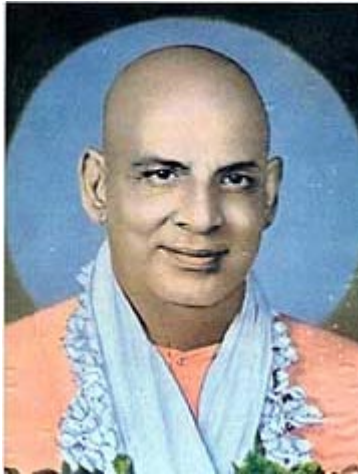


THE GITA VISION

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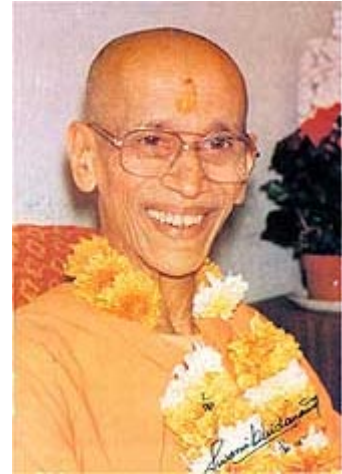
SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA



**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**



Sri Swami Chidananda

A DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY PUBLICATION

First Edition: 1992
World Wide Web (WWW) Reprint : 1998
WWW site: <http://www.rsl.ukans.edu/~pkanagar/divine/>

This WWW reprint is for free distribution

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Published By
THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY
P.O. SHIVANANDANAGAR—249 192
Distt. Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh,
HIMALAYAS, INDIA.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

During the Sivananda Ashram Sadhana Week, which was held in September 1991 prior to his 75th birth anniversary, H.H. Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj was asked to give a series of lectures on the philosophy and practice of the Bhagavad Gita. In this series, Swamiji concentrated on the first three chapters and this core portion of the lectures is now being offered to the reading public under the title "The Gita Vision."

Over the years, in his talks given throughout India and the world, revered Swamiji has constantly quoted from the Gita. Years of reflecting over its message, and, still more important, putting its precepts into practice in his own life, has made this scripture into a living reality for him. As a result, the message and vision of the first three chapters of the Gita, delivered in Swamiji's unique style, had a profound impact upon the attentive audience.

We believe that this inspiring message and vision will be of equal benefit to all devotees of the Gita, who, after reading this booklet, will return to the Gita with a fresh appreciation of its timely and life-giving message.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

*Sivananda Ashram
Sri Krishna Jayanti
August 21, 1992*

PREFACE

The Srimad Bhagavad Gita contains the quintessence of the wisdom of the Vedas. Therefore, one who has understood the Gita has understood the essence of the Vedas. Gurudev, Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, insisted that you should get a knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita. For then you will get a knowledge of yourself, and of how to overcome dejection, despair, hopelessness and a total breakdown of self-confidence by determining to follow the instructions of the Divine, by fulfilling God's Will in your life. You will know how to overcome attachment, delusion and faint-heartedness, to cast them aside and to stand up and engage in self-culture and self-mastery.

The Gita starts in defeatism but ends in victory. The final verse firmly affirms victory and fulfilment. The Gita begins with Arjuna's unwillingness to face the call of life, the call of duty. He says: "I would much rather take a beggar's bowl and wander over the earth than engage in battle." And when Krishna starts to correct him, he tries to argue with Krishna and prove Him wrong. Arjuna tells Krishna that He is asking him to do something very seriously wrong and sinful that will have dire consequences. But Krishna makes him realise that what he thinks to be a wise understanding about life has at its bottom deluded attachment, *moha*. And once Arjuna says, "I now realise that I have been thinking in a wrong manner, I shall follow Your teaching, please teach me," then everything proceeds well. Even in the midst of the battle, when Arjuna is unable to withstand the onslaught of Bhishma, Krishna Himself takes up a wheel of the chariot, *rathanga*, as His *chakra*.

So, once you pledge obedience to the Divine Will, the Divine never lets you down. It helps you even in the direst of circumstances. Even when defeat seems to be one hundred percent sure, the Divine will not allow you to be defeated. It fights on your behalf, takes up arms, because your pledge for obedience is complete. And to one who has thus pledged total obedience to the Lord's Will, there is no defeat. It is all victory.

The very incident of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita is an indication of what life should be, in what manner it should be lived. That is, we should allow the Divine to guide the chariot of our life. Throughout the Gita, the position of Lord Krishna is of one who guides Arjuna's chariot. The chariot of life, throughout this great battle, is guided by Lord Krishna. Arjuna only goes on doing his duty, fulfilling his *kartavya karma*. It is Krishna Who takes the chariot wherever it is right for Him to take it.

This is the very clear indication of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita incident, the episode and the outcome. It is a clear indication to the seeker who is sincerely dedicated to the divine ideal to allow the Divine Will to guide him throughout, until victory is attained and victory is proclaimed.

If you look at the Gita in this way, then you will understand it in a totally different way. You will know what its teachings mean to you personally as seekers engaged in the battle of life and as seekers who have to somehow overcome and attain the supreme Goal. You will understand its relevance to yourself. And thus understanding, the benefit you derive from the Gita will be totally different. It will be of practical spiritual benefit.

May Lord Krishna's grace enable you to understand the Gita in this intimate, personal way and be benefited by it, so that you attain the Goal Supreme!

Swami Chidananda
Om

Sivananda Ashram
Sri Bhagavadgita Jayanti
December 17, 1991

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita is the philosophy of the Upanishads put into practice. It is also an Upanishad in the form of a prescription for *tapatraya* and *bhavaroga* (the threefold afflictions of man and the disease of transmigration). The philosophy of the Gita is a philosophy of shaking away weakness and bondage to darkness and ignorance, a philosophy of liberating yourself from "I and mine" and attachments, of being bold and brave enough to see the truth as it is, and then commencing once again the journey towards the ultimate state of a liberated consciousness.

It is the practice of the Gita that gradually removes from one's interior the ignorance of the reality of our situation. The *sadhana* of the Gita is the time-honoured methods evolved, formulated, perfected and handed down to us as the great science of Yoga. But it goes a step further. The *sadhana* of the Gita is also a prescription suited to each and every individual. It is an integrated *sadhana* of *karma*, *bhakti*, *dhyana* and *jnana*. Overemphasis is not laid upon any one. All are important. All have to be synthesised. But, most important, they all have to be put into practice in daily life.

The practice of the Bhagavad Gita is not in a hermitage nor in a secluded place aloof from mankind; it is not in a forest where the Upanishads were realised and put down for our benefit. The *sadhana* of the Gita is commensurate with your life itself. The *Gita-sadhana* is not something to be separated from life; it is something which has to be made part and parcel of life. *Gita-sadhana* and right living are synonymous. Right living is *Gita-sadhana*. *Gita-sadhana* is right living. *Gita-sadhana* and life are to go together hand in hand and become one. They have to merge into one.

That is the type of life that will ultimately raise you from the delusion of unrealities to the clear perception of the Reality. It is a Gita-pattern of life that will take you from the darkness of ignorance into the light of supreme divine wisdom. It is Gita integrated into your practical day-to-day life that will ultimately take you from death, mortality and bondage to this wheel of rebirth to a supreme realm of immortality and everlasting eternal life.

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THE GITA VISION

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita is no other than the philosophy of the Upanishads. But in one respect it has gone a step further, in that the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita has brought the philosophy of the Upanishads from the forest dwellings of the *rishis* and the *munis*, from the hermitages of *tapasvis* and *sannyasis* and has given it a central place in the home of the *grihastha* in *samsara*, in the market place of *vyavahara*, worldly life, so that the Gita is *upanishad-darsan* in practice. In the Gita we have the Upanishadic wisdom applied. In the Gita we have the translation of the *adesa* (command) and *sandesa* (instruction) of the Upanishads into daily life. To teach how the Upanishads can actually be practised, how the Upanishads can be made the basis of our daily life, is the purpose of the Bhagavad Gita.

The philosophy of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita deals with the situation of the individual pilgrim soul upon this earth plane, in the midst of the very vexing problems that constitute an inevitable part of the individual's life. It takes the life of the *jivatma* in this *prapancha*, beset by the *dvandvas*, love and hate, like and dislike, attachment and repulsion. It takes the life of the *jivatma* faced with the situation of an inner, essential conflict between what one would like to do and what one is required to do, between one's sentiments, emotions and attachments and one's duty in one's station in life. It takes the life of an individual trying to grapple with this inner conflict of *bhavana* (feeling) and *kartavya* (duty), this inner conflict of the *sreya* (good) and the *preya* (pleasant), this inner conflict of *dharma*, which is very difficult, and the easier way.

It provides the necessary strength to the individual by enlightening him with the hidden reality of the situation. Because of his insufficient understanding, his lack of proper perspective, the individual takes the situation to be what it appears to be and does not try to analyse it beyond and behind the surface appearance, nor try to understand it as it is in essence. He thus takes to a certain course of action which is contrary to his own highest welfare and supreme good and which is also contrary to the good of the world in which he lives.

The Gita, by bringing into our *antahkarana*, into our minds and hearts and intellects, the light of proper reasoning, correct perception and right understanding, liberates us from the delusion that brings about such conflicts, such inner two-ways pulls. When one understands a situation properly and one sees things clearly, one is then able to understand, to know, what the essence of the situation is in fact, not what it appears to be. How does the Gita do this?

The philosophy of the Gita is not just a declaration of experienced truth. It is not merely an expounding of a certain revelation. But, from start to finish, it is dialectic in its method of approaching this question of the individual in this universe, of his situation in life and the various problems and conflicts that surround him as he tries to execute this journey of life. It takes on an approach that is dialectic, in that every Chapter constitutes the imparting of certain teachings. It is a teacher teaching a student. It is like a class lesson and the teacher takes great pains to clarify intricate points and to answer all the questions of the student, to remove all doubts as the student goes on asking questions and placing doubts before him.

Therefore, the philosophy of the Gita is an educative process of bringing the individual soul from a state of wrong understanding, a state of a mixed-up interior, a state of confusion, into a higher state of right understanding, a clarity of perception and vision and a very clear interior. The episode of the Gita sets the stage for this educative process of a teacher teaching one with lesser knowledge. In this process, the teacher attempts to lift the student up into the state of a fullness of knowledge that characterises the teacher himself. The teacher makes the student see through the teacher's eyes; whereas, before, the student was trying to look at things only through his own eyes.

THE STAGE IS SET

The stage is set in such a way that Arjuna, the leader of the army of the Pandavas in the immanent Mahabharata war (the purpose of which was to decide conclusively whether *adharma* would go on prevailing absolutely unchecked or whether ultimately it was to be uprooted and *dharma* established) became the occasion for the Gita teachings. For, at this juncture, this chief, the prince and warrior Arjuna, the principal personality there, falls into a state of terrible inner conflict. He is overcome by numerous emotions and comes to a state bordering on a total collapse of his entire being—physically, physiologically and psychologically.

Physically, Arjuna becomes incapable of even standing. He is overcome by great fear and confusion. And the symptoms of this acute inner state, this psychological state of stress, of tension and terrible conflict, manifests as palpitation of his heart, profuse perspiration, trembling in all his limbs, drying up of his tongue, parching of his throat, tears welling up from his eyes and dizziness. The world is spinning round. He is not able to stand and his bow slips from his hand and falls to the ground. He himself also falls to the ground, because in this state of physical collapse brought about by a nervous breakdown, by an acute intensity of emotional conflict that has gone beyond a certain stage of toleration, his legs are not able to carry him anymore. There is a total breakdown, psychological, physiological and physical.

MAN'S EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

It is only when a person is in greatest danger that he begins to shout and call for help: "Help! Help! Help! Save me! Save me! If you do not save me, I am lost!" In that state of dire extremity, he looks for someone to come and rescue him. He calls aloud and is prepared to do anything, because he wants to save himself—"Whatever you say, I will do." When one's resources are completely at an end and one realises one's absolutely helpless state, then, like a man drowning, knowing he can no longer rely upon himself or save himself, one reaches up and calls out for help from the outside.

In this way, perhaps certain heavy sorrows, extremely dire situations, catastrophes or calamities become the turning point of one's life. From a feeling of self-sufficiency, from a basic egoistical arrogance of feeling that one is capable of doing everything in this world, one comes into a sudden realisation that here is something which one cannot face.

As long as the *jivatma* is in a state of, as they say "hypervitaminosis I," an oversupply of the vitamin "I", *ahamkara* (egoism), the *jivatma* is lost, because *ahamkara* is the first product of *avidya* or *ajnana*. It contains the essence of individuality. And this individuality is a state of alienation from one's eternal oneness, one's unity with the Divine Reality. And this state of alienation from

our divine Source, our divine cosmic Origin, which deprives us completely of the awareness of our essential *svarupa* as *amsas* (parts) of the supreme *paramatman*, is the root cause of all the *tapatrayas* (sufferings or afflictions) of *samsara* and *prapancha* (worldly life).

If you wish to commence your liberation from total bondage in this net of *ahamkara* and *mamakara* (I-ness and mine-ness), attachment, selfishness and an identification with these inner principles of a separate, finite, little ego-personality, then the first thing needful is to realise and recognise the insufficiency of this little ego-principle, which up till that moment was to you the centre of your universe, the most important and precious thing in the world, the dearest thing, for which, to protect its interest, you have been prepared to fight with anyone.

When this ego-principle is recognised in its true colours, that it, as a matter of fact, constitutes your real problem, that it is the factor that holds you in thralldom, in bondage, then you realise that if you rely upon it, you will ultimately be left in the lurch. When that realisation begins to dawn and you start looking up for a higher Being, a higher Power to take you out of this predicament which has been brought about by giving over-importance to the ego, then commences your liberation.

Thus the all-knowing Lord-of all existence, *anantakoti brahmanda nayaka prabhu bhagavan* (God, the Lord and the Ruler of millions and billions of universes), Who is the inner prompter, *sarvantaryami*, in order to give the highest wisdom teachings for all mankind, brings about this conflict situation and puts Arjuna into a fix, like Hamlet, not knowing what to do.

Arjuna actually does know what he has to do; he has come fully prepared for it. But suddenly, when the attachments of the sentimental and emotional aspect of his personality begin to invade his consciousness and begin to overcome him, overwhelm him, then he finds himself in a terrible fix. Suddenly there is this clash between the clear thinking intelligence, the rational aspect of Arjuna, and the overwhelming and very powerful emotional and sentimental aspect of Arjuna. And the sentimental aspect of Arjuna is now trying to undo everything. And in this state of fix, not able to decide what to do, this normally clear thinking young prince, who had come with no doubts about what he had to do that day, cries aloud for help. They say: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."

THE LORD REBUKES ARJUNA

And so, the *Gita jnana-upadesa* starts from this human situation: the ultimate extremity of a helpless individual calling for intervention from the Divine. And the Divine speaks and says: "What is this that has happened to you? This is the time for *viveka* and *vichara*, not sentiment, *bhavana*. There is a *maryada* (social norm) of every given situation, a time and a place. And at this time, the *maryada* requires that you must exercise your discrimination, your right thought, your *viveka* and *vichara*. This is not a time for indulging in sentiment. Your heart has given way to a completely wrong factor in your personality make-up. That factor has no business here. Intruding at a time and place which is not its territory, it is working havoc with you; it has taken away your strength. *Vichara*, *viveka*, determination and will-power constitute the strength of an individual. Silly sentiment, uncontrollable emotion, constitute a weakness of an individual." Therefore the Lord

uses the word *hridaya daurbalya* (weakness of heart). “This is not the right thing. Stop it! Give up this inner weakness. Stand up and fight! Be strong!”

That too is the call of the Upanishads: *na-ayam atma balahinena labhyah* (This Atman cannot be attained by one who is destitute of strength). And this morning Mahamandalesvar Sri Swami Vidyanandaji Maharaj spoke about the necessity of strength, heroism, if you are going to confront the undesirable aspects of your own nature and refuse to yield to their pull. Because Lord Brahma put an extra portion of *rajo guna* into the *antahkarana* of the *jivatman*, man’s mind and senses are all outgoing, and to go against this very elemental aspect of one’s nature requires some special strength. Only such special strength can enable you to dive inward where you can see the Self, the immortal, eternal, imperishable Self, and attain supreme bliss and immortality.

And so we see that Arjuna’s deep grief and anxiety, his nervous breakdown and physical collapse, put Lord Krishna into a temporary dilemma, so to speak. Arjuna, the redoubtable, renowned warrior prince, having requested Krishna to assist him in the war by being his charioteer, is now behaving in this most unwarrior-like way. To make matters still more embarrassing, the prince had come with a great determination to join battle with the opposing forces of the Kauravas and just a few minutes before, with this intention and determination, he had asked Krishna to take the chariot right to the middle of the battlefield in between the two opposing forces. Thus whatever is now taking place between Himself and Arjuna is being witnessed by everyone on both sides. And they must be wondering what the matter is! Arjuna is no longer in the chariot. He is there on the ground and he seems to be in some peculiar state of agitation. He is making gestures and looking up to Krishna and then bowing his head.

Krishna must be feeling: “What is this? If this had happened when we were still behind the battle lines, or at least in the midst of the Pandavas, it would have been somewhat better. At least they would have somehow or other looked upon this with sympathy and understanding, not with scorn. But now, here we are in front of the enemy forces, and this has happened. Very embarrassing! I have promised to take him into the battlefield for battle and here he is saying, ‘I won’t fight.’”

For the moment, as it were, humanly speaking, Krishna was taken aback, nonplussed. He asks Arjuna: “What has happened to you? What is the matter? A little while ago you were full of spirit, full of mettle, and now, in one moment, you have come to this abject condition. From where has this type of mood come? It is not supposed to be in you. You are a warrior, a young person, a hero. You are courageous, renowned for your prowess and valour. And now this! What has happened to you? This sudden yielding to a negative quality of fear, of anxiety, of cowardice, of wanting to run away from your duty, is unbecoming of you.”

THE REASON FOR LORD KRISHNA’S REBUKE

Why does Krishna, the great World Teacher and very close friend of Arjuna, take such a seemingly unsympathetic attitude towards His very dear friend? They have been close companions, living together, eating together, and joking together with great familiarity, and yet Krishna rebukes him sharply. He does not seem to be at all inclined to be sympathetic with him. He does not make any attempt to understand him. Instead, He says: “What is this? Are you not ashamed? Get up!”

These are not words of sympathy from a friend. Why is He so very sharp, a little intolerant even, impatient, with Arjuna? He has full reason to be.

The reason is not far to seek. It is more or less the same way as a Guru is sometimes very sharp, very unsympathetic and impatiently angry with a disciple. He will never act this way with a new disciple, with one who has been recently admitted into his fold, who has not had the opportunity to be in close contact with him and to imbibe, over a long period of time, his *upadesa* and *adesa* (teachings and instructions). But, he will act this way with a disciple who has been living with him for years and years and who has had the opportunity over a long period of time to be in constant contact with him, to have heard his *upadesa* a hundred times and yet in spite of this behaves in a different manner.

So, in effect, Lord Krishna says: "Have all my efforts on you been wasted? Is that what you are trying to demonstrate now, that your association with Me, your discipleship, and all that I have tried to teach you is so much waste, useless? Has it been of no value, that you demonstrate this foolish behaviour at this point in your career?" For, through thick and thin, rain and shine, ups and downs, good fortune and misfortune, Arjuna had long been in contact with Lord Krishna. And this contact had not only brought forth Lord Krishna's wisdom teachings to Arjuna but also to Kunti, Draupadi and all the Pandava brothers.

For a discerning and wise person, something said once should be enough. Perhaps due to a weakness of memory he may forget the first time, but if it is said twice, then that should be enough. It is only impossible people who will never imbibe it, no matter how many times you give them good advice. But the Pandavas were not like that. They were *sattvic* people. They valued the company of Lord Krishna. They valued His teachings. But in spite of that, at this juncture, when all the *satsang* and *sravana* that Arjuna had done should have come to his aid and helped him, he was acting like this!

Life after life, the *jiva* comes into this earth plane to progress in knowledge, expand in wisdom, to learn, to educate itself. Each life span is an opportunity given by God for it to learn, sometimes the easy way, sometimes the hard way, but always to learn. Gurudev used to say that this world is a great university for evolution into divine perfection. Life is the great teacher. All the experiences one encounters in life are an educative process. They come with lessons, valuable lessons. Nothing is empty of valuable content.

Therefore, God Himself will become impatient when He has constantly tried to teach the *jiva* in so many ways, life after life, and still the *jiva* manifests obduracy and an asinine obstinacy by refusing to imbibe that which is placed before it. Then God says: "No, this is not good enough. Therefore, through knocks and blows I will make this *jiva* wake up, learn, become wise and strive for its own highest good, supreme welfare."

But Arjuna was a Pandava, not a Kaurava. He was an *uttama adhikari* (best qualified aspirant). Yet, in this situation, when the situation calls for action, it is Arjuna who says: "I would much rather take up a begging bowl, turn into a mendicant and live by begging, than rule over a kingdom obtained after so much bloodshed and the killing of my relatives." As though he had not

known all along that the opposing Kaurava forces were his relatives! This is what happens when sentiment takes over the area that is the proper territory of the *viveka* and *vichara* of the *buddhi*.

The place where the Gita advice is being given to Arjuna is a field of action. It is Kurukshetra. In Sanskrit, *kuru* means do, act. And instead of acting, Arjuna says: “I won’t act. I won’t fight. I will go away.” He wants to run away from action. And when Krishna the great World Teacher, the Divine Teacher, tries to tell him, “Now you must engage in action, you must do your duty, you must fight,” Arjuna, refusing to understand, finds fault with Krishna’s advice and says: “No, no, no! It is wrong action. I don’t agree.”

THE TEACHINGS BEGIN

Then Krishna tells him: “This idea of yours is because of your lack of knowledge; it is because of your ignorance. You are adducing arguments like a lawyer in a court of law. You are trying to argue with Me, but yet your mind is full of confusion and ignorance. That is why you are refusing to act. You think that you are going to kill someone. Who can kill whom? Do you know? These beings whom you, with your *sthula drishti*, gross outer vision, characterised by unknowing and ignorance, think to be perishable beings whom you will destroy, do you know what they really are? They are immortal, imperishable, eternal. Weapons cannot injure them, fire cannot burn them, water cannot wet them, wind cannot dry them. They are unborn, eternal, beyond time. Who are you to say that you are going to kill something which is imperishable and immortal? One who says that he is killing someone or one who thinks that he is being killed, both of them are in ignorance. The Reality never ceases to be. And the unreal is never really there; it is only an appearance; it never exists. To think that you are sending something unreal out of existence is ignorance. So, first of all, clear your brain of *avidya*, this *ajnana*. Have clear perception, know properly, understand properly. Then let us see whether you talk about killing, destroying, and all that.”

Therefore, Lord Krishna, first and foremost, brings Arjuna to an awareness of his ignorance. He says: “O Arjuna, listen, this tendency of yours to run away from action is not the answer to your dilemma and your problem. You must open your eyes, have an inner understanding and see clearly. It is not a question of action and inaction. The wise thing is to know that there is a third way, which is the right and proper way, and that alone is the solution and answer to your present situation. And that way is wisdom-filled action.

“For it is ignorance that is making you feel this terrible way, and it is ignorance that is making you shy away from action. Let Me tell you one thing. Whether you want to or not, act you must. The very nature of this life on earth, the very nature of the human individual, is such that the drive to activity is inherent in that nature. And, whether you want it or not, you are part and parcel of this Cosmic Nature that has brought manifestation into being. The Cosmic Nature contains within Herself this inaccessible impulsion to action. Understand this clearly. Forcibly you will be made to engage in action.

“It is better, therefore, to prefer to act in a wisdom-filled manner and thus liberate yourself from the consequences of action, than to either engage in foolish action or foolishly try to give up all action. The choice is not just between the total giving up of action or acting with ignorance. There is a wise alternative choice, which is to act with knowledge and understanding. Such action cannot

bind the individual. Such action goes beyond the operation of the law of action and the inevitable experience of the fruits of action. It is almost like engaging in action, yet being actionless. This is the great secret of action.

“Therefore, do not think that turning away from action and trying to merely become a mendicant, trying to go into a life of spiritual quest, a life of meditation and contemplation, is the only alternative, the only way out. Rather, here and now you have to elevate action to a higher dimension by bringing into it a clear knowledge of the realities of the human situation in this universe.”

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

The path of knowledge is an absolutely indispensable must. It is the absence of knowledge that is the root cause of all sorrow. It is the failure to perceive the imperishable nature of the human spirit that is the cause of all attachment, grief and delusion. Without knowledge you will make a total mess of your whole life and reduce yourself to a miserable predicament.

But then, the acquiring of this right knowledge is not incompatible with engaging in right activity. They are not mutually opposed to each other; they are not mutually exclusive of each other. On the contrary, in truth, they have to go hand in hand. Knowledge has to support and supplement action and all activity should be full of knowledge.

Knowledge-filled activity and action-oriented knowledge is the message and the *sadhana* of the second chapter of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. If in ignorance you engage in action, you are finished. You are heading for trouble, inviting trouble. And having theoretical knowledge, if you neglect right action, you will put a stop to your evolution. Action is God’s plan for man for moving towards perfection. Action constitutes the inner dynamics of human evolution, collective as well as individual.

There is a trite but very wise saying: “To rest is to rust.” Action is like honing something to keep it sharp, incisive. Knowledge blooms forth into experience only when it is transferred into action, when it is practised. Knowledge is meant to be practised. And, therefore, if you are not to get caught in the circle of action and reaction, then action is as necessary for knowledge as knowledge is necessary for right action. Being in the midst of activity, if you do not want to be bound by activity, knowledge is the only way. It is the key.

Therefore, Sankhya Yoga and Karma Yoga are not opposed to each other. They are mutually supportive; they are not incompatible. On the contrary, they are two facets of the one process of the progressive evolution of the human soul towards the fullest unfoldment of knowledge through knowledge-infilled activity. The Yogi who thus synthesises within himself both Sankhya Yoga and Karma Yoga is the real *daksha* (expert). He is the one who will succeed.

For, such a Yogi, by elevating normal secular activity into a higher dimension of the Spirit and transforming it into sublime spiritual activity, thus synthesising *karma* and *jnana*, has learned the art and science of making life itself a process of liberation. Just as the subdual of all mental *vrittis* while practising a technique is termed Yoga, the same Yoga becomes defined as *yogah*

karmasu kausalam (Yoga is skill in action) when one is in the field of active day-to-day living. You act with the awareness that the three *gunas* are doing their *dharma*; whereas I, the *trigunatita atma tattva* (Self beyond the three *gunas*), am really *nishkriya* (actionless). “I am the silent, detached, unaffected witness of all activity. How can action bind me! But I am not a passive witness. I shine my wisdom upon all the limbs, all thoughts, and thus illumined with wisdom, they engage in action.”

ACTION CANNOT BE AVOIDED

This second stage in the unfoldment of the Gita *upadesa* brings to us another great home truth: “Look here, O *jivatma*, no matter what you do, you cannot avoid action, because you are part of *prakriti* and *prakriti* has an excessive share of *rajo guna*. She will drive you to activity. You cannot escape it. Even if you think, ‘I am not doing any action,’ even if you seemingly sit quietly, thousands of processes are constantly going on within your own anatomy and physiology. Cells are dying and being eliminated and new cells are being formed. Blood is coursing through your arteries and veins. Your heart is pumping this blood and your lungs are ever supplying fresh oxygen to purify it. Every internal mechanism is actively engaged in doing its function—your liver, spleen, kidneys, bladder, stomach, all your organs. Without action you will not even be able to keep alive.

“When you think you are not acting, you are breathing. Breathing is also action. When you think you are not acting, the mind is busy thinking a hundred things, remembering a hundred things, planning and scheming a hundred things, imagining a hundred things. How can you say that you are not acting? You are acting in so many ways. You deny activity only when it comes to action that you have to engage in as part of your *kartavya karma* (duty). This is either foolishness or hypocrisy. Therefore, realise this fact well: As long as you are in this universe of *prakriti*, you cannot avoid action. It is better, therefore, to act wisely than to act foolishly.”

There is in *prakriti iccha sakti, kriya sakti* and *jnana sakti*. If *jnana* is kept out and only *iccha* (desire) is the impelling force behind your *kriya* (action), then you get into trouble, you make all manner of mistakes and act foolishly. It is only when you bring in *jnana* and purify your *iccha* that your *kriya* becomes a liberating force.

Action, *purushartha*, is never undesirable. The whole of the voluminous advice and admonition given by the great Brahmarishi Vasishtha to Maryada Purushottama Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra in the great treatise Yoga Vasishtha ultimately declares the supremacy of *purushartha*, right action, engaged in with knowledge which gives it a proper direction.

“Therefore, O Arjuna, engage in action, but not with folly. Engage in action with wisdom—unattached, recognising all things, yet not becoming involved in delusion with them.” Thus is the message of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita for each and every individual soul engaged in working out its *karma* and moving towards the great goal of God-realisation upon this earth plane.

Act you must, willy-nilly. But, if you do not invoke wisdom and act wisely, you will get caught. Therefore, unfold the wisdom within and, infilled with this wisdom, engage in activity. Let wisdom purify your desires, make them all *dharmic*. Purified desires are not obstacles on the way to God-realisation. Let all your desires be *dharmic*, spiritual, divine, God-oriented desires. Thus

purifying your *antahkarana* (inner being) by wisdom, with the fire of wisdom, engage in wisdom-filled activity. Perform all activities with wisdom, with expertise and rise above the binding force of action, being detached within, *anasakta*.

In this way, Arjuna is gradually made to realise that behind his apparent words of rationality and logic, there was really the weakness of silly sentiment, not any great knowledge much less wisdom. He is made to come to his senses and recognise his inadequacy. Consequently, he begins to ask questions which are more rational and sane, more appropriate and suitable. And then Krishna takes a real interest in leading him on to an increasingly higher awareness of knowledge. Until that, Krishna brushes aside all his queries. Krishna tells him: “You are ignorant, yet speaking seemingly high words of wisdom.”

After that correction, Arjuna comes to his senses, realises that his feelings have carried him away and that his thinking was neither logical nor rational. He then requests Krishna: “Please teach me. I have been deluded. I have been overcome by *karpanya dosha* (weakness of heart). My *chitta* has become completely *dharmasammudha* (confused about *dharma*). Now, please teach me.”

Thus, in the first chapter, the situation prepared the ground for the Gita *jnana-upadesa*. In the second chapter, Arjuna himself prepares the ground. He makes himself receptive. He now wants to listen.

Thus the way is prepared for further wisdom teaching by Lord Krishna.

ARJUNA’S AFFLICTION

In this world, people are troubled by various kinds of afflictions. Some afflictions are inflicted upon us by other forms of life—infertile bacteria, disease-carrying insects, bedbugs and so forth. Even so-called innocent and beautiful flowers can produce pollen which may cause acute asthma or hay fever in some people. Dysentery, cholera, amoebiosis and so many other diseases are inflicted upon us by other forms of life.

Then there are other afflictions over which we have absolutely no control, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, tidal waves and volcanic eruptions. There can be too much rain causing floods, or too little rain resulting in droughts and starvation. Thousands can die in a severe heat wave. These are natural forces which afflict mankind and have been afflicting him since the dawn of creation.

But, terrible as these afflictions are that come to us from the operation of natural forces and from other forms of life, there is a third form of affliction which is an even greater menace, a greater problem. *Atmajanita tapa* (self-created sorrow), afflictions which are not inflicted upon us by anything exterior, but afflictions arising from our own psyche can make us suffer acutely and intensely. Our jealousy, envy, intolerance, anger, passions, infatuated attachments and delusions, fears, anxieties, hatred and ill-will can all consume us and throw the mind into a state of terrible agitation and deprive it of peace. Thoughts of revenge, frustration, dejection, depression, melancholia and disappointment do not come to us from outside.

Outside factors may have a ten percent part to play by stimulating or triggering off certain of these states, but the truth is that they abide within. If they are not there within, then no outside factor will be capable of stimulating them. You must grasp this point. If the negative emotions, sentiments, moods, attitudes or states of mind are not within, then any number of outer factors may be there, but they will leave the person unaffected.

Therefore, this third type of affliction, *adhyatma tapa*, comes from one's own self, one's own psyche, one's own mind. We create pleasure and pain, happiness and misery by allowing our interior to be thrown out of serenity, balance and stability. We create the affliction for ourselves by throwing a certain reaction from our interior towards something exterior. If we refuse to react, the exterior factor has no power over us.

So, this third type of affliction or *tapa* can afflict you at any time, in any place. If an earthquake or tornado occurs and you are not nearby, then you are not affected. You only read about it in the newspaper or see it on TV. But you carry the source of the third type of affliction with you always. You are one with it; it is one with you twenty-four hours of the day and night. You have to deal with it. And there is no escape unless you know the art and science of changing yourself, becoming immune to outer factors, rising above them, transcending them and letting them be. Otherwise, this is something that is inbuilt and part and parcel of your personality. It is always present to harass you unless you come to terms with it, change it, educate it, alter it, conquer it, subdue it. Do anything, but it is necessary to deal with it in such a manner that it is no longer able to produce these types of afflictions within you.

So, Arjuna was suffering intensely in an acute state of this third type of affliction, *adhyatma tapa*. In the beginning he was overconfident: "I will show them, I will teach them a lesson. O Krishna, take me to the middle of the battlefield and stop the chariot in between the two forces." Little did he know that by doing this he was going to experience exactly the same situation inside—in between two forces. On the one side he had a sense of duty to the Pandavas and their forces and on the other, a sense of compassion and of attachment to the Kauravas and the forces assembled together on their side. He was torn with conflict, with conflicting emotions and ideas. He made himself miserable. He became a total wreck for the time being, suffering both a physical as well as mental and nervous breakdown.

ARJUNA'S DELUSION

This was because he took all these mental conditions, these strong emotions and sentiments to be real, to have some reality, *sat*. And he thought himself to be the experiencer of all these terrible ups and downs that were taking place inside the *antahkarana*. He identified himself with them. He thought: "This is happening to me," because at that time he was in a state of ignorance of his own true nature. He had no *jnana* of his *svarupa* which is *nitya* and *nirupadhika* (eternal and without attributes), which has no body, no mind, no intellect, no *ahamkara* (ego), no memory, no senses. It is beyond the body, the senses, the *pranas* and the four-fold interior instrument consisting of the mind, intellect, ego and memory.

Arjuna did not know it. Therefore, he thought that these passing phenomena were real, whereas in fact they had no reality. They were the product of *maya*; they were simply illusory

things. Reality was his Self. But his entire interior was clouded, so he took the passing, the evanescent, the unreal, to be the real. All these silly sentiments and moods became for him a tangible reality. And his own reality, which is always above and beyond, the *paramatma tattva*, the *nityasuddha*, *nityamukta*, the eternally pure, eternally free, of the very nature of *ananda*, was to him a myth. He had no awareness of Reality. He took the unreal to be the real and allowed it to affect him in such a terrible way—weeping and wailing, profuse tears flowing out of his eyes, throat choked with emotion.

In an instant, the great World Teacher, Lord Krishna, recognised the situation, the source of his delusion. He thought within Himself: “I must give him the right knowledge. I must make him aware of what he is. I must bring about an eradication of this state of ignorance, of this *ajnana* and *avidya*.” And so the first sentence He speaks is: “You need to get rid of this ignorance. You are speaking wisely, but you are in a state of ignorance. You are speaking apparently very wise words, but you are doing something very foolish. You are grieving for that which should not be grieved for.”

Therefore, right at the very commencement, Lord Krishna diagnoses Arjuna's state as being due to ignorance, to a lack of *vidya*, a lack of *jnana*, a lack of a proper perspective of what is real and what is unreal, what is *sat* and what is *asat*. Arjuna is taking the unreal for the real and allowing himself to be terribly affected by it. He has forgotten his own reality. If only he had a glimpse of it, he would never succumb to such a mood, such an abject state.

Therefore, Krishna begins by telling Arjuna what he really is. He starts by telling him: “Your delusion is because you are thinking that these beings in front of you are perishable, that they can be killed, they can die, that you will destroy them and create *anartha*, great chaos. Let Me tell you, never were these beings ever not. Neither you, nor I, nor these beings were ever non-existent at any period of time. We have always been. And never shall we be non-existent at any time in the future.

“We shall always continue to be, because we are eternal; we are beginningless and endless, eternal and imperishable. That is what we are, you and Me and all these beings. So give up this deluded notion that anyone is being killed or that anyone is killing. Who can kill whom? It is ignorance. Those who do not know the reality of things, the truth about being, existence, they alone think someone is killing and someone is being killed.

“All these beings are eternal sparks of Divinity. Bodies come and go. Just as a person casting aside worn-out garments takes on new ones, even so the dweller within the body casts aside a worn-out body and takes on a new one. What reason is there to grieve? It is a transition. We close our eyes in death for a little while and then wake up into a new life. So why upset yourself in this manner?”

Thus, in ever so many ways, He brings home to Arjuna the central truth of Vedanta—the immortality of the inner Spirit, the imperishable nature of the *atma tattva*. It is *avinasi* (indestructible). Nothing can happen to It. It can never be put out of existence.

Arjuna asks many questions. All the questions are answered and his doubts are cleared. Again and again the necessity of being firmly established in this knowledge, if one really wants to succeed in life, is brought home. Otherwise one will be at the mercy of every little passing experience that afflicts one. Experiences descend like waves battering someone who is trying to swim across a storm-tossed ocean. This is inevitable. This is the world of *dvandvas* (the pairs of opposites) and ever-varying experiences. The pairs of opposites are always there. If there is day, there is night also. If there is joy, there is also sorrow. If there is pleasure, there is also pain. If there is success, there is also failure. It is inevitable. Face them boldly. They cannot touch you or afflict you. You are the ever-stable, never-changing *atma tattva*.

One who has thus realised, who has become established in this inner state, him nothing can touch. Not all the afflictions in the world can touch that being. Be in that state, ever serene, ever untouched, ever calm, ever stable!

Only such a being, who has become firmly established in the truth of his eternal, imperishable nature, only such a being is a truly successful person in life. He has already attained victory over life. Life cannot devastate that person. Life cannot shake up, agitate, confuse or delude him. Life can come and go; he will remain ever stable, like a rock, knowing that all things are passing except the Self within.

Everything here is perishable, evanescent, transitory, subject to decay and dissolution. The being who has seen this realises the pettiness of all desire, the uselessness of all things, the foolishness of running after pieces of glass when a priceless diamond is his birthright. Those who do not realise this take the unreal for the real. And mystics have very strong words to say about them: “A great wonder it is in this world of men, that discarding the life-giving nectar of immortality, the very ambrosia, they are running after poison which brings about death. They throw away a priceless jewel for the sake of a piece of glass. Wonder of wonders!”

When this folly of running after these petty, perishable things dawns upon a person of deep reflection, then that person clearly sees that his foolishness is no good. He feels: “This does not become me who am an *amsa* (part) of *Isvara*, Who is the very form of absolute knowledge, wisdom consciousness, *jnana svarupa isvara*.”

When we are the essence of, part and parcel of that Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, how dare we manifest ignorance in our life? How shameful, how ignoble, how pitiable it is! Whatever mistakes and follies that we might have, in ignorance, committed are past and gone. We should once and for all forget them. We should now firmly resolve not to commit them in the future. We should endeavour to be always alert, awake and vigilant at every step, at every moment, at all times and in all circumstances. We should endeavour to keep ourselves armed with discrimination and sublime thoughts.

ESTABLISHED IN THE INNER WISDOM

After Lord Krishna describes to Arjuna how a person who has become established in the knowledge of himself is able to maintain an absolutely undisturbed state of serenity amidst the ups and downs of life, Arjuna asks: “How does this person behave? How does he speak? How does he

deal with others? What is his nature? How does this model person, who can be kept as an *adarsa* (ideal) for me, go through life?”

It is here that the Lord has given to us a precious gem, just like the one in the latter part of the twelfth chapter of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. In the concluding eight verses of the twelfth chapter, the subtle secret of the Lord’s own concept of what real devotion is, who a true devotee is, is revealed to us. Even so, in the latter part of the second chapter, there is this classical description of the person who is firmly and ever established in the inner wisdom. That *avastha* (state) of being established in inner wisdom makes one look at the petty, puerile nature of outer things and to feel that it is not worthwhile to allow these petty outer things to upset one or to allow oneself to run after them.

It was these concluding verses of the second chapter of the Gita, the *sthitaprajna lakshana slokas*, that the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, a living sage of his own era, reverently listened to throughout his life, without missing one single day. Twice a day, at his prayer meetings, these verses describing the nature of one who is firmly established in wisdom were recited and Mahatma Gandhi would sit, all attention, in silence, serene, like a Buddha, absorbing the meaning of each word. That is how his interior was built up and became what it was. That serenity was never lost. He was ever established in a higher state of divine consciousness, spiritual consciousness.

THE CENTRAL DECLARATION OF VEDANTA

The central declaration, the central experience of Vedanta is the immortality of the Self in the individual. It is the divinity of the innermost Spirit indwelling the material body, the physical body—*ajo nityah sasvato ’yam purano na hanyate hanyamane sarire* (Unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, the Self is not killed when the body is killed). This is the culminating declaration about the immortal, imperishable nature of the Spirit within, the third dimension of man, the other two being the physical and the psychological. The spiritual dimension, the real dimension, is something that is immortal, imperishable, eternal and divine. To be established in this truth of our real nature is to grow in strength day after day, is to grow in fearlessness day after day, is to grow in a state of unperturbable stability day after day.

And it is only when you are established in this interior state of stability that you can truly act in an effective manner in this outer world. In all changing circumstances, trying to act in a way that the situation requires at that particular point in time, be *daksha* (proficient, apt). Always be in a state of full knowledge, full awareness, that there is something else that is acting, a mechanism is acting. Be established in the knowledge: “The forces that operate the mechanism are the three-fold *gunas*, which are a part of *prakriti* to which this mechanism belongs; whereas, within that I am the unaffected witnessing consciousness. I am the witness. I apparently do, but in the midst of my apparent doing, I am really the actionless witness beyond time and space. *Indriyas* act amidst their objects. The three *gunas* are doing many things. But seated in their midst, I am the silent, unaffected, detached witnessing consciousness.” This is the secret of true *karma yoga*. It is the secret of apparently being active as the situation demands and yet at the same time being fully aware of what you are, never losing the awareness of your true transcendental nature, which is beyond the body, senses, *prana*, mind and intellect.

LIVING THE GITA VISION

This is the call of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita to every *sadhaka* as he is moving towards his goal of God-realisation. Unless we learn the manner of living in this world upon the Gita-spirit, Gita-ideal, we will lose our way. We will get caught and entangled. Always assert: “Nothing can entangle me. Never can I become entangled in anything, because I am the immortal, ever-free Soul, always one, secondless.” It is this interior awareness that makes one go through life amidst the many and yet rooted in the One.

This Gita-awareness within and the Gita-vision of this changing world, the need to be in the midst of the field of action but yet maintain and retain one’s awareness of being a serene witness, is absolutely essential to all *sadhakas* who, being in the world and of the world, have to move towards the great Goal. It is all the more essential in these changing times when human society has changed so vastly. Conditions are not always conducive, helpful and favourable to this interior journey of the soul towards its eternal Source. There is a lot of distraction and a lot of disturbance. In the midst of all that, serenity is to be maintained.

It is only the vision and the spirit of the Gita *upadesa* of the second and third chapters that will enable us to be in the midst of activity and yet be serenely poised in the Self that is actionless and changeless. That alone abides; all else passes on.

“I shall be rooted in the Eternal and function in the non-eternal. I shall abide in the Divine—God in me and I in God.” Thus may you reflect and contemplate upon the Gita ideal of life in this world and the Gita ideal of action in the midst of this ever-changing phenomenal situation. May you reflect deeply upon this and create an awakened interior within, so that the world is not able to affect your *sadhana*, so that your *sadhana* goes on unhampered in spite of the distractions outside, because you ever abide in the Self.

May the Lord, Jagad-Guru, Gita-Acharya, Bhagavan Lord Krishna, the World Teacher, shower His divine grace upon you and may His grace manifest within you as this awakened spiritual awareness and as the ability to act with expertise, so that in the midst of action you still maintain an abidance in the ever-actionless Reality within, so that you are able to be actionless in the midst of action.

May God’s grace manifest within you as the heightened awareness and elevated, uplifted consciousness of the Reality. May you abide in that, and may you move through this journey of life as an *anasakta karmi*, a detached actor. Always think: “Action is going on. I am not attached to it. I am aware that I am not the actor.” May His grace manifest within you as this inner perception and the inner awareness, the inner consciousness, which is the key to successful *karma yoga* together with your *bhakti*, *jnana* and *dhyana*.