

Newsletter on Bhagavad Gita by Dr. P.V. Nath

The following text is a compilation of the single issues of a regular newsletter by e-mail, composed by Dr. Pathikonda Viswambara Nath. It includes the original slokas of the Gita as well as the transliteration, translation and commentaries by Dr. Nath.

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**OM SAHA NAVAVATU SAHA NAU BHUNAKTU
SAHA VEERYAM KARAVAVAHAI
TEJASWI NAVADHEETAMASTU
MAA VID VISHAVAHAI**

May He protect us both (the teacher and the pupil)

May He cause us both to enjoy (the Supreme)

May we both exert together (to discover the true inner meaning of the scriptures)

May our studies be thorough and fruitful.

May we never misunderstand each other.

The Gita is in the form of dialogue between Krishna, the preceptor and the disciple Arjuna. Sanjaya, the narrator to King Dhritarashtra, intercepts now and then with a comment of his own. There are a total of 18 chapters with 701 verses (slokas.) Each of the chapters has a title and the title ends with the word "Yoga".

The word "**Yoga**" is derived from the word "Yuj" which means "Unite."

Study of every chapter assists the seeker to unite with the Lord and hence the use of the word "Yoga."

The seeker is he/she who is looking for attaining the union with the "Parabrahman" and experience the "Eternal Bliss." In Sanskrit the name for the word "seeker" is "Sadhaka". The efforts of the sadhaka is known as "Sadhana".

To undertake the task, the seeker must have "Faith" and "Devotion" in the subject, the teacher and "Parabrahman."

Chapter 4: JNANA YOGA

Introduction

Jnana yoga is the study of knowledge that leads to ultimate union with the Parabrahman. The subject of “knowledge” is very vast and covers so many different branches. We can broadly divide the subject into:

a)

Knowledge of the Atman and the physical body composed of the mind, intellect and gross physical body and the knowledge of the constituents of the nature with its working mechanism. In brief it is the knowledge of the Purusha (the creator) and Prakriti (created). This is the spiritual science.

b)

Knowledge of the material world.

The knowledge of the material world has its benefit of bringing success and happiness but only in relation to the material possessions. This, the scholars say is momentary happiness as it leads eventually to the state of no more happiness or even to sorrow. This is because none of the possessions in one’s life are permanent and we learn the same by the experiences in our own lives or by witnessing the lives of others. Without the knowledge of the spiritual world, the success in the knowledge of the material world leads to development of “Ego” which is the main cause of downfall of the individual or of the society.

On the other hand, the knowledge of the spiritual science teaches one the art of contentment and the art of detachment in attachment towards the material possessions in life and at the same time guides one towards the ultimate purpose of human birth, namely “Moksha.”

To say the same in a different way, we can say that the knowledge in any field gives one a certain amount of power. The power obtained from the knowledge of the material world makes one develop a sense of “Ego.” On the other hand, the knowledge of the spiritual world gives the power to overcome the “ego” and the power to withstand the turbulences in one’s life.

Spiritual knowledge assists the individual in conducting actions for the welfare of the society because it teaches the art of realising the presence of Atman in oneself and understanding the presence of the same Atman in all forms of life. This is the only means of not developing the ego which is the root cause of destruction not only of the individual but also that of the society.

We can understand this by comparison to that of the car. The car has various parts like the engine, gear box etc. We see various types of cars ranging from simple basic ones to super luxury cars. There is one thing common in all of them. None of them can work without the presence of the fuel inside. The same fuel is needed to run all the cars. The car stops running after the exhaustion of petrol in it. Petrol is the energy that is needed to make the car move.

Similarly, we must realise the presence of divine energy within us in the form of the Atman and the presence of the same Atman in all forms of life.

Of course, we must also learn the art of using the car so that we do not hurt ourselves or the others on the road. Similarly we must use our physical body in a way that does not harm us or harm others around us.

This Jnana is the main gate of entry into the temple of knowledge. The temple with the idol of Atman inside is the living physical body. We block the ever effulgent light of knowledge of the Atman by our ego and Jnana yoga is to assist us in unblocking the ego and letting the light of Atman shine forth.

Our body is like a microcosmic representation of the nature. It is constituted of the Atman and the physical body made up of the Pancha Maha Bhootas. (Space, Air, Light, Water and Earth.) The nature around us, both the known and unknown parts is a macrocosm with the un-manifest energy and the five gross elements.

The subject matter of investigation that leads to ultimate understanding of the Supreme Parabrahman is Jnana Yoga.

As we go through the various chapters of the Gita, we will realise that this chapter is only the preliminary or primary course in understanding the Supreme. Real Jnana Yoga is taught by the Lord later on in Chapter 13, Kshetra Kshetrajna Yoga. Initially the Lord takes Arjuna through the comparison of life in an external battlefield of Kurukshetra with the battle between Kauravas and Pandavas. As He unfolds the entire Gita, we find that He reverts back to individual human body and makes us realise that the human mind is the true battlefield between divine and un-divine qualities. Victory for the divine qualities with the assistance of the Supreme knowledge over the un-divine qualities leads to Liberation which the Hindu scriptures say is “Moksha”.

Let me conclude the introduction with a definition of knowledge as given by Swamy Vivekananda. He defines it as follows:

“Knowledge is finding association about things.”

The association of the physical body with the Atman within on an individual basis and the association of the Pancha Maha Bhootas with the divine un-manifest energy with reference to the nature (prakriti) is the knowledge the Vedas and the Gita talk about.

The scriptures talk about “Lighting the light of knowledge.” What does it mean?

When we go to a temple we see the priest lighting the lamp and offering the light to the deity in the temple. This light is to illumine the God inside the inner sanctum sanctorum. (The old traditional temples in India are built in such a way that the inner sanctum sanctorum is totally dark and the installed deity is not seen. The deity is seen only on lighting the lamp.)

Similarly, we are expected to illumine the Atman within and make it visible by lighting the lamp of knowledge. This is possible only by developing the divine virtues, destroying the animal tendencies within and by dropping the “Ego” in all actions. We are expected to understand clearly the “Karma Yoga” and put the same into practice with “Sraddha and Bhakti.” Meditation on what has been taught by the Lord not only on what we have read so far but the contents of the subsequent chapters will assist the seeker in attaining the Liberation.

Sri Krishna, by incarnating on earth has set an example and shown us the way to act on the principle of true “Karma Yoga” and given us the knowledge to understand the principle of correct actions.

So before we embark on sloka after sloka in this chapter, here’s the joyful message we’re heading to:

Sloka 39:

The man of faith having knowledge as his supreme goal, having controlled the senses, obtains the knowledge of the Atman and having obtained that, enjoys the peace for ever.

Sloka 1

Sree Bhagawan Uvacha:

**IMAM VIVASVATE YOGAM PROKTAVAN AHAM AVYAYAM
VIVASVAN MANAVE' PRAHA MANUR IKSAVAKAVE' BRAVEET.**

The Lord said:

I had taught this everlasting yoga to Vivasvaan. Vivasvaan taught it to Manu who declared it to Ikshvaku.

Let us briefly recollect Sloka 15, chapter 3:

"Know that the action arises from the Vedas. The Vedas are born from the imperishable Brahman."

Knowledge of the Self is the theme of the Vedas. The Vedas deal with the task of bringing out the divinity in man. This is with the sole intention of universal welfare. Vedas being so vast are difficult to understand by ordinary mortals. Upanishads/Vedanta are said to be the final chapters of the Vedas. There are more than 108 Upanishads and again not easy for the ordinary mortals to understand in their life time. Srimad Bhagawad Gita is the summary of all the Upanishads and the simplest form for the humans to understand.

That Sloka 15 says that the Vedas are born from the imperishable Brahman. The Sloka in this chapter says that Krishna taught it to Vivasvaan. We have to understand by these two slokas that Sri Krishna is declaring that He is none other than Brahman.

In the earlier Vedic period, the mode of teaching was "oral transmission" from the learned to the seeker. As there were no institutions like the present universities and as there was no form of written language, it was transmitted by word of mouth.

Vivasvaan taught it to his son Manu.

Vivasvaan is the name of "Sun God." "Sun" as we know is the source of light for the entire universe. This light is not for any selected few but to one and all, both animate and inanimate. The scriptures always relate the "Light" to the "Light of Knowledge." Hence, we have to take that "He" has given the light of knowledge to one and all irrespective of religion, caste; sex etc. He has made it the "Universal Knowledge" and not restricted to selected few. It is important to realise that the Sun god represents actions that follow the principle of "Nishkama karma."

Manu is the first Aryan man, progenitor for the entire mankind. He is considered to be the son of Vivasvat, the sun god. He is said to be the first one to offer oblations to the gods.

Manu, it says, gave the knowledge to Ikshvaku. It is the name of the king, son of Manu Vaivasvat. He founded the solar dynasty.

The role of the kings in ancient India was mainly in upholding dharma and propagating dharma to all its subjects. Hence, the Vedas were taught to the kings for protection of their subjects.

Sloka 2

EVAM PARAMPARA PRAPTAM IMAM RAJASRAYO VIDUHU

SA KALENEHA MAHATA YOGO NASHTAHA PARANTAPA.

This knowledge was handed down in regular succession from generation to generation. The royal sages knew this yoga. But by long lapse of time it has been lost here, O “scorcher of enemies.”

Let us dwell briefly on the word “Rajarshi” mentioned in this Sloka.

“Raja” is “a king.”

“Rishi” is a “Seer.”

The rishis are said to be those who represent the Vedic Aryan current of thought. They are considered as the ideal or the model for others to follow the path to spiritual development. He who has conquered the mind and senses, practices the art of “Nishkama karma and Karma Phala tyaga” and has attained a vision of the “Supreme” is fit to be called “Rishi.”

The post-Vedic mythology classifies the rishis into the following sub-sections:

Maharshi:

These are “Saptarshis” who are the primary ancestors because they are said to be the “primal makers of creation”. They followed the command by their creator “Brahma” and created the various forms of life on this earth.

Rajarshi:

The royal sages are “Rajarshis.”

Brahmarshi:

Priestly seers are "Brahmarshis".

Devarshi:

The seers who possessed virtues that merited the title of “Divine virtues” are “Devarshis.” The example being sages Narada and Atri.

The knowledge given by the Lord is to be known as “Brahma Vidya” as it leads to the union with the Brahman. The kings and emperors who learnt, practiced and propagated the Brahma Vidya are given the title “Rajarshi.” Such kings possessed both the knowledge of the Vedas and the knowledge to rule the kingdom. King Janaka, father of Sita is the prime example of a Rajarshi. It is said that many great sages went to his palace to learn the scriptures. Possession of royalty and wisdom made them great monarchs whose fame remained eternally. The practical application of Vedanta to actual life was the contribution by the Rajarshis to mankind.

Let us be clear of the fact that this knowledge is not just the domain of these elite Rajarshis but really for any individual, who has the deep rooted desire to learn “Brahma Vidya”, be it a politician, professional, businessman or a labourer. The spiritual knowledge should not be a barrier to worldly life.

In olden days, the royal lineage continued from generation to generation and those who practiced Brahma Vidya passed it on to their subsequent generations. As we have seen in history we do get periods of time when there is a break in the continuity of ancestral teaching and practices. Instead of being true karma yogis, some rajas live as karma bhogis. They live to enjoy the life. Such selfish and arrogant people fail to follow the good way of living and the practice of spirituality comes to a halt. One can say it is also natural and is like day followed by night.

The same rule applies concerning the revival of good and dharmic way of living. The night has also to be followed by day. Great people and sometimes the Lord Himself incarnate and bring to life the forgotten spirituality and propagation of dharma. The knowledge can never be lost and the expression by Sri Krishna that it has been lost here is only figurative. In the last Sloka, we have been told clearly that the knowledge is “Avyayam.”

The Lord is Eternal and the Dharma He gave to mankind is also “Eternal.”

Sloka 3

**SA EVAYAM MAYAA TE'DYA YOGAHA PROKTAHA PURATANAHA
BHAJKTO'SI ME' SAKHA CHE'TI RAHASYAM HYETAD UTTAMAM**

This same ancient yoga has now been taught by me to you. For you are my devotee and friend. It is indeed a Supreme secret.

Sri Krishna is indirectly stating that the yoga taught by Him to Arjuna is nothing new and that He, Krishna, is not just Krishna, cow-herd son of Vasudeva and Devaki, but, the Supreme Parabrahman. He is going to assert this fact in the next Sloka to follow.

Arjuna, as we know, had suddenly lost his nerve to fight and asked Krishna's help and guidance. Both of them have been friends for few years. He also had a great respect for Krishna. Just before the beginning of the Great War, both Duryodhana and Arjuna went to Krishna to ask for his assistance. Krishna had the entire Yadava army behind him. Krishna gave them the choice of either having the Yadava army or Krishna in person. At the same time He said that on His part, He would not take any weapon to fight and will only be the guide. Despite this stipulation, Arjuna opted to have Krishna on his side. He believed Krishna to be an embodiment of dharma.

When he lost the nerve to fight, Arjuna decided to surrender to Krishna. He accepted Krishna as guru and a guide. Krishna therefore is saying that Arjuna is both a friend and devotee. Later on in the subsequent chapters we find Krishna saying that a true devotee is the best friend of the Lord.

It is surprising to note the point that His advice is said to be a supreme secret. Why?

Popularly, a thing can be said to be a secret for one of the following reasons.

- a) Because one does not want others to know about the same and would like the same to be revealed at a later date. It is like the surprise gifts for special occasions like birth-days, Christmas etc.
- b) One might come across some hidden treasure/wealth and would not like others to get it.
- c) In certain situations, it is imperative for safety reasons to keep some information secret. Nuclear installations, details of war reports are kept secret by the Governments.

These are definitely not the reasons for using the word “Supreme secret “in this context. What the Lord means is that the knowledge has to be imparted to those at the right time and right place who can understand the same and do not use it for personal material gains in life. This way the knowledge is sure to be passed on safely to the subsequent generations and benefits the mankind, universe and nature. Those who are not mature to understand the hidden meaning in the slokas, (guhya bhasha), who understand in a wrong sense or who misrepresent the facts would cause profound confusion in the minds of not so clever people. Dharma and Truth, that are the cornerstones of the philosophy, will get misrepresented and lose their true meaning. It is like a diamond that falls into the hands of a monkey. It has no idea of the value of diamond and simply throws it away into a ditch.

Sloka 4

ARJUNA UVACHA

**APARAM BHAVATO JANMA PARAM JANMA VIVASWATAHA
KATHAM ETAD VIJANEYAM TVAM ADAU PROKTAVAN ITI**

Arjuna asked,

Later was your birth, earlier the birth of Vivaswan. How then am I to understand that you taught him in the beginning?

This question is to unravel the mystery of who Krishna really is.

It appears Arjuna is questioning the validity of the authority of Krishna's statement. How could the friend he knew for so many years say that He is prior to Vivaswan? Sage poet Veda Vyasa has made Arjuna come out with this question on behalf of mankind who would also entertain the same doubt.

The facial expression on Arjuna must have made Krishna realise that it was a genuine question. The reply from Krishna that comes in the next Sloka makes it clear that Krishna considered it as a question from a genuine seeker in the spiritual path.

If we recollect the story of Mahabharata, we will find that Yudhistira, elder brother of Arjuna conducted Rajasuya Yaga. During the proceedings, Krishna was insulted by the prince Shishupala. Krishna assumes a divine form and uses his wheel and beheads Shishupala. For some reason, Arjuna did not question who Krishna was at that time. Arjuna must have known that Krishna is the Lord Supreme of the universe. It must have appeared as a mystery and the events in the battlefield made him come out with the question. He wished, for the sake of the common man, that the Lord Himself should unravel the mystery.

We, the humans have an evolved physical body and with that we can have three planes of vision of the world and the objects in it depending upon our spiritual maturity. The three planes from lower level to the highest level of maturity are as follows:

- a) The physical external plane of vision. With the assistance of the sense organs, we can fathom the form, colour, complexion and shape of the object/person. This is external appearance only. This is deha drishti.
- b) Using the mind and intellect, he is able to consider the character, quality and nature of the object/person. This is mano drishti.
- c) Using the highest spiritual entity in him, he can visualise the Atman within all forms of life. This is Atma drishti.

The first two are relative truths from the physical and mental plane of vision and the third is Absolute truth from the spiritual plane of vision.

The entire Gita and the Vedic philosophy are to assist the seeker to develop the spiritual plane of vision and see the Absolute Truth of the Atman/Parabrahman in the entire universe.

Sloka 5

**BAHOONI ME' VYATEETANI JANMANI TAVA CHARJUNA
TANYAHAM VEDA SARVANI NA TVAM VETHA PARANTAPA.**

O Parantapa, many births of mine have passed as well as yours. I know them all, but you know them not.

We need to have Sraddha and Bhakti to accept this statement.

It is the accepted Hindu philosophy that each one of us had so many births and deaths in the past and will have many more of the same in future. The actions we conduct out of ignorance are the root cause for going through so many births and deaths. Not only human births, but our scriptures say that we have gone through births and may go through future births as other forms of life also. It all depends upon the types of actions we conduct/conducted.

By the blessings of the Lord we now are born as humans with the power of intellectual capacity of reasoning. We have adhikara (karmenyevadhikaraste' - sloka 47, chapter 2.) in the conduct of our actions and thereby we are responsible for our own destiny. Why is this so?

One way of answering this is to say that it is all His leela. The Lord who created life on earth has given us all the freedom to act the way we want but also given the guidance in the form of Vedas to the right ways of conducting actions. The vast universe with its varied manifestations, varied qualities in each individual, varied physical features is full of attraction for each one of us. Forgetting His words of advice or ignorant of His advice we end up conducting actions that bind us to this universe. This is known as "Maya."

The illusion makes us forget our true identity as the "Atman" within and also makes us forget to see the same Atman in all forms of life. We attach importance to name and form and forget the "Sat, Chit and Ananda." In other words, we are the slaves to maya. Sri Krishna on the other hand is the master over Maya. Maya has no hold on Him and He wields His power over maya.

We are born as a result of our actions whereas He is born out of His free will. He has taken several births in the past, will take several births in future, all out of His own free will and departs from the world out of His own free will. He is incarnate and we are ordinary mortals.

We have no control over the time, place and the form of our birth. And we also do not have any control over the time of our death. He has full control over the time of His birth and departure from this world.

He remembers all the past, knows the present and is aware of the future of all forms of life. We, on the other hand, do not know our past, do not know the future and think that the life is all about "present."

In the 15th chapter, He tells us that memory and loss of memory are also His blessings to mankind.

Sloka 6

**AJO'PI SANN AVYAYATMA BHOOTANAAM ISWARO'PI SAN
PRAKRITIM SVAM ADHISHTAYA SAMBHAVAAMI ATMA MAYAYA**

Though I am unborn and eternal in MY being, the Lord and controller of all beings, controlling my own nature, I take birth by my own Maya.

Sri Krishna is saying that He is unborn (aja) and eternal (avyaya). Why?

We, the humans are born into this world and all forms of life are born into this world because of “Karma Phala.” Everyone and everything that is born is due to the failure to burn out the existing vasanas in the previous births. The condition for Moksha (Liberation) is “Mano nasha and vasana kshaya.” The vasanas should be burnt and the mind annihilated.

When we first came out into this world, (many births ago), we came with a pure mind and no vasanas. Association with the world/nature around resulted in desires and hatreds and the consequent actions made us stay in this world on and on.

But, Sri Krishna’s birth is not an ordinary birth like the human. He may have been born as human but not because of any vasanas. He is born out of His own free will and we say it as His “Avatara.”

The Maya or illusion which binds us to this world does not affect Him. Maya is His tool and He decides to do what He wants. He comes into the world and departs from this world on His own free will. It is only for protection of Dharma and uprooting the evil. This is made clear in the coming few slokas.

On the contrary we are the tools of Maya. Maya enslaves us but the Lord enslaves the Maya.

He goes on to say that He is the Lord and controller of all beings.

He, as the Atman resides inside each one of us. He is the Supreme primordial energy. Without the energy we cannot survive. We need energy to live and we need energy to survive. He acts as the energy within and the energy all round us that is resident in nature. Hence He is the Lord. The moment He decides to leave the physical body, we have no more chance to be alive. Without the energy in nature, we cannot survive also.

One other reason for His birth is to set an example for others to follow. We come across several slokas in the Gita that reiterate the fact of His birth to set an example for mankind.

Let us therefore clearly understand that apparently He is the son of Devaki and Vasudeva but actually He, Krishna is the Supreme Parabrahman.

Sloka 7

**YADA YADA HI DHARMASYA GLANIRBHAVATI BHARATA
ABHYUTTANAM ADHARMASYA TADAATMANAAM SRUJAMYAHAM.**

O Bharata, whenever there is decline of righteousness and rise of evil, I manifest Myself.

Two words are of great importance in this sloka. They are:

Dharma;

Srujami’ (manifest).

We have discussed about dharma several times already. We need to look into the word “dharma” once again and that too in its relevance to the present sloka.

Dharma is “Righteousness in action.” It is the basic principle of man’s existence. It is needed for our existence, peace and happiness.

The Supreme Parabrahman, when He created Brahma, the four-headed Lord for the purpose of creation of life on earth, gave Him the Vedas. The Vedas are the sacred texts for the mankind that teach the humans the art of upholding the dharma.

As individuals, each one of us has to follow the law of dharma of the Atman within and the dharma of the body. This is to keep the body, which is the temple with the Lord within in good shape during its life on earth. This is for individual's existence, peace and happiness. If we break this law, as individuals, we have no right of existence and will not experience peace and prosperity.

But we are not just individuals. We are individuals that form part of the society. The society is not just humans but includes other forms of life and nature in its various manifestations.

As members of the society, we are again divided into various nationalities. There is need for existence of each nation and peace and prosperity within each nation. Towards this there is a need for its citizens to follow the law of the land. Of course, there are defects in the structure of the law in any country and every so often there comes changes in the constitution supposed to be for the better of its individuals and the nation itself. This system is also prone to misuse. Selfishness as we know is one of the root causes of ruin of any society. The Divine Law is needed to supplement the law of the land to bring stability to any country and assist in its progress. This has to be followed by all its citizens for experiencing the maximum benefit in terms of peace and prosperity.

Every so often things happen that bring problems between nations and instability to the global life as a whole. At this time, the Divine Law is most important to avoid catastrophes.

Dharma which is "the law of the being" and the "principal of man's existence" has to be protected to protect the individual and the universe. The Vedas boldly declare "Dharmo rakshati rakhsitaha." (Dharma protects him who protects dharma.)

As dharma is karma conducive to man's progress, all our actions as individuals and as corporate bodies have to follow the law of dharma.

When this karma becomes "adharma", it impedes the progress of man and the community. Chapter 3, Karma yoga when followed with the help of Jnana yoga, the present chapter gives the basic rules for conducive duties. This is the command of the scriptures.

Hence, higher than all the laws is the Law of the Divine. This is for universal existence, peace and prosperity. While continuing to uphold the law of the land by the citizens of any country, the universal citizens have to follow the law of the Divine.

If there is majority of those who break the law of the land and/or the law of the divine, it leads to acts of evil. This in turn leads to doom of the society. Anarchy destroys the society. It becomes act of self-destruction.

During such times, when there is great danger of anarchy and destruction of society, the Lord says "I Manifest." (Srujami)

We need to understand this word clearly. It means "He" shows His presence. As God is considered to be good and divine, we can say "Good and Divine manifest" instead of saying "I manifest." This in turn will kill evil and bring in turn peace and prosperity.

The next question is "which God" comes out and manifests?

There are two ways in which we can approach this issue of "Manifest."

First one is to see the extra ordinary divinity in a human form who lived/lives/will live the life of a sthitaprajna/jivanmukta.

The second one is actual incarnation of Lord on earth who takes birth for namesake but actually out of His free will and not due to any vasanas from previous births like us.

The sastras clearly state that he who works selflessly and not looking for fruits of action is actually divinity on earth. He who dedicates his life for the welfare of all is said to be God on earth for that period.

During evil times there will arise someone who will reach Godhood by his actions and becomes God Himself and destroys evil. The history has many examples of men/women who are considered as Gods by generations that come later on.

As the learned scholars say, at every time adharma prevails and prevents man's evolution, the Parabrahman embodies Himself.

What will He do?

This theme is taken up in the next Sloka.

Sloka 8

PARITRANAYA SADHOONAAM VINASHAYACHA DUSHKRITAAM DHARMA SAMSTHAPANARTHAYA SAMBHAVAAMI YUGE YUGE

For the protection of the righteous, for the destruction of wicked, and for the establishment of Dharma, I am born in every age.

There are three promises by the Lord in this Sloka. It is a promise by the Lord who created the life on earth. As it is He who created the life, He has to take full responsibility of its protection. This is His promise for all of us.

We should make a note that He does not bring out the Hindus or the Indians in His statement of protection. Also He has omitted caste, sex, religion, creed of any kind. He has not shown any partiality. We should therefore understand that His promise is for the entire life on earth. Hence, it is one more assertion that the Srimad Bhagavad-Gita is a universal philosophical message by the Lord of the Universe.

The three promises are:

- Protection of the good.
- Destruction of the wicked.
- Upholding the dharma.

Let us look into the meaning of some of the words used in this verse.

The word "Trana" means "protection." "Pari" means "total, full." The word "Pari" is prefixed to "Trana" to stress the total protection.

Similarly, "Nasha" means "destruction". "Vi" means "intensely". "Vinashaya" means "intensely destroying".

Finally, "Sthapana" means "to establish" and "Sam" means "well, very much". "Samsthapana" means "very much established."

"Yuga" refers to the four periods of time concerning the world's existence according to the Hindu sastras. These comprise of:

- Krita yuga - duration of 1,728,000 years
- Treta yuga - duration 1,296,000 years
- Dwapara yuga - duration 864,000 years
- Kali yuga - duration 432,000 years.

The four yugas together represent one "Maha Yuga."

The present eon is Kali yuga. Starting from the Krita yuga, the duration is reduced by one fourth/third/half at every yuga. It is supposed to represent a similar reduction of the physical and moral decline in every Yuga.

The Hindu scriptures say that:

- In Krita Yuga He manifested as Narasimha and Vamana to destroy demon Hiranyakashipu and the asura Bali. The incarnations were only for protection of the righteous.
- In Treta Yuga He manifested as Rama to destroy Ravana. All the three promises in this Sloka apply aptly to incarnation as Rama.
- In Dwapara Yuga He manifested as Krishna to destroy Shishupala and Dantavakra and uproot the entire Kaurava clan.
- In Kali Yuga, we are told that He will be born as Kali to uproot evil. They say He will come as a sword wielding warrior on a white horse from the Himalayan region and destroy the evil.

We have already learnt that desire is the seed of action. Even the Lord falls into this category of people when it comes to action. His promise is action against the evil. It means that He also has desires.

We have to stress the fact here that His desire is only for the protection of the life He has created. For having created the life on earth, He has taken a promise to protect what He has created. It is His "Sankalpa" which is the vow taken by Him before He created the life on earth.

His desire is "Satvic", nay, "Suddha Satvic." It is a highly pure desire on His part. Rest of us, in this world, conduct actions which are admixture of the three basic gunas of "Satva, Rajas and Tamas." In general Rajas and Tamas predominate during periods of adharma and the Lord in some form or other brings out Satva to predominate over Rajas and Tamas. A balance of power among the three gunas is necessary to protect the social fabric.

Purgation is the law of nature. Cleansing process is a constant cycle on earth. The farmer who sows the seeds, to assist in their growth, has to constantly remove the weeds that hamper the growth of the crops.

The Lord, as a prelude for creation, sowed the seeds of dharma before He created the life. As a good farmer, he has to see that He weeds out "Adharma" which hampers the growth of dharma. This Sloka is reiterating this task of weeding out adharma undertaken by the Lord.

He says that He incarnates to protect the sadhus. Even though sadhu is generally applied to an ascetic, really it means "righteous person." It is not applicable only to the ascetics. There has to be righteousness and good amongst the four varnas.

The Brahmin has to be righteous in protecting the Vedas and scriptures.

The Kshatriya has to be righteous in protecting the masses.

The Vaishya has to be righteous in his business transaction and assist the common man to live comfortably. He is not expected to hoard anything for personal gain and bring hardship to masses.

The Sudra has also to be righteous in conducting his social duties belonging to his profession.

Real sadhu is he, who conducts actions selflessly.

To protect such sadhus, the Lord promises to come down “yuga yuge”: in every age. It is not just one incarnation in one Yuga. He is ready to appear any time there is predominance of evil. The divinity in certain special people will show forth its presence in certain regions and uphold dharma. In extreme cases, the lord incarnates Himself to uproot evil.

He promises to destroy the wicked. There are some who do not like the idea of the Lord punishing, killing wicked people. We have to look at it as a way of clearing the evil from the face of earth. We should understand this aspect of Lord’s actions clearly. In every society, there are people to uphold the law of the land. No society would like to harm its citizens. But it has a duty towards protection of its citizens. This is not a contradictory statement at all.

Similarly, we have to see the Lord as the Universal protector of dharma. After all He is the universal Justice of Law.

To punish the wicked is not to be looked upon as an act of hatred but as an act of mercy by the Lord. We, the humans have to climb up from being Stone-men to the level of God-men on earth. The world is a combination of men of the following four categories:

Stone-man

Animal-man

Man-man

God-man.

Most of the criminal acts are by Animal-men on earth.

We either have to climb up in the spiritual ladder or fall down to lower levels of birth and be born again and again till we develop the intellectual maturity to reach the level of God-men on earth. This is the path to Moksha or Liberation.

The Lord is guiding us towards the path of Moksha through the sacred book the Gita, and warns us through this Sloka not to fall from the heights of birth as humans. The sastras say that the birth right of every individual is to attain the final Liberation. The Lord, out of immense love to His creation is only assisting the individual to reach the final goal.

Our enemy is “Arishadwargas.” It is the family of six evils:

Kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada and matsarya.

The leader is “Kama”, the desire, lustful desire. If the leader is destroyed, his followers will surrender and peace will be established. The Lord’s incarnation is destroying the leaders that bring havoc on earth.

Sloka 9

**JANMA KARMA CHA ME’ DIVYAM EVAM YO VE’TTI TATVATAHA
TYAKTVA DEHAM PUNARJANMA NAITI MAAME’TI SO’RJUNA.**

O Arjuna, he who thus knows My divine birth and action, having abandoned the body, is not born again, but to Me, he comes.

In the secular world, knowing and becoming are two different entities and we should not apply the same principle in understanding this Sloka.

As a matter of fact this Sloka is really the re-iteration of the Upanishad declaration:
Brahmavit Brahmaiva bhavati.

It means the one who knows Brahman, becomes Brahman.

Let us try to understand this declaration first.

What the Lord has taught us so far is the fact that each of us has the Atman within which is the true Self. This Self is covered with the outer physical body made up of five elements. We are not the body but the Atman. The Atman is “Brahman.” He who knows this basic spiritual principle of the Hindu philosophy comes to understand and live with the “Eternal Truth.”

Such an individual realises the process of birth and death due to the play of the gunas and maya and soon learns to live with the bliss of “Atma Jnana.” Such an individual attains oneness with the Brahman. This is the Upanishad declaration.

In this Sloka, the attention is drawn to the incarnation of the Brahman as “Krishna.” The Gita as we know is incorporated in the epic Mahabharata and it highlights the divinity of Lord Krishna. He has incarnated on to the earth for the protection of the righteous and destruction of the wicked.

Mahabharata is considered as a Purana. Puranas are a collection of tales of ancient times. In post-Vedic times, the Puranas became the medium for conveying the Vedic teaching to the common man.

In the early Vedic period, there were no forms of God as such. The learned seers who went in search of the life beyond death became convinced of an unknown power behind all the activities on earth. They called the power as “Brahman.” For the sake of description, they said He was Nirguna Nirakara Brahman. This is the first step in bringing the idea of God to the fellow humans.

Understanding and realising this idea is very hard for majority. To make the subject of Brahman easy to understand, the seers took the next step in the description of Nirakara Nirguna Brahman and brought out the notion of “OM”.

“OM” is the representation of Brahman in the form of “Sound.” Sound is the tanmatra of space. Among the five gross elements of nature, the space/ether is the nearest representation of the Parabrahman.

Meditating on this was the beginning of “Upasana” on the Supreme for the spiritual seekers.

Even this form of upasana is not easy for majority. This led in course of time to give a name and form to “OM.” This brought out the change in upasana to a form given to the Supreme. This form was dictated by depicting the story of the Brahman in various forms of manifestations known as “Avataras.”

Through these Avataras, meditation on a name and form aspect of the Parabrahman came into vogue. Brahman, birthless and deathless, puts on the appearance of birth and growth by His divine power. It is only for the welfare of the righteous and protection of the righteous. In the process, it is also for elimination of evil.

Those seekers who mature in spirituality and attain higher levels of Bhakti, known as “Para Bhakti”, are able to live unaffected by the changes in the material world. Ultimately, even before casting off their physical bodies they merge into the Supreme.

This Sloka is bringing out this aspect of upasana of “Saguna, Sakara Brahman.” By knowing in detail about the Avatara, accepting the form in which He manifests and developing love, nay, intense love for the same is the method advocated for the benefit of the common man. To do so, the seeker has to have faith in the Brahman and belief in the mythological explanations of the Avataras. He/she can select any one of the Avataras to meditate upon.

Meditation is a means of cleansing the mind of impure thoughts. Diverting the attention of the dynamic mind from the material world towards the Atman within needs intense love for the Supreme and concentration on His divinity and divine play. This is the path of Bhakti.

We are expected to realise that Krishna was not just the son of Vasudeva and Devaki but divinity on earth. He has no birth or death. He is immortal and omnipresent. The seeker has to understand in essence the divinity of Krishna. The word used is “Tatvataha.” He who knows the essential principle of Brahman and His manifestations is the real seeker. Knowing in this sense is living the life of divinity and expressing divinity in speech, thoughts and actions.

This implies that the seeker who can see the Lord dwelling in all forms of life, in all aspects of nature, shows love and respect for the same, is fit to attain unity with Brahman. Only such a seeker is the real knower. Knowing Brahman is not theoretical understanding of Brahman. It is the direct experience of the Brahman which is beyond the equipment of body, senses, mind and the intellect. Only such understanding of Brahman is what is meant by “Tatvataha.”

Attempts to know Brahman is “Sadhana” and to become one with the Brahman is “Sadhya.” Sadhana is practice and Sadhya is the goal to achieve.

Sloka 10

**VEETARAGA BHAYA KRODHAA MANMAYA MAM UPASHRITAH
BAHAVO' JNANA TAPASA POOTA MADHAVAM AGATAHA.**

Free from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, purified by the penance in the fire of knowledge, many have attained Me.

This chapter is Jnana Yoga and the Lord is giving the path of Jnana to attain His being which is nothing other than Moksha. He says, “Madbhavam Agataha.” It means “attain My being”.

Having given the advice, He has also given the means to achieve the same.

He says, “Free from attachment, fear and anger.” Conducting karma in the ordinary worldly sense brings in these three consequences. These lead us away from the spiritual path and make us bound to the world of samsara. We have already learnt from the previous chapter that the only way to be free from these three is by “Nishkama karma.” We have to carry on conducting all ordained actions to burn our existing vasanas and not accumulate new vasanas in the process.

We are the Atman within and the physical body is covering the same. The real me is the Atman. The physical body and the objective world around is not real Me. Attachment which arises out of desires could be either to the body or to the world of objects. Attachment to our desires and attachment to what we want to get from the desires is “Raga.”

The fear of not getting the object of desire is “Bhaya.” We see this all the time in our life. Many a times the students get frightened of not passing the exams. This reduces their efficiency while undertaking the exams. Fear of losing what we get is also Bhaya.

This in turn makes us get angry and this is “Krodha.” We have read in the second chapter the consequences of anger. (Slokas 63, 64). We fall down from the path of spirituality and become either animal men or stone men. This is because the senses and the mind drag us down and move us away from our sadhana. The sadhana is to achieve Moksha.

What should we do?

Our senses including the mind should be directed towards the Divinity within and Divinity all round. This is what we should understand from the statement “Manmaya Mam upashritaha.” The senses should be absorbed in the Atman (Manmaya). Taking shelter in Him by selfless devotion is "Mam upashritaha".

Karma and Bhakti have been given as adjuncts in the path of Jnana.

The purification of the mind by knowledge is “Jnana tapas.” “Putaha” used in this Sloka refers to the purification of the senses. Understanding the correct way to perform karma and accordingly carrying out the correct actions is “Jnana tapas.” Knowing the essential divinity which is one’s own nature, seeing the same in all forms of life around and living the life of divinity is real Jnana.

This is the path to Liberation.

We can see that these three paths of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana are not separate entities but are totally intermingled with each other.

The person who sincerely follows karma yoga becomes a Jnani.

Jnani learns to see divinity in true sense and thereby conducts nishkama karma.

Bhakta is he who sees the divinity in various manifestations and shows his love towards one and all.

He has no hatred to anybody.

The experts say that fuel consigned to the fire becomes fire itself.

The fire of the penance, “tapas” which offers the mind and its content of vasanas to the fire of divinity within is “Jnana Tapas.”

Quote:

Sri Ramakrishna:

Maya is inherent in Ishwara. It is constituted of both vidya and avidya.

Vidya Maya assisted by the art of discrimination, devotion, detachment and love of beings takes the aspirant Godward.

Avidya Maya on the other hand estranges man from God.

Finally the Lord says that this has been achieved by many. He is therefore trying to tell us that it is not as difficult as one imagines. It is possible and this determination is needed in the spiritual path. It gives us the fuel to fly upwards to His abode.

Sloka 11

**YE YATHA MAAM PRAPADYANTE TAAM STHATAIVA BHAJAMYAHAM
MAMA VARTMANUVARTANTE MANUSHYAHA PARTHA SARVASHAHA**

O Partha, in whatever way men approach Me, even so do I reward them, for the path that men take from every side is Mine.

Prapadyante: approach

Bhajayaham: I reward them.

In this chapter, The Jnana Yoga, we have in the last 10 slokas been informed by the Lord that He is not just Krishna, son of Vasudeva and Devaki, but the Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Nirakara, Nirguna

Brahman. It is us who have given that power various forms and names and worship the same in different ways.

We have a number of different religious denominations all over the world we know of. In each of those main denominations, there are a variety of different branches. We have come to recognise ourselves as separate entities and our knowledge of the Supreme Power is limited.

We are told that it does not matter how we approach the Supreme, we will get due rewards for our efforts.

The results either in the secular world or spiritual world depend upon our actions, knowledge of the actions and devotion to the actions. The more faith we have in the knowledge we have received, the more faith we have in the scriptures or the texts as the case may be, greater will be the final benefits from the actions.

Every way of life, if aimed at the Divine, will eventually lead us to Him.

Every wish we entertain will remain as a vasana imprint till it is fulfilled or totally wiped off from our mind. The Lord, who stays as the Soul/Atman within does not desert us any time. From birth to death, the Soul will give us the energy to live. At death, it is only the gross physical body that perishes. The subtle body with the mind and intellect moves to the nether worlds entrapping the Soul within. The Soul never departs. It wears a new suit in the form of a new birth and the same mind and intellect will then have a new body. This is to fulfil the un-manifested vasanas from past birth/births. Depending upon the desires entertained, according to the three basic gunas we either move upward in spiritual path or fall down from the path.

Every one, at the end, will realise the folly of attachment to worldly pleasures and finally will clear the mind of all vasanas. The mind gets annihilated totally. That state, we have learnt, is "Moksha" or Liberation.

This is the message from the Lord through this Sloka to the mankind in general and to every individual being irrespective of his/her religion, caste, creed, sex, social status etc.

Examples:

All the branches from a tree belong to the same tree. Subsequent branches from the main branch also belong to the same tree. All the flowers and leaves from individual branches belong to the same tree. Finally every fruit belongs to the same tree. Similarly, all religions, creeds, sects etc belong to the same tree of samsara of the Lord. We are all His children. We receive the same love from the Lord. How we reciprocate the love results in the reward we get.

The petrol in cars is same. The same petrol is needed for all types of cars ranging from simple basic cars to most luxurious modern cars. The petrol is needed to take the car to the destination. The way the car holds on the road depends upon the sophisticated parts in it, the driver who has control over the car, the condition of the road and the weather.

All it means is that different types of persons receive the grace of the Lord in different ways according to their own samskaras. (actions due to the inherent thought imprints.) Those who approach (Prapadyante) Him for wealth will get the wealth, those who approach for knowledge will get the knowledge and those who yearn for Liberation will get liberation. Eventually, as we have discussed, each one of us, will attain Liberation. If so, can we not see the folly in approaching Him for partly worldly pleasures? Why should one approach a king for getting few pennies? Let us learn to approach Him with a desire for Universal welfare and salvation.

Quote from Shirdi Sai Baba:

"I give people what they want in the hope that they will begin to want what I want to give them."

Some approach Him for secular prosperity. Even this wish is granted. But the time it takes to mature and get fulfilled depends on various factors. Like past samskaras, way of approach, type of guna that is involved in the approach etc. It might even be the future births that one gets the reward. Nature being what it is, we do not remember what we wished for in the past births.

Another point to note is that even Nature in its various manifestations is also the Lord manifest in a form different to what we have the vision of Supreme. The approach by the sense organs is towards the Nature and through the mind/intellect equipment could be for both the secular or the spiritual.

The ancient sanatana dharma of the Hindus advocates four basic paths of humans depending upon their temperament. These are:

Karma
Bhakti
Jnana
and
Dhyana.

Whatever may be the path the seeker follows, the end result is "Moksha."

Let us recollect a hymn the Hindus recite during the "Sandhya Vandana" prayers.

Akashat Patitam Toyam Yatha Gacchanti sagaram
Sarva-Deva-Namaskaraha Kesavam Prati Gachati.

It means:

Just as the drops of water from the sky do end in the ocean, the salutations to various Gods reach Me.

This Sloka therefore re-iterates the fact that the sacred text is universal with a universal message to all the mankind.

Sloka 12

**KANKSHATAHA KARMANA SIDDHIM YAJANTA IHA DEVATAHA
KSHIPRAM HI MANUSHE LOKE SIDDHIR BHAVATI KARMAJAA**

They, who long for satisfaction from actions in this world, make sacrifices to the Gods, because satisfaction is quickly obtained from actions in this world of men.

The experts in spiritual science designate the earth as "Karma Bhoomi." (land of action) In this world whatever action performed has a result, albeit good or bad depending upon the type of action.

What are the results of actions?

The Puranas talk about higher abodes like Gandharva Loka, Yaksha Loka, Indra Loka etc wherein live the celestial beings. "Gandharvas" are celestial musicians, a class of demi-gods regarded as musicians for gods. "Yakshas" are another class of demi-gods who are assistants to Kubera, the god of riches. Indra is the lord of heaven.

There are prescribed rituals to please these demi-gods in the higher worlds. By conducting yajnas to please these gods, the specific god to whom the yajnas are directed will get pleased and bestow benefits. By praying to "Varuna" the Lord of waters, rains are the result.

The fruits of such actions are quickly attained and enjoyed.

There are according to the Puranas, 6 worlds above the earth and they are:
Bhuvaha, Suvaha, Mahaha, Janaha, Tapaha and Satyaha. (more on those in the next newsletter)

Depending on the type of work and sacrifices conducted men attain to any of these six worlds.

The main point to remember is that these are like the holiday resorts we are used to in the world of ours. Depending upon how much we have earned, saved and depending on where we want to go, we spend the saved money and go to those resorts. After using up the money we paid for those holidays, we have to come back to our native palace again.

Similarly, those who want to enjoy these higher worlds use up the points of merit they would have accumulated by their dedicated works. After death, they are said to enter one of these worlds, reside there for a prescribed period of time. When that period is completed, they would have to come back to earth.

Those who want to enjoy life of luxury in any one of the higher worlds would have to work to please the demi-gods of that region and enter that sphere on death. But, they will have to return to earth after exhausting the points of merit accumulated.

Similarly, there are 7 worlds below the sphere of earth and these are the regions people fall down to as a result of bad/wrong actions conducted on earth. There are said to be the 7 hells below the earth.

Herein is a deeper analytical description of the same sloka for those who would like to have an insight into the same. Let me make it clear that it is a very difficult subject to comprehend.

Our philosophy talks of a total of 14 worlds in total. They are known as "creative worlds", because they are subject to creation and destruction. They are subjected to changes.

There are seven worlds above and seven worlds below.

On top of all the worlds and separate from all is "Parabrahman", who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. His world, if we may say so for the sake of description only, transcends all the 14 worlds. It does not undergo any physical changes and is not subject to any changes.

The sacred text, Srimad Bhagawatha Purana says that the "Viswaroopa" or "universal form" of the "Parabrahman" consists of and envelops all the 14 worlds.

These 14 worlds in descending order of merit are as follows:

Starting from the earth where we are all living, there are seven worlds upwards up to the abode of Brahman, the creator. These are the abodes of those who have by their good karma achieved an entry into one of the seven lokas appropriate to their accumulated good deeds. (punya karmas) Celestials, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Devas, sages are to be found in these planes.

Tracing downwards there are seven worlds below the sphere of the earth. Those men/women who by their cruel deeds and actions against the sastras end up in these lokas, born as reptiles, snakes and other lower forms of life.

Back to the top:

- 1) Brahma loka: also known as Satya Loka. This is the abode of the creator Brahma. It is said to be the abode of 100 great rishis who by their relentless actions for universal welfare enter His kingdom and after pralaya or dissolution attain union with Parabrahman.
- 2) Tapoloka: this is the abode of next level of great rishis who are in a state of deep meditation (Samadhi). These are the sages who are meditating to attain Moksha.
- 3) Janaloka: it is said to be the origin of life in this universe.
- 4) Maharloka: this is the abode of those men on earth who lived a pure Satvic life and by their meritorious acts ascended to this plane.
- 5) Svarloka: it is the abode of devas and stars. Devas are considered as “Illumined ones.” The chief of devas is “Devendra.”
- 6) Bhuvanloka: it is the abode of sun, moon and planets.
- 7) Bhuloka: it is the earth on which live the various forms of animate and inanimate objects. We, the humans are residents of this earth.

The beginning of the sacred Gayatri mantra goes as follows:

OM Bhoohu, Bhuvaha, Suvaha, Mahaha, Janaha, Tapaha, Satyam.

This represents the seven worlds that include the earth and higher worlds up to Brahma loka.

The seven nether worlds are:

- 1) Atala
- 2) Vitala
- 3) Sutala
- 4) Talatala
- 5) Mahatala
- 6) Rasatala
- 7) Patala

These are the different grades of hell in a descending order. The lowest of the low, by their cruel deeds end up in Patala loka. These are said to be the dark worlds as they are enveloped in darkness with no light of sunshine.

The earth is the focal point in as far as the results of actions are taken into account. Good actions take the folk upwards and bad actions take them downwards into one of the worlds named above. As soon as the benefits are used up those who find entry into the higher worlds have to come down to earth and start accumulating meritorious points by their good deeds.

In this sense, the inhabitants of heaven including Indra, the Lord of heaven have a temporary stay in the higher worlds. Each one of those inhabitants in the higher worlds has to come down to earth after exhausting the benefits of punya karmas. It is said that even Brahma is bound by these rules. The only difference is that the inhabitants of these worlds have a very long life. In case of Brahma, it is almost millions and millions of years.

Similarly, those who find entry into nether worlds stay for a length of time depending upon their bad deeds and are born as humans on earth again.

Those who study the scriptures and realise that good actions will take them into higher worlds, will follow the texts that describe various yajnas and sacrifices which please the gods above. The word “gods” used in this sloka refers to the demi gods described in the Hindu texts.

The Hindu religion depicts a number of higher powers that are also benign in nature. (in the sense that they do no harm.) They are greater and more powerful than the men on earth. They are designated as “gods.” Each one of these powers, if worshipped with sincere faith and devotion bestows grace and fulfils the wishes.

What we have to understand is that the success is quickly obtained by man for the work he does in this world. To do so one must have a sense of devotion and humility and conduct sacrifices that please the higher powers like Indra, Agni, Vayu etc. Taking the same logic, we can conclude that entry into the lower worlds results from evil actions.

All the other 13 worlds apart from the earth are only places of results of actions conducted on earth either good or evil. We attain hell or heavens depending upon our actions.

The earth is therefore to be considered as the centre of spiritual realisation. When we realise that if we desire fruits of actions we have to be prepared to be born on earth again and again and may be even to fall down into the hellish regions and suffer.

Finally, one in a million realise the folly of going after the fruits of actions and strive for Moksha. Only a rare few achieve the end result of birth as humans which is “Union with the Parabrahman” with no re-birth.

The person who wants to attain the higher worlds is looking for fulfilment of a desire. He is selfish and egoistic and full of pride at his way of living.

The one who looks for Moksha is also in a way looking to fulfil a desire but in the process of sadhana will realise it will come on its own accord as a result of living life of a jivan mukta/sthitaprajna and following in full the practical implementation of the meaning of sloka 47, chapter 2.

Moksha:

It is not easy to understand fully the meaning of this word. The understanding by a common man is "Liberation". Liberation from what is the next question? With the experience of happiness and sorrow in every stage of life from infancy to old age, at every stage one prays for "Liberation" and hopes the next stage will bring in more happiness. But alas, he finds the same problem. The student would like to be liberated from the disciplined way of study and exams. After graduation and few years of work, would feel to be liberated from the cumbersome work regime and so on and so forth. Life is not just a bed of roses as they say. At every stage, one would pray for Liberation. True feeling of Liberation from desires does come for rare few and the Gita says that among thousand one would think of Him and among thousands of such people one would understand and one among such would really reach His abode.

Majority of us belong to the ordinary class of men and women caught in the web of samsara and our prayers should be to achieve the state of "Liberation from desires." Jivanmukta, who is a sthitaprajna belongs to this category. Gunatita belongs to this category and true Jnani belongs to this category.

Quote from Sri Swamiji:

"Most people do penance and prayers, either in a demanding way or in a complaining fashion; demanding God to bestow health, wealth, status, etc., and complaining that God did not give anything. Ideal prayer consists of begging God to grant desirelessness. Simple, sensible thinking proves that it is impossible to extinguish the fire of desires. It is funny that man desires so many things that even if somehow they were all granted to him, the life span would be less than the time required for fulfilling those desires."

Those who reach the level of satva in their purity of gunas, have a great danger of dropping down to lowest levels of tamasica because they look down upon others as inferiors. The greater one climbs up the letter, harder will be the drop.

The three gunas are Satvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. The aim in one's life is to achieve purity and lift from lower tamasic to higher Satvic. Suddha satva is a state higher and is to be looked upon as "transcending" the three gunas.

Tamsic - stone man

Rajasic - animal man

Satvic - man man

Suddha satva - god man on earth

Vasishta muni showed the right way of living satvic and reached Suddha satva. By not actually desiring for anything he reached that transcendental level.

Viswamitra, having his pride all the time, wishing to get titles to his name like "Brahmarshi", failed to transcend the Satvic level he managed to reach several times by his penance. But everytime he reached that state, the ego caused his downfall and he fell down to lower grades again and again.

Sloka 13

**CHATUR VARNYAM MAYAA SRISHTAM GUNA KARMA VIBHAGASHAHA
TASYA KARTARAM API MAAM VIDDI AKARTARAM AVYAYAM**

The four-fold caste system has been created by Me according to the differentiation of qualities and actions. Though I am the author, know Me as non-doer and eternal.

The caste system as it is practiced in India at present has been a bone of contention amongst many. Even this sloka has been used by many to support their view of the same but unfortunately with incomplete / improper / misguided understanding of its words. It is therefore very important to understand the meaning of the sloka in its totality and not just a part of it.

“The four fold caste system has been created by Me”:

Taking this part of the sloka, there are many who, without proceeding further, simply say that after all the system has been created by Sri Krishna. They tend to put the blame on the present problems due to the existing method of caste system directly on Krishna. It is definitely not true and not correct.

As we can see Sri Krishna immediately adds up to the first statement by saying:
"According to the differentiation of qualities and actions."

We have to understand this section more clearly to remove any misunderstanding.

Let us therefore proceed with the analysis of the meaning of the entire sloka in total.

Chaturvanyam: (the four varnas):

The word “varna” refers to the colour of the person. The word “caste” has been a latter entry into the dictionary of the Hindus. Sri Krishna admits to creating the “Varna” system but does not say “caste system.”

When one refers to the “colour” of the person, it means “the colour of the centre of actions.” “Colour” in this sense is only a poetic description and does not really refer to the physical colour of the individual like dark, fair etc.

Guna Karma vibhagashu: divided according to the gunas and actions.

The centre for all our actions (karma) is “the mind.” The mind is the seat of three basic qualities (gunas) of “Satva, Rajas and Tamas.” All the three qualities are inherent in every individual but their proportion expressed outwardly as actions differs from individual to individual. The actions expressed according to the gunas is “Guna karma.” The division of such actions is “Guna karma Vibhagashu”.

Broadly speaking, in any single society, the individuals can be divided into four main groups depending upon the proportion in expressing outwardly the three basic gunas in the form of actions. “Chaturvarna” refers to the four groups of individuals in any society.

We naturally accept that the different parts of the body constitute a single person even though their functions vary. We are expected to use the same logic and accept that the four castes are constituents of one single society and we should act with love and respect towards each of these four groups.

We naturally accept that the different parts of the body constitute a single person even though their functions vary. We are expected to use the same logic and accept that the four castes are constituents of one single society and we should act with love and respect towards each of these four groups.

These are:

Brahmana

Kshatriya

Vysya

Sudra.

(A description of the qualities of these four classes of people is to be found in chapter 18, slokas 42-44 of the Gita.)

Brahmana is he who has a predominant of satva and shines forth with the light of knowledge of the sastras. Satva is depicted as pure white in colour. Those members in the society who have a true and complete knowledge of the sastras and express the divinity within in all their actions are the brahmanas in the truest sense. The priestly class of the present are referred to as brahmanas.

Kshatriya is he who has predominance of rajas and satva and stands prominently by his physical power. He is also a man of knowledge of the sastras. Rajas is depicted as red in colour. The ruling class of people in the days gone by were the kshatriyas.

Vysya is he who has a combination of rajas and tamas but with a small portion of satva included. Those members in the society who are businessmen and take part in the trade market are the vysyas.

Sudra is he who has a predominance of tamas. He is physically strong but has not got the knowledge of the sastras. The labour class who are physically strong but who do not possess the knowledge of the sastras are considered as sudras.

The ancient system was used therefore to classify the people according to their capacity into these four classes. The sacred text tells us that each one of us is born with a set of gunas carried forward from the previous births. By our so called past samskaras (vasanas) each one of us belong to one of these four main groups.

Even though we belong to one of the four categories at birth, we have an opportunity to better ourselves and move upwards. Even the lowest of the low, the sudra has a right to acquire the knowledge and move up in the ladder. The sacred Hindu texts and the Gita clearly state that it is the duty of the Brahmana to impart the knowledge to whoever seeks for the same and assist in his/her spiritual progress.

Unfortunately somewhere in the middle from the time of creation of the life by Brahman to the present day, this classification was misrepresented. It was misused by those belonging to the upper class to hold on to their power and suppress the lower class. They brought the word "birthright" to belong to the class they were in.

Child born to a Brahmana was called a Brahmana, to a Kshatriya a Kshatriya and so on and so forth. In course of time this method was accepted as norm and the caste system of the present was born. The Government of India has used this method for classifying its citizens who are Hindus. This has caused a lot of upheaval in the society and it is not the intention of this author to dwell on such issues.

Sri Krishna, the creator of life on earth says in this sloka that this classification was created only according to the differentiation of qualities and functions of the individual. The entry into the classification is according to the "guna-right and not birthright."

By acquiring the skills needed for any varna system, the individual can progress in life. Sri Krishna says that the "Purusharta" of every individual is to attain "Moksha." If so, this should include all the members of all the four classes mentioned above without any exception. They can attain this final aim only by acquiring the knowledge which the upper class has to impart with love and affection.

Let me make this bold statement made by Swamy Vivekananda:

It is in the nature of any society to form into groups, each group with certain privileges. Caste system is a natural order with each group member capable of performing certain duty better than the other. One can be a governor and other a shoe mender and there should be no reason for anyone considering them to be superior to the other. Governor cannot mend the shoes and shoe mender cannot govern a state. One can be clever in reading Vedas but he has no right to trample over others. Men must form themselves into groups and it is impossible to get rid of this in principle. The titles like Brahmana, Kshatriya may differ but the groups will remain the same.

It is therefore not necessary to change the caste system but change the way in which it is used. There should be respect and love for each other and no one should consider themselves as superior. No privileges to anyone and equal chances for all should be the motto. Let everyone be taught that the divinity is within each one and the same God is in all. Everyone should be given the opportunity to get the education and work out his own salvation.

"Though I am the author, know Me as non-doer and eternal."

What does it mean?

Why does Krishna contradict Himself by saying that He is the author of this system and at the same time describes Himself as “non-doer and eternal.”

Krishna as such has been depicted as the son of Vasudeva and Devaki and leaving the physical body behind at the end. To dispel any doubt, He has made it clear at the beginning of this chapter that He is Eternal and He is the one who taught the sacred text to Vivaswan.

It is possible that the caste system was probably evident even in Dwapara yuga and Krishna did not like the practice. He therefore must have used the Gita as an instrument to express His opposition to the system and clarify the rules for the varnashrama.

He admits to be the author of “Varna” system but never said that He is the author of the caste system.

Also, as such, Parabrahman through the medium of the four headed Lord Brahma gave the Vedas to the mankind at the time of creation. Man, in course of time made changes every so often in the system of administration. The caste system is therefore one of such changes that has crept up somewhere in the middle of cycle of creation and dissolution. It does not benefit us to blame Sri Krishna and the Hindu system for the misuse of the class system in the name of “caste”.

Further analysis of the sloka using the Purusha Suktam:
(Hymns in praise of Parama Purusha who created the entire universe.)

Here is a closer analysis of this sloka using the “Purushasukta” and is given for the benefit of those who would like to trace this system to the ancient teachings and practices.

“Purusha” in the most general sense means “a man”. By extension, it is said to mean “a human being” irrespective of sex. In the Vedas and Upanisads and allied scriptures it is applied to the Primeval God. It is derived from the word “pr” which means “to protect” or “to fill up.” That which is the whole universe known and beyond the realms of known and protecting the same is “Purusha.” He is the manifested state of the un-manifested Brahman.

Purushasukta is an integral part of the Vedas and also the most important exposition of its teaching. It is one of the most commonly used Vedic hymns even to this day and will be for many more kalpas (eons) to follow. It is an integral part of Rigveda Samhita, Samaveda samhita and Atharvaveda samhita.

“Sukta” means that which is “well said.” It should be understood as a “true description.” The Purushasukta is a hymn that gives a true description of the Purusha. “Purusha” is “primeval being” who is nothing but the Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Omniscient Parabrahman.

This Purusha is said to have thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. He envelopes this world from all sides and has transcended it by 10 inches. All the beings in this universe form only a quarter of Him. The rest of His three quarters is immortal and is said to be established in heaven. The one quarter of Him here, in this universe becomes this world (made up of all forms of life) again and again.

He is the “Primeval being,” also known as “Adipurusha” (the first person) and from Him is born the “Virat Purusha.” Virat Purusha means “Immense being.” As soon as He was born, He multiplied himself and created this earth and its beings.

The Devas, who are the “Illumined ones” on creation performed a Yajna using the Purusha Himself as the oblation. From this yajna all the Vedas and all forms of life came into being in this universe.

The devas, sadhyas and rishis are the centres of various powers and action in the body of the Virat (indriyas and pranas). They in turn took up the task of secondary creation and conducted this yajna mentally. They offered oblation of Virat Purusha mentally to produce further creation.

Since it was before the creation, when no materials were available for oblation, they conducted the yajna mentally by imagining the various parts of the body of the Virat. Since the Purusha was everything in this yajna, it came to be called as "Purusha Yajna." When they offered the various parts of the body of the Virat, the people of the four varnas groups were born.

Varnashrama is nothing but choosing one's profession according to the aptitude of the individual. Aptitude in turn brings out the desires and the desires form the basis of vasana. The mind is a store house of vasanas. Predominance of any of the aptitudes makes the individual fall into one of the four varnas. It is important to note that it is the "Prakriti" (Nature) that brought into the being with the differentiation of qualities and Purusha sukta just simply highlights the facts.

The brahmanas were the custodians of the Vedic knowledge and culture and hence the mouth of the Purusha is associated with "Brahmana."

The kshatriyas were fighters and kings with military skills and so the arms of the virat symbolised the Kshatriya.

The vasyas were the main segment of the population supporting and sustaining the entire society by their economic activities. As they supported the society, the thighs of the Virat symbolises the Vasyas.

The feet of the Virat represent the Sudra. This is because, without the feet the body cannot stand erect in a state of balance. The society cannot stand without the supply of the physical labour. This was the chosen occupation of those who were physically strong but did not have matching brain power.

Diversity is a fact of life and varnashrama is a facet of diversity of nature. There have been many great saints among the sudras and even the untouchables.

Examples are:

a) Bhagawan Veda Vyasa, the greatest of the seers was the son of fisherwoman, of low caste. He is the most revered and well known example we can quote.

b) Aitareya Upanisad: by "Mahidasa" - son of a Brahmana Visala and his mother "Itara." His mother was the "other wife" of the sage (e.g. one of the two wives, probably from a lower caste and not accepted by the community in general). The mother was ashamed that her act (of having fallen in love) had brought an insult (from the society) to her child and so embraced mother earth and wept. Mother India manifested herself to bless her and initiated spirit of Hinduism to the boy. The boy came to be known as "Mahidasa", son of earth. He has brought out the spiritual message in his own language - language of the low and discarded, the language of the worker, of the slave and of the common man. His mother "Itara" was probably the daughter of a potter community. Aitareya was not a Brahmin by birth and he was originally "Mahidasa", son of earth.

Hymn 13:

Brahmanosya Mukhaseet: Bahu Rajasya kritaha:
Uru tadesya yad Vaishyaha: Padabhyam Shoodro Ajayata.

His face (mouth) became the Brahmana,
His two arms became the Kshatriya,
His two thighs became the Vasya

And

From His two feet Sudra was born.

Santi Parva of Mahabharata has a similar verse in it recited by the grandsire Bhishma:

Brahma vaktram bhujau kshatramkrtsnam urudaram visah
Padau yasya stitah sudras tasmai varnatmane namaha

It means:

My salutations to Varnatma who has Brahmana as His face, shoulders as Kshatriya, stomach and thighs as Vaishya and feet as Sudra.

Herein is a reference to Manu dharma sastra.

“Manu”, first Aryan man, the first to offer oblations to gods.

Manu dharma sastra: the Code of Manu. A collection of laws based on custom and precedent and the teaching of the Vedas.

Manusmriti is an outstanding sociological work of ancient India with a comprehensive outlook which has impacted greatly on the Hindu society for all these thousands of years. His influence upon the organisation of the society persists till this day. Chapter 4 of Manusmriti deals with his concept of the society.

The original concept of social class could be traced back to the Rigveda which based the society recognising the all-importance of distinct social classes vested with the responsibility for the discharge of strictly specific social duties or obligations. Its concept was that the different social classes are separate from and independent of one another and yet they, together, were intended to serve the basic interests of the society as a whole. The so called social classes were only functional divisions of the society. The reason for affiliation of the individual to a certain social class was no other than that which consisted in his habitual performance of the duties that are demanded by his membership of that social class.

Such a flexibility of the functional role of the individual did not last long and it came to an end in the post-Vedic period and presumably during the period of evolvement of Dharmasastra of Manu. The division of the society became a rigid pattern and hardened into caste system. The differentiation became a birth-right instead of the functional role appropriate to it.

Manu goes on to give a detailed description of the role of Brahmanas and the way to treat a Brahmana by the other three classes. He has given importance to the Brahmana and places them at the top of the social order. He has given primary and secondary duties of the four classes of people in the society.

(Those readers who would like to know more about this, please contact Dr. Nath for further information on the subject.)

Brief explanation of "Untouchable"

The Hindu way of life over many many years has been on the four fold caste system. I would say that the fourth class of "Sudras" were not really "Untouchables" but in course of time the two words have become synonymous. These people stayed in the same town/city, but may be all of one group lived together in a colony type of living. But there was no restriction in their movement. Sometime in the middle of the history, somewhere, they put restrictions on their movement. One cannot trace a definite period for it.

What happened in the olden days was this:

It so happened that someone committed a heinous crime in a town, village, like murder, stole from a temple, or in some cases the boy from a higher caste was going to marry girl from lowest class and the leaders of community did not like it, they would banish the guilty to go far away from the boundaries of the town. Such people had to live in the forest and should not enter the town at any cost. These groups got to be known as "Untouchables." Sanskrit word was "Chandalas."

Sloka 14

**NA MAAM KARMA NI LIMPANTI NA ME' KARMA PHALE SPRUHA
ITI MAM YO'BHIJANATI KARMABHIR NA SA BADHYATE.**

Actions do not taint Me. Nor have I desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows Me thus, is not bound by karma.

Sri Krishna wants Arjuna to realise that He is not just his charioteer, son of Vasudeva and Devaki who showed a number of miracles in His life and destroyed a number of demonical people. He also wants us to transcend His leelas of His incarnation in Dwapara Yuga and recognise that he is the Supreme Parabrahman incarnating for the protection of Dharma and destruction of evil.

Whenever we conduct any actions we get the feeling like "I did it, I enjoyed it, I feel happy etc." This is because actions/karma produces modifications of the mind which in turn is due to "Ego." We associate with the physical body and with the present. As we have studied in the previous chapter, our actions are due to our gunas and that we carry gunas from the past birth onto the present birth. Our actions in turn leave further reactions due to association with the actions and results of actions. The Lord does not want us to have the feeling of doership in any of our actions and also not to be attached to the fruits of actions.

Krishna is not just any other individual we come across. He is divine incarnate. He has no vasanas to carry from past births. He has no association with the results of actions and is therefore not bound by the consequences of His actions. This sloka is reiterating this fact.

His desire if we call it a desire, (really speaking He takes it as His will) is for the welfare of the life He created. Doing it for the sake of duty is His motto. Those who want to tread on the path of spirituality with a desire for Moksha should emulate Him and conduct actions accordingly.

It is important to understand the meaning of the sentence:
"He who knows Me thus, is not bound by karma."

Knowing is when we put into action what we have learnt. We should put into actions what we have learnt from studying His life as Krishna of the Mahabharata period in Dwapara Yuga. If our actions also fit in with the principle of Nishkama karma and karma phala tyaga we will be burning the existing vasanas we are carrying and do not get any more new vasanas. Thus we pave the way for our own "annihilation of the mind and Vasana kshaya."

Our learned masters quote the example of the moon when they are trying to explain the principle of His actions.

The moon does get reflected on a clear day in ponds, wells etc. When there is movement in any one of those containers the water in turn shakes. This in turn make distorts the shape of the reflected moon. The moon above as such does not shake but the reflection shakes.

Our Atman within us is like the reflected moon. Due to our association with the physical body which makes us feel the Atman as ego, we feel reactions due to the desires and hatreds. Our desires and consequences of desires do not affect the Atman but does affect the ego. Transcending this feeling is the way to progress in the spiritual path.

By giving Himself as the greatest Karma Yogi to follow, He is leading the mankind towards liberation.

Sloka 15

**EVAM JNATVA KRITAM KARMA POORVAIRAPI MUMUKSHUBHIHI
KURU KARMAIVA TASMAT TVAM POORVAIHI POORVATARAHM KRITAM**

Thus knowing, the ancient spiritual seekers also performed actions. Therefore you shall do the same actions as performed by the ancestors in the olden times.

There are a number of salient points included in this sloka.

Mumukshubhihi: those seeking “Moksha” or “Liberation.” There were many in the past who followed the spiritual path for attaining the final aim of life: which is “Moksha.” Spiritual seekers were there in the past, are there now and will be there in future.

This principle behind the teaching of the sacred text holds good for all times. What is the benefit from such principle?

The benefit is “Universal welfare” also known as “Loka Kalyana.”

This can be possible only by the conduct of actions. The actions of the seekers who want Liberation must be without the sense of “Ego” and without the desire for the fruits of action.” Such actions in turn become the foundation for liberation. This is the process of “Self-realisation”.

Krishna reminds Arjuna that it is possible only by being part of the society and fulfilling one’s role in the society. “Action” or “Karma” associated with the “Jnana” (knowledge) and “Devotion, Faith” towards the teachings of the Lord is the foundation for success.

Let us understand that this path is open to all of us to understand and implement in our day to day life and will be open for our future generations to come.

Another commentary on the same sloka:

The sacred text Srimad Bhagawadgita was narrated to Arjuna by the Lord. Arjuna has to be considered as an example of Rajasic quality. If one can divide the rajasic quality into Satvic Rajas, Rajasic Rajas and Tamasic Rajas, Arjuna would fall in the category of Satvic Rajasic individuals. His actions were on the higher plane of purity. He was a man of action but his actions were not desire oriented.

When he was confused on to the right action to conduct for attainment of Moksha, he was guided by his guru Sri Krishna on the principle of action. Arjuna is to be considered as the representative of all those who would like to know the right path to take in one’s own life. Hence, on behalf of all those rajasic men desirous of treading on the spiritual path, Sri Krishna is giving His opinion. He is saying that for spiritual liberation, one must work and the work has to be like the actions of the ancient spiritual seekers.

Laziness is not the path for liberation.

One may say that there are many rishis and tapaswins who are not really conducting any actions and ask how they will get liberation?

Tapaswi is he who is an ascetic practicing penances. He is in meditation connected with the practice of personal self-denial or bodily identification.

Rishi: a sanctified sage, an ascetic. A prophet gifted with supernatural powers. Basically a rishi can be looked upon and called as tapaswi also.

Both the rishis and tapaswis by their ascetic practices have given up bodily attachments and work for universal welfare and attain final emancipation.

Yes, a categorical yes that they will get liberation. These great souls are conducting tapas for the universal welfare. Their actions are at the mental and intellectual planes. Majority of us do not fall in this category because we have not got the mental power of conducting such tapas. Karma yoga is the path for us. Let our actions emulate the learned ancient masters and fit in with the principle of Karma yoga. Let us understand the same clearly and work for universal welfare.

Sloka 16

**KIM KARMA KIMAKARME'TI KAVAYOPYATRA MOHITAH
TAT TE' KARMA PRAVAKSHAMI YAJ JNATVA KOKSHASE' SHUBHAT.**

What is action? What is inaction? In this matter even the wise are deluded. I will teach you that action knowing which you shall be liberated from this evil.

What is "Ashubha"?

Ashubha is "evil".

What is evil?

In this context, evil is to be considered as the cycle of births and deaths.

It is the entry into the ocean called "samsara". As humans we have reached this phase of life we are experiencing now. We have been repeatedly told that actions are needed to swim and reach the other end of this ocean.

From the spiritual point of view, many a wise including some of the sages have not got a clear idea of what is action and what is inaction. For the sake of clarity, Sri Krishna is informing Arjuna that He will teach the difference between the two. Arjuna and through him all of us in the spiritual path are expected to know that we have to work to live and also work to be liberated.

It is possible that the facial expression on Arjuna on listening to the last few verses prompted Krishna to explain the intricacies of karma in greater detail. It is no use by simply saying that "I want Liberation and I do not want to fall into the ocean of samsara." We must know clearly all the various aspects of karma and act accordingly. We should become experts in the field so that all the correct actions will become involuntary actions by nature.

For example, breathing and circulation are necessary for survival and we have adopted our central nervous system in such a way that we do not think of these two but still carrying on functioning in these two fields. The correct actions have to become involuntary actions. They have to become our second nature.

In the next few slokas we will be going to get a clearer view of “Nishkama karma” which is the law of action

Sloka 17

**KARMANO' HYAPI BODDHAVYAM BODDHAVYAM CHA VIKARMANAHA
AKARMANASCHA BODDHAVYAM GAHANAM KARMANO' GATIHI.**

The nature of right action, wrong action and also of inaction should be known. Deep and difficult to understand is the path of action.

Three words concerning various types of karma have been introduced in this sloka. They are:

Karma

Vikarma

Akarma

If we understand these three words, we would have gone a long way in understanding the intricacies of action.

First of all we must realise that our physical body owes its existence to the Atman within. The Atman is the energy that keeps us alive and propels us into action. On this principle when we conduct any actions, we must be clear that it was only due to the Atman.

Really speaking, it is the Atman who appears inactive but is in total control of all actions of the body. On the other hand the physical body appears as though it is conducting the actions but it is not. Once we understand this truth, the entire process of karma will become crystal clear.

Similarly it is important that we understand that the “Nature” appears active but cannot be alive without the presence of the divine energy. The Atman/Divine energy is imperishable but the body/nature is perishable.

Let us now proceed to analyse the meaning of the three words Karma - Vikarma - Akarma. Again, it is important to note that we are dealing with the spiritual science and the path taken by the spiritual seekers. When we use the word “karma”, it applies to all actions according to the scriptures.

Vikarma applies to all actions that are contrary to the scriptures.

Akarma has two meanings. The “Guhya bhasha” or the hidden/implied meaning would be “No feeling of doership” in all actions. The other meaning would be simply “Inaction.” There is a very big difference between the two different meanings.

Karma:

An introduction to this has already been discussed when dealing with sloka 8, chapter 3. Further analysis will give us the following explanation.

These are the following categories of karma:

- a) Varnashrama dharma
- b) Ashrama dharma
- c) Pancha maha yajnas
- d) Kula dharma
- e) Desha dharma

f) Atma dharma

The actions pertaining to each of the above classifications is “Karma.”

a) Varnaashrama dharma has been discussed when dealing with the sloka 13 in this chapter.

b) Ashrama dharma relates to the duties pertaining to the four principal stages in life:

Brahmacharya: first stage in life involves celibacy as a requirement for studies.

Grihastha: second stage in life starting from graduation and entering into married life.

Vanaprastha: third stage in life starting from the time of retirement from work to the last stage of sanyasa.

Sanyasa the last stage in life dealing with renunciation of worldly life with aspiration for union with the Parabrahman.

c) Pancha maha yajnas: the duties towards:

Gods

Rishis

Ancestors

Fellow humans

Other forms of life

These five are part of one’s daily duties.

d) Kula dharma: these are duties/custom peculiar to a family/clan.

e) Desha dharma: we all have a duty to the nation we belong to.

f) Atma dharma: these are duties on recognising that we are the servants of the power within and our actions should be considered as the divine duties of the Atman. Total divinity in all thoughts/actions/speech is Atma dharma.

In the spiritual path that is followed by the seeker, all the above actions become “Karma” only when there is no sense of individuality in relation to the actions and when all the results from the actions are offered to the Lord.

The result of such actions is “Peace”.

Vikarma: actions which are contrary to the sastras become “Vikarma.”

Actions with a sense of ego and those with a desire for the fruits of actions are considered as vikarma. It also includes the forbidden duties known as “Nishiddha karmas” which are actions prohibited by the sastras. Many of forbidden duties in spiritual life and secular life are similar. Injury to others, telling a lie, stealing, rape etc fall in this category.

Whereas some of the duties in the section of “Karma” enumerated above are for a particular sect or groups of people, “nishiddha karmas” apply to all classes of people in total without exception.

The results of such actions is “Sorrow.”

Akarma: the meaning of this word is “No action or inaction.”

The true meaning of this word has not been grasped clearly by many. Many believe that it involves no actions on the part of the individual. He who works with “Jnana” realises that he cannot escape actions in this life. To burn the existing vasanas he has no other go but to work. The work has to be without the sense of ego and with no desire for fruits of actions.

Sri Ramanujacharya says that Karma and Jnana are complementary to each other and not two separate entities. Realising that we are the servants of the divine who is resident as Atman within and acting for universal welfare is “Akarma” in the truest sense.

Krishna makes it clear that it is difficult to understand the path of karma.

Sloka 18

**KARMANY AKARMAHA YAHA PASYED AKARMANI CHA KARMA YAHA
SA BUDDHIMAAN MANUSHYESHU SA YUKTAHA KRITSNAKARMAKRIT.**

He who sees actions in inaction, and inaction in action, is the wise man, the yogi, the doer of all actions among men.

What is “seeing action in inaction” and “inaction in action”?

As this is a spiritual discourse, these two sentences refer to the actions of a spiritual seeker.

We have a very good example to understand this from two of the events in our day to day life in this world.

a) Take the example of two trains at a station and we are the passengers in one of those two trains. When the train we are sitting moves forward, it appears that the other stationary train and the passengers in it are moving in an opposite direction even though that second train is stationary. Here, motion is attributed wrongly to the motionless. We see action in inaction.

b) Let us imagine that we are on the shore and there is a sailing ship in the waters. From our own viewpoint, it appears that the ship is stationary even though it is in motion. Here, we attribute inaction to action.

We can see how ignorance covers our vision in these two instances.

In the spiritual journey, as discussed in the previous sloka, we are attributing action in inaction and say that “I am the doer, I enjoyed the food etc”. These actions were made possible only because of the life energy within which make us feel that we are the doer of actions.

On the contrary, we do not recognise the role of the life energy in all our actions and consider that this energy is static even though it is the real kinetic energy in constant motion to keep the body alive. Herein we mistake “inaction in action.”

He who recognises the role of the Atman within, the role of the divine energy in nature is the wise and a yogi. Mistaking the self (physical body, inert in the absence of life) as the Self (real doer of actions) is ignorance or egoistic.

“Doer of all actions among men”:

This again refers to actions towards achieving “Self-knowledge” which is “Atma Jnana.”

Such a wise man is the doer of actions that helps him in getting the “Atma Jnana” which is also “Brahma Jnana”. Yogi is he who has no ego or sense of doership in his actions and attributes all to the Atman within. He is said to be in a state of constant bliss and does not succumb to pleasures and pains of day to day life. He is the “Sthitaprajna” and “Jivanmukta.”

Let us not therefore desist from our obligatory duties due to laziness or ignorance as it is going to be harmful in the spiritual journey. Let us all diligently conduct all actions in the spirit of “Nishkama karma and karma phala tyaga.”

In the words of Swamy Vivekananda:

Let not your work produce results for you, and at the same time you may be never without work.

Swami Vivekananda says also:

The perfectly trained alone are at their best both in solitude and society. They are tuned both to action and inaction. They conduct all their obligatory duties and have no sense of ego.

In the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna is the embodiment of “inaction in action” as He is the instrument for all the events on the battlefield. On the contrary, Arjuna who has dropped the bow and arrows and sitting dejected is the example of “action in inaction.” Non apprehension of reality made him develop misapprehension of reality.

No action/inaction in action:

This is satvika type of action. Such an individual sees himself as the Atman and attributes all actions to the body which is the servant of the Atman within.

Let us take the example of a cinema screen. In the absence of the background screen, the film cannot be projected. It is essential for seeing the film. The screen is not tainted by any actions that take place on it.

The Atman is the screen and the various scenes on the screen are the actions of the body in relation to the secular world. Realising that I am not the doer of actions and I am the eternal witness for bodily modifications is the way of satvika. There is absolutely no sense of doership.

Action in inaction:

Actions sprout from the thoughts in the mind. Thoughts sprout from the mind. One can be still active without showing any outward actions. As a matter of fact, there is an idiom that says: An idle mind is a devil’s workshop.

A wise man is he who can realise and see intense activity in inaction and inaction in action. The Lord says he is fit for liberation.

Arjuna dropped his bow and arrow and sat down on the chariot; he was physically inactive but mentally highly active. His mind was full of thoughts of grief. Such a state of him is the example of action in inaction.

Sri Krishna on the other hand was holding on to the reins of the horses on the chariot. He had no desire for action or desire for the fruits of action. He is the example of inaction in action. He is imparting the spiritual knowledge to Arjuna and through Arjuna to the entire mankind.

Sloka 19

**YASYA SARVE SAMARAMBHAAH KAMA SAMKALPA VARJITAH
JNANAGNI-DAGDHA KARMANAM TAMAHUM PANDITAM BUDHAHA.**

He whose undertakings are all free from desire and purpose, whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, him, the wise call a "Pandit".

“Arambha” means “beginning.” “Samarambha” means “beginning of actions or undertaking of actions.”

There is usually a purpose and desire behind undertaking important actions in one’s life. For example, the parents who decide to send their child to the university do so with a desire to make him a degree holder who will become eligible to work and stand on his own two feet. The couple who would like to get married will do so with a desire to enjoy the married life together.

Samkalpa: “mental resolve, volition, purpose, intention.”

Usually in the Hindu tradition, before any major undertaking like marriage, building a new house, sending the children to university etc, the concerned persons conduct a “Vrata” (religious observance) to please the Lord and request Him/Her to bestow grace. The priest who conducts the Vrata makes the individual repeat some prayers that declare the will/mental resolve to conduct the religious observance. This intention to conduct the religious observance is “Samkalpa.” The purpose behind an undertaking is “Samkalpa.”

Kamasamkalpa: if the purpose behind the intention is to fulfill a desire it is called “Kama samkalpa.”
Varjitaha: free from.

Pandit (also spelt as Pundit):

It is a title given to a Hindu scholar. Nowadays it refers to any learned person. A well learned wise man is a pandit.

In this sloka Sri Krishna says that a truly wise man who conducts actions in the spirit of nishkama karma (desire-less actions) and with no egoistic feeling is a Pandit. He has understood the principle of “Karma” and knows the intricacies of actions. From this statement we can understand that mere book-learning is not enough to receive the title of “Pandit.” Pandit should have mastered both the Jnana and karma yogas and has no desire and purpose behind any actions. He works as the servant of the Lord within. He looks upon his body as “Upadhi” or medium for the Lord to express His actions.

If we can realise that we are “Nimittamatra” (visible agents of actions) we would have understood the philosophy of the Gita.

“Thus says so the wise” says the Lord. He does not say “I say so” but brings in the authority of the learned scholars.

The learned scholars compare the knowledge to “Fire.” Fire” as we know is a great purifier. The heat from the fire is used in many situations like purifying the gold, sterilising instruments etc. (water and air are also the purifiers)

The desires are precursors of actions and so our desires have to be burnt out in the fire of knowledge. This comes from “Atma Jnana” or knowledge of the Self.

Our heart beats incessantly and our lungs function constantly without the agency of “I”. This is so because they have become “involuntary actions.” We do not think of the benefits of breathing and circulation before every breath and heart beat. There is no “Arambha” for these two acts. How does this happen?

This is because at birth we trigger off a centre in our brain that takes over these bodily involuntary actions. It works constantly till we depart from this world. Similarly our actions as members of this

universe should be involuntary actions without any desire for actions or for the results of actions. “Sri Krishnarpanamastu” (I offer all to Krishna.) should be the spirit of any work we undertake.

Sloka 20

**TYAKTVA KARMAPHALASANGAM NITYA TRUPTO NIRASHRAYAHA
KARMANYABHI PRAVRITTO’PI NAIVA KINCHIT KAROSI SAHA**

He who has given up attachment to the fruits of work, who is ever content, who does not depend upon anything, though engaged in actions, does not verily do anything.

Herein is a description of “Jivanmukta.”

Who is a Jivanmukta, how does he live and how does one recognise him? Three characteristics of such a person are given in this sloka. They are:

Tyaktva karamphala sangam: abandoning attachment to the fruits of action.

Nitya trupta: ever content.

Nirashrayaha: does not depend upon anything.

Abandoning the fruits of action is stressed so many times in the Gita. It is true that every action does bring its results either good or bad. Whether one wishes for it or not, results will follow every action.

Actions are “present” and results are “future.” One of the principal rules of any action is to be in one plane and that is “live in the present”. Living in two planes of “present and future” at the same time reduces the efficiency of the present.

A student studying in the university does so to get a degree and thereby have a source of living. His duty should be to live in the “present” and study. He should be putting 100% concentration on all aspects of study like listening to the teacher, revising what is learnt and preparing for next day’s lessons etc. He strives hard to get all his doubts cleared by sheer concentration, assistance of the teachers and study of the concerned texts.

With this effort he completes the necessary exams at the end of the studies. With all this effort, by the blessings of the Lord (who takes into account the results of actions of the past), he will get the results. With the degree achieved by the efforts and the blessings of the Lord, the next stage is to work and learn to live in self sufficiency.

The student has no right to be thinking of the life after graduation during his studies. He needs to take into account the life after graduation before deciding on the course of studies. Once having taken a decision to take up a course of studies, the effort has to be totally on the present.

The same rule applies to all the individuals and at all times. The rule being simply “abandoning attachment to the fruits of action”. Everybody is entitled to receive the fruits of action and will get the same on completion of the actions. Even those on the spiritual path are also entitled to get the reward which is “Moksha.”

Normally one expects the results immediately at the end of any action. Philosophically speaking this is not possible because it is the grace of the Lord that decides on the time of receiving the result of action. Every action will have a result either now or in the future and the timing of the future is not in our hands.

We have been instructed by the Lord not to be the slave to the desires but do every action as a duty to the Lord.

The next characteristic is “Nitya Trupta.”

“Trupti” is “contentment.”

“Trupta” is he who is content.

“Nitya trupta” is he who is content at all times.

Contentment applies both during the conduct of actions and also on receiving the results of actions either good or bad. It is important to have aspirations in life but at the same time gracefully accept the end result of actions. One should work for fulfilling the aspirations but be content with the results of such actions. As we discussed before the results depend upon so many factors.

Depend upon our past karmas. Every karma/action has a result but the time one gets the results varies. This depends totally on the grace of the Lord. The word used in the sastras is “Sanchita Karma”. It means accumulated karmas from the past (the results of which have not materialised. This includes the results of both good and bad actions).

Even though the present may have been done with 100% efficiency, because of some of the wrong/bad actions of the past, (the results of which that have been decreed by the Lord,) one may not get the 100% results. We have to accept that knowingly or unknowingly each one of us have done both good and bad actions in the past and have to be prepared to receive the results at any time in our life, either present or in the future.

Similarly, even if the present effort is not total 100% efficient, one may get surprisingly good results, again because of the good/correct actions in the past. (the results of which have been bestowed now on us by His grace.)

The one who understands this principle of “Sanchita karma” will learn the art of being content at all times. Their contentment is not conditioned by “time, place or circumstances.”

The last character of such an individual is “Nirashrayaha.”

Ashraya means “dependant.”

Nirashraya means “not dependant.”

In our day to day life, majority of us are dependent upon wealth, family, society and our own physical health. We all cling to something or other in the material world. When we lose the same, when something unpleasant happens to what we are attached to, we lose our sense of balance and get depressed. This reduces the efficiency of actions.

What we have to realise is that none of these are permanent. We are conditioned by time, space and circumstances. This in turn is because we perceive anything (including our own physical body) with our sense organs, we are conditioned by “Name and form” (nama, roopa). We are blind to the reality of “Sat, Chit, Ananda” (Truth, Existence and Bliss.) He alone who sees the “Sat, Chit, Ananda” and not the “Nama, Roopa” will not depend upon anything from the material world. Happiness and sorrow does not enter the realm of his reactions and his life is constantly in “Bliss” of the Atman.

The word “Nirashraya” is used in this context. Our own shelter has to be “The Lord” and nothing but the Lord.

Such an individual will find his abode of peace in the Atman and never falls down to the level of matter. He does so despite the fact that he is constantly engaged in actions by accepting the fact that he has a role to play in the theatre called “Life.”

This is a message for Arjuna to stand up and discharge his duty of protecting the dharma and uprooting the evil by becoming an instrument in the hands of the divine. This state of spiritual discipline is essential for the spiritual seeker.

Sri Ramakrishna quotes this following episode from Srimad Bhagawatam.

The Gopis were returning home one day and found no ferrymen to carry them across the river Yamuna to Brindavan. Sri Veda Vyasa was at the shore at that time and they explained their plight to him. He tells them not to get worried and that he would lead them back home. "Please give me some food first to appease my hunger" he said. The gopis did oblige and offered him milk, butter etc. After finishing the sumptuous food offered, the sage got up and said "O Yamuna Devi, if it is a fact that I am fasting today, stop flowing and make way for us to go back to Brindavan." To everyone's surprise, the river parted and the party walked back home.

The perplexed gopis asked the sage how after having consumed the food he could say that he was fasting? The sage then replied "The ceaseless hankering of my heart for Sri Krishna is my spiritual fasting. The idea I eat, is not allowed to enter my mind. I offered the dishes to the Lord as oblation as He is the presiding deity in my body."

Sloka 21

**NIRAASHEER YATA CHITTATMA TYAKTVA SARVA PARIGRAHAHA
SHAAREERAM KEVALAM KARMA KURVANNOPNO'TI KILBHISHAM**

He who is free from hope, who is self-controlled, who has abandoned all the possessions though working merely with the body, does not incur sin.

Kilbhisha means "sin".

"Na apno'ti kilbhishaha" means "does not incur sin."

"Sin" is a word commonly used in the spiritual sense. The dictionary meaning for the word is "transgression against divine or moral law." Any action that results in deviation from the spiritual path is considered as an act of "sin." Actions conducted according to the divine or moral law accumulate points of merit (in the spiritual journey) and actions opposite to it will result in negative points that take the seaker in a downward path towards self destruction.

Three further qualifications of a "Jivanmkuta" are enumerated in this sloka.

a) Nirasha:

"Asha" is "Desire, Hope". "Nirasha" is "free from desire, hope".

Let us not forget that "Nishkama karma and karmaphala tyaga" are the two main conditions for any actions we undertake. It is therefore imperative that one should not have any desire but do the work as a duty to the divine.

Wishing for "Moksha" is acceptable in the early stages of progress. One has to progress consciously from "Tamas to Rajas", from "Rajas to Satva" and from "Satva to Shudda Satva." This does take a long time and one has to pass through so many cycles of births and deaths before reaching this stage. The true Jivanmukta does not desire to enjoy the pleasures of the material world and at the same time he does not even long to enjoy the bliss of the Atman. By his efforts he does automatically experience

the bliss but it is not out of any desire on his part. He does not also look for any fame and credit for himself.

We start off with a desire to pass and that too with distinction in our school and college examinations. This is not wrong. Those who seek to go for postdoctorate studies do not do so for the degree but for the sake of progress in acquiring the higher knowledge and becoming masters in that speciality. For the dedication they put in this field, they automatically get the title of “post-doctorate fellow”. This is the nearest one can explain “Moksha”.

Let us take another example of mountain climbing. The climber fixes the end point firmly and makes sure it is totally secure and takes totally the weight of his body in the process of climbing up. He then starts from the bottom end of the rope and starts climbing one step at a time. Even though his final aim is to reach the peak of the mountain, he concentrates on the present and works at climbing one step at a time. He wishes to climb one step at a time. To do so, he holds on to the bottom end of the rope firmly with both the hands. With a fine art, he lets go of one hand, moves it upwards to the next step and gets hold of the rope at the next point. At the same time, he lets go totally of the hand which was holding at the bottom end. Adeptly he moves that free hand and takes it up to the next step of progress and holds on firmly at that point. Like that, he makes progress and attempts at reaching the top.

In the early steps, there is a strong desire to reach the top but the concentration has to be towards the first step to take. There should be and there will be a need and desire to move to the next step. The expert climber, as he moves forward, is confident of his actions and does not have any desire to reach the peak. He aims and works at the end result but does not live in the dreamland during his journey.

(Let us remember that all these are examples to understand the principle but the experience of divinity and the path towards divinity is totally different. None of the examples can give a totally true picture of the end result of “Moksha” because it is beyond description.)

b) Yata chittatma: Self controlled.

It is the control of the lower self which is the “ego” by the higher Self which is the Atman within.

The ego works through the sense organs, mind and the intellect. One cannot put any blame on the objective world for the failure to progress. It is our reaction to those sense objects that makes all the difference. The vision we have of the objects has to move from sensual to spiritual. An object of beauty should not become an object of desire. It should become an object of adoration. One should see the hand of the divine in creation of the object of adoration. The sense organs should be taught the lesson of collecting the “Sreyas” aspects of the world around. (Sreyas is that which is beneficial in the spiritual quest.) They should be under the control of the mind.

The mind in turn should know its master and be under the control of the intellect. The intellect should be working hard at listening to the “Inner voice of the divine” (Antaratma) and get a grip on the thoughts that generate in the mind which might distract the seeker (refer to sloka 42, chapter 3). Eventually such acts of constant self-control will lead to “Atmajnana.”

This way, the ego will be subdued and the physical body will work as the servant of the divine atman within.

The example we have from the epic Ramayana is about the character of Hanuman. Hanuman is said to have the image of His Lord Rama and mother Sita in his chest at all times. He considers himself as the servant of Rama and never as the most powerful vanara (monkey). He lives constantly in self-control.

c) Aparigraha: Non-receiving.

The word used in the sloka is “Tyakta sarva parigraha.”

Parigraha is receiving. Not receiving any gifts and abandoning all possessions is “Tyakta sarva parigraha.” It is the rule of conduct for any spiritual aspirant.

The scriptures declare that he who receives any gift from others automatically receives from them their part of the karma. Let us understand this clearly. If the other person has accumulated bad karma, by accepting gifts from him, the receiver would receive part of donor’s sin. Using the same logic, if the other person has accumulated good karma, by accepting gift from him, the receiver will get part of his punya. This is the principle of work by the saints. The saints give us the gift of the scriptures which they have mastered. We get part of their punya but they in turn get more punya by their gift to us.

Accepting of gifts would put the individual under moral obligation and many a times there is an expectation of return of favours. This rule of aparigraha does not apply to those who receive the due remuneration for the work rendered.

Sloka 22

YADRUCCHA LABHA SANTUSHTO’ DWANDWATITO VIMATSARAH SAMAH SIDDHAVASIDDHO CHA KRITVAPI NE NIBHADYATE

Content with what he gets without efforts, free from the pairs of opposites, free from malice, balanced in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound.

Continuing the theme of the knowledge required to conduct perfect actions, we have enumeration of few more aspects of karma.

One has to conduct actions/karma; there is no doubt about it. Every individual has to act. Normally our actions are related to Annamaya kosha, Pranamaya kosha, Manomaya kosha. (The gross physical body; the internal organs lungs, heart, digestive organs, excretory organs, genital organs and to the mind.).

Whenever we act, we feel that we have put our efforts in it. The feeling of effort comes in because we feel that we have carried out the work. This feeling is the “ego” and the mind feels that “I have carried out the work.” If we can strive to go beyond the level of the mind and intellectually analyse the real doer of actions, we will find out that the actions were conducted because of the power of the Atman within.

Another way of explaining the same is as follows:

Every individual has a duty to work for his body, his family, the society and for the nature and all these have to be fulfilled in the spirit of “I am the servant of the Atman/divinity within.”

The Jnani realises that he has to work and it is his duty to do so. Karma and Jnana, (action and knowledge), Jnana and work, (knowledge and action) are interdependent.

With this understanding one has to know what the meaning of the sentence is:
“content with what he gets without efforts.”

“Effort” according to the dictionary is “putting forth an exertion of strength or power either bodily or mentally”. When we feel that we have put forth an exertion we consider we have done so with an effort. This is the “Ego” in us that makes us feel “I have done it.”

Such an individual, who has acquired the true Jnana, does not feel the effort by him in any actions conducted. He therefore feels content with what he gets out of the work done. Like a true karma yogi he puts 100% efforts in what he has to do, which is not desire oriented and offers the results to the Lord in the spirit of “Sri Krishnarpanamastu.” This is what we have to understand by the first quarter of the Sloka “Content with what he gets without efforts.”

Because of this attitude even though he works, it is all above the intellectual plane of thinking. He is not affected by success or failure, gain or loss, victory or defeat.

He is free from malice: (ill will, spite)

The true karma yogi with the knowledge of Jnana does not bear any ill will to anybody. Despite the failures he encounters in his work, he does not harbour any personal grudges. He attributes the failures to his past karmas and the fate decreed by the Lord for his past actions. On the other hand, if somebody else gets the benefit of his efforts, he does not get jealous. He does not feel that it was his right to enjoy the results and the other person should not have got the benefit.

Such an individual, who has perfected the art of working from the planes above the intellect, does not get bound by the results of his present actions. He will have successfully worked at clearing away the existing vasanas and will not have any more new vasanas entering his mind. He would soon move to mano nasha and attain “Liberation.”

The main feature of such an individual who has no sense of ego in his actions is “Trupti.” “Trupti” is contentment. He is content knowing that he has put all his efforts in the work and is not interested any more in what he would get out of the work. His actions are always without any Sankalpa.

Quote from Bhajagovindam of Sri Shankaracharya:

Mudha jahihi dhanagamat trishnam
Kuru sadbudhim manasi vitrisnam
Yallabhate nijakarmopattam
Vittam tena vinodaya cittam

O you ignorant, drop your thirst for wealth. Attain that state of the mind which is free from thirst for wealth. Develop the habit of letting your mind be satisfied with what you get from your personal effort.

Sloka 23

**GATA SANGASYA MUKTASYA JNANAVASTITA CHETASAHA
YAJNATAACHARATAHA KARMAM SAMGRAM PRAVILEEYATE**

Of the man who is devoid of attachment, whose mind is established in knowledge, the whole action performed in the spirit of sacrifice is dissolved.

This Sloka gives us the four essential qualities of a Jnani. They are:

Gatasangasya: devoid of attachment to the world of plurality.

Muktasya: freedom from desires and hatreds.

Jnanavastita chetasaha: mind established in knowledge.

Yajnaaya: conduct of work in the spirit of sacrifice.

Such a person may be conducting / will be conducting thousands of actions but the results of all such actions do not bind him back to the samsara. As we have discussed before this is because with this attitude and understanding of work the present actions do not lead to accumulation of any further vasanas. He is continuing to live as long as he is alive and burning away all his existing vasanas.

Unrestricted mind and senses, desires and hatreds and ego result in accumulation of new vasanas. This leads to subsequent birth into the whirlpool of samsara. Let us be clear therefore that this is the creation of man's own mind and the objective world is only an instrument of his destiny. We have no right to blame the world for what is happening to us. We are the creators of our own destiny.

The perfect sage who has released himself from the enslaving forces of the senses and the mind finds the eternal peace in himself and continues to discharge all his worldly obligations. If the work gets dissolved in the ocean of knowledge, there is no further bondage.

Yajnaaya: "Yajnas" as we have discussed before is "Dedicated work." Any dedicated work becomes a sacrifice but the dedication has to be for the "Supreme" only. In the context of the secular world we live in we should consider yajnas as acts of worship of God, acts for the welfare of others and/or any acts conducted to maintain dharma on earth. Only acts that fall in this category do not accumulate any more new vasanas.

The art of living with the feeling of "nothing in the material world is really mine" but fulfilling the duties to the family, society, nature as long as one is living is true "Gatasangasya." He gives all his love and affection to those that depend on him but with a sense of detachment in attachment.

Muktasya: because of freedom from attachments he is "Atmanishta and Atmatupta." (Established in Atman and contented with Atman.)

There is a very good explanation by Sri Madhvacharya of the three words used in this Sloka:

Gatasangasya: free from friendship to the fruits of actions.

Muktasya: free from bodily attachment and Ahamkara.

Jnanavastita chetasaha: who constantly keeps the mind immersed in the knowledge of the Parabrahman.

Sloka 24

**BRAHMAPANAM BRAHMA HAVIR BRAHMAGNOU BHRAHMANAA HUTAM
BRAHMENA TENA GANTAVYAM BRAHMA KARMA SAMADHINO**

**The oblation is Brahman,
The offerings are Brahman,
The sacrifice is Brahman,
And asorption in action is Brahman.**

Brahman referred to in this sloka has to be understood in the sense of spiritual or divine energy. Brahman shall be reached by him who recognizes Brahman alone in his action.

This Sloka is with reference to the Yajnas which was a ritualistic action in the days gone by. The traditional yajna was conducted with building up an altar for sacrificial fire in which were poured oblations. Sacrifices were offered to invoke and satisfy the deity. The karta was told by the priest that he would get his wishes fulfilled by the deity invoked. Basically the yajna was a ritualistic act to fulfil

a desire knowing that there is always a higher power than the individual and the individual has to show his respect to that power and get his/her grace bestowed on him.

Yajna had four factors incorporated in it.

The deity invoked.

The fire.

The material for oblation.

The individual performing the yajna, called karta.

The deity invoked is the higher power whose grace is requested in fulfilling the desire. The highest of the highest power is “Brahman.” All other deities we invoke are a part of the Parabrahman.

The fire is symbolic of the “knowledge.” “Agni”, the fire God is considered as the medium to take the human wishes and oblations to the higher deity. This is because the fire is always pointing upwards. “Upward” signifying the abode of the higher powers. One has to understand that the fire represents “knowledge”. Knowledge as we know is the path to higher aspirations in life. The Vedas clearly declare that “Knowledge is Brahman.”

The materials used in the yajna are the firewood, oil, ghee, naturally occurring herbs and medicinal plants products, food cooked for the yajna, fruits etc. As we know all the articles used for the yajna are a combination of the Pancha Maha bhootas, the five gross elements. Again, from what we have studied so far, the material is not manifest in its form of presentation without the presence of the “energy” within it. For example, the firewood simply looks like a log of wood. It has a certain amount of “energy” which is un-manifest within it. May be 90-95% of it is simply wood. A small but important element is the “energy” within. On burning the firewood, the five elements join back with the five elements of nature and the energy within mixes with the un-manifest “energy” in nature.

The individual who is performing the yajna, (using the same explanation used for the material for oblation) is also alive because of the “Atman” within.

Hence the four factors mentioned in the Sloka:

The deity is Brahman,

The oblations are Brahman,

The offerings are Brahman and

The sacrifice is Brahman.

The Sloka reiterates the fact that the main rule for the conduct of any yajna is “total absorption in the act of yajna.”

One of the main activities we conduct every day which is related to our health is eating the food. Using the meal as the example:

The food we eat is the food we have to offer to the Brahman. We are really “The Brahman” residing as the Atman within and the food is symbolically for him. The deity invoked is Brahman.

The digestive fire, excretory fire, circulatory fire, fire of the nervous system and all the fires involved in bodily functions act as physical representatives of the Brahman.

What we eat is another manifested form of the Brahman and hence the material we eat is also Brahman.

We, the kartas, eating the food are really the “Brahman” manifest as the individuals.

It is therefore a very strong tradition to repeat this Sloka before any food is consumed. One can see the similarity with the Christian tradition of saying the “Grace” before consuming the food.

This prayer is to remind us of the “Eternal Truth” and the means to act keeping the Truth in mind constantly.

To summarize,
The fire is Brahman,
The energy is Brahman,
The food is Brahman,
The feeder is Brahman and
The act of eating is Brahman.
Everything and every act is Brahman.

The sacred texts remind us of the need to keep in mind constantly this verse in the performance of every action we perform in life.

Chandogya Upanishad:
Sarvam khalvidam Brahma: all this is Brahman.

We need to clear the delusion of duality by the process known as “purification of the mind”, which is an act of “Tapas” in itself.

The acts conducted with this spirit lose their separate limited quality and their binding power. The binding power that leads one to be born into the whirlpool of samsara is converted into spiritual quality that lifts us out of the samsara. Brahman is realised in all that one thinks and acts. Karma melts into Jnana and Jnana melts into karma.

Sloka 25

**DAIVAM EVAPARE' YAJNA YOGINAH PARYUPASATE
BRAHMAAGNAAVAPARE' YAJNA YAJNENAIVOPAJUHVATI**

Some yogis perform sacrifice to gods only while others by the union of the self with the Brahman, offer the self as sacrifice in the fire of Brahman.

We are going to be told in the next seven slokas the different types of yajnas conducted by spiritual seekers. We have two types of yajnas enumerated in this Sloka.

Some yogis perform sacrifice to Gods only.
This is the meaning of the first half of the Sloka.

We need to understand the meaning of the word “Deva” used here. Depending upon the way we interpret the meaning, we have two explanations for this type of yajna.

Supreme Brahman who is Nirakara, Nirguna is not easy for majority to comprehend. It is very hard to meditate on the formless Brahman with no qualities. By bringing out the same Brahman with a form and attributing divine qualities to that form it becomes easy for the majority. Our ancestral seers having realised this fundamental truth, have therefore brought out the same Brahman in so many different forms and attributes a number of divine qualities to each of them. They have thereby given a democratic choice for every individual to worship the form he/she likes/adores. Thus the path of

Bhakti/devotion has been encouraged for the simple folks who find the path of knowledge hard to understand and follow.

We have a number of Gods like Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva, Ganesha, Satyanarayana etc. So many different types of worship are there in the books for each of the devas in the Hindu pantheon. Bhaktas/devotees of a particular named God offer worship to that God and meditate on him/her with all sincerity and devotion. It helps in their spiritual growth. They are said to conduct yajna in the true spirit by performing all actions to please that god.

The word “Deva” means “illuminated ones”. The worship or conduct of yajna to any illuminated soul is also accepted to be correct.

The other meaning of the word “Deva” is as follows:

The power behind each of the five sense organs is also known as “Deva.”

We have five sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. The corresponding Panchamaha bhootas, sun, space, earth, water and air are the five devas for our sense organs.

What is the power behind the eyes? What makes us see with our eyes? The light makes us see. We cannot see in the dark. Hence the light is the power that makes us see.

What is the light we normally associate with?

We associate the sun with the light. Daylight comes from the sun and we are generally awake during the day time.

Hence, sun is considered as the Deva for the eyes.

Using this logic of explanation, we should understand about the following devas:

Space: Deva for the ears. We can hear only when there is space for the sound to travel.

Earth: Deva for the nose. This is attributed to the function of smell by the nose.

Water: Deva for the tongue. The function of taste by the tongue makes the water Deva of it.

Air: Deva for the skin. The function of touch is possible because of the power of the air.

How can one offer sacrifice to these five devas?

By the power of discrimination if we can see what is good for us and do not take notice of what we see which is not good for us it is considered as the yajna for the Deva “Sun.” In the fire of knowledge the seekers offer as oblations all the good they see and with the feeling of universal welfare by saying “Sri Krishnarpanamastu, Shivarpanamastu etc.” At the same time they offer as oblations in the fire what is not good for them and the society.

In simple words the general rule “do not see evil, speak evil and hear evil” is the true sacrifice to the devas for our sense organs.

"Others by the union of the self with the Brahman, offer the self as the sacrifice in the fire of Brahman."

This is the meaning of the second half of the Sloka that gives the second type of yajna.

Not all individuals are same. The world is made up of millions of people and each one in their own sense has a sense of individuality. Among these there are some who have faith in the Vedas and Upanishads and conduct yajna. Amongst those who conduct yajna there are some who with the fire of knowledge realise that they are just instruments in the hands of the divine.

They overcome the barrier of “ego” which acts as a hindrance in the spiritual journey. The “bhavana” (feeling) they conduct any act is simply “Sri Krishnarpanamastu, Shivarpanamstu etc” (all of the results are to you my Lord). They dedicate their entire life to the Lord. With that bhavana, they manage to clear away the existing vasanas and do not accumulate any new vasanas. They make their path clear to attain union with the Supreme. They realise that it is the physical body that has to stay alive till death and they make use of their body for the welfare of the society they live in. One can say that these are the true “Jnana yogis.” This is the true knowledge of the Brahman: “Brahma Jnana”.

Sacrifice of the self by the self means dedicating oneself totally to the Supreme. One can say that it is the surrender of the individual consciousness to the Cosmic Consciousness. This type of yajna makes the apparent man change into the real man, the real man being the “Supreme Parabrahman.” (Tat-Tvam-Asi.)

Sloka 26

**SROTRADEEN INDRIYAANIANYE SAMYAMAGNISHU JUHVATI
SHABDADEEN VISHAYAAN ANYA INDRIYAGNISHU JUHVATI**

Others sacrifice the senses like the organ of the hearing etc. in the fire of sense-restraint. Some others offer sense-objects like the sound etc.in the fire of the senses.

We have two more types of yajnas described in this Sloka.

The yajnas concern the sense organs and as an example we have the organ of hearing, the ear and its action of hearing. The same principle applies to all the other four sense organs.

The two yajnas are:

Restraining the senses. (Sense control.)

Rejecting the sense objects. (self control.)

What is sacrificing the senses in the fire of sense-restraint?

Hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and feeling (through the sense of touch) are the functions of the ears, eyes, nose, tongue and skin respectively. Sacrificing these five functions in the fire of restraint is advocated. The total restraint of all the impulses becomes total sense control. Without sense control it is impossible to control the mind. Without mind control liberation is impossible.

It is like eating for sake of eating which should be for nourishment to the body and not as an act to enjoy. All the senses are made to work for the bare maintenance of the body. The mind is then able to concentrate on the Atman within and at the same time life can go on mechanically.

We have studied already that Moksha is freedom from pains and pleasures arising from the contact with the material world and revelling on the eternal bliss from within. These pleasures and pains are from the objective world and sense organs are the medium to bring the impression of the objects to the mind. By the power of sense restraint we can eliminate the entry of the impressions reaching the mind.

Be awake but let the sense organs go to sleep is another way of explaining this yajna (refer Sloka 69, chapter 2).

Many people take recourse of following the life of vows in the conduct of this type of yajna. Not talking certain days in a week, not eating certain types of food, avoiding some foods on certain days, not reading certain types of books, not watching certain types of films etc. are some of the examples. The idea behind such vows is sense-control.

In the second type of yajna we are told to reject the sense objects. This is self-control.

Again the question comes as to what does it actually entail? It is not total rejection of all but to have a controlled entry. It means that we should control the entry into the mind of these five types of senses. We should be vigilant at the entry gates.

One cannot totally close the sense organs and block the total entry of any impulses. It is like the customs control at the port of entry to any country. The customs officer checks the authenticity of entrants into the country and allows a limited entry. The welfare of the country is the criterion for this check of those coming in.

The seeker should master the art of deeply and closely examining what impression of the objects the senses are letting in.

Basically whatever impulses that assists in adoration of the Almighty should be allowed in. Tamasic and rajasic objects/impulses should be blocked and Satvic objects/impulses can be allowed in.

One can see the same object from a number of different planes. Sensual plane, physical planes, intellectual plane and finally the highest “spiritual plane” are the planes of visualising/receiving any object.

In the spiritual plane everything perceived is as a form of the divine. By offering the objects in the fire of self control the seeker will be able to concentrate the mind on the contemplation of the divine. Letting divine impulses come from all the five senses and blocking the sensual impulses (which are the root cause of pains and pleasures) the seeker will master the art of self-control.

The mind should make use of the intellectual capacity of reasoning to analyse the impulses coming in. It is like a child who has a large number of toys to play with and one day realising that he/she does not need/like certain types of toys and putting them away in a box. In course of time he/she forgets the existence of those toys which used to give him/her a lot of pleasure in the past. Once the mind has rejected an object, even when the senses perceive it, it does not get any pleasure out of that object. Such a mind will be able to remain calm in the ocean of samsara.

The sense restraint will make the senses ineffective but self-control makes the same senses more effective. Sense control is negative discrimination and self-control is positive discrimination. Sense control is rejecting “bad” and self-control is taking in “Good”.

Sloka 27

**SARVANEENDRIYA KARMANI PRANAKARMANI CHAPARE’
ATMA SAMYOGAGNOU JUHYATI JNANA DEEPITE’**

Others again sacrifice all the functions of the senses and the functions of breath (vital energy) in the fire of yoga of self-control, illumined by knowledge.

The aim of the seeker is Self-realisation.
What is the barrier to this objective?
What is the tool required to achieve this objective?

“The mind” is the answer for both these questions. The mind is considered to be the band master in all the bodily actions. On one side it is bombarded with the information about the material world through the sense organs and has a channel to communicate with the same through the organs of action. On the other side it has the “Intellect” that assists in the process of Self-realisation.

Yoga of self-control: (Atma samyama yoga)

The “self” referred to in this section is the “self” with the small “s”. It refers to the “Ego.” The seeker is asked to learn the art of controlling the ego/ahamkara.

The fire of yoga of self-control:

The fire as we have discussed before refers to the “Knowledge.” Knowledge of one’s true identity as the “Atman” will help to overcome the ego. This is the means to control the mind which has to learn the art of discrimination between “Atman and Un-atman.” The ego has to be offered as an oblation in the sacrificial fire to attain spiritual knowledge. Sri Shankaracharya says in “Atma Bodha”: “Nitya Anitya Viveka Vicharana” (analytical discrimination of what is eternal and what is temporary.)

Some experts use the example of a charcoal to understand this Sloka. The charcoal when put in the fire becomes ember and shines brightly. When the fire is extinguished it becomes charcoal again.

When the mind illumined by the knowledge understands its identity with the “Atman” it is like the ember. When it is covered with ahamkara and forgets its true identity it is like the extinguished charcoal.

The first step towards this is by sense-control and self-control which we discussed in the last Sloka.

Illumined by knowledge:

This chapter is “Jnana Yoga” and gives detailed description about “Jnana” for the beginner. (Chapter 13, Kshetra Kshetrajna Yoga is the chapter on Jnana for the advanced seekers.) This Jnana should keep the fire of knowledge alive and dispel the darkness called “ignorance of the Self.”

The mind which is covered with ignorance due to the inherent past samskaras (vasanas) is the barrier to “Self-realisation”. To conquer such a mind needs various spiritual disciplines and we have two such disciplines given in this Sloka.

Restraining the senses.
Controlling the breath.

The force of the impulses brought in by the senses and ill regulated health agitate the mind endlessly. The seeker has to learn the two types of control:
Control of the senses - Indriya nigraha
Control of breath - Pranayama.

One cannot live in this world closing all the senses. But with the fine art of discrimination using the “Jnana” one should control what is coming in from the senses. This is “Indriya nigraha.” This is what is meant by the first quarter of the Sloka which says:

Sacrifice all the functions of the senses (in the fire of yoga of self-control.)

Self-control is “Atma-Samyama” the subject matter for the next chapter to come. This needs control of sense organs and organs of action. Breathe control is “Pranayama.”

Patanjali was a grammarian and an author of Yoga sutras, the earliest systematic treatise on yoga. He advocated eight limbed practice of yoga and it has come to be known as "Ashtanga yoga of Patanjali."

The eight steps in yoga are:

1) Yama - disciplines/restraints in the spiritual practice like:

Ahimsa

Satyam:

practicing to speak and follow the truth

Asteya:

not stealing

Brahmacharya:

celibacy

Aparigraha:

not receiving gifts (as in course of time it leads to becoming greedy)

Kshama:

capacity to forgive

Dhriti:

firm resolve in the undertaking of any actions (in this case, the progress in the spiritual path).

Resolve to fulfil the obligations to one's own body, to family, to the spiritual master, to the society, to other forms of life and to the mother nature in general is “Dhriti.”

Daya:

compassion to all forms of life, to the ignorant, to the poor, to the handicapped etc is "Daya".

Arjavam:

it is being straight forward and honest in all dealings socially and spiritually. It requires capacity to overcome habit of deception.

Mitahara:

habit to be moderate in food. In this sense “food” includes the impulses received from all the five sense organs.

2) Niyama - observations needed in the practice of spiritual disciplines like:

Soucham: cleanliness.

Tapas: purification of body, speech and mind.

Swadhyaya: self study/analysis of one's actions.

Ishwara poojana: worship of the deity of choice.

Trupti: contentment.

Danam: alms giving.

Astikya: faith in God and spiritual master and the spiritual texts.

Hri: learning to be remorse by recollecting the faults/errors and make amends for the mistakes.

Vrata: observation of resolves undertaken and the spiritual practices.

Japa: recitation of a mantra, sacred syllable Om on a regular basis.

Dara: to give liberally without any thought of recognition or reward for the efforts put in.

3) Asana - postures that assist in the practice of meditation. The practice of asana is to develop “body discipline.” Various postures like “Padmasana, Virasana, Bhadrasana” are described in the texts.

Certain medical conditions or serious illness like stroke will make it difficult for some to practice asanas. The sastras do give directions for such people also to conduct the yajna.

4) Pranayama - breathe control.

5) Pratyahara - sense withdrawal. When the mind is totally absorbed in “the task at present” it is said to be in “Pratyahara.” In such state the impulses from the surroundings that continue to enter the mind while it is absorbed in a specific task do not divert the mind.

6) Dharana - constant flow of thoughts on a single task is Dharana.

7) Dhyana - meditation. This is the constant flow of thoughts on the object of Dharana.

8) Samadhi - absorbed in the union with the Atman achieved by the above methods. There is no more of the objective world in this state for such a seeker.

It is well known that there is a clear connection between consciousnesses, breathe and body.
The body is kept still by the practice of postures,
The breathe is controlled through Pranayama and
The mind is kept still through concentration.

If the flow of breathe is voluntarily regulated, its effect on the mind is beneficial. On this basis the science of Pranayama evolved in course of time. It consists of three steps:

Breathing in through the nostril - Puraka

Holding the breathed air in - Kumbhaka

Breathing out - Rechaka.

The yogi avoids breathing through the mouth. Air taken in through the nostril is “Apana” and the air that is breathed out through the nose is “prana.” Correct practice of Pranayama is said to assist in healing diseases, tones the system, enhances the health and calms the mind. Is it not true that measured breathing and attitude of calmness constitutes a good practice? Pranayama does assist in this good practice. The masters recommend the practitioners of Pranayama learn to recite the holy mantra “Aum” during the procedure. This method of breathe control is considered as a form of sacrifice.

Sloka 28

**DRAVYA YAJNAS TAPOYAJNA YOGA YAJNAS TATHAPARE'
SWADHYAYA YAJNA-JNANAYAJNASCHA YATAYAHA SAMSHITA VRATAHA.**

Others offer wealth, austerity and yoga as sacrifice. Some others, the ascetics of self-control and rigid vows, offer study of knowledge as sacrifice.

Dravya yajna:

It is the sacrifice by using the wealth as oblations in the fire of knowledge. The scriptures advocate acquiring the wealth only after learning all about “Dharma”. The Purushartha for a Hindu is “Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.” “Artha” refers to the wealth one has to acquire in life. Acquiring wealth by righteous means and making use of it to conduct the five “Nitya karmas” is true “Dravya Yajna.” (Refer to Karma yoga slokas 8 and 13)

Dana/alms giving is a form of Dravya yajna. The scriptures do give detailed advice/instructions about this type of yajna. Charity comes from giving with love what one has to others who need it. Of course

it goes without saying that charity has to be only that which has been acquired lawfully and not in the form of robbing the poor to give the rich. We will find in the latter chapters of the Gita detailed instructions on the subject of “Danam.”

Tapo yajna:

This is the sacrifice wherein the body and the senses are subjected to austerities (tapas) with the sole intention of purification.

We see pictures of sages and those wishing to acquire boons from gods standing in the extreme heat or cold, withstanding the extremes of weather and concentrating on the deity of choice. The word “Tapas” for an average brings to mind the above picture. Really speaking “Tapas” is an effort at purification.

A true student working hard in University and coming out with a degree is said to have conducted “Tapas” and purified his brain to get the degree. He did not let his mind wander about and become a tool for the play of the senses. He managed to get control over his senses and concentrated on the final goal.

To achieve something higher, one needs to let go of the lower. This is possible by control of the wandering mind and the senses. Any such act conducted to achieve the higher spiritual goal by constant restraint becomes “Tapas.”

In chapter 17, slokas 14, 15 and 16 the Lord gives us tapas of the body, speech and mind and that is “Tapas” in the truest sense.

Yoga yajna:

Control of the wandering mind is “Yoga Yajna” and in Sanskrit we say “Chitta Vritti Nirodha”. “Vritti” means “diversions” and “Chitta Vritti” is diversions of the wandering mind. “Nirodha” means “Control.”

Constant practice of Raja yoga or Ashtanga yoga constitutes “Yoga Yajna.” Breathe control, using the technique of Patanjali’s Ashtanga yoga is said to be the way of conducting “Yoga Yajna.” (Refer to the last Sloka).

Swadhyaya yajna:

“Swa” means “self.”

“Adhyaya” means “study.”

Learning the scriptures with self effort or with the help of the guru is “Swadhyaya.” “Swadhyaya” also means “self-analysis”. Analysing the events that happen in the lives and learning lessons from the same is true Swadhyaya. Study of the sacred texts requires a great deal of self-preparation and this also constitutes Swadhyaya.

When such sacred acts are conducted with a spirit of sacrifice, it is known as “Swadhyaya Yajna.”

Jnana yajna:

Pursuit of the spiritual knowledge with total purity of the mind, speech and body is true Jnana yajna. This needs the critical analysis of that which is “eternal” and which is “transitory.” Adiguru Shankaracharya calls it as “Nitya Anitya Viveka Vicharana.” (Analytical knowledge and understanding of Self which is Eternal and the physical world which is transient.)

The Jnana yajna is offered as sacrifice by ascetics of rigid vows. (samshrita vrataha) “Sadhana” is spiritual practice and “Sadhya” is the attainment of the end result.

To become an Olympic runner needs a great amount of discipline and not everybody who undertakes such discipline will win the gold medal. Similarly not all the seekers succeed in attaining the “Moksha” in this life. It needs constant practice of all the above forms of yajnas. Once all the vasanas are cleared, which might take several births into this world; the seeker will be blessed with “Moksha.”

With the ultimate aim of achieving salvation, several vows are taken by the different seekers. True Jnana is to make sure that the vows do not become acts of blind rituals.

The Lord used the word “Yatayaha” to describe such seekers. Yati’s are those who live the life of asceticism by constantly working to burn their existing vasanas and not acquiring any more new vasanas by their actions.

Sloka 29

APANE’ JUHVATI PRANAM PRANE-PANAM TATHAPARE PRANAPANA-GATI RUDDHVA PRANAYAMA-PARAYANAHA.

Others offer as sacrifice the out-going breath in the incoming, and the incoming in outgoing, restraining the sources of the outgoing and incoming breaths, solely absorbed in the restraint of breath.

This Sloka is about breath control. It is a specialist subject and the sincere seeker should consult a proper expert in this field. It is my sincere request that the novices should refrain from such practices.

A properly measured breathing, according to the medical experts is one more tool for healthy living. This technique is known as “Pranayama.”

Normally the breathing is an involuntary act. An average adult breathes between 14-16 times per minute. It involves three stages of breathing in, holding the breath and breathing out. We take the oxygen in and breathe out the carbon dioxide.

Depending upon the impulses received from the external world, our breathing pattern changes. Anger, hatred, fear, lust disturb the mind and this in turns alters the breathing pattern. The faster we breath, greater will be the disturbance on the mind. This is because the brain receives less oxygen and retains more of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide dulls the mind whereas oxygen activates the mind.

Rhythmic breathing is seen during states of calmness of the mind. By practices of control over the senses, one could control the breathing. Properly controlled breathing by voluntary methods benefits the mind. The ancient seers of India, the masters in the development of the Hindu culture realised this truth and developed the technique of Pranayama.

Prana: the incoming breath.

Apana: the outgoing breath.

The three stages of breathing:

Puraka: steady intake of breath.

Kumbhaka: holding on to the breathed in air.

Rechaka: breathing out.

Repeating the three stages of the cycle of breathing, with correct time for each of three stages, accompanied by the chanting of the sacred syllable “Om” constitutes the technique of Pranayama. Breathing not only regulates the respiratory system but directly or indirectly regulates all other bodily functions which also come under the word “Prana.” In a broad sense, Pranayama is control of all bodily functions. We are told in this Sloka that even this control of breath should be in the form of a sacrifice.

Sloka 30

**APARE' NIYATAHARAAHA PRANAAN PRANESHU' JUHYATI
SARVEPYENA YAJNAVIDO' YAJNA KSHAPITA KALMASHAHA**

Others with well regulated diet sacrifice life-breaths in the life-breaths. All these are knower's of sacrifice whose sins are destroyed by sacrifice.

So far a total of 12 different types of yajnas have been enumerated and of these the last Sloka and the present Sloka deal with control of breath and diet. Breathing and eating are two of the most important actions we conduct and they are for our survival. It is therefore important we understand these clearly.

Well regulated diet:

In chapter 17, verses 8, 9 and 10 we get detailed description of the foods that are either good or harmful to our body.

Doctors and dieticians stress on the importance of a healthy diet.

Basically the food we eat should meet the following requirements:

Pure

Moderate in quantity

Fresh

Earned by righteous means

Eating at the proper time and place

Offered to God with recitation of prayers and

Offered to the needy and other forms of life.

By this type of control over the food the mind remains pure and if the mind is pure the seeker will experience the spiritual illumination.

This is because the food we eat is converted into energy and energy is needed for our daily activities including discharge of our spiritual duties. Unhealthy food and food habits disturb the concentration of the mind needed to conduct all the activities.

The verse says:

Sacrifice life-breaths in life-breaths.

Let us analyse as to what it really means.

It is a fact of life that life lives on life. We should therefore learn to dedicate our life to the service of the cosmic life which is nothing but the various manifestations of life on earth.

Yajanvidaha is another word we come across this Sloka. It means “the knower's of the 12 types of sacrifices” enumerated so far.

Whose sins are destroyed:

In spiritual practice, sin is applied to that action which hinders the path to Liberation. Sins are one type of actions we perform. As we have studied so far, thoughts are precursors of actions. The thoughts are the vasana imprints on our mind. Destruction of the entire vasanas accumulated over so many births by the acquisition of knowledge and conduction of actions according to the knowledge acquired is the prerequisite for Liberation. "Sins are destroyed" means simply the destruction of all the accumulated vasanas.

The disciplines practiced in the 12 types of yajnas will lead to Self-realisation.

Sloka 31

**YAJNA SHISHTAMRUTA BHUJO YAANTI BRAHMA SANATANAM
NAAYAM LOKOSTY AYAJNASYA KUTONYAHA KARUSATTAMA**

Those who eat the remnants of sacrifices which is nectar go to the eternal Brahman. To the non-sacrificer, even this world is not, how can he get a higher world? O best of the Kurus.

This Sloka is almost similar to Sloka 13, chapter 3.

Yajna shishta: remnants of the sacrifice.

“Prasada” is a word commonly used in the Hindu philosophy. It means the returns one gets after offering his services to the higher power. Yajna shishta has to be considered as the returns for the sacrifice and this has to be accepted as the blessings from the higher power.

So far we had description of different types of sacrifices. All the sacrifices have one thing in common and that is self-denial.

We associate fruits as something we eat and enjoy. Karma Phala is fruit of action performed. In spiritual sense, eating does not apply only to the food consumed but to the results/fruits of any action conducted.

The Gita is all about the actions, fruits of actions, knowledge about the correct actions. Through the description of the various types of yajnas we are directed towards correct actions. Not only we have to conduct correct actions but we must also know how to make use of the results achieved.

In brief here is a description of how to make use of the results of actions: (taking example of the monthly wages received for the work conducted.)

- a) Considering that the body is a temple with the divinity inside it, we all have a sacred duty to look after our body. We have to use a portion of the gains by actions for the welfare of the body. Needs for clothing, shelter, food etc have to be met depending upon one's social status in the society. Taking care of the bodily needs is not wrong as long as it fits in with the principle of dharma.
- b) One cannot guarantee that he can continue to work all the time. Ill health, injury, retirement etc reduces the income or completely stops the income. At such times, one should try not to be a burden on others and on the society. Therefore, as a preventive measure, wherever possible one should keep a portion of wealth earned for needs in such desperate situations.
- c) Each one of us will have some dependants like husband/wife/children/elderly parents/relatives etc. We cannot say when death approaches us. We should make sure that our death does not make our dependants lose their shelter. We should make provision wherever possible that the dependants are reasonably secure after our death. Part of the wealth is for this type of insurance.

d) We have a social obligation to the needy in the society and also need to contribute towards the societies expenses for the various sections of the society. Portion of the wealth is for this purpose. It is in the form of local taxes and charitable deeds.

e) Finally we have duty to contribute towards religious activities like upkeep of religious institutions and supporting those who keep our culture alive. This includes contribution towards maintenance of the temples also. After all we are the children of God and we need to see that the name of God is kept alive for the generations to come.

This is the sacrifice or self-denial the Gita talks about.

If we do not follow this basic rule we are considered to be selfish. Krishna tells us that a selfish person does not really get joy out of this world and whatever joy he gets is limited to a short period of time.

Total destruction of “I” (self) confers the highest reward and that being “merger with the Supreme”. This merger is “Liberation”. Liberated individual has the abode of the Supreme as his abode and that is “The Nectar” referred to in this Sloka.

If we consider that every individual is a composition of “divinity and man”, the task of having been born as human is to expose the divinity to the world outside and annihilate the man element.

Sloka 32

**EVAM BAHUVIDA YAJNA VITATAA BRAHMANO' MUKHE
KARMAJAN VIDDHI TAAN SARVAN EVA JNATVA VIMOKSYASE**

The various forms of sacrifice are spread out in the storehouse of the Vedas (which are the faces of Brahman). Know them all to be born of action. Thus knowing you will be liberated.

The first half of the Sloka states that all the above mentioned yajnas are not something new brought out by Krishna, the cowherd son of Vasudeva and Devaki but by Brahman. We should remember the fact that Krishna is the incarnation of the Parabrahman. All these are described in the Vedas which have originated from the Brahman. Hence the expression that the Vedas are the faces of Brahman.

As we know that the Vedas are spread out in three sections:

Karma kanda - action

Upasana kanda - meditation

Jnana kanda - knowledge.

The various yajnas are from the karma kanda section of the Vedas. The actions as we know are born of desires to achieve the desired objects. We have to learn the yajnas and conduct the same to achieve the Liberation. Actions have to be the means to the end and not an end in themselves. “Jnana” is the final step to the end result. Well planned and well executed actions should become only the means. Individual effort is essential for the performance of yajna. Inaction/inactivity is not the way for majority and is only for the selected few who have already climbed up the spiritual ladder. We must make use of the body, speech and mind to achieve the goal. Any individual who converts karma into yajna in its truest sense is fit for Liberation.

This is another reminder for Arjuna to fight the war of righteousness. He had a duty to fight the enemy in the spirit of “Yajna” and this chapter on Jnana is reiterating the truth to him. Through the medium of Arjuna, we are reminded to do all our karmas in the spirit of yajna. Arjuna expressed his ignorance

about the right action but did so to the Supreme Lord himself and the Gita given by the Lord is to dispel this ignorance.

Sloka 33

**SHREYAAN DRAVYAMAYAAD YAJNAJ JNANAYAJNAHA PARANTAPA
SARVAM KARMAKHILAM PARTHA JNANE' PARISAMAPTATE.**

O Partha, knowledge-sacrifice is superior to wealth-sacrifice. All actions in their entirety, O Arjuna, end in knowledge.

As we go through the Gita we find that in different contexts we hear the word that a particular way of sadhana is superior to the others. These should not be taken as contradictory statements. Every method of sadhana that suits the temperament of the seeker is a superior method for that seeker. The end result of any sadhana is acquirement of the "Knowledge."

Which knowledge?

It is as Sri Jagadguru Shankaracharya says "Nitya Anitya Viveka Vicharana" which means the analysis and through analysis acquiring the knowledge of realising which is eternal and which is temporary. To know which is "Atma" and which is "Anatma" and realise the "Eternal Truth" and live in contentment with the knowledge acquired is the real knowledge.

"Wealth-sacrifice" when not done in the true spirit and done with the purpose of gaining name, fame, reputation will procure only a temporary period of happiness. If it is done with the spirit of "self denial" and for "acts of welfare", as "nishkama karma and karma phala tyaga" the seeker will experience the "Peace within and peace all round." The sadhana which uses the tools of control of mind, senses and the intellect from running towards sense objects and diverting the attention to the Atman within and all around will give the Eternal Peace. The knowledge of discrimination between ego and the Soul is true "Atma Jnana."

In the context of this sloka we have to understand that karma is sadhana (effort) and Jnana is Sadhya (result).

In the second half of this verse Sri Krishna declares that all actions culminate in knowledge. Let us understand the same by examples.

A child that plays with fire out of curiosity will realise the pain and suffering after burning the fingers and will not play with the fire any more.

Student who wastes his time during study term is expected to realise that his failure to get the grades was because of lack of attention towards studies and revision. If he realises his mistakes and corrects his actions next term it will help in getting better grades.

We all know from our own life's experiences that we suffer due to wrong actions and will sooner or later realise the mistakes and promise not to repeat the same mistakes again. Beings what we are, generally we blame others for our failures. There comes a time, according to the scriptures, either in this life or in future births we do take the blame and correct our mistakes. Only then we are said to be on the path of knowledge and become eligible for "Liberation."

Our mind has a covering of ignorance “Avarana” and the thought processes agitate the mind constantly (Vikshepa). By clearing our minds of the “Avarana” with the help of knowledge and controlling the “Vikshepa” we will acquire the true spiritual knowledge.

The greatest sacrifice is “Jnana Yajna”.

It involves two distinct processes:

Pouring the ignorance in the sacrificial fire and burning away the ignorance

And

Pouring the knowledge also in the sacrificial fire (for Loka kalyana) and working for the welfare of the family, society and the universe.

We have a duty to sacrifice some of our efforts towards study of the scriptures, satsang etc in the process of acquiring the knowledge. The acquired knowledge has to be passed on to others and used towards acts of welfare.

Not only for the welfare but also the acquired knowledge has to be used in not conducting acts that harm others. Not harming others is the first step and helping others is the next step in the spiritual sadhana.

Jagadguru Shankaracharya conducted the highest form of Jnana Yajna and blessed the world with the books of knowledge about the scriptures and the Bhagawadgita. Sharing the spiritual wisdom with others is the greatest gift we can give.

The emphasis is both on need for karma and excellence of Jnana as the tools for final realisation.

Sri Ramakrishna:

He is truly a man who has made money his slave. He is not fit to be called a man who does not know how to make use of money.

Sloka 34

**TAD VIDDHI PRANIPATENA PARIPRASHNENA SEVAYA
UPADEKSHYANTI TE' JNANAM JNANINAS TATVA DARSHINAH**

Know that by full prostration, question and service, the sages who have realised the truth will instruct you in that knowledge.

The spiritual seeker/sadhaka is in search of spiritual knowledge. He needs instructions/guidance on the ways to understand “The Truth” and approach “The Truth” properly. He has to approach the “Jnani”. This is the meaning of the statement “Upadekshante te’ jnaninaha.”

Who is such a Jnani? As it is concerning the knowledge of “The Truth”, the instructor has to be one who has himself realised “The Truth”. This is the meaning of the word “Tatvadarshinaha.”

How to approach such an instructor?

“Pranipatena” - By prostration.

“Pariprashnena” - By repeated questioning.

“Sevaya” - By service.

In the Hindu philosophy we use the word “Guru” for the spiritual teacher. “Guru” is he who dispels the darkness known as “ignorance.” Whereas, the teacher we refer to in our daily life gives/assists in knowledge about the material world.

We contribute towards the pay of the teachers who are employees of the teaching institutions. The way to approach the teacher or guru is similar in certain ways and totally different in a number of ways. Humility and a desire to learn are common requirements to approach both the guru and the teacher.

In the olden days, thousands of years ago, the science of the material world was taught by the father to son. There were no teaching institutions like what we are familiar now. As we know in the beginning there were not even the written alphabets with which we are familiar now.

Those belonging to the business and service trades stayed back in the city/town/village of their birth and learnt the trade by observing their father conducting such a trade.

Those belonging to the priestly class and the warrior class needed to go out of their place of birth to a hermitage which was away from the hub of city life. The hermits lived in forests and the place of their residence was known as "ashrama." The word "ashrama" means "shelter." For those seekers of spiritual knowledge these hermitages were a place of shelter which provided boarding/lodging and education. The requirements were the need to show the keenness to learn "The Truth" and to be humble. Along with this the student was encouraged to ask repeated genuine questions to clear the doubts. As there were no written books, the students had to depend on memory and understanding what was taught. Only by repeated questioning the guru would understand the doubts and would find ways to help such a student to clear the doubts.

Why the condition of "Pranipatana"? (repeated prostration.)

This method of prostration is known popularly as "Sashtanga Pranama". It means obeisance to the revered ones. It involves the act of literally falling down at the feet of the master/revered guru/parents/respected elders with eight parts of the body touching the floor. The eight parts being: "hands, knees, shoulders, chest and forehead."

This is a sign of respect. The revered ones are representatives of spreading the dharma on earth. The feet are their organs in moving about and spreading dharma and hence the custom of touching their feet in this show of respect.

This shows the annihilation of ego on the part of the seeker, be he a king/prince/rich member of the society.

This is associated with "Pariprashnena" which means "repeated questioning."

Repeated prostration and questioning is a sign of humility on the part of the seeker who is requesting the seer to guide him in the path of dharma. Unless the doubts are cleared seeker cannot make progress and the only person to clear the doubts is the seer who is "The Guru". This is by repeatedly questioning on points that are not clear and requesting for forgiveness in slow uptake of the spiritual knowledge. "I am an ignorant fool and master, please be patient and help me in clearing all my doubts and lead me in the right path," should be the attitude of the seeker.

The questioning is, let me make it clear only to clear the doubts. It is not the fashion of some of the present institutions where one finds the students bombarding the lecturer (with the information collected from sources like internet). This I believe is more in the form of a show off on the part of the student who wants to display his knowledge and test the teacher's knowledge in front of the peers.

Sevaya: By service.

The seeker is also expected to take up some of service needed by the guru. The seeker looks after the physical needs of the guru and his ashrama where all the seekers are staying. In return the guru takes care of the spiritual needs of the seeker.

As mentioned already, this system of basic and higher education was unique to the land where there were no universities and educational institutions as we know of today. It was not a business transaction where the student pays a fee and demands returns for the fees paid. In those days the guru did not demand any fees except humility on the part of the student and an interest to learn the Vedas and Upanisads.

When we read some of the Puranas and mythological stories, we come across instances where there was a division of labour on the part of all the students in a particular ashrama.

- a) All students took up the task of going to the forest sometime in the day and bring in “samidha” (barks of certain plants) needed for the homa.
- b) Some students went to the river/wells to get water needed for drinking and washing the clothes/utensils.
- c) Some others went to collect root vegetables / fruits / flowers for the ashrama.
- d) Few cleaned all parts of the ashrama.
- e) Some took the cattle for grazing and looked after the cowshed. They collected the milk from the cows that was needed for all the inhabitants of the ashrama.
- f) Advanced/senior students were allowed to enter into the personal residence of the ashrama and assist the “Gurupatni” (wife of the preceptor) in all the household chores.
- g) Special students who made exceptional progress were allowed to press the feet of the guru and let him gradually doze off to sleep. This has a special significance also. During those moments before going to sleep the guru imparted higher spiritual knowledge to the selected disciple and helped him in making rapid progress in his studies.

This sort of seva does not apply to the present system of education. In India, in village set ups, (sometimes there are no basic needs that are lacking) the sincere teacher who resides to teach the students of the village needs help and the students/community of the village are morally expected to do some service to the teacher.

Whereas the guru is the one who dispels spiritual darkness, teacher is he who gives/assists in knowledge which is mostly secular.

Total dedication of the body/mind/speech to the guru is offered via this method of prostration/questioning/seva. There is no commercial motive on part of the guru. Let us also make it clear that the guru assists only in expelling the ignorance from the mind of the student. The Hindu philosophy believes that there is inherent knowledge in every individual but it is masked by ignorance in the form the three basis gunas of Satva, Rajas and Tamas.

The Lord ends this sloka with a special word:

Tatva darshinaha: those who have realised the “Eternal Truth.”

It is a must condition for the guru. The guru must have:

Realised the Truth,

Must have a perfect knowledge of the scriptures.

Should be well above the needs to fulfil worldly pleasures and should be living the life of a simpleton.

Finally they are not just masters in theory but followers of what they preach. The master teaches the seeker "Brahma Jnana" in quest of which the seeker travels sometimes hundreds of miles, leaves the luxury of his homeland and comes to live the humble life in the ashrama of the respected guru.

Sloka 35

**YAJNATVA NA PUNARMOHAM EVAM YASYASI PANDAVA
ENA BHUTANY ASESENA DRAKSYASY ATMANY ATHO MAYI**

O Arjuna, having obtained that knowledge, you will not be deluded again like this. You shall see all beings in yourself and also in Me.

Having obtained that knowledge:

Sri Krishna is referring to the knowledge of the Atman which is also known as Brahma Jnana. Arjuna has been given this knowledge in the battlefield. The patient, Arjuna, needed urgent therapy to clear his mind. Why?

The second half of the first line of this Sloka:

"you will not be deluded again like this."

Arjuna developed mental weakness, the details of which have already been discussed in detail in the first chapter.

Arjuna, an extremely powerful rajasic temperamental person, decided that he could not face the revered elders and teachers in the battlefield and accrue sin. Some may consider that it was a good quality to develop because fighting a battle against respected elders, teachers and friends is not correct. They would say it is a sinful act. This is where the philosophical outlook has to change.

Arjuna was not going to become a Satvic person by his actions but would have become a tamasic person. In the situation he was exposed, (in the war of righteousness) he had a duty not to look at the soldiers in the opposite camp in terms of relations but had to see them only as those opposed to dharma.

The spiritual path is to travel in an upward curve from tamasic to Satvic and not going down from Satvic to rajasic or rajasic to tamasic.

Arjuna forgot the "Dharma" in this context and hence Krishna gives Arjuna the introduction to Jnana and then tells him "you will not be deluded again like this." (With the knowledge I have imparted so far.)

You shall see all beings in yourself and also in Me:

When one understands and accepts that the real and eternal in any embodied being is "Atman" then he should see all beings in himself. This is because there is no difference in the "Atman". The only difference is in the covering which is the physical body with the three karanas (limbs) of "mind, body and speech."

Saying in another way, the seeker must learn to see "Sat Chit Ananda in all and not be deluded by Nama Roopa."

In the same logical way the seeker has to learn to see all in the God principle. When one can see the God principle in all, there will be no room for hatred, envy, anger, pride, arrogance which are the root causes for delusion due to attachment to the material world and sense objects.

Sri Krishna is saying that a Jnani and Himself (incarnation of God) are one and the same. The devotee and the God are one. Only this knowledge gives the true understanding of this sentence which forms the second line of this Sloka. The entire universe has to be looked upon as one indivisible absolute Reality.

Example: an unripe mango is sour and the same mango when it ripens becomes sweet. Similarly, the unripe mind of any person sees the diversity of the world but on spiritual ripening sees the unity in diversity.

Sri Ramakrishna:

"Knowledge leads to unity and ignorance to diversity."

"The Tatva darshinaha" mentioned in the last Sloka refers to the guru who clears all forms of delusion forever from the mind of the seeker and assists him to see unity of Atman in diversity of varied manifestations. The seeker should approach such a realised soul with repeated prostrations and clear all doubts by repeated questioning and thereby clear all his doubts.

Sloka 36

**API CHEDASI PAPEBHYAHA SARVEBHYAHA PAKRITTAMAHA
SARVAM JNANA PLAVENEVA VRUJINAM SANTARISHYASI**

Even if you are the most sinful of all sinners you shall cross over all sins by the raft of knowledge.

The emphasis on this Sloka is on "Papa and Papebhyaha". It means, "The sin and those who commit acts of sin."

We have dealt with sin several times already in the preceding chapters. "Sin" can be defined as act/acts or thoughts that generate in the mind that are contrary to the sastras and which are considered as "unrighteous." Hatred, lust, greed, arrogance, enmity, anger etc make one commit acts of sin. The root cause for committing the sin is "Ego" which is man's worst enemy in the spiritual progress towards "Liberation."

In the Hindu philosophy, the emphasis is on achieving "Liberation". Liberation is freedom from rebirth, uniting with the God principle and experiencing the "Eternal Bliss." Attachment to the physical body, one's family, friends, positions acquired in life prevents us progressing in the path to Liberation.

Each one of us has gone through several births and deaths in the past and the probabilities are that we will continue to progress in the same path and end up having to be born again and again. The cycle of births and deaths is the "samsara", the philosophy talks about and the samsara is compared to an ocean in this Sloka.

We need to have the knowledge that we are on an ocean and that there is a shore at the other end. We have knowingly or unknowingly out of ignorance committed a number of sins in the past that includes past births also. We have not paid for those mistakes yet. These have accumulated and it has become a big and mighty ocean. If it dawns on us that we have made ourselves drown into the ocean and we

need to come out of the ocean then we have to look for means to reach the shore. The means given by Lord Krishna out of compassion to all is "Jnana".

The Jnana to dispel the ignorance will then act as the raft on our life's boat and assists us towards having a smooth passage to the shore overcoming all obstacles in the way. The main message from the Lord to all spiritual seekers is "Nishkama karma and Karma Phala tyaga."

The sins referred to are the acts committed out of ignorance of one's own true identity and the sinners are those who conduct such sins. The philosophy does not condemn one as sinner but points out to the sins in the actions. Swamy Vivekananda stresses on his commentary on Sloka 3, chapter 2, (Klaibyam Maa sma gamaha Partha) that any work which brings the latent divinity is punya (virtue) and that which makes the body and mind weak is verily, sin.

Discrimination between "Truth and un-truth" and dispassion to worldly possessions are the keystone of spiritual knowledge which will assist in crossing over the ocean of samsara.

Sloka 37

**YATHAIDAMSI SAMIDHOGNIR BHASMASAT KURUTE'RJUNA
JNANAGNIHI SARVA KARMANI BHASMASAT KURUTE TATHA**

O Arjuna, just as the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes.

After having referred the Jnana to the raft in the last verse, Jnana is compared to "the fire." What does the fire do?

Any item that is burnt by the fire is considered to be the fuel for the fire. Firewood, any material made of wood like the chair, table etc, paper and any flammable product can be the fuel. The fuel would have some form of identity before being burnt. After it is burnt, there is no more identity left of the fuel. What are left are only the ashes.

All the actions we conduct do normally end up with entry of new vasanas on our mind. This would result in further new actions and consequent accumulation of new vasanas. It is an ongoing chain of actions and reactions.

The purpose of Jnana given by the Lord is to clear the vasanas without formation of new vasanas. This is known as "burning of the existing vasanas." The vasanas are technically said to have burnt to ashes with no more identity left.

Those actions conducted without "the Jnana" (out of ignorance) generally are considered as "sins" because they lead to rebirth into this world of samsara. Based on this explanation, Jnana is said to burn the sins.

This is the time to introduce three popular words in the literature concerning actions and reactions.

These are:

Prarabdha

Sanchita

Aagaami

In relation to actions,
Sanchita - past

Prarabdha - present
Aagaami - future

Whatever actions we conducted in the past life that resulted in further vasanas and such vasanas have not materialised into actions remain in our mind at the time of physical death as unfulfilled desires/hatreds etc. These are the bundles of vasanas we carry to our next birth, next stage of life. This is known as "Sanchita karmas" .It is like the sack we carry on our back as our luggage. No one can carry the bag for us and it is solely on us to take responsibility for all the unfulfilled vasanas of the past.

In the new birth or the new stage in our life, we will get the fruition of some of these accumulated vasanas. It is like taking some items from the sack we carry.

For whatever good we may have done in the past, we might get good benefit/reward in some form or other. (Example- in an examination we might have probably entitled to get 80% of marks but we may end up by getting highest marks.) On the other hand, for whatever wrong actions we might have conducted in the past and not experienced the results thereof, we would experience some form of hardship or other. (Taking the example of the student sitting for an examination - the student might have been entitled to higher marks but will end up getting lower marks.)

We can use this explanation for happy and painful experiences in our lives. The sastras say this is the "Prarabdha" which is the fate. It is the fate decreed by the Supreme for our actions of the past. In other words, it is the result of our actions committed knowingly/unknowingly in the past.

We still may have a number of unfulfilled items in the sack that would need to be taken to the next birth or next stage in our life. In our present life, we would have added more vasanas into the sack with the innumerable thoughts that cross the mind. We would have added additional desires/hatreds into the sack and death may have proceeded before the fulfilment of those at the time of death. So, we would not know what the future holds for us for tomorrow to come in our life either as a new stage in life or a new birth. This is known as "Aagaami." It simply means "not known". We do not know tomorrow and hence it becomes "Aagaami."

Even though we have no control over the present from results of the past, we, the humans have the blessings of the intellect that will help us to correct the present actions and thoughts. By understanding the scriptures, knowing dharma and adharma, truth and un-truth, we can put new good vasanas in our sacks and will then be expected to have a better tomorrow. The Jnana which we are learning now will help in making for a better tomorrow not only for us but through our actions for the society.

To summarize: we can make our future blissful by our present actions conducted with the knowledge acquired (following the path of righteousness), learn to accept the hardships now as the results of our past (grin and bear and at the same time do not forget to continue to discharge the duty as far as possible.) Thus we can leave a better world for tomorrow not only for us but for our future generations to come.

Sloka 38

**NA HI JNANENA SADRUSHAM PAVITRAMIHA VIDYATE
TAT SVAYAM YOGA SAMSIDDHIM KALENATMANI VINDATI**

Certainly there is nothing as pure as knowledge in this world. He who is himself perfected in yoga finds it in the Self by himself in due season.

Na hi jnanena sadrusham pavitram: there is nothing as pure as the knowledge.
Iha vidyate: certainly/indeed.

This statement applies to all forms of knowledge, be it spiritual or be it material science, more so in relation to the spiritual knowledge.

The root word for the Vedas is "vid". It means "to know." The knowledge of one's own self, the knowledge of the eternal truth is emphasised as the real knowledge in the Vedas. Vedas are the authoritative books on Hindu philosophy.

Opposite of the knowledge is "ignorance." Ignorance of our true nature, ignorance of our origin has made us fall into this whirlpool called samsara. We are experiencing so much of suffering in our life and see suffering all round us.

The Gita is to remind us of our true nature which is Tat-Tvam-Asi. "Thou Art That" says the Lord.

What are we doing? What have we done?

We have forgotten this "Maha vakya" (famous statement from Chandogya Upanishad, Sama Veda.)
We have covered ourselves with ignorance and the root cause for it is the development of "ego".

Finds it in the Self:

"The Self" referred to is the Atman/Soul. It is within us. The same Atman is also in all forms of life. There is no differentiation in the Self. It is "Nirakara, Nirguna". The entire journey of every individual, taking one back to all the past births is all about the realising this statement.

We start the spiritual quest with the question "Ko'ham?" - "Who am I?"

The end for the quest is finding the answer "So' ham" - "I am That."

In due course:

The time taken for "Vasana kshaya and mano nasha" (destruction of all vasanas and destruction of the mind) is not in our hands. We fall prey to worldly pleasures and either fall down from the spiritual heights achieved or stay trapped in the present without upward progress. But, at the end, each one of us will realise the truth and attain Moksha. We are not told that it is possible for only selected few but only that it will happen in due course of time.

The Lord has no favourites. In chapter 12 He enumerates 36 qualities of a true Bhakta and says that he who develops all the qualities of a Bhakta is inevitably "verily the Lord Himself" only and there is no differentiation between such a devotee and the Lord. What He is asking us is development of all divine qualities (chapter 16) / qualities of a true Bhakta (chapter 12) / qualities of a true Jnani (chapter 13) / features of Sthitaprajna (chapter 2) or features of a Gunatita (chapter 14). All of these have one thing in common and that is annihilation of "ego" and surrender to Him.

Sloka 39

**SRADDHAAVAAN LABHATE JNANAM TATPARAHA SAMYATENDRIYAHA
JNANAM LABDHVAA PARAAM SHANTIM ACHIRENA ADHIGACHATI**

The man of faith having knowledge as his supreme goal, the devoted, having controlled the senses, obtains knowledge of Atma, and having obtained that, enjoys peace for ever.

Sraddhaavaan: the man of faith.

Tatparaha: devoted; having the knowledge as the supreme goal.

Samyatendriyaha: subdued the senses.

The above three are the conditions to be met to get the knowledge in any field of activity, either spiritual or worldly. Stronger the determination to acquire the knowledge, greater is the need to fulfil the above three conditions.

The student who has reached the stage of secondary education and who would like to make substantial progress in the studies has to develop devotion to the subject of his choice and not let the wandering mind get distracted. As he receives the dividends for his efforts, he develops more faith in continuing his plan of action for making further progress in the studies. With total devotion, faith and self-control, he will achieve the knowledge he strived for and come out with distinction.

With this success, he can enjoy the next stage of life because he would be competent and eligible to take the professional duties of his choice and get financial reward for the work conducted. The security of the wealth obtained from the knowledge acquired should give immense joy in becoming a professional.

We can take the same principle in the study of the spiritual science.

Why do we have to undertake such study and austerities?

We should do so to get the knowledge of the Atman that gives the “Bliss”.

Spiritual studies and spiritual practice are the means to get “The Bliss.”

The spiritual seeker is he who is after the knowledge that gives him the eternal peace. He has realised that every action has a result and that result is either happiness or sorrow. The life has taught him the lesson that both the states of happiness and sorrow are temporary and one experience eventually merges into the other. He is on the lookout for that experience which is beyond both sorrow and happiness. The sastras designate this state as “Moksha” which is nothing but “Eternal Peace” (param shantim). It is a process of climbing up the spiritual ladder, the steps of the ladder being the results of life’s experiences.

Let us now analyse the three conditions enumerated in this sloka.

a) Faith:

The spiritual seeker needs Sraddha/faith in the scriptures, guru and the masters. This faith is nothing but the unshakeable conviction in the sastras and the words of the guru.

He needs to have faith in himself that he will succeed.

He needs to have determination to succeed.

Faith is the first of the three conditions to be met.

The success in any action depends upon the faith one has in the result to be achieved. It is the seed of success. The degree of faith determines the level of success.

Let me make it clear that the philosophy does not advocate blind faith even if the teacher is the greatest master.

There was a great master who gave this advice to his students:

"Listen to your guru and understand clearly what has been taught.

Make it a point to clear the doubts that crop up in the mind.

Question the master on points you have not understood.

Do not blindly follow the guru’s teaching.

You can even test the truth of what has been taught.

If you are not convinced, step aside and go the way your intellect guides you.

If and when you face problems in the path you have chosen, think of what was taught by the guru and see if it makes sense.

If you consider what was taught made sense, come back to the guru and continue your sadhana."

What is to be understood is that the sincere seeker should carry out all the instructions according to the sastras he is learning and the teacher who is teaching with the sincere hope that one day he would experience the best results. This strong conviction assists in making rapid strides towards final success.

The person who believes in the Self, who goes in search of it in a proper manner, will find in every step something or the other to prove the statements embedded in the scriptures and the words of his master. The faith never urges one to go contrary to one's judgement.

Doubts never carry one towards progress. The doubts are to be cleared and the faith has to be established firmly to make the desired progress.

If we look back at our childhood we will find that the faith in our parents made us learn a lot of lessons. The parents do not want their children to get hurt and warn them of dangers in day to day life. Many a time, we, the curious children do neglect the warning by the parents and sooner or later gets hurt. We understand and realise that our welfare was their main concern. This protective attitude of the parents makes us feel devoted to our parents.

b) Tatparaha:

To have the determination to acquire the knowledge that gives "Eternal Peace" should be the spirit of action. First of all one should develop the faith in the knowledge to acquire and the source to get that knowledge. The devotion to acquire the knowledge becomes the next step to take. Single minded devotion always gets the best results.

The seeker needs to be devoted to his selected subject of the spiritual science. Greater the devotion, stronger will be the enthusiasm to learn and capacity to withstand any adversities that one may encounter. This devotional attitude should have the harmony of thought, speech and action. Disharmony between thought, speech and action will never achieve success. There should be total dedication to the acquisition of knowledge.

If one wants to become a rich man, one should first of all have faith in himself that he can become rich one day. He then needs to acquire the knowledge that can make him rich. One cannot become rich just by faith alone. He should be devoted to the acquisition of knowledge that could make him rich.

To get the desired result there is the need to control one's wandering mind and the senses. This is the third requisite to achieve the final result of "Eternal peace."

c) Samyatendriyaha:

Self-control is essential all through the walk towards the achievement of the final goal. The senses have the knack of taking the individual away towards the sensual world. There is always something in the world outside that pleases the mind and makes the mind send the organs of action to get it. The accumulated memory imprints on the mind from the previous experiences in life also make the mind wander towards the sensual world.

What is needed is making use of the capacity of "Intellectual discrimination." There should be a gap between thought and action. The intellectual capacity for discrimination between right and wrong has to be exercised. This is the meaning of "Self-control." It is the control over the ego.

Param Shantim Achirena adhigacchati: "Soon attains the supreme peace."

The final result of such actions is experience of the "Eternal Peace." Adverse situations do come in every one's life due to the results of past karmas or due to the actions performed out of ignorance or indiscriminately. The beauty is in finding the "Peace" within oneself and this peace no power in the world can take away.

Actions to get the knowledge of the "Atman" in conjunction with desirelessness either in actions or in the fruits of actions will guarantee the success.

Quote: Sri Ramakrishna:

A devotee asked the master once:

When will I have the vision of God?

Sri Ramakrishna took the disciple to the sea shore and held him immersed in water for a while. He then asked the disciple how he felt.

The disciple said, "I thought I would die of want of fresh air."

The master said,

You will have the vision of God when you develop the feeling that you will choke unless you have the vision of God. Only when you feel that the material world is choking you to death and only His vision will work like the breath of fresh air.

Sloka 40

**AJNASCHA ASRADHAVANASCHA SAMSHAYATMA VINASHYATI
NAAYAM LOKO'STI NA PARAAM NA SUKHAM SAMSHAYATMANAHA.**

The ignorant, faithless, doubting man goes to destruction. For the doubter, there is neither this world nor the other world nor the happiness.

The last sloka gave us the positive aspects of the seeker who moves in the quest of true knowledge with the zeal of total faith. One may ask, what is the fate of the person who has no knowledge of the scriptures and who has no faith? This sloka gives a contrasting picture of self-destruction of such a man.

Three characteristics of the individual who will fail to experience the "Eternal peace" are brought out in this sloka. They are beautifully given in the right order of "Ignorance (ajnana), Faithlessness (ashraddha), and doubting nature (samshaya)."

Ajnascha: (Ignorant)

The first hurdle in the search for the "Eternal Peace" is ignorance. Ignorant are those who have lack of knowledge of the Atman. They do not understand what dharma is and what constitutes adharma. They do not have the notion that the body is to be looked upon as the eternal servant of the master. They are highly egotistic by nature. Not only that, but they firmly believe in the material world and in the "present." They do not believe in past and results of past actions. They work for experiencing the pleasures and fortunes of the world.

What should be the advice to such persons?

One would say "go and find a master and learn the scriptures."

But by nature such people are faithless. They do not have faith in the scriptures or the gurus. They consider that whatever they are doing is correct.

Let us pause for a moment and consider the consequences of such beliefs.

If everyone in the world has his own personal idea of what is right and what is wrong, there will be millions of ideas of rights and wrongs. There will be no common consensus of rights and wrongs.

How can we then teach the future generation about dharma and adharma?

The sastras are the consensus of opinions of learned people who had the welfare of the universe forefront.

The department of law in any country has fixed views on the correct actions one has to follow in that country. Those who break the law are considered as guilty and receive punishment. They act as the sastras in relation to the physical life in that country.

Similarly, we are part of life in the universe and our elders have given us the sastras which are the guides for good conduct that results in universal welfare. We should have faith in such sastras. The gurus are those who have studied the sastras and experienced the “Truth” encompassed within the scriptures. We should have faith in the gurus and learn from them. They should be our guides on spiritual practices.

Faith, practiced sincerely takes one to higher steps in spiritual practice and that much nearer to the “Truth.”

Ashradhascha:

This sloka is about those who have no such faith. They live the life of law for themselves.

The individual should have a desire to understand dharma and approach the sastras and the guru. There should be no hesitation in approaching them and seeking guidance.

The last of the qualities brought out in this sloka is “Samshaya.”
Samshaya is “doubting nature.”

A person of doubting nature has doubts even about the existence of the “Higher.” He doubts the genuine nature of the masters who have the welfare of all as their motto. He does not believe in the scriptures.

One should put genuine efforts to clarify the doubts which help to overcome the obstacles. Acquisition of “Jnana” is a must to make any true progress.

Sri Ramakrishna puts beautifully this example:

The mother tells her daughter, “This is your brother.” The daughter accepts it with total sincerity and faith. She introduces him to others as “my brother.” Where is the proof to give the daughter? The daughter has to simply accept faithfully that her mother’s statement is true. If she has no faith in her mother or her words, there is no progress in relationship in that family.

By nature, a doubting person has doubts on everything and everybody. He cannot take one simple step forward towards progress. He doubts everybody and everything. Because of this nature, he cannot take any positive decisions.

Such people become the failures even in this life. What to say about their future?

The grace of Lord comes with such faith and knowledge of the scriptures.

Sloka 41

YOGA SAMNYASTA KARMANAAM JNANA SAMCHINNA SAMSHAYAM ATMAVANTAM NA KARMANI NIBHADNANTI DHANANJAYA

O Arjuna, actions do not bind him who has renounced actions by yoga, whose doubts are cleared by knowledge and who is established in the Self.

The enlightened man is he who fulfils the following three conditions:

- a) He is constantly established in the Atman. It means, he is aware of his identity with the Atman and considers that the body is the tool to attain perfection in unity with the Supreme.
- b) He continues to discharge all his duties to the society of which he is a part of. Thereby he is burning away all the past samskaras/vasanas.
- c) He will work in the true spirit of nishkama karma and karma phala tyaga. Thus he will not accumulate any new vasanas.

This is possible only when he has the clear spiritual knowledge. The knowledge is the tool to clear all doubts and scriptures and gurus are the medium in the attainment of knowledge.

Yoga samnyasta karmanaam: Actions renounced by yoga

This refers to the present actions conducted. As we have studied before no one can remain free even for a minute without conducting some action or the other. The word “yoga” in this context refers to “Jnana yoga.” We should all conduct actions using our knowledge. We can drive a car only after having the knowledge of driving and passing the test to drive the car.

The actions have to be in the spirit of “Nishkama karma and karma phala tyaga.” There should not be any trace of ego/personal interest in the actions conducted.

Jnana samchinna samshayam: with all doubts cleared totally by the knowledge.

In the last verse, the Lord condemned the individuals who have the doubting nature all the time. Here, he is advocating total clearance of all doubts. It is true that doubts crop up in some form or other till one reaches the final destination. On reaching the final destination, all doubts will get cleared totally. For this the raft of knowledge is the tool. Sastras and the gurus are the medium to clear the doubts and establish the knowledge.

The seeker has to be established in the Atman always. He should never swerve from the path of “Dharma and Truth.”

Only for such an individual, actions do not bind. All his actions automatically become “divine.”

Sloka 42

TASMAD AJNANA SAMBHOOTAM HRITSYAM JNANASINATMANAHA CHITVAINAM SAMSHAYAM YOGAM ATISHTOTTISHTA BHARATA

Therefore, with the sword of knowledge, cut asunder the doubt born of ignorance about the Self, dwelling in the heart, and take refuge in yoga. Arise, o Arjuna.

This is the last verse in this chapter on Jnana. We get the summary of what has been said so far. Even though the Gita was taught by Krishna to Arjuna, it is a lesson to be learnt by all the mankind.

On the day of the famous battle to uphold dharma, Arjuna, a true warrior of repute went with all the zeal to fight the enemy. On seeing the array of armed personnel facing him, he developed a number of doubts on the authenticity and righteousness of actions by himself and his brothers.

Krishna is therefore stressing on clearing the doubts in the mind of his disciple/friend. Indirectly, it is a message for all of us to clear our doubts.

What were Arjuna's doubts?

Could he kill the elders and teachers in the battle?

What right has he got to cause confusion in the society that will lead to anarchy?

Is it not a sin?

Is it not better to take up sanyasa, renounce all and go to the forest? Taking up sanyasa, surely is it not the path to heaven?

Where are the doubts?

Doubts as we know are all in the mind. Here, we are told they are in the heart. We should understand this clearly.

If we draw an arbitrary picture of the mind, it will read as follows.

The mind is in the centre of the brain. In front of it, are the connections to the sense organs that bring in the message from the world around. Also we find the connections to the organs of the action.

Behind the mind is the so called intellect. One can say the back half of the mind is the intellect. This is supposed to guide the mind on proper actions to conduct on receiving the impulses from outside. Also, it is said to guide the mind which would like to act on stored imprints from the past. The intellect, full of knowledge is to be looked upon as a source of illumination.

Behind the so called intellect is the "Antaratma" which is the inner voice from the Atman within. It is also the "Antarjyothi" (the light within). This illumines the intellect with the clear light of knowledge. The intellect in turn illumines the mind.

With the light of knowledge beaming on the mind, the doubts will get cleared away.

The intellect is said to be in the cave of the heart. It is not the physical heart. The spiritual heart that shows love and compassion is the intellect.

Between the intellect and mind is said to be the gap that is filled with ego, ignorance and doubts. Because of these, the connection between intellect and the mind is blocked. The light from the intellect does not reflect on the mind and the mind remains in darkness. The mind is then said to work in darkness.

Why are all the doubts?

We are told that doubts are due to ignorance. Ignorance of the Atman residing within and which is supposed to be the guiding force in our daily activities is the root cause of misery.

Ignorance is compared to darkness and knowledge is compared to brightness.

We can understand this by the analogy of night and day.

We get all types of doubts in darkness when there is no light to shine. We do not know where we have kept the articles in the room. We do not know the position of various furnitures in the room. We do not know if there are any dangerous objects/creatures in the room.

We then get despair and drop down on the bed.

As soon as the sunlight enters into the room or when the lights are lit, everything in the room becomes clear and we will be ready to take up our duties.

Similarly, as soon as the knowledge dawns, the doubts will get cleared and we can take up our duties. Having been born into this world we have a role to play in the society.

During the phase of ignorance either we do not use the intellectual capacity properly or we misuse the capacity.

The simile of a sword is used in this sloka. We are asked to cut asunder the knot of ignorance that hinders our progress in spirituality.

What should we be doing?

The Lord brings out the word "Atishtothishta."

Aatishta: perform.

Uthishta: arise.

"Arise and perform" is the command to Arjuna and Arjuna's of the present world.

Arise from despair born out of ignorance and perform your work is the clear cut message from this sloka.

We are asked to conduct "Yoga."

Yoga in the context is Karma yoga using the teaching of Jnana yoga.

It is nothing but "Nishkama karma and karma phala tyaga."

Clearly there is a message for Arjuna that he should not go to the forest and take up sanyasa. Do your duty is the advice and command.

This is the message for all of us. Let us do our duty as per the guidelines given by the scriptures.

We have got the intellect. Let us use this and cut asunder all doubts. Let us all be fit to fight the battle of life and attain Liberation from sorrows and pains arising from the objective world. Let us uplift ourselves and in turn uplift society. Let us be the tools for a happy, prosperous, peaceful world.

If all the people who are blessed with knowledge decide to abandon work as it is a sin and take retirement, what will happen to the world? Technically speaking, it will come to a halt. This will be the root cause of destruction of life on earth which is the final end result.

WHEN KNOWING AND DOING GO HAND IN HAND, THEN MAN IS AT HIS BEST.

HARI OM TAT SAT.

Thus completes the fourth chapter, "Jnana Yoga" in the Srimad Bhagawadgita which is a Upanisad, Brahma Vidya and Yoga sastras in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna.