

Living the Bhagavad Gita Way



Swami Suryadevananda

Sadhana Week Talks, 2014

suryadevananda.org



Dedicated to Gurudev Swami Sivananda

Contents

Introduction	5
Prayers before Study.....	7
I. God and Jiva	9
1. Prayer to the Lord	11
2. Nature of Brahman	14
3. Immanence of God.....	16
4. Immortality of the Soul	18
II. The Mahatma or Saint	20
1. Bhāgavatā.....	20
2. State of Sthitaprajñā	23
3. Yoga-Bhraṣṭa	25
4. Gunātīta	27
5. Nature of Equal Vision	29
III. Spiritual Life & Sadhana - I.....	31
1. Three Kinds of Sukha.....	31
2. Great Enemies of Man	33
3. Yogic Discipline.....	34
4. Three Kinds of Tapas.....	37
5. Control of Mind.....	38
6. Virtues to be Cultivated	40
Song of Eighteen 'Ities'	41
III. Spiritual Life & Sadhana - II.....	42
7. Vairāgya.....	42
8. Real Renunciation	45
9. Rules of Right Activity	48
10. Self-surrender and Grace	50

V. Way to Blessedness	55
1. Body and World are Evanescent.....	55
2. Aspire for the Supreme Alone	56
3. Thought at Death	61
4. Jñāna or Supreme Wisdom	62
5. Way to Peace	64
Inspiring Songs of Sri Swami Sivananda.....	68
Song of Eighteen 'Ities'	68
Song of Divine Life.....	68
Divine Life Medley	69
Song of Little	69
Song of Joy	70

Introduction

This series is a study of a better way of living, based on the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita.

I am grateful to The Divine Life Society for their permission to use 'Gita Meditations' by Swami Sivananda – whose translation and flow we will follow.

Since this offering is in the week before Guru Purnima, it is worth looking into it a little to understand how things were in days gone. Earlier, there was a sense of naturalness in everything, including spiritual pursuit.

Let us take our minds back in time a little to understand what we have lost as we will have to restore naturalness that is missing outside – within our hearts and minds.

Guru Purnima is the day when the guru is venerated. It is not so much the personality of the guru but what 'guru' represents. It is said that on this day, all perfected ones, masters and sages shower their blessings unreservedly on those who sincerely tread the path they have trodden themselves.

Historically, this day also heralded the start of the monsoon season in India. Living natural lives, seekers reduced all unnecessary activity to use this period for deep study. This was not an academic type of learning but of turning to the teachers, scriptures or both to have all their doubts cleared for their immersive practice. Thus, study became the primary sadhana or practice while the other practices were still continued but with lesser emphasis. When it rains, the air is charged with a lot of energy which raises one's alertness and concentration becomes easier. Just think, when you are driving far and you feel fatigued, you roll down the windows, sit upright and feel refreshed and alert.

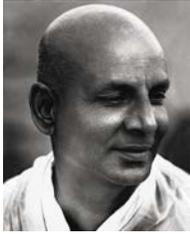
Later, when it became cooler – the climate was best suited to deep meditation and for this, seekers either reduced their other activities further or took to a period of isolation for deep meditation. During this period, local villagers often provided what they could to help seekers in the form of food so they could continue their practice with full focus.

Spring brought fair weather and the fields were ready for a good harvest. There was an air of thanksgiving all about and seekers often visited the villages and gave talks from their direct experience – reminding people of the goal of life and its path. So now, the seekers gave back to the local villagers from their spiritual harvest.

Thus, spiritual living and normal living too flowed along with the seasons – each one doing his own duty and helping each other without any dictates to do so. Regulation and mandates numb the spirit and make effort mechanical at best.

Swami Suryadevananda

Recommended Reading



We will have five sessions with 'Living the Bhagavad Gita Way' being the theme. As we will follow the flow of 'Gita Meditations' by Gurudev Swami Sivananda, I expand a little here and there to focus our study on Living the Gita Way. This book is published by The Divine Life Society, and can be ordered from their online bookstore.

Credit: I am most grateful to The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, India for their kind permission to use the translation and verse arrangement of, 'Gita Meditations' by Sri Swami Sivananda in this offering.

An Ananda Kutir Publication



First Edition: July 2014

www.suryadevananda.org



Creative Commons: This eBook can be downloaded for personal use. It can be shared publically as long as credited. No commercial use. It may not be changed in any way.

The Divine Life Trust Society is the copyright holder to the translation of the verses used herein.

Prayers before Study

Prayer is the foundation and pivot of spiritual life. When you pray, you must feel your relationship with God. It is from there that you will relate or commune. For most, the relationship will evolve as you evolve spiritually. Let us start our daily sessions some prayers.



Universal Prayer of Swami Sivananda

O adorable Lord of Mercy and love!
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee
Thou art Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Omniscient.
Thou art Satchidananda.
(Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute)
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.

Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,
Faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength
To resist temptation and to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, hatred and anger.
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us ever remember Thee.
Let us ever sing Thy glories.
Let Thy name be ever on our lips.
Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.

brahmānaṇḍam parama sukhadam kevalam jñānamūrtim
dwandwātītam gaganasadṛśam tatwamasyādi lakṣyam
ekam nityam vimalam acalam sarvadhī sākṣibhūtam
bhāvātītam triguṇa rahitam satgurum tam namāmi

I prostrate to that Sadguru, the Brahman, who is bliss, who is the giver of supreme happiness, who is absolute knowledge, who is beyond the pairs of opposites, who is vast like the ether, who is attained through assertions like “Tat Twam Asi”, who is one, eternal and changeless, the witness of the mind; who transcends all change and modifications, who is devoid of the three modes (of Prakriti).

vasudeva sutarṁ devarṁ kaṁsa cāṇūra mardanaṁ
devakī paramā 'nandaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ vande jagad gururṁ

I salute lord Krishna, the world teacher, the son of Vasudeva, the destroyer of Kamsa and Chanura, the supreme bliss of Devaki.

om tatsatpurūṣoṣṭamaṁ samgurūṁ śāntaṁ viyatsañibhaṁ
māyātītamkhaṇḍabodhaparamānandātamaratnākaraṁ
viśvathithyudyāntamekamṛtam ṭṛdhaiv bhāntaṁ vibhuṁ
satyaṁ jñāṇamanantakotimihirjyotiḥ-svarūpaṁ bhaje

I take refuge in that One Immortal Purushottama, who is known as Om Tat Sat, who is the Guru of all, who is peaceful and all-pervading like ether, who transcends maya, who is the ocean of the indivisible consciousness and the supreme bliss of the Self, who is the beginning, the middle and the end of the universe, who, the One Lord, appears as though He is threefold, who is truth, knowledge and mass of effulgence like endless crores of suns put together!

sarvo 'paniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopāla nandanaḥ
pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā dugdhaṁ gītā'mṛtaṁ mahat

All the Upanishad are the cows, the milker is Krishna the cowherd boy, Arjuna is the calf, men of purified intellect are the drinkers, the milk is the great nectar of the Gita.

om saha nāvavatu
saha nau bhunaktu
saha vīryam karvāvahai
tejasvināvadhītam astu
mā vidviṣāvahai
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

Om! May He protect us both (teacher and pupil). May He cause us both to enjoy the bliss of mukti. May we both exert to find out the true meaning of the scriptures. May our studies be fruitful. May we never quarrel with each other. Om Peace! Om Peace! Om Peace!

I. God and Jiva



1. Prayer to the Lord
2. Nature of Brahman
3. Immanence of God
4. Immortality of the Soul

We start this series by understanding the relevance and need of the Bhagavad Gita's teachings in our life today. The Gita was first given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna as a solution to the conflict he faced. Arjuna's conflicts are our conflicts even today and the solutions offered by Lord Krishna can and will not only solve, but dissolve our problems. Let us see how.

Introduction

We often hear that life has become artificial today. True, but is life just what is out there or also how life is lived? What is out there is out there and will continue to change this way and that over time. No matter how things are, what prevents us from living naturally? And, just what is natural living?

What comes to mind when talking about natural living is simple living, eating natural food - but, these have to do with 'doing'. What does it mean to 'be natural'?

To be natural is to be true to our real nature. Our personality with its likes and dislikes is not our true nature because we are aware of it and can change it. Who is it that is aware of this personality and can change it? That self does not seem to be disturbed by anything in life as it is aware of all things. The self has seen the body and conditions change but it has stayed the same – silently being aware of all, unaffected and beyond aging.

This self is not in us but our very self – stable, beyond the afflictions of the body and mind. It is the sun within that is obscured so-to-say by the clouds of ignorance or conditioning. This ignorance or conditioning limits the self just as clouds seem to hide the sun though the sun is always present and ever luminous. The personality with its name and appearance is useful in communicating and getting things done but it is not our true nature as we are always aware of it. Awareness is lost when the personality turns away from the self – its source – and faces all that is out there – seeing everyone and everything as apart from each other and one's self.

Three factors make appearance seem very real: the substratum of our being or self is real; the substratum of all people and things have the same substratum or self as their source and support; and; we have conviction in the reality of all that is perceived as very real – the reality of our being, recognizes the reality of all and in all, and gets cemented by the reality of our conviction. And so, all that is perceived, feels absolutely real. Now, we are not saying that what appears is not but it is not what we make it out to be.

When we give the value of reality to all that is perceived, we feel the need to give some sort of value to things for ease of dealing with it and not being overwhelmed. So, 'this I like' and 'this I

don't like' or 'not as much compared to what I prefer'. So firstly, we give a sense of reality to all that is perceived. Secondly, we give it a value which is subjective and not inherent in what is perceived. Thirdly, we react to 'our own values' and not to what is perceived. We would like more of what is liked and less or none of what is not liked or preferred. We forget that these values were given by us in the first place and so we get stuck in a self-tightening cycle of assigning values and running after all that we have given a positive value and running away from all that we have given a negative value.

This is a sure recipe for tremendous confusion which will lead to much inner conflict and trying to keep things in balance would be the only relief we know. The Bhagavad Gita tells us that confusion, conflict and its resulting symptoms of hurt and hurting other is not necessary or part of life and that afflictions or pain that has not come can be and should be avoided.

The Gita tells us that problems do not exist in what is out there but our feelings and reactions to them and that mastery of mind or self-mastery is the way to sane and peaceful living. Life has to be lived skillfully, every action or response has to be a masterstroke on the canvas of life. For this, we must first understand the nature of truth, God or the Absolute; our own essential nature; the relationship between God and the individual including all that we perceive.

Now, you may feel that it will take a long time to know these by direct experience – perhaps true. But, in the journey 'to know' by direct experience, we can start off what others have discovered as the truth by their verification or direct experience and seek to verify or know it for ourselves and by ourselves. The Gita's message has been *verified and is verifiable* by any who chose to know. The path of verification is known as sadhana which is translated as spiritual practice but is better reworded as 'practice of the spirit' or 'the practice of spirituality'. The term practice is only used because we fail to get verification of the sought in the first attempt just a scientist goes back again and again but changing each time as he knows what does not work till he finds what does work. Similarly, we too go back again and again but not the same and not in the same way as each attempt must teach you something by which you can focus better and we go back with this sharper focus till there is direct verification of the truth.

The Gita tells us that living life without confusion or conflict and the pursuit of the truth are not opposed to each other. Life can be very useful in correcting wrong values assigned and this, leads to immediate inner expansion as we go about our lives. This way of living where life is lived expertly so it can be free of hurt and hurting others while at the same time being the foundation of your spiritual pursuit is the Gita Way of Life. Bhagavad Gita is translated as Song of God and to live with the rhythm of God's Song is to live naturally or as things are in their true nature. This way of living corrects all missteps and at the same time gives us a sure path to travel so our lives are both; free of all sorrow and a movement towards joy that endures.

Before we get into some of the verses, keep in mind that the Gita has several dimensions. Firstly, being that it was narrated by Sanjaya to the blind king Dhritarashtra, it is a narration. We are going to skip over the verses that were more for the information of the blind king to whom the dialogue was narrated. Secondly, being that it was a series of answers and solutions to Arjuna's doubts, it was knowledge of the truth of things. Thirdly, having spoken about the truth, the Gita is very extensive and thorough in its treatment of the different ways to experience the truth. This last portion is what makes it a Yoga Shastra or Scripture of Yoga and is often overlooked. We will be looking into the important verses on yoga or sadhana over two evenings – Wednesday and Thursday.

We start at the water's edge with Arjuna's Prayer on being graced with a vision of the cosmic form of Lord Krishna. The teachings that follow, paint a wonderful picture of God as all till the vision returns to us and roots within as God in all. But, it is still difficult to let go of this ego-personality which we have grown so accustomed to and so the Gita tells us of the immortality of the Soul – the indwelling presence of God. It is only when we truly feel we already have or are something much bigger and worthwhile than these many other things we run after morning to night – will we let go and allow ourselves to return to our true nature.

1. Prayer to the Lord

In the first eleven verses of the 10th chapter, Krishna tells Arjuna about his essential nature. Hearing this, Arjuna responds with the below verse.

param brahma param dhāma pavitraṁ paramaṁ bhavān
puruṣaṁ śāśvataṁ divyam ādidevam ajaṁ vibhuṁ

Thou art the supreme Brahman, the supreme abode, the supreme purifier, eternal, divine person, the primeval God, the unborn and omnipresent. (X-12)

Much of Krishna's revelation that continues in the first eleven verses of the 10th chapter, was already spoken in the 7th and 9th chapters. This is very important as we are assured that if we are sincere in trying to remember God in and through our life, we will not be forsaken and God will also continue to reach out to us for our welfare. Truth is not difficult to understand but difficult to stand under or accept wholeheartedly so it can be lived by. We will come back to this verse to understand better what faith is.

Krishna answers Arjuna's questions with further revelations until a request in the 11th chapter, 4th verse to see his imperishable form if he is found worthy of the vision. Arjuna's sincerity is known to the Lord and there is no hesitation, instantly, in the next or 5th verse, Krishna says, *"Behold, O Arjuna, My forms by the hundreds and thousands. Of different sorts, divine, and of various colors and shapes"*. Arjuna is not able to see this because he has not risen to the level of purity to be able to behold such a tremendous sight. Without hesitation, Krishna says, *"But thou*

art not able to behold Me with these, thine own eyes; I give thee the divine eye; behold my lordly Yoga” in the 8th verse.

Because of the Grace of the Lord, Arjuna was allowed to behold the cosmic form of the Lord and beholding it, these were among the outpourings of his heart.

tvam akṣaram paramaṁ veditavyaṁ
tvam asya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānaṁ
tvam avyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā
sanātanas tvaṁ puruṣo mato me

Thou art the imperishable, the Supreme Being, who should be known. Thou art the great treasure-house of this universe; thou art the imperishable protector of the eternal dharma; thou art the ancient person, I deem. (XI-18)

tvam ādidevaḥ puruṣaḥ purāṇas—
tvam asya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānaṁ
vettā ’si vedyāṁ ca paraṁ ca dhāma
tvayā tataṁ viśvam anantarūpa

Thou art the primal God, the ancient puruṣa, the supreme refuge of this universe, the knower, the knowable and the supreme abode. By thee is the universe pervaded, O being of infinite forms. (XI-38)

vāyur yamo ’gnir varuṇaḥ śaśāṅkaḥ
prajāpatis tvaṁ prapitāmahaś ca
namo namas te ’stu sahasrakṛtvaḥ
punaś ca bhūyo ’pi namo namas te

Thou art Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, the moon, the creator, and the great-grandfather. Salutations, salutations unto thee, a thousand times, and again salutations, salutations unto thee. (XI-39)

namaḥ purastād atha pṛṣṭhataḥ te
namo ’stu te sarvata eva sarva
anantavīryāmitavikramas tvaṁ
sarvaṁ samāpnoṣi tato ’si sarvaḥ

Salutations to thee, from front and behind. Salutations to thee on every side, O All. Infinite in power and prowess, thou pervadest all; wherefore thou art All. (XI-40)

pitā ’si lokasya carācarasya
tvam asya pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān
na tvatsamo ’sty abhyadhikaḥ kuto ’nyo
lokatraye ’py apratimaprabhāva

Thou art the father of this world, moving and unmoving. Thou art to be adored by this world. Thou, the greatest guru, for none there exists who is equal to thee; how can there be then, another superior to thee in the three worlds, O Being of unequalled power? (XI-43)

We too are told in the scriptures and teachings of great masters who have had God-realization the truth that, 'God Alone Is' – this is called non-duality. But, our minds and hearts are so saturated with ideas of 'other' that the feeling of non-duality does not lodge in firmly. It is easy to understand but difficult to accept wholeheartedly so we can live with it as the ego with all its self-centered ways must be set aside for a universal vision.

Still, if we persevere and keep trying, we too will receive God's Grace as Arjuna did and is stated in the opening verse of the 10th chapter, *"Again, O mighty-armed Arjuna, listen to My supreme word which I shall declare unto thee who art beloved, for thy welfare"*. But, we have to be mighty-armed just like Arjuna was in that we have to fight our lower nature and its promptings daily, nay, each moment so that we constantly and in all ways persevere towards the good. This single-minded devotion towards the good matures into devotion to God and makes us 'beloved to God' who just as Arjuna – will again reach out to us for our welfare.

The first verse (X-12) of the prayers of Arjuna was based on what the Lord revealed to him as his essential nature. Arjuna has still not seen the cosmic form for himself but still had the faith for the declaration he heard. Remember, Arjuna and Krishna were related in a way and had known each other for a very long time – they had a different type of relationship. This changed when Arjuna surrendered (II-6) with these words, *"My heart is overpowered by the taint of pity, my mind is confused as to duty. I ask Thee: tell me decisively what is good for me. I am Thy disciple. Instruct me who has taken refuge in Thee"*. The Yoga Vasistha echoes the same teaching when Vasistha tells Rama these words at the end of the second chapter.

vicārayā ' 'cāryaparamparāṇām
matena satyena sitena tātvat
yāvad viśuddhaṁ svayam eva hy
anantarūpaṁ param abhyupaiṣi

O Rāma, till such time as this wisdom arises directly in you, take recourse to the knowledge transmitted by the great teachers. (Yoga Vasistha II.19.35)

Arjuna did not have his own experience as yet but his surrender was sincere and the sincerity of his faith gave him enough courage to stand on it and truly accept Krishna's words. Now, having been graced with the vision of the cosmic form, Arjuna's heart burst with the wonderful words we have just heard.

Faith has nothing to do with others, outer conditions or time – it is our feeling completely. We too have read the scriptures and heard many teachings. Why does the faith that will allow or

enable us to act on it unflinchingly in life not take root? What can stop us in this endeavor of faith? What is for our own highest good but to also rely on this faith while we proceed with our own investigation of the truth and have our own realization too?

2. Nature of Brahman

Used to seeing all as distinct and apart from ourselves, we see God as a special kind of being someplace but not here in this world. The verses in this section are meant to raise the bar of understanding to God's pervasiveness till the heart can accept God's pervasive presence as all.

In this first verse among the verses on the Nature of Brahman, Lord Krishna praises that which is to be known in order to create in Arjuna or any listener, an intense desire to know it. If you are told that this one medicine will cure-all from a very reliable source, you will surely want to try it.

jñeyam yat tat pravakṣyāmi yaj jñātvā 'mṛtam aśnute
anādimat paraṁ brahma na sat tan nā 'sad ucyate

I will declare that which has to be known, knowing which one attains to immortality, the beginningless supreme Brahman, called neither being nor non-being. (XIII-12)

Arjuna has already beheld the cosmic form of the So, Krishna raises Arjuna's vision further by stating that he is the inner ruler, the innermost self, support and substratum of all. All that seems to exist as distinct, apart and so very real are only because of the limiting adjuncts of the body, mind and senses and their activities.

There is the often used analogy of the snake in the rope – on a dark night when one sees a rope, mistaking it for a snake can cause real reactions towards it. But, the rope is not affected by the illusion as it rests in the beholders mind only. Until the illusion is let go, we will always see the snake and never the rope though the snake alone exists.

sarvataḥpāṇipādaṁ tat sarvato 'kṣīromukhaṁ
sarvataḥśrutimal loke sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati

With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, he exists in the worlds enveloping all. (XIII-13)

sarvendriyaguṇābhāsaṁ sarvendriyavivarjitaṁ
asaktaṁ sarvabhṛc cai 'va nirguṇaṁ guṇabhoktṛ ca

Shining by the functions of all the senses, yet without the senses; unattached, yet supporting all; devoid of qualities, yet their experienter, (XIII-14)

bahir antaś ca bhūtānām acaraṁ caram eva ca
sūkṣmatvāt tad avijñeyaṁ dūrasthaṁ cā 'ntike ca tat

Without and within all beings, the unmoving and also the moving; because of its subtlety, unknowable; and near and far away is that. (XIII-15)

avibhaktam ca bhūteṣu vibhaktam iva ca sthitam
bhūtabhartṛ ca taj jñeyam grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu ca

He is undivided, yet he exists as if divided, in beings; he is to be known as the supporter of beings; he dissolves and generates all these. (XIII-16)

jyotiṣām api taj jyotis tamaṣaḥ param ucyate
jñānam jñeyam jñānagaṁyam hr̥di sarvasya viṣṭhitam

That, the light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable and the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all. (XIII-17)

To see the rope for what it is requires for us or the sense of being to rely on its own light and not the borrowed light of the mind which acts as a prism and generates the illusion. Let us take a simple situation – someone is nagging you about something. What is actually going on? There is someone, he is doing something called nagging. You are also there and in you, something seems to express itself within at first and then want to act out. “Why is this person nagging me? What have I done?” This feeling may want to act out as, “I should tell him to stop or that he is being hurtful or whatever”. The feeling and its wanting to act out are not what is happening out there or what that person is doing. It is what is happening within, and all things within are done by you only – either in the present or have been repeated in the past so many times so that the vritti or pattern has been infused by your energy to make it seem so very real and that you are feeling that way. You are not feeling that way (at least I hope so) as you are aware of this. If you are aware of this, it is possible to go your way and as you do – to let the vritti fall away too as it does when you do not associate yourself with it. In this, you identify with awareness or the light of your own being rather than the light of the vritti, the mind, conditioning or any way the limiting adjunct is called.

na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śāsāṅko na pāvakaḥ
yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama

Neither doth the sun illumine there nor the moon, nor the fire; having gone thither, they return not: this is my supreme abode. (XV-6)

We are told in this verse that the supreme abode or God is self-illuminated and it is his illumination alone that illumines all. In our spiritual quest, we have to bring this to life by resorting to the deepest reach of that which knows or is aware and this extricates us from the limited senses, mind, intellect, their operation and the powerful vrittis that fight hard to sustain their grip on you.

The Katha Upanishad has a very similar verse as the closing verse of the 5th valli.

na tatra sūryo bhāti na candratāraḥ nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'yamagniḥ
tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṁ tasya bhāsā sarvamidaṁ vibhāti

The sun does not shine there, nor do the moon and the stars, nor do lightnings shine and much less this fire. When He shines, everything shines after Him; by His light, all these shine. (Katha Upanishad II.5.15)

3. Immanence of God

The first section of verses today were prayerful verses by Arjuna, one when the Lord told him about his essential nature, and the others that followed, a spontaneous outpouring on beholding the cosmic form. Now, the bar of understanding is raised even further from God's pervasiveness 'as all' to God's immanence or his presence in all thus dissolving the idea of 'I' as an independent reality. Though the verses that follow are from different parts of the Gita, the first from the 7th chapter, it is better to hear these now after the two-step prayers of Arjuna and Krishna's declaration of the truth.

mattaḥ parataraṁ nā 'nyat kiñcid asti dhanañjaya
mayi sarvaṁ idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva

There is nothing whatsoever higher (other) than me, O Arjuna. All this is strung on me, as clusters of beads on a string. (VII-7)

aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitaḥ
aham ādīś ca madhyaṁ ca bhūtānāṁ anta eva ca

I am the self, O Arjuna, seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings. (X-20)

yac cā 'pi sarvabhūtānāṁ bījaṁ tad aham arjuna
na tad asti vinā yat syān mayā bhūtaṁ carācaraṁ

Whatever is the seed of all beings, that also am I, O Arjuna. There is no being whether moving or unmoving that can exist without me. (X-39)

yad-yad vibhūtimat sattvaṁ śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā
tat-tad evā 'vagaccha tvaṁ mama tejoṁ 'śasaṁbhavaṁ

Whatever being there is, glorious, prosperous or powerful, that know thou to be a manifestation of a part of my splendour. (X-41)

This particular verse should allow us to let go of attitudes we can sometimes have towards some people who are 'glorious, prosperous or powerful' – whether on good footing or otherwise as Krishna makes it clear that all these are 'a manifestation or part of his splendor'.

athavā bahunai 'tena kim jñātena tavā 'rjuna
viṣṭabhyā 'ham idaṁ kṛtsnam ekāṁśena sthito jagat

But, of what avail to thee is the knowledge of all these details, O Arjuna? I exist, supporting this whole world by one part of myself. (X-42)

Once again, the question of faith comes into play. Faith and belief are two different things. Faith asks us to accept the hypothesis while we exert to have our own experience that can confirm that, 'yes, it is indeed so'. Belief is accepting someone else's declaration and the buck stops there and the doubts and wrong notions stay within – just where they are. There is a verse in the Yoga Vasistha which refines this thought and tells us what is worth inquiring and what to avoid.

na 'kāraṇe kāraṇādi pare vastvādi kāraṇe
vicāraṇīyaḥ sāro hi kim asāra vicāraṇaiḥ

One should enquire into that which is truly the uncaused cause of all substances, which is yet beyond all such causation: this alone is worth enquiring into, for this alone is the essential. Why enquire into the non-essential? (Yoga Vasistha IV.18.23)

Often, scientists too start with some sort of theory or feeling about a theory and keep experimenting till they have a discovery or direct experience. Too much theory is not good as we can get caught up in a cycle of finding verbal answers to everything or the mind-game. Just enough to run with till like fuel till we have our own experience is the better way.

brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā 'ham amṛtasyā 'vyayasya ca
śāśvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasyai 'kāntikasya ca

For I am the abode of Brahman, the immortal and the immutable, of everlasting dharma and of absolute bliss. (XIV-27)

īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṁ hṛddeśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati
bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā

The Lord dwells (abides) in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by his illusive power, to revolve as if mounted on a machine. (XVIII-61)

These last two verses from the 14th and 18th chapter cinch together the transcendence and immanence of God in the most beautiful way, "I am the final abode, the immortal and the Absolute – I also abide in the heart of all beings". If we remind ourselves of these wonderful words, we will find the strength to deal with all that comes and strengthen our faith by which we move towards our own experience.

4. Immortality of the Soul

Still, the heart struggles to accept God's omnipresence – especially his immanence. In throwing light on the immortality of the soul, these verses tell us that letting go of the ego or individuality is not a loss but the only way to any real gain as in letting go of that which perishes, we discover the immortal.

avināśi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam idam tataṁ
vināśam avyayasyā 'sya na kaścit kartum arhati

Know that, by whom all this is pervaded, to be indestructible. None can cause the destruction of that, the imperishable. (II-17)

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
nā 'yaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre

The self is not born, nor does the self ever die. After having been, the self again does not cease to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, the self is not killed when the body is killed. (II-20)

nai 'naṁ chindanti śastrāṇi nai 'naṁ dahati pāvakaḥ
na cai 'naṁ kledayanty āpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ

Weapons do not cut the self. Fire burns it not. Water wets it not. Wind dries it not. (II-23)

acchedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam akledyo 'śoṣya eva ca
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇur acalo 'yaṁ sanātanaḥ

This self cannot be cut, burnt, wetted, or dried up. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, immovable and ancient. (II-24)

dehī nityam avadhyo 'yaṁ dehe sarvasya bhārata
tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi

This self, the indweller in the body of everyone, is ever indestructible, O Arjuna, therefore, thou shouldst not grieve for any creature. (II-30)

We started today's session with the two-step prayer. We then heard about the nature of God and the immanence of God. Well, if God is without and within – my true nature must be divine and not of the frail personality I have been mistakenly identifying with for so long. Today's whole session is a strengthening of faith, not so that we take what is heard and do nothing but so that we can continue to live on good principles and sound footing, while we exert towards having our own direct experience.

Everything in the Gita is verified by many who have trodden this path before us and at the same time, all the teachings are also verifiable by any and all who come unto her with unflinching faith and the steady resolve to exert and verify the teachings for themselves.

Next time, we look at the qualities of those who have attained this verification as the spiritual path is long and narrow and all who tread through it will need the same qualities. Inculcating those qualities is breaking with limitation or the ties that bind. Let us see how the next time.

II. The Mahatma or Saint



1. Bhāgavatā
2. State of Sthitaprajña
3. Yoga-Bhraṣṭa
4. Gunātīta
5. Nature of Equal Vision

In the previous session, we covered the nature of God and the individual. Still, the heart struggles to accept that a direct experience of this is possible for the common man. The Bhagavad Gita does not ask you to accept anything blindly, telling you instead that many, of different dispositions have experienced the truth and you can experience it as well. This experience is not had by adding on, acquiring something but by letting go of all limiting adjuncts till individuality is let go and the universal shines brightly in its own light.

1. Bhāgavatā

The 12th chapter is the chapter on the Yoga of Devotion. Arjuna asks about the better way between the yoga of devotion and the yoga of knowledge. By 'knowledge', we are not talking about academic or scholarly prowess but a discipline that seeks to know without any support but direct intuition or meditation. This is a very difficult path as the requirements of the seeker are very high. Krishna extolls the yoga of devotion as the better way as it is easier and accessible by most.

So, we arrive at some questions: Who is a devotee and what does it mean to be devoted? In the Gita, love and devotion are synonymous. A bhagavata is one who loves God and by love, we mean one who is devoted to God.

mayy āveśya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate
śraddhayā parayo 'petās te me yuktatamā matāḥ

Those who, fixing their mind on me, worship me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in yoga in my opinion. (XII-2)

ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi saṅyasya matparāḥ
ananyenai 'va yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate

But to those who worship me, renouncing all actions in me, regarding me as the supreme goal, meditating on me with single-minded yoga, (XII-6)

Perhaps we should start at the other end and see what it means to be devoted. This is especially important today as the minds are very distracted with over-reliance on technology which allows access to anything at any time. This makes the mind want to jump from one to another and though technology can be very useful – overuse and misuse degrade the mind severely.

Worship is adoration of God which must have love as its basis. Even when people sit to worship either in their homes or a place of worship – they refuse to be without their electronic leashes and feel that it is okay or the one saying, ‘This will not be allowed here’, is a show-spoiler. This points to a very pitiable state of degradation.

teṣāṁ ahaṁ samuddhartā mṛtyusaṁsārasāgarāt
bhavāmi nacirāt pārtha mayy āveśitacetasāṁ

To those whose minds are set on me, O Arjuna, verily I become ere long the saviour from the ocean of samsara. (XII-7)

Krishna is very specific when mentioning, “To those whose minds are set on me...” before he mentions “I become the savior...”. Again, to have one’s mind set on something means to give it your full attention. Now you can see that this means – without any distraction. To be able to do this, you have to learn to do all things, however menial you may consider them with the same value. Otherwise, you will not be able to ‘set your mind on God’. This word ‘set’ is very important. When you make yogurt at home, you mix in some culture into hot milk that has cooled a little and keep it in a cool place undisturbed. The yogurt sets or forms from milk. Only when you practice being undisturbed or distracted in all things – can you understand what ‘set on me’ means.

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṁ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca
nirmamo nirahaṁkāraḥ samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī

He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving, (XII-13)

If you are devoted to a certain goal – you are not going to quit when trials and tribulations come along. Similarly, when one is devoted to an ideal – there is no compromise. The ideal here is God who is omnipresent – with this, how can hatred, unfriendliness, pride and grudges come into play? But, we also see that one must be free from attachment and balanced in not only pain but pleasure also. This is a package deal which says, all or nothing. So, devotion which is love is free from attachment – think about this. It is also free from losing balance in pleasure as well as pain. Usually, we bundle love and attachment and love and pleasure – but, we are asked to be free of both for love to be.

saṁtuṣṭaḥ satataṁ yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ
mayy arpitaṁanobuddhir yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ

Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with the mind and intellect offered to me, he, my devotee, is dear to me. (XII-14)

To be devoted means to give that to which you are devoted to your full and uncompromising attention. Full means zero leakage – not only physically but by attention – your entire mind and

heart along with your body is facing that to which you are devoted. If you are devoted, meditation should come naturally as meditation is devotion – you are giving the object of your meditation your complete attention. In devotion, you have the use of as much support as you may need. In ritual worship – there are all the implements of worship and the sequence you may follow. This makes it easy as the mind is goaded by the other sense organs and senses that are brought into play.

yo na hr̥ṣyati na dveṣṭi na śocati na kāṅkṣati
śubhāśubhaparit̥yāgī bhaktimān yaḥ sa me priyaḥ

He who neither rejoices nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing good and evil, and who is full of devotion, is dear to me. (XII-17)

We are now told that we must be free from hate, grief, desire and renounce both good and evil in order to be devoted. You can somehow understand the rest but to be free of grief for there to be devotion or love? We grieve when things change, when people go away, even if it is just a couple hours away to school let's say and our hearts get heavy. When you accept God as all and all as God in essence earnestly – you will be at once free of grief as God indwells all and all rests in Him so what is there to grieve about?

samaḥ śatrau ca mitre ca tathā m̥nāpamānayoḥ
śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu samaḥ saṅgavivarjitaḥ

He who is the same to foe and friend, and also in honour and dishonour, who is the same in cold and heat and in pleasure and pain, who is free from attachment, (XII-18)

tulyanindāstutir maunī saṅtuṣṭo yena kenacit
aniketaḥ sthīramatir bhaktimān me priyo naraḥ

He to whom censure and praise are equal, who is silent, content with anything, homeless, of a steady mind, and full of devotion – that man is dear to me. (XII-19)

The last two verses raise the bar even higher saying one must have sameness in attitude which means any form of favoritism, preference or priority cannot be – not even to what is often called, 'our people' – our people is the absence of sameness. We have heard "Free from attachment" in verse XII-13, it resurfaces in XII-18 – just five verses later so you can understand the importance of being free of attachment for devotion of real love.

We are told more about sameness in other contexts and introduced to the word 'homeless'. Does this mean that one has to be out on the street, wandering about? When we say a homeless person that is usually what comes to mind – a person without a brick and mortar home of his own. But here, I feel 'homeless' is one who is at home everywhere he is – none 'more homey' than the other. To be at home everywhere is another requirement of the acceptance of God's omnipresence – wherever you go – you are moving about or residing in him only. And, you have

that sameness in attitude that we spoke about to all – not just ‘our people’ or the group in the same slightly dissatisfied condition of not accepting where you are as home completely.

You have to lift your hearts, mind and understanding to a very high degree to rise to what the Gita calls devotion. I have heard some people say, “This meditation stuff is not for me – I am a devotee”. Very good, excellent, congratulations! But – they still worry, grieve and have their complaint box full – always trying to get some relief from the fires that scorch them – where is devotion?

2. State of Sthitaprajña

A sthitaprajña is a person of steady wisdom. What good is it to know a lot about elevating philosophy if it does not elevate us irreversibly? Book-knowledge is one thing and words and impressive oration can come from it. Real knowledge is another thing altogether as life flows from it and it flows into life. Book knowledge does not help you in life and people in this camp find themselves talking about ‘my regular or work life’ and ‘my spiritual life’ as they are unable to reconcile them and so, their wisdom is not steady or established – it does not endure in our day to day life. These verses tell us about the state of one whose wisdom is steady – a sthitaprajña or one established in wisdom.

prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān
ātmany evā ’tmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñas tado ’cyate

When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind, and when his self is satisfied in the self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom. (II-55)

duḥkheṣv anudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprḥaḥ
vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīr munir ucyate

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom. (II-56)

Book knowledge comes about by a sort of accumulation – it is not learning. Cramming or remembering some words that can be repeated in a soft and impressive voice is not show learning capacity – it helps earning capacity. Sounds alike doesn’t it?

But, when one lives an examined life, one sees each moment and situation for what it is. In this vigilant living, false values ascribed to people, things and conditions fall away. One sees that desire is not about others or things but about an operation of our own mind and pursuing any form of desire is like a dog chasing its tail. Desires fall away naturally when one sees this clearly by oneself and there is peace and contentment. Again, these do not come by any form of getting things or making it in life but by getting the point that all values are subjective and chasing anything is itself trampling on peace and contentment. As long as one is in the chasing mode, there is no peace or contentment.

When one lives intelligently, one learns not to hanker after things but to be concerned with one's duty instead. Do all that needs to be done with the very best effort possible and let come what may. There is peace in doing and contentment with what comes – nowhere in the process of action and its fruition is there loss of peace as the heart and mind stay with the action – never ahead of it in anticipation of what is expected to come. When there is no anticipation, there is no fear and when there is no fear, there is no anger. Examine it for yourself. When you anticipate anything – there is always the possibility of it not resulting and this snowballs into fear. If you continue to put effort and the result becomes even more improbable – you feel dissatisfied and anger rises as a sort of frustration or helplessness – not being able to make it happen. So, who is behind all of this? Look at it for yourself and you will see that it is meaningless and a downward spiral to have any expectations at all. This does not mean that we become cold and dejected with things but rather, you get all fired up to do, to exert when the energy that was going into anticipation is also made available for effort. You cannot know real effort till you have every drop of energy going into the work on hand. And this is not just about your job but about any and every effort.

yaḥ sarvatrā 'nabhisnehas tat-tat prāpya śubhāśubhaṁ
nā 'bhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

He who is everywhere without attachment, who neither rejoices nor despises on meeting with anything – good or bad, his wisdom is established. (II-57)

We come again to the theme of homelessness, “...*everywhere without attachment*”. Attachment to any one, any thing or any condition is an invitation to sorrow as all things are in the process of change. People, things and conditions come into view, change and then go away from view – it is the biggest recycling project you can think of. Really, nothing comes or goes – it just appears to do so because of the new look it takes on. Why do we feel that love has anything at all to do with attachment? Is attachment even possible? How does one get attached? Attachment is a peculiar and blind operation of the mind which has no rationale at all. Again, in living an examined life, one sees that attachments are really impossible – even in the tightest quarters as it is all mind-play and nothing outside need conform to these personal desires – attachments are desires only but in camouflage. When attachments are seen through – it is dispensed with and if one is unable to dispense with it – wisdom has not arisen and one is still not capable of examined living but by choice. When attachments are dispensed – the ebb and tide of rejoicing when things go our way and dejection when things don't go our way also stops – there is peace and one's wisdom gets established.

yadā samharate cā 'yaṁ kūrmo 'ṅgānī 'va sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṇī 'ndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

When, like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs on all sides, he withdraws his senses from the sense-objects, then his wisdom becomes steady. (II-58)

tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ
vaśe hi yasye 'ndriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Having restrained them all, he should sit steadfast, intent on me. His wisdom is steady whose senses are under control. (II-61)

tasmād yasya mahābāho nigṛhītāni sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṇī 'ndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Therefore, O Arjuna, his knowledge is steady whose senses are completely restrained from sense-objects. (II-68)

Sense-control and self-control are brought into practice through the single but double-sided action of vairagya and abhyasa or dispassion and right application. It is hard to wean oneself from undesired habits if one does not give the same energy that is flowing there – a new, positive and desired flow. It is pointless to struggle with letting go, it is much easier and beneficial to make new tracks and just go from good to better. The old ways will die by themselves by disuse if you make new ones, better ones.

If you clearly see that one way is a downward spiral – good, cut a new path and keep prodding. What is the difficulty in this? Why look over your shoulder and sigh, “Gee, I wonder what will happen to all these folk who are or were connected with me...”. Let things work out how they will work out – what is your involvement in what you have found non-conductive? If you are awake – you have clarity and know that your duty is self-cultivation till the highest and very end through life. If this wisdom has dawned within – you will not be deceived by promptings otherwise.

Sense-control and self-control are the pivot that make one human. These two qualities are essential for self-cultivation and inner blossoming. Parents who have learned some lessons in life, will make it a point to instil them in children from early on if they truly wish for their highest welfare. Children brought up without these, find it hard in their adult years to instill them.

3. Yoga-Bhraṣṭa

The spiritual path has many ups and downs as we stumble now and again to our lower nature, force of habit and weakness of personality. It may seem that it is a stiff uphill climb and perhaps, there is more to lose than gain. But, these verses assure us that there is no loss in yoga – only gain. Once on the path, it does not matter if you fall as long as you pick yourself up and keep going. The price of not walking the path is way greater than the total sum of all falls experienced.

pārtha nai 've 'ha nā 'mutra vināśas tasya vidyate
na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścid durgatiṃ tāta gacchati

O Arjuna, neither in this world, nor in the next world is there destruction for him; none, verily, who does good, O my son, ever comes to grief. (VI-40)

prāpya puṇyakṛtām lokān uṣitvā śāśvatīḥ samāḥ
śucīnām śrīmatām gehe yogabhraṣṭo 'bhijāyate

Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and having dwelt there for everlasting years (many millennia) he who was unsuccessful in yoga is reborn in a house of the pure and (spiritually) wealthy. (VI-41)

athavā yoginām eva kule bhavati dhīmatām
etad dhi durlabhataram loka janma yad īdrśam

Or, he is born in a family of even the wise yogi; verily a birth like this is very difficult to obtain in this world. (VI-42)

tatra taṃ buddhisamyogaṃ labhate paurvadehikaṃ
yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ saṃsiddhau kurunandana

There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former body and strives more than before for perfection, O Arjuna. (VI-43)

pūrvābhyāsenā tenai 'va hriyate hy avaśo 'pi saḥ
jijñāsur api yogasya śabdabrahmā 'tivartate

By that very former practice he is borne on in spite of himself. Even he who merely wishes to know yoga goes beyond the shabda-brahman, the rituals of the Veda. (VI-44)

prayatnād yatamānas tu yogī saṃśuddhakilbiṣaḥ
anekajanmasaṃsiddhas tato yāti parām gatiṃ

But the yogi who strives with diligence, purified of sins and perfected gradually through many births, reaches the highest goal. (VI-45)

Yoga-Brashta is one who has not been able to attain perfection. If for whatever reason we have not been able to reach the goal – there is no loss as all our effort is brought back to life just as seeds lying dormant during a drought come to life at the first rainfall. We all make mistakes on the path and they can be good teachers. To avoid making mistakes takes intelligent practice and living. This is made easy when one has firm conviction of the ideal; has adopted a good set of precepts and principles for living that supports his goal; has a leak-proof plan for living and practice; and a system of self-accountability each time there is a slip or deviation.

Mistakes are not the problem, not learning from them and not trying to avoid them is and these can lead to a 'fallen state' or a state where one has lost his way. The grip of old habits and weaknesses can take hold with redoubled vigor, so much so that one feels he has lost his way and is drifting.

The best thing you can do if you are drifting is to ground yourself somehow and start with the basics again. This is no time for heroics and one has to be down to earth to realize what is going on. Any conditions can be recovered from if there is the will. All the good that you have done before is ready to help you if you will follow the path the point to. To keep your orientation or compass always pointing to the good, is a skill that must be cultivated.

4. Gunātīta

Gunās are modes of the mind and a gunātīta is one who has mastery over these modes. The mind has three modes: sattva which is purity, balance, light and helpful to the spiritual path; rajas which is dynamism which often results in passions and strong feelings about things; and; tamas which is laziness, heedlessness, ignorance, darkness and sloth. Tamas hides the truth and rajas goads you to find peace, happiness and joy in things outside. These verses tell us about the qualities of one who has mastery of the gunas or a gunātīta.

prakāśam ca pravṛttim ca moham eva ca pāṇḍava
na dveṣṭi saṁpravṛttāni na nivṛttāni kāṅkṣati

Light, activity and delusion – when they are present, O Arjuna, he hates them not, nor does he long for them when they are absent. (XIV-22)

Swami Sivananda was fond of reminding seekers, “You must know what gunas are operating in you each moment”. Gunas are modes of the mind or frequencies of energy flow in the mind. Let us take the example of a little stream in which water flows differently through the day and on which we depend for our water supply.

Tamas: When there is no flow in the water, it starts to get stagnant. Mold and other forms of algae grow and there is limited visibility. You cannot see the bottom and never know just how deep it is and the contour of the bottom. When tamas operates in the mind, similarly, it hides the truth, the good and promotes lethargy, dullness of mind and indecision.

Rajas: When the water level and speed increases, there can be a spill over and flooding on the banks. Water will take the path of least resistance and rush through those areas. This is what happens in the mind too when rajas or dynamism operates. The speed of the flow of energy increases and it tends to want to flow to lower areas or areas of weakness. You have to be especially watchful as this can happen when there are outer conditions that are conducive to acting out on them or even worse – when there are no outer conditions as if we are unguarded in these moments, we can cut deeper grooves by allowing the whole drama to play out in the

mind. Why is the inner drama more dangerous than the one with outer conditions? Because when there are outer conditions – like say rajas operating, a propensity to be angry quickly and a person who seems to be nagging you – there is also the weighing of consequences as acting on it will have. This can help one to somehow subdue the urge and deal with it differently. But, when there is no outer condition to act out and you are alone – you can get angry and act out in thought. Thought is real action – never the physical action and it is thought and feeling that makes karma. When rajas operates in the mind, it points to what is not accurate, true or good and goads you into action. All vices become magnets for rajas and just as water seeks the lowest level – the increased speed of psychic energy’s flow rushes to those low lying area and one feels compelled to act in spite of knowing the consequences.

Sattva: When the water flow is just right, there is no turbulence and there is no stagnation – the water is clear and clean. You can drink from it, see through it and the water becomes most useful. When sattva operates in the mind, there is good balance and harmony. We see things clearly for what they are and consider the pros and cons before acting. Sattva is especially conducive for study and meditation. It is the duty of each person to increase his sattva through all that he does as sattva is inner goodness.

udāsīnavad āsīno guṇair yo na vicālyate
guṇā vartanta ity eva yo ’vatiṣṭhati ne ’ṅgate

He who, seated like one unconcerned, is not moved by the qualities, and who, knowing that the qualities are active, is Self-centred and moves not (is a gunātīta). (XIV-23)

samaduḥkhasukhaḥ svasthaḥ samaloṣṭāsmakāñcanaḥ
tulyapriyāpriyo dhīras tulyanindātmasaṁstutiḥ

Alike in pleasure and pain, who dwells in the self, to whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike, to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike, firm, the same in censure and praise, (XIV-24)

mānāpamānayos tulyas tulyo mitrāripakṣayoḥ
sarvārambhaparityāgī guṇātītaḥ sa ucyate

The same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings – he is said to have crossed the qualities. (XIV-25)

Now, these verses have to do with inner balance or samatva. To see thing alike does not mean one is foolish in seeing gold and a clod of earth as the same thing literally. One sees gold as gold with its value and knows what is best to be done with it. One sees earth for what it is and knows what is to be done with it. Both have their uses – each, useless when the other is required. If one is deep in the woods, good earth or fertile soil is very useful to grow food in. If one sees suffering of others, the value gold can get may be useful in providing help or relief. The important thing is

that the type of balance suggested in ‘alikehood’ or ‘sameness’ is to not be moved positively when one sees gold and negatively when one sees a clod of earth as that type of reaction makes one vulnerable to the deadly mechanism of like and dislike which are ever waiting for a door left open.

5. Nature of Equal Vision

Whatever path you chose as your mainstay, be it the way of devotion, the way of yoga or the knowledge – equal vision is requisite. Seeing, feeling, and acting with equal vision is the mark of a sage as he indeed sees the sameness everywhere which to him is the omnipresence of God. These verses extoll the nature of equal vision and one who has equal vision.

vidyāvinayasampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini
śuni cai ’va śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ

Sages look with an equal eye on a brahmana endowed with learning and humility, on a cow, on an elephant, and even on a dog and an outcaste. (V-18)

iḥai ’va tair jitaḥ sargo yeṣāṃ sām̐ye sthitaṃ manaḥ
nirdoṣaṃ hi samaṃ brahma tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ

Even here, birth is overcome by those whose minds rest in ‘sameness’. Brahman is spotless indeed and ‘sameness’. Therefore they are established in Brahman. (V-19)

Again, we see an emphasis on ‘sameness’ which is equal vision in simpler terms. That which is sought is one and uniform and the seeker must rise to the quality of the sought as the seeker does not stand outside the sought. There is no instrument other than oneself for the quest of self-realization. There are differences in appearance but in essence – all is perfectly synthesized in oneness or sameness. Unless you overcome the limitation of unequal vision in your day to day life – you cannot overcome it in meditation.

In meditation, different thoughts rise and fall in and of the same consciousness, appearing so very real that something wants to react to it and consciousness is pulled to identify with that which wants to react. All this is happening while we are fully aware and are intently looking at it all going on. The instrument or mind for meditation is cultivated when you are not sitting and meditating. So, this means that even when you are not sitting and meditating – you are required to still be meditating which means watching the mind. This is called vigilance – a state where the mind is observed relentlessly. Unless you bring yourself to do this – meditation will be difficult to impossible.

labhante brahmanirvāṇam ṛṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ
chinnadvaidhā yatāmānaḥ sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ

The sages obtain absolute freedom or moksha – they whose sins have been destroyed, whose perception of dualities is torn asunder, who are self-controlled and intent on the welfare of all beings. (V-25)

suhṛṇmitrāryudāsīnamadhyasthadveṣyabandhuṣu
sādhuṣv api ca pāpeṣu samabuddhir viśiṣyate

He who is of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, enemies, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, the relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous, excels. (VI-9)

sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cā 'tmani
tīkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ

With the mind harmonised by yoga he sees the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self; he sees the same everywhere. (VI-29)

ātmaupaṁyena sarvatra samaṁ paśyati yo 'rjuna
sukhaṁ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṁ sa yogī paramo mataḥ

He who, through the likeness of the self, O Arjuna, sees 'sameness' everywhere, be it pleasure or pain, he is regarded as the highest yogi. (VI-32)

When there is unremitting and relentless vigilance – one sees that idea of essential difference in all things is nothing but the values that reside in our own mind. There are differences in appearance – yes, but not essential differences. When the mechanism that sees essential difference is abandoned – a different vision which has always been there but submerged and not used – comes into play. One is able to see things as they are – to be able to see what appears different, feels different, smells different, tastes different and sounds different but knowing that the differentiation too is the reactions of the senses which are limited – working through the sense organs which are also limited and synthesized by the mind which is also limited.

It does not matter what path in yoga becomes your main stay – equal vision is requisite. Each path reaches this differently and is best for different make-ups. It is good to have a well-balanced practice also as it makes equal vision easier to attain by giving you the best of many approaches. Krishna tells us that when there is equal vision – one is regarded as the highest vision. Equal vision is not a something you do as a skill or selectively – it is when the passion or rajas in the mind is squeezed out and though things appear different – there is no fuel in the mind to react to them as different as there is mastery of the gunas.

III. Spiritual Life & Sadhana - I



1. Three Kinds of Sukha
2. Great Enemies of Man
3. Yogic Discipline
4. Three Kinds of Tapas
5. Control of Mind
6. Virtues to be Cultivated

It is good to know about the truth but better to experience or actualize it. The truth is not an attainment or a result of practice as it already exists. Practice purifies the mind and heart so that our true nature can shine in its pristine splendor. The Katha Upanishad tells us that two paths are open to all: the path of the pleasant or shreyas and the path of the good or preyas. You need not look for them – both paths are open to all, all the time – you have to choose. But, these choices are not so much in the outer but in the heart and mind that seeks. If the heart and mind are purified or restored to their original nature – there will only be one choice which is the way of the good.

1. Three Kinds of Sukha

In these verses, we start off with three kinds of happiness, a little different from the Katha Upanishad's two choices, but essentially the same and then look at why it seems difficult to walk the way of the good.

yat tad agre viṣam iva pariṇāme 'mṛtopamaṁ
tat sukhaṁ sāttvikaṁ proktam ātmabuddhiprasādajam

That which is like poison at first but in the end like nectar - that pleasure is declared to be sattvika, born of the purity of one's own mind due to self-realisation. (XVIII-37)

viṣayendriyasamyogād yat tad agre 'mṛtopamaṁ
pariṇāme viṣam iva tat sukhaṁ rājasam smṛtam

That pleasure which arises from the contact of the sense-organs with the objects, which is at first like nectar, and in the end like poison – that is declared to be rajasa. (XVIII-38)

yad agre cā 'nubandhe ca sukhaṁ mohanam ātmanaḥ
nidrālasya pramādottham tat tāmasam udāhṛtam

That pleasure which at first and in the sequel is delusive of the self, arising from sleep, indolence and heedlessness – that pleasure is declared to be tamasa. (XVIII-39)

“That which is like poison at first but in the end like nectar...” – what the Katha Upanishad calls shreyas is the good but does not appear as best initially – good is always in the longer run. One example: eating right, exercising daily and a healthy life style may not seem as satisfying to those who are indulgent. But, the indulgent soon find out that the price tag of ill health and more –

comes later. Another example: self-control, self-discipline and character are among the most important things to be cultivated in children and especially today – they must be cultivated as early as possible as they are very early on bombarded with other options. Indulging them may feel move loving but activates the premature flow of rajas as pandering to all I like wakes up the ‘I’ and all latent impressions carried into this birth. Both these are one aspect of understanding. Sukha or happiness is not about pleasing and satisfying sensory urges which increases the flow of rajas (this is the second type), or encouraging indolence which increases the flow of tamas (this is the third type) – we have already talked about these gunas earlier.

Sukha or happiness of the first type is what endures, protects, nourishes and brings peace as it is based on what is good for the long run – what is really good and just doesn’t feel good. This is happiness increases one’s sattva which is the fuel for sadhana or spiritual pursuit.

A classical exposition of this is given by Nachiketas in the ending verses of the first chapter of Katha Upanishad when he is tempted with the very best of things that even celestials and gods in heaven do not have access to by Yama, Lord of Death.

ye kāmā durlabhā martyaloke sarvān kāmāmschandataḥ prārthayasva
imā rāmāḥ sarathāḥ satūryā na hīdṛṣā lambhaniyā manuṣyaiḥ
ābhirmatprattābhiḥ paricārayasva naciketo maraṇam mā’nuprākṣiḥ

Whatever desires are difficult to attain in the world of mortals, ask for them according to thy wish. These fair maidens with their chariots and musical instruments—such are indeed not enjoyable by mortals; be attended by them, I will give them to thee; but, O Nachiketas! Do not ask the question of the state of the Soul after death. (Katha Upanishad I.1.25)

Nachiketas replies to Lord Yama...

śvobhāvā martyasya yadantakaitat sarveṁdriyāṇām jarayaṁti tejaḥ
api sarvaṁ jīvitamalpameva tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte

These things last till tomorrow (ephemeral). O death, they wear out the vigour of all the senses. Even the longest life is verily short. Keep thou thy chariots, the dance and music. (Katha Upanishad I.1.26)

na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuṣyo lapsyāmahe vittamadrākṣma cettvā
jīviṣyāmo yāvadiśiṣyasi tvaṁ varastu me varaṇīyaḥ sa eva

No man can be made happy by wealth. If we should obtain wealth and behold thee, we would only live as long as thou shalt sway. Only that boon which I have chosen is fit to be longed by me. (Katha Upanishad I.1.27)

ajīryatāmamṛtānāmupetya jīryanmartyaḥ kvadhaḥsthaḥ prajānan
abhidhyāyan varṇaratipramodān atidīrghe jīvite ko rameta

What decaying mortal living in the world below and possessed of knowledge, after having approached the company of the undecaying and the immortal, will rejoice in long life, after he has pondered over the nature of the pleasures produced by song and sport (beauty and love)? (Katha Upanishad I.1.28)

Nachiketas had been given three boons by Lord Yama – the first two were satisfied at once. His third boon concerns knowledge of the soul after what is called ‘the great hereafter’ or the great death. We will not get into this here but it is important to note the tremendous wisdom, clarity and resolve that Nachiketas had in knowing what was best and in his best interests.

yasminnidam vicikitsanti mr̥tyo yatsāmparāye mahati brūhi nastat
yo’yam varo gūḍhamanupraviṣṭo nānyam tasmānnaciketā vṛṇīte

O death! Tell us that in which men have this doubt, and which is about the great hereafter. Nachiketas does not choose any other boon but that (concerning the soul) of which the knowledge is hidden. (Katha Upanishad I.1.29)

You may feel that everyone wishes true welfare for themselves and those close to them but if you examine how we live and the priorities – you may be quite surprised to see things inverted. Yet, we brush away all attempts to suggest otherwise and hush things up by calling this confusion ‘unconditional love’ – now, it sounds so very nice. Isn’t it worth reexamining?

2. Great Enemies of Man

The obstacles are not outside but within and verses point out to the great enemies of man which must be overcome by anyone wishing his own highest good.

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ
mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhy enam iha vairiṇam

It is desire, it is anger born of the quality of rajas, all-devouring, all-sinful; know this as the foe here. (III-37)

tasmāt tvam indriyāṅy ādau niyamya bharatarṣabha
pāpmānam prajahi hy enam jñānavijñānanāśanam

Therefore, O Arjuna, controlling the senses first, do thou kill this sinful thing, the destroyer of knowledge and realisation. (III-41)

We have talked about the gunas and now when asked by Arjuna as to our greatest enemy – Krishna unhesitatingly says: “...the quality of rajas, all-devouring, all sinful; know this as the foe here”. We have seen the havoc rajas does. Why then is it so difficult to live in such a way that all we do and how we do things – promotes sattva, burns tamas and squeezes out rajas? Well, this would take living an orderly and disciplined life and we do not want to do this for ourselves or for others. But, what happened to wanting best for ourselves and those close to us? When we

do not cultivate sattva – we are cultivating tamas which hides the truth and all that is good and increasing rajas which compels us to pursue all that is not good, transitory, fleeting, changing and sorrow bringing. Yet, we say that we want our highest good, our welfare and what is best for us and our loved ones – because ‘we love them’?

evaṃ buddheḥ param buddhvā samstabhyā ’tmānam ātmanā
jahi śatruṃ mahābāho kāmarūpaṃ durāsadaṃ

Thus knowing him who is superior to the intellect and restraining the self by the Self, slay thou, O Arjuna, the enemy in the form of desire which is hard to conquer. (III-43)

trividhaṃ narakasye ’daṃ dvāraṃ nāśanam ātmanaḥ
kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhas tasmād etat trayam tyajet

Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self – lust, anger and greed; therefore one should abandon these three. (XVI-21)

We are now told that there is a gradation within in the inner instrument and the lower can be restrained by the higher or more pervasive layer. This is not vain theory but a direct instruction in how to get a handle on rajas by empowering sattva.

When we have any desire or strong urge – we are also aware that this urge has arisen. It is possible to go on doing whatever you are doing while watching that urge at the same time. Though one appears outside and one inside – we are aware of both in one consciousness or awareness along with all else. The urge is not a problem, identifying with the urge at the cost of losing awareness is. If one does not have the ability to observe one’s urges and desires – know that there is an excess of rajas and tamas that must be thinned out by other yoga practices first.

Lastly, we are told that these three must be abandoned as they are the triple gate of hell: lust, anger and greed. All three require rajas to thrive or operate. So, one part of controlling them is to increase sattva which simultaneously squeezes out rajas and acting or responding in each situation and condition with their opposite counterpart which are all virtues.

3. Yogic Discipline

Discipline is usually seen as punitive and restrictive but these verses tell us how yogic discipline is positive liberating. Wisdom and discipline go hand in hand. Discipline is the refining fire that makes wisdom steady.

praśāntātmā vigatabhīr brahmacārivrate sthitaḥ
manaḥ saṃyamya maccitto yukta āsīta matparaḥ

Serene-minded, fearless, firm in the vow of a brahmachari, having controlled the mind, thinking of me and balanced in mind, let him sit, having me as his supreme goal. (VI-14)

To be free of all distraction, to be intent on the ideal and to sit with the ideal as one's supreme goal – this is a tremendous instruction. When we stop disturbing the water in the pond – it regains its serenity. The mind will also do the same and the way to stop disturbing it is a life of brahmacharya which is a lot more than just celibacy as usually taken. Brahmacharya is a life of conservation in every way to the point of want not, waste not. When one does not want and is satisfied with what comes from his efforts naturally – the mind is controlled by the discipline of this way of living.

To be content with what comes naturally does not imply denial or suppression as some say. It is wisdom in action. The '*...sit, having me as his supreme goal*' has a physical implication of steadiness in asana and also a tremendous psychological implication of the mind which can sit or be steady. When you sit, you are not moving around – you are just there. Total sitting or asana happens when the mind also sits, the vital energy or prana sits and the body sits. They all sit together and face the supreme goal or ideal within – intent on it, having it as the supreme goal.

When one is sitting with one's goal or ideal – one is sitting with the sought and should be fully satisfied unless the ideal is not as sought as other ideals. Then, one clearly knows where the problem is. Someone who loves eating, is not distracted when sitting with a delicious banquet. Someone who loves the outdoors, is not distracted when he is in the wilderness. Someone who loves making money, is not distracted when he is doing very well and making a lot of money. Krishna tells us just this: Sit, but sit with your ideal. If you just sit but are wishy-washy about your ideal – then it is not an ideal and you will know this by the mind reaching out to what is. If you have an ideal but never sit, preferring to visit places of worship or be attend 'functions' – the feeling of 'ideal' will weaken. 'To sit' is to be with fully and 'with the ideal' is something that you have found ideal or perfect. When both, sitting and with your ideal come together – you have total sitting.

This total sitting or asana does not come if throughout the day, we lead distracted and dissipated lives. Repeating what I have said earlier, 'the mind for meditation is cultivated when you are not sitting – and so, you have to always be in meditation or a state of vigilance – relentlessly'. There is no shortcut or flip-switch that you can turn on, now that it is time to meditate.

yuktāhārahārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu
yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥā

Yoga becomes the destroyer of pain for him who is moderate in eating and recreation, who is moderate in exertion in actions, who is moderate in sleep and wakefulness. (VI-17)

yadā viniyataṁ cittam ātmany evā 'vatiṣṭhate
niḥspṛhaḥ sarvakāmebhyo yukta ity ucyate tadā

When the perfectly controlled mind rests in the self only, free from longing for all the objects of desires, then it is said: “He is united”. (VI-18)

Moderation is ‘just enough as needed’ – it has to do with need and not want. When we temper consumption with need – the want mechanism is weakened by existing wants weakening by disuse and no new wants being allowed to take seed. This drains existing rajas and increases sattva within. All wants are tethered to the ‘I’ which wants and so, the ego is also weakened. Thus, you work on all that can hinder your meditation by the way you live and meditation just happens – no aids, special techniques or blessings and other trickery is needed.

In meditation, you realize or it becomes real to you by your direct experience that the triggers of pain are not others, things or conditions but the movement of desires in your own mind with which you or the sense of being gets identified somehow. When you learn to know yourself as distinct from existing desires and live without generating new desires – you find the path that is free of pain.

taṁ vidyād duḥkhasaṁyogaviyogaṁ yogasaṁjñitam
sa niścayena yoktavyo yogo ’nirviṇṇacetasā

Let that be known by the name of yoga, the severance from union with pain. This yoga should be practised with determination and with an understanding mind. (VI-23)

In the Yoga Sutras, you find a similar verse...

heyam duḥkham anāgataṁ

Yet, all is not lost. For, sorrow that has not yet ‘arrived’, not yet reached the field of experience, can be avoided; unhappiness that has not yet befallen may be avoided, by avoiding psychic contact with it. (Yoga Sutras II.16)

Pain that has not come, can be and should be avoided by avoiding psychic contact with it. This means that pain and sorrow can be avoided and cut off. The Gita tells us that this is yoga just as the Yoga Sutras – I think this should clear up all doubts about what yoga is. But, pay heed to “...with determination and with an understanding mind”. We have seen this again and again. Determination is unwavering resolve and an undaunted spirit or indefatigability. Understanding mind is a mind that understands or is constantly persevering to discover or uncover the truth in all things in all conditions. This is a mind that is either free of conditioning or striving to be free of condition and has severed connection with the past and future at each step. An understanding mind is a mind that ‘stands under the truth of things’ and for this, it is perpetually in the present as it wants to understand all that happens. This is also a steady mind that is bent of casting off any and all conditioning, thinning down to clarity so the light of its source can shine brightly.

śanaiḥ-śanair upamed buddhyā dhṛtigrhītayā
ātmasaṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcid api cintayet

Little by little let him attain to quietude by the intellect held firmly; having made the mind establish itself in the self, let him not think of anything. (VI-25)

What we have been given so far is the outer ring of mind control or how to live in such a way that our expertness in living brings about a gathering of the dissipated rays of the mind. Now, this verse blends into sitting or meditation. These words are most important: *‘attain to quietude, intellect held firmly, having made the mind establish itself in the self, and, not think about anything’*. Each of these four are instructions in the preparation for meditation and to be capable of them requires us to live in a way that promotes them.

4. Three Kinds of Tapas

Tapas is translated as austerity which is usually associated with some form of physical hardship. In these verses, we are told that tapas is psychological austerity or control of passion and its results. This single verse is a complete prescription for self-purification and perhaps, enough for a lifetime of practice.

devadvijaguruprājñapūjanam śaucam ārjavam
brahmacaryam ahimsā ca śarīram tapa ucyate

Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the teachers and the wise, purity, straightforwardness, celibacy and non-injury are called the austerities of the body. (XVII-14)

We usually associate physical austerity with some kind of physical hardship but here we see worship of the gods, twice-born, teachers and the wise. A couple words about this ‘twice-born’. The twice-born was relevant to the caste system only when those brahmanas or people born into brahmana families lived the life completely dedicated to pursuit of truth. Things are quite different today and the entire structure of days gone by is no more. Anyone who makes self-realization or God-realization his or her single and only ideal, having seen the worthlessness in living a shallow and pointless life is twice-born as he or she is born again into wisdom and this is a spiritual birth.

We also have other important instructions in physical austerity as: *“...straightforwardness, celibacy and non-injury”* – which we can understand but have to accept wholeheartedly by first examining each of them and seeing how to live life with their seed.

Straightforwardness is the absence of all forms of deceit to others and your own self. Celibacy is a disciplined life of conservation in every way. Non-injury is the absence of the ability to injure anyone – not just physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. One cannot gossip, spread rumors or any such act if one would live in the spirit of just this one verse. To hold this verse dear in the heart means to not entertain their opposites which burn or exhaust themselves by disuse. This psychological burning is called tapas.

So, physical austerity includes psychological austerity and is not by any means torture of the body – that is foolishness of the first order.

anudvegakaram vākyaṁ satyaṁ priyahitaṁ ca yat
svādhyāyābhyasanam cai 'va vānmayam tapa ucyate

Speech which causes no excitement, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, the practice of the study of the Veda, are called the austerity of speech. (XVII-15)

You have heard it said that words are powerful and cannot be taken back. We cannot control what comes at us or unfolds as events in our lives – let's call it the inbox. But, we can control our inner and outer response to all and everything – let's call this the outbox. Yes, the inner response and outer response. Bring to mind what we have spoken about earlier – thoughts and feelings are the real triggers of karma or destiny. Smiling outwardly and working overtime inwardly is hypocrisy and deception – it is trickery and must be avoided. It also increases rajas and vrittis in the mind which will make meditation difficult if not impossible.

Study of the veda is not limited to study of the scriptures known as the vedas but to be a student of knowledge or one who wants to know by direct experience. Veda means knowledge and to know as well. When we are students, we wish to know and a mind that wants to know, has to be a mind that is free of the known, notions and concepts. When these are let go, much of memory of things including hurt and fear are let go. Natural goodness rises to the surface and there is natural austerity of speech. Till this can happen, one has to be careful with all things said in the feelings or the mind and said aloud through the mouth – they are not different – all part of the outbox or expression.

manaḥprasādaḥ saumyatvaṁ maunam ātmavinigrahaḥ
bhāvasaṁśuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam ucyate

Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, silence, self-control, purity of nature – this is called mental austerity. (XVII-16)

Here again we see the cultivation of all that increases sattva and squeezes out rajas at the same time. These are not just words that sound good which are clubbed together but potent instructions which you have to figure out how to live them. Give thought to each of them and see how they can be practiced. The more you practice goodness in life, the easier it will be to practice on the mat.

5. Control of Mind

In three verses, the Bhagavad Gita tells is the secret of mind control.

viśayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ
rasavarjam raso 'py asya param dṛṣṭvā nivartate

The objects of the senses turn away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind: but this longing also turns away on seeing the Supreme. (II-59)

This is the secret of mind control in one verse or rather, in one word: “...*abstinent*...”. To abstain is to turn away or stay away from. But in yoga, it is not just turning away or staying away as a sort of withdrawal but, turning to or staying with a better option instead. This single, double-sided action of ‘detach and attach’ (as Gurudev Swami Sivananda calls it), or vairagya which is absence of passion and abhyasa which is right effort or application in the language of the Gita is the alpha-omega of yoga.

In the first section of the Yoga Vasistha, Rama explains his condition to the teachers assembled and says...

iti me doṣadāvāgni dagdhe mahati cetasi
prasphuranti na bhogāśā mṛgatṛṣṇā saraḥsv iva

This perception of the defects of the world has destroyed the undesirable tendencies in my mind; and therefore, desire for sense-pleasure does not arise in my mind, even as a mirage does not appear on the surface of water. (Yoga Vasistha I.29.1)

When you live an awakened life, you see through things and come to realize that value is not inherent in anything or anyone – they are self-ascribed. You see things as they are and in time-process. Seeing the defect in things is seeing things without defective vision or conditioning. When you see things as they are, you no longer desire them as you know that the complete mechanism of desirability is in the mind, self-generated, self-sustained and self-fulfilling.

yatato hy api kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ
indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabhaṁ manaḥ

The turbulent senses, O Arjuna, violently carry away the mind of a wise man though he be striving to control them. (II-60)

tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ
vaśe hi yasye ’ndriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Having restrained them all, he should sit steadfast, intent on me. His wisdom is steady whose senses are under control. (II-61)

Krishna cautions us, “*The turbulent senses, O Arjuna, violently carry away the mind of a wise man though he be striving to control them*”. He does not give praise unduly and when he says ‘wise man’ and ‘striving to control’ – we should pay heed in knowing the severity of the task on hand. This, not to promote fear but to gather the forces for battle by being better prepared.

Restraint too must be taken to include detach and attach or vairagya and abhyasa together. We have spoken about sitting and steadfast and also about steady wisdom and sense control earlier.

6. Virtues to be Cultivated

Virtue is not just outer behavior like courtesy and politeness – as behind that facade, much secret working could be hidden. Virtue is a state of being that does not think does not function from a personal point of view or any special consideration to oneself or one's kith and kin, and instead, functions on principles, doing only what is best for each situation. Selfishness and self-centeredness tie one to the post of un wisdom and make real spiritual life impossible. To live in the spirit, one has to abandon the hurdle of self-centeredness in all its forms.

People struggle unnecessarily with trying to eradicating vices which is a limited way of looking at the problem. Refrain is a struggle at best if there is no positive direction given to the same energy. To develop virtues is to give the energy that was flowing in limited ways a wider scope and this results in inner expansion. Virtues to be cultivated are spread out in different areas of the Gita, in this section, we have them all together.

amānitvam adāmbhitvam ahimsā kṣāntir ārjavam
ācāryopāsanam śaucam sthairyam ātmavinigrahaḥ

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control. (XIII-7)

abhayam sattvasamśuddhir jñānayogavyavasthitiḥ
dānam damaś ca yajñāś ca svādhyāyas tapa ārjavam

Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga, alms giving, control of the senses, sacrifice, study of scriptures, austerity and straightforwardness, (XVI-1)

ahimsā satyam akrodhas tyāgaḥ śāntir apaiśunam
dayā bhūteṣv aloluptvam mādavam hrīr acāpalam

Harmlessness, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion towards beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, (XVI-2)

tejaḥ kṣamā dhṛtiḥ śaucam adroho nā 'timānitā
bhavanti saṃpadam daivīm abhijātasya bhārata

Vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride – these belong to the One born for a divine state, O Arjuna. (XVI-3)

Earlier, when we covered the bhagavata or devotee and the jnani or one on the path of knowledge – we looked at the qualities that is the highlight and requirement of each. In these four verses, the qualities that are required, not just those intent on success in the spiritual path are given. Rise over the social or behavioral definitions of each and try to feel how these bring

inner expansion. There are many, start with what is the opposite of any vice or area of lacking that you need most and work on it consciously and systematically.

Take up one virtue to be developed for two weeks. Before starting, be clear of the scope of this virtue in your life and do not allow any limitation or justification. Make clear to yourself how you will hold yourself accountable as any effort without frequent introspection and stern self-accountability is a farce. Do not announce it to others, even those who are closest and do not talk about it at all. Today, people talk about everything under labels of love etc. but it is a weakness that is justified. Make it a contract with God and continue bravely – you will attain success.

These four verses are a long list, eighteen are the most important for the spiritual seeker and Gurudev Swami Sivananda has culled them into one of his English Songs called the “Song of Eighteen ‘Ities’” – as all qualities end with the letters ‘ity’. Memorize this song and you will have a good list of what must be cultivated and what is really important.

Song of Eighteen ‘Ities’

Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity,
Equanimity, fixity, non-irritability,
Adaptability, humility, tenacity,
Integrity, nobility, magnanimity,
Charity, generosity, purity,
Practise daily these eighteen ‘ities’,
You will soon attain Immortality.

Brahman is the only real entity,
Mr. So-and-so is a false non-entity.
You will abide in Eternity and Infinity,
You will behold unity in diversity,
You cannot attain this in the university,
You can attain this in the Forest University.
...Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity.

III. Spiritual Life & Sadhana - II



7. Vairagya
8. Real Renunciation
9. Rules of Right Activity
10. Self-Surrender and Grace

Sadhana is spiritual practice which purifies the heart and mind so one's true nature can be seen. People often pay less attention to this aspect of the Gita, 'Yoga Shastra' or Scripture of Yoga because the verses on sadhana are spread out widely. Today, we start with vairagya or dispassion and move through what the Gita tells us real renunciation is, the rules for right activity, self-surrender and grace.

7. Vairāgya

Translated as dispassion but often taken as aversion which vairagya is not. In these verses, the Gita tells us how and why the senses flow towards their objects in the first place and the way out of passion's tight grip.

mātrāsparśās tu kaunteya sītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ
āgamāpāyino 'nityās tāms titikṣasva bhārata

The contacts of the senses with the objects, O Arjuna, which cause heat and cold, pleasure and pain, have a beginning and an end; they are impermanent. Endure them bravely. (II-14)

asaṁśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calaṁ
abhyāseṇa tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca grhyate

Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but by practice and by dispassion it may be restrained. (VI-35)

We have already talked about vairagya or dispassion and abhyasa or right application of effort as the alpha-omega of yoga. These are not two actions but one, dual-sided action. When you turn and face the light – your back is to the shadow.

indriyārtheṣu vairāgyam anahaṁkāra eva ca
janmamṛtyujarāvyaḍhiduḥkhadoṣānudarśanaṁ

Indifference to the objects of the senses and also absence of egoism, perception of (or reflection on) the evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain, (XIII-8)

asaktir anabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāragrāhīṣu
nityaṁ ca samacittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu

Non-attachment, non-identification of the self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable, (XIII-9)

Indifference to the objects of senses does not mean you hate things or completely stay away from them but that you are not attracted or repelled by them. For instance, when you are thirsty, you get a drink of water as water quenches thirst. As you are going to get a drink of water, you see a juice stand but you know your movement is to quench your thirst and water is just fine. On the other hand, if you are visit someone's home and they offer you juice – there is no point refusing and insisting on water only. You can quench your thirst without being inflexible.

Living an examined life is essential to inner growth and spiritual living. We have already spoken earlier about seeing the defect in things which boils down to seeing the defect in our assessment of things earlier.

Still again we come back to non-attachment – it has a much wider scope than you can imagine. Here, non-attachment is followed by non-identification and we have, “*Non-attachment, non-identification of the self with son, wife, home and the rest...*”. ‘And the rest...’ means anything and all things that one could be identified with strongly and this may even mean one's culture or background if it is strong. Now, there is nothing wrong with culture as such but feeling a strong sense of any identification is another thing. This again does not mean you hate anything but that you realize which means really feel no sense of attachment, preference or identification with any of it – ‘*all the rest*’. Some people are so heavily tied into certain backgrounds, they fail to realize that attachment and identification in one way is really non-different from attachment with another – as the inward operation is the same – reacting to vrittis or self-created and self-sustained patterns of the mind.

This is why, among other reasons, seekers retire to the forests so they can learn how to live without ideas of association with this, that and another. One gradually comes down to ‘I am just a man’, then to, ‘I am just a person’, then to, ‘part of this landscape or surrounding’ and to ‘I just am’. If you are going to identify with some culture or heritage – you will not be able to drop below this threshold and sustain. You may be able to drop below in a little sitting but once you get up – you are the same old Joe – there is no real progress.

mayi cā 'nanyayogena bhaktir avyabhicāriṇī
viviktadeśasevitvam aratir janasaṁsadi

Unswerving devotion unto me by the yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places,
distaste for the society of people, (XIII-10)

adhyātmajñānanityatvaṁ tattvajñānārthadarśanaṁ
etaj jñānam iti proktam ajñānaṁ yad ato 'nyathā

Constancy in knowledge of the self, perception of the end of true knowledge – this is declared to be knowledge, and what is opposed to it is ignorance. (XIII-11)

viviktasevī laghvāśī yataṅkāvāyamaṅasaḥ
dhyānayaogaparo nityaṅ vairāgyaṅ samupāśritaḥ

Dwelling in solitude, eating but little, with speech, body and mind subdued, always engaged in meditation and concentration, taking refuge in dispassion, (XVIII-52)

ahaṅkāraṅ balaṅ darpaṅ kāmaṅ krodhaṅ parigrahaṅ
vimucya nirmamaḥ śānto brahmabhūyāya kalpate

Having abandoned egoism, (a show of) strength, arrogance, desire, anger and covetousness, free from the notion of ‘mine’, and peaceful – he is fit for becoming Brahman. (XVIII-53)

These four verses contain a wealth of instruction which is self-explanatory. Let us zero in on ‘distaste for society’ as this ties in to what we have been talking about earlier and needs some clarification as it is easy to go wrong. Distaste for something is not hatred of it. Distaste means I just do not have a taste for something. For example, say I do not have a taste for non-vegetarian food. If offered, I can simply say that it does not suit me. But, it is foolish for me to condemn others for eating it as it is their business.

However – a distaste for society? We just spoke about freeing oneself from all attachments and identifications and distaste for society ties into it in the next verse but preceded by “...resort to solitary places, distaste for the society of people”. Now, it all makes perfect sense. To be free of all attachments and identifications – one has to be on one’s own for a while to see within oneself that all attachments and identification including family, culture and society are limiting notions in our own minds and have no real basis. Only then, will one find the way to a sense of complete freedom which is the doorway to our true nature.

When talking about ‘abandoning strength’, what is being alluded to is ‘a show of strength’. One does not have to appear or become a hand or palm ringing weakling. Spiritual life requires tremendous strength as the battle always rages on without letting up. There is a big difference between being strong and showing strength and this applies not just to the physical but mental and spiritual real as well. Some people come across as tough guys but are not really tough as they cannot overcome their urges. Some people come across as weaklings that are so harmless and gentle but their brains are always working on how to get things in their favor. Show of strength and show of weakness are both ‘shows’ only – big house, no furniture. Seekers will need physical, mental and spiritual strength to endure whatever rigors come upon them – yes, physical strength too as you have to be able to take care of yourself and endure any amount of hardship and one cannot understand this if one has money at all. This is why again one has to be bold enough to stand apart – truly apart from all one’s support to see for oneself just what one’s metal is and

learn how to wean oneself psychologically from all limitations so one can discover one's complete independence and freedom or kaivalya.

8. Real Renunciation

The Gita tells us that renunciation too is not aversion or hatred as is sometimes misconstrued. In these verses, the Gita tells us that renunciation is a complete change of heart as it is no point to give up the objects and then sit and think of them – this, the Gita calls hypocrisy. If we listen to these verses carefully, we will find the way to this 'change of heart', by which, we lose the taste for those things we clamored for earlier – having found something better and enduring.

na karmaṇām anārambhān naiṣkarmyaṁ puruṣo 'śnute
na ca saṅyasanād eva siddhiṁ samadhigacchati

Not by non-performance of actions does man reach actionlessness; nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection. (III-4)

The Yoga Vasistha also tells us that work is not averse to knowledge or self-realization in one of the opening verses.

ubhābhyām eva pakṣābhyām yathā khe pakṣiṇaḥ gatiḥ
tathai 'va jñāna karmābhyām jāyate paramaṁ padaṁ

Verily, birds are able to fly with their two wings: even so, both work and knowledge together lead to the supreme goal of liberation. (Yoga Vasistha I.1.7)

Work requires interaction and cooperation and becomes a mirror to see ourselves as through the rise of likes, dislikes, preferences, identification and attachment – we can get a sense of the ego and know how to carry on in a way that weakens it.

na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛt
kāryate hy avaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijair guṇaiḥ

Verily none can ever remain for even a moment without performing action; for everyone is made to act helplessly indeed by the qualities born of nature. (III-5)

If something has to be done – do it with all your being and let go. Can you do what needs to be done wholeheartedly but without concern of 'what comes' and without attachment to the action itself? We are made to act, we have to do something – why not in the doing simultaneously work on dismantling the ego? A little less may come outside, there may even be a loss materially or in recognition but – you would have tremendous gain within by inner expansion as you free yourself from ego's icy grip little by little. Those who value, concern with and chase after the outer – miss the mark of inner expansion as any form of pursuit itself leads to inner contraction as it is the 'I' that must pursue. But, when you do not stand outside the situation and learn to do what is needed – there is inner expansion as you have a wider identification.

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran
indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācārāḥ sa ucyate

He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense-objects in mind, he, of deluded understanding, is a hypocrite. (III-6)

yas tv indriyāṇi manasā niyamāyā 'rabhate 'rjuna
karmendriyaiḥ karmayogam asaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate

But, whosoever, controlling the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, engages himself in karma yoga with the organs of action, without attachment – he excels. (III-7)

Mithya is false and achara is conduct – mithyachara is false conduct which is hypocrisy. This happens when there is a front or put on of some kind and the inner makeup is quite different. Krishna tells us that karma yoga is an excellent way to heal any level of duplicity or inner rift that may have accumulated. Karma Yoga is action for action's sake – doing what needs to be done – free of any and all attachment. Karma Yoga is not social welfare work though it may result – it is yoga abhyasa or yoga in action which aims at weakening the ego's grip by acting wholeheartedly but without any personal interest, identification or attachment.

tattvavit tu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ
guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate

But he who knows the truth, O Arjuna, about the divisions of the qualities and their functions, knowing that the guna, as senses, move amidst the guna, as the sense-objects, is not attached. (III-28)

We have spoken about the gunas earlier and referred to them as modes of the mind. When the urge, whatever the attitude be, is towards someone, something or some condition outer – it is usually rajas in action. Rajas or dynamism is rooted in the 'other' principle or conviction that the other towards which you are being goaded is real and has value. Rajas' twin brother tamas or dullness carefully hides the fact that the value is self-ascribed by a cloud of ignorance over it. It also hides that the real object is not outside but inside as the value is what we go after or turn away from. The same guna that want to move towards or away is also masquerading as the object but this is hidden by tamas. So, in all pursuit – we go in circles like a dog chasing its own tail or sucking a dry bone thinking all along that the juice it tastes, comes from the bone while it is its own making and experiencing.

jñeyaḥ sa nityasaṁyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati
nirvandvo hi mahābāho sukhaṁ bandhāt pramucyate

He should be known as a perpetual renunciate who neither hates nor desires. For, free from the pairs of opposites, O Arjuna, he is easily set free from bondage. (V-3)

yaṁ saṅyāsam iti prāhur yogaṁ taṁ viddhi pāṇḍava
na hy asaṅyastasaṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana

Do thou, O Arjuna, know yoga to be that which they call renunciation. No one verily becomes a yogi who has not renounced thoughts, scheming or planning. (VI-2)

yadā hi ne 'ndriyārtheṣu na karmasv anuṣajjate
sarvasaṅkalpasāṅyāsī yogārūḍhas tado 'cyate

When a man is not attached to the sense-objects or to actions, having renounced all wishes or schemes, then he is said to have attained to yoga. (VI-4)

kāmyānām karmaṇām nyāsam saṅyāsam kavayo viduḥ
sarvakarmaphalatyāgam prāhus tyāgam vicakṣaṇāḥ

The sages understand saṅyāsa to be renunciation of desire-motivated action; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all action as tyaga. (XVIII-2)

na hi dehabhṛtā śakyaṁ tyaktuṁ karmāṅy aśeṣataḥ
yas tu karmaphalatyāgī sa tyāgī 'ty abhidhīyate

Verily, it is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is verily called a man of renunciation. (XVIII-11)

In these verses, Krishna makes it very clear what has to be renounced, what is renunciation and who a man of renunciation is. We once again encounter: 'neither hates nor desires' and 'free from the pair of opposites'. But, something new has been said, "...renounced thoughts, scheming or planning". Often, even earnest seekers get lost on doing good work and ideas of expansion enter the heart. Soon, from feeling they are doing good work, they begin to feel 'I am doing God's work' – one 'o' drops away – O! O! 'Now, why not do more and expand?' And so, thoughts start to twirl, schemes about how to raise funds (not fun) and plans to gain support for – all these flood the mind. Now my friends, what is the difference between his mind and a businessman's? Mechanically speaking, not much – the businessman may be driven by profit and this person is driven by what he feels is 'God's work'. Both have increased mental activity connected with the outer which will not allow them to meditate or inquire into the truth as the mind will be a maze of inner wiring that will block you. The purpose of yoga, all yoga, including karma yoga is atma-shuddhaye or purification of mind and heart. This does not require outer expansion but inner expansion. Outer expansion is inner contraction. So, what we are asked to renounce is all the ties that bind, especially, "*desire-motivated action and the fruits or rewards of all actions*" – however noble the action may be justified or made out to be.

9. Rules of Right Activity

Building on what we have been talking about, we come to the golden pendants among the Gita on renunciation.

karmaṇy evā 'dhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi

Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction. (II-47)

yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and remaining balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga. (II-48)

tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara
asakto hy ācāraṁ karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ

Therefore, without attachment do thou always perform action which should be done (your duty). For, by performing action without attachment man reaches the supreme. (III-19)

It is very difficult to live in the spirit of these verses if the value of life as duty has not been instilled into our hearts from very early on. Parents are too eager to shower upon children *'all the good stuff and in plenty'* in the name of love. But, what happened to upbringing which means to raise or bring upward? Upbringing requires higher ideals be seeded in the hearts so no matter how conditions shape – one is on an inner ascent of growth. Duty before privilege is essential and privilege is not a right but a passing phase which is best shared with those less privileged. Privilege thus comes into the fold of duty as well and Krishna is clear about this in saying, *"Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction"* – we have no right to fruit or privilege. If it comes, fine, use it wisely which means not all for yourself and without creating an appetite for more. Thus, you will traverse through life, experiencing but not getting stuck, enjoying but not getting addicted to more and sharing, which results in inner expansion.

na mām karmāṇi līṃpanti na me karmaphale sṃṛhā
iti mām yo 'bhijānāti karmabhir na sa badhyate

Actions do not taint me, nor have I a desire for the fruit of actions. He who knows me thus is not bound by actions. (IV-14)

nirāśīr yatacittātmā tyaktasarvaparigrahaḥ
śārīraṁ kevalaṁ karma kurvan nā 'pnoti kilbiṣaṁ

Without hope and with the mind and the self controlled, having abandoned all greed, doing mere bodily action, he incurs no sin. (IV-21)

yadrcchālābhasaṅtuṣṭo dvandvātīto vimatsaraḥ
samaḥ siddhāv asiddhau ca kṛtvā 'pi na nibadhyate

Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound. (IV-22)

gataśaṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ
yajñāyā 'carataḥ karma samagraṁ pravilīyate

To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice, the whole action is dissolved. (IV-23)

Pursuit of any kind is at once the loss of peace and contentment as we are after something and some of us in that which we pursue. Only after the loop of its attainment closes, will we experience a little peace – till the next race calls all runners. We do not control what comes or the shape of things but we do have full control over our effort. Why not commit ourselves to doing what needs to be done wholeheartedly and let come what comes? This way, not only is 'pursuit' taken out of the equation but full energy is put into the action and three things result: better effort, better chances of success; and; peace and contentment before, during and after action because result is taken out of the equation; and finally; thinning of the ego by disuse. Again, it is very hard to be able to do this if the seeds of 'life as duty' have not been inculcated from a very early age – especially in the time we now live.

brahmā 'rpaṇaṁ brahma havir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam
brahmai 'va tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamādhinā

Brahman is the oblation. Brahman is the clarified butter. By Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire (Brahman). Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action. (IV-24)

brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā karoti yaḥ
lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatram ivā 'mbhasā

He who does actions, offering them to Brahman, and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf is untainted by water. (V-10)

sarvakarmāṇi manasā saṅyasyā 'ste sukhaṁ vaśī
navadvāre pure dehī nai 'va kurvan na kārayan

Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others to act. (V-13)

We have discussed the physical and mental benefits to our own selves by life as duty. Now, we are shown the spiritual benefits. When we weaken the ego – it is easier to do sadhana or spiritual practice. Just as it is difficult to light a fire with wet or green wood and easier to light logs when they are dry – similarly, it is easier to take to spiritual sadhana when the ego has been significantly weakened.

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe”.

—Abraham Lincoln.

A scientist has his instruments for his research and if the instruments are not calibrated – he will not succeed. But, what instruments do we have? Our self only and this same self that is entangled and enmeshed in habitual ways, must be turned around and made to face within – to the very core of being. Self-control is not a loss, it is a gain as in shallow living – self is spent by being tied up to so many things – to all your likes and dislikes. The Yoga Vasistha echoes the same message of self-control in one verse.

sthito 'pi na sthita iva na hr̥ṣyati na kupyati
yaḥ suṣuptasamaḥ svasthaḥ sa śānta iti kathyate

He who, though living amongst all is unaffected by them, does not feel elated nor hates, even as one is during sleep – he is self-controlled. (Yoga Vasistha II.13.76)

Don't mistake the “...even as one is during sleep...” for some kind of dead or flat living – it is not. When the ignorant ego is made to face its source by watching it relentlessly while not using it – something else, more pervasive, stable, wiser and capable rises to the surface and enlivens the way. It is already there but sits silently as we are so blind to the havoc we bring on our own selves – growing used to damage control, the blame game and living as tomorrow men – tomorrow, it will be better.

As we have talked about earlier, if one has lived an awakened life – which means seen clearly the futility of ‘I, me, mine and more’ – the boat can be turned back home. All struggle and pressure of priority is a message that one has not awoken and this invites more lessons from nature in the school of life.

10. Self-surrender and Grace

What does it mean to surrender one's self and just how does one bring about this miracle? It is easy to say, ‘I have surrendered...’, but, continue to feel the weight of personality. These verses tell us that grace is proportionate to the degree of meaningful surrender and it can be said that grace and self-surrender are two sides of one coin – self-surrender is the invitation to grace.

kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ
pṛcchāmi tvām dharmasaṁmūḍhacetāḥ
yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me
śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi mām tvām prapannaṁ

My heart is overpowered by the taint of pity. My mind is confused as to duty. I ask thee, tell me decisively what is good for me. I am thy disciple. Instruct me who has taken refuge in thee. (II-7)

Until this verse, Arjuna was doing most of the talking and Krishna, the listening. This gave us insight into the nature of the seeker. There are things that each seeker must do on his own before seeking help. He must awaken, start walking towards the light until he comes to the crossroads and is unsure of which way to turn – this is the moment of the guru or the light on the path. The Yoga Vasistha has almost two chapters or sections as they are called, dedicated to vairagya or dispassion and the nature of the seeker.

ahaṁ baddho vimuktaḥ syām iti yasyā 'sti niścayaḥ
nā 'tyantam ajño no taj jñāḥ so 'smiñ chāstre 'dhikāravān

He is qualified to study this scripture (the dialogue between Rāma and Vasiṣṭha) who feels “I am bound, I should be liberated”, who is neither totally ignorant nor enlightened. (Yoga Vasistha I.2.2)

First, Vasistha tells us that one who is qualified to study the scripture must feel bound and an equally strong if not stronger feeling that he must be liberated. Second, one should be neither totally ignorant, nor enlightened. If one does not feel bound, one will not seek liberation as human nature will and one’s habitual ways will suggest that all is well or tomorrow will be better. A doctor may tell a patient to stop smoking, there may be warnings on the label and cigarettes may be expensive but often, these do not turn things around for most. However, once this person coughs up blood – the doctor’s words come to mind, “If you continue smoking, perhaps six months...”. A loud bell rings within and the light bulb comes on. But, does it take all this for us to awaken? Each one will have to sort things out for themselves as to what to renounce and how to renounce. The verses we have covered so far and a couple to follow throw light on just this.

apahastita sarvārtham anavasthitir āsthitā
grhītvotsṛjya cā ' 'tmānaṁ bhavasthitir avasthitā

I have given up everything; but I have not established myself in wisdom; hence I am partly caught and partly freed. (Yoga Vasistha I.30.8)

This verse is by Rama to Vasistha, a little later in the same first chapter. He has just explained his condition to the teachers assembled who wanted to know why he had become so withdrawn and introverted though he was a prince. After Rama gave them his inspiring and insightful observation

on all things, he says that he as seen through things and thus, is not drawn to them. He has left them, turned away from them as they have been found to not promote one's good. However, he has not been able to get a solid footing on the path which is free of all doubt that leads to liberation. Each one will have to do their own homework of carefully and meticulously examining life to see through much of what appears to be so full of promise and hope and arrive at the conclusion by themselves that status quo or more of the same is not tenable – it is a dead end and the sooner they change direction – the better.

mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṅyasyā 'dhyātmacetasā
nirāśīr nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ

Renouncing all actions in me, with the mind centred in the self, free from hope and egoism, and from (mental) fever, do thou fight. (III-30)

ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathai 'va bhajāmy ahaṁ
mama vartmā 'nuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ

In whatever way men approach me, even so do I go to them. My path do men tread in all ways, O Arjuna. (IV-11)

daiivī hy eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etāṁ taranti te

Verily, this divine illusion of mine, made up of the three qualities of nature, is difficult to cross over; those who take refuge in me alone, cross over this illusion. (VII-14)

We wonder why things are difficult – they are not – nothing is difficult. All things are just as they are. What appears to be difficult is our dislike of a condition and preference for another which is a habit patterns in the mind. All difficulties are these habit patterns inside out or the mind's baggage reflected on the blank canvas of life. Krishna tells us that the illusion is his and that the illusion is made and sustained by the three gunas of nature which are also his only.

Take your mind back to a little earlier when we talked about why it is so important to bring up children in an environment where they see life as duty and not privilege as the principle of duty does not prematurely rouse up rajas and tamas but does awaken sattva or one's innate goodness. When sattva has been given a good start, one is on sound footing as rajas and tamas along with the impressions that one has brought along into this birth will awaken soon enough but sattva is already on watch – already on guard. Safety is the first thing taught when learning how to drive, not just for others but for oneself also and if one has good driving habits – one will be better off on the road. Why will the same principle not apply here? If the children are indulged early on under the facade of love – rajas and tamas are roused into action and these in turn awaken all the negative latent samskaras or impressions brought along as part of one's karma instead of the good ones. See, it is a matter of what we want to get an early start. This is especially important

today as very, very early – the child is going to get inundated with convincing influences and it will be too late for the foundation to be laid then as he will put up all kinds of walls right before you.

“...those who take refuge in me alone, cross over this illusion” – note that it is not just take refuge but take refuge in me alone. This means not depending on anything else including our wealth, associations, identifications and the lot. This is a very high bar for those hooked on those things but it means they are not yet awake as there still seems to be a feeling that these can provide security. It is easy if one has seen through them as their hollowness is known directly and one is inwardly free to take refuge. When a person becomes a political or any other sort of refugee in another country – he takes an oath to uphold the principles of the new country and a pledge of allegiance of some sort. This taking refuge where one cuts himself from ways and means that one has seen through and found not conducive to one’s highest good and a wholehearted and unreserved embrace of the better is required in *“...take refuge in me alone”* – don’t leave out the *‘alone’* as it is part of taking refuge or how refuge must be taken for one to feel secure.

ananyāś cintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate
teṣāṁ nityābhīyuktānāṁ yogakṣemaṁ vahāmy ahaṁ

To those men who worship me alone, thinking of no other, of those ever-united, I secure that which is not already possessed and preserve what they already possess. (IX-22)

Once again you see, *“...worship me alone, thinking of no other, of those ever-united...”* – Krishna is very clear about the standard – no compromise at all. *“...alone, no other, ever united”* – to be able to do this, one has to live very carefully and intelligently and then – we are in his care.

manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru
mām evai ’śyasi yuktvai ’vam ātmānaṁ matparāyaṇaḥ

Fix thy mind on me (saturate thy mind with me); be devoted to me; sacrifice unto (work for) me; bow down to me; having thus united thy whole self with me, taking me as the supreme goal, thou shalt come unto me. (IX-34)

matkarmakṛṇ matparamo madbhaktaḥ saṅgavarjitaḥ
nirvairaḥ sarvabhūteṣu yaḥ sa mām eti pāṇḍava

He who does all actions for me, who looks upon me as the supreme, who is devoted to me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, comes to me, O Arjuna. (XI-55)

sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣāmi mā śucaḥ

Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in me alone. I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not. (XVIII-66)

In these last verses in this section, we are given how to make this wholehearted taking refuge possible. Once again you see ‘free of attachment’. My friends, there are many more times this statement comes up in different contexts. All attachment includes all notions, ties, associations and pulls. This does not mean you hate or even turn your back on the lot but it does mean that God is your refuge and when you do what has to be done – do it in this light and whenever in conflict – this refuge cannot be broken even if the cost be all other entanglements.

This is precisely what is told to us in the very last verse today, *“Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in me alone. I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not”*. Dharma is a sense of duty that gives priority or precedence as a principle of living. Our lives naturally bring us to many different crossroads of difficult decisions, sometimes many times a day. They are difficult because there is a pull both ways – each has its own pros and cons because they all have different value and offer something different. This is precisely the problem – we have too many competing priorities. But, where are these priorities? Within us. So, who is competing with who? We are competing with ourselves. Who is making things difficult for who? We are stressing ourselves out!

Krishna is being most practical when he says that the way out is to streamline and have one priority – that which was, is and will be ‘prior’ to all. If this sinks in, you will see clearly that it is not only the best but the only way to rise above the turbulent waters of our own making into calm and peaceful waters from where we can continue to work things out. Does it mean that everything will be taken care of and we will have to do nothing if we take refuge? Everything is taken care of right now, everything except ourselves because we refuse to *“take refuge”*.

There will still be ups and downs as that is part of working things out but there will be no more fear, worry, confusion. Hard work – yes. Fear, worry and confusion – no. What are the options? Examine your own life very honestly – there may be a ‘yes’ answer to both. You decide.

V. Way to Blessedness



1. Body and World are Evanescent
2. Aspire for the Supreme Alone
3. Thought at Death
4. Jñāna or Supreme Wisdom
5. Way to Peace

Today, we continue with the verses on sadhana or spiritual practice and focus on practice in the wider field of direction and values in purposeful living. As you know, today, more than before, we are in a rush to 'prepare' children for life by 'teaching them all they need to know', and, 'giving them all they need to have'. But, towards what end is all this rush? Here, in this last section, the Gita tells us about the true nature of the body and world so we don't rush to a finish line that isn't there. Knowing the true nature of things, the Gita tells us what is worth striving for and a way to blessedness that is not opposed to healthy living. There is a better way to live but it has to start and stay on a different footing so no matter how things are in the world – we are moving solidly in a direction that is indeed for our highest good.

1. Body and World are Evanescent

In two and a half verses, the Gita tells us the secret of life and death and points to a higher attainment.

jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca
tasmād aparihārye 'rthe na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi

For certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead; therefore, over the inevitable thou shouldst not grieve. (II-27)

ye hi saṁsparśajā bhogā duḥkhaḥayonaya eva te
ādyantavantaḥ kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhaḥ

The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only wombs of pain, for they have a beginning and an end. O Arjuna, the wise do not rejoice in them. (V-22)

anityam asukhaṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva mām

Having obtained this impermanent and misery-ridden world, do thou worship me. (IX-33 - second half of verse)

Death is the portal of change and since all that is born must die – death's door ever revolves. Days come to an end and years pass; youth flows into old age and old age meets death. This is not high sounding philosophy for the contemplation in the twilight years by the fireplace but a fact of life. If one leads an awakened life – one will be keenly aware of the hands of time and its play of change. The awakened person knows the value of each moment and the daunting task on hand – he wastes no time, delays not and does not grieve over the inevitable – intent on the ideal

set – he treads expertly. We have discussed earlier that sorrow and pain do not result from things outside but from our reactions to them. The object is not the trigger of action – the ego-personality that desires is. This has to be known by direct experience till you are no longer lured by any ‘other’ and the palm of otherness is opened to reveal one’s own self. There is no status quo in life – we either awaken and live awakened or fall deeper into ignorance’s grip and the karma’s wheel. Satisfaction or joy cannot be had in the changing and all things change. Thus, this world is called impermanent and misery ridden not because it is awful but because unawakened – it feels promising, but each promise is a repetitive echo of that never fulfils. Krishna tells us in this last half of a verse, “Having obtained this impermanent and misery-ridden world, do thou worship me”. The worship referred to is not a ritual but a wholehearted adoration where the heart and mind love and therefore only seek the permanent, the enduring, the unchanging, the absolute – seek God only – in this opportunity of a human birth. Nothing else is worthwhile, nothing else will satisfy – all other roads go deeper into the forest of change which is guarded by death.

2. Aspire for the Supreme Alone

Continuing on, the Gita tells us how our faith can be made steady and the results of different attitudes and effort.

kāṅkṣantaḥ karmaṇām siddhiṁ yajanta iha devatāḥ
kṣipraṁ hi mānuṣe loke siddhir bhavati karmajā

Those who long for success in action in this world sacrifice to (worship) the gods, because success is quickly attained by men through (such) action. (IV-12)

yo-yo yām-yām tanuṁ bhaktaḥ śraddhayā ’rcitum icṇati
tasya-tasyā ’calām śraddhām tām eva vidadhāmy ahaṁ

Whatsoever form any devotee desires to worship with faith – that faith of his I make firm and unflinching. (VII-21)

antavat tu phalaṁ teṣām tad bhavaty alpamedhasām
devān devayajo yānti madbhaktā yānti mām api

Verily the reward that accrues to those men of small intelligence is finite. The worshippers of the gods go to them, but my devotees come to me. (VII-23)

These three verses flow very nicely together even though they are in different chapters in the scripture. Firstly, you can pray and worship presiding deities for some ends and this is an easy attainment. It may not come now, it may not come later in this life but strong desires with wholehearted prayer are attainable. There is no telling how long it will last or how it will work out but it can come. Secondly, whatever one strongly desires, that desire is made unflinching – this is a serious double-edged sword that answers many things. If your strongest desire is to get

out of this cycle of samsara – it will be made stronger. If your strongest desire it to have more, that may come as well, in this life or later and no telling what other headaches will be tagged on. Remember, we have been told that this world is an impermanent abode of pain – remember this before you ask. You may get more and plenty but no telling for how long, at what cost and what else will come with it. Be careful what you hold in your heart because if held long, it may just come to be. Some people are overly suspicious for no reason and this feeling held in the heart is also made stronger till they cannot get over the feeling. You can apply this to anything held in the heart deeply. Thirdly, we are reminded that those who ask for little things, have little understanding and the finite always goes to the finite or must end. All that was hoped for, is painful when it ends. In a very humble way Krishna says, “...but my devotees come to me” - those who seek the infinite, come to me – hinting to us how the paths are laid out and leaving the choice to us always.

ananyacetāḥ satataṁ yo mām smarati nityaśaḥ
tasyā 'haṁ sulabhaḥ pārtha nityayuktasya yoginaḥ

I am easily attainable by that ever steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers me, not thinking of anything else, O Partha. (VIII-14)

mām upetya punarjanma duḥkhālayam aśāśvataṁ
nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ saṁsiddhiṁ paramām gatāḥ

Having attained Me these great souls do not again take birth in this world which is impermanent and the place of pain; they have reached the highest perfection. (VIII-15)

ābrahmabhuvanālokaḥ punarāvartino 'rjuna
mām upetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate

All the worlds including the world of the creator are subject to return (re-manifestation), O Arjuna; but he who reaches me, O son of Kunti, has no rebirth. (VIII-16)

The difficulties in life are directly proportional to our resistance to things as they are. Krishna tells us, “I am easily attainable by that ever steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers me, not thinking of anything else...”. We have heard this word steadfast before, now, we are told that the supreme attainment is easy if we are a steadfast yogi. To be steady means to not waiver and requires wisdom and inner strength. This becomes easier if we constantly and daily remember God – not thinking of anything else. But, you may ask, ‘How does one go about one’s life which includes work, family etc. if we are to not think about anything other than God?’

You get along much better actually and this is done practically by the habit of making the silent repetition of the mantra ongoing, having aligned it with one’s natural breathing. If the mind is tuned to listen to the inner silent repetition – the more pervasive and stable ‘awareness’ or ‘consciousness’ comes into play – it is already wide awake and in operation but ignored and sort

of squeezed out of play by the little mind. It is this wider awareness that does operate in your daily life. When you drive and think about things – it works ceaselessly, making all kinds of adjustments and taking you where you need to go. This awareness or consciousness is not plagued by fickleness, whims and fancies. You might feel that this is a recipe for disaster as what you are doing requires your complete attention. You may be surprised to know that most of the time – we are distracted anyway. Instead of thinking of many different things, hopping from one to another – the practice of silent japa with the mind’s attention on the mantra steadies the mind, removes fickleness and the hopping tendency and increases your ability to concentrate. There is conservation of energy as energy is no longer expended hopping from one to another as all these scenes have to be created, sustained and made to feel real by the mind – conservation of psychic energy is a tremendous gain. Most of our physical problems including diseases are due to a huge and ongoing wastage or leakage of psychic energy. When conserved, this same subtle psychic energy flows towards cell repair and other functions and you feel fresh.

So, intelligent and purposeful living is not only good for the long run but for every leg of the run or the journey of life itself. Mostly, people are very short-sighted and whimsical – a little of this and a little of that – change here and change there – let’s see what comes. Krishna tells us that all problems are set aside when we make the supreme the goal as going there, there is no returning to this cycle of samsara or rebirth. What does it matter if we reach there in one birth of successive births as long as we are headed in the right direction? No effort is wasted and every step is a real investment in our highest welfare. Hearing all this, how does your heart and mind feel? Does it feel ‘nice to hear’ only or does something deeper reverberate in acceptance of Krishna’s guidance to us through Arjuna and the Bhagavad Gita?

traividyaṁ mām somapāḥ pūtapāpā
yajñair iṣṭvā svargatimprārthayante
te puṇyam āsādyā surendralokam
aśnanti divyān divi devabhogān

The knowers of the three Veda, the drinkers of the soma, purified of all sins, worshipping me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven; they reach the holy world of the lord of the gods and enjoy in heaven the divine pleasure of the gods. (IX-20)

te taṁ bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālaṁ
kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti
evam trayīdharmam anuprapannā
gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante

They, having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals when their merit is exhausted; thus abiding by the injunctions of the three Veda and desiring objects of desires, they attain to the state of going and returning. (IX-21)

yānti devavratā devān pitṛn yānti pitṛvratāḥ
bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti madyājino 'pi mām

The worshippers of the gods go to them; to the ancestors go the ancestor-worshippers; to the deities who preside over the elements go their worshippers; but my devotee comes to me. (IX-25)

Some people feel allured by the promise of going to heaven where there is plenty but we are told – that is a limited journey and after burning up your time there – all must return back here to this world to continue where they left off. Return in what condition? Just where we left off and perhaps worse as in heaven where there are supposed to be plenty of the 'good life of enjoyment' – one can deepen one's taste for the pleasant instead of the good and get used to more, which may not be the condition to which one returns. Once again, bring back to mind the wise words of Nachiketas when he was tempted by Yama, Lord of Death.

śvobhāvā martyasya yadantakaitat sarveṁdriyāṅām jarayaṁti tejaḥ
api sarvaṁ jīvitamalpameva tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte

These things last till tomorrow (ephemeral). O death, they wear out the vigour of all the senses. Even the longest life is verily short. Keep thou thy chariots, the dance and music. (Katha Upanishad I.1.26)

na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuṣyo lapsyāmahe vittamadrākśma cettvā
jīviṣyāmo yāvadiśiṣyasi tvaṁ varastu me varaṇīyaḥ sa eva

No man can be made happy by wealth. If we should obtain wealth and behold thee, we would only live as long as thou shalt sway. Only that boon which I have chosen is fit to be longed by me. (Katha Upanishad I.1.27)

ajīryatāmamṛtānāmupetya jīryanmartyaḥ kvadhaḥsthaḥ prajānan
abhidhyāyan varṇaratipramodān atidīrghe jīvite ko rameta

What decaying mortal living in the world below and possessed of knowledge, after having approached the company of the undecaying and the immortal, will rejoice in long life, after he has pondered over the nature of the pleasures produced by song and sport (beauty and love)? (Katha Upanishad I.1.28)

yasminnidam vicikitsanti mṛtyo yatsāmparāye mahati brūhi nastat
yo'yaṁ varo gūḍhamanupraviṣṭo nānyaṁ tasmānnaciketā vṛṇīte

O death! Tell us that in which men have this doubt, and which is about the great hereafter. Nachiketas does not choose any other boon but that (concerning the soul) of which the knowledge is hidden. (Katha Upanishad I.1.29)

These are the ending verses of the first chapter of the Katha Upanishad. What use is all the pleasures of the world if they must end as when they do, the longing is still left behind, perhaps stronger and with weakened senses and without what was promised? These allurements are called ‘the pleasant’ or preyas in the language of the Upanishad and what is good is called ‘shreyas’. Nachiketas rejects all the pleasures of the world, having considered their true worth and what is in his best interests. What about each of us? Do we consider things this way? There is a Nachiketas element in each of us but we have to go beyond the grip of the pleasant which is not only hollow but riddled with sorrow. It is up to each one to consider if it is about time to reverse this and take charge of our lives and thereby – our destiny.

yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat
yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam

Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in sacrifice, whatever thou givest, whatever thou practisest as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering unto me. (IX-27)

This verse perfectly blends ‘life as duty’ and ‘life as worship’ into a formula for life. However, one cannot just do, offer, give and practice with words – we have to be ready to back up the feeling with all and everything we have been allowed or endowed with. Just saying, ‘I offer all unto you O God’, will not do. There must be a feeling of satisfaction that all was indeed offered. Let’s look at one simple example here and use ‘giving’ among the ways listed. When you give someone something – you must give good things – things that you, yourself would be very pleased to have. Things that would make the other person as happy as you would like to feel yourself – perhaps much more than you would allow yourself, your kith and kin. You must feel that it is a gift given to God – through them. There is a lot of hypocrisy in giving. People get the cheapest deals they can find, package it in the least expensive but still presentable ways and call that a gift. People even stock up on such cheap gifts – ‘and do their part’. Now, it is one thing if it is the best you can afford but deception and not giving otherwise. This is precisely what is pointed out in one of the second and third verse of the first chapter of the Katha Upanishad.

taṁ ha kumāraṁ santaṁ dakṣiṇāsu
nīyamānāsu śraddhāviveśa so’manyata

When the presents were being distributed, filial anxiety (about the welfare of his father) entered into the heart of Nachiketas, who was still a boy, and he thought. (Katha Upanishad I.1.2)

pītodakā jagdhatṛṇā dugdhadohā nirindriyāḥ
anandā nāma te lokāstān sa gacchati tā dadat

Joyless verily are those worlds to which a man goes by giving (presents in a sacrifice) cows which have drunk water, eaten grass, given their milk and are barren. (Katha Upanishad I.1.3)

Nachiketas' father was performing a sacrifice which not only involves giving but is giving itself and he was expected to give all that he had of value for spiritual gain. In those days, cattle was wealth and he chose instead to give away the poorest among his cows which were more of a liability under the guise of giving. Nachiketas observed this and felt that this was not giving and remembered the scriptures say that those who give what is joyless – invite joyless conditions for themselves for a long time. Being a very good and dutiful son, he did not critique his father, but instead, offered himself as part of the giving or to be given away so that his father's hope would be fulfilled. Such beauty, such clarity and such insight – what do you feel when you listen to things like this? If your heart and soul feel that this better way of living must be adopted now – very good – it is in your best interests only.

3. Thought at Death

To make the last thought a complete thought of God, we must live in in the spirit of that thought every day. The last thought is not one thought among many but a cumulative thought which comes natural to one who has walked the path sincerely.

ntakāle ca mām eva smaran muktvā kalevaram
yaḥ prayāti sa madbhāvam yāti nā 'sty atra saṁśayaḥ

And, whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering me alone, at the time of death, he attains my being; there is no doubt about this. (VIII-5)

abhyāsayogayuktena cetasā nā 'nyagāminā
paramam puruṣam divyam yāti pārthā 'nucintayan

With the mind not moving towards any other thing, made steadfast by the method of habitual meditation, and constantly meditating (on the divine), one goes to the supreme person, the resplendent, O Arjuna. (VIII-8)

aum ity ekākṣaram brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran
yaḥ prayāti tyajan deham sa yāti paramam gatim

Uttering the one syllabled Om – the Brahman – and remembering me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal. (VIII-13)

Again we hear the words, “...goes forth remembering me alone” – remembering ‘me alone’ is the fruit of a life lived practicing the presence of God. The second verse here brings back the vairagya and abhyasa principle as the way to do this. We have already discussed this as the alpha-omega

of yoga. We shudder because we feel that great will be the loss if life is lived this way but fail to see that life itself will be lost soon enough and it is given to us for just this purpose.

The last verse here tells us one who goes forth or departs repeating the mantra 'Om' attains the highest goal. Repetition here is not uttering the mantra but one's whole being fused into the feeling of what the mantra points to. Whole being, wholehearted – we see these words again and again. This whole feeling is difficult because there are very few things we do wholeheartedly – especially, if there is no stick and carrot or personal gain. This is why it is so very important to do everything wholeheartedly, without distraction or personal gain or simply put – life as duty.

4. Jñāna or Supreme Wisdom

Jnana or wisdom is not what we know or how much we know. To the Gita, knowing and being are one. How we live is what we know – all else is hypocrisy and deception. These verses are very thrilling and inspiring – they offer hope, assurance and encouragement to stay on the path of the good for our highest good.

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā
samādhāv acalā buddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi

When thy intellect, perplexed by what thou hast heard, shall stand immovable and steady in the self, then thou shalt attain self-realisation. (II-53)

yā niśā sarvabhūtānāṃ tasyāṃ jāgarti saṃyamī
yasyāṃ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneḥ

That state which is night to all beings, to the self-controlled man is wakefulness; when all beings are awake, that is night for the sage who sees. (II-69)

āpūryamāṇam acalapraṭiṣṭhaṃ
samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat
tadvat kāmā yaṃ praviśanti sarve
sa śāntim āpnoti na kāmakāmī

He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean which, filled from all sides, remains unmoved; but not the man who is full of desires. (II-70)

yaḥ tv ātmaratir eva syād ātmatṛptaś ca mānavaḥ
ātmany eva ca saṃtuṣṭas tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate

But for that man who rejoices only in the self, who is satisfied with the self and who is content in the self alone, verily there is nothing to do. (III-17)

We have been talking about a better way to live – the Bhagavad Gita way or the spiritual way of life. The spirit of this way of living enters the heart when we examine everything carefully and see through the self-created and self-sustained hopes that we harbor. Desires are fueled by rajas

and as we dry up the river of rajas, the turbulence quells and in its very place the bottom is seen. Even before the seeing of our true nature, there is contentment, knowing that we are on the right path wholeheartedly and doing what we have come here to do.

The “...*verily there is nothing to do*” – does not mean that we can hang up our coat and pass time, now that we have said this way will do but we are not driven by external factors anymore. Usually, an unexamined cycle guides our grinding in life, ‘we work so that we may eat and we eat to replenish so we can work’. You discover a new way where you still do what needs to be done, with all your heart and soul but without personal purpose or gain through the action or its fruit. You are one with the wider fabric of life and do your part as duty to the whole from which you do not stand apart.

yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāmasaṅkalpavarjitāḥ
jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇaṁ tam āhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ budhāḥ

He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and selfish purposes and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, – him the wise call a sage. (IV-19)

When one’s undertakings are, “...*all devoid of desires and selfish purposes...*” – then only can we see things as they are or right and do what needs to be done or the right thing. This because, there is no ‘in my best interests’ anywhere in the equation. The more one practices unselfishness, the more is selfishness squeezed out of the system and one universalizes one’s existence. The vision we have when we stand together with all inseparably – is called wisdom and the person is called a sage.

śreyān dravyamayād yajñāḥ jñānayajñāḥ paraṅtapa
sarvaṁ karmā ’khilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate

Superior is wisdom-sacrifice to the sacrifice with objects. All actions in their entirety, O Arjuna, culminate in knowledge. (IV-33)

Wisdom sacrifice is called jnana yajna and is not limited to times when we come together as today but a continual offering of all limited thinking into the fire of vigilance. Wisdom blossoms when we let go of ignorance.

api ced asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ
sarvaṁ jñānaplavenai ’va vṛjinaṁ saṁtariṣyasi

Even if thou art the most sinful of all sinners, yet thou shalt verily cross all sins by the raft of knowledge. (IV-36)

yathai ’dhāmsi samiddho ’gnir bhasmasāt kurute ’rjuna
jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute tathā

As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes. (IV-37)

na hi jñānena sadṛśaṁ pavitram iha vidyate
tat svayaṁ yogasaṁsiddhaḥ kālenā 'tmani vindati

Verily, there is no purifier in this world like knowledge. He who is perfected in yoga finds it in the self in time. (IV-38)

These three verses assure us that the past can never disallow a future if we seize the present and make self-effort. Knowledge again is not knowing about but knowing as such by direct insight or intuition. It may take time, it may take lives but why does this matter at all?

nā 'datte kasyacit pāpaṁ na cai 'va sukṛtaṁ vibhuḥ
ajñānenā 'vṛtaṁ jñānaṁ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ

The Lord takes neither the demerit nor even the merit of any. Knowledge is enveloped by ignorance. Therefore beings are deluded. (V-15)

jñānena tu tad ajñānaṁ yeṣāṁ nāśitam ātmanaḥ
teṣāṁ ādityavaj jñānaṁ prakāśayati tat paraṁ

But to those whose ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge of the self, like the sun, knowledge reveals the supreme Brahman. (V-16)

God is not responsible for individual or collective conditions that exist and conditions do not bind one from exceeding them. Let the conditions be what they may, let this body also age naturally – the question is what is going on within and if there is there inner expansion, growth and ascent. Krishna points out that “...ignorance is destroyed by knowledge of the self...” - direct knowledge of the self requires living life as a seeker. It does not matter what conditions we find ourselves in – in and through it – we can each still live with self-knowledge being the goal.

5. Way to Peace

These last verses sum up most of what have been covered so far – a virtual summary of the Gita or a quick guide to spiritual living.

vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṁś carati niḥspṛhaḥ
nirmamo nirahaṁkāraḥ sa śāntim adhigacchati

The man attains peace who, abandoning all desires moves about without longing, without the sense of mine (possessiveness) and without egoism. (II-71)

eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha nai 'nām prāpya vimuhyati
sthitvā 'syām antakāle 'pi brahmanirvāṇam ṛcchati

This is the seat of Brahman, O Arjuna. Attaining to this, none is deluded. Being established therein, even at the end of life, one attains to oneness with Brahman. (II-72)

śraddhāvān labhate jñānaṁ tatparaḥ saṁyatendriyaḥ
jñānaṁ labdhvā parāṁ śāntim acireṇā 'dhigacchati

The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it, and who has subdued the senses obtains knowledge. And, having obtained the knowledge, he goes at once to the supreme peace. (IV-39)

saṁyāsas tu mahābāho duḥkham āptum ayogataḥ
yogayukto munir brahma nacireṇā 'dhigacchati

But renunciation, O Arjuna, is hard to attain without yoga. The yoga-harmonised sage quickly goes to Brahman. (V-6)

yo 'ntaḥsukho 'ntarāramas tathā 'ntarjyotir eva yaḥ
sa yogī brahmanirvāṇaṁ brahmabhūto 'dhigacchati

He who is happy within, who rejoices within and who is illuminated within, that yogi attains absolute freedom or moksha – himself becoming Brahman. (V-24)

bhoktāraṁ yajñātapasāṁ sarvalokamaheśvaraṁ
suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā māṁ śāntim ṛcchati

He who knows me as the enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, the great Lord of all the worlds and the friend of all beings, attains to peace. (V-29)

yuñjann evaṁ sadā 'tmānaṁ yogī niyatamānasaḥ
śāntim nirvāṇaparamāṁ matsamsthāṁ adhigacchati

Thus always keeping the mind balanced, the yogi, with the mind controlled, attains to the peace abiding in me, which culminates in liberation. (VI-15)

praśāntamanasaṁ hy enaṁ yoginaṁ sukham uttamaṁ
upaiti śāntarajasāṁ brahmabhūtam akalmaṣaṁ

Supreme bliss verily comes to this yogi whose mind is quite peaceful, whose passion is quieted, who has become Brahman and who is free from sin. (VI-27)

yadā bhūtapṛthagbhāvam ekastham anupaśyati
tata eva ca vistāraṁ brahma saṁpadyate tadā

When a man sees the whole variety of beings as resting in the One, and spreading forth from that alone, he then becomes Brahman. (XIII-30)

māṁ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate
sa guṇān samatīyai 'tān brahmabhūyāya kalpate

And he who serves me with unswerving devotion, he, crossing beyond the qualities, is fit for becoming Brahman. (XIV-26)

These verses together from different chapters have been arranged very beautifully and form a mini Bhagavad Gita by themselves.

tam eva śaraṇaṁ gaccha sarvabhāvena bhārata
tatprasādāt parāṁ śāntiṁ sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śāśvataṁ

Fly unto him for refuge with all thy being, O Arjuna; by his grace thou shalt obtain supreme peace and the eternal abode. (XVIII-62)

The path is difficult not only because of its ups and downs and rough terrain but because the instrument or vehicle for travel which is our own self - has to be made by travelling. The self is the means by which the self is known. The self that is enmeshed or entangled in unhealthy ways of living, has to be lifted up by the self only and given a good direction. The Bhagavad Gita does not talk about the guru much except in two places and here, towards the end of the last chapter, Krishna gives us very good counsel to, *“Fly unto him for refuge with all thy being, O Arjuna; by his grace thou shalt obtain supreme peace and the eternal abode”*. The guru having already trodden the path or be one who is steady on the path knows where the pitfalls lie and there are many.

yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ
tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītir matir mama

Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, the lord of yoga, wherever there is Arjuna, the archer, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and firm policy; such is my conviction. (XVIII-78)

This last verse of the Bhagavad Gita is Sanjaya’s declaration. He was the charioteer of the blind king Dhritarashtra whose sons pushed this war. Krishna gifted Sanjaya with a divine vision whereby he could see the entire battle in every detail as it unfolded and relay it to the blind king. We too are often tied up or blinded by so many ‘entanglements’ and Krishna’s message is still relayed to us through different means as it was when it was first given. The Bhagavad Gita is an eternal message for all who seek their highest good, peace and happiness that endures. In this very last verse, we are told by Sanjaya, the charioteer of the blind king, *“Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, the lord of yoga, wherever there is Arjuna, the archer, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and firm policy; such is my conviction”*. Krishna is not just the personality of Krishna but all that Krishna represented and this is the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. If this Song of God becomes the song of the soul, we are assured, *“...there are prosperity, victory, happiness and firm policy...”*.



Swami Suryadevananda

suryadevananda.org

Inspiring Songs of Sri Swami Sivananda

Song of Eighteen 'ities'

Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity,
Equanimity, fixity, non-irritability,
Adaptability, humility, tenacity,
Integrity, nobility, magnanimity,
Charity, generosity, purity,
Practise daily these eighteen 'ities',
You will soon attain Immortality.
Brahman is the only real entity,
Mr. So-and-so is a false non-entity.
You will abide in Eternity and Infinity,
You will behold unity in diversity,
You cannot attain this in the university,
You can attain this in the Forest University.
...Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity.

Song of Divine Life

Gopala Murlilola
Yashodha Nandana Gopibala
Serve, love, give, purify, practise Ahimsa,
Satyam Brahmacharya, (take Sattvic food) Study Gita,
Have Satsang, control senses, do Japa Kirtan
Meditate in Brahmamuhurta, Know Thyself,
Love all, embrace all, be kind to all,
Work is worship (serve all), serve the Lord in all,
Purify, concentrate, reflect, meditate,
Serve, love, give and be dispassionate,
Know the Brahman, Maya, Samsar and "I",
Behold the goal of life, Hae Saumya nearby.
(Gopala Gopala...)

Divine Life Medley

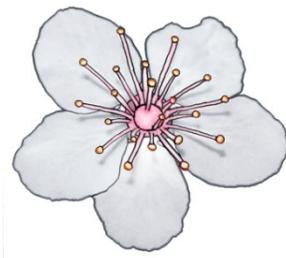
Serve love give purify meditate realise
Be good do good be kind be compassionate
Enquire “who am I?” know the self and be free
Adapt adjust accommodate
Bear insult bear injury highest sadhana
Find the knower find the seer find the hearer
Find the taster find the smeller
You are not this body not this mind
Immortal self you are
Devotion dedication and discipline
Discrimination dispassion determination
Satsang santosha sat-vichara
Solitude seclusion and silence
These are the aids to self-realisation
Detach attach detach and attach (2)
Attach it to the Lord
D.I.N. D.I.N. D.I.N. Do it now do it now do it now
K.I.V. K.I.V. K.I.V. Keep in view keep in view keep in view
Seek find enter and rest
This is the way this is the truth this is life divine

Song of Little

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Eat a little, drink a little,
Speak a little, sleep a little,
Mix a little, move a little,
Serve a little, think a little,
Help a little, give a little,
Study a little, worship a little,
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little,
Write mantra a little, reflect a little,
Do asana a little, pranayama a little,
Meditate a little, do vichara a little.

Song of Joy

Within you is hidden God
Within you is Immortal Soul.
Kill this little 'I'
Die to live
Lead the Divine Life.
Within you is fountain of joy.
Within you is the ocean of Bliss.
Rest peacefully in your own Atman
And Drink the nectar of Immortality.



For more information, kindly visit: suryadevananda.org