorced from it. It is so much the warp and woof of the text that to imagine devotion as an interpolation into the text will be to envisage a living body without life. Unwavering devotion is said to provide not only the worldly needs of the devotee but to provide all of his needs right up to final deliverance and that this will occur without any delay is assured to those who meditate on the Lord (B.G. 9.22, 5.6). Starting from the worldly needs right up to Liberation, there is hardly anything that a devotee cannot hope to achieve through devotion to the Lord. While the Lord has instructed that without devotion nobody can get the vision of the Cosmic Form (B.G. 11.54), nor the Higher Brahman that is beyond the Un-Manifest, that these attainments cannot be reached by any means other than through devotion, is made clear in verse 8.22. To know His all-pervading nature as well as his Real nature of Oneness (*Advaita*), wherein there is no longer any one pervading and there is nothing to pervade, devotion alone is said to be the means (B.G. 18.55). As a matter of fact, starting from the immediate relief from our worldly difficulties right up to our attainment of the Knowledge of the Lord, devotion is the only succor (B.G. 7.16). No sincere aspirant need despair of not being able to reach the Lord merely because he has led an evil life or that he or she was born in a lower rung of society in which

the study of the scriptures would not even be permissible. Provided that such a person approaches the Lord with one-pointed devotion, he or she has the assurance of the Lord that they will be rescued from the ocean of saṃsāra (B.G. 12.6-7). This ancient knowledge, in the form of Yoga, was taught to Arjuna because he was a devotee (B.G. 4.3). Therefore, it becomes almost impossible to isolate a state mentioned or a practice taught in the Gītā that is free from devotion. The text itself proclaims that even amongst the Yogis, the best Yogi is the one who worships the Lord with faith and devotion (B.G. 6.47). To entitle oneself for being bestowed with the capacity for discrimination, devotion is also said to be indispensable (B.G. 10.10). The one dearest to the Lord is said to be his devotee (B.G. 12.20), who, when he becomes a Jñāni, a Wise Man, will have become the very Self of the Lord (B.G. 7.18). To be able to discriminate between Ātman, the Knower, from the field, the Known, and to reach Him one has to become a devotee (B.G. 13.18). Devotion, being one of the characteristics of the persons who have overcome the guṇas, is therefore an essential quality for attaining that purpose (B.G. 14.26). One who is aiming to obtain knowledge must practice unswerving devotion and through devotion one has to know him (B.G. 13.10, 14.26) and to enter into Him immediately (B.G. 18.55). A Jñāni with no misunderstanding and who has realized that the Lord is the Supreme Being is devoted to Him in all respects (B.G. 15.19).

If therefore, devotion can bring comfort in this world and also relief, in the form of Liberation, the question

naturally arises as to why people do not have recourse to devotion alone and why is it that the whole world, to the contrary, is stricken with sorrow and bondage. After the above discussions the answer should be obvious. For cultivating the correct type of mind, so that it is able to turn exclusively towards the Lord, good deeds undertaken with the correct attitude must first serve as the basis (B.G. 7.16). The universe is constituted of the three guṇas, which delude beings to such an extent that they see only the guṇas and do not recognize the Lord, who is beyond them (B.G. 7.13, 13.14). The majority of people rush toward the guṇas, which appear to them as very attractive, as indeed do all temptations. When they secure what they are seeking there is a momentary satisfaction and joy, which the indiscriminating people do not recognize as the very source of unhappiness (B.G. 5.22) nor the fact that the semblance of comfort seen in such accomplishments is but a flash of the uncreated original bliss of one's own True nature. Such a sorry state ceases to exist only when, instead of falling for the appearances of the guṇas, the seeker turns toward the Lord, for which purpose the performance of the right karma with the right attitude becomes essential.

The question can be raised as to how, just because the Lord is above these, the misery created by the guṇas disappear merely by knowing Him? The answer is that what are considered as the guṇas are merely *Māyā*, appearing to exist but being incapable of standing the test of valid reasoning (B.G. 7.14). They can be seen only as long as one uncritically accepts them and unthinkingly get

themselves involved with them. The guṇas immediately make themselves scarce when once the mind has withdrawn itself from them. Hence, the ideal exercise to overcome these three guṇas is to take refuge in Him, the Lord alone (B.G. 7.14). It is only then, the Lord assures us, that He shall take us out of the illusion of Māyā. At some point the mind will have to be taught to see the guṇas as mere appearances of the Lord, instead of looking at them in the form in which they commonly appear as having their own independent existence. Those who cannot surrender completely to Him will never get over the harassment of the guṇas. The Lord says, “These misguided miserable ones, who are habituated to evil deeds, have their knowledge robbed by Māyā, because they depend on demonic tendencies” (B.G. 7.15). The adjectives used in this verse are there to warn us against evil deeds leading to demonic qualities and to remind us that by correct actions, done with the correct perspective, the mind can acquire divine qualities and be trained to turn towards Him.

The Lord says, “Four types of people, who have undertaken good deeds, are devoted to Me; one in trouble, the inquirer, the seeker, and the Jñāni” (B.G. 7.16).

Whenever one is in trouble, one is likely to attribute it to a cause or agency in the world and also to seek relief from a source outside. Only a person who is accustomed to performing good karma, in a spirit of surrender to the Lord and as his worship will turn to Him for help in times of need. He will do so without having the idea

that because of his worship and devotion it has now become the Lord's obligation to provide relief from his troubles. He turns to the Lord merely because it has become the continuous habit of the devotee to see Him and to look up to Him in all situations. When the devotee gets relief from his troubles, which he definitely will if his petitioning was sincere, it is but natural for him to get attracted toward the Lord, who has lifted him out of that difficulty. Overtime he will develop a yearning to want to know the true nature of the Lord and will want to inquire into his exact relationship to the Lord. As this desire to know Him becomes more acute and intense, the tendency develops to lean on Him more and more, until he can see no other goal than the Lord. This is the third stage of devotion described in the *Gītā* as *Arthārthi*, (B.G. 7.16), one whose only goal is to know Him. At this stage, through the devotee's own efforts at discriminating the not-Self from the Self, the not-Self has been completely eliminated and he will then be in a position to attain knowledge, *jñāna*. We can also say, when looked at from a different angle, that when the devotion has become ripe and intense enough, through the Grace of God, knowledge will arise in that devotee and he will receive immediate relief from the ocean of *Saṃsāra*. This is because upon the attainment of knowledge the devotee is completely merged in the Lord himself. The Lord has explicitly declared that the devotee that knows Him becomes "My own Self" (B.G. 7.18). From the above discussion it becomes clear that not everybody has the capacity to turn to God for relief in case of difficulty nor

can we sit complacently with the hope of turning toward Him only when a difficulty actually arrives. Unless we cultivate, consciously and continuously, the habit of lifting ourselves above the guṇas and away from our identification with them, as well as our hope of deriving any comfort from them, it will be impossible to look to the Lord for relief when troubles arrive.

In the same way that our understanding of the Gītā as a text, which unfolds the spiritual practices in a graded and telescoping manner, differs from the usual interpretations so also our understanding of the concept of devotion in relation to the specific term ‘*arthārthi bhakta*’, referred to in verse 7.16 of the Gītā, also departs from the more common understanding. The literal and often accepted meaning of the term ‘*arthārthi*’ is that it refers to someone who is a seeker of wealth. But such an understanding in our opinion, as well as the opinion of Rāmānujācārya would represent a radical break in the sequence of the progressive development of devotion that is being described in that verse. Having seen that a Jijñāsu devotee, one who wants to Know God, is the next and higher stage after ārta devotee, the devotion of one in distress, and is a development from the relief obtained by God’s grace from a difficulty, then to suddenly interpose as the next stage a “seeker of wealth” who can, by no stretch of imagination, be described as a devotee and to place him between this Jijñāsu devotee and the Jñāni devotee would be to go against the very current or the flow of thought contained in the verse. If, on the contrary, the term *arthārthi* is taken to indicate the devotee who

has God alone as his goal, he will then be the equivalent to a jñāna niṣṭha, sāmkhya, or naiṣkarmya siddha and will be entitled to reach God through knowledge, jñāna. This interpretation will be in accordance with the whole text, since at various places, the importance of devotion to attain Jñāna has been well-stressed (B.G. 10.10, 14.26), and it is also in accordance with the Lord's assurance that even a Jijñāsu will transcend the scriptural injunctions (B.G. 6.44), and that "even a little effort (of this Yoga) will put one across the great terror of saṃsāra" (B.G. 2.40). When the sequence of devotion is understood in this way it will actually show us how the progress of the devotee runs parallel to that of karma Yoga. Prayer for relief from trouble can at best be a crude form of devotion, understandably as it is the primary stage. If this tendency is not developed then when once the trouble goes devotion may also be forgotten. Hence, by the development of more intense feelings directed to the Lord and more detached karma performed as service to the Lord, the person develops into a Jijñāsu, a stage that was seen earlier to be that of a Yogī who after further effort becomes a Jñāna Niṣṭhā, one whose only goal is Jñāna, before graduating to the final Knowledge itself. In this context one should remember that in verse 7.18 of the Gītā, the Lord has declared that all these four types of devotees are held to be exalted (*udārāh*).

What, from the point of view of karma, was described as naiṣkarmya siddhi, the state of attaining perfect non-action in action, when looked at from the point of view of devotion, the artha arthi devotion, having God alone

as ones goal, is also known as the third stage of bhakti. In other words, naiṣkarmya siddhi is the same as bhakti Yoga when looked at from the point of view of devotion to God. From a practical angle, the difference can be drawn thus: while in karma Yoga, the stress leans toward the non-attachment to karma in any of its stages, in bhakti Yoga the stress is on the dependence on the Lord for the performance of karma in all its aspects (B.G. 18.46–56). In both, the withdrawal of the ego from its involvement with activities and the directing of the attention completely towards the Lord are common and absolute. In this stage of development, it is natural that the mind, immersed in the Lord, refuses to be dragged by the senses toward their objects, as the mind is now content within its Self and finds no need to seek comfort outside (B.G. 2.70, 3.17–18). It is therefore, in this this frame of mind that all that is the not-Self can be eliminated, where nothing holds attraction any longer, and this becomes a necessary aid in attaining the correct and complete Knowledge of the Self, culminating in a merging with the Lord.

In the state of bhakti Yoga, the devotee, saturated with his feelings always directed toward God, always thinking of God, talking about Him, acting in Him, and keeping Him alone as his highest goal will be in complete emotional absorption in Vāsudeva alone. This is because the devotee sees everything residing in Him and He residing in everything. The devotee does this because he does not find any deity other than Him to go to for relief from saṃsāra. If others claim to have found some deity, or any other thing different from God for that matter, that

has brought them some relief, it is because they have not yet realized that the essence of every being including divine beings is Him alone.

It is often the case that either through textual instruction or from listening to others, a person finds that the devoted worship and contemplation of some 'divine being' can yield a particular desired result. In this way, especially if one gets his desired result, faith in that deity may develop and get strengthened, but this does not constitute bhakti Yoga in the sense that we are discussing here nor will this type of devotion become a qualification for the attainment of the final Knowledge (Jñāna). This is not to decry such devotion to other deities nor even to disparage the effort to achieve certain results through that type of devotion because that type of worship can also be done in a sāt̥tvic manner (B.G. 17.4), which in the course of time may ripen into devotion to the Lord Himself. This will occur only when that sād̥haka discovers that the very capacity of that particular deity to grant any desire comes only through the Grace of the Supreme Lord and He alone confers that capacity to that divine being.

As opposed to this type of sāt̥tvic worship of a particular deity there are rājasic and tāmasic types of worship and devotion that are described in the Gītā as being directed either toward demigods, spirits, ghosts, or even inanimate objects. Totem worship must have been popular in the preliminary stages of the development of devotion and most likely preceded the worship of and devotion to particular forms. It is said that as a final result of intense

devotion on a particular deity a devotee can attain identity with the very nature of the deity being worshiped. Since Vāsudeva is the Self of all these deities, their worship is in fact the worship of Vāsudeva also. Because those devotees do not know this fact the result to be gained by their devotion will be limited in scope and short-lived (B.G. 7.23, 9.23–24). Among the devotees, therefore, the best devotee is the one who worships Vāsudeva as the All (B.G. 7.19).

What this essentially means is that to arrive at this stage of devotion, wherein Vāsudeva is the All, discrimination is absolutely necessary, thus making it imperative for a person in whom the desire has been kindled to know the Lord (Jijñāsu) to pass onto the devotional state of an *arthārthi* as we have described the word, a person who has reached the state of seeing nothing other than God as his goal before he attains the final Jñāna. In the first instance, to get the desire to know the Lord the seeker had to drain from himself all temptations to enjoy the fruits of his karma. Afterward, the sense of being the agent for that karma must also disappear completely if his attention is to concentrate on the Lord alone. At this stage, through discrimination, the identification with the body, etc., must vanish. It is for those who are in this ultimate state of devotion that the Lord has promised to release the capacity for discrimination (*buddhi*) by which they go to Him (B.G. 10.10). Realizing that the Lord is the source and sustenance of every being, the seeker, with intensity of emotion and the conviction that apart from the Lord life is impossible, exchanges thoughts on the Lord

with those in a similar state, always deriving pleasure in recounting episodes about the Lord, living in the Lord, and being completely contented with Him. Finally, out of compassion towards such noble devotees, residing within their hearts, the Lord destroys their ignorance through the floodlight of knowledge. It is in this context that the Lord assures Arjuna that He imparted to him the Yoga, the supreme secret, in the form of eternal Knowledge (Jñāna) and this was because Arjuna was his devotee (B.G. 4.3).

Other than these practitioners who aim at immediate release from saṃsāra directly, the Gītā mentions a number of other types of devotees who can be considered to be at different levels of ambition for liberation. The ripeness of Yoga can be seen in a devotee of the highest order when he sees the Lord in everything and everything in the Lord and is situated almost within the visible vicinity of attaining Him. Because he is unswervingly serving Him, such a devotee gains the ability to see Him directly, He who is his own Self as well as the Self of all beings. That devotee is considered to be dwelling in the Lord even when he is engaged in the activities of the world (B.G. 6.30–32). But even amongst such Yogis, the one who has merged his identity with the Lord in every aspect and is serving Him with faith (B.G. 6.47) would have in fact reached the culmination of all the practices including meditation, devotion, faith, and discrimination.

In this context the intent of Gītā verses 7.28–30 become clear:

“It is possible that among those people that may have committed innumerable incorrect actions in their lives and thereby have collected a lot of demerit, if one of these persons aspire to become a Yogi and tries to mitigate this demerit through correct actions performed now, completely freeing himself of all pairs of opposites through discrimination and having removed attachment toward comfort and discomfort, serves the Lord with steadfast determination, attempts to overcome birth, old age, and death, and deriving sustenance only from Him, he then can overcome death, knowing Brahman, even if it be with his last breath” (B.G. 7.28–30).

Because all of the four types of devotees mentioned in verse 7.16 of the *Gītā* refer to those who have already resorted to devotion of the Lord they would never intentionally commit evil actions in this life. Thankfully, this does not mean that a person who led a life of evil activity has no relief at all. The only requirement for help from the Lord is that, whatever his past may have been, his mind is now wholly directed toward the Lord, who neither hates persons for their past wrong actions nor loves them for their previous good conduct. Such a person, in spite of his previous wrong doings, if he can turn to the Lord with unswerving devotion, will also entitle himself to permanent peace. This is so because his sense of agency for any action performed as well as the sense of being the enjoyer of the result of that action would have been taken away (B.G. 9.30). It should be noted here that this verse along with verses 2.19, 11.33, 18.17, and a few others in the *Gītā* are subject to willful

misrepresentation and become dangerous weapons in the hands of mischievous people wishing to rationalize their wrong behavior. It must be repeated that the statements in these verses do not apply to ordinary people at all and refer only to such incomparable devotees or Jñānis, who will never resort to any evil deed, of which they are in fact incapable. The stress in all these cases is on a complete identification with the Lord where there is absolutely no scope for any wrongdoing.

Lastly, there is the devotee who by virtue of his or her birth cannot study the scriptures or perform scriptural activities (karmas). If that devotee realizes that this world is impermanent and is the primary cause of unhappiness and as a result of this insight completely surrenders to the Lord, he or she can also hope to reach Him by His grace. The greatness and grandeur of the Gītā's teaching concerning devotion is that none is condemned merely because of their of birth, station in life, or even their past deeds. The Gītā teaching is that there is always hope for progress and salvation.

The culmination of devotion can be seen as complete surrender to the Lord, which requires and entails the complete elimination of the ego, without even the slightest trace remaining. In this context the English word surrender and its Sanskrit equivalent *prapatti* requires a bit of explanation. It is commonly understood that all that one has to do is to 'fall at His feet' and He will look after the rest. This concept would be correct if the word were to be derived from the root, 'pat' (to

fall), so that after merely ‘falling’ at the Lord’s feet one can go on demanding from the Lord everything that one desires as though it were one’s right to expect something from the Lord and to still continue on with all of our old avocations and wrong behavior. Nothing can be further removed from the idea of devotion or surrender than this farce. According to the Gītā, even before surrender, one has to purify oneself to the extent that he is able to submerge the ego, so that the idea of surrender itself is banished from his mind. When we are aware of the fact that we are surrendering, there is clearly a disguised ego involved and that type of surrender will be an object of condemnation when seen in the light of verse 3.6 in the Gītā :

“He who sits, restraining his organs of action, while in his mind he broods over the object of the senses, he is a deluded man, he is said to be a hypocrite” (B.G. 3.6).

Even though the ego may have become less coarse by falling at the feet of God it will still persist. It is therefore essential that sincere and intense practice must precede surrender so that we can reach the state in which even the idea of ‘I’ as the one who is surrendering will have become extinct. In fact, this is so because that devotee sees nothing but God. It is this type of devotion, the acquiescence to the will of God, the faith that He is doing every thing and not being compelled by circumstances but to submit to His will, that is required here. This devotion has nothing to do with an outward exhibition of surrender but rather refers to an inner acquiescence

to the will of God after a careful deliberation of all the possible alternatives available, including the choice of not accepting his authority. A devotion of this kind will become a lasting faith and this is what is required to remove all our unhappiness. On the contrary, if the surrendering to the Lord is a business deal so as to escape from certain unwanted circumstances, that type of faith will disappear when those circumstances go away. Hence, it will be more appropriate to derive the word *prapatti* from the root ‘*pad*’, meaning to obtain, rather than merely indicating the act of falling. This can be seen when we look at the cognate words such as *prapanna*, which is also derived from the root ‘*pad*’ (Panini Sūtra 8.2.42). ‘Prostrate unto Me,’ ‘Have recourse to Me alone,’ and other similar statements are employed to indicate such surrender, the preparation for this having been indicated earlier.

The Lord says “Set your mind on Me. Become My devotee. Perform all actions as Yajña to Me. Prostrate to Me. Thus, performing Yoga, if you accept Me alone as your ultimate goal, you will reach Me” (B.G. 9.34). This is an assurance repeated on oath in verse 18.65 in the Gītā.

The very first requirement therefore is that the mind must become God-oriented and in order to do that it must be taken away from the sense objects, with the conviction that the sense objects are indeed the seeds of unhappiness, so that the senses do not drag the mind outward. Then one can become a devotee, instead of being

a slave to the objective world, as all normally extrovert people are. When these two conditions become ripe, all actions can then be performed seeing the Lord in all the stages of activity (karma), starting from the very volition to perform the action right up to the experience of the fruit of that action. This practice will remove the sense of agency for the action as well as the bondage caused by having to enjoy the fruits of one's actions.

Even though the idea of surrender occurs in other places in the Gītā, the two verses that demand special attention are 18.66 and 18.62. Verse 18.66 has already been referred to while discussing the commencement and conclusion of the text, where it was pointed out that the phrase “sarva dharmān parityajya”, ‘completely abandoning all dharmas’, should include not only all practices but even the practitioner, not only devotion but even the ego. Depending on the state of the seeker and the particular exercise in progress, the identification can be at various levels, from the body up to the ego, all resulting in the feeling that the ‘I’ is merely one among many. But in the case of true surrender, even the feeling of the ‘I’ surrendering is absent, even though a very subtle identification with the ego would not have been completely obliterated. The seeker is now conscious of the illusoriness of the ego. At this point the feeling of ‘I’ will be nearest to the True Self, in which state the feeling will be “One with Me” (*Mām Ekam*) (B.G. 18.66). The essence of this state, on the disappearance of the last traces of the ego, is what is referred to in the Gītā as the real *Mām*, the Lord, the Self (*Ātman*). This

concept has been depicted in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad when it uses the phrase *ekātma pratyaya sāram* (the essence of the concept of one Ātma). Since the true Self, being the Eternal Subject, can never become the object of any concept, this Upaniṣadic expression should be understood in the sense whereby the idea of ‘many I’s’ would have been removed by a process of the negation of all superimposed qualities as detailed in the same 7th mantra of that Upaniṣad. To state this more simply, what *Mām Ekam* (B.G. 18.66) and *ekātma pratyaya sāram* (Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 7) means is that the mind is in the state of maximum purity by ridding itself of all possible impurities in the form of the not-Self and this is what is being denoted as *ekātma pratyaya sāram*, the essence of the concept of One Self, entitling a person to reach the Self. That state wherein even any traces of ego present are considered as illusory is the state that is envisioned in the Gītā as true surrender. It is at this stage that the Lord absolves the devotee of all sins, and not before, and confers upon him liberation.

Verse 18.62 in the Gītā instructs one to surrender to Īśvara, the Lord, alone, who is said to be situated in the hearts of all beings. It is said there that surrender should be undertaken with *sarvabhāva* (all of one’s being) when, by his grace, supreme peace and eternity can be won. The expression *sarvabhāva* normally refers to something done with ‘all your heart and all your soul.’ Earlier in verse 18.56, the Lord had assured Arjuna that “by My grace you will attain the eternal state, never decaying.” The similarity between the verses regarding the state to be

attained is not accidental, since in the Gītā wherever the Lord refers to Himself in the first person, He is referring to the Supreme Brahman, which is denoted in chapter 18 verse 62 as Īśvara. Since that expression indicates that he is the Supreme Lord situated in the hearts of all beings, He is identical with Vāsudeva, who is said to be the All in verse 7.19. Now the implicit import of the word sarvabhāva becomes clear. It refers to the attitude that He is the All as Vāsudeva, including the All of the devotee. With this attitude the idea that ‘I surrender’ will naturally have no place, since the devotee has taken himself also to be in Him. This understanding is in accordance with the next verse, where the preceding teaching is said to be the ‘Secret of Secrets’—the knowledge that He is the All.

In summary, we can say that when the devotee has equipped himself with these qualities, the ego can then accept the Lord as his only savior, removing the tendency to seek for relief from any external source other than the Lord, as well as removing the tendency to run after any goal other than the Lord. In the final stages of devotion everything that can be included in the field of dharma, even devotion and the ego, as they are also non-Self, must be rejected in order to be able to surrender to the Lord completely. It can thus be seen that the Gītā affords a very exalted place to the concepts of devotion and surrender.

2.9 Contemplation (Dhyāna)

As discussed earlier, expressions used in the Gītā are sometimes expressed in senses that are popularly current in

some of the other Indian philosophical systems (*Darśanas*) and this has resulted in quite a bit of confusion. About the term Yoga, a fairly detailed discussion has already been undertaken. The word Knowledge (*Jñāna*) used in the *Gītā* sometimes denotes a particular meditation (*upāsana*), sometimes it denotes the Final Knowledge, and at other places it is seen to merely mean scriptural Knowledge depending on the context. In the same way the word *Dhyāna*, commonly translated into English as ‘meditation’, has appeared with two distinct meanings in the *Gītā*, either as a type of *upāsana* or as a method of directly seeing the truth. The failure to differentiate these two has resulted in misconceiving the word meditation as described in the 6th chapter of the *Gītā* to mean meditation as taught in Patañjali Yoga or Hatha Yoga.

Meditative processes (*upāsana*s) have been discussed earlier, where it is seen that in that context if the word *dhyāna* is used it means meditation on a object, whether be it a form or a quality, as indicated by the scriptures, or other authoritative texts, so that the mind carries this picture while following some physical effort, such as the repeating of a mantra, etc. This type of meditation is evidently dependent on the practitioner’s choice, in that he can do it, not do it, or do it otherwise. And if he does it, the result of that meditation will depend on the intensity and the quality of his effort. This type of meditation is antecedent to devotion and a preparation for it.

But there is another type of meditation, perhaps a better word for it would be contemplation, also referred to as

nididhyāsana in some texts, which is not an imaginative process about which we can decide whether or not we want to do it, but which refers to an undisturbed contemplation on an already existing particular object so as to determine its true nature. In the case of the Gītā, this object is Ātman, the True Self. This type of meditation (*nididhyāsana*), has to be undertaken when one is absorbed in devotion to the extent of perfect surrender to the Lord, who will then, at that point, release the buddhi, the faculty of discrimination, which is absolutely required for determining His nature correctly. While the other types of dhyānas, meditations, can be undertaken by any sincere person, this particular type of meditation, *nididhyāsana*, requires a very clear, subtle, and introvert mind for the preparation of which all the earlier sādhanas discussed till now are absolutely essential since this type of meditation involves constant contemplation until the object of contemplation reveals itself in its True nature. For this purpose, it is clear that one will have to first eliminate all thinking about the not-Self. Without the preparation of the mind through the practice of karma Yoga, upāsana, and bhakti, all of which lay the foundation for the capacity to undertake this constant discrimination, even if a person has a keen intellect, sharpened with logic, his effort will only serve to strengthen his ignorance and pride. In contrast, the Sādhaka with a purified and cultured mind, which bases itself on sound reasoning and incessant gazing at Ātman, the Self, which is the real nature of *nididhyāsana*, will constantly reject all not-Self, including the worldly intellect, by not entertaining any thoughts about them.

Roughly, this contemplation, *nididhyāsana*, can be divided into the following stages. The Lord, after having separated the whole known objective universe, called the ‘Field’ (the not-Self), from the ‘Knower of the Field’ (the Self), in the first verse of chapter 13 says:

“This body, son of Kunti, is called the Field, He who knows this is called the Knower of the Field, according to the Wise-Ones, who know them both” (B.G. 13.1).

The Lord declares later:

“Whatever gets created, inert or animate, know it to have been the result of the combination of the Field and the Knower of the Field, O Best of the Bhārata clan” (B.G. 13.26).

In the second verse of chapter 13 the Lord asked Arjuna to realize that He, the Lord Himself is the true nature of the Knower of the Field. We should therefore have a clear understanding of what exactly is the Field, who is the Knower of the Field, and what is the nature of the combination of the two, which is said to result in the universe. It is only to facilitate this discriminative exercise that the scriptures have provided us with a detailed description of creation, in spite of the fact that they negate it in the end as being illusory (B.G. 2.16). The Field is said to consist of the five subtle elements that are in their rudimentary state before combining with one another to give rise to the gross elements: the ego, the intellect, the un-manifest, the ten senses, and the mind, the five sense objects, awareness (conceptual knowledge),

and determination (the quality of the mind which upholds the body and senses under adverse conditions, when otherwise they might have crumpled) (B.G. 13.5–6). Of these items, which are all included in the ‘Field’, the five elements, mind, intellect, and ego have all been grouped together under the category of the lower nature (*prakṛti*) in verse 7.5. The Un-manifest has been described in verse 8.18 as the cause from which the manifest world of name and form emerges upon creation and into which it merges on dissolution. The term ‘intellect’ in this context refers to what is called the *mahat* by the Sāṃkhya philosophers and is considered to be the first evolution of *prakṛti* and is also technically referred to as *pradhāna* in that school. The qualities such as desire, antipathy, pleasure, and pain are accepted as belonging to the Self by the school known as Vaiśeṣika. But all these elaborately listed items, seen or unseen, material or mental, are grouped by the Lord under the single category of the Field, the objective world, which being subject to constant change cannot have any real existence of its own (B.G. 2.16). If we examine closely we can determine that other than the perception of the perceiver himself, there is no independent means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) by which we can establish the existence of the Field.

To be able to perceive the changes outside, the perceiver has to remain unchanging. Hence, in the first stage of contemplation, the Self is provisionally accepted to be the perceiver, retaining his agency in the act of perceiving the object, an idea which is also in the field of ignorance since in reality no such activity can be imputed

to the Self (B.G. 13.21–29, 2.19). The initial step of this type of contemplation is not difficult to undertake. All objects, which are outside the observer's body, can be easily objectified and we all have the conviction that the observer is different from them, so this can be achieved with little effort.

The next and more difficult step of the discrimination is to examine the nature of the body itself, since the existence of objects outside us cannot be established except when they are perceived, what is their state when there is no perceiver? This difficulty arises when we start to examine the reality of the body. In our waking state, the identification with the body is so natural and complete that it does not even occur to us to question the reality of the body and its relation, if any, to ourselves. For the most part, we talk about ourselves as bodies. When we leave the waking state and enter into dream or sleep, we are not aware of the waking body, which we had accepted as ourselves only a few moments earlier. Nevertheless, instead of inquiring whether it could have existed even when we are not aware of it, we take it for granted that it always exists. Because of the fact that we all assume that before we slept the condition of the body that was seen is now taken to be just the same as the one appearing as soon as we wake up, we uncritically assume that it remained in the same condition in between also. Hence, the statement becomes possible; 'before sleeping I was awake, during sleep I dreamt, and then I woke up.' It is seen that throughout the 'I' concept refers to the body, in spite of the fact that during sleep, our identification

with the body of the waking state is completely absent, and during the dream state the identification of the 'I' is with an entirely different body appearing. Such a feeling is the *prima facie* view or the common view when there is no discrimination.

Because of this strong identification with the body, the Lord has expended considerable effort in examining the nature of the body. Everyone is aware of the fact that one who was a toddler developed into a youth and then grew old (B.G. 2.13). The two terminal incidents, birth and death, are not mentioned here because we are not actually aware of them, although we know that they do happen. But if the body of the old man is compared to that of the baby, or of the youth, nothing in common between them can be noticed. The earlier body destroyed itself, every cell of it having perished, in order to give way to the succeeding body. In spite of this, the old man can fondly recollect the activities of the child or the pranks of the youth, as his own. Some reflection would clearly reveal that neither the activities of the child's or youth's bodies were actually his own true nature and the feeling of identification with them could not be true, as he is existing now as identified with the old body. The earlier feelings bear no relation to that of the old man's body.

While we are aware of the changes which have been taking place in the body and which we take ourselves to be, in the same way that we see the changes which have been occurring in the bodies of others, and are readily

prepared to objectify those other bodies, we refuse to apply the same test, i.e. objectivity, to ourselves. The body continuously dies, but still this feeling of 'I' in it persists throughout, demonstrating that whatever correctly answers to the description of 'I' must be different than the body, the changes which the 'I' continuously knows.

Then there is the second contemplative exercise mentioned in verse 2.28 in the Gītā, wherein it is shown that before creation the five elements, existing in their un-manifest form, could not have been perceived by the senses, if in fact there were any senses at that time to perceive them. During the period of creation they again become objects for the senses. And once again, they disappear from sight when dissolution takes place. Actually, nothing has been created or destroyed, as the effect is nothing but an appearance and the cause is the only reality. In the same way, a small portion of the five elements takes a certain shape in the form of the body, senses, and mind, etc., for some period, at which time they are taken to be different from the rest of the five elements having become their 'subject', the one who objectifies the outer elements. After that period, the small portion of the five elements that had become the body, senses, mind, etc., merge back into the totality of the five elements putting an end to the subject/object relationship. It is only when the subject/object condition obtains that objects, in terms of perceivable forms can appear. It is in this context that the appearance of beings has been described as their 'birth'. The period during which they remain as such has been called their 'sustenance' or

‘existence’ and lastly, when they cease to be objects for the senses, it has been called ‘death’. But, even from the point of view of the body, nothing has been created in fact nor has anything been destroyed as these are only modifications of the five elements.

While these above mentioned criteria form the necessary conditions for something to be perceivable and to be accepted as having birth, existence, and death, the same criteria are not extended to our daily experience. The description of our common experience may be stated as follows. When we did not perceive the body during either sleep or dream we did not bother to question its existence. The argument that others continue to exist even while I was asleep or dreaming and that they would be perceiving our bodies at that time, although we were not aware of our body, is in fact a futile argument when examined closely. Because all the evidences we have for the existence of our body, be it personal evidence or the testimony of others, are all included in our own waking state alone and can never go beyond it. The argument about the testimony of others could have had some validity if those other perceivers could have seen our bodies when they themselves were asleep or dreaming. The intriguing question to be asked here is that when we have no identification at all with any of the other bodies which we see in our waking, why is it that we have such a complete identification with one particular body, taking it as ‘my body’, which is similarly appearing in the waking state alone? In other words, we must come to appreciate the fact that when our direct experience is that

the waking body comes and goes with the waking state, just like all the other bodies appearing therein, our notion that ‘I am this body that is appearing in the waking state’ can not have as its cause anything other than a lack of discrimination (*aviveka*).

In the traditional texts, when dealing with this contemplative exercise a type of reasoning has been provided to facilitate detachment from the body and has been explained in detail in Sureśvarācāryas’ Naiṣkarmya Siddhi in verse 2.12. It is common knowledge that the body grows on food and decays on the lack of it, showing that the body is a product of food. The food, when consumed, provides its useful portion when absorbed and the unusable fraction is evacuated. The portion absorbed thus sustains the body. Before eating or after being thrown away, no body considers the food or the waste, as ‘I’. Still, in between the identification with it arises, even though that same food was considered to be distinctly different from us before consumption. With these discriminative processes, it is possible to eliminate the identification with the gross body. It needs to be cautioned that a mere intellectual appreciation that ‘I am not the body’, is not enough. This is known even to a child when he says that his hand has been hurt and thus has unconsciously separated his self from his body for the time being. But this Vedāntic discrimination must sink deep into one’s experience so that just as before this contemplative exercise, the identification with the body was perfect and automatic and the pain resulting from an injury to the body was considered completely as

‘mine’, now, after this contemplation has been absorbed, the detachment from it becomes equally experiential and natural, so that one has the conviction that the happenings in the body do not affect him at all.

The body’s activities will continue but the identification with that body will no longer be noticeable, even slightly. In this context, the insistence on and the need for previous intense preparation even before embarking on this type of contemplative exercise should be quite evident. Even the worldly benefits arising out of the capacity to engage in such a contemplative exercise are too obvious to need elaboration. It is at this stage, when the identification with the body has been shaken off, that our attention can be turned toward the senses, about which we can note two things: The senses are subtler than the body and without the body’s activities the identification with the senses becomes impossible. Just as the existence of objects outside cannot be established except by the perception of the perceiver, the existence of the senses themselves has to be inferred from the objects. For instance, unless there is a form to be seen, the process of seeing is meaningless and the existence of the eyes will never have any proof. Sense objects are in nature, as we have seen in the early portion of this discriminative exercise. The objects have also been shown to possess no independent existence of their own. This same type of discrimination, as in the case of the body, can now be extended to the senses.

It should be noted that if the mind is not associated with the senses, the senses are as good as non-existent; for

example, when we are wool gathering or day-dreaming. Hence, the mind should be seen as a superior adjunct in relation to the senses. It should also be noted that each of the senses can function only within its' own specific field and can generate knowledge about the object in one particular way. For example, the eyes can reveal the form and color of an object and it is the eyes alone that have the capacity to do this, but they are completely ineffectual in generating the knowledge of smell or taste. But our experience is that we do get the knowledge of sound, touch, form, and smell simultaneously and in a composite form, which can become possible only in the mind. The mind has, therefore, to coordinate the activities of all the senses and it also continues to function even when any one of them, or even all of them, are not functioning. In view of the minds greater subtlety, importance and continued existence, while the senses exhibit interrupted existence and because the mind percolates and pervades all the activities of the senses, from this perspective the senses may be dropped, so that identification may now be shifted, consciously, to the mind.

In the same fashion that we have examined the body and the senses, when the mind is examined closely, we will come to find that it also cannot function except on the authority of the intellect (buddhi), which, in its turn, is ineffective apart from the ego. While the mind is responsible for volition, i.e., the idea that I will undertake some activity, the real decision to embark on any activity can only come from the intellect, which has to weigh the arguments for and against any decision

to act and, therefore, it is the intellect that directs the mind accordingly. Similarly, we should see the fact that without the ego, no determination, no activity, physical or mental, becomes possible. So therefore, in this order, starting from the external objects and the body, passing through, by stages, to the senses, the mind, and the intellect, the process of elimination through contemplative discrimination can be used to arrive at the ego (B.G. 3.42-43).

At this stage, because all activity must proceed based on the inescapable identification with the ego, it is obvious that the ego itself cannot be directly objectified and its dismissal by this type of discrimination is not possible. Because the ego cannot remove himself by any activity of his own, including discrimination, and because the Pure Self cannot by itself resort to any activity, it seems as though we have arrived at an insurmountable impasse. In spite of this, the ego can be considered an object to us and as different from us through another means. Emotions, like happiness and unhappiness, are properties of the ego and not of the True Self (Ātman), as we have seen earlier, since happiness and unhappiness were both included as items in the Field. We are all aware that sometimes we are happy and that later we may become unhappy, the change from one state to the other being quite well known to us. Since these qualities cannot be separated from the one having those qualities, they cannot be separated from the ego. Because the qualities of the ego are objects to us, we can say that even the ego is an object. The result of this discriminative exercise is

described by the Lord as Knowledge and anything other than this is Ignorance (B.G. 13.2).

In all the steps of this contemplative exercise there is one thing in common, and that is the higher or the subtler adjunct continues to run through the experience, while the lower and more gross adjuncts are to be dismissed as they have a relatively limited existence and exist only in one particular state of experience and they are being dismissed at other stages because they are confined to a particular time and space. In spite of this, we all function as though all of these adjuncts (the body, senses, mind, intellect, and ego) all enjoy a continued existence because of the superimposition of the qualities of one adjunct onto the other. When one particular adjunct is seen to have limited dependent existence it can be dismissed on the basis of the higher adjunct that continues throughout. When the lower adjuncts are separated from the higher adjuncts based on the fact that the higher adjuncts are subtler and more pervasive than the illusoriness of the lower adjuncts becomes obvious.

To revert back to the earlier example, while the body of the child had existence only during the period of childhood and the body of the young man only had existence only during his youth, even though both of these bodies have ceased to exist the feeling and experience of 'I' continues throughout. This is because the qualities of the perceiver and the perceived were superimposed on each other. That thing that continues throughout all the intermediate stages is known in Sanskrit as *anvaya*

(continuance) and that which is coming and going, and thus has a limited existence is called *vyatireka* (exclusion). This contemplative exercise, therefore, goes by the name of *Anvaya-Vyatireka*.

The mutual superimposition of the qualities of the ever changing nature (*prakṛti*) and those of the immutable Self, *Puruṣa*, results in our experience of the empirical universe. While nature is said to be the cause in terms of being both the un-manifest and manifest world, the Real Self (*puruṣa*) whose nature is beyond both the manifest and the un-manifest (B.G. 8.20, 15.17), appears as though he is the experiencer of the activities of nature and thus becomes subject to apparent birth and death, rebirths good and bad. In other words all the empirical dealings are occurring merely because of the *puruṣa*'s the Real Self's apparent association with the *guṇas*, the qualities of nature. On the contrary, the *puruṣa* is taught in the *Gītā* as the one whom, while appearing to be in the body, is in fact the Immediate Perceiver, the Overseer, the Sustainer, the Highest Lord, and the Real Self (*Ātman*) (B.G.13.22). The Real Self, being beyond time, eternally abides as absolutely free from all the activities of the *guṇas*.

To arrive at this state of the Pure Self (*Ātman*), all the qualities falsely imputed to him will have to be removed through this type of discrimination. As discussed above, in the first stage of discrimination the Self was assumed to be the 'Knower of the Field', the existence of which can only be established when there is an object to be known. Each object perceived produces a concept in the

mind and that concept gives way to another when the object changes. The perceiver continues to perceive not only the objects that have changed but also the changes that have taken place in each of them. Hence, the objects are considered to be worthy of exclusion (*vyatireka*) and the perceiver, who continues throughout, is to be known as that which enjoys continuation (*anvaya*). Everyone sees not only other peoples' bodies but also the changes that are taking place in those bodies. Similarly, we see the changes taking place in the body that we identify as ourselves. While it is easy to see the rest of the bodies as objects and as being different from us, it requires this contemplative exercise of constant observation and simultaneous discrimination between the seer and the seen to arrive at the firm conviction that the body, with which we are so thoroughly identified, is also different from us.

But this above contemplation was based on the tentative assumption that the Self is in fact the knower of the Field and therefore, the very process of knowing imputes the concept of agency to the Self who in fact is free from that idea also. Therefore, we must proceed to a further stage in this contemplative exercise and that is to eliminate the concept of perception also from the nature of the Self. In order to do so the ego will have to be separated from the Pure Self, who has seemingly become a perceiver only in association with that ego. In fact, the Self, in its true nature, cannot have any activity in it and this includes not only the act of seeing but also the activity required for the removal of *saṃsāra*.

The same method of continuance and exclusion (*anvaya-vyatireka*) is utilized here also with regard to the ego, the perceiver, that were applied to the other objects, wherein that which is continuing (*anvaya*) is known as the Witness who sees the changes in the various emotions and which, being the qualities of the ego, are then capable of being excluded (*vyatireka*). This stage in the discrimination becomes more difficult because the ego is the subtlest of the adjuncts and because all empirical activities, including even this subtle discrimination, can take place only within the framework of the ego. It is for this very reason that the ego cannot be dismissed by this type of discriminative process. It can help make the identification with the ego thinner and weaker but it is not capable of eliminating it all together. So, at this point, we must turn to the Lord who assures us:

“Thus, to those, who serve Me with love, uniting themselves constantly with Me, I grant them Buddhi Yoga, Discriminative Wisdom, by which they come to Me” (B.G. 10.10).

The Lord then says, “Due to my compassion toward them, remaining as their Self, I destroy the darkness born of ignorance through the effulgent lamp of Knowledge” (B.G. 10.11).

It is at this stage of discriminative wisdom, that has been described as *sāṃkhya*, as delineated in verses 11 to 38 of chapter 2, and which had to be achieved through the successive stages of the practice of Yoga, that the aspirant would have eliminated all not-Self, except the

ego, which he knows he is not and which is illusory but which he cannot dismiss. His sense of agency for the actions would have disappeared and all desire, volitions, and actions would have been dissolved automatically and involuntarily while the bodily and mental functions would be going on and with which he has no identification at all. All that the aspirant does at this stage is to reject immediately any thought of the non-Self, which may creep into him on account of past impressions and wait for the exhaustion of any obstacles to the Final Knowledge, in the form of *prārabdha* (the Lord's fructifying karma), and for the Lord to take away the last traces of his ego. This will occur when "the time has become ripe enough" to carry him back into his own true nature, the nature of the Self, the nature of the Lord (B.G. 6.24-28). This contemplative and discriminative exercise, taught by the Lord in various places has received quite an important place in the effort to get rid of *saṃsāra*.

Having elucidated the lack of reality of the Field in verse 2.16, the Lord then dismisses the agency for all actions from the Knower of the Field, since all actions can occur in nature (*prakṛti*) or natures' qualities, in the *guṇas* alone (B.G. 13.29). Since the common feeling is that we are performing all transactions, all of us attribute the agency for action to our Self, to our real nature, which is in fact absolutely free from any activity. This illusion gets corrected when actions are performed without attachment as is taught in verses 3.19-21. To repeat, the three *guṇas* and everything composed of them are subject to change and that which changes cannot

be Real. Everything that is known as nature (*prakṛti*) is thus shown to be an illusion. Anyone who, because of the lack of the correct and complete knowledge of the Self, attributes reality to *prakṛti* and its *guṇas* and then drags the functions of those *guṇas* over himself and takes himself to be the agent for those activities as well as being the experiencer of the fruits of those activities has seemingly fallen into the endless ocean of *saṃsāra*. In essence, this misconception, this false mixing up of the Self and the not-Self, is the *saṃsāra* and without this misconception there can be no misery and no *saṃsāra* at all. Discrimination alone is what enables a person to get rid of this primary ignorance. The task of clarifying what exactly is the true nature of the Self, the nature of the not-Self, and the consequences of mixing these two in the form of empirical transactions such as ‘I am a knower, I am a doer, I am an enjoyer’, have received first priority from the Lord in His teachings contained in the second chapter and has received extensive elaboration in chapter thirteen.

After realizing that action is performed by nature alone and not by the Self, the practitioner can see that all differentiated beings are contained in the One undifferentiated God (B.G. 13.30). How such a realization can arise is made clear in verses 9.4–5 where the Lord says,

“All this universe is pervaded by Me, in My unmanifest form. All beings dwell in Me but I am not in them. Nor do these beings exist in Me. Behold my

Divine Yoga! Even though I am the cause of beings and My nature sustains them, I am not in them” (B.G. 9.4-5) In this context one can also compare verses 7.6 and 7.12 in the Gītā.

On a superficial reading, the statements contained in the above two verses (B.G. 9.4-5) appear quite contradictory. How can all the beings exist in Him and at the same time not exist in Him? For the correct understanding, the next verse provides a clue:

“Know that all beings exist in Me, just as air, that is in vast proportion, eternally subsists in space, moving everywhere” (B.G. 9.6).

The subtlest element in any being is space, which is in no way affected by any of its effects, such as air, which exists and moves about everywhere in space. But since air is an effect of space, it cannot exist apart from space, which is its cause even though it appears to be moving in space as though they were two separate things. To speak of the Lord as the cause of the universe is to speak from the point of view of ignorance, since the universe is an illusion. The relation between the Lord and the universe can be considered valid in the same way that a rope can be considered a cause of the snake seen in it and thus related to it. The imagined snake can never have an independent existence apart from the rope nor can we say that the rope actually exists in the snake. In reality, even the snake is not in the rope, since the snake is a product of incorrect or defective vision. When that vision gets corrected it will be understood that there was no

snake and that it never existed even when it was being seen. Exactly in the same fashion, the universe cannot remain apart from the Self (Ātman), upon whom it is superimposed by the ignorance of people and therefore must exist in the Self, who, being the only Reality, is not in the universe. But when our ignorance is removed by Knowledge, since the illusory nature of the universe is then realized, it is seen to be not even existing in the Self. That is why the Lord calls this phenomenon Yoga Māyā, meaning not really existing but appearing to exist. Just as a mirage does not wet the sand on which it is seen nor does the snake seen in a rope impart its poison to the rope, the superimposed universe and all the bodies contained in it in no way tarnishes the purity of the Self. Like the sun illuminating the whole universe but not being affected by any of the happenings in it, the Self is not affected by any activities in the world (B.G. 13.32-33).

In spite of the Self appearing to dwell in the body, he does nothing nor does he experience anything (B.G. 13.31). This conclusion becomes clear to us when the guṇas are separated from Him, since it is the association with the guṇas that is solely responsible for the Self appearing as though it were their experiencer (B.G. 13.20-21). This cannot be easily realized by all of us who feel that we daily experience the results of our actions.

To make this position clear the Lord cites two examples, each conveying a slightly different message (B.G. 13.32-33). The first example is space. Just as space is all pervading, providing support to everything, though

it does not adhere to anything, in the same way the Self, in spite of being in all the bodies, it is also not stained by anything, including the qualities of the body. No superimposed thing can in any way affect the substratum on which it is falsely superimposed. For example the water of a mirage cannot actually wet the sand in any way. Thus, the activities of the body, which in essence, are merely the activities of the *guṇas*, can in no way affect the Self. In the second example, the sun illuminating the whole world is compared to the True Self, who provides the consciousness to all beings. The Sun illumines the good and the bad, the saint and the sinner, the robber and the robbed equally, without being affected in any way by the nature or the activities of any of the objects it illumines. Nevertheless, these activities are said to be caused by the Sun, since the world wakes up to activity only in its presence. In the same way, without the Light of Consciousness being provided by the Self, no one can act and in that sense the Self can be said to be cause for all activity. But none of these activities in fact, affect the Self in any way. While the intention of the first example utilizing space (B.G. 13.32-33) is to remove the idea that the Self is an agent of any action. The second illustration using the metaphor of the Sun rids from the Self the idea that it is the experiencer of the result of actions. Similar to the first illustration is another, which is well known in Vedānta: Even though the space in a pot seems to move when the pot moves, or seems to become smoky when the pot is full of smoke, in fact the space neither moves nor is affected by the smoke. Since the space in the pot

is at no time different from the all-pervading space, no movement is possible in it or for it.

This contemplative, discriminative exercise known as *anvaya-vyatireka*, explained in verses 2.11-39, and which the Lord Himself has called Sāṃkhya, should be considered as the apex of the whole exercise. To indicate that this is the final way to eliminate all illusion and misery, the Lord starts his teaching with this subject alone. Here, in these early verses, the Self is described as indestructible, immutable, all-pervading, and eternal. In contrast to this, the body gets created, exists for a short duration and then disappears. Whatever really exists cannot be destroyed and therefore whatever can be destroyed cannot have real existence (B.G. 2.16) though we commonly think of things in the world to be persisting and existing even though they are constantly changing. Whatever is born must die, though in between birth and death it seems to exist but in fact its existence cannot be established for the very reason that it has a beginning and an end, and is thus subject to continuous destruction. All changes, birth and death, growth and decay, and all states in between are seen by the Self, who continues to Witness these changes unchanged; while the universe and everything in it continuously undergoes modification. This is what is known as the ‘anvaya of the Self’ and ‘vyatireka of the objective world’ (B.G. 2.27-28). Obviously the teachings in verses 2.27-28 have not come in order to teach Arjuna that an embodied being undergoes childhood, youth, and old age. Like all other people in the universe, Arjuna is well aware of this fact without the need for justification

from any scripture or Divine Teacher. Since these changes occur in the body with the experience of the ‘I’ continuing at all the different stages, the changes should be recognized as objects to him, since he is seeing them. The Lord is asking Arjuna to examine what exactly is the nature of this ‘I’ that persists throughout all these changes. To the doubt that we do remember that ‘I was a child’, ‘I was young man’, etc., and therefore they must be my true nature, the answer is to be found in the next verse. Since these changes come and go they must be adventitious and not belonging to our true nature, as the true nature of a thing can never be lost. Therefore, even though the states of childhood, etc., have passed away, the ‘I’ in the form of experience persists throughout and it is on the authority of this experience that such memories arise. The Self does not end, but rather persists as the body of the baby, child, youth, etc., passes on. In verse 2.17 it has been made clear that the one Self persists in all the bodies, equally, and is All-Pervading. This means that according to the Gītā each body does not have its own individual Self.

2.10.1 Liberation

Though the concept of devotion pervades the whole of the Gītā, the importance that the Gītā gives to Jñāna (B.G. 4.33, 4.38, 4.39, etc.) must be taken as preeminent. One can come to appreciate the importance of knowledge if one were to take a comprehensive look at the progression of thought as the chapters proceed. It begins by teaching the nature of Pure Consciousness, as distinguished from

empirical conceptual knowledge in the 2nd chapter. It discusses the nature of Yoga in the 4th chapter. It then teaches us the difference between nature (prakṛti) and the Self in the 7th chapter. The inability of even the attainment of Brahma Loka to offer us final relief from saṃsāra is shown in the 8th chapter. The 9th chapter teaches us that it is the direct knowledge of the Self that confers immediate and final Liberation as opposed to ‘liberation in stages’ that was described in the previous chapter. Then, the Gītā goes on to portray the illusoriness of the Field and the Self’s freedom from it in the 13th chapter. Then the stage of transcending the qualities of nature, the guṇas, is discussed in the 14th chapter. The Lord is shown to be the Supreme Ruler of both the manifest and un-manifest nature (prakṛti) in the 15th chapter. And then summing up, as the final conclusion of the text, the 18th chapter examines the direct means for the attainment of Knowledge and its result. From this brief overview it is easy to see that the subject of knowledge is the binding force that holds together all the other subjects contained in the Gītā. It is doubtful if any chapter of the Gītā can be pointed to as being free from a deliberation on Knowledge (jñāna).

The word Knowledge (jñāna) in the Gītā, like the word Yoga, is also found to be employed in various senses. This becomes obvious from that fact that only in certain places the word Knowledge is used to describe the Highest, the Supreme among all types of Knowledge (B.G. 14.1). It is also clear from verse 13.2 that this Supreme Knowledge refers to the correct and complete Knowledge of the Self.

The Lord says, “The Knowledge of the Field and the Knower of the Field is, in My opinion, the Real Knowledge” (B.G. 13.2).

Since in common usage the meaning of the word Knowledge refers to objective knowledge, it becomes necessary to ascertain what exactly is the correct connotation of the word Knowledge (Jñāna) when used in the Gītā. Knowledge has been declared, as we have seen above, to be the correct Knowledge of the Field as well as the Knower of the Field and “taking recourse to this knowledge; those who attain the form similar to Mine do not get reborn when creation takes place nor do they suffer during dissolution” (B.G. 14.2). Hence, the discrimination between the Field and its Knower is the means for getting the complete Knowledge of the Self and final relief from saṃsāra. Birth and rebirth are caused by one’s own actions, depending upon which one attains higher or lower births (B.G. 14.18). This is because a person superimposes upon his Real nature the activities of the Field, which should be correctly seen as the activity of the guṇas alone. On the contrary, when by proper discrimination it is realized that the activities are in the Field only then the Wise-One realizes the fact that the qualities of nature, the guṇas alone, are the agent for all activity. That discriminating person will entitle himself to know the One Self, who is beyond the qualities of nature (the guṇas) and thereby reach Me (B.G. 14.19).

The Lord says, “If the embodied one transcends the three guṇas, he will be freed from birth, old age,

death, and unhappiness and thus attain Liberation” (B.G. 14.20, 18.16).

The Lord also says, “He (alone) sees properly who sees the guṇas as the agent of all activity and the Self as the non-doer” (B.G. 13.29).

The Real Knowledge therefore, refers to the direct and immediate experience of the Self, who is devoid of any agency for any action and who is not the enjoyer of the results of any action, and whose nature therefore transcends saṃsāra. The Knower, the Jñāni, the Wise-One, already being the Self, has become One with the Self, and he is declared by the Lord to be “My Own Self” (B.G. 7.18). It is in this state where one has become identical with the Supreme Being that all of duality finally ceases. Hence, it should be clearly understood that it is only in a secondary sense that the Gītā makes statements like ‘Knowledge alone is the cause of liberation’, ‘Through Knowledge alone one attains the Self,’ or ‘One who has attained Knowledge directly experiences Brahman.’ This is because in the actual state of Knowledge, the triple distinctions of knower, knowing, and known are completely absent. The words Knowledge, the Self, the Absolute, or the Intuition of the Self all mean the same thing; i.e., the state of Liberation in which there is no duality. From this perspective all these words can be seen as synonymous expressions. As a matter of fact, this state of non-Duality cannot be described by any word, since language is confined to and limited by the state of duality, which has now disappeared. This state is the

culmination of the process of the elimination of the not-Self by discrimination and the attainment of Knowledge whereby the Pure Self remains as the Self alone (B.G. 5.16), unsullied by any other thing that is not 'I'. While this is the real meaning of Knowledge as taught in the Gītā, all the qualities enumerated in verses 13.7-11, such as humility, etc., can also be taken as referring to Knowledge in the primary sense and need not necessarily be viewed, as is the usual case, in the secondary sense wherein these qualities are said to be practiced for the attainment of Knowledge. This is because the qualities, such as humility, etc., have become the very nature of a Jñāni, a Wise Man. These qualities are natural to both Knowledge and the one who has that Knowledge, and in this sense do not refer to anything that has to be practiced.

While this Supreme Knowledge is in the form of immediate experience, the intermediate indirect knowledge obtained from the Scriptures and the teacher is also called Knowledge (Jñāna) in the Gītā. In order to distinguish the two types of Knowledge, the first meaning is immediate experience and is referred to by the Sanskrit word *vijñāna*, (B.G. 3.41, 6.8, 7.2, 9.1, 13.34), as opposed to mere scriptural knowledge. In other words, we can separate the type of knowledge that is merely an intellectual understanding of the teachings of the Scriptures and the preceptor from *vijñāna*, which is the conversion of that indirect knowledge into direct experience, often designated by the Sanskrit word *anubhava* (direct intuition). Similarly, in verse 16.1 of the Gītā the word Knowledge is used in a totally different sense to indicate one of the Divine Tendencies.

In addition, the qualities required and the practices to be undertaken for achieving direct Knowledge have also been referred to in the Gītā by the use of the word Knowledge (B.G. 13.7–11). We have also seen previously that meditative processes (upāsana) have an important role to play in stabilizing the mind, which is a prerequisite for the attainment of this ultimate Knowledge (vijñāna). It is in this context that even the meditation on the Cosmic Form has been declared to be Knowledge. The Lord says, “By unalloyed devotion alone can you know Me in this (Cosmic) Form and also see it and enter into it” (B.G. 11.54). The differentiation sought to be made here is between mere scriptural knowledge, which can merely describe the Form, and the experiential knowledge aided by one-pointed devotion, which alone can reveal that Form.

In the 13th chapter we find the most difficult of all the practices, the discrimination between the Self and the not-Self. Obviously, the nature of the Pure Self and the not-Self, as well as the process of separating the latter from the former, had to be explained in detail. It is noteworthy that in the list of qualities mentioned as being essential for the attainment of Knowledge humility, in the form of the absence of egotism, takes pride of place. Humility, it may be noted, is also listed as one of the important characteristics of the Divine tendencies (B.G. 16.3), the development of which is said to be absolutely essential to progress towards liberation. How the quality of humility has figured as an important item of spiritual practice needs a bit of elaboration. In the text known as

“The Thousand Names of Viṣṇu” (Viṣṇu Sahasra Nāma) one of the names for the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu is *Amānī*, meaning ‘one who is completely free from egotism’. Hence, when the ego overpowers a spiritual practitioner, he should remind himself that he is straying from his goal, which is the Supreme Lord, and remember that the Lord is the very embodiment of the absence of egotism. Therefore, humility does not have to be seen as just a negative quality, an absence of something, but also as a positive quality and something that has to be constantly practiced. When, if for even a short while, the humility becomes somewhat curbed the aspirant can then examine how this ugly tendency of a lack of humility has crept into him and then resort to preventative measures so as to ensure that it does not occur again. In the same way, the remaining qualities narrated in verses 13.7-11 should also be consciously cultivated. These qualities alone, it is declared, constitute Knowledge and what is opposed to these qualities is merely Ignorance. This shows that it is these enumerated qualities alone that need to be encouraged and developed for the attainment of Knowledge and any other qualities, which are the opposite of these, should be understood as naturally leading to bondage and therefore should be shunned.

Lastly, some types of conceptual or objective Knowledge are also described as Knowledge in the Gītā. In verse 14.6, the quality of *sattva* is described as being both illuminating and pure but it is also said to be a source of bondage, in that it causes attachment to comfort (*sukha*) and Knowledge (*jñāna*). Here obviously the word

knowledge is referring to the indirect knowledge gained from the Scriptures. In spite of the fact that the quality of sattva must be cultivated in order to proceed towards Knowledge, because sattva is also included as one of the guṇas, it also has to be finally transcended in order to escape the glorified but subtle bondage that it also causes.

What then is the nature of Liberation that the Gītā teaches that must be attained by Direct Knowledge? The final and supreme achievement of any being, the *Parama Purushārtha* is said to be Liberation (mokṣa) in relation to which the other three achievements of human effort, the Purushārthas (dharma-righteousness, kāma-desire, and artha-wealth) become preparative for the final Liberation from saṃsāra, the cycle of birth and rebirth and all the ills attendant with it. Since it has been explained that those that are born must die and those having died must be reborn, the only relief from this cycle of birth and death, designated by the word saṃsāra, is to reach Eternity (*amṛta*), which can be attained through Direct Knowledge alone.

The Lord says, “I shall narrate the thing that is to be known, by knowing which one will attain immortality. The Higher Brahman, He is beginning-less and cannot be designated as either Existence or non-Existence” (B.G. 13.12).

This state of Immortality is described in the Gītā in other places. For example, expressions found in verses 2.15 and in 2.51 such as “the perfect condition without any suffering,” and again by the words “peace” mentioned

in verses 2.70-71, “Higher Peace” in verses 4.39, 5.39, 13.12, 18.62, “Higher Attainment” in verses 8.15, 9.1, and “Freedom” or “Deliverance” in verses 5.28, 17.25 and 18.30 all refer to this same Immortality (amṛta).

As discussed earlier, anything that is created will be subject to destruction and anything that is acquired must be lost. Only our nature remains with us permanently. Hence, if a state should be free from birth and death and be in the form of Immortality (amṛta), evidently it should be our very nature. The corollary to this is that the state of mukti (liberation) must in fact be our own nature, to attain which, we have to do nothing at all and nothing need be done. We just have to eliminate the obstacle that is preventing us from knowing our True nature. When that obstacle is eliminated, we are then figuratively said to ‘become’ what we already are, while before the elimination of that obstacle we were appearing to be really what we are not. It is this state, where Ignorance has been completely eliminated as well as the saṃsāra it seemed to be causing, without having to reach any other state or having to wait for any future time, that is known as *Sadyo Mukti*, Instant Liberation. This Instant Liberation is declared to be simultaneous with the dawn of Knowledge (B.G. 4.39, 18.55). Even though the aggregate of the body, etc., in which the knower attained his Knowledge, continues to exist, when at the time of death the fructifying activities (prārabdha karma), which had brought the body into being in the first place, exhausts themselves and finally perish, there is no question of the Wise-Man (the Jñāni) assuming a new body (B.G. 5.25-26).

This state of Liberation has been praised profusely in the Gītā. The culmination of Yoga being the discrimination of the not-Self from the Self, followed by the elimination of the not-Self, must result in establishing one's self in the True Self (Ātman). It is this establishment in the Self that is referred to as the State of Liberation. When the mind rids itself of all extraneous material and gets established in the Self, the state of Liberation will be the result (B.G. 2.53). This assurance by the Lord prompted Arjuna to seek clarification about this state. The Lord then taught him how Self-Knowledge alone leads directly to Liberation in the last 18 verses of the 2nd chapter. In verse 2.72 the final culmination of all practices is the state described as the *Brāhmīsthiti*, the state of being Brahman, and *Brahma Nirvāṇa*, the complete dissolution into Brahman. This state of Liberation has also been described as the culmination of naiṣkarmya siddhi, the perfection of actionlessness, by which means one attains Brahman (B.G. 18.50). The Pure Self is to be reached by Sāṃkhya, the discriminative knowledge as taught in the beginning of the teaching, in the 2nd chapter itself. When a person realizes that the Lord is in fact the experiencer of all sacrifices (Yajñas) and all austerities (Tapas) and is the Supreme Lord of all the worlds, by knowing Him thus, one attains peace (B.G. 5.29). This State of Liberation is again described as *Brahma Nirvāṇa* (Dissolution into Brahman) in verse 5.24 and as *Brahmabhūta* (Existing as Brahman) in verse 6.27. The Sanskrit word Yukta, meaning Joined to Brahman, found in verse 6.8 is derived from the word Yoga, whose root

means to join and because it has the suffix ‘ta’ added to it, the word conveys the meaning that the activity has been completed. In other words, the one described in this verse as a Yukta is the Liberated One. The terms *Aśubhāt Mokṣa* (Freedom From All Evil) (B.G. 4.16, 9.1), *Māyā taranam* (Crossing Over Māyā) (B.G. 7.14) and *Guṇātīta* (The One Who Has Transcended the Guṇas) (B.G. 14.25) are all pointing to this state of Liberation. Even though the state of Liberation can only be intuited directly and can neither be learnt nor taught, the Lord assures us that an earnest seeker, who approaches a teacher in the proper manner, will be taught by those Jñānis who have seen that Ultimate Truth, as it really is (B.G. 4.34).

There seems to be a contradiction here in saying that a Wise-Man (Jñāni) who is beyond all duality and therefore does not see, hear, or know anything is the one who will teach us. A proper way to reconcile this apparent contradiction may be explained as follows. In the first instance we should clearly appreciate the fact that one who is Liberated, being free from all identification with any of the limiting adjuncts, such as the body, senses, etc., or with any aspect of nature, such as the qualities of nature (the guṇas), or the products of the guṇas, cannot function in the dualistic state of empirical transactions, in which field alone even the process of teaching and being taught becomes possible. Not being aware of the aggregate of the body, senses, or mind with which he is seemingly associated with from the perspective of others, the Jñāni does not even see as he has no instrument such as the eyes or the mind by which he could possibly

become a perceiver. Since he is free from all duality, he does not recognize a seeker nor the latter's bondage from which he is to be relieved. This would mean that no realized person can enlighten anybody else concerning this Knowledge (jñāna) and if anything is taught then that teaching should not be considered Knowledge (jñāna) at all. This is the situation that needs to be clarified if we are to understand correctly how there could be a traditional line of Wise Teachers and their students.

This seeming conundrum can be explained as follows. Since Knowledge (jñāna), in the form of Liberation (mukti), is accepted to be a matter of direct experience it should be conceded by all that the object of direct experience, the Absolute Reality, cannot be the object of either language or reason. Nevertheless, the only method of guiding a seeker is through language and reasoning, with all their limitations. When we speak of one who has attained Knowledge (here the word 'one' refers to the collection of the body, senses, mind, etc., with which he was previously identified and in which he attained this Knowledge, even though after that attainment, 'he' is not aware of that body, etc., or anyone else's body) we should understand that before he attained this Knowledge (jñāna), he went through a rigorous course of practice, in successive stages, gradually ridding himself of the not-Self until finally even the last traces of the ego were eliminated. It is therefore not difficult to understand that the aggregate of the body, senses, mind, ego, etc., in which this Knowledge was attained continues, as long as the fructifying activities, the prārabdha karma, lasts. In

what might be termed a ‘Twilight State’ the mind of that aggregate would be in a state which is described as being Established in Knowledge (Jñāna Niṣṭhā) and that state is maintained with absolutely no effort. This would be the nearest approximation to True Knowledge, the reason being that whatever is taught by the Jñāna Niṣṭhā is also called Knowledge (jñāna) because it leads to the Real Knowledge. This is similar to saying that qualities, such as humility, are called Knowledge because they also lead to Real Knowledge (B.G. 13.7-11). Since the teachings of one Established in Knowledge are not the Ultimate Knowledge (Jñāna) his teaching is also said to be in the field of Ignorance alone. When the student is taken to that Supreme Non-Dual State by the Realized One (here we should understand the expression ‘the Realized One’ as having the same connotation as explained above) all efforts end for both the teacher and the student, since at that stage all duality ceases and the Ultimate Knowledge dawns on its own in the form of the dissolution of the last traces of the ego. Hence, there is no contradiction between the assurance given in the Gītā verse 4.34 as well as the injunction of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad’s verse 1.22.12 where the seeker is instructed to “approach the Guru alone, who is an adept in the Scriptures (śrottriya) and who is also Established in the Absolute (Brahma Niṣṭhā) and the fact that the Wise-Man, the Jñāni, sees nothing, knows nothing, and teaches no one at all. In other words, we have to recognize the distinction between the Wise-Man who has in fact become one with the Non-Dual Reality and the aggregate of the body, senses, mind,

etc., that remains after the attainment of Knowledge and is appearing to us as the teacher.

2.10.2 Different types of Liberation (Mukti)

Besides the state of Instantaneous Liberation (Sadyo Mukti) discussed above, which can only be attained by Knowledge, and whose result is to be experienced here in this very life, there is another type of Liberation described in the Gītā which take place in stages, called *Krama Mukti* and its result can take place only after the fall of the body. In this context the type of Liberation referred to as Instantaneous Liberation has been clearly indicated as follows:

“Those ascetics, who are free from desire and anger, and who have their mind under control and who have known the Self, they have attained *Brahma Nirvāṇa*, Complete Dissolution Into the Absolute, whether they are living or dead” (B.G. 5.26).

In this verse it is said that those who have attained the Knowledge of the Self are already the Liberated Ones. Hence, the Sanskrit word *abhitaḥ* in verse 5.26, which literally means “on both sides,” refers to the fact that the one who has attained Knowledge is both Liberated while he is living and after death. By using this word *abhitaḥ* the Lord seems to be indicating that when once the collection of the body, mind, etc., with which a knower of the Absolute (a Brahma Jñāni) was seemingly associated perishes, then even the apparent association will finally cease.

The Lord says, “Keeping the senses, the mind, and the intellect under control, having emancipation alone as the goal, getting rid of desire, fear, and anger, the Muni (the one engaged in constant reflection as a habit) is always liberated” (B.G. 5.28).

The Sanskrit word *sadā*, meaning always, is used in the above verse to indicate that in spite of the Jñāni (the Wise-One) having already attained Instantaneous Liberation the body, mind, and senses, etc., as well as their activities, that are attributed to him by the ignorant, will in fact not create any problem at all for the Wise-One (the Jñāni).

The Lord has also mentioned a type of Liberation that takes place in stages, *Krama Mukti*, and which refers to a process wherein the aspirant first purifies his mind through the practice of *karma Yoga*, as already discussed and then engages himself in the continuous practice of meditating on the sacred syllable ‘Om’ as Brahman, the Absolute. By this practice the practitioner is said to reach *Brahma Loka*, wherein, along with the First Born, *Hiraṇyagarbha*, he may attain Liberation at the end of the present Aeon (*Kalpa*) (B.G.8.24). This same Liberation in Stages (*Krama Mukti*) that is taught in the *Gītā* is described in even greater detail in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* in verses 5.10.1-2 and 8.15.1, as well as in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* in verse 6.2.15. In this context two facts should be kept in mind. First is the fact that this practice of meditating on the symbol ‘Om’ to attain Liberation after death is for the aspirant who has concluded that he has

too many obstacles to attain the Ultimate Knowledge in this life. And secondly, even this type of Liberation in Stages is contingent on the fact that the final Knowledge of Brahman must also be attained in that Divine World referred to as Brahma Loka. If the aspirant does not attain the final Knowledge in Brahma Loka, he must once again take rebirth. This implies that, in the final analysis, Liberation can be attained only through Knowledge.

2.11 The nature of Transcendental Reality

We shall now discuss the exact nature of the Transcendental Reality that is taught in the Gītā. We have already shown how, when the ignorance of the Self has been removed and correct Knowledge has dawned, the aspirant merges into his Real nature, in the form of the Absolute non-Dual Brahman, the Universal Consciousness, wherein there can be no birth, death, or the possibility of rebirth. The following verses are all pointing to this Transcendental Non-Dual Nirguṇa Brahman:

“When all the differentiated beings are seen to be in the One Supreme Self, the Paramātmā, and have been seen to be permeated by Him, then he will attain Brahman” (B.G. 13.30).

“My devotee, having intuited this Knowledge, the difference between the Field and the One to be Known, will attain My nature” (B.G. 13.18).

“Thus, performing Yoga and keeping Me as the only goal, you will reach Me” (B.G. 9.34).

“Know That to be indestructible” (B.G. 2.17).

“It does not get born nor does it die” (B.G. 2.20).

In accordance with verse 18.20, Knowledge was declared to be Sāttvic when it reveals the One in all beings, even when they appear to be differentiated, the Indestructible One, “That which never gets separated from beings” (B.G.13.30). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Gītā teaches the identity of the Self and the Supreme Self, in which not a trace of duality can exist. Since this is the case, it is obvious that the Supreme Reality can neither be taught by words nor can it be meditated upon by the mind, as words and the mind can only function within the confines of duality. It is this ‘Quality-less (Nirguṇa), Formless, Non-Dual, Absolute Brahman which is beyond all words and the mind that has been presented in the Gītā as the highest Transcendental Reality. This same Quality-less (Nirguṇa), Non-Dual, Absolute has also been described as having certain qualities or forms in order to enable the devotee to meditate on the Supreme Reality and in other contexts certain qualities and forms have been temporarily attributed to the Supreme Reality not as an aid to meditation but merely as a skillful means, so that the teacher is able to teach this Quality-less Transcendental Reality. But all these temporary attributions that have been adopted solely for the purpose of teaching and which do not really belong to the Quality-less, Absolute, Non-Dual, Nirguṇa Brahman will have to be negated in the end.

Both the Upaniṣads and the Gītā have described the Absolute Non-Dual Reality, Brahman, from two distinct

viewpoints. When the Absolute is viewed in relation to the created universe, then the Non-Dual Brahman is said to be the One from whom the universe is born, in which it exists, and into which it is dissolved. Hence, the Supreme Brahman is declared to be the cause of the universe both manifest and un-manifest only from the empirical point of view, the point of view rooted in Ignorance (B.G. 7.6, 10.41-42). There has been quite a bit of heated discussion as to how exactly Brahman (the Absolute Reality) is said to be the cause of the world. Many early commentators, as well as recent thinkers, both in the West and in India, have opined that it must be the case that Brahman (the Absolute Reality) actually gets converted or transformed into the Universe. It should be noted that this wrong theory is also different from the Sāṃkhya philosophy, which teaches that it is a really existing nature (*prakṛti*) and not Brahman that converts itself into the universe.

To explain the anomaly as to how something, in this case the Nirguṇa Brahman, can become the effect, the Universe, and still remain Eternal (*Nitya*) various hypotheses have been advanced. One theory is that it is only one part of Brahman (the Absolute) that has become the Universe and the rest of Nirguṇa Brahman will retain its identity as the Eternal Absolute. But in this case Brahman will have become insentient, a thing, as well as an entity which has parts. Both of these ideas will contradict the teachings of the Scripture and the Gītā, which says that Brahman is not insentient and has no parts. This is in spite of the fact that in verse 10.42 these ideas seem to be latent. But the Gītā does not leave any scope for doubt in this respect when the Lord declares:

“At the dawn, everything gets manifested from the Un-manifested, and into which everything gets dissolved when night arrives” (B.G. 8.18).

And again it is stated:

“There is another, greater, Primal Being, which is Invisible, Beyond the Un-manifest, and which is not destroyed when all others are destroyed” (B.G. 8.20).

This makes it clear that either during creation or dissolution, the Ultimate Cause, the Supreme Reality, which has been denoted by the words *Akṣara* (the Indestructible) or the *Parama Puruṣa* (the Supreme Person) is in fact referring to the Transcendental Reality from which there is no return (B.G. 8.21). This Non-Dual Transcendental Reality is always distinct from the Universe, since no cause can convert itself into an effect unless the whole or part of it has become the effect. Verse 8.18 equates the Un-Manifest with that which has been called in verse 9.7 nature (*prakṛti*), consisting of the three *Guṇas* (B.G. 7.13,18.40). It is this Un-manifest nature that creates all sentient and inert beings and are merely said to be under His Control as their Over-Seer.

Hence, the Lord (*Īśvara*) or the Absolute Brahman has no active involvement in the process of creation. This gives rise to the question of the relation between the Lord (Brahman) with nature (*prakṛti*), the Universe. As has been discussed earlier, the complete *prakṛti* (the Un-manifest, the Manifest, and the mental modifications) are all grouped under the one category of the Field in

verses 13.5-6, which being subject to constant change cannot have an independent, Real Existence of its own (B.G. 2.16). The type of relationship that nature or the Universe has with the Absolute requires examination. It may be surmised that the relationship takes one of the following forms: 1) The relationship of a master and a servant, 2) the relationship between a container and the thing contained, 3) the relationship between the supporter and the supported, etc., but none of these relationships can apply to the Non-Dual Transcendental Reality. Having declared that “All beings are in Me but I am not in them” (B.G. 7.12, 9.4) and thus showing the complete dependence of all beings, the whole Universe, on Him as well as his complete freedom from all beings and the whole universe. We should also note that the Lord has immediately extended this idea in the next verse when he states, “Look at my Lordly Yoga, all the beings are not in Me either!” (B.G. 9.5). What is really being taught here is that while all these ‘beings’ are appearing as though they are ‘in’ Him, in reality they do not exist anywhere at all. We can therefore conclude that the only possible relationship between the Non-Dual Transcendental Reality and the Universe must be that of the relationship existing between a reality and its appearance and on this basis we can conclude that what was described as nature (*prakṛti*) in verses 13.5-6 is merely *Māyā* (an Illusion). This same idea is implicit in the following verses:

“Again I will elucidate the Highest of All Knowledge’s, which upon knowing, all the Silent Sages have attained Supreme Perfection, beyond the empirical sphere.

Resorting to this Knowledge they have achieved My own nature. For them there will be no birth upon creation nor misery upon dissolution” (B.G. 14.1-2).

These verses should be sufficient to show that if the knowledge of a thing is capable of removing something, then that thing must be illusory and its apparent existence a product of ignorance. If this be the case, then the only way that Brahman can be considered to be the cause of the Universe or that there is a relation or dependence between the two is that the Universe is a superimposition on Brahman and Brahman should be seen as its True Substratum. The wonders-of-wonders is that in spite of the fact of His sustaining all beings, He is not in them (B.G. 9.5–6). The Lord says, “Unattached, the sustainer of all beings, free from all guṇas, experiencing the guṇas also” (B.G. 13.14).

In this way, not only will all beings and the Universe disappear completely having known its nature correctly, but also Brahman will retain its Pristine Purity and Unity, in spite of its being treated as the cause of the universe. This method of teaching Brahman as the cause of the universe has been technically called *Tatastha Lakṣaṇa*, meaning defining a thing through neutral or alien characteristics. On the contrary, when Brahman is taught as *Sat, Cit, Ānanda* (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss) that definition is known as *Svarūpa Lakṣaṇa*, meaning defining a thing with the characteristics that are its essential nature. Here also, these seeming characteristics in fact denote no particular quality but serve the function of denying the

absence of the opposites of the characteristic mentioned. For example, when Absolute Reality is said to be *Sat* (Existence) all that is intended is that the Absolute is not *Asat* (Non-Existent). Hence, the Scriptures have adopted the well-known technique of negation, ‘Not this, Not this’ (*Neti, Neti*), whereby they merely deny all positive qualities that have been falsely attributed to the Absolute. The Absolute Non-Dual Brahman can never have any positive quality nor can the Eternal Brahman be limited or qualified by them. It is this very method that is being made use of in verse 13.12 wherein the Highest Brahman is declared to be incapable of being described as either Existent or Non-Existent.

In the same way, the Lord declares Himself as being born (B.G. 4.5), as protecting the good and destroying the wicked (B.G. 4.8), as being active without a moments rest (B.G. 3.22), and as the knower of everything (B.G. 7.26). But there are clear statements to annul these ideas also. For example, His statement about His birth should be seen in the light of His nature being incapable of birth (B.G. 2.20, 4.6). Hence, it is that he instructs Arjuna to know that both his birth and actions are celestial, divine, or subtle and assures him that anyone who knows this “as it is” will also not be subject to rebirth after casting off his present body.

While dealing with the nature of a Knower of Truth (a *Jñāni*) the Lord says that there is no duty for him to perform, or anything to achieve by activity nor is anything lost by not acting (B.G. 3.28). Since the *guṇas*

alone provide the agency for action (B.G. 3.27, 13.28-29) because a Jñāni is said to be a *Guṇātīta*, one who is beyond the guṇas, as well as the Lord's own Self (B.G. 7.18), he is freed from the actions of the guṇas and their effects. The Gītā teaches that the Lord does not create actions in the world, nor the agency for it, nor the relationship between the action and its fruits, and the Lord does not accept responsibility for the good or evil actions of anyone (B.G. 5.14-15) The illusion of all these three: action, agency for the action, as well as the experience of the results of action, arises only due to the fact that the Real Knowledge of one's True nature is being shrouded by Ignorance. But it is said that Knowledge destroying this Ignorance, will illumine the Transcendental Reality, like the bright sun illumines the world (B.G. 5.16).

The various descriptions of the meditative processes (upāsanaś) that are described in the Gītā should all be seen this light. Since the Transcendental Reality cannot be grasped by the mind or the senses (B.G. 7.26) certain qualities have been attributed to the Lord in order to facilitate meditation on Him by devotees. As we have seen earlier, the only purpose of these meditations (upāsanaś) are to stabilize the mind on the Lord, which is normally oriented outward and extrovert. When by that process of meditation the mind has become stabilized on the Lord the effort at that point should only be directed toward the elimination of Ignorance by the discrimination between the Self and the not-Self. The culturing of the mind through the teaching of the Scriptures and the preceptor is a prerequisite not only for gaining the capacity to have

the vision of the Cosmic Form (B.G. 11.8) but also for undertaking the discrimination between the Self and the Not-Self (B.G. 13.34, 15.11). Hence, the imputation of the qualities onto the Lord must be considered as merely a means adopted for the purpose of teaching only and they are not to be carried over to the end. Wherever the Lord has been described as having qualities, it should never be lost sight of that those qualities are in fact alien to His nature, a nature that is eternally devoid of all qualities and forms. This Non-Dual State, the Transcendental Reality, which is free from all qualities is the state to which the Lord refers to as “I,” “Me,” or “Mine.” By these types of descriptions, we should not be confused and understand them as if they are referring to His human form, in which the teachings were imparted. In this connection, we may recall the previous discussion regarding the so-called teaching of Knowledge by a Knower, which can only take place in the realm of duality, the realm of Ignorance. The Lord Himself has clearly said:

“Though I am Un-Manifest, the dull witted think of Me as fallen into manifestation, not knowing my Higher Being, which is Imperishable and Unsurpassed” (B.G. 7.24).

More specifically the Lord warns the ignorant people who devalue or underrate Him, not knowing ‘His Higher Form’ as the ‘Supreme Lord of all Beings’, and identifying Him with a human form (B.G. 9.11).

This ‘Higher Form,’ without any qualifications or adjunct, has been described in various places in the Gītā as the Transcendental Reality.

The Lord says, “Those who meditate on the Indestructible, Indescribable, Omnipresent (form), Unimaginable, Unchanging like an anvil, Immovable and Steady, they attain Me” (B.G. 12.3-4).

“Know Him to be Indestructible” (B.G. 2.17).

“Neither is it born nor does it die” (B.G. 2.20).

“He, who is beyond the intellect” (B.G. 3.42).

When examined closely we will find that the Gītā teaches this same idea in verses 13.12-14. Here in verses 13.13 and 14 certain deliberate superimpositions have been placed on the Supreme Reality but in verse 13.12 all qualities that have been superimposed have been negated by saying that this reality is to be described as ‘not existant and not non-existant’. This is the traditional method of Vedānta, of the Upaniṣads, to deliberately superimpose, for the purpose of teaching, and in the end to negate that very means. In the light of the above, it becomes clear that it is this Non-Dual Transcendental Reality that has to be recognized as the only and final destination for all practitioners (sādhakas) and that all the practices and whatever else is being taught in the Gītā must ultimately lead to this final destination alone. In conclusion the Gītā states: “The Lord is the Support, The Underlying Reality for the Eternal Never-Decaying Brahma, and for the Eternal Dharma and Limitless Bliss” (B.G. 14.27), “Knowing Him and reaching Him alone can there be freedom from saṃsāra” (B.G. 8.15), “and the final attainment of our Real nature, the Eternal Bliss” (B.G. 6.21).

