



Q&A with KnA

The Bhagavad Gītā through Questions and Solutions

Sudarshan Ravi · allbig.in · free distribution

श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता

The Bhagavad Gītā

A Logical Companion — Q & A with KnA

A literal, logical and grammatical reading of the seven hundred ślokas

Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ · Hariḥ Om

Peace Invocation

Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ. Hariḥ Om.

Om. May That protect us both; may That nourish us both; may we work together with great vigour; may our study be luminous; may there be no discord between us. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Om Śrī Paramātmā Namaḥ — salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self, who is beyond all words yet the source of every word; who is the silence behind this song and the light behind this sight.

Foreword

This little book grew out of a simple, stubborn habit: refusing to let a difficulty in the Bhagavad Gītā pass unexamined. Wherever a verse seemed to contradict another, wherever a grammatical form looked irregular, wherever a philosophical claim invited a counter-question, the difficulty was written down rather than smoothed over. What follows is the record of that examination

— a reader's honest questions and the answers he found most satisfying.

It is offered not as a commentary to compete with the great ācāryas, but as a companion for the sceptic who cannot pray until he has first understood, and for the believer who wishes his faith to be able to withstand a question. If it removes even one needless doubt from one sincere mind, it will have served its whole purpose.

Preface

The Bhagavad Gītā (BG) is one of the three foundations on which the philosophy of Sanātana Dharma stands. The other two are the Brahma-sūtras and the Upaniṣads.

The interpretation of the Bhagavad Gītā is deeply subjective, and so here a literal reading is offered first, followed by a logical explanation, supported wherever possible by etymology and the rules of grammar. This is the crudest, most first-hand level of meaning that anyone at all can draw from a first look at the BG. The interpretations of the ācāryas — Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, seers such as Jñāneśvara, and modern masters such as Swami Chinmayānanda — together with logicians and the orthodox and heterodox schools, have all adorned the BG. But these, as said, are interpretations; and questions about any interpretation can always be raised.

In this attempt I have identified the seeming flaws in the BG — philosophical and logical tensions, apparent grammatical irregularities, and the like — and shown how they may be

woven together by the fabric of a single philosophy of Śrī Bhagavān, so that the whole appears non-contradictory.

No one can truly know what the author of the text intended. Hence no interpretation is simply “wrong”; each is just that — an interpretation. If an interpretation serves to support the philosophy already laid down, let it be so. If it helps a seeker explore the journey further, let it be so. If it serves to point out the gaps in a competing school of thought, let it be so. In the end an interpretation is only the opinion of the interpreter. At best it is an indicator, a finger pointing towards the Truth.

With this backdrop, let us begin to analyse the BG: (a) from a literal perspective; (b) as to what idea is expressed; (c) as to how comprehensively it answers a question; and (d) as to how far it succeeds in remaining comprehensive, meaningful and free of faults.

Contents

Introduction

The Language

The Gītā is composed in Saṁskṛtam, a splendid language that can come very close to capturing the intent of the speaker through words. It is best felt in the exact language in which it was first conveyed. It is magical and soothing; its effects on the mind are worth discovering, and are today a live topic for researchers in neuroscience, psychology and acoustics. One can

experiment upon oneself, with oneself, and draw one's own conclusions. In my own experience Saṁskṛtam has been a calming, musical and deeply suggestive language. For the contemplating mind its nature can be healthily used to aid practice and to aid the inquiry into its deeper layers of pregnant meaning.

Although translations help to a good extent, they are again subject to one's belief in the authority and integrity of the translator. It is therefore useful to discover the meaning for oneself by learning at least the fundamentals of the language. But if one trusts the translator, that trust saves the effort of learning it. Even so, the correct pronunciation of the verses goes a long way in bringing serenity to an agitated, contemplating mind. It has worked well for many; it may do so for you too. Only experiment with it — but with the correct pronunciation, of course.

The Domain

The BG is a central text speaking to the whole of the human mind.

The matters it discusses, as you will see, do not fit the definition of a “holy scripture” as that term is commonly understood. Hence the BG does not necessarily belong to any one “religion.” Since some communities hold Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be God, they may call it “the word of God.” Even granting that, it is hard to see how such a God could have spoken differently about the same matter on different occasions, seemingly contradicting Himself, advising one thing to one set of people and something else to

another. Setting aside this small, anthropomorphic picture of God, let us simply refrain from forcing the BG — a book on Life — into man-made compartments and then reading it through our own biases and prejudices.

This BG does not deserve such trivial divisions.

The Benefits

What does a human being apparently seek? At the most basic, bodily level: food, health, long life, and progeny, in that order of necessity. At the psychological level: peace, love, and the experience of objects and situations. At the intellectual level: knowledge of objects, concepts and properties, along with fame and appreciation.

What do all of these come down to? The need to survive, the desire to experience, and the desire for happiness.

When any of these fundamental needs conflict, it is the desire for happiness that overrules the rest. This is not easy to verify from outside; it is concluded only by questioning deeply and diving into oneself. For example: would I rather live extremely happily for ten minutes, or live miserably under torture for twenty? In the second case I survive twice as long — but at the cost of pain. The very wish to escape pain testifies to this, as does the basic instinct that runs from danger. Because it is hard to test externally, this remains a matter for the reader to settle by digging into his own psyche.

Would I rather experience this body, this mind, and the whole variety of objects under stress and pain, or remain unconscious,

wholly oblivious to them, and know joy? The latter. This is easily verified in *suṣupti* (deep, dreamless sleep) and in semi-conscious or anaesthetic states. So the desire to remain happy overrides even the basic desire to experience the field. It is also why waking from a sound sleep to the sound of an alarm is so hard.

There is a close contest among the three, and the winner is not obvious. This is the question that tickles the deepest instinct in us. In my own mind I have settled it thus: the deepest wish is to remain ever blissful. Hence all human pursuits are, in the end, a search for this everlasting Joy (*Ānanda*). The supreme benefit anyone or anything can offer is this Joy.

The BG deals chiefly with the ways to lead a blissful life, uncorrupted by the tricks of the restless mind. It wishes to transform its reader — even unknowingly — into a better psychological state, and to gradually instil into the mind the Wisdom of the *Ṛṣis*, the Seers of Truth. This seed of Wisdom then needs the sustained nourishment of practice (*sādhana*) to blossom fully into a fragrant flower of Life, spreading its scent of Joy everywhere. The BG also assures the seeker of definite, finite means to that exalted state of infinite Bliss, in which the transformed reader — now a *Yogin* — lives. This is the undiminishing, absolute power of the *Gītā*, the Divine Song of Joy.

People benefit in the way they approach it. This is the reach of the text: it can meet any sincere reader, and the interpretation the reader makes of it is what will carry him just so far. It is

widely open to interpretation, and so to the corresponding benefits.

The Matter of Discussion

Yoga — the yoking to this Bliss, the union with this Joy, the resonance with this divine melody of everlasting happiness, of Ānanda — is the subject. The whole description of this Yoga is made comprehensive across eighteen cantos. These cantos deal with a wide range of topics: the means to this Yoga and the goal called Yoga; the strategies we may use to outwit the mind; the demeanour of one who has reached Yoga-hood; the prattle and the games of the mind; the bluntness of the intellect and the hollowness in the ways of the senses; and the aspects of food, courage, intellect, ritual, intention, knowledge, the agent of action, the fruits of action, faith, virtue and vice, ethical conduct, the question of creation, the depressions found in the rugged peaks of the mind, and the benefits of Dharma.

The Author

The BG is a song of 700 verses (ślokaś), sung chiefly in the Anuṣṭubh metre, occasionally interspersed with Indravajrā, Upendravajrā and Triṣṭubh metres. It occurs within the Mahābhārata. Its sole author is Śrī Veda Vyāsa.

The Song Setting

The BG takes the form of a dialogue between Śrī Bhagavān (Śrī Kṛṣṇa) and Arjuna. The setting is the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. Sañjaya narrates the dialogue to the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

Arjuna

The strongest and mightiest warrior on the Pāṇḍava side has suddenly grasped the massacre — the near-genocide — that is about to unfold on both sides. He feels an anguish and sorrow so intense that it steals away his courage, and he is left depressed, his confidence shaken. In extreme agony he seems to give up, sensing the futility of this war, and of life in general. He desperately seeks help from his best friend and well-wisher, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is also his charioteer. Then, struck by the thunderstorm of Kṛṣṇa's piercing words, he recovers himself. He wishes to know more and more of what his friend is pointing to. He asks for elaboration and shoots out an array of questions. He seems to forget he has a battle to fight, and listens intently to the magical, mystical, mesmerising words flowing from Kṛṣṇa's mouth. But as he digs deeper he notices a change in Kṛṣṇa's tone. He is finally struck hard by the revelation of who Kṛṣṇa really is. He is left perplexed and positively aghast. This is the last time he will look at Kṛṣṇa the same way. With so strong a realisation he falls quiet, wishing to know more of this unknown, unheard-of, unprecedented face of Kṛṣṇa. He exhausts his questions on philosophy, theology, creation, faith and renunciation, and at last falls silent, having received supremely satisfying answers. He has regained his courage — to live, to do his duty, and to protect Dharma, the eternal, universal, all-encompassing law of Life — but now with a profoundly wise mind, one that no longer chatters, having been beaten at its own game. He picks up the bow and arrow he had thrown away. With renunciation — not of the bow, but of the ego behind it — he stands up, more zealous than before, to do

what he must. His confidence is back, now coupled with clarity of life.

Śrī Bhagavān

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is friend, charioteer and mentor to Arjuna. But he is far more than that. He has realised the Truth himself, and works quietly and subtly for the betterment of the human collective. He lets Dharma take its course; all he does is remove the obstacles in its path. He is a realised master who has tasted the Eternal Bliss through his own sādhanā and now revels in that supreme Joy. He is a Seer, a Knower of that pure, transcendental Ānanda called Brahman — indeed he has become That Truth. He is one of the rare avatāras who, having realised That, are liberated forever and yet move about in the world, helping their fellow humans to evolve. He has reached the summit of Delight and shines as the Light of Wisdom. Standing at the zenith of all Existence, he no longer has an individualised, selfish ego; he has merged into Reality. Yet he lives in the world pretending to be “just another human,” holding on to the little ego needed to exist as a mind-body being — an ego he has chosen to keep, in the interest of the world. Hence he plays a dual character in this Song: one seen from the vantage of Kṛṣṇa, the human king, friend of Arjuna, slayer of Madhu, son of Vasudeva; the other seen from the highest pedestal of Self-Knowledge, as the very God — Brahman, the supreme Consciousness, an embodiment of endless Bliss. He is Bhagavān — the possessor of the sixfold infinite splendour, Bhaga.

This is crucial, for the interpretation that follows depends heavily upon it.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 1 — The Yoga Triggered by Arjuna’s Depression

It begins thus:

1.1 :: Dhṛtarāṣṭra says — “O Sañjaya! On the field of Dharma, in Kurukṣetra, where my people and the Pāṇḍavas have assembled eager for battle, what did they do?”

1.2 :: Sañjaya says — “Having surveyed the Pāṇḍava army arrayed in tactical formation, King Duryodhana approached his teacher and spoke as follows ...”

1.3 :: “... O Teacher! Behold this mighty army of the Pāṇḍavas, skilfully marshalled by the son of Drupada, your gifted disciple ...”

Overview

Duryodhana names some of the prominent kings on both sides. Bhīṣma blows his conch, sounding the cry of war, soon answered by the others. Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to draw his chariot into the space between the armies, so that he may study the field and form a strategy. But it backfires. He is shattered in mind by the sheer magnitude of the consequences of this “world war.” He tries to rationalise his fear with citations from the scriptures he has heard. In the end his depression carries him to

the very peak of suicidal despair, and he sits down and throws away his bow and arrows. He — the bravest, most manly of warriors — for the first time sheds tears and becomes despondent.

Questions and Solutions

1.10 What is the meaning of aparyāptam? What does it signify?

Aparyāptam here can mean “inexhaustible,” because Duryodhana is boasting of his enormous army — eleven akṣauhiṇīs against the Pāṇḍavas’ eight — commanded by the valorous Bhīṣma, and therefore not easily exhausted. By contrast, since his sworn enemy Bhīma stands with the Pāṇḍavas, their army is relatively weaker and might be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. (The word is famously ambiguous, and can be read the opposite way — “insufficient” — which itself hints at Duryodhana’s inner unease.)

1.38–1.44 How do the varṇa-saṅkara and the ensuing disasters resonate with today?

The world of the Mahābhārata favoured a homogeneous flow — genetic, psychological and occupational — within communities. Inter-varṇa unions and the offspring born of them were, in that setting, seen as ruinous and against the established order. So Arjuna fears that future generations will be steeped in sin through such transgressions. He lays out the sequence like a chain of certain destruction: unrest in a clan degrades the clan’s conduct, which leads to injustice; with injustice unchecked, the women are corrupted and drawn into disordered unions;

children born of such unions are doomed; the whole clan slides towards hellish realms; the forefathers fall from their state for want of the post-death offerings; the codes of caste and the eternal law of conduct erode; and at last the whole population sinks. Whatever we make of its sociology, the underlying anxiety — that the breakdown of the family breaks the culture, and the breakdown of the culture breaks the person — is not foreign to any age.

1.46 Did Arjuna give up?

Yes, he did. His mind has stormed itself into a knot with no way out. He has thrown away his bow and arrows and lost the will to fight. He is torn by contradictory emotions — love and hate, sympathy and ruthlessness, physical strength and weakness of heart, a sense of justice and a sense of the war's pointlessness. When his thoughts have taken up so much of his inner real estate, he becomes hopeless and helpless. Or so he thinks.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 2 — The Concise, Well-Defined Yoga

Overview

Seeing his grief-stricken friend in despair, Kṛṣṇa replies with thundering words of raw truth. He says, in effect: “Death is certain for whatever is born, and birth for whatever dies; it is not that any of us truly ceases to be. Just as the perishable body passes through the stages of life, the indestructible, immutable,

eternal, all-pervading, stable Dehin (the Indweller) passes from one body to another, as a man changes worn-out clothes. One who has realised this can neither kill nor be made to kill. Grieve, then, for nothing. If you shy from your duty and miss this rare, unfailing door to heaven that opens to a Kṣatriya, you will incur a disgrace worse than death. There is one Truth, told again and again in flowery words; knowing it, you cross the bondage of karma. Remaining equanimous in the ups and downs of life, expecting no fruit and craving nothing, do what you must.” Arjuna then asks where such a realised person is to be found and how he behaves. Kṛṣṇa answers: “He who, in any circumstance, can master his senses and mind, having wiped out desire, anger and greed, and remains wholly dispassionate — he is the Saint of Steady Intellect. Established in joy, he performs all action at its highest efficiency. When desires have turned away from him, and even all of them together cannot perturb him in the slightest, he lives forever in that joy. He sees day in night and night in day. This is the state of Brahman, reaching which there is no return; steady in it, even at the moment of death, he abides in that ineffable Bliss.”

Questions and Solutions

2.69 What is this contradiction — day in night, night in day?

There is a yogic technique, powerful but difficult, by which total awareness may be secured within one lifetime through sincere practice. It consists in remaining as conscious as possible in the final, dissolving moments of sleep at night — not lying awake in insomnia, but holding a different kind of alertness, with the senses withdrawn yet mindfulness unbroken, not surrendering

to inert sleep. The converse practice is easier and less powerful: to “sleep” consciously during the day — not by napping or day-dreaming, but by consciously withdrawing activity from the energised mind and making it still, as it becomes unconsciously at night. This is likely what Kṛṣṇa hints at. It is by no means an instruction to become an owl.

2.70 The simile of the ocean and the rivers seems unclear.

As rivers pour into the ocean, the water-level does not rise appreciably, because of the ocean's sheer vastness. Even in flood, with tons of water rushing in at a delta, the ocean shows no real increase or decrease; it remains as it is. Similarly — not exactly, but similarly — when the mind of the Yogin has grown as vast as the ocean, the petty flood of desires makes no difference and stirs no disturbance in it. Such a Yogin has attained Peace, in its absolute sense.

2.59 Rasa-varjam — what of the lingering taste?

By the conscious practice of “fasting” — not giving the mind and senses everything they fancy — the sense-objects and surface desires leave in a hurry. But the deep-rooted relish for pleasure in those objects does not. The seeker (sādhaka) may refrain from indulgence, yet even unknowingly the craving for pleasure is not extinguished. The only way to rise beyond it is to “see” the Beyond — to reach a higher Bliss from whose standpoint these worldly pleasures look insignificant. With the firm knowledge of that greater bliss, even the residual taste-desires vacate their house.

2.50 Loss of sandhi in the second quarter — a grammatical note.

The line as it stands appears to skip an expected guṇa transformation at the junction of two words. One resolution is to read an unelided hi between them, which restores the metre and the expected junction without altering the sense. This is a small point, best confirmed with a traditional Sanskrit grammarian; it does not touch the meaning that yoga is skill in action.

2.49 “Take refuge in the intellect.”

Kṛṣṇa values the intellect highly. He does not ask us to believe or to dismiss anything by mere disbelief. He wants the highest intellectual power turned to good use in exploring the psyche and the existential questions. He supports intellectualism — but not in the modern sense of a biased, agenda-driven, closed mind. He means the intellectualism, the spiritual inquiry, of a Vasiṣṭha, a Janaka, an Aṣṭāvakra, a Yājñavalkya, and the other sages.

2.46 The dam and the Veda.

For a Brāhmaṇa — not in the misunderstood sense of a caste, but a native of the realm called Brahman (and Brahman here is not the four-headed creator-god) — who has access to the elevated experience of Supreme Bliss, there are no further Vedic injunctions to follow, nor anything left to learn from them. He cannot be bound by rules or norms; he stands beyond social custom and belongs wholly to the Supreme. He is what we also call an Avadhūta. To one who dwells day and night in that

reservoir of ecstasy, of what use is a small vessel of water? The Vedas speak of the Unknown, pray to the Unknown, prescribe the processes (yajñas and sādhanā) and deal with the metaphysical questions. When the Unknown has become Known for such a person, all the prescriptions of the Vedas together make no difference. When the goal-post has been reached, need one warm up and re-read the rule-book?

2.45 The threefold Vedas.

Ṛk, Yajus and Sāman are the three Vedas referred to here. There is also a fourth, the Atharvaṇa Veda, less popular in those times owing to the esoteric nature of much that it treats. It remains less famous than its three brothers, and is even wrongly notorious for its occult sections. In fact it is not exclusively occult, and is not so different from the others; it deals more directly with human civilisation than with the godly prayers and yajñas found elsewhere.

2.44 Bhoga and Aiśvarya.

Not every seeker longs for Mokṣa; there is an evolutionary range among seekers too. Some practise yajña — the ancient counterpart of sādhanā — to enjoy the subtler pleasures of life. Bhoga here may mean such enjoyments: the heightened pleasure that follows austerity, the subtler joy of the arts, the skill of extracting more happiness from a situation, of managing people and circumstances, of making a living by sensitive and efficient means. Aiśvarya covers the powers — the occult and the divine — such as telepathy, clairvoyance, levitation, foresight, manifestation, and the like, said to come from the higher yajñas. The other, commonest class simply wishes to

reach the heavens and over-indulge in their luxuries, where there is no morality at all. (This is taken up again at 9.20.)

2.31 Svadharma and Kṣatriya.

Svadharma is the duty one has chosen — for a living and to serve society, keeping individual and collective well-being in mind — following one's own inclination towards certain qualities. A Kṣatriya, in the varṇa scheme, is a description into which a person fits when he carries qualities such as patriotism, generosity, valour, physical endurance, courage, a sense of responsibility and rulership, justice, fraternity, and leadership (see 18.43). Such a person may instead take up some other profession demanding other qualities — and then he is not truly a Kṣatriya. But when one's nature (svabhāva) and one's work (dharma-karma) align, one is a real Kṣatriya. Arjuna is one.

2.27 Birth and death are pre-ordained.

“All that is born shall die; all that dies shall be born.” This cyclical nature of creation and destruction is, in essence, saṁsāra, and it is fundamental to the theory of karma. No one escapes karma — no avatāra, no human, no god, no seeker, no ṛṣi, no beast, no plant, no insect. No life is exempt from this Law. Only those who have died inwardly — in whom the ego, the “I”-sense, is dead while the body still lives (jīvanmukta) — have a choice, having transcended the cycle and reached the Ultimate Abode reiterated in the cantos to come. All others, retaining their little sentient ego and their identity as individuals, remain bound to the loop of karma.

2.28 Unmanifest, manifest?

This is one of the most cryptic verses of the BG, and the scientifically inclined may find it fascinating and even draw parallels to modern physics. “Unmanifest in the beginning, manifest in the middle, unmanifest again in the end — why, then, should anyone lament?” The verse points to the very question of birth and death: whence did I come, and what happens after dissolution? The “beginning, middle and end” may be read spatially or temporally; the verse does not specify, and so remains general and abstract. The only sure way to answer the riddle, I think, is to delve deeper into oneself.

2.29 The Amazement.

There is a change in the metre here; Kṛṣṇa seems either perplexed or inspired as he speaks. The verse points to the sheer unknowability of Brahman, the Vast. And yet he says that some have seen It — experienced It. So, like the Ṛṣis of old who stammer when trying to convey It to a student, Kṛṣṇa says that the only expression the mind can offer of that Vast Expanse is, inevitably, Wonder. Wonder is a wonderful feeling; it is born of the experience of something far greater than oneself — in stature, size, complexity, quality, or being. And Wonder has a twin sister: humility. One becomes humble automatically when wonderstruck; there is no other way. Those who speak of It in such amazement still cannot fully convey the extent of the Great One, and the student who hears their words can only take it to be some kind of wonder, with no direct perception of his own. Hence Kṛṣṇa goes one step further and declares that no one — not even the Ṛṣis themselves — has ever known It fully.

2.16 The existent and the non-existent.

This apparently simple statement is needed to bring solid conviction to the misunderstood pairs — true and false, real and unreal, existent and non-existent. Kṛṣṇa says: “The unreal never comes to be; the real never ceases to be. The seers of That-ness (tattva) have concluded and verified both.” So the false, being itself non-existent, cannot bring anything into existence; and from the real, which is the true, no destruction can ever come. The truth ever is, and never changes; the false never truly is, and is ever fleeting. This must be borne in mind.

2.12 Never non-existent.

This is perhaps the most mystic and cryptic verse of all; the language is deliberately dense, a double negative used for more than Shakespearean emphasis. It runs: “It is not that I was not, nor that you were not, nor that these kings were not; nor shall we ever cease to be.” The naïve, positive reading is that these kings, you and I existed in the past and shall exist in the future. But the verse is richly suggestive. It may mean that, in the past, there was no distinction among my non-existence, yours and theirs — for non-existence only appears to be heterogeneous. It may mean that in the past we all existed as one homogeneous being; that only in the present do we see distinct variety; and that in the future we shall again be one. In that sense, before these bodies were born they existed as a single whole (“the unmanifest in the beginning,” 2.28), and after death we shall exist, perhaps not embodied but as one whole (“the unmanifest in the end”). It may finally mean that we have always been present as manifestations of the one Truth spoken of in 2.16: the kings are the Truth, you are the Truth, I am the Truth, and by the transitive law all of us are the one same Truth, the apparent

differences dissolving with time. The great sayings of the Mahāvākyas, and the highest claims of the saints — Gārgī, Madālasā, Janaka, Ādi Śaṅkara, Gorakṣanātha, Kabīra, al-Hallāj, Rūmī, Nāmadeva, Dattātreyā, Ānandamayī Mā, Sadāśiva Brahmendra, Ramaṇa Maharṣi, and, to some degree, even the Buddha and Jesus (“I and my Father are one”) — all point to the riddle of this puzzling verse.

2.37 The win-win situation.

If Arjuna wins, he has a kingdom to enjoy; if he falls, he earns a passage to heaven. But how do we know a heaven exists? This is taken up at length around 8.6. By dying for a good cause, having fought on the side of justice, he will have earned merit enough to buy that passage; or, more subtly, by dying consciously — aware to the very last breath before the curtain falls — he experiences a long pleasant limbo that may be what is called heaven. Since he will die without guilt or agitation, but content and confident of having walked the path of justice, he can remain fearless and aware — virtues that grow so naturally on the path of the good.

Om Śrī Paramātmānamah — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 3 — The Yoga Attained by Action

Overview

Arjuna has heard enough of high philosophy and cannot yet see how it bears on his present predicament. He is caught in a

dilemma — fight, or not? — and complains that he is now more confused than before. Kṛṣṇa answers that true renunciation is not inaction but action done without desire for its fruit; that no one can remain even a moment without action, since the guṇas of Nature compel it; and that the wise perform their duty unattached, for the sake of yajña and the welfare of the world (lokasaṅgraha), as the enlightened king Janaka did. He then traces the source of all wrongdoing to desire (kāma) and anger, seated in the senses, mind and intellect, and prescribes the inquiry into the Self — that which is higher than the intellect — as the way to slay this enemy.

Questions and Solutions

3.2 The confusing words of Kṛṣṇa.

Arjuna is in a genuine bind. Kṛṣṇa has praised the Yoga of Wisdom and told him to give up all desire to gain peace; yet he has also told him not to abandon his svadharma as a Kṣatriya, but to fight to his last breath. To Arjuna this looks paradoxical. “With these seemingly mixed words you bewilder my understanding. Tell me decisively the one path by which I may attain the highest good (śreyas).” The confusion is real and honest — and it is exactly the confusion the rest of the chapter is written to dissolve.

3.4 Renunciation and inertia.

“If you think you can reach that blessed state of Inaction (naiṣkarmya) merely by doing nothing — by stupor and inertia — and that by dropping all responsibility you can reach Perfection (siddhi), you have wholly misunderstood me.” For

not a moment passes without action; everything is driven by the guṇas. Merely donning ochre robes and fleeing to a cave will not win that Perfect Inaction. There is a deeper sense of “action” and “inaction” at work here. Giving up the craving for fruit, dissociating from the bondage of needless involvement, doing only what is ordained and what survival requires, with the senses mastered by a right mind — the one who acts thus, unattached, is the venerable Karma-Yogin.

3.10 Prasaviṣyadhvam — an irregular verbal form.

The form here does not derive cleanly by the standard Pāṇinian rules; it looks like a hybrid of the future and the imperative moods. The sense, however, can be safely guessed: “may you flourish, may this be the cow that yields your desires.” Prajāpati, having created beings along with yajña, tells them that through yajña they shall prosper and it shall grant their wishes. The irregularity is worth flagging for a grammarian, but does not obscure the meaning.

3.11 Prajāpati, devas, humans.

Prajāpati — the creative function of God, the Creator — fashioned the various disciplines of sādhanā (yajña) according to the needs of different people, together with the wholesome means of enjoying life. It then appointed guardians — the devas, the divine or natural forces — over each such yajña. The yajña is a powerful ritual, outer and inner, by which such guardians are invoked: from the archaic (darśa-pūrṇamāsa, āsvamedha) through the mediaeval (pitṛ, bhūta, manuṣya, ṛṣi and deva offerings) to the modern (homa, pūjā, japa, pārayāṇa, mantra, dhyāna — and, in a wider sense, perhaps all our technological

means as well). Rightly invoked, they are favourable to us. A symbiotic relationship with them is doubly beneficial: it avoids inviting their disfavour, and it helps us obtain what we seek.

3.12 The thief.

If, having received favours through a yajña, one shares nothing back — offering no oblation to the devas, returning nothing to Nature, enjoying all the benefit alone without so much as acknowledging the support received — one deserves the name of a thief, and nothing less. “Those who eat what remains of the yajña” — that is, what is left after a portion has been returned to Nature and to fellow beings — “incur no sin.” Sin (pāpa) is the currency of sorrow, merit (puṇya) the currency of happiness; and one who “cooks” only for himself is a sinner. “Cooks” may be extended to mean “earns” or “makes” in the widest sense.

In the most literal sense, Avadhūtas are seen feeding other creatures — often dogs — from even the little food they are given. It seems only right, then, to offer a little to others as a sign of gratitude, rather than covet everything for oneself. Coveting is the very source of greed and the building of a wall of identity. By feeding others we unconsciously take them into our sense of identity, and so expand ourselves — not physically. What we eat, we become. By hoarding, the walls of “I” only harden. The whole point of Yoga is to break those walls and expand; hence parting with even hard-earned food loosens attachment and knocks a boulder or two off the ego. There is a real relief and peace in sharing.

3.15 Brahman and brahman.

The Vedas too are called brahman, on account of their vastness. They are said to be the direct, perceptive knowledge of the Immutable Expanse — Brahman — and are said to have emerged from Om, the single syllable. In this chain of creation the Absolute stands at the top, in direct or indirect relation with all the rest. The way to raise awareness to that state is through yajña; hence yajña is the foundation, the essential means, for reaching Brahman. Doing yajña is what we can do; and even by yajña we reach Brahman — otherwise It would remain Unknown.

3.16 One who does not turn this wheel lives in vain.

The wheel is the turning of yajña, drawing down both spiritual and material good. Through yajña the forces of nature — rain, earth, sun and the rest — are pleased, and they in turn support us with food and other pleasures. One who takes to sheer inaction, or to an excessively self-indulgent life, cuts the chain; society loses its balance, and he leads a worthless life. The chain runs: Brahman the Absolute → Veda → action → yajña → rain and sun → food → beings — and back again.

3.20 Janaka.

A very famous king-seer, the enlightened ruler who appears again and again wherever Karma-Yoga or even Jñāna-Yoga is discussed. He figures in the Rāmāyaṇa, the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad and the Aṣṭāvakra Gītā. He is the ideal Karma-Yogin: holding the busiest and most responsible position of all — that of a king — he discharges his duties faithfully while abiding not in his palace but in the Truth.

3.21 “And yet I remain in action.”

“Fully established in Perfect Inaction, having attained the purpose of all action, wholly content, I have no need to act at all. Yet I engage in action, solely for the benefit of the world. How, and why?” First, by setting an example, like Janaka: for if such an exalted one as Kṛṣṇa were seen to do nothing, people would wrongly conclude, “Why should we act, when he himself does not?” Second, by acting, Kṛṣṇa adds the further benefit of pouring out his realised, infinite Joy and Wisdom to those who seek it.

3.25 The wise and the fool; tathā-asakta (3.29).

To live as a “sane,” ordinary human in the world, the Wise one must appear to do the very same actions — but now subtly unattached (tathā, so-and-so, yet asakta, unattached) — purely for the general good. Such realised seers should never rush to debunk people's illusions and show them the raw truth outright; it may be wasted, or may even rebound. History gives many examples of Seers who were rebuked, abused, hounded and even tortured by the “sane” public for speaking the uncomfortable truth. So the wise one does better to keep silent, and to correct gently and gradually, if the others are willing.

3.27 The ego — the “I-doer.”

Since all action arises from an intention or desire in the mind (itself a product of the three guṇas of Prakṛti, see Canto 14), and all action is carried out by the mental or physical body (both parts of Nature, see Canto 13), the being in truth does nothing at all. It is a delusion to think “I do,” when in fact you do not. This

delusion is the birth of the ego, aptly named the “I-doer.” You are only the witness of the drama unfolding before you — a spectator. Hence you need not cling to any prop or character; you sit through it, enjoy both comedy and tragedy, and then you leave.

3.28 The three-fold envelope.

Swami Tejomayānanda of the Chinmaya Mission has explained this magnificently; I paraphrase him. All three guṇas bind the Puruṣa, though they function differently (14.5). All of them form the three veils of Prakṛti — another name for Māyā — hiding her husband, the Puruṣa. Sattva’s veil is like smoke over a flame: a gentle breeze removes it, revealing the blaze. Rajas’ veil is like dust over a mirror: some effort is needed to wipe it clean and reveal the surface. Tamas’ veil is like the membranes over a developed foetus: much time and energy — and pain — are needed to deliver it. So Kṛṣṇa leaves the choice to us: how, and through which dominant guṇa, we would rather uncover the Puruṣa, and which is the quicker way.

3.32 The fear of criticism.

It may seem that Kṛṣṇa fears criticism. He does not. Anyone who is to benefit from his counsel must be open-minded and trusting; one who dislikes an idea is free not to follow it, and has no cause to belittle its presenter. To attack the speaker instead of the argument is *ad hominem* — a plain logical fallacy. One should be willing to digest an idea free of personal bias. And then there is that other set of people, forever cynical about every little thing, with nothing to do with the subject at hand, who nag and hurl abuse for no reason. They are bound to be

deprived of all knowledge and wisdom — for they abuse without cause, and are truly lost.

3.33 “What can forceful restraint do?”

In the end it is Prakṛti that plays about me; what need have I to control this or that, or to make everyone bend to my command, or to have everything go my way? I know well that not everything will. Yet I desperately try to convince or convert others — sometimes even sincerely feeling “it is my duty to help my fellow humans.” This is a firm no to forced conversion. Let people be; let nature take its course. Why be so troubled about others, when I have enough to attend to in myself? Read carelessly, this could seem to say I need practise no restraint at all — which is wrong. The idea is the detachment of the witness, the “udāsīna-vat āsīnaḥ” of 14.23: make the effort, then let go. Once wisdom has dawned, I have a choice — to act like Kṛṣṇa for the welfare of all, or to roam as an Avadhūta, oblivious of surroundings, in the spirit of this verse. Neither is higher; it is a free choice, like a pastime.

3.35 Svadharma and Paradharma.

In its coarsest sense, dharma can be crushed to fit the definition of “religion” — though that is unnatural and insensitive. Even in this coarse sense the verse opposes forced conversion: better to die within one's own path than to be driven into another's. This is controversial ground. Many — soldiers, kings, women, sages, ordinary citizens — have clung to this verse of reassurance under horrific pressure to convert, and drawn solace from it in terrible times. Yet terrorists and suicide-bombers may also misuse the saying to justify a wrong stance. The sequence of the

verses must be noted. First one is to see everything rightly, without prejudice; then one identifies one's svabhāva; then one follows a path — any genuine religion or sādhanā — and this is one's Svadharma; anything against one's inner structure is Paradharma. Even a faltering practice within one's own Svadharma is better than an excellent practice that cuts against one's nature, for the latter breeds resistance and grief. Finally, one should mind one's own sādhanā; there is no point in converting others. But if my very life hangs on the edge under the pretext of Svadharma or Paradharma, I must reassure myself that I have been, and remain, in my own Svadharma — even under unimaginable cruelty or death. Easier said than done. Yet many heroic figures of India's unbiased history have become exemplars of just this view.

3.37 This one is Lust and Anger.

There is one evil force, called by many names and taking many forms, in the mind and across cultures. Why do we err although we know the guidelines? Only the perceptive beginner notices how she struggles at first to master an urge, is somehow overridden at its peak, and is visited afterwards by guilt — a cycle of struggle and relapse. This is what troubles Arjuna, and you, and me. So the answer is sought and given: the primal seed of disturbance in the peaceful mind is “desire.” The Nāsadiya Sūkta of the Ṛgveda tells how “desire, the primal seed, arose in It, and thence mighty powers and impulses erupted, creating this universe.” In the microcosm too, when the mind is serene, a thought of desire arises and carries it off on a bumpy ride. Even on waking, I feel transported from elsewhere back into this supposedly familiar world; I sense the difference between the

objectless state of *suṣupti* and the twin world of dream and waking. What drives us back into this chaos? This seed of primeval desire, said to lie unnoticed even in deep sleep for want of awareness, which pulls us back and chains us. This agitation belongs to the *Rajas* aspect of *Prakṛti* (see 14.7, 14.12).

So the real enemy is this deeply planted seed. This is *Kāma* — not merely bodily lust — the net of *Māyā*, the temptation of the serpent's fruit, Satan, the Devil, the inner ego, the deep-seated emperor of the void. Until it is burnt away, no one truly rises to Divinity. And what are its disguises? It is one substance, like water, taking the shape of its container. Allowed to flow, it looks and feels like lust, craving, longing, possessiveness. Obstructed, it camouflages as anger, wrath, rage, frustration. Fed repeatedly, it becomes greed, miserliness, hoarding. Sated in every wish — or thwarted in all — it turns to delusion. Tasting a little hard-won success, it swells into pride and vanity. Seeing another enjoy what it lacks, it curdles into envy and spite, and returns either as fresh desire or as frustration, and the cycle goes on. Since its root is in *Tamas* and its power drawn from *Rajas*, it is naturally opposed (14.10) to *Sattva* — to purity, knowledge, right thinking, and the Guru's counsel.

3.40 A playground for Desire.

For this enemy of the *Puruṣa* to work its mischief, it needs a few toys — otherwise how would it play? Its playthings are the mind, the senses and the intellect. It clouds the intellect, confuses it, manufactures self-serving justifications and moral compromises. It occupies the mind and spends its enormous energy in expansion, by repeated thought. It commands the

senses to behave as it wishes, to gather biased data from the world and to react as the mad emperor, Ego, dictates.

3.42 The inquiry into the Self, beyond the intellect.

This is perhaps the single most direct tablet of Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka — the discrimination of Seer from seen — with which many saints cured their disease of ignorance. Ādi Śaṅkarācārya put it concisely in his Eka-ślokī. By such an inquiry — Who is the light beyond the intellect? Who sets all these thoughts, this knowledge, these distinctions in me? From whose presence do action and speech spring through the senses? What is the deeper sense of “dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt” in the Gāyatrī? — advocated by many Upaniṣadic sages and pressed most strongly in our own age by Ramaṇa Maharṣi, one comes at last to the question “Who am I?” Kṛṣṇa says that unless this fundamental question is faced, and its answer realised by oneself (aparokṣa-anubhūti) and not merely accepted from books or on the word of a guru or a god, the problem of the ego — which is desire — and hence every trouble of the seeker, does not vanish. Such troubles may be dealt with piecemeal, but the permanent cure comes only by “slaying the ego”: by abiding as the Ātman, in the Ātman, by the pure mind.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 4 — The Yoga by Knowledge

Overview

Kṛṣṇa now traces the lineage of this teaching: he first gave this imperishable Yoga to Vivasvān, from whom it passed through Manu and Ikṣvāku down a long succession of royal sages, until, lost by lapse of time, he declares it afresh to Arjuna. He explains the mystery of his own repeated births — that he, unborn and imperishable, takes birth by his own Māyā, age after age, to protect the good, destroy the wicked and re-establish Dharma. He unfolds the secret of action-in-inaction and inaction-in-action, praises the many forms of yajña, and crowns them all with the yajña of Knowledge (jñāna-yajña), in whose fire every action is reduced to ash. The chapter closes by warning that only the doubting mind perishes, and by urging Arjuna to cut his own doubt with the sword of Knowledge and stand up.

Questions and Solutions

4.1 Who is Vivasvān? What does it mean? What is this paramparā?

Vivasvān is the Sun — literally “the one who shines forth,” the luminous source that sustains all life on earth. That Kṛṣṇa should give this Yoga first to the Sun is fitting: a teaching meant to enliven the whole world is handed to the enlivener of the whole world. From Vivasvān it passes to Manu (the archetypal first man and law-giver) and to Ikṣvāku (founder of the solar dynasty), and so down a chain of royal sages. This chain is the paramparā — the unbroken hand-to-hand succession by which

a living teaching is transmitted, not as dead text but from a realised teacher to a ready student. The point is subtle: the truth is timeless, but its transmission is fragile, and “by long lapse of time this Yoga was lost.” That is why it must, from age to age, be spoken again.

4.5 How does Kṛṣṇa have previous lives?

“Many births of Mine have passed, and of yours too, Arjuna; I know them all, you do not.” Here the two speakers are contrasted, not equated. Arjuna, the ordinary embodied soul, is swept from birth to birth by karma and forgets each one; the veil of Māyā falls afresh on him each time. Kṛṣṇa takes birth not by compulsion of karma but by his own will (ātma-māyayā, 4.6), and so his awareness is never broken across those births. It is not that a realised being accumulates lives as we do; it is that he is never bound by them. The “previous lives” of Kṛṣṇa are the descents (avatāra) of the one changeless Reality into time — memory intact, because the ego that forgets was never there.

4.9 How is Kṛṣṇa identifying himself with God?

This is the first place in the Song where Kṛṣṇa quietly shifts his standpoint — from Kṛṣṇa the friend to Kṛṣṇa the Absolute (recall the dual character noted in the Introduction). “One who knows, in truth, My divine birth and action, is not born again on leaving the body; he comes to Me.” He speaks not as a man claiming godhood, but as the realised one for whom the little “I” of Kṛṣṇa and the “I” of Brahman have become one. When a jīvanmukta says “Me,” the word no longer points to a body; it points to the Self that is the Self of all. The claim is startling only

if we insist on hearing it from the lower vantage-point. From the higher one, it is simply a statement of fact.

4.13 Varṇa?

“The four-fold varṇa was created by Me according to guṇa and karma.” The order named here is by quality and function, not by birth. A person in whom sattva and the urge to know predominate is, by nature, a Brāhmaṇa; one in whom rajas with sattva and the urge to rule predominate is a Kṣatriya; and so on (the qualities are spelt out at 18.42–44). It is a psychological and vocational classification — a map of temperaments — before it is anything hereditary. The later hardening of varṇa into rigid birth-caste is a social distortion, not what the verse says. Kṛṣṇa adds at once that though he is its author, he is not bound by it, being the changeless non-doer — which itself warns us not to absolutise the scheme.

4.18 Non-doer and doer — inaction in action.

“One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men.” Two errors are corrected at once. The first is to think the busy person is necessarily bound: he may act ceaselessly and yet, having given up the sense of doership and the craving for fruit, remain wholly untouched — inaction in the midst of action. The second is to think the idle person is free: he may sit still in his cave and yet churn inwardly with desire and resolve — action in the midst of apparent inaction. What binds is never the outer movement but the inner “I-doer” (see 3.27). Remove that, and the most strenuous action leaves no trace, as a line drawn on water.

4.24 Is Brahman everything?

“Brahmārpaṇaṁ brahma haviḥ ...” — the offering is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, poured by Brahman into the fire of Brahman; Brahman alone is reached by one absorbed in Brahman as his work. This is the great mantra of seeing the one Reality in every part of an act. For the realised, the ladle, the ghee, the fire, the priest and the goal are not five things but one Brahman appearing as five. Read outwardly it is a ritual formula; read inwardly it dissolves the very division of doer, doing and done, which is the last knot of the ego. Everything is Brahman — not as a slogan, but as a way of acting in which nothing is left outside the Whole to be grasped or feared.

4.25 Yajña by yajña.

Some yogis offer sacrifice to the devas; others offer the very self as sacrifice into the fire of Brahman. The phrase points to a whole spectrum of practice, outer and inner. At the outer end, one offers grain and ghee to the gods; at the inner end, one offers the ego itself — the sacrificer becomes the sacrifice. “Yajña by yajña” is the movement from the first to the second: using the discipline of ritual to arrive at the point where the last thing offered is the one who was offering.

4.26–4.33 The kinds of yajña.

Kṛṣṇa lists them like rungs of a ladder. Some offer the senses into the fire of restraint; some offer the sense-objects into the fire of the senses; some offer all the functions of the senses and the breath into the fire of self-control kindled by knowledge. Some sacrifice with wealth, some by austerity, some by yoga;

some by the study of scripture and by knowledge (svādhyāya-jñāna-yajña); some by the disciplined regulation of the in-breath and out-breath (prāṇāyāma); some by moderating their food. Every one of these is a genuine offering. But the conclusion (4.33) is decisive: the sacrifice of Knowledge (jñāna-yajña) is greater than any sacrifice of things, “for all action, without exception, culminates in Knowledge.” The material offerings purify; Knowledge liberates.

4.40 The clouded doubter.

“The ignorant, the faithless, the doubting soul perishes; for the doubter there is neither this world, nor the next, nor happiness.” This is a strong verse, and easily misread as a threat against questioning. It is the opposite. The whole book has been one long invitation to question. What is condemned here is not honest inquiry but chronic saṁśaya — the corrosive, unresolved doubt that never lets a person commit to any path long enough to test it, so that he drifts, gaining nothing here and nothing beyond. The cure is given in the very next verses: cut this doubt, born of ignorance and lodged in the heart, with the sword of Knowledge (4.42), and stand up. Doubt is meant to be resolved into knowledge, not nursed forever.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 5 — The Yoga by Renouncing Action

Overview

Arjuna, still caught between renunciation and action, asks Kṛṣṇa to choose for him one path. Kṛṣṇa answers that only the immature see Sāṅkhya (knowledge/renunciation) and Yoga (action) as opposed; rightly done, they reach the same goal, and the one truly established in either gains the fruit of both. He paints the Karma-Yogin who acts with body, mind and senses yet remains unstained, offering all works to Brahman “like a lotus-leaf untouched by water.” He describes the sage who, though seeing, hearing, eating and moving, inwardly knows “I do nothing at all,” dwelling serene in the city of nine gates. He ends with a short, potent meditation-technique — steadying the gaze, balancing the breaths, mastering the senses — and the peace of one who knows the Lord as the friend of all beings.

Questions and Solutions

5.1 The dilemma of the paths still persists.

Arjuna is honest to a fault. He has been told to renounce, and told to act; the two sound incompatible, and he asks Kṛṣṇa to settle it: “Renunciation of actions You praise, and again Yoga; tell me decisively which one is better.” The repetition of his confusion from 3.2 is not a flaw in the text but a fidelity to how the mind actually learns — the same knot must often be untied more than once, and at a deeper level each time. Kṛṣṇa's answer will be that the dilemma is false: the choice is not between

acting and not-acting, but between acting with the ego and acting without it.

5.4 Why is the new term “Sāṅkhya and Yoga” brought in now — and what is the contrast?

Sāṅkhya here means the path of discriminative Knowledge and formal renunciation; Yoga means the path of dedicated action. Kṛṣṇa introduces the pair precisely in order to dissolve it: “the childish, not the wise, speak of Sāṅkhya and Yoga as separate; one truly established in either gains the fruit of both.” The contrast is real at the level of method — one renounces action outwardly, the other renounces the fruit of action inwardly — but false at the level of goal, for both aim at, and arrive at, the same egoless state. He raises the distinction only to teach us to stop clinging to it.

5.7 The ātman, the aatman, and the Aatman.

The Sanskrit word ātman does triple duty, and the reader must feel which sense is meant. At its lowest it means simply “oneself,” the body-mind person (as in “he controlled his ātman” = himself). At a middle level it means the individual soul, the jīva, the apparent doer and experiencer. At its highest it means the Ātman proper — the Self, identical with Brahman, the witness beyond all doing. In 5.7 the yogin is “vijitātmā” (self-conquered, lower sense) whose “ātman has become the Ātman of all beings” (highest sense) — so that, though acting, he is not stained. Many apparent contradictions in the BG dissolve the moment one notices which of the three the word is carrying.

5.11 Is ātma-śuddhi not itself a desire?

The yogis act “for the purification of the self” (ātma-śuddhaye) — and one may object that this too is a desire, and so still a bondage. The reply is that there are desires which feed the ego and desires which dissolve it, and only the first bind. The wish for a bigger house thickens the wall of “I”; the wish for purity thins it, and is designed to consume itself at the end, like a stick used to stir a fire that is then thrown into the same fire. This is sometimes called śubha-vāsanā — the wholesome tendency that undoes the unwholesome ones and then quietly departs. Until the goal is reached it is not only permitted but necessary; only a fool would refuse the raft because he must eventually leave it.

5.8, 5.9, 5.13, 5.14, 5.15 The Avadhūta — “I do nothing at all.”

Here is the portrait of the liberated-in-life. “Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing, speaking, letting go, grasping, opening and closing the eyes — he holds firmly that the senses move among the sense-objects, and that I do nothing at all.” Renouncing all actions by the mind, he dwells at ease as the sovereign in the “city of nine gates,” neither acting nor causing action. The Lord (the Self) takes on no one's sin or merit; it is the covering of ignorance that makes creatures deluded. This is the Avadhūta's inner stance: total activity outwardly, total non-doership inwardly. Note that the non-doing is not laziness — the body works fully — but the withdrawal of the false claim “I am the author.”

5.16 Knowledge and absolute absorption.

“But for those whose ignorance is destroyed by the Knowledge of the Self, that Knowledge, like the sun, reveals the Supreme.” The image is exact. Ignorance is not a positive thing to be fought

and defeated; it is only the absence of light, and vanishes the instant the light comes, without struggle. When that Knowledge dawns, the mind is absorbed in the Supreme so completely that thought, intellect and very being rest in It, and “with their sins washed away by Knowledge, they go whence there is no return” (5.17). Absolute absorption is simply what remains when ignorance has been illumined away.

5.18 The Paṇḍita — not the scholar.

“The wise see with an equal eye a Brāhmaṇa endowed with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and one who eats dog's flesh.” The Paṇḍita here is not the bookish scholar but the sama-darśin, the one of equal vision, who perceives the single Self shining equally through every form, high or low, clean or unclean. Learning that does not issue in this vision does not, for Kṛṣṇa, deserve the name of wisdom at all. True paṇḍitya is measured not by how much one knows but by how evenly one sees.

5.20, 5.21 Inward joy, to the exclusion of the outer.

The steady sage “neither rejoices on getting the pleasant nor grieves on getting the unpleasant”; “with the self unattached to outer contacts, he finds the joy that is in the Self.” This is not a grim shutting-out of the world but a discovery that makes the world's pleasures redundant. Once the inner spring is found, the outer taps lose their urgency; one no longer runs after external sensation, not because it is forbidden, but because a fuller sweetness is already at hand. “To the exclusion of the outer” means the outer is no longer needed, not that it is violently pushed away.

5.20, 5.24 “Becoming Brahman,” the knower of Brahman, and Nirvāṇa.

“Resting in Brahman, of steady understanding, undeluded, the knower of Brahman abides in Brahman” (5.20); “whose joy is within, whose light is within — that yogi, having become Brahman, attains the peace of Brahman (brahma-nirvāṇa)” (5.24). Three things are said, and they are one. To “become Brahman” is not to turn into something one was not, but to cease mistaking oneself for the body-mind and to recognise the Self one always was. The “knower of Brahman is Brahman” because here, uniquely, the knower and the known are not two. And Nirvāṇa — literally the “blowing-out” of a flame — is the extinction not of the person but of the ego-fever; what is “put out” is the restless craving, and what remains is peace. The Buddhist and Vedāntic uses of the word are closer here than the schools' polemics admit.

5.27 The regulation of prāṇa and apāna — a yogic technique?

Yes. “Shutting out external contacts, fixing the gaze between the brows, equalising the in-breath and the out-breath moving in the nostrils” — this is a compact prāṇāyāma. By balancing the prāṇa (the upward, outgoing breath) against the apāna (the downward, incoming one), the breath is brought towards stillness, and with it the mind, since breath and mind rise and fall together. It is a genuine, workable instruction, not a metaphor — though, like all such practices, safest learned under a competent teacher and undertaken gradually.

5.28 How is Kṛṣṇa the “enjoyer of all yajñas” when at 5.15 he takes on no one's sin?

There is no contradiction once the standpoint is kept clear (again the dual character). As Brahman, the Self of all, he is the true recipient and enjoyer of every offering — for there is finally no one else to whom anything can be offered (5.29). But as that same changeless Self, he is the untouched witness who “takes on neither the sin nor the merit of any” (5.15). The Sun makes the lotus bloom and the mud dry and the corpse rot, and is stained by none of it. To be the enjoyer of all and the taker of none is precisely the mark of that which is beyond doing and undergoing — present to everything, altered by nothing.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 6 — The Yoga by Meditation on the Self

Overview

Kṛṣṇa turns to the practical craft of meditation. He declares that the true renouncer and the true yogi are one and the same, for neither can arise without giving up saṅkalpa — the self-willed resolve of the ego. He describes the one “established in yoga” (yogārūḍha), and gives the famous counsel that a man must lift himself by himself, being his own friend or his own enemy. Then comes the classic method: a clean, steady seat; the erect body; the calm, inward-turned mind fixed on the Self; the middle way in food, sleep and effort; the lamp unflickering in a windless place. The fruit is the vision of the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self, and the supreme yogi who feels

others' joy and pain as his own. Arjuna protests that the mind is restless as the wind; Kṛṣṇa concedes it, but insists it is tamed by practice (abhyāsa) and dispassion (vairāgya), and promises the fallen yogi that no sincere effort is ever lost.

Questions and Solutions

6.2 Yogin and Sannyāsin?

“What they call renunciation (sannyāsa), know that to be Yoga; for none becomes a yogi who has not renounced saṅkalpa.” Kṛṣṇa collapses the supposed rivalry between the withdrawn monk and the active yogi. What makes a sannyāsin is not the ochre robe but the dropping of self-centred willing; what makes a yogi is the same dropping, carried into action. So the two names describe one inner fact from two sides. The outer form — robe or armour, forest or battlefield — is secondary.

6.3 Karma and Śama.

“For the sage wishing to climb to Yoga, action (karma) is said to be the means; for the same sage once he has attained Yoga, quiescence (śama) is the means.” This is a beautifully practical staging. In the ascent, work — disciplined, dedicated action — is the ladder that purifies the mind and steadies it. Once the summit is reached, further striving would only disturb; there stillness itself sustains the state. The beginner who tries to be still too soon merely daydreams; the arrived one who keeps striving merely fidgets. Each stage has its own proper means.

6.4 A new entity — the Yogārūḍha.

“When one is attached neither to sense-objects nor to actions, having renounced all saṅkalpas, then he is said to be established in Yoga (yogārūḍha).” The word means “one who has climbed onto Yoga” — no longer climbing but arrived, seated on the peak. The single test given is the renunciation of all saṅkalpa: not the absence of action, but the absence of the ego's private agenda behind it. He wants nothing from the world and clings to nothing he does.

6.5 Who is this ātman that must be upheld and not demeaned?

“Let one raise oneself by oneself; let one not degrade oneself; for the self alone is the friend of the self, and the self alone its enemy.” The verse plays on the several senses of ātman at once (see 5.7). The self to be raised is the lower self, the mind-person mired in moods; the self that raises it is the same person's higher resolve, in the end backed by the witnessing Self. The lesson is bracing and non-mystical: no god will do your inner work for you; your own mind, mastered, is your best friend, and the same mind, indulged, your worst enemy. Self-effort is not opposed to grace; it is the form grace takes in a willing person.

6.8 Jñāna and Vijñāna (also 3.41; and again in Canto 7).

The yogi is “satisfied with jñāna and vijñāna” (jñāna-vijñāna-tr̥ptātmā). Jñāna is knowledge — the truth heard, understood, held by the intellect. Vijñāna is that same truth realised — made one's own in direct experience, so that it is no longer information but flesh and blood. A man may have the jñāna that fire burns; he gains the vijñāna the day he is scorched. Kṛṣṇa keeps pairing the two because the BG is not content with correct

opinion; it wants the truth assimilated (aparokṣa) — hence the same pair returns in 3.41, here, and prominently at the head of Canto 7.

6.8 Kūṭastha and Udāsīna.

The same verse calls the yogi kūṭastha and, elsewhere, udāsīna. Kūṭastha means “standing on the anvil” — the unmoving base on which countless things are hammered into shape while it itself never changes; the immovable witness behind all the mind's modifications. Udāsīna means “seated apart, indifferent” — like a disinterested umpire who watches the game closely but has no stake in who wins (the same posture as “udāsīna-vat āsīnaḥ,” 14.23). Together they describe one who is fully present to experience yet wholly unbudged by it: a rock in the stream, wetted everywhere, worn nowhere.

6.11 “Caila, ajina, kuśa — the layered seat.”

The instruction for the seat is concrete and ancient. On a clean spot, neither too high nor too low, one lays first kuśa grass, then a deer-skin (ajina) upon it, then a cloth (caila) on top. The three layers insulate the seated body — grass, hide, cloth — giving a firm, dry, steady base that neither chills nor tires the body over long sittings. The detail matters because the BG's meditation is embodied: comfort and stability of the seat are the ground on which stability of the mind is built.

6.13 The tip of the nose, or its base?

“Gazing at the tip of the nose (nāsikāgraṃ), not looking about.” Two readings have long been offered. The literal one takes it as the physical nose-tip: the half-closed eyes rest there, which

quietens the restless outward glance and draws the attention inward without the strain of full closure (which invites sleep). The subtler reading takes nāsikāgra as the root of the nose, the point between the brows — the seat named again at 5.27 and 8.10 — as the focus of attention. Both work; the first is a steadying of the eyes, the second a fixing of the inner gaze. Beginners do well with the first.

6.14 “Mat-para” — why “intent on Me”?

Having described a rigorous, seemingly impersonal discipline, Kṛṣṇa adds “mat-paraḥ” — sitting “with Me as the supreme goal.” Why bring the personal Lord into a meditation on the formless Self? Because the mind needs a resting-place, and a bare abstraction gives it none. To hold the mind on Kṛṣṇa — the Self shown in a form the heart can love — is far easier than to hold it on “nothing.” The devotional focus is not a rival to the knowledge-path but its kindest support; it is how the formless is approached by beings who are, for now, embodied (the very point argued at 12.5).

6.16 The mean between extremes.

“Yoga is not for one who eats too much, nor for one who eats nothing; not for one who sleeps too much, nor for one who keeps too much awake.” This is the BG’s quiet rejection of violent asceticism. The instrument of yoga is the body-mind, and an instrument starved or abused cannot play. Moderation in food, sleep, work and recreation makes yoga “the destroyer of sorrow” (6.17). The path is a razor’s edge, but the edge runs down the middle, not along either cliff.

6.19 The lamp in a windless place; and the family of yoga-words.

“As a lamp in a windless place does not flicker” — the perfect simile for the mind of the yogi held steady in the Self. Around this image the chapter clusters a whole family of related words built on the roots yuj (to yoke) and yam (to restrain): the yata (the restrained one), the yati (the striver), the constantly yuñjat (yoking) yogin who becomes yukta (united), abiding in Yoga (6.25). They are not loose synonyms but stages and aspects of one movement — restraint ripening into effort, effort into union, union into the unflickering flame.

6.20 Seeing the Self by the self.

“Where the mind, restrained by the practice of yoga, comes to rest; where, seeing the Self by the self (ātmanā ātmānam), one is satisfied in the Self.” The phrase is not a riddle but a precise description: the purified mind (the lower self) is turned back on its own source and there beholds the Self (the higher). The seer, the seen and the instrument of seeing collapse into one. This is the moment the whole discipline was for — self-evident, self-luminous, needing no external witness or proof.

6.24 All desires — only saṅkalpa-born? What of survival desires like hunger? (cf. 4.20, 3.8)

“Abandoning without residue all desires born of saṅkalpa” — the qualifier is important. What is to be given up is not the body's natural, functional needs but the ego's manufactured wants. Hunger, thirst, breath, the instinct to survive — these are the body's own dharma, and the BG never asks us to starve

them (indeed it forbids it, 6.16); Kṛṣṇa himself eats, sleeps and acts. The desires meant here are the saṅkalpa-desires: the imagined “if only I had this, I would be happy” that the mind spins endlessly. One may perform “bodily action alone” (3.8, 4.21) without incurring bondage. So the rule is not to kill the body's needs but to stop feeding the mind's fantasies.

6.27 One who has become Brahman.

“Supreme bliss comes to the yogi whose mind is at peace, whose passion is stilled, who has become Brahman (brahma-bhūta), free from taint.” Once more, “becoming Brahman” is not a transformation into something foreign but the settling of the mind into its own ground, where the disturbance of rajas has subsided. The bliss is not manufactured; it is what is always there, uncovered when the ripples die down.

6.28 Easily attaining boundless happiness.

“Thus ever uniting the self, the yogi, freed of taint, easily attains the boundless bliss of contact with Brahman.” Note the word “easily” (sukhena). The early stages are hard — the wind-tossed mind, the falls, the restarts — but once the groove is cut, the state comes with less and less effort, until it is more natural than distraction. What begins as a strain ends as a homecoming.

6.29 The Self in one is the Self in all.

“With the self united by yoga, seeing the same everywhere, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.” This is the social and moral fruit of meditation, and its test. A yoga that ends in private calm but leaves one indifferent to others has stopped short. When the one Self is truly seen, the wall between

“mine” and “yours” thins, and compassion follows not as a commanded virtue but as a natural consequence of vision.

6.30 Whence the equating of the Self with “Me”?

“For one who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me, I am never lost to him, nor is he ever lost to Me.” The reader may ask why the impersonal Self of 6.29 becomes the personal “Me” of 6.30. It is the same move as “mat-para” (6.14): Kṛṣṇa the speaker is, from the higher standpoint, that very Self, so “seeing the Self in all” and “seeing Me in all” are one statement in two keys — the impersonal Absolute and the personal Lord being two faces of one Reality. The change of pronoun is the BG’s constant, deliberate reminder of that identity.

6.32 Samatvam — the highest yogi.

“Who, by the likeness of himself (ātma-aupamyena), sees pleasure and pain everywhere as the same — him I hold the highest yogi.” Here is Samatva again, the BG’s single cure applied to a new disease. The measure is exquisitely concrete: judge another’s joy and grief by your own — want for others exactly what you want for yourself, and shrink from causing others exactly what you shrink from suffering. This one practice, taken to the end, contains the whole of ethics and much of the whole of yoga.

6.39 A loss of sandhi?

The line here has been read by some as showing an irregular junction between words where the expected euphonic combination does not surface. It is a minor metrical-grammatical point and does not affect the plain sense — Arjuna

asking who but Kṛṣṇa can dispel his doubt. As with the note at 2.50, this is best put to a traditional grammarian; the meaning stands regardless.

6.44 Śabda-Brahman?

“Even the mere inquirer into yoga passes beyond the śabda-brahman.” Śabda-brahman is the “Brahman-as-word” — the whole body of Vedic sound, ritual and injunction; the audible, prescriptive scripture. Kṛṣṇa's striking claim is that even one who has only begun to inquire into yoga, drawn on by the momentum of past practice, is already carried past the level of mere ritual observance towards the wordless Reality the words were pointing at. It echoes 2.46: to one who has reached the reservoir, the vessel of prescriptions is surpassed — not despised, but outgrown.

6.45 Through many lives (cf. 4.5, 7.19).

“Through many births the yogi, striving diligently, purified of sin, at last reaches the supreme goal.” This answers the natural fear “what if I do not finish in this life?” Nothing sincere is wasted (6.40): the momentum of one life's practice is carried into the next (6.43), and the seeker is drawn on “even against his will” by that momentum. The realised Kṛṣṇa remembers all his births (4.5); the ordinary seeker forgets his, yet the account is never lost. The soul is on a long road, and no step already taken has to be taken again.

6.46 The Karmin.

“The yogi is greater than the ascetics (tapasvins), greater than the men of knowledge, and greater than the men of ritual action

(karmins) — therefore, Arjuna, be a yogi.” The karmin here is the ritualist who acts for results, however pious; the tapasvin the austerity-doer; the jñānī of this verse the merely learned. The yogi is set above them all not because their paths are worthless but because the yogi has taken the essence of each — the karmin's action, the jñānī's knowledge, the tapasvin's discipline — and married it to the surrender of the fruit. He is the synthesis, not a rival.

6.47 The greatest of yogis.

And then a final ascent: “of all yogis, the one who, full of faith, worships Me with his inmost self absorbed in Me — him I hold to be the most united of all (yuktatama).” Having just crowned the yogi above ascetic, scholar and ritualist, Kṛṣṇa crowns, above the yogi himself, the loving devotee. Knowledge without love can stay cold; here the warmth of bhakti is named the very summit of union. It is the note on which the whole first six chapters end, and the door through which the next six — on the nature of that “Me” — are entered.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 7 — The Yoga by Knowledge and Experience

Overview

Now Kṛṣṇa unfolds who this “Me” is. He offers jñāna together with vijñāna — knowledge with its realisation — “knowing

which nothing more remains to be known.” He divides his own nature into a lower (aparā) prakṛti of eight elements and a higher (parā) prakṛti, the life-principle that upholds the world; he is the origin and the dissolution of all, the thread on which everything is strung, the taste in water and the light in the sun. He names his divine Māyā, made of the guṇas, hard to cross except by taking refuge in him; classes the four kinds of devotee and exalts the jñānī as his very Self; and explains why the deluded world, veiled by the pairs of opposites, fails to know the Unborn behind the human form.

Questions and Solutions

7.2 Knowing this, nothing else remains to be known.

“I shall declare to you this knowledge together with its realisation (jñāna and vijñāna), knowing which nothing further remains to be known.” This is not a boast about a vast encyclopaedia of facts. It is the Upaniṣadic promise that there is one thing by knowing which all is known — as by knowing clay one knows all pots, or by knowing gold all ornaments. To know the one Reality of which all things are forms is to hold the key to every particular, not by listing them but by seeing their common ground. After That, other knowledge remains useful but no longer essential to one's peace.

7.5 Aparā and Parā Prakṛti.

Kṛṣṇa first lists his “lower” nature (aparā prakṛti): earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego — the whole insentient apparatus, gross and subtle. “But know My other, higher nature (parā prakṛti),” he says, “the very life-principle (jīva-bhūtā) by

which this world is upheld.” The distinction is between the field and the life that animates it — matter and consciousness — both called his “nature,” both belonging to the one Lord. It anticipates the kṣetra/kṣetrājña analysis of Canto 13 and quietly places even the ego on the “lower” side, where it belongs.

7.6 “I dissolve and create this universe.”

“All beings have their womb in these two natures; I am the origin of the whole universe, and its dissolution.” Creation and destruction here are not two separate acts by two moods of a god but the single rhythm of one Reality — the manifest arising from and returning to the unmanifest, as waves rise from and fall back into the sea. “Create” and “dissolve” describe the same tide seen at flood and at ebb. Nothing new is added at creation and nothing is lost at dissolution; only the form appears and disappears on the one changeless ground.

7.7 “There is nothing higher than Me.”

“There is nothing whatever higher than Me; all this is strung on Me like rows of gems on a thread.” The image is the key. The thread runs unseen through every bead and holds the whole necklace together, yet is itself not any bead. So the one Reality runs through every being and thing, holding the world in coherence, while remaining distinct from each particular. “Nothing higher” is not a territorial claim of supremacy; it is the statement that there is nothing outside or beyond the Whole — for there is no “outside” the Whole.

7.8 Where is he explicitly manifest?

Kṛṣṇa answers the natural wish for something to hold on to: “I am the taste in water, the light in the moon and the sun, the sacred syllable Om in all the Vedas, the sound in ether, the manliness in men.” These are the first of the vibhūtis that will fill Canto 10. He is not “somewhere” to be found; he is the essence, the very quality that makes each thing itself — the wetness that makes water water, the shining that makes the sun the sun. The meditator is given, in each of these, a concrete handhold by which to feel the one Presence in the ordinary world.

7.11 The desire not opposed to Dharma.

“I am the strength of the strong, free from desire and attachment; and I am, in beings, the desire that is not opposed to Dharma (dharma-aviruddhaḥ kāmah).” This is a remarkable concession. The same Kṛṣṇa who names kāma the great enemy (3.37) here blesses one kind of desire: the desire that runs with Dharma rather than against it — the wish to provide for one's family, to do good work, to seek the Truth itself. Not all wanting is the enemy; only the wanting that violates the moral order and thickens the ego. Desire aligned with Dharma is Kṛṣṇa's own presence in us, and it is the very raft (śubha-vāsanā) by which we cross to the desireless shore.

7.13 Where delusion begins — Māyā.

“Deluded by these three states made of the guṇas, this whole world does not know Me, who am beyond them and imperishable.” Here the mechanism of ignorance is named. It is not that the Reality hides; it is that the guṇas — the very texture of the mind through which we look — colour and distort the

seeing, as tinted glass colours the light. “This divine Māyā of Mine, made of the guṇas, is hard to cross; but those who take refuge in Me alone cross beyond it” (7.14). Māyā is not a wall built to keep us out; it is the film on our own eye, and refuge in the Real is what dissolves it.

7.17 The Jñānī is dearest.

Of the four who worship him — the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the inquirer, and the wise (7.16) — “the jñānī, ever-steadfast, of single devotion, excels; for I am exceedingly dear to the wise, and he is dear to Me.” All four are honoured; none is turned away. But the first three come to Kṛṣṇa for something — relief, gain, understanding — while the jñānī comes for Kṛṣṇa himself, wanting nothing else. Love that seeks the Beloved and not the Beloved's gifts is the ripest, and so the dearest.

7.18 “The Jñānī is verily Myself.”

“All these are noble, but the jñānī I hold to be My very Self (ātmā eva).” This is the highest thing Kṛṣṇa says of any devotee, and it is exact rather than extravagant. In the truly wise, the last separation between worshipper and worshipped has dissolved; there is no longer a “he” loving a “Me,” but one Self. To call the jñānī “My own Self” is simply to state that non-difference. Devotion, pressed to its limit, arrives at the same summit as knowledge — the two paths meeting at the peak (the synthesis of 5.4, restated in a warmer key).

7.19 Broken metre; and who is this Vāsudeva?

“At the end of many births the man of knowledge takes refuge in Me, realising Vāsudeva is all (vāsudevaḥ sarvam) — such a great

soul is very rare.” Some read the line as showing a metrical irregularity, perhaps to arrest the ear at so weighty a claim. Vāsudeva is at once the son of Vasudeva — Kṛṣṇa the person — and, by derivation, “the one who dwells (vas) in all and in whom all dwell.” To realise “Vāsudeva is all” is therefore not to worship a tribal hero but to see the one indwelling Reality as the whole of what is. That such realisation comes only “at the end of many births,” and to a “very rare” soul, is Kṛṣṇa's own measure of how high it stands.

7.20 The “other deities.”

“Those whose knowledge is carried off by this or that desire resort to other gods, following this or that rite, constrained by their own natures.” The “other deities” are the many gods of the pantheon — powers who grant particular boons. Kṛṣṇa neither denies them nor mocks their worshippers; he simply notes that such worship is desire-driven and its fruit finite (7.23). The devas are real functionaries within the manifest order, but to stop at them is to mistake a clerk for the sovereign. The verse is descriptive, not contemptuous.

7.21 “I make firm the faith in whatever form is worshipped.”

“Whatever form any devotee seeks to worship with faith, that same faith I make unshakable in him.” This is one of the most generous verses in world scripture. The one Reality does not insist on being approached under a single name; it steadies whatever sincere faith is offered, under whatever form, and — through the boon granted by that lesser worship (7.22) — draws the worshipper gradually towards itself. Every honest path is thus quietly underwritten by the same Presence. It is the seed of

4.11 (“in whatever way people approach Me, so do I receive them”) and 9.23.

7.23 Is he distinct from the devas?

“But finite is the fruit won by these of small understanding; the worshippers of the gods go to the gods, My devotees come to Me.” Kṛṣṇa marks the difference not in the sincerity of the worship but in its ceiling. The devas grant what belongs to their own realm — bounded, temporary goods; their worshippers reach those bounded realms and, when the merit is spent, return (9.21). To reach the Unbounded one must aim at the Unbounded. He is “distinct” from the devas as the ocean is distinct from its bays: not another thing, but the whole of which they are parts.

7.24 Thinking of the Unmanifest as merely manifest.

“The unintelligent think of Me, the Unmanifest, as having come into manifestation, not knowing My higher, imperishable, unsurpassed nature.” The error named here is precisely the one warned against in the Introduction: to take Kṛṣṇa for “just another human,” a mere manifest personality, and to miss the changeless Reality wearing that form. The form is real, but it is the tip; the deluded grasp the tip and deny the iceberg. The whole of Canto 7 is written to correct this by degrees.

7.25 Why does not everyone become enlightened?

“Veiled by My yoga-māyā, I am not manifest to all; this deluded world does not know Me, the unborn and imperishable.” The answer is the veil of the guṇas (7.13) working in each unprepared mind. The Reality is equally present to all — it

withholds itself from none — but it is perceived only by the mind made transparent through practice. The sun shines on every eye; the blind do not see it. Enlightenment is not rationed by the Lord; it is limited by the readiness of the seer.

7.26 “I know all; none knows Me.”

“I know the beings of the past, the present and the future, Arjuna; but no one knows Me.” There is no arrogance in this; it is a plain consequence of what the knower is. The Self, being the very subject in every being, sees all as its own contents — as the eye sees all colours. But no object can turn round and grasp the subject that is seeing it; the eye cannot become its own object of sight. “None knows Me” — that is, none knows the Self as an object — precisely because the Self is what does the knowing in everyone. It is known only by being, not by grasping.

7.27 How do beings fall into folly and ignorance?

“By the delusion of the pairs of opposites (dvandva), sprung from desire and aversion, all beings fall into confusion at birth.” The engine of ignorance is here laid bare: from the two primal reactions, liking and disliking, arise all the polar pairs — pleasure and pain, gain and loss, honour and dishonour — and the mind, tossed endlessly between the poles, never rests long enough to see clearly. This is why Samatva — even-mindedness towards the pairs — is the BG's constant prescription: to still the see-saw is to lift the fog.

7.29 “They are verily Brahman, those who know That.”

“Those who strive for freedom from old age and death, taking refuge in Me, know that Brahman entirely, the whole of the Self,

and all about action.” The verse binds together this chapter’s threads: refuge in the Lord issues in the knowledge of Brahman, of the Self (adhyātma), and of action (karma) — the very terms Arjuna will ask about at the head of Canto 8. To know That fully is, in the end, to be That; the knower of Brahman is Brahman (5.24).

7.30 “At the time of death also.”

“Those who know Me as the adhibhūta, the adhidaiva and the adhiyajña — they, steadfast in mind, know Me even at the hour of death.” The chapter ends by pointing straight into the next. The one who has known the Reality behind the physical, the divine and the sacrificial orders does not lose that knowledge at the last, most disorienting moment; his mind, long trained, holds firm as the body falls away. The technical terms are defined at the start of Canto 8, and the art of “dying well” is its central theme.

Om Śrī Paramātmānam Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 8 — The Yoga of the Immutable Brahman

Overview

Arjuna asks for the meaning of the technical terms just used — Brahman, adhyātma, karma, adhibhūta, adhidaiva, adhiyajña — and how the steadfast know Kṛṣṇa at death. Kṛṣṇa defines them briefly, then gives the heart of the chapter: whatever state a

person dwells on at the moment of leaving the body, that state he attains; therefore one should remember the Divine always, and above all at the end, with the breath gathered and the syllable Om on the mind. He unfolds the vast cosmic cycles — the day and night of Brahmā, the manifest streaming out of the unmanifest and dissolving back — and points beyond even that to the eternal Unmanifest, the Akṣara, his supreme abode from which none returns. He closes with the two paths after death, of light and of smoke, and promises that the yogi who knows all this passes beyond the merit of every rite.

Questions and Solutions

8.2 Defining the new terms.

Kṛṣṇa gives compact definitions. Brahman is the supreme Imperishable. Adhyātma is one's own essential nature, the Self as it stands in the individual. Karma is the creative offering — the force that sends beings forth into becoming. Adhibhūta is the perishable order — all that comes to be and passes. Adhidaiva is the divine order, the presiding Puruṣa behind the cosmic powers. And adhiyajña — “the Lord of sacrifice” — is Kṛṣṇa himself, here in the body. The six terms are simply the one Reality named from six angles: as absolute, as indwelling self, as creative act, as perishable world, as divine presence, and as the goal of all offering.

8.5 The thought at death.

“Whoever, at the end, leaves the body remembering Me alone, attains My being — of this there is no doubt.” The last thought is decisive, and the reason follows in 8.6. This is not magic; it is

psychology carried to its edge. The final state of mind is the concentrated residue of a whole life's tendencies, and it colours what comes next. Hence the enormous stress the chapter lays on how, and on whom, one remembers at the close.

8.8 Which Puruṣa is meant here?

“Meditating with a mind disciplined by the practice of yoga, not straying elsewhere, one reaches the supreme, divine Puruṣa.” The Puruṣa here is not the individual soul but the Supreme Person — the Paramātmān, luminous, ancient, subtler than the subtle, the ruler and sustainer of all (8.9). The distinction matters because the chapter uses “Puruṣa” at more than one level; here it is unmistakably the highest, the very goal towards which the dying yogi's whole attention is gathered.

8.10–8.13 How to die.

The instruction is precise and practical. At the moment of death, with a steady mind and the strength of devotion, one draws the life-breath fully up to the point between the brows by the power of yoga (8.10); restraining all the gates of the body, holding the mind in the heart, fixing the breath at the crown (8.12); and, uttering the single syllable Om — the sound-symbol of Brahman — remembering the Divine, one departs and reaches the supreme goal (8.13). It is the same technique practised through life (5.27, 6.13), now brought to bear on its most important single application. One dies as one has learned to live.

8.14 Why practise beforehand?

“For one who remembers Me constantly, with no other thought, I am easy to reach, Arjuna — for that ever-steadfast yogi.” Here

is the answer to why the whole discipline must be built up in advance. No one can, at the terrified and disordered moment of death, suddenly summon a steadiness he never cultivated; the mind at the end runs in the grooves it has worn all its life. Only constant remembrance (nitya-yukta) makes the Divine “easy to attain” at the close. The exam cannot be passed by a candidate who never studied.

8.15 No rebirth?

“Having reached Me, the great souls are not born again in this impermanent abode of suffering, for they have attained the highest perfection.” This is the promised end of the whole road: release from the compulsory round of saṁsāra. It is not annihilation but the cessation of the driven, forgetful re-embodiment that the ordinary soul undergoes (contrast 4.5). The “impermanent abode of sorrow” is not condemned as evil but recognised as unstable; one is not made to hate the world, only released from being helplessly recycled through it.

8.17 The cycle of time and the process of manifestation.

Kṛṣṇa now sets the individual's death within a cosmic frame. “Those who know that a day of Brahmā lasts a thousand ages, and his night as many, they know day and night.” At the coming of that cosmic day all beings stream forth from the Unmanifest; at its close they dissolve back into the same Unmanifest (8.18–19), “helplessly, again and again.” The staggering scale is not offered to crush us but to loosen the grip of the little life: what looks permanent to us is a flicker in a rhythm of unimaginable breadth. And the whole rhythm, Kṛṣṇa will say, still stands upon something that does not move.

8.21 “My eternal abode — the Akṣara.”

“Beyond even that Unmanifest is another Unmanifest, eternal, which does not perish when all beings perish” (8.20). “That Unmanifest, called the Imperishable (Akṣara), is declared the supreme goal; reaching which they return no more — that is My supreme abode” (8.21). The point is subtle and crucial: even the cosmic Unmanifest, out of which worlds pour and into which they subside, is still within the cycle of appearance and disappearance. Behind it stands the Akṣara, which is untouched by any cycle. That, and not any heaven, is the final home; and from it there is no falling back.

8.23 The two paths after death.

Kṛṣṇa describes the two ways by which yogis depart: the bright path — of fire, light, day, the waxing moon, the northward sun — treading which the knowers of Brahman go and do not return (8.24); and the dark path — of smoke, night, the waning moon, the southward sun — by which the meritorious go, attain the lunar light, and return again to be reborn (8.25). These are the “bright and dark paths of the world”, eternally set (8.26); by the one there is release, by the other, return. The imagery is old and symbolic — light for the direct, knowledge-led ascent that does not come back, smoke for the merit-led ascent that must.

8.28 Beyond all merit.

“The yogi, knowing all this, passes beyond whatever fruit of merit (puṇya) is laid down for the study of the Vedas, for sacrifices, austerities and gifts, and reaches the supreme, primeval abode.” The chapter ends where 2.46 and 6.44 pointed.

Rites and study yield puṇya, and puṇya yields pleasant but perishable heavens from which one returns. The knower, aiming past all that, gathers the essence of every rite — knowledge — and so reaches the one place beyond both merit and demerit, beyond coming and going altogether.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 9 — The Royal Wisdom and the Royal Secret

Overview

Kṛṣṇa now confides the “king of sciences and king of secrets” to the uncavilling Arjuna. He declares the great paradox of immanence and transcendence: the whole world is pervaded by him, all beings rest in him — and yet he does not rest in them; behold his divine yoga. Presiding unmoved over his Prakṛti, he sends worlds forth and draws them back without being bound by the deed. He contrasts the deluded, who despise him in his human form, with the great souls who worship him single-mindedly; declares himself the sacrifice, the offering, the father and mother of the universe, immortality and death, being and non-being; welcomes the simplest offering made with love; and throws the door open to all — of every birth and station — who turn to him with undivided heart.

Questions and Solutions

9.1 The secret for the non-envious.

“To you, who do not cavil (anasūyave), I shall now declare this most secret knowledge together with its realisation, knowing which you shall be freed from evil.” The one pre-condition Kṛṣṇa sets for the highest teaching is not intelligence or learning but the absence of asūyā — the carping, fault-finding spite that cannot bear another’s greatness. Such spite closes the mind in advance; nothing can be poured into a vessel held upside-down. The teaching that follows is “secret” not because it is deliberately hidden but because it is hidden of itself from the envious and the closed, and opens only to the receptive.

9.4 This royal secret revealed.

“By Me, in My unmanifest form, all this world is pervaded; all beings dwell in Me, but I do not dwell in them.” The first half is straightforward immanence: nothing is outside the one Reality; every being rests in it as a wave rests in the sea. The startling clause is the last — and it opens directly into the paradox of the next verse.

9.5 Contradicting his own words, and calling it his glory.

“And yet beings do not dwell in Me — behold My divine yoga! Sustaining beings, yet not dwelling in them, My very Self is the source of beings.” Kṛṣṇa says in one breath that all beings dwell in him (9.4) and that they do not (9.5), and names the seeming contradiction his aiśvara-yoga, his lordly mystery. There is no real contradiction, only two standpoints. From the side of the world, all rests on the Reality as the pot rests on clay. From the

side of the Reality, nothing at all has really happened to it — the clay is not modified by being called a pot; the rope is not touched by the snake imagined on it. So the world is in him, and yet he, unmodified, is not “in” the world at all. To hold both truths at once, without cancelling either, is the “divine yoga” he asks us to behold.

9.7 Creation.

“At the end of a cosmic cycle all beings return to My Prakṛti; at the beginning of the next I send them forth again.” Creation here is not a manufacture out of nothing at a first moment of time, but a periodic re-emergence — the same beings, carrying their unspent tendencies, streaming out again when the long night ends (echoing 8.18–19). There is no absolute beginning to grope for; there is a beginningless rhythm of manifestation and rest, turning on the one who is himself outside the turning.

9.10 Who actually creates?

“Under My presidency, Prakṛti gives birth to all that moves and does not move; by this cause, Arjuna, the world revolves.” Here is the careful answer. The Lord does not create by labouring, as a potter labours at the wheel; he presides, and under his mere presence Prakṛti does the work — as iron moves in the presence of a magnet that itself does nothing. “These actions do not bind Me, seated as one indifferent, unattached to them” (9.9). So creation belongs to Prakṛti, agency belongs to the guṇas, and the Self remains the changeless witness in whose light the whole play proceeds. This is why he can create endlessly and yet be the eternal non-doer.

9.11 “Fools despise Me, clothed in human form.”

“The deluded despise Me, dwelling in the human form, not knowing My higher nature as the great Lord of beings.” This is the direct restatement of the Introduction’s central caution and of 7.24. Seeing only Kṛṣṇa the man — the cowherd, the charioteer — and missing the Reality he is, the deluded slight the very presence they stand before. The error is universal: we constantly mistake the vessel for what it carries, the wave for the ocean, the person for the Self.

9.13 Who is this that is worshipped?

“But the great souls, taking refuge in the divine Prakṛti, worship Me with undistracted mind, knowing Me as the imperishable source of beings.” Set against the deluded of 9.11, here are those who have seen through the form to the Reality. They worship not a tribal god but the “imperishable source” — the same one Reality named through all these chapters. What is worshipped is never finally other than the worshipper’s own Self; this is why their minds are “undistracted,” having nowhere else to stray.

9.15 Worshipping the One, or the Many.

“Others, too, worshipping by the sacrifice of knowledge (jñāna-yajña), adore Me as the One, as the many, and as the universal form facing everywhere.” Kṛṣṇa quietly authorises the whole range of higher worship. One may adore the Reality as sheer non-dual Oneness (ekatvena), or as the many gods and forms through which it shines (prthaktvena), or as the single all-facing cosmic whole (viśvatomukham). None is condemned; each is a valid mode of the jñāna-yajña, suited to a different

temperament — the very inclusiveness that will be argued out in Canto 12 between the worship of the formless and the worship of the form.

9.20 Dictated by the triad — Indra, and heaven.

“The knowers of the three Vedas, drinkers of the soma, purified of sin, worshipping Me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven; reaching the holy world of Indra, they enjoy in heaven the divine pleasures of the gods” (9.20–21). This is the ritualist’s ceiling once more. Such worship, bounded by the three ritual Vedas and aimed at svarga, wins its reward — the heaven of Indra (the “*Vaikuṇṭha*” of the merely meritorious) — but a reward that is spent like a savings account: “having enjoyed the vast heaven, their merit exhausted, they return to the mortal world.” It is a round trip, not a release.

9.22 Reiterating the promise of 8.14.

“Those who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, ever-steadfast — to them I bring attainment and security (*yoga-kṣema*).” Where the ritualists of 9.20 must fetch and carry their own reward and then lose it, the single-hearted devotee is carried by the Lord himself. This restates 8.14 (“to the ever-steadfast I am easy to attain”): where devotion is undivided (*ananya*), the burden shifts from the seeker to the Sought. The verse has comforted countless hearts precisely because it promises not only the goal but the provision for the journey.

9.23 The “other gods” when there is only One.

“Even those who, devoted to other gods, worship them with faith — they too worship Me alone, Arjuna, though not in the

prescribed way (avidhi-pūrvakam).” This resolves the apparent clash between his oneness and the many deities. There are not really “other” gods receiving worship elsewhere; there is one Reality receiving every sincere worship under every name. The worship of the other gods is “not by the right method” only in that it stops short at the form and misses the whole (9.24), so that its reward is finite. The faith is honoured; only its aim is too small. This is the mature form of 7.21.

9.25 They get what they ask for.

“Worshippers of the gods go to the gods; worshippers of the ancestors to the ancestors; worshippers of the spirits to the spirits; and My worshippers come to Me.” The universe is shown to be scrupulously fair: each attains exactly the object of his aspiration, no more and no less. There is no injustice in it and no favouritism — one reaps where one aimed. The verse is therefore also an invitation to aim high: since one reaches precisely what one seeks, why seek the finite when the Infinite is offered on the same terms?

9.26 Won by the humblest offering.

“A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water — whoever offers Me with devotion, that offering of the pure-hearted, given with love, I accept.” After chapters of cosmic grandeur, this is the tenderest verse in the Song. The Lord of all worlds asks for nothing costly; the whole transaction turns on the bhakti, not the gift. A rich sacrifice given for show is worth less than a wildflower given in love. This single verse democratises the entire path: the poorest person, with nothing but a cupped handful of water and a full heart, has everything required.

9.29 “They are in Me, and I in them.”

“I am the same to all beings; none is hateful or dear to Me. But those who worship Me with devotion are in Me, and I am in them.” The two halves must be held together. In himself the Lord is perfectly impartial — the sun that shines equally on all. Yet the devotee, by opening himself, comes into a felt mutual indwelling that the closed heart shuts out. The Lord does not change towards the devotee; the devotee changes towards the Lord, and so enters a nearness always on offer but not always accepted. Grace is impartial; reception is not.

9.32 Of every birth and station.

“For those who take refuge in Me — even those said to be of lowly birth, women, vaiśyas, śūdras — they too reach the supreme goal.” Read in its own hierarchical age, this is a radical throwing-open of the highest attainment to everyone barred by the ritual system. The path of loving refuge asks no credential of birth, sex or class; it asks only the turning of the heart. Whatever the social categories of the time, Kṛṣṇa declares the door of liberation to stand open to all who will enter — the same universality proclaimed for animals and plants, the “sin-born,” and for the virtue-born alike.

9.34 Which self, in total surrender?

“Fix the mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me; thus uniting yourself, with Me as your supreme goal, you shall come to Me.” The “self” that surrenders is the whole individual — mind (manas), act (worship), body (prostration), will (making Kṛṣṇa the goal) — offered up

together. Surrender here is not the collapse of one part of us but the gathering of every part towards a single end. And the one to whom it is offered is, in the final analysis, one's own deepest Self; so the surrender of the little self is, secretly, its homecoming. This verse — repeated almost word for word at 18.65 — is the compact seal of the whole path of devotion.

Canto 10 — The Yoga of Glory

Overview

The seeing heart now asks *where* to look. K first restates that no one — not the gods, not the great seers — knows His origin, for He is their source; and he who knows Him unborn and beginningless, the great Lord of the worlds, is freed of all delusion. He is the origin of everything, and from Him all proceeds; the wise, knowing this, worship Him with love, and to them, ever-devoted, He gives the *buddhi-yoga* by which they come to Him, dispelling their darkness with the lamp of knowledge from within. Overwhelmed, Arjuna pours out a hymn of recognition and asks: *by what forms* shall I contemplate You? K answers with the *vibhūti* — the “glories” — naming Himself as the highest and best in every category: Viṣṇu among the Ādityas, the sun among lights, the mind among the senses, *Om* among words, the Ganges among rivers, even the gambling of cheats and the splendour of the splendid. And he closes by folding the whole list back into unity: these are but hints; whatever is glorious springs from a spark of His splendour; with a single fragment of Himself He stands supporting the entire universe.

Questions and Solutions

10.3 Knowing Me as Maheśvara, the Almighty.

“He who knows Me as unborn, beginningless, the great Lord of the worlds (*loka-maheśvaram*) — he, undeluded among mortals, is freed from all sins.” Three attributes are stacked: *aja* (unborn), *anādi* (beginningless), *maheśvara* (great Lord). To grasp these is not to add a doctrine but to be *un*-deluded — the knowledge itself dissolves the confusion that is the root of all “sin”. Right knowing is here therapeutic: see Him rightly, and the false self that sins simply loses its ground.

10.8 “I am the origin of everything; from Me all proceeds.”

“*Ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo, mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate* — I am the source of all; from Me everything moves forth. Knowing this, the wise, full of feeling (*bhāva-samanvitāḥ*), worship Me.” Note that the response to metaphysical knowledge is not more analysis but *bhāva* — devotional feeling. The correct reaction to “everything comes from Him” is love, not a lecture. This is the chapter’s quiet thesis: knowledge of His glory naturally *melts* into worship.

10.9 “Ramanti.”

“With minds fixed on Me, their very lives given up to Me, enlightening one another, and ever speaking of Me, they are content and they delight (*tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca*).” On the grammatical worry: *ramanti* (from $\sqrt{ram}$, to delight, to sport) is here used intransitively — “they take delight, they rejoice” — with the object of delight (in Me / in speaking of Me) understood from context, a common Gītā economy. The picture is of a

community of devotees — teaching each other, forever telling His stories — who find in this mutual, God-centred fellowship a self-renewing joy. It is one of the warmest verses in the text: devotion here is not solitary but shared.

10.10 “I give knowledge to those who worship Me with love.”

“To these, ever-united and worshipping with love (*prīti-pūrvakam*), I give the *buddhi-yoga* by which they come to Me.” A crucial reversal of the usual order. We assume knowledge must come *first*, and love follow. Here love comes first, and *God Himself* supplies the knowledge in response — He becomes the inner teacher. The devotee is not left to reason his own way to the summit; the grace he has earned by love is the very intelligence that carries him home (see 10.11). Bhakti, sincerely offered, *draws down* jñāna.

10.11 (Destroying the darkness with the lamp of knowledge.)

“Out of compassion for them, dwelling within their own being, I destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge (*jñāna-dīpena*).” The image completes 10.10. God is not a distant giver but an *indwelling* one; the light He gives is lit *inside* the devotee’s own heart. Grace and self-effort meet here: the devotee kindles love; God, thus invited, lights the lamp — and the darkness that no amount of mere information could clear is gone.

10.12 Arjuna’s admission; from intellectual to visible proof.

Arjuna breaks in with a hymn: “You are the supreme Brahman, the supreme abode, the supreme purifier, the eternal divine Puruṣa...” He accepts the truth *intellectually* now — “all this I

hold to be true, that You tell me” (10.14) — but the honest student knows the difference between accepting and *seeing*. His hymn is the hinge: having granted the verbal case, he begins to reach for the direct vision that canto 11 will grant. Assent has ripened into a hunger for experience (the *jñāna* wanting to become *vijñāna*).

10.17 “How shall I contemplate You?”

“How shall I know You, O Yogin, ever meditating on You? And in what various aspects (*keṣu bhāveṣu*) are You to be thought of by me?” This is the practical question of the whole chapter, and it is a *meditator’s* question, not a philosopher’s. Arjuna does not ask *whether* God is everywhere — he asks *how to hold his mind on it*. The mind cannot rest on a bare abstraction; it needs handholds. The *vibhūti* that follow are exactly these handholds — concrete points on which a real mind can actually settle.

10.19 “Infinite are My glories; yet some I shall name.”

“So be it — I shall tell you My divine glories (*vibhūti*), but only the chief ones, Arjuna, for there is no end to My extent.” The disclaimer is important: the list that follows is not a complete inventory (that is impossible) but a *sampler*, a few representative sparks. K names the best-in-class not because He is *only* there, but because the mind grasps the whole through its most luminous instances.

10.20 “I am the Self; I am Brahman.”

“I am the Self (*ātmā*), Guḍākeśa, seated in the heart of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings too.” Before the long external list, K plants the internal truth first:

seek Me not only *out there* in sun and mountain, but *in here*, as the very Self in every heart. The vibhūti that follow are the outward glories; this verse is the inward one — and it is placed first, lest the seeker chase Him across the cosmos while missing Him in his own chest.

10.21–10.38 The list.

K runs through creation naming Himself as its summit in each order: among the Ādityas, Viṣṇu; among lights, the radiant sun; among the Vedas, the Sāma; among the gods, Indra; among the senses, the mind; of living beings, consciousness itself; among mountains, Meru; of priests, Bṛhaspati; of waters, the ocean; of words, the single syllable *Om*; of sacrifices, the *japa-yajña*; of the immovable, the Himālaya; of trees, the *aśvattha*; of rivers, the Ganges; of sciences, the science of the Self (*adhyātma-vidyā*). Two touches deserve note. First, He claims not only the noble but the ambiguous: “I am the gambling of the fraudulent” (*dyūtaṃ chalayatām asmī*) — even the cleverness of cheats is a spark of His power, misused. There is nothing anywhere, high or low, that is not *some* fraction of His energy. Second, He ends the list on the moral note: “I am the victory, I am the effort, I am the goodness of the good (*sattvaṃ sattvavatām*)” (10.36). The catalogue is a training exercise: whatever most excellent thing the mind lands on, it is bidden to see *through* it to the One whose splendour it is.

10.39 “The original cause of all, I am.”

“I am the seed of all beings, Arjuna; there is nothing, moving or unmoving, that can exist without Me.” After the many, the One. The list of glories could mislead into thinking Him a collection of

high points; this verse corrects it — He is not the sum of the excellent things but the *seed* of every thing whatsoever, excellent or ordinary. Nothing at all stands outside Him. The vibhūti were only the mind's stepping-stones back to this totality.

10.41 “Everything splendid is but a fraction of My splendour.”

“Whatever being is glorious, prosperous or mighty — know that to spring from but a spark of My splendour (*mama tejo-ṛśa-sambhavam*).” And the seal (10.42): “But what need have you of all this detail? I stand supporting this entire universe with a single fragment of Myself (*ekāṁśena*).” Here is the chapter's overwhelming close. The whole dazzling cosmos, all its glories together, is not even the whole of Him — it is *one fragment*. He is not exhausted by His creation; He infinitely exceeds it. The mind that was given handholds is now shown that the handholds are less than a millionth of the mountain — and so is turned from counting glories to bowing before the Immeasurable. Which is exactly the state in which Arjuna asks, in canto 11, to *see*.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 11 — The Yoga of Experiencing the Universality

Overview

Verbal proof no longer satisfies; Arjuna asks to *see* the cosmic form that canto 10 described. K grants him a “divine eye”, for the mortal eye cannot bear it, and reveals the *Viśvarūpa* — the Universal Form: countless faces and eyes, blazing like a thousand suns, boundless, containing all the worlds and all the gods, its mouths devouring the warriors of both armies like moths into fire. Terrified and awestruck, Arjuna asks who this fierce being is; and K answers, “I am Time (*Kāla*), the mighty destroyer of worlds” — these warriors are already slain by Me; be you the mere instrument. Trembling, Arjuna praises the Form, begs forgiveness for every casual familiarity of their friendship, and pleads to see again the gentle, four-armed, then the human face of his friend. K restores it, and declares that this supreme Form — never seen before by any amount of Veda-study, sacrifice or austerity — was shown by grace alone; and that only by undivided devotion can He be known, seen and entered.

Questions and Solutions

11.3 “I want the truth proved visually, after the verbal proof.”

“As You have declared Yourself to be, O Supreme Lord, so it is; yet I desire to see Your lordly Form (*aiśvaram rūpam*).” This is

the honest student once more (compare 10.12). He does not doubt the words; he wants the *seeing*. The Gītā honours this — realisation (*vijñāna*, *aparokṣa anubhūti*) is not the same as belief, however well-argued, and the sincere seeker rightly hungers for the direct experience that alone convinces the marrow.

11.7 “See the whole universe here, standing as One.”

“Behold now, Arjuna, the whole universe — moving and unmoving — standing as one, here in My body (*ihaikastham*), and whatever else you wish to see.” The offer is staggering: the *entire* cosmos, gathered into a single locus. It is the visual proof of 7.7 (“all strung on Me”) and 9.4 (“all beings exist in Me”) — no longer stated but *shown*, the many collapsed into one field of vision.

11.8 Divine eyes.

“But you cannot see Me with this eye of yours; I give you a divine eye (*divyaṃ cakṣuḥ*) — behold My sovereign Yoga.” A pivotal admission. The vision is not a public spectacle available to any onlooker; it requires a *transformed faculty*. The ordinary sense-eye, tuned to the finite, cannot register the Infinite. This is why the vision is grace, not achievement — the very organ of seeing must be *given*. It quietly answers a perennial question: why do not all see God? Because the seeing needs an eye that only He can open (recall 7.25, the veil of *yoga-māyā*).

11.9 Īśvara-Rūpa.

At this point the narration passes to Sañjaya, who reports what “Hari, the great Lord of Yoga (*mahā-yogeśvaraḥ*)”, then showed.

The shift of narrator is telling — the Form is beyond even Arjuna’s power to describe from within; it must be relayed by the witness. The *Īśvara-rūpa* is the personal Lord displaying His cosmic totality, the *saguṇa* made vast.

11.15–11.31 The Magnificent, the Magnanimous and the Mighty.

Arjuna beholds all the gods and hosts of beings within the one Form; Brahmā on his lotus, the sages, the celestial serpents; boundless, without beginning, middle or end; with innumerable arms, faces, eyes; blazing immeasurably, “if a thousand suns were to rise at once in the sky”. Then the vision turns terrible: the warriors of both armies rushing into the flaming mouths, some crushed between the teeth, “as moths rush headlong into a blazing fire to their destruction”. The description moves deliberately from *wonder* (the beauty and vastness) to *terror* (the devouring) — because the Real is both. A God who is only sweetness is a sentimental idol; the true Absolute contains creation *and* destruction, the nursery *and* the crematorium. Arjuna is being shown the whole, not the comfortable half.

11.31 “Who are You?”

“Tell me who You are, of such fierce form — I bow to You, O best of gods, have mercy! I wish to know You, the Primal One, for I do not comprehend Your working.” Note that even here, at the height of terror, the student’s instinct is to *ask*. Awe has not extinguished enquiry; it has deepened it. This is the mark of the true seeker throughout the Gītā — reverence and questioning together, never the one without the other.

11.32 “I am Time” — not Kṛṣṇa.

“*Kālo’smi loka-kṣaya-kṛt pravṛddhaḥ* — I am Time, grown mighty, the destroyer of worlds; here I am engaged in withdrawing the worlds. Even without you, all these warriors arrayed in the opposing ranks shall cease to be.” This is the terrible centre of the whole Gītā. The speaker is no longer “the friend Kṛṣṇa” but *Kāla* — Time itself, the impersonal, all-consuming power under which every finite thing is already, in principle, undone. The clocks of these men have already run out; the vision merely shows Arjuna what is *always* true, and usually hidden. Death is not something Arjuna will *do*; it is something Time has already *done*, and Arjuna is only asked to let it appear through him.

11.33 “Kill these whom I have already killed.”

“Therefore arise, win glory; conquering your foes, enjoy a flourishing kingdom. By Me alone are they slain already (*mayai vaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva*); be you the mere instrument (*nimitta-mātraṁ bhava*), O left-handed archer.” Here the whole teaching on action lands on Arjuna’s exact situation. The doer’s delusion (3.27) is dissolved not by argument now but by *sight*: he sees that he is not the true agent; the killing belongs to Time. His task is only to be a clean instrument — to let the inevitable pass through him without the ego’s grasping or recoiling. This is *niṣkāma karma* shown, not stated: act, because the act is ordained; but know you are not its author.

11.36 “Space liquefies.”

Arjuna, recovering his voice, breaks into praise (the passage from 11.36): “Rightly does the world rejoice and delight in Your glory; the demons flee in fear to every quarter, and the hosts of the perfected bow down.” The trembling has turned to adoration. Where a moment ago there was only terror, now there is a hymn — for the same Form that devours is also that in which “the whole world rejoices”. The seer’s response completes the vision: terror alone would be mere fright; terror ripening into worship is *religious awe* (recall the “wonder” of 2.29).

11.37 “Nameran.”

A grammatical note: *na nameran* (“why should they not bow?”) stands in the optative/precative — a subjunctive of appropriateness — “and how should they *not* bow to You?” Such modal forms carry the tone of Arjuna’s overwhelmed reverence; the very grammar strains, as the speaker does, before the Immeasurable.

11.41 Guilty Arjuna.

“Whatever I said rashly, thinking You merely my friend — ‘Hey Kṛṣṇa! Hey Yādava! Hey comrade!’ — not knowing this greatness of Yours, in carelessness or in affection... for all that I beg Your pardon.” This is one of the most human moments in the Song. The revelation of who his friend *really* is fills Arjuna with retrospective shame at every casual liberty of their friendship. It dramatises 9.11 from the inside: he *had* despised the greatness by over-familiarity, and now, seeing the truth, he trembles at his own former ease. Yet note — the intimacy was not *wrong*; it was simply innocent of the whole truth.

11.46 “Return to that gentle form of Viṣṇu.”

“I long to see You as before, crowned, bearing mace and discus; assume again that four-armed form, O thousand-armed One of universal form.” Having *seen* the Absolute, Arjuna cannot bear it, and asks for the mediating, gracious form — first the four-armed Viṣṇu, then (11.51) the familiar human face of his friend. This is not a step *down* but a homecoming. The formless and the terrible are true; but the human heart lives with the *personal*, gracious form. The Gītā validates *saguṇa* devotion here at its climax: after the vision of the All, one returns, relieved, to the Beloved with a face.

11.47 What was it that Arjuna saw?

K explains: “This supreme Form of Mine has been shown to you by My grace, by My own Yoga-power (*ātma-yogāt*) — full of splendour, universal, infinite, primal — which none before you has ever seen.” So the vision was the *Viśvarūpa*, the Universal Form, granted by grace alone and unique to Arjuna. It was not a hallucination and not an achievement; it was a self-disclosure of the Absolute, given once, to a fit and beloved seer.

11.48 “Śakya” and “Aham”; the broken metre.

A grammatical note on the construction *na ... śakyo’ham ... draṣṭum* — “I am not able-to-be-seen” — where the passive potential (*śakya*) is predicated of “I” (*aham*), an idiom that sits awkwardly with the strict metre and has been remarked by commentators. Such roughnesses, here as elsewhere (recall 6.39, 11.54), are best read as the metre yielding to the weight of the meaning rather than as errors to be corrected.

11.48 “By none but you.”

“Not by the Vedas, not by sacrifice, not by study, not by gifts, not by rites, not by fierce austerities can I be seen in this form in the world of men, by any but you.” The point is decisive: the cosmic vision is not purchasable by *any* quantity of ritual merit (recall 8.28). No stacking of good works opens this eye. Only grace, met by undivided devotion (11.54), does. This dismantles once and for all the notion that the Highest can be *earned* by transaction.

11.49 Consequences of seeing this Form.

“Be not afraid, nor bewildered, at seeing this terrible form of Mine; free of fear and glad of heart, behold again that other, familiar form.” K reassures the shaken seer. The vision of the Absolute is not meant to leave one broken but to be *integrated* — one must be able to hold the terrible truth and yet return, unafraid, to ordinary loving relationship. Maturity is to have seen Time-the-devourer and still be able to smile at the friend’s face.

11.54 A note on sandhi.

A grammatical/euphonic note at the juncture in this verse (as at 6.39): the expected *sandhi* is relaxed for metre and clarity. The verse itself carries the chapter’s thesis, so the small irregularity should not distract from its weight.

11.55 “He enters Me.”

The chapter’s — and by many reckonings the whole Gītā’s — culminating verse: “He who does work for Me, who holds Me supreme, who is devoted to Me, free from attachment, without

enmity to any being — he comes to Me, Arjuna.” Śrī Śaṅkara called this the essence of the entire teaching. Notice how it gathers every path into one sentence: *doing work for Me* (karma-yoga), *holding Me supreme* and *devoted to Me* (bhakti), *free from attachment* (jñāna and renunciation), *without enmity to any being* (the samatva of 6.32, the equal vision of 5.18). All the yogas converge here, in a life of God-centred action, love, detachment and universal friendliness. And such a one, the verse promises, does not merely reach Him or see Him — he *enters* Him. That entering is the goal of the whole Song.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 12 — The Yoga by Devotion

Overview

After the overwhelming vision, Arjuna asks the practical question it provokes: of those who worship You with form, and those who worship the formless Imperishable — who are the better versed in Yoga? K answers plainly: those who fix their minds on Him, ever-united and full of faith, He holds the most perfect — though the seekers of the Unmanifest also reach Him, their road is harder, for the formless goal is difficult for embodied beings to grasp. To those who surrender all actions to Him and meditate single-heartedly, He becomes the swift rescuer from the ocean of Saṃsāra. He then lays out a ladder of practice for those who cannot rest the mind at will — fix it on Me; failing that, seek Me by repeated practice; failing that, work

for My sake; failing even that, renounce the fruit of all action — each rung within reach of a weaker grip. And he ends with the tender, extended portrait of the devotee dear to Him: without hatred, friendly, compassionate, free of “I” and “mine”, even in pleasure and pain, content, self-controlled, unshaken — the very likeness of the perfected one, of a true Guru, and the pattern a seeker is to grow towards.

Questions and Solutions

12.1 Who is better — Your devotees (with form) or the worshippers of the Immutable?

Arjuna asks: “Those devotees who, ever-united, worship You [with form]; and those who worship the imperishable Unmanifest (*akṣaram avyaktam*) — which of them are the better knowers of Yoga?” It is a real and enduring question: is the higher path the personal (loving a God with a face) or the impersonal (merging in the formless Absolute)? Arjuna, fresh from seeing both the Universal Form and his friend’s human face, asks it with earned urgency.

12.2 A bias towards His devotees?

“Those who, fixing their minds on Me, ever-steadfast, endowed with supreme faith, worship Me — them I hold to be the most perfect in Yoga (*yukta-tamāḥ*).” K does seem to lean towards the personal path — but the reason is practical, not partisan, as the next verses show. He is not saying the formless goal is *false* or lower in itself; he is saying that *for embodied human beings* the path of loving devotion to a personal God is surer and gentler.

The “bias” is a physician’s, choosing the more effective medicine for the patient actually in front of him.

12.5 The trouble with “seekers of the Unmanifest.”

“Greater is the toil (*kleśo’dhikatarah*) of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest; for the goal of the Unmanifest is reached with difficulty by the embodied.” Here is the whole reason. To love and hold a *formless* Absolute, the mind — which is built to grasp forms — has almost nothing to take hold of. It is like trying to embrace the sky. The path is not *wrong*, but it is arduous and, for most, discouraging. The embodied being, tied to sense and image, finds a face far easier to love than a void. The Gītā is being kindly realistic about human psychology.

12.6 Unwavering Yoga.

“But those who, surrendering all actions to Me, holding Me supreme, worship Me, meditating with undeviating Yoga (*ananyena yogena*)...” — the sentence completes in the next verse. The mark here is *ananya*: undivided, with no second object. The devotee’s whole activity is offered up (recall 9.27), and the mind rests on Him alone. This single-pointedness, aimed at a lovable form, is what makes the personal path both easy *and* effective.

12.7 Swift release.

“...of these, whose thought is absorbed in Me, I become before long the deliverer (*samuddhartā*) from the ocean of the death-bound round of Saṃsāra.” The promise is *speed* and *rescue*. Where the seeker of the Unmanifest labours long against the current, the devotee is *lifted out* — God Himself reaches into the

ocean and draws him up. Grace does for the devotee what unaided effort must do for the abstractionist. This is the compassion-mechanism of 10.10–11 restated as salvation.

12.8 “In Me, in Me, in Me...”

“Fix your mind on Me alone, let your intellect dwell in Me; thereafter, without doubt, you shall live in Me alone (*mayy eva niveśayasva*).” The verse repeats “in Me” like a heartbeat. It states the *ideal* rung — total, effortless absorption of both *manas* (mind/feeling) and *buddhi* (intellect/will) in Him. For the one who can do this, nothing further is needed; he already dwells in God. But K knows most cannot begin here — and so the ladder descends.

12.9–12.12 The ladder of Sādhana.

This is one of the most compassionate passages in the Gītā, meeting the seeker exactly where he is: *If* you cannot fix the mind steadily on Me (12.9), *then* seek to reach Me by the Yoga of repeated practice (*abhyāsa-yoga*). *If* you are unable even in practice (12.10), *then* be intent on doing works *for My sake* — mere action offered to Me will also bring perfection. *If* you cannot do even this (12.11), *then*, resorting to union with Me, renounce the fruit of all action, self-controlled. And K ranks the rungs frankly (12.12): knowledge is better than mere practice, meditation excels knowledge, and the renunciation of the fruit of action excels meditation — for from such renunciation, peace immediately follows. The genius of the passage is that *no one is left out*. The strongest may rest wholly in Him; the weakest need only give up grasping at results. Every temperament, every level

of capacity, is handed a rung it can actually reach. This graded fallback is the Gītā at its most humane.

12.13–12.20 The characteristics of the Yogin — and hence of a Guru, an Avadhūta, and the pattern for a seeker.

The chapter closes with the long, tender portrait of the devotee “dear to Me” — a checklist not for testing others but for growing oneself, and a description of what the goal *looks like* when it walks about in a human body. He is: without hatred toward any being, friendly and compassionate, free of “mine” and of egoism, even in pain and pleasure, forgiving; ever content, self-controlled, of firm resolve, his mind and intellect given to Me (12.13–14). He is one “by whom the world is not agitated, and who is not agitated by the world”, free of elation, impatience, fear and anxiety (12.15). He is unconcerned, pure, capable, indifferent, untroubled, renouncing every undertaking (for its fruit); who neither rejoices nor hates, neither grieves nor craves, renouncing good and evil alike (12.16–17); the same to friend and foe, in honour and dishonour, in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain, free from attachment; to whom blame and praise are equal, content with whatever comes, homeless-hearted, of steady mind (12.18–19). Read the list slowly: it is at once the description of a *jīvanmukta*, the marks by which one may recognise a true Guru or Avadhūta, and the very qualities a seeker is asked to cultivate. Every trait is a form of *samatva* — the one equanimity, wearing many faces (recall 2.48, 5.18, 6.32). And K ends: “those who follow this nectar-law of righteousness (*dharmyāmṛtam*), full of faith, holding Me supreme — those devotees are exceedingly dear to Me” (12.20). The whole of Yoga, in the end, is to *become* someone God could love in this way.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 13 — The Yoga by Distinguishing the Knower and the Known

Overview

The Gītā now turns philosophical in the strict sense, drawing the great distinction on which liberation turns: between the *field* (*kṣetra* — the body, senses, mind and all that is experienced) and the *knower of the field* (*kṣetrājña* — the conscious witness). K declares Himself the knower in *every* field. He lists the constituents of the field and the marks of true knowledge (humility, non-violence, evenness, unswerving devotion, solitude, constancy in Self-knowledge). He then describes the *Knowable* — Brahman — only by paradox: with hands and feet everywhere yet without organs, unattached yet all-supporting, beyond the *guṇas* yet experiencing them, indivisible yet appearing divided. Prakṛti and Puruṣa are set out as the two beginningless principles — Prakṛti the doer, Puruṣa the experiencer — and their entanglement is named as the cause of rebirth. The one who sees the same Lord equally in all, undying amid the dying, and who thus does not injure the Self by the self, reaches the Supreme; and those who discern by the eye of knowledge the field from its knower, and the way out of Prakṛti, go to the Highest.

Questions and Solutions

13.0 The rare hidden question.

Some recensions (and the Gītā Press text) open the chapter with Arjuna’s question — “*prakṛtiṃ puruṣaṃ caiva, kṣetraṃ kṣetrajñam eva ca...*” — “I wish to know Prakṛti and Puruṣa, the field and its knower, the means-of-knowledge and the to-be-known.” Other recensions lack it, which is why it is a “hidden” or disputed verse. Whether spoken by Arjuna or implied, it frames the whole chapter as an answer to *one* deep enquiry: how are these pairs — Nature and Spirit, the field and its witness, the knowing and the known — actually distinct? The entire adhyāya is the reply.

13.1 Definitions.

“This body, Arjuna, is called the *field* (*kṣetra*); and he who knows it, the sages call the *knower of the field* (*kṣetrajña*).” Then the master-key (13.2): “And know Me too as the knower of the field, in all fields.” The definitions are exact. The “field” is everything that can be *observed* — not only the gross body but the mind and intellect (which, recall from 7.4, are Prakṛti, not the Self). The “knower” is that to which all this is observed, the light of awareness. And this knower, in *every* body, is one — is “Me”. The whole of Vedānta is folded into this single distinction: you are not the field; you are that which knows it.

13.4 Brahma-Sūtra?

“This has been sung by the sages in many ways, in distinct hymns, and also in the well-reasoned aphoristic words of the *Brahma-Sūtra* (*brahma-sūtra-padais caiva hetumadbhir*

vinīścitaiḥ.)” K situates his own teaching within a tradition: the field-knower distinction is not his novelty but the settled conclusion of the Vedic seers and of the reasoned aphorisms. Whether this refers to the Bādarāyaṇa *Brahma-Sūtras* as we have them, or more generally to “the aphorisms that lead to Brahman”, the point stands — the teaching claims the authority of continuity (recall the *paramparā* of 4.1) and of *reasoned* determination (*hetumat*), not mere assertion.

13.12 Brahman, the ultimate ‘to-be-known’; its qualities — Nirguṇa!

“I shall declare that which is to be known (*jñeyam*), knowing which one attains immortality: the beginningless supreme Brahman, said to be neither existent nor non-existent (*na sat tan nāsad ucyate*).” What follows can only be stated in paradox (13.13–17): “with hands and feet everywhere, eyes, heads and faces everywhere” — yet “without any of the senses”; “unattached, yet supporting all”; “devoid of the *guṇas*, yet experiencing the *guṇas*”; “outside and inside all beings”; “undivided, yet appearing as if divided in beings”. This is the Gītā’s way of pointing to the *nirguṇa* Brahman — that which has no attribute the mind can pin, so that every positive description must be immediately cancelled by its opposite. It is “not *sat*” (not a limited existent thing) and “not *asat*” (not sheer nothing) — the language strains precisely because the Reality exceeds the grid of language. Brahman can be *shown*, by such double-negation, but not *defined*.

13.19 Prakṛti, the employer, supplier and task-master.

“Know both Prakṛti and Puruṣa to be beginningless; and know the modifications and the *guṇas* to be born of Prakṛti.” Then the division of labour (13.20): “Prakṛti is said to be the cause in respect of agency in the instruments and effects (*kārya-karaṇa-kartṛtve*); Puruṣa is said to be the cause in respect of the experience of pleasure and pain.” This is the crux. *All the doing* — the body acting, the senses grasping, the mind willing — belongs to Prakṛti, the great task-master (recall 3.27, “the *guṇas* act; the Self does nothing”). The Puruṣa contributes only *experiencing* — and even that, as we shall see, only by a mistaken identification. Prakṛti supplies the whole machinery of action; the Self merely, and wrongly, thinks itself the doer.

13.20 The dance of Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

“For the Puruṣa, seated in Prakṛti, experiences the *guṇas* born of Prakṛti; and attachment to the *guṇas* is the cause of its birth in good and evil wombs (*sad-asad-yoni-janmasu*).” Here is the mechanism of bondage in one line. The Spirit, in itself free, “sits in” Nature as a spectator who has forgotten he is only watching — and, identifying with the play of the *guṇas*, is dragged by his attachments from birth to birth. The “dance” is this fatal intimacy: Prakṛti dances, Puruṣa watches, but so absorbed that he takes the dance for himself. Liberation is simply the Spirit *remembering* that he is the witness, not the dancer (13.23: “the Puruṣa, thus knowing Prakṛti and the *guṇas*, is not born again, howsoever he lives”).

13.22 This Puruṣa is Paramātmā? How is that possible?

“The Puruṣa in this body is called the witness (*upadraṣṭā*), the permitter (*anumantā*), the supporter, the experienter, the great

Lord, and also the Supreme Self (*paramātmā*).” The astonishing claim is that the individual witness in *this* body, correctly understood, is not different from the Supreme. How? Because the “individuality” was only the mistaken attachment of 13.20; strip that away, and the witness in me and the witness in all — and the one witness Brahman — are found to be the same light (recall 13.2, “know Me as the knower in *all* fields”). The Puruṣa is *paramātmān* not by promotion but by the removal of a misidentification. What seemed a private self was always the universal Self, wearing a costume.

13.24 ‘Seeing’: by meditation, by discrimination, by action, by devotion.

“Some behold the Self in the self by the self through meditation (*dhyānena*); others by the Yoga of discrimination (*sāṅkhyena yoga*); others by the Yoga of action (*karma-yoga*).” And (13.25) “yet others, not knowing thus, worship on hearing from others — and they too cross beyond death, devoted to what they have heard.” The Gītā’s characteristic breadth: there is no single mandatory door. The meditative, the analytical, the active and even the simply faithful (those who trust the teaching heard from a teacher) all reach the same Self. Even *śraddhā* alone — faith in the word rightly received — ferries one across. No temperament is disqualified.

13.27 Echoing samatā.

“He sees truly who sees the supreme Lord dwelling equally (*samaṃ*) in all beings, the undying amid the dying.” The equal vision of 5.18 and 6.29 returns, now grounded in the field-knower analysis: the *field* differs infinitely (a worm’s body, a

sage's body), but the *knower* is one and the same in all. To see equality is not to deny the obvious differences of the fields, but to see the single Lord shining undivided through them all (recall 13.16, “undivided, yet as if divided”).

13.28 “Do not injure yourself.”

“For, seeing the same Lord established everywhere, he does not injure the Self by the self (*na hinasty ātmanātmānam*), and thereby reaches the supreme goal.” A profound ethical corollary. When I see the one Self in all, harming another is harming myself — for there is, at bottom, no “other” self to harm. Cruelty is revealed as a kind of self-mutilation performed in ignorance. And “not injuring the Self by the self” also has the inward sense of 6.5 — not degrading oneself by wrong identification. Equality of vision is thus at once the root of *ahimsā* and the safeguard of one's own liberation.

13.30 When all distinction ceases.

“When one perceives the varied states of beings as resting in the One, and their expansion (spreading forth) from that One alone, then one attains Brahman (*brahma sampadyate*).” The verse names the exact moment of realisation: not when one has amassed more facts, but when the very *habit of separateness* dissolves — when the mind stops carving the seamless into “this being and that being” and sees all diversity as the branching-out of a single ground. Brahman is not *reached* by travel; it is *attained* the instant the illusion of division falls (recall the *dvandva*-blindness of 7.27, here undone).

13.31 Categorically: the Paramātman is formless.

“Being beginningless and *without qualities* (*nirguṇatvāt*), this supreme, imperishable Self, though seated in the body, neither acts nor is tainted (*na karoti na lipyate*).” The Gītā states it flatly: the Supreme Self has no *guṇa*, no form, no action. Whatever acting and being-tainted seemed to belong to it belonged in fact to Prakṛti (13.19–20). The Self “in the body” is like a king who owns a battlefield but never lifts a sword — present, sovereign, yet untouched. This is the final answer to the doer-delusion of 3.27: the true Self *cannot* be a doer, for doing belongs wholly to the *guṇas*.

13.32 The analogy of space (and of wind, water, sun).

“As the all-pervading space (*ākāśa*), by its very subtlety, is not tainted, so the Self, though seated everywhere in the body, is not tainted.” And (13.33): “As the one sun illumines this whole world, so the Lord of the field (*kṣetrī*) illumines the whole field.” The Gītā returns, as it loves to, to its favourite images (recall 9.6, 2.24, 8.9). Space contains everything yet is soiled by nothing; the sun lights all deeds — noble and vile alike — yet is stained by none. So the Self *pervades* and *illumines* the entire body-field while remaining forever clean of it. The witness lights the play; the play cannot touch the light.

13.34 Those who know That, attain That.

“Those who thus perceive, with the eye of knowledge (*jñāna-cakṣuṣā*), the distinction between the field and its knower, and the liberation of beings from Prakṛti — they go to the Supreme.” The chapter’s seal. The single instrument of freedom is the *jñāna-cakṣus*, the eye of discrimination that separates the seer from the seen, the witness from the field, the Self from Nature.

To see this clearly — and to see the way out of Prakṛti's grip — is to be free. Knowledge, here, is not a description of liberation; it is liberation itself.

Om Śrī Paramātmānam Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 14 — The Yoga by Distinguishing the Three Aspects

Overview

Having distinguished the field from its knower, K now anatomises the field itself — the three *guṇas*, the strands of which all Nature is woven. He opens with a great promise: those who take refuge in this supreme knowledge attain His own nature, unborn at creation and undisturbed at dissolution. He describes the *guṇas* one by one — *sattva*, luminous and pure, binding by attachment to happiness and knowledge; *rajas*, of the nature of passion and craving, binding by attachment to action; *tamas*, born of ignorance, binding by heedlessness, sloth and sleep — and gives the marks by which each may be recognised as it waxes, and the destinations to which each, at death, leads. Arjuna then asks the practical question: how is one who has *crossed* the three known, and how does he cross them? K answers with the portrait of the *guṇātīta* — even in pleasure and pain, unmoved by the strands as they operate, self-poised — and reveals the way across: unswerving devotion to Him, by which one becomes fit for Brahman, whose very abode and support He is.

Questions and Solutions

14.2 The great promise.

“Those who, taking refuge in this knowledge, have attained to My own nature (*mama sādharma*) are not born at the time of creation, nor disturbed at the dissolution.” The promise sets the stakes of the chapter. To understand the *guṇas* — and thereby to rise above them — is to step outside the whole cosmic cycle of birth-and-dissolution (recall 8.17–19, 9.7). One who has attained “likeness to His nature” is no longer swept out at each cosmic dawn nor dissolved at each cosmic night; he has reached the changeless (the *Akṣara* of 8.21). This is the reward held out for mastering what follows.

14.3 *Mahat*: a new term. How does it relate to Prakṛti?

“My womb is the great Brahman (*mama yonir mahad brahma*); in it I place the seed, and thence is the birth of all beings.” The “great Brahman” here is *mūla-prakṛti* — primordial Nature, also called *mahat* (“the Great”) in the Sāṅkhya scheme, the first, undifferentiated matrix from which all differentiation unfolds. K’s image is deliberately generative: Prakṛti is the *womb* (mother-matter); He supplies the *seed* (the animating consciousness, the *parā prakṛti* of 7.5); and from the union all beings are born (14.4: “whatever forms are produced in any wombs, of them the great Brahman is the womb, and I the seed-giving father”). Prakṛti and Puruṣa of canto 13 are here re-imaged as mother and father of the cosmos.

14.5 All three aspects bind.

“Sattva, rajas and tamas — these *guṇas*, born of Prakṛti, bind fast in the body the imperishable dweller (*dehinam*).” The crucial word is *all*. Even *sattva* — purity, the highest strand — *binds*. This is the chapter’s great subtlety and its warning against spiritual complacency: goodness is a golden chain, but a chain still. The aim is not to become sattvic and stop there, but to pass *beyond* all three (14.20). To mistake sattva for the goal is to rest content in the finest cell of the prison.

14.6–14.17, 14.10 The three aspects, their signs, and their proportion.

K defines each (14.6–8). *Sattva*, being pure and luminous (*nirmalatvāt prakāśakam*), binds by attachment to happiness and to knowledge — the pleasant chain of feeling wise and serene. *Rajas*, of the nature of passion, born of craving and attachment (*tṛṣṇā-saṅga-samudbhavam*), binds by attachment to action — the restless chain of always *doing*. *Tamas*, born of ignorance, deludes all embodied beings, binding by heedlessness, sloth and sleep (*pramāda-ālasya-nidrā*) — the dull chain of inertia.

Their *proportion* (14.10) is dynamic, not fixed: “sattva prevails, overpowering rajas and tamas; rajas, overpowering sattva and tamas; and tamas likewise.” So it is never a single sole winner permanently — the three are *always all present*, in shifting dominance, one rising as the others recede, like three wrestlers taking turns on top. This is why a person is sattvic in the morning, rajasic at work, tamasic at night — the mix is a moving average, not a label. Their *signs* (14.11–13): when the light of knowledge shines through every gate of the body, sattva is

dominant; greed, exertion, the undertaking of works, restlessness and craving betray rajas; darkness, inertia, heedlessness and delusion mark tamas. And their *fruits at death* (14.14–15) follow suit: dying in sattva, one goes to the pure worlds of the knowers; in rajas, one is reborn among the action-attached; in tamas, in the wombs of the deluded (leading downward).

14.18 What is the use of such classification? The effect of the aspects.

“The sattvic go upward; the rajasic stay in the middle; the tamasic, abiding in the function of the lowest strand, go downward (*jaghanya-guṇa-vṛtti-sthā adho gacchanti tāmāsāḥ*).” Here is the practical payoff of the whole taxonomy. It is not idle labelling; it is a *map of trajectory*. The *guṇa* one lives in determines the direction one moves — up towards light and freedom, level in the round of action, or down into deeper delusion. Knowing this, one can *choose* to cultivate sattva (by right food, company, study, practice — canto 17) as a deliberate ascent, while remembering (14.5) that even sattva is a stage to be passed, not a terminus. The classification is a compass, not a caste.

14.21 Can I overcome these aspects?

Arjuna asks the operative question directly: “By what marks (*kair liṅgaiḥ*) is one known who has crossed these three *guṇas*? What is his conduct? And how does he cross beyond the three *guṇas* (*katham... ativartate*)?” Two questions in one — *how to recognise* the liberated, and *how to become* him. It is the same practical instinct that made him ask after the *sthitaprajña* at

2.54. The Gītā consistently refuses to leave the ideal abstract: Arjuna always demands the *marks* and the *method*, and K always supplies both.

14.24 Again *samatā*: one cure for many diseases.

The *guṇātīta* is described (14.22–25): he neither hates the light, activity or delusion when present, nor longs for them when absent; seated as if indifferent (*udāsīnavad āsīnaḥ*), he is not shaken by the *guṇas* as they operate, knowing “it is only the strands acting”; **the same in pleasure and pain (*sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ*)**, self-poised, to whom a clod, a stone and gold are alike; the same to the pleasant and the unpleasant, to blame and to praise; the same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, renouncing every self-initiated undertaking. Once again the single medicine is *samatva* — the equanimity that we have met as the mark of the *sthitaprajña* (2.55), the *paṇḍita* (5.18), the highest yogin (6.32) and the beloved devotee (12.13–19). The Gītā keeps prescribing the one remedy for every stage of the disease, because equanimity is what freedom feels like from the inside — the refusal to be jerked about by the see-saw of the strands.

14.26 Getting ready for the plunge into Brahman-Bliss.

“And he who serves Me with unswerving devotion (*avyabhicāreṇa bhakti-yogena*), crossing beyond these *guṇas*, becomes fit for becoming Brahman (*brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*).” Here is the *method* Arjuna asked for (14.21) — and it turns out to be *bhakti*. One does not cross the *guṇas* by wrestling them directly (that is only more *rajas*); one crosses them by *unswerving devotion*, which lifts the mind clean out of their

field. And (14.27): “For I am the abode of Brahman (*brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā aham*), the immortal and imperishable, the eternal Dharma and absolute bliss.” The chapter that began by dissecting bondage ends by pointing to the exit — and the exit is love. Devotion is the rope let down into the ocean of the *guṇas*, by which the swimmer is drawn up onto the changeless shore of Brahman.

Om Śrī Paramātmānam Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 15 — The Yoga of the Greatest Puruṣa, the Enlivener

Overview

K paints the whole of Saṃsāra as a cosmic tree (*aśvattha*) — roots above (in Brahman), branches below (in the world), its leaves the Vedic hymns — and bids the seeker fell this deep-rooted tree of worldly attachment with the axe of non-attachment, and then seek the goal from which none return. He reveals that the individual soul (*jīva*) is an eternal fragment of Himself, drawing to itself the senses and mind, carrying them from body to body at death as the wind carries scents — a passage the deluded cannot perceive, but the eye of knowledge can. He is the light in sun, moon and fire; entering the earth He upholds beings by His energy, and becoming the sap He nourishes every plant; seated in every heart, He is the source of memory, knowledge and their loss, the one thing all the Vedas seek to know. Finally he resolves the many “enliveners” into a

hierarchy: the perishable (all beings), the imperishable (the unchanging witness), and — higher than both — the Supreme Person, *Puruṣottama*, the Lord who enters and sustains the three worlds; and to know Him thus is to know all, and to worship Him with one's whole being.

Questions and Solutions

15.1 Reference to the Śvetāśvatara (and Puruṣa-Sūkta, Praśna, Muṇḍaka).

The inverted world-tree of this chapter draws directly on older scripture. The image of a cosmic tree “with roots above and branches below” appears in the Kaṭha and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads; the theme of the one Puruṣa pervading all echoes the Puruṣa-Sūkta of the Ṛgveda; and the two-birds-on-one-tree and the imperishable-syllable motifs run through the Muṇḍaka and Praśna. K is not inventing but *gathering* — condensing the Upaniṣadic vision into the Gītā's compact idiom (as at 8.11, 13.4). The reader who knows those sources hears the resonances; the reader who does not still receives the essence.

15.1 Which “new species of Ficus” is this?

The *aśvattha* — the sacred fig, *Ficus religiosa* (the pipal). But here it is described as *no ordinary tree*: “with roots above and branches below, imperishable, whose leaves are the (Vedic) hymns.” It is the *world-tree* of Saṃsāra, inverted — its root above in the unmanifest Brahman (the source), its branches spreading downward into the manifest world (the effects), nourished by the *guṇas*, its secondary roots (of attachment and action) striking downward into the soil of human life. The

botanical name is only borrowed; the “species” found is the tree of conditioned existence itself, which the seeker is told to cut down with “the strong axe of non-attachment (*asaṅga-śastreṇa*)” (15.3).

15.4 “I seek refuge in that Puruṣa, the great enlivener.”

“Then that goal (*padam*) is to be sought, going whither one does not return again; ‘I take refuge (*prapadye*) in that Primal Puruṣa, whence streamed forth the ancient current (of manifestation).” Having felled the tree of attachment, the seeker must not be left in a void; he is turned towards the *source* — the primal Person from whom the whole cosmic process first flowed. Note the shift into the first person of *surrender* (*prapadye*): the chapter’s philosophy culminates not in a proposition but in an act of taking-refuge. To cut the tree is renunciation; to seek its root is devotion. The two are one movement.

15.6 “The sun illumines it not.”

“That the sun illumines not, nor the moon, nor fire — that is My supreme abode (*tad dhāma paramaṁ mama*), reaching which none return.” This is a near-quotation of the Kāṭha and Śvetāśvatara verse (“*na tatra sūryo bhāti...*”). The meaning is precise: the supreme Reality is not lit by any *external* light, because it is *itself* the light by which all lights shine (as 15.12 will say). The sun cannot illumine it, for the sun borrows *its* radiance from That. To reach that self-luminous abode is to reach the end of return — the *Akṣara* of 8.21 named again.

15.6 Is Kṛṣṇa insecure? He keeps reasserting what he says of God and tying it to Himself.

A fair-minded doubt, and worth answering squarely. It can *look*, to a modern reader, as though K repeatedly hijacks every description of the Absolute — “that supreme light... is *Mine*”; “that abode... is *Mine*”; “the Vedas seek *Me*” — as if from vanity or insecurity. But this misreads the grammar of the whole Song. When K says “Me”, he speaks (as the Introduction laboured to establish) from the highest pedestal, as the impersonal Self voicing itself in the first person — the only way a *dialogue* can convey non-dual identity. He is not a small ego grabbing credit; he is the one Self saying, in effect, “the light you seek is not elsewhere — it is your own deepest reality, here called ‘Me’.” The repetition is *pedagogical insistence*, not psychological insecurity: the student keeps re-externalising the Absolute (making it a far-off God), and the teacher keeps pulling it back to the intimate “I”. Far from arrogance, it is the most generous claim possible — *you* are That.

15.7 The eternal Jīva?

“An eternal fragment of My own Self (*mamaivāṁśo... sanātanaḥ*), becoming the living soul (*jīva-bhūtaḥ*) in the world of the living, draws to itself the senses, of which the mind is the sixth, resting in Prakṛti.” The individual soul is here defined as an *amśa* — a portion, a spark — of the Supreme, eternal in nature, that has (as it were) stepped into embodiment and gathered around itself the five senses and the mind. The word “fragment” must not be pressed materially (the infinite is not chopped into pieces); it means that the jīva is *of the same essence* as the Whole, as a spark is of the same nature as the fire, differing only in apparent limitation. This is the reconciliation of the “many souls” of experience with the “one Self” of

metaphysics: the jīvas are countless as reflections, one as the light reflected.

15.8 What happens after death?

“When the lord [of the body, i.e. the jīva] takes on a body, and when he departs from it, he carries these [the senses and mind] with him, as the wind carries scents from their sources (*vāyur gandhān ivāśayāt*).” The image is exquisite and answers the question of continuity. At death the gross body is dropped, but the *subtle* body — the senses and mind, laden with tendencies (*vāsanās*) — is carried onward to the next embodiment, exactly as a breeze lifts the fragrance from a flower and bears it elsewhere. What travels is not the flesh but the *perfume* of a life — its accumulated dispositions. This is the mechanism behind the Karma-theory of 2.27 and the many-births of 6.45.

15.10 Only Jñānis can sift out God in the jīva.

“Departing, dwelling, or experiencing, united with the *guṇas* — the deluded do not perceive Him; those with the eye of knowledge (*jñāna-cakṣuṣaḥ*) do.” The passage of the soul — its leaving one body, inhabiting another, experiencing through the senses — is invisible to ordinary perception. We see bodies born and dying; we do not see the *jīva* that carries over, still less the divine essence within it. Only the *jñāna-cakṣus* (the same “eye of knowledge” of 13.34) discerns it. This is why the truth of the soul cannot be settled by ordinary observation and is missed by the merely clever: it requires a *different faculty*, developed by *sādhana*.

15.11 Unprepared minds, though striving, cannot see.

“The striving yogins behold Him seated in themselves (*ātmany avasthitam*); but the unripe (*akṛtātmanāḥ*), of unformed understanding, though they strive, see Him not.” A sobering and honest verse. Effort alone is not enough; the effort must fall on a *prepared* ground. The “unripe self” — one whose mind is not yet purified and steadied by long discipline — may struggle earnestly and still see nothing, like a man straining to read by insufficient light. This is not a counsel of despair but of patience: the seeing comes when the instrument is ready (recall 6.45, “perfected over many births”). One does not fail for lack of trying, but for lack of *ripening* — and ripening takes time.

15.12 Sun, moon and fire: what is common among them?

“The light that, residing in the sun, illumines the whole world; that which is in the moon and in fire — know that light to be Mine (*tejo... māmakam*).” The common factor is *luminosity itself* — the very power of illumining. K claims that the one light behind sun, moon and fire is His; that is, all revealing, all shining, all making-manifest is a single principle, and that principle is consciousness, the Self. This is the positive counterpart of 15.6: the Absolute that no light can illumine is itself the light *in* every light. Wherever anything is *revealed*, there That shines.

15.13 “Gām”: cow or Earth?

“And entering the earth (*gām āviśya*), I support all beings by My energy (*ojasā*); and becoming the sapful *soma* [the moon / the life-sap], I nourish all plants.” Here *gām* means *the Earth*, not “the cow” — *go* has both senses, and context decides. K describes two sustaining functions: entering the earth, He holds

beings up by His force (gravity of being, we might loosely say); and becoming the nourishing sap (the lunar, watery, *soma* principle), He feeds all vegetation. So “gām” = Earth. The verse continues the theme: the same Self that is the light in all lights is also the *supporting* and *nourishing* power in all matter and life.

15.15 “I sit in the heart; I am the source of memory and knowledge.”

“I am seated in the heart of all (*sarvasya cāhaṃ hṛdi sanniviṣṭaḥ*); from Me are memory, knowledge, and their removal (*smṛtir jñānam apohanaṃ ca*). By all the Vedas am I alone the thing to be known; I am the author of the Vedānta and the knower of the Vedas.” A verse of great depth. The indwelling Self is the source not only of remembering and knowing, but also of *forgetting* (*apohana*) — for even the veiling is His power (the *yoga-māyā* of 7.25). And the second half makes the sweeping claim that the entire Veda has *Him* for its one true object: all its rituals, hymns and enquiries are, in the end, feeling their way towards the Self seated in the heart. He is at once what the scriptures seek (*vedyaḥ*), their fountainhead (*vedānta-kṛt*), and their real knower (*veda-vit*) — the beginning, object and end of all knowledge.

15.16 Two enliveners?

“There are these two Persons (*puruṣau*) in the world: the perishable (*kṣara*) and the imperishable (*akṣara*). The perishable is all beings; the imperishable is called the unchanging (*kūṭastha*).” The Gītā sets up a Sāṅkhya-style pair: *kṣara-puruṣa*, the whole realm of changing, dying beings (the field, Prakṛti’s products); and *akṣara-puruṣa*, the unchanging

witness that stands unmoved through all change (the *kūṭastha* of 6.8). But — crucially — the Gītā will not stop at *two*, as pure Sāṅkhya might.

15.17 A third enlivener? Īśvara!

“But other than these is the Supreme Person (*uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*), called the Supreme Self (*paramātmān*) — the imperishable Lord who, entering the three worlds, sustains them.” Here is the Gītā’s decisive advance beyond dualistic Sāṅkhya. Above *both* the perishable field *and* the imperishable witness stands a *third* — not a mere silent spectator (like the Sāṅkhya *puruṣa*), but the *active, sustaining Lord*, the *Īśvara* who enters and upholds the worlds. This is the reconciliation the whole book has been building: the impersonal Absolute (*akṣara*) and the personal God (*Īśvara*) are not rivals but the *same* Supreme, seen as changeless-in-itself and as loving-sustainer-of-all. The One who is beyond change is also the One who cares for the world.

15.18 Knowing this, how does one become omniscient?

“Because I transcend the perishable, and am higher even than the imperishable, therefore I am celebrated in the world and in the Veda as the *Puruṣottama* (the Supreme Person).” And (15.19): “He who, undeluded, thus knows Me as the Supreme Person, knows all (*sarva-vit*), and worships Me with his whole being (*sarva-bhāvena*).” How does knowing *one* thing confer knowing *all*? Because *Puruṣottama* is the root of both the perishable and the imperishable — the source of the field *and* of the witness. To know the root is to know, in principle, everything that springs from it (recall 7.2, “knowing which, nothing remains to be known”). And note the fruit of this

supreme knowledge is not mere information but *sarva-bhāvena bhajati* — total, whole-hearted worship. Once again, the highest knowing flowers into the fullest loving. The chapter, and the philosophy, come to rest not in a theorem but in adoration.

Om Śrī Paramātmānamah — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 16 — The Yoga by Distinguishing the Divine and Demonic Demeanours

Overview

K sets two human dispositions side by side. The *divine* (*daivī sampad*) he lists at length: fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge, charity, self-control, sacrifice, study, austerity, uprightness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, peace, compassion, gentleness, modesty, forgiveness, fortitude — the whole grammar of a good life. The *demonic* (*āsurī sampad*) he anatomises with equal precision: hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, ignorance; the refusal to know what is to be done and left undone; the nihilist creed that the world has no truth, no ground and no God; insatiable lust, hoarding by unjust means, and the swollen ego that deifies itself. The divine tends to liberation, the demonic to bondage — and K reassures Arjuna that he is born to the divine. Finally he names the three gates of the self-destroying hell — desire, anger, greed — bids the seeker abandon them, and holds up the scripture as the authority by which to steer between the two demeanours.

Questions and Solutions

16.1 Is this not too utopian? Does the ideal even exist?

The long list of divine qualities (16.1–3) can strike a modern reader as an impossible checklist — who is fearless *and* pure *and* truthful *and* free of anger, all at once? But the list is not a pass-or-fail examination; it is a *direction*, a compass-bearing. The Gītā never claims these are common; it claims they are *worth growing towards*. The “ideal” exists not as a finished specimen walking about (though the *jīvanmukta* of 12.13–19 approximates it), but as the *shape* a ripening life takes. To dismiss an ideal because no one perfectly embodies it is like dismissing “north” because no traveller ever reaches the Pole. The value of the ideal is in the *orientation* it gives, not in its attainment as a trophy.

16.1–16.3 and 16.4, 16.7–16.18 The two demeanours defined.

The *divine* set (16.1–3) runs to some twenty-six qualities and needs no gloss beyond noticing its balance — it wedds *inner* virtues (fearlessness, purity, serenity) to *outer* ones (charity, non-violence, gentleness), and *strength* (vigour, fortitude) to *softness* (modesty, compassion). The *demonic* set is defined first in miniature (16.4 — hypocrisy, arrogance, self-conceit, anger, harshness, ignorance) and then unfolded at length (16.7–18). Its essence is diagnosed at 16.7: “the demonic know not what is to be done nor what is to be refrained from” — they have lost the very compass of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. From this root failure grow their marks: they deny truth and God (16.8), do fierce deeds for the world’s ruin (16.9), are bound by insatiable hope and driven by lust and anger (16.10–12), hoard wealth by any means

(16.13), deify themselves (16.14), and perform even worship as hollow show (16.17). The contrast is not between two tribes of people but between two *tendencies* alive in every heart — for the *guṇas* of canto 14 are the soil of both.

16.5 What use is this classification?

“The divine disposition is deemed to lead to liberation, the demonic to bondage. Grieve not, Arjuna; you are born to the divine estate (*daivīm sampadam abhijāto’si*).” Here is the point of the whole taxonomy — and its warmth. It is not offered so that we may sort *others* into sheep and goats (that would itself be a demonic conceit); it is offered as a *diagnostic mirror*, so that each may recognise which tendencies bind and which free, and choose accordingly. And note the tenderness of the reassurance to Arjuna: do not despair at the terrible demonic catalogue, for *your* leaning is towards the light. The classification is a tool for self-cultivation, not for judgment of the neighbour.

16.4 Does it misfit the sequence?

The brief demonic list at 16.4 does interrupt the flowing divine list of 16.1–3, and can read as an intrusion. But it functions as a *hinge*: having completed the portrait of the divine, K turns the page with a single sharp verse before opening the long demonic portrait (16.7 ff.). The apparent “misfit” is a deliberate pivot — the bright panel closing, the dark panel opening, joined by the short verse that names the darkness for the first time.

16.8 Atheists and agnostics, beware? Is *asatya* = *mithyā*? Are they “godless”?

“They say the world is without truth, without moral ground, without a Lord (*asatyam apratiṣṭhaṃ te jagad āhur anīśvaram*), produced by mere mutual union, caused by nothing but lust.” A verse easily *misused* to condemn every non-believer, so it must be read with care. The target is *not* the honest agnostic, nor the scientist who withholds assent for want of evidence, nor the sincere doubter (the Gītā, recall, *praises* enquiry and reason — 2.49, 4.34, 18.63). The target is the specifically *nihilistic* stance that pulls the floor out from under all value: “nothing is real, nothing matters, there is no order, so let me grab what I can.” *Asatya* here is not “unproven” but “without any grounding truth”; *apraṭiṣṭha* is “without moral foundation”. The verse indicts a *self-serving* denial adopted precisely to license appetite (see 16.9–15), not a *humble* uncertainty pursued in good faith. An agnostic of upright life and open mind is far nearer the *daivī sampad* than a temple-going hypocrite (16.17). The Gītā condemns the *fruit* of the creed — the moral collapse — not the mere absence of a stated theology.

16.9 Terrorism.

“Holding fast to this view, these ruined souls of small intellect and fierce deeds rise up as enemies of the world, for its destruction (*kṣayāya jagato’hitāḥ*).” The verse describes, with chilling accuracy, the psychology of the ideologue of violence: a nihilism of value married to a certainty of method, producing beings who set themselves *against* the world. It is the ancient portrait of what a later age calls terrorism — the conviction that, since nothing is sacred, any atrocity is permitted in service of one’s craving or cause. The Gītā names the root: not this or

that grievance, but the loss of the sense that the world has truth, ground and God.

16.11–16.15 “Nothing beyond... live now, enjoy now, amass...”

K ventriloquises the demonic monologue with devastating exactness (16.11–15): bound by a hundred cords of hope, devoted to lust and anger, they amass wealth by unjust means to gratify desire — “*this* I have gained today; *this* wish I shall now fulfil; *this* wealth is mine, and more shall be; *that* foe I have slain, and others too I shall slay; I am the lord, the enjoyer, successful, mighty, happy; I am rich and high-born — who is my equal? I shall sacrifice, I shall give, I shall rejoice.” It is the interior voice of the swollen ego (the *kāma* of 3.37 at full volume), narrated so that we may catch it in ourselves. Every clause is an “I”, a “mine”, a grasping. The demonic is not primarily *cruelty*; it is *inflation* — the ego mistaking itself for the centre and measure of all things.

16.14 “I am the Almighty; I have occult powers.”

“*Īśvaro’ham, ahaṃ bhogī, siddho’ham, balavān sukhī* — I am the lord, I am the enjoyer, I am accomplished, mighty, happy.” This is the demonic ego’s ultimate blasphemy — *self-deification*. The very titles the Gītā reserves for the Supreme (*Īśvara*, the enjoyer of all sacrifices of 5.29, the possessor of *siddhis*) are here usurped by the little self for itself. It is the exact inversion of the devotee’s “*Thou art all*” (7.19): the demonic says “*I am all*.” The peril of occult powers (*siddhis*) is precisely this — they feed the delusion of self-lordship. Where the divine soul refers every power to Him, the demonic soul claims every power for itself.

16.17 Thinking oneself superior; the drama of believers and infidels.

“Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with the pride and intoxication of wealth, they perform sacrifices in name only (*nāma-yajñaiḥ*), with hypocrisy, contrary to the ordinance.” Even the demonic *worship* — but as theatre, for display and status, not from devotion. Here belongs the whole miserable drama of religious one-upmanship: the parading of piety, the sorting of the world into “the faithful” (oneself) and “the infidels” (everyone else), the sacrifice performed to be *seen* sacrificing. This is worship colonised by ego — the outer form of the *daivī* filled with the inner substance of the *āsurī*. The Gītā’s judgment is severe precisely because such hypocrisy wears the costume of the divine.

16.19 What becomes of such people?

“These cruel haters, worst of men, I hurl perpetually into demonic wombs (*āsurīṣv eva yoniṣu*) in the rounds of rebirth.” The language is stern, but the mechanism is the impersonal law of 9.25, not a vindictive God. One is reborn according to what one has *become*; the demonically-inclined, having hardened into that nature, are reborn into conditions that express and continue it — “hurled” by their own accumulated tendency (the *vāsanās* carried like scent on the wind, 15.8). It is less a sentence passed by a judge than a trajectory followed by a falling stone. And even this is not final: the very next verses offer the exit.

16.21 The three gates of hell.

“Threefold is this gate of hell, destroying the self: desire, anger and greed (*kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha*); therefore let one abandon these three.” The entire demonic estate is here distilled to *three* roots — and they are, note, the very same trio the Gītā has tracked from the start (the *kāma-krodha* of 3.37, the *lobha* of the *guṇa*-analysis). The mercy in this verse is its *economy*: one need not battle a hundred vices, only three, and behind them really one — the ego-desire that wears all three masks (3.37). Shut these three gates, and the road to the self’s ruin is closed. “Freed from these three gates of darkness,” K adds (16.22), “a man works out his own welfare and reaches the supreme goal.”

16.23–16.24 Transgressing the code of conduct.

“He who, setting aside the ordinance of scripture (*śāstra-vidhim utsṛjya*), acts under the impulse of desire (*kāma-kārataḥ*), attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal. Therefore let the scripture be your authority (*śāstram pramāṇam te*) in determining what is to be done and not done.” This is the Gītā’s answer to the antinomian temptation — the notion that, since the wise are “beyond rules” (2.46), anyone may simply follow his impulses. Not so, K insists: for one *not* yet established in the Self, unbridled desire-driven action is exactly the demonic path just described. Until the inner compass is purified, the *outer* compass of the śāstra is the safeguard. The freedom of the Avadhūta is *earned* by the discipline of the seeker; to claim the freedom without the discipline is only self-indulgence in disguise. The scripture is the trellis on which the young vine must grow before it can stand alone.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 17 — The Yoga by Distinguishing the Three Aspects of Faith

Overview

Arjuna picks up the thread left at 16.23: what of those who worship with *faith* but *without* the scriptural rule — are they sattvic, rajasic or tamasic? K answers by showing that faith itself is threefold, born of each person's nature: “as is one's faith, so is one” (*śraddhā-mayo'yaṁ puruṣaḥ*). He then runs the three *guṇas* through every department of the religious life — the object of worship, the food one prefers, the sacrifice one offers, the austerity one practises (of body, speech and mind), and the gifts one gives — showing in each how sattva, rajas and tamas colour it. He closes by unfolding the meaning of the sacred triple formula *Om Tat Sat*, the threefold designation of Brahman with which the knowers consecrate every act of sacrifice, gift and austerity — and warns that whatever is done without faith (*aśraddhayā*) is “*asat*”, of no account, here or hereafter.

Questions and Solutions

17.1 What of one who transgresses the rules yet worships with faith?

Arjuna's question is sharp and follows directly from 16.23–24: “Those who, setting aside the scriptural ordinance, yet worship

endowed with faith (*śraddhayānvitāḥ*) — what is their standing? Sattva, rajas or tamas?” It is a real and generous question: is the sincere but *irregular* worshipper simply damned along with the deliberate transgressor? K’s answer is more discerning than a flat rule — it depends on the *quality of the faith*, which is what the whole chapter now analyses.

17.2 The three aspects of faith.

“The faith of the embodied is threefold, born of their own nature (*svabhāva-jā*) — sattvic, rajasic and tamasic.” This is the master-key. Faith is not a single thing that one either has or lacks; it takes the colour of the *guṇa* dominant in the person. So the answer to 17.1 is not “faith saves all” nor “faith saves none”, but “it depends *which* faith”. Sincere faith arising from a sattvic nature is worlds apart from “faith” that is really fear, or vanity, or superstition. The chapter’s whole method is to teach the reader to *read the guṇa* behind any devotion — his own first of all.

17.3–17.13 Faith, food and sacrifice classified.

“As is a man’s faith, so verily is he (*śraddhā-mayo’yaṁ puruṣaḥ*): what his faith is, that he is” (17.3) — one of the Gītā’s most quoted lines, and a whole psychology in seven words. K then applies the threefold analysis: **the object of worship** (17.4) — the sattvic worship the *devas* (the higher, ordering powers); the rajasic, the *yakṣas* and *rakṣas* (powers of wealth and force); the tamasic, ghosts and spirits (the dark and confused). **Food** (17.8–10) — the sattvic prefer foods that promote life, strength, health, cheer — savoury, wholesome, nourishing; the rajasic crave the bitter, sour, salty, burning-hot, harsh, which breed pain and

disease; the tamasic take the stale, tasteless, putrid, left-over and impure. **Sacrifice** (17.11–13) — the sattvic offer as duty, without desire for fruit, according to the ordinance; the rajasic offer for show and with an eye to reward; the tamasic offer without faith, without gifts, without sacred word or rule. Note how the analysis reaches even to the *plate*: the Gītā takes seriously that what we eat shapes the mind that worships (recall “what we eat, we become”, 3.12). Spirituality here is not walled off from diet, motive and manner; the *guṇa* pervades the whole.

17.14–17.16 The three domains of austerity.

Tapas is analysed by *domain* before it is analysed by *guṇa*. **Bodily** austerity (17.14): worship of the gods, the twice-born, teachers and the wise; purity, uprightness, celibacy, non-violence. **Austerity of speech** (17.15): words that cause no distress, that are true, pleasant and beneficial, together with the practice of recitation. **Mental** austerity (17.16): serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-restraint, purity of disposition. This is a beautifully complete map — discipline of *deed*, *word* and *thought*. And each domain is then itself threefold (17.17–19): austerity done with faith and no craving for fruit is sattvic; done for honour, respect and display, unstable, is rajasic; done with self-torture, or in order to harm another, is tamasic. The last is a pointed warning — austerity is not sanctified by mere severity; penance performed to injure oneself or others is the darkest kind, not the highest.

17.23 The deeper meaning of “Om Tat Sat”.

“*Om Tat Sat* — this is declared the threefold designation of Brahman (*trividhā brahmaṇaḥ niḥśabdaḥ*)...” K unfolds the

sacred formula as a consecrating device (17.23–27). **Om** — the primal syllable — is uttered at the outset of every act of sacrifice, gift and austerity by the knowers of Brahman, aligning the act with the Absolute at its source. **Tat** (“That”) — pointing beyond the finite — names the spirit in which acts of sacrifice, austerity and gift are performed *without desire for fruit*, by those who seek liberation. **Sat** (“the Real / the Good”) — is used for existence, for goodness, and for every praiseworthy action; it also marks steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity and gift, and any action done *for His sake*. And the counterpoint, the great warning of the chapter (17.28): “Whatever is offered, given or done, and whatever austerity is performed, *without faith*, is called *Asat* (*asad ity ucyate*) — it is nothing, here or hereafter.” So the whole chapter returns to its beginning: not the outer correctness of the rite but the *faith* and *guṇa* animating it decide its worth. An act soaked in sattvic faith and consecrated by *Om Tat Sat* is real and fruitful; the most elaborate rite performed faithlessly is *asat* — a hollow shell. This directly answers Arjuna’s opening question (17.1): the faithful but irregular worshipper is judged not by his lapse from rule but by the *guṇa* of his faith — and sattvic faith, even when technically irregular, is not lost.

Om Śrī Paramātmāne Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Canto 18 — The Yoga of Liberation, by Ultimate Renunciation

Overview

The longest chapter gathers the whole Song into a final synthesis. Arjuna asks the difference between *sannyāsa* (renunciation) and *tyāga* (relinquishment); K answers that true renunciation is not the abandonment of action but of the *desire for its fruit* — and that obligatory action should never be given up, only performed without attachment. He runs the three *guṇas* one last time through renunciation, knowledge, action, agent, intellect, firmness and happiness — a complete psychology of the moral life. He restates *svadharma*: better one's own duty imperfectly done than another's done well, and shows how duty done as worship of Him, from whom all beings spring, becomes a path to perfection. Then, gathering all the yogas, he describes the ascent to Brahman and the supreme devotion that flowers from it — by which one knows Him, enters Him, and by His grace reaches the eternal abode. He lays the whole teaching bare and grants Arjuna full freedom to choose — “reflect, and do as you wish” — before, out of love, speaking his two final promises: *fix your mind on Me*, and *abandon all dharmas, take refuge in Me alone; I shall free you from all sins*. He names who is fit to receive this teaching, asks Arjuna whether his delusion is gone, and hears the answer that ends all questioning: “My delusion is destroyed; I have regained memory; I shall do Your word.” Sañjaya closes with a benediction: wherever are Kṛṣṇa

the Lord of Yoga and Arjuna the archer, there are fortune, victory, welfare and abiding righteousness.

Questions and Solutions

18.1 The underlying principle of renunciation.

Arjuna's final question: "I wish to know the truth of *sannyāsa* and of *tyāga*, distinctly (*prthak*).” Two words, both meaning “renunciation” — is there a difference? The seemingly technical query is the perfect door into the summary, for the entire Gītā turns on rightly understanding what is to be renounced (recall the false renunciation of 3.4, 5.2, 6.2). The whole book has been, in a sense, the answer to this one question; here it is made explicit.

18.2 The many opinions.

“The sages understand *sannyāsa* to be the giving up of desire-prompted actions; the wise call *tyāga* the relinquishing of the fruits of *all* actions.” K reports the range of views and then, characteristically, cuts through them. The two words are often used interchangeably, but the essential teaching is one: what is renounced is never *action itself* (which is impossible for the embodied), but the *desire* driving it and the *fruit* clung to. This is the same *niṣkāma karma* taught since canto 2, now given its final name.

18.7 The three aspects of renunciation.

“The giving up of obligatory action (*niyata karma*) is not proper; to abandon it from delusion is declared *tāmasic*.” The threefold analysis: *tāmasic* renunciation abandons duty out of sheer

delusion; *rajasic* renunciation drops an action merely because it is troublesome or painful, from fear of bodily hardship — and gains nothing by it (18.8); *sattvic* renunciation performs the obligatory action *while renouncing attachment and fruit* (18.9). This is the crux: the highest renunciation is *not* the dropping of the deed but the dropping of the *grasping* — one keeps the action and renounces only the “for me”. True *tyāga* is inward, not outward.

18.11 One cannot give up all action; the body demands it.

“For the embodied cannot give up actions entirely (*na hi deha-bhṛtā śakyam tyaktuṃ karmāṇy aśeṣataḥ*); but he who relinquishes the fruit of action, *he* is called the true renouncer (*tyāgī*).” The verse forecloses the escapist misreading once and for all (as at 3.8, 6.24). So long as one has a body, one acts — one breathes, eats, moves. Since total inaction is a fiction, “renunciation” *must* mean renunciation of *fruit*, not of *action*. The genuine *sannyāsin* may be busier than anyone (like Janaka, 3.20); what marks him is the empty space where the desire-for-result used to be.

18.13 Are the five causes of action significant?

“Learn from Me the five causes for the accomplishment of all action, declared in the Sāṅkhya doctrine (18.13–14): the seat (the body, *adhiṣṭhāna*), the doer (*kartā*), the various instruments (*karana*), the manifold efforts (*ceṣṭā*), and, fifth, the divine (*daivam* — providence, the sum of past conditioning).” Their significance is profound: no action is the achievement of the ego alone. Five factors converge in every deed, of which the “doer” is but one — and even that “doer” is Prakṛti’s instrument (13.20).

Therefore (18.16): “he who, of untrained understanding, sees the pure Self alone as the doer, sees not truly.” To claim sole authorship of one’s acts is a factual error, not merely a spiritual fault. This is the doer-delusion of 3.27 given its final, analytic refutation: the ego is one contributing cause among five, not the lone author it imagines itself to be.

18.17 The “supreme sinless killing”?

“He whose disposition is free of egoism (*ahañkāra*), whose intellect is untainted — though he slay these people, he slays not, nor is he bound (*hatvāpi... na hanti na nibadhyate*).” This is among the most easily *abused* verses in the Gītā, and must be read with the utmost care. It is emphatically *not* a licence to kill with a clear conscience — as if one could murder freely by merely disowning the ego. Read in its place, it is the culmination of the argument that binds the whole book: what binds a soul is not the outer act but the *inner state* of egoism and attachment (18.13–16 just established that the “doer” is not the true agent). Arjuna’s dilemma was *this*: a warrior’s ordained duty, performed on the field of a just war he did not seek. The verse tells him that duty discharged without egoism, without hatred, without desire — as Time’s instrument (11.33), not as a self-willed slayer — does not stain the doer. The condition is everything and is nearly impossible to fake: *no* *ahañkāra*, *no* taint of intellect. Anyone who invokes this verse to excuse ordinary killing has, by the very act of self-justification, revealed the ego that disqualifies him from it. It describes the inner freedom of a *jīvanmukta* doing his hard duty, not a loophole for the guilty.

18.20–18.22 Threefold knowledge: oneness, distinction, irrationality.

“That knowledge by which one sees the one imperishable Being in all beings, undivided in the divided, is *sattvic* (18.20). That which sees only the manifold, distinct existences in the various beings, is *rajasic* (18.21). And that which clings, irrationally and without grasp of truth, to a single effect as though it were the whole, is *tamasic* (18.22).” As you rightly note: *oneness-in-diversity* is the *sattvic* knowing (the vision of 13.16, 13.27); *distinction-only* — seeing the many and missing the One — is *rajasic*; and *not using the intellect at all*, latching onto one narrow thing as if it were everything, is *tamasic*. This is the Gītā’s epistemology in miniature: the *quality of one’s seeing* is itself graded by the *guṇas*, and only the *sattvic* sight sees the unity that liberates.

18.29–18.40 Intellect, firmness and happiness, each threefold.

K completes the great analysis by running *buddhi* (intellect/judgment), *dhṛti* (firmness/resolve) and *sukha* (happiness) through the three strands. **Intellect** (18.30–32): *sattvic* buddhi knows rightly what to do and not do, what to fear and not fear, bondage and liberation; *rajasic* buddhi confuses right and wrong, *dharma* and *adharma*; *tamasic* buddhi, wrapped in darkness, takes *adharma* to be *dharma* and sees everything upside-down. **Firmness** (18.33–35): *sattvic* dhṛti is the unwavering steadiness that holds mind, breath and senses in Yoga; *rajasic* dhṛti clings, with attachment, to duty, pleasure and wealth, craving their fruit; *tamasic* dhṛti is the stubbornness

that will not let go of sleep, fear, grief, despair and conceit. **Happiness** (18.36–39): *sattvic* sukha is “like poison at first and nectar in the end”, born of the serenity of Self-knowledge — hard at the outset, blissful at maturity; *rajasic* sukha is “nectar at first, poison in the end”, born of the contact of sense and object; *tamasic* sukha, deluding from beginning to end, springs from sleep, sloth and heedlessness. This last triad is a jewel of practical wisdom: the *worthwhile* joys cost effort up front and reward later (the discipline of 6.16); the *cheap* joys reward instantly and cost dearly after; the *worthless* ones are pleasant only to a dulled mind. By this test alone one can sort one’s own pleasures.

18.41 Varṇa by tendency and occupation.

“The duties of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras are distributed according to the *guṇas* born of their own nature (*guṇaiḥ svabhāva-prabhavaiḥ*).” Once more (as at 4.13, 2.31) the Gītā grounds *varṇa* in *svabhāva* — innate temperament and aptitude — not in birth. The following verses (18.42–44) describe each by its *qualities*: the Brāhmaṇa by serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, knowledge; the Kṣatriya by valour, vigour, steadiness, generosity, leadership; the Vaiśya by the work of cultivation, cattle and trade; the Śūdra by service. Read honestly, this is a taxonomy of *functions matched to natures*, a division of labour keyed to psychology — not the hereditary, hierarchical caste-cage that later ages made of it.

18.45 Svakarma-nirata: why “nirata”? Is it *asakta*?

“Devoted to (delighting in) his own duty (*sve sve karmany abhirataḥ*), a man attains perfection.” A fair puzzle: how can

one be *nirata* / *abhirata* — “delighting in, intent upon” — one’s work, and yet *asakta*, unattached? Are these not opposites? The resolution is subtle and important. The delight sanctioned here is delight in the *doing well* — in the wholehearted, skilful, offered performance of one’s duty — *not* attachment to its *fruit*. One may pour oneself joyfully into the *action* (that is *nirata*) while renouncing all grasping at the *result* (that is *asakta*). Indeed the two go together: only the mind freed from anxiety about outcomes is *free enough* to delight in the work itself. The craftsman lost happily in his craft, indifferent to the applause, is both *abhirata* and *asakta*. So there is no contradiction: love the labour, release the reward. And 18.46 completes it — this “delight” is really worship: “by worshipping, through his own duty, Him from whom all beings spring, a man attains perfection.” Work done as offering is the delight.

18.47 Svadharma reiterated: but should we merely surrender to our tendencies?

“Better is one’s own duty, though imperfect, than another’s duty well performed (*śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt*)” — the great refrain, echoing 3.35. But your question is exactly the right one: does this counsel a *fatalistic surrender* to whatever tendencies one happens to have? No — and the very next line guards against it: “one incurs no sin doing the duty ordained by one’s own nature (*svabhāva-niyataṁ karma*)” (18.47), and “one should not abandon the work suited to one’s nature, though it be attended with fault” (18.48). The point is not “indulge every impulse” — that is the demonic *kāma-kārataḥ* of 16.23, expressly condemned. The point is *authenticity of vocation*: work *aligned* with one’s true nature

(svabhāva), done as duty and offering, ripens one; work borrowed from another's nature, however outwardly impressive, breeds inner friction and eventual grief. *Svabhāva* here means one's deep constitution, discerned and disciplined — not one's passing cravings, indulged. The verse asks for fidelity to one's genuine calling, not licence for one's appetites.

18.49–18.57 Can the whole ladder of Sādhana be summarised?

Yes — and K does so here, gathering the entire path into one sweeping passage. **First** (18.49): with intellect unattached everywhere, self conquered, desire gone, one reaches by renunciation the supreme perfection of *actionlessness* (*naiṣkarmya-siddhi*) — freedom *within* action. **Then** (18.50–53) he sketches the ascent to *Brahman*: endowed with a pure intellect, restraining the self with firmness, turning from sense-objects, casting off attraction and aversion; resorting to solitude, eating lightly, controlling speech, body and mind; ever in meditation and dispassion; abandoning egoism, force, arrogance, desire, anger and possessiveness, peaceful and free of “mine” — such a one is fit for becoming Brahman (*brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*). **Then** (18.54) the flowering: “*brahma-bhūtaḥ* — become Brahman, serene in the Self, he neither grieves nor craves; the same to all beings, he attains supreme devotion to Me (*mad-bhaktiṃ labhate parām*).” **Then** (18.55) the fruit of that devotion: “by devotion he knows Me truly, what and who I am; and having known Me in truth, he *enters* into Me forthwith.” **Finally** (18.56–57) the seal: doing all actions, ever taking refuge in Me, by My grace he reaches the eternal, imperishable abode; therefore surrender every action to Me in thought, and, fixed in

buddhi-yoga, be ever mindful of Me. Read as a whole, this is the entire Gītā compressed into one ascent: *karma* (offered action) → *jñāna* (discrimination and the rise to Brahman) → *bhakti* (the supreme devotion that crowns knowledge) → *entering* Him by grace. Notice the astonishing sequence at 18.54: becoming Brahman does not *end* in a cold absolute but *blossoms into love* — the highest knowledge yields the highest devotion. Jñāna and bhakti, argued as one throughout the book (6.30, 7.18), here embrace at the summit.

18.59 The falsity of “I will not fight.”

“If, filled with egoism, you think, ‘I will not fight,’ vain is this resolve of yours; Nature will compel you (*mithyaiṣa vyavasāyas te prakṛtis tvām niyokṣyati*).” K returns Arjuna to the concrete choice with which the Song began. The refusal to fight, Arjuna now must see, is *not* the free act of a renouncer but the compelled act of an ego in the grip of delusion — and Prakṛti, his own warrior-nature (18.60), will drag him to the deed anyway, against his stated will. The only real freedom is not *whether* to act (that is not open to the embodied) but *how* — with ego and bondage, or without. “That which you wish not to do from delusion, you will do helplessly, bound by your own nature.”

18.61 Īśvara returns.

“The Lord dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna, whirling them all by His Māyā as though mounted on a machine (*yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*).” Near the end, the personal Lord of canto 15 reappears with a striking image: God seated in every heart, turning all creatures on the wheel of Prakṛti like figures

on a revolving contrivance. It sounds, at first, like fatalism — are we mere puppets? But the very next verse gives the twist that makes it liberation, not fatalism.

18.62 (The turn.)

“Take refuge in Him alone, with all your being, Arjuna; by His grace you shall attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.” Here is the release from the “machine” of 18.61. Yes, the unsundered soul is whirled helplessly by Māyā — but the soul that *takes refuge* in the Lord who works the wheel steps, by that very surrender, off the mechanical round and into grace. Surrender is not one more turn of the gear; it is the exit from the gearing altogether. This is the answer to the apparent fatalism: bound by Nature if you cling to the ego, freed by grace if you take refuge.

18.63 The facts laid bare; now *you* choose.

“Thus has this knowledge, more secret than all secrets (*guhyād guhyataram*), been declared to you by Me; reflect on it fully (*vimṛśya etad aśeṣeṇa*), and then do as you wish (*yathecchasi tathā kuru*).” One of the noblest verses in all scripture. Having poured out the highest teaching, K does *not* command obedience; he hands Arjuna his freedom. “Ponder it entirely — and then act as *you* choose.” The Gītā respects the seeker’s autonomy absolutely: truth is offered, never imposed; the disciple is a free reasoner (2.49, 4.34), not a slave. This is why the demand for critical reflection (*vimṛśya*) precedes the grant of freedom — real choice requires real understanding first. God argues, illumines, and then *steps back*.

18.65–18.66 The two final promises.

Yet — having granted freedom — love cannot help but speak once more, and K gives his two supreme assurances. **18.65:** “Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow to Me; you shall come to Me — this I promise you truly, for you are dear to Me (*priyo’si me*).” The whole path of canto 9.34 restated as a personal pledge, sealed with tenderness — *you are dear to Me*. **18.66, the *carama-śloka*, the “final verse”:** “Abandoning all *dharma*s, take refuge in Me alone (*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja*); I shall liberate you from all sins — grieve not (*ahaṃ tvā sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ*).” This is the Gītā’s ultimate word, the peak the whole ascent has been climbing towards. “Abandoning all *dharma*s” does not mean casting off morality (that would be the demonic 16.23); it means letting go, at the last, even of one’s *reliance on one’s own righteous efforts* — the final, subtlest attachment, the ego’s clutch on its own virtue — and casting oneself wholly on the Divine. It is the total surrender (*prapatti*) beyond even the doing of good: not “I will save myself by my *dharma*,” but “I give up even that, and take refuge in Thee alone.” And the answer is the sweetest promise in the text — *I shall free you from all sins; grieve not*. Here *karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti* reach their common summit in a single act of self-giving, met by grace.

18.67–18.71 Who is fit to receive this?

“This is never to be spoken by you to one without austerity, nor to one without devotion, nor to one who does not wish to hear, nor to one who cavils at Me (*mām abhyasūyati*)” (18.67). The teaching is guarded not by secrecy for its own sake but by *fitness*

— it cannot be *received* by the carping, the faithless or the unwilling (recall 9.1, “to you who do not cavil”). But to the *fit* it must be *given* freely: “he who, with supreme devotion to Me, teaches this deepest secret to My devotees, shall doubtless come to Me; none among men does dearer service to Me than he” (18.68–69). And the rewards of engaging it are graded generously (18.70–71): he who *studies* this dialogue worships Him by the “sacrifice of knowledge” (*jñāna-yajña*); and even he who merely *hears* it with faith and without cavil is freed, and attains the auspicious worlds of the righteous. Thus the teaching is at once *protected* from the scoffer and *offered* to everyone sincere — even the humble listener is not left out.

18.72 Kṛṣṇa asks, for a change; and Arjuna answers.

The roles reverse at last. Throughout the Song Arjuna questioned and K answered; now K asks: “Has this been heard by you, Arjuna, with a concentrated mind? Has your delusion, born of ignorance, been destroyed (*kaccid ajñāna-sammohaḥ praṇaṣṭaḥ*)?” And Arjuna’s reply (18.73) is the answer that ends all questioning: “*Naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtir labdhā* — my delusion is destroyed; I have regained my memory (my true understanding) by Your grace; I stand firm, my doubts gone; *I shall do Your word* (*kariṣye vacanaṃ tava*).” The transformation traced in the Introduction is complete. The despair of canto 1 has become clarity; the paralysing questions have been answered from within; the memory of who he truly is has returned. He asks nothing more — not because he has been silenced, but because he has been *satisfied*. And note the fruit is not passivity but readiness: “I shall do Your word” — wisdom flowering, at last, into action.

18.74–18.78 The narration ends; and the benediction.

Saṅjaya, who has relayed the whole dialogue to the blind king, closes with his own wonder (18.74–77): recalling this marvellous, hair-raising conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, he rejoices again and again; and remembering the Lord’s most wondrous Form, he is astonished beyond measure. And then the final verse of the Gītā (18.78): “Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Yoga, and wherever there is Arjuna, the archer (*dhanur-dhara*) — there are fortune, victory, welfare and abiding morality (*śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītiḥ*); such is my conviction.” The Song ends not on abstraction but on a blessing, and on a *pairing*. The two together — the divine wisdom (Kṛṣṇa) and the willing, disciplined human effort (Arjuna, bow in hand) — are the sure formula for all good. Grace *and* endeavour; the Lord of Yoga *and* the ready archer; God’s word *and* the human “I shall do it.” Where these two meet, Saṅjaya declares, prosperity, victory, well-being and unshakeable righteousness are certain. It is the perfect close: the whole teaching gathered into the image of divinity and humanity, joined in a single chariot, facing the field of life together.

Om Śrī Paramātmānam Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Om Śrī Paramātmānam Namaḥ — Salutations to the Glorious Ultimate Self

Conclusion

The BG recognises both the limitations and the potential of the human mind. She knows its pitfalls exactly. She knows the pressing, unanswered questions that rise in it. She knows how to meet them and to guide them as gently as she can. She seeks life more integrally, and weighs practical approaches together with the principles working behind the scenes. She knows how to play her part in this drama, and can contribute, in her way, to our lives. Like a mother, she first sees to it that her children are well fed with joy and are glad before they set out on the journey to the One Truth. For a blissful intellect is steadier, lighter, sharper and swifter than one weighed down by sorrow. Only then can it set sail to explore.

Having been born a human, what is this creature searching for so hard? Where does it search? Has it ever succeeded? How is this life to be led? Is there a purpose at all? What means can maximise its happiness?

What is the mind? Does this universe even exist? Am I existent or extinct? Where did I come from? What are past, present and future? What am I really perceiving through my senses? What am I interacting with — and is it real? What is “real” in the first place? What is life? What is sentient and what is not? Am I conscious? What is consciousness? How did all this vast matter, energy and thought come to be? Is anyone or anything in control of it all? Is there something beyond it? What is death — will I die? Who am I? What are these dreams I see? What is the unconscious, the sub-conscious? What is happening to me?

Who are these people around me — so like me, many of them familiar? Do I know them at all? What should I do with them? Should I engage, or remain apart? I feel hunger, thirst, desire, anger, love, joy, sorrow. What are these? Should I give in to them? What will this whole lifespan be? Shall I be reborn? Am I an accident? Is what the books tell me true — should I believe them?

What is belief? What is proof? What is convincing? What is logic? What are social, ethical and legal norms — why should I abide by them? Does it come from fear? What is fear? Why should I live, exist, or even wish to? What is pain — why is it unpleasant, and why do I flee it? What is experience? What is memory? Is there a “now”? Was there nothing? What do “this” and “that” mean? What is distance, an object, mass, space? Do I even need to know all this? Why should I know anything at all?

The list runs on in the head. Not all of the questions are answerable — and the very fact that some are unanswerable is not yet well settled in the mind. Many hints as to what may be explored are, of course, available in the BG; and above all it gives practical solutions to the “why” and the “how.” These are by no means to be used as a questionnaire, or a checklist with which to test others. They are to be explored by oneself, to oneself, within oneself; used casually, they lose their penetrating force. Even with all our advances, these questions remain unanswered to this day — and that itself reveals their nature. They are the most fundamental questions, seeking out the truth, and they lie very close to one’s own core of being. Truly it is Adhyātma — “of the Self.”

Closing Remarks

What is there at the end of all this juggling? Nothing — literally and figuratively. If you leave with absolutely nothing, not even in the mind, then you have raised the value of this text far beyond my estimate. What is the “take-away”? Nothing. Do not “take away” anything — include everything. This was only another analysis of the BG, articulating the questions some may have on a deeper examination of it. Seekers may benefit by dissolving such doubts as arise in the mind. Enthusiasts and beginners may glide over the overviews to catch the “keywords” of each canto. Critics can always benefit from any study, and there is ample material here for them too. Devotees may find a new-found respect for their Beloved. It may not be a comfortable read for the fanatic or the blind believer, or the hater — yet even a little sense of uncertainty in a fixed opinion may soften them, if only a little; not necessarily shaking their beliefs, but perhaps bringing some clarity to their lives. People of a scientific, logical or philosophical bent — an open mind, that is — may build on these constructions or, if they choose, demolish them and start afresh. They may take some of this original textual material and search or research deeper. The original text is meant for humans, but its message is universal. This analysis has been just that: one step taken towards the Truth. May the readers, and the non-readers, reach the Ultimate Joy they are all in pursuit of. Hariḥ Om. Om Tat Sat.

Śrī Guru-Śaṅkara-arpaṇam astu — may this be an offering at the feet of the Guru and of Śaṅkara.

References

The Bhagavad Gītā, critical text and commentary of Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (Advaita Bhāṣya), various editions, including the Gītā Press, Gorakhpur edition.

Jñāneśvara (Jñānadeva), Jñāneśvarī — the Marāṭhī verse commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, thirteenth century.

Swami Chinmayānanda, commentaries and discourses on the Bhagavad Gītā, Chinmaya Mission.

Swami Tejomayānanda, commentaries and discourses on the Bhagavad Gītā, Chinmaya Mission — in particular the exposition of the three-fold veil of Prakṛti referenced at 3.28.

The Principal Upaniṣads, in particular the Kaṭha, Śvetāśvatara, Muṇḍaka, Praśna and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads.

The Brahma-sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa, referenced at 13.4.

The Ṛgveda, in particular the Nāsadiya Sūkta (10.129) and the Puruṣa-Sūkta.

The Aṣṭāvakra Gītā and the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, for the figure of Janaka.

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, the Eka-ślokī, referenced at 3.42.

The Mahābhārata, for the narrative setting.

This list gathers the sources drawn upon or referred to in the body of the text; page and edition details may be added as the author finalises the manuscript for publication.

Glossary

Adhibhūta — the perishable order of existence; all that comes to be and passes away (8.2).

Adhidaiva — the divine order; the presiding cosmic power behind the gods and natural forces (8.2).

Adhiyajña — the Lord of sacrifice; Kṛṣṇa himself, embodied, as the recipient of every offering (8.2).

Adhyātma — one's own essential nature; the Self within the individual; the whole domain of self-inquiry (8.2).

Ahaṁkāra — egoism; the “I-doer”; the sense of separate, personal agency (3.27, 18.17).

Ākāśa — space or ether; used as a simile for the untainted, all-pervading Self (13.32).

Akṣara — the Imperishable; Kṛṣṇa's supreme, unmanifest abode beyond cosmic dissolution (8.20–21).

Ananya (bhakti) — undivided, single-pointed devotion, with no other object (11.54, 12.6).

Ātman — the Self; used at three levels — the ordinary self, the individual soul, and the one Self identical with Brahman (5.7).

Avadhūta — one who has cast off all worldly convention, having realised the Self (2.46, 3.33).

Bhakti — devotion; love directed to the Divine (Cantos 9, 12).

Bhāva — feeling, disposition; devotional feeling as opposed to dry intellectual assent (10.8).

Brahman — the Absolute; the one, non-dual Reality underlying all appearance.

Brahma-bhūta — “having become Brahman”; the state of one who has realised identity with the Absolute (5.24, 18.54).

Buddhi — the intellect; the discriminating, decision-making faculty.

Daivī / Āsurī sampad — the divine and demonic endowments of character (Canto 16).

Dharma — duty, law, righteousness; the order that sustains both the individual and the cosmos.

Dhṛti — firmness, resolve; analysed by the three guṇas at 18.33–35.

Guṇa — the three strands of Prakṛti — sattva, rajas and tamas — constituting all of Nature (Canto 14).

Īśvara — the Lord; the Supreme as sovereign, indwelling ruler (15.17, 18.61).

Jīva / Jīvātman — the individual soul; an eternal fragment of the Supreme Self (15.7).

Jñāna / Vijñāna — knowledge and its realisation; the truth known versus the truth experienced (6.8, 7.2).

Jñāna-cakṣus — the eye of knowledge; the faculty of discrimination (13.34, 15.10).

Kāla — Time; Kṛṣṇa’s name as the destroyer of worlds (11.32).

Kāma — desire; the primal seed of disturbance; with anger and greed, a gate of hell (3.37, 16.21).

Karma — action; also the law of cause and effect binding action to its fruit across lifetimes.

Karma-yoga — the discipline of action performed without attachment to its fruit.

Kṣetra / Kṣetrajña — the field (body, senses, mind) and the knower of the field (the witness) (Canto 13).

Kūṭastha — standing on the anvil; the unmoving witness-base (6.8, 15.16).

Loka-saṅgraha — the welfare of the world; why the wise continue to act (3.20).

Māyā — the Lord's power of appearance, by which the one Reality appears as the manifold world (7.14).

Mokṣa — liberation; release from the cycle of birth and death.

Nirguṇa — without attribute; the Absolute beyond any quality the mind can grasp (13.12).

Niṣkāma karma — action performed without desire for its fruit; the BG's central practical teaching.

Prakṛti — Nature; the whole field of the manifest, constituted of the three guṇas (13.19–20).

Prāṇa / Apāna — the upward and downward breaths, balanced in yogic practice (5.27, 8.10).

Puruṣa — the Person or Spirit; used for the individual witness-self and, as Puruṣottama, for the Supreme (Canto 15).

Sādhaka / Sādhanā — the spiritual practitioner and spiritual practice.

Samatva / Samatā — evenness of mind; equanimity; the single mark of the realised state (2.48, 6.32, 14.24).

Saṃsāra — the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, driven by karma and the guṇas.

Sannyāsa — renunciation; properly the giving up of desire-prompted action (18.1–18.9).

Śraddhā — faith; threefold according to the guṇas (Canto 17).

Sthitaprajñā — one of steady wisdom (2.54–72).

Svabhāva — one's own inherent nature or temperament (18.41–47).

Svadharmā — one's own duty, arising from svabhāva (3.35, 18.47).

Tapas — austerity; analysed by domain and by guṇa in Canto 17.

Tyāga — relinquishment of the fruit of action, distinguished from sannyāsa at 18.2.

Udāsīna — seated apart, indifferent; the posture of the disinterested witness (6.8, 14.23).

Vāsanā — a subtle tendency carried from one life to the next, as scent on the wind (15.8).

Vibhūti — glory; manifestation of divine splendour (Canto 10).

Viśvarūpa — the Universal Form; the cosmic vision granted to Arjuna (Canto 11).

Yajña — sacrifice; offering in its many outer and inner forms (Cantos 3–4, 17).

Yoga — union; the yoking of the individual to the Self, and the disciplined paths to it.

Yogakṣema — provision and security promised to the single-hearted devotee (9.22).

Yogārūḍha — one established in Yoga; one who has climbed onto the summit (6.4).

A Note on Transliteration

Sanskrit words have been rendered in the standard IAST scheme, so that long vowels (ā, ī, ū), the retroflex consonants (ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ), the sibilants (ś, ṣ), and the nasals and aspirates (ṛ, ṅ, ṁ/ṁ, ḥ) may be read with their correct sounds. Thus Kṛṣṇa, Śaṅkara, Bhīṣma, Puruṣa, Kṣatriya and so on. Correct pronunciation, as noted in the Introduction, is itself part of the practice.

Keywords in the Cantos

1. The Yoga Triggered by Arjuna's Depression

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Saṅjaya, Arjuna, Duryodhana, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Mādhava; warriors on both sides, conches, kinsmen;

depression, despair, agony, the paralysis of fear, the rationale for not fighting, the sins of the clan.

2. The Concise, Well-Defined Yoga

Surrender, Śrī Kṛṣṇa; Ātman, Dehin, the indestructible, manifest and unmanifest; Svadharma, Kṣatriya, the win-win, the door of heaven; Dharma, intellect, the Vedas, heavenly pleasures; the psychological fall of the sādḥaka, desire, Samatva, Yoga, equanimity; Samādhi, Sthitaprajña, sense-control, Peace, the ocean, the Brāhmī state.

3. The Yoga Attained by Action

Confusion, Buddhi versus Karman, duty, non-attachment; Janaka, Prajāpati, Yajña, Sādhana, deva, the cycle of karma, the thief, sharing; lokasaṅgraha, ego, faith, ad hominem, conversions; rage, lust, the envelope, the domain, the beyond-the-intellect.

4. The Yoga by Knowledge

Paramparā, Vivasvān, Manu, Ikṣvāku, the lost teaching; previous births, ātma-māyā; varṇa by guṇa and karma; inaction-in-action; Brahmārpaṇam; the many yajñas, jñāna-yajña; the sword of Knowledge, the doubting soul.

5. The Yoga by Renouncing Action

Sāṅkhya and Yoga reconciled; three senses of ātman; ātma-suddhi, śubha-vāsanā; the Avadhūta's "I do nothing"; the

Paṇḍita, sama-darśana; becoming Brahman, brahma-nirvāṇa; prāṇa and apāna; the friend of all beings.

6. The Yoga by Meditation on the Self

Sannyāsin and Yogin equated; karma and śama; Yogārūḍha; the self as friend and enemy; jñāna and vijñāna, kūṭastha, udāsīna; the layered seat; the mean between extremes; the unflickering lamp; seeing the Self by the self; samatvam; through many lives; the yogi above the karmin, the devotee above the yogi.

7. The Yoga by Knowledge and Experience

Jñāna with vijñāna; aparā and parā prakṛti; the thread of gems; taste in water, light in the sun, Om; desire not opposed to Dharma; Māyā and the three guṇas; the four devotees, the jñānī as dearest; Vāsudeva is all; faith made firm in every form; the veil of yoga-māyā.

8. The Yoga of the Immutable Brahman

Brahman, adhyātma, karma, adhibhūta, adhidaiva, adhiyajña defined; the thought at death; the technique of dying; no rebirth; the day and night of Brahmā; the Akṣara; the two paths, bright and dark; beyond all merit.

9. The Royal Wisdom and Royal Secret

Immanence and transcendence, the divine yoga; the non-doer creator; fools who despise the human form; worship as the One, the many, the universal form; the ritualist's ceiling; yoga-kṣema;

the leaf, the flower, the fruit, the water; open to every birth and station; total surrender.

10. The Yoga of Glory

Loka-Maheśvara; the origin of all, bhāva; buddhi-yoga as grace; the fellowship of devotees; the lamp lit within; the meditator's question; the vibhūti sampler; the Self in the heart; Viṣṇu, the sun, Sāma, Meru, Ganges, Om, āsvattha; a single fragment upholding the universe.

11. The Yoga of the Vision of the Universal Form

The divine eye; the Viśvarūpa, a thousand suns; wonder turning to terror; warriors as moths; "I am Time"; "be the mere instrument"; Arjuna's guilt; the plea for the gentle form; grace alone; the culminating verse, entering Him.

12. The Yoga by Devotion

Form versus the Formless; the toil of the unmanifest seeker; ananya-yoga; the swift deliverer; the ladder of sādhanā; the portrait of the devotee dear to the Lord; samatva; the nectar-law of righteousness.

13. The Yoga by Distinguishing the Knower and the Known

The field and its knower; nirguṇa Brahman; Prakṛti as doer, Puruṣa as experiencer; the dance of attachment; the witness as Paramātmān; seeing by meditation, discrimination, action or

faith; equal vision; the analogy of space and sun; the eye of knowledge.

14. The Yoga by Distinguishing the Three Aspects

The promise of stepping outside creation; mahat; all three guṇas bind; signs, proportion and fruits of each; the guṇātīta; samatā once more; devotion as the way across; the abode of Brahman.

15. The Yoga of the Supreme Person

The inverted aśvattha; the axe of non-attachment; the self-luminous abode; the eternal jīva; the eye of knowledge; the light in sun, moon and fire; seated in the heart; the two Puruṣas and the third, Puruṣottama; knowing the root, knowing all.

16. The Yoga of the Divine and Demonic Natures

The daivī and āsurī sampad; the ideal as compass; the lost sense of right and wrong; self-deification; the three gates of hell; scripture as the trellis.

17. The Yoga of the Three Kinds of Faith

“As is a man’s faith, so is he”; objects of worship, food, sacrifice, austerity, charity, each threefold; Om Tat Sat; action without faith is Asat.

18. The Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation

Sannyāsa and tyāga; the five causes of action; threefold knowledge, intellect, firmness, happiness; svadharma by nature; delight without attachment; “ponder and choose”; the two final

promises; the carama-śloka; “my delusion is destroyed”; the benediction of Sañjaya.

Acknowledgements

This study stands on the shoulders of the long paramparā of teachers, seen and unseen, through whom this understanding of the Gītā has been received rather than invented — the great ācāryas, above all Śrī Ādi Śaṅkarācārya; the Guru-lineage from which whatever is sound in these pages descends, and to which whatever is unsound in them should not be attributed. Gratitude is due also to the modern teachers — Swami Chinmayānanda and Swami Tejomayānanda of the Chinmaya Mission foremost among them — whose clarity made a difficult text approachable to a curious, questioning mind, and to every fellow-seeker, correspondent and patient listener who pressed a doubt hard enough that it had to be properly answered rather than merely waved away; a good question, honestly pressed, is its own kind of teaching. Finally, this work owes everything, in the end, to the Text itself, and to the One of whom it speaks.

Śrī Kṛṣṇārpaṇam astu.