

Bhagavadgīta

Jnani speaks to Jijnasu

Jijnasu Vasudeva

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Jnani speaks to Jīnasu

Jīnasu Vasudeva

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA YOGA ANUSANDHANA SAMSTHANA (SVYASA)

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Preface

Considering that there may be students who would wish to study their subjects beyond the scope of academics, this is being made available as one of the reference books.

The book refrains from using religious parlance, and views Kṛṣṇa as a Jñāni rather than as the ultimate Godhead. This is not to refute such views, but since this is a study of the Gītā as a Yōgaśāstra intended for the students of the yogic *sciences*, all these are not pertinent here; it is only apt here to view Kṛṣṇa as a Yōgēśvara (master of yōga). In this regard, some of the little known aspects of Kṛṣṇa (from Mahābhārata and Śrīmadbhāgavatam) have been appropriately cited.

The 18 chapters of the Bhagavadgītā have been covered in 12 Units that have been grouped into 4 Blocks. Some chapters receive more elucidation than others, and therefore the eighteen chapters are not distributed evenly across the four blocks. The first six chapters constitute the first two blocks, and the remaining twelve chapters the next two blocks.

The analyses of the verses are based primarily on Śrī Śāṅkarabhāṣya (the commentary of Ādi Śāṅkarācārya on the Gītā) with contemporary allegories and explanations provided where relevant.

JIJNASU VASUDEVA

Contents

		Page
<i>Block 1</i>		<i>1</i>
1. <i>The Epic behind the epic dialogue</i>	<i>Prelude</i>	<i>2</i>
2. <i>The Warrior Trembles</i>	<i>Chapter 1</i>	<i>10</i>
3. <i>Sāṅkhya Yōga - the Foremost Teaching</i>	<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Block 2</i>		<i>23</i>
4. <i>Karma Yōga - Act to Express, not Impress</i>	<i>Chapter 3</i>	<i>24</i>
5. <i>Inaction, In action, and Beyond action</i>	<i>Chapter 4-5</i>	<i>32</i>
6. <i>Dhyāna Yōga - The Incoming</i>	<i>Chapter 6</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Block 3</i>		<i>50</i>
7. <i>The Marvel of Vijñāna</i>	<i>Chapters 7-9</i>	<i>51</i>
8. <i>Bhakti Yōga - The Science of Resonance</i>	<i>Chapters 10-12</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Block 4</i>		<i>74</i>
9. <i>Thou art not That</i>	<i>Chapters 13 & 15</i>	<i>75</i>
10. <i>The Conscious and the Compulsive</i>	<i>Chapter 16</i>	<i>83</i>
11. <i>Guṇa - Not Dual, but 'Tri'al</i>	<i>Chapters 14, 17 & 18</i>	<i>87</i>
12. <i>Surrender, and Fight!</i>	<i>Chapter 18</i>	<i>98</i>

Block 1: Prelude and Chapters 1-2

Chapters covered:

- Chapter 1 (Arjuna Viṣāda Yōga)
- Chapter 2 (Sāṅkhya Yōga)

This block covers the first two chapters of the Bhagavadgītā (or shortly, Gītā) after a brief prelude.

The prelude section firstly sets the backdrop for the epic conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna by summarizing the events leading up to that crucial moment in the battlefield. Secondly, the obvious yet overlooked unique features of the Gītā among spiritual texts are highlighted. Thirdly, certain misconceptions that are widespread about the Gītā are countered with appropriate details from the Mahābhārata.

In this academic study of the text we can accomplish only an introductory analysis. Therefore, not all the chapters are explored equally deeply. Second chapter is generally acknowledged to be the most important, and will be covered with special attention in this block.

"Krishna can never be understood until you have studied the Gita, for he was the embodiment of his own teaching."

- Swami Vivekananda

1. Prelude - The Epic behind the epic dialogue

1.1. Introduction

Bhagavadgītā is by far the most popular scriptural text of Sanātana dharma. As you are already aware, it is a *Smṛti* (memory based text)¹, a reiteration of the teachings of *Śruti* (direct revelations — the Vēdas). Indeed, Gītā is proclaimed by prominent scholars and realized beings (such as Ādi Śaṅkarācārya²) as the quintessence of the Vēdas (and particularly the Upaniṣats). We will begin our study of this sacred text with the following invocation chant which also serves as a basic introduction of the text.

ॐ पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयं ॐ pārthāya pratibōdhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇēna svayam
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्ये महाभारतम् । vyāsēna grathitām purāṇamuninā madhyē mahābhāratam
अद्वैतामृतवर्षिणीं भगवतीं अष्टादशाध्यायिणीं advaitāmṛtavarṣiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādaśādhyāyīṇīm
अंब त्वां अनुसन्दधामि भगवद्गीते भवद्वेषिणीम् ॥ amba tvām anusandadhāmi bhagavadgītē bhavadvēṣiṇīm

Translation: Om. With which Pārtha (Arjuna) was illumined by Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself, which was composed within the Mahābhārata by the ancient sage, Vyāsa, which is the showerer of the nectar of Advaita, which consists of eighteen discourses, and which is the destroyer of rebirth—upon Thee, O Gītā, O affectionate Mother, I meditate!³

This invocation answers, in sequence, the following questions:
Who was it taught to? Who taught it? Who documented it?
Where was it documented? What is its subject matter? How long is it? And what is the outcome of studying it?

Naturally, the significant phrases here are "advaitāmṛtavarṣiṇīm" and "bhavadvēṣiṇīm", which are the very reasons for us taking to the study of this text. Gītā categorically imparts the knowledge of the existential *unity*⁴, and offers several paths to realize the dissolution of the apparent multiplicity.



¹ This does not mean to say that Kṛṣṇa was merely teaching something from his memory. This only indicates that Gītā (or rather the entire Mahābhārata) was documented later by Vyāsa from his memory.

² तदिदं गीताशास्त्रं समस्तवेदार्थसारसङ्ग्रहभूतं (श्री शाङ्कर भाष्य)

³ English translations of the verses are based on the free online edition by Swami Shivananda (Divine life society).

⁴ Here, "*advaita*" can be taken as an assertion of unity/oneness (yōga) rather than as a system of philosophy.

1.2. Background — The Mahābhārata

Bhagavadgītā appears within Mahābhārata, one of the two *Itihāsa* (historical records — one type of *Smṛiti*) texts in the Sanātana tradition (the other being Rāmāyaṇa). A thorough study of the Mahābhārata and assimilation of the overall ambience of the situations therein is essential for one to appreciate the tone and teachings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā; without it one is bound to pass erroneous judgements ("Gītā promotes war!") as is happening in our times. A study of this mammoth text (comprised of 100,000 verses) is anyway impossible within this course. We will nonetheless try to absorb the heart of the matter. Knowledge of the background story and the characters also makes the subject lively for the reader.

1.2.1. About the Epic

Mahābhārata is by far the longest epic on the planet. Rāmāyaṇa (24,000 verses), which is the second longest epic, is itself less than a fourth of the size of Mahābhārata. And Iliad and Odyssey, the two Greek epics, combined amount to only one tenth of its length. Mahābhārata primarily reports the eventful episodes associated with one particular dynasty. But around this main thread, Vyāsa has weaved—in the form of stories within stories—plenty of other legends from prior to his time (Satyavān-Sāvitrī, Naḷa-Damayantī, Śibi etc.), thus using Mahābhārata as a storehouse to preserve the historical records; in fact Mahābhārata also contains a condensed Rāmāyaṇa within it. Vyāsa has also used it as an opportunity to document several illuminating discourses by the wise ones (both ancient and contemporary ones to him) on spiritual and worldly affairs. Sanatsujātīya (teachings of Sanatsujāta to Dhṛtarāṣṭra) is an example of the former; Vidura nīti (teachings of Vidura to Dhṛtarāṣṭra) is an example of the latter. Mahābhārata also contains several beautiful stōtra compositions celebrating the opulence of the Supreme, the most popular one being Viṣṇusahasranāma (thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu). And of course, it hosts the glorious Bhagavadgītā.

Mahābhārata consists of 18 books or parvas. Bhagavadgītā appears in the Bhīṣma parva⁵.

1	Ādi parva	7	Drōṇa parva	13	Anuśāsana parva
2	Sabhā parva	8	Karṇa parva	14	Aśvamēdhika parva
3	Vana parva	9	Śalya parva	15	Āśramavāsika parva
4	Virāṭa parva	10	Sauptika parva	16	Mausala parva
5	Udyōga parva	11	Strī parva	17	Mahāprasthānika parva
6	Bhīṣma parva	12	Śānti parva	18	Svargārōhaṇa parva

⁵ If interested in studying the Mahābhārata, one should take up Vyāsa Bhārata, and not some versions by later poets which have a lot of distortions. Vyāsa Bhārata also has different versions, but any version is fine for the first round of study.

1.2.2. Timeline

As far as a spiritual seeker is concerned, knowledge of the timeline of Bhagavadgītā (and thereby Mahābhārata) is of little or no consequence. Details on when it was told, and when it was documented are trivial as compared to the fact that it *is* available to us. However, here is the summary of what historians have been up to.

In the book *Astronomical Dating of the Mahabharata War*, Dr. E. Vedavyas surveyed the researches done by 120 scholars over the past hundred years. Sixty one of the scholars fixed the war as having occurred between 3000 and 3200 B.C. The next favoured time period—subscribed by forty of the scholars—was between 1000 and 1500 B.C.⁶

1.2.3. Outline of the story

Mahābhārata is the story of the Kuru dynasty spanning five-six of its generations, with the limelight on Arjuna's generation. Without going into the complexities encountered at every stage of the storyline (the typical characteristic of Mahābhārata), and omitting some of the initial episodes, here is an outline.

Among the two successors of king Vicitravīrya—Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu—the younger son Pāṇḍu was coronated as the king of Hastināpura (the capital of the kingdom) as Dhṛtarāṣṭra was blind by birth. Pāṇḍu had two wives (Kuntī and Mādri) and he fathered five sons — Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna from Kuntī, and the twins Nakula and Sahadēva from Mādri. Dhṛtarāṣṭra married Gāndhāri, and fathered one hundred sons and a daughter (born as test-tube babies from medicated vessels). Among these children, Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhira was the eldest. Pāṇḍu had an untimely death (when Yudhiṣṭhira was around ten years old), and Dhṛtarāṣṭra ascended the throne in the absence of an alternative. All the children underwent training in weaponry under preceptor Drōṇa. Pāṇḍu's children (especially Bhīma and Arjuna) outclassed Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons in all the areas of weaponry. After their education was complete, Yudhiṣṭhira, being the eldest and the wisest, was declared as the crown prince. Subsequently, Bhīma and Arjuna went on a military campaign, and vanquished several of the traditional enemies of the Kurus, bringing great amount of wealth to the kingdom.

Meanwhile, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eldest son Duryōdhana burnt in jealousy and hatred towards his cousin brothers. Knowing very well that he cannot defeat them face to face in a duel, he tries to murder them through crooked means several times. His first attempt was during their school days itself where he poisons Bhīma's food. After Yudhiṣṭhira was declared the crown prince, he makes another attempt on the lives of all the Pāṇḍavas (and Kuntī) by trying to burn them alive in a house of wax. When that plan fails, he

⁶ Excerpt from publisher's note (p. xxi) in *God Talks With Arjuna* by Paramahansa Yogananda.

Prelude

persuades his father Dhṛtarāṣṭra (who was always dancing to the tunes of his son) to send the Pāṇḍavas away into another part of the kingdom called Indraprastha (modern day New Delhi) which was an extremely underdeveloped locality in those days as compared to the capital city of Hastināpura. However, Pāṇḍavas, with the help of Kṛṣṇa, build a prosperous city from scratch and it attracts people from all over the country. Also, Pāṇḍavas get married to Draupadī⁷ (daughter of king Drupada of the neighboring kingdom Pāñcāla), making them more politically powerful in the region. Subsequently, Pāṇḍavas perform the Rājāsūya Yāga and unify the subcontinent under their emperorship. Unable to bear the grandeur of Indraprastha and Pāṇḍavas' rise to prominence, Duryōdhana hatches another plan along with his maternal uncle Śakuni and friend Karṇa to break them. Pāṇḍavas are invited to play a game of dice⁸, wherein Yudhiṣṭira loses all his wealth and kingdom to a deceitful Śakuni. He subsequently gambles away his brothers, himself, and finally Draupadī⁹. In a culmination of their nastiness, Duryōdhana and his crew humiliate Draupadī attempting to disrobe her in the royal court. By then, Dhṛtarāṣṭra is terribly scared of the consequences of the deeds of his sons, and restores all that Yudhiṣṭira had lost back to him.

Human beings often fall into the vicious pit of becoming more aggressive and malicious to protect themselves from the consequences of their earlier malice. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons were victims to this very pattern. After the above episode, they continued to live in fear thinking that Pāṇḍavas will come back for revenge; and fear gave birth to further hostility. They invite Pāṇḍavas again for gambling, this time with the bet that whoever loses the game will be exiled into the forests for twelve years followed by one year of incognito; if they are found in that one year, the twelve plus one year period will be repeated. Yudhiṣṭira loses and Pāṇḍavas are exiled. Afflicted further by fear (that Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa may come back and blow them to bits) Duryōdhana and his friends become more hostile and try to follow the unsuspecting Pāṇḍavas and kill them in the forest. Vyāsa intercepts them and sends them back. A few years later Duryōdhana, Śakuni and Karṇa decide to go to the forest and ridicule the destitute condition of the Pāṇḍavas. However, their plan backfires. They end up having a battle with the Gandharva king Citraratha in the forest. Duryōdhana's so called best friend Karṇa flees the battlefield and Duryōdhana is captured. His soldiers go to Pāṇḍavas and request for help. Due to this dishonor to the Kuru family by an outsider, Yudhiṣṭira asks his brothers to keep the family feud aside, and rescue Duryōdhana. Bhīma and Arjuna defeat the Gandharvas and release Duryōdhana from captivity. Even after knowing what the original intention of Duryōdhana was in coming to the forest, Yudhiṣṭira speaks to him compassionately. Having been saved by the very people he was always trying to kill, Duryōdhana experiences

⁷ This is one of the rare incidents of polyandry

⁸ As per the norms of the day, Kṣatriyas are not supposed to turn down an invitation to gamble and fight.

⁹ Wagering people was not uncommon then, but Yudhiṣṭira could have risen above the rigid patterns of the society. It is worth noting that Draupadī (or anyone else in the storyline) does not question/criticize Yudhiṣṭira for using her as stake. She only questions as to how Yudhiṣṭira could wager her *after* he had lost himself.

Prelude

unimaginable shame, and decides to starve himself to death. But he is soon turned away from his decision by Śakuni, Karna and a group of Asuras. He returns to Hastināpura without an iota of improvement in his decadent attitude.

Pāṇḍavas complete twelve years of exile, and enter in disguise the Matsya kingdom ruled by Virāṭa to spend one year of their incognito. Months pass by and Duryōdhana is unable to find the Pāṇḍavas. At the juncture of the completion of the year, Kīcaka (the powerful and tyrant commander of Virāṭa) tries to violate Draupadī (who was disguised as the maid of the queen) and gets beaten to death by the mighty Bhīma. Because of this unusual incident, Duryōdhana gets a hunch that Pāṇḍavas may be hiding in the city of Virāṭa. Along with his ally, the Trigartas, he launches an attack on Virāṭa with the calculation that if Pāṇḍavas are in Virāṭa then they will surely come out to aid their king, and if they are not in Virāṭa then he would get an easy victory over Virāṭa in the absence of Kīcaka — profitable either way. However, four of the Pāṇḍavas, without getting recognized, help Virāṭa to face the Trigartas and defeat them. Before the Virāṭa army could return and recover, Duryōdhana attacks the kingdom from another side on the next day. What follows is one of the most dramatic episodes of the Mahābhārata. Arjuna, who had not been asked to join the battle with the Trigartas (because he was disguised as a eunuch), knowing that the one year period was over on that day, now surfaces in all his splendor and valor, and singlehandedly vanquishes the entire Kaurava army (consisting of warriors such as Bhīṣma¹⁰, Drōṇa and Karna).

Pāṇḍavas had fulfilled the conditions of the gambling, and were now ready to come back and rule Indraprastha. However, Duryōdhana disputes the calendar calculations despite all his elders disagreeing with him, and contends that the one year period was not yet over when Arjuna surfaced. In a series of talks that subsequently took place Duryōdhana ignores the advice of all the wise ones to give Pāṇḍavas what is rightfully theirs. As the final resort, Kṛṣṇa himself arrives at Hastināpura as an envoy to resolve the situation. When Duryōdhana refuses to give Indraprastha back to Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa tries to strike a deal by asking Dhṛtarāṣṭra to allocate just five villages to the Pāṇḍavas. When Duryōdhana declines this offer too with his infamous statement "I shall not give even five pinpoints of land to the Pāṇḍavas", an annoyed Kṛṣṇa suggests Dhṛtarāṣṭra to restrain his son, or else face the destruction of the entire clan in a colossal war. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and other elders express helplessness. An anxious Duryōdhana foolishly and unethically tries to arrest Kṛṣṇa and gets to witness Kṛṣṇa's extraordinary yogic powers. With this final peace attempt thus failed, war becomes inevitable.

¹⁰ The elder step-brother of Vicitravīrya and the grandfather of Pāṇḍavas and Duryōdhana. Arjuna had especially grown very fond of his grandfather and had even called him "father" in his childhood thinking that he is actually his father. Bhīṣma had given up the throne due to circumstances and had vowed to protect whoever rules Hastināpura from his brother's lineage.

Prelude

Both the sides send requests to their relatives and allies to come to their aid. Pāṇḍavas are able to gather seven akṣauhiṇis (large units of military), and Duryōdhana's side (commonly referred to as the Kaurava side) manages to gather eleven. Bhīṣma and Drōṇa, despite knowing that Duryōdhana had wronged the Pāṇḍavas, fight from the Kaurava side due to their allegiance to the throne of Hastināpura. Kṛṣṇa, being a relative and friend of the Kuru family, is approached by Duryōdhana and Arjuna at the same time seeking aid. Kṛṣṇa asks them to make a choice — either him, unarmed or his elite army — and gives Arjuna the right to make the first choice as he was the younger between the two. Much to Duryōdhana's relief Arjuna chooses Kṛṣṇa and requests him to be his charioteer, a choice that sealed the fate of the war. On a decided date the two armies assemble in the battlefield of Kurukṣētra for the final showdown. In that last moment, looking at his beloved grandfather Bhīṣma and his revered teacher Drōṇa on the opponent's side¹¹, Arjuna is overcome by grief and nervousness, and decides to back off. What followed was Bhagavadgītā, the celebrated dialogue with his best friend and charioteer.

1.2.4. Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍavas

Here are a few notes on the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍavas.

Kṛṣṇa was Pāṇḍavas' close friend, especially of Arjuna (both were of similar age). They were not educated together, but in some places Mahābhārata suggests that they were friends since their early days. For instance, in the Draupadi svayamvara episode Kṛṣṇa recognizes Pāṇḍavas who were in disguise when no one else does; this indicates he knew them quite well. Later Nārada also explicitly mentions their acquaintance since childhood. That is understandable as Pāṇḍavas were related to Kṛṣṇa from the maternal side — Kunti was Kṛṣṇa's father's sister.

The era of Mahābhārata is marked by excessive Kṣatriya mindset—valour, power, weapons—in the society¹². Most of the kings were inflicted by the desire to become the most powerful. With many kings ruling across the subcontinent, conquests and battles were common phenomena during Kṛṣṇa's time. In the Pāṇḍavas Kṛṣṇa saw the exceptional blend of power and nobility, and thus an opportunity to unify all the kingdoms of the subcontinent and to realize peaceful times. He convinced his own kinfolk (Yādavas) to accept the emperorship of Yudhiṣṭira (when the latter performs Rājasūya Yāga), and helped Pāṇḍavas vanquish corrupt and powerful kings such as Jarāsandha of the Magadha kingdom. But alas, a dispute arose within the Kuru family itself, and it led to the biggest war of those times.

¹¹ Arjuna had faced them in battle earlier, but now he knows that this war can end only one way - death.

¹² In contrast, today the world is excessively obsessed with economy. And in the Vedic age, the society was obsessed with self-realization.

Prelude

The exceptional friendship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna requires a special mention on this occasion; it enables us to appreciate the chemistry between the two and thereby the tone of the conversation that we witness in the Bhagavadgītā. On several occasions Kṛṣṇa affirms that "I have no dearer friend on earth than Arjuna" (Sauptika parva, 12). Arjuna married Kṛṣṇa's younger sister Subhadrā with full consent and support from him. Kṛṣṇa happily concedes to Arjuna's request to become his charioteer (which is a lowly task for a warrior of his stature to perform) in the Mahābhārata war. Kṛṣṇa spends a sleepless night (the 13th night of the battle) contemplating as to how Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha—failure to accomplish which Arjuna had to take his own life—can be realized.

1.3. Uniqueness of the Gītā

Bhagavadgītā is a highly regarded scripture, and all the prominent ācāryas have written bhāṣya (commentary) on it. But it stands apart from other spiritual texts in the following aspects.

- It came from a Kṣatriya (warrior) and a Gṛhastha (householder), not a Brāhmaṇa (educator, especially of spirituality), not a Sanyāsi (monk), not a Ṛṣi (seer — people who uncover truths through their meditative revelations). Upaniṣats generally consist of the teachings from the latter type of people who are also generally the authors of literary works such as the Brahmasūtra.
- Again, unlike Upaniṣats, Bhagavadgītā is a conversation between friends, not Guru-Śiṣya. But yes, Arjuna does surrender to Kṛṣṇa as a Śiṣya during the conversation.
- The path of Bhakti is also highlighted in the Gītā which makes it unique among the three prasthānas (śruti, smṛti and nyāya)
- It does not cite or quote other texts as much as a formal literary work does. Sāṅkhya is the only system that receives an explicit credit from Kṛṣṇa for some of the details he presents. However, some similarities can be seen, notably with Kathōpaniṣat, and with Patañjali Yōga sūtra also (but it is debatable whether Kṛṣṇa quoted Patañjali or vice versa). Apart from these, the terms "vēda", "brahmasūtra" and "vēdānta" are uttered without referring to any specific details from these texts.

1.4. Misconceptions about the Gītā

1.4.1. Live narration by Sañjaya?

When the Mahābhārata war was about to begin, Vyāsa visits the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and asks him if he would like to have the clairvoyance ability to know what is happening in the battlefield. Dhṛtarāṣṭra refuses the offer saying that he does not wish to watch his kin getting killed, but suggests that his

Prelude

secretary Sañjaya be given the ability instead so that he can narrate the details. Thus, the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is presented within the Mahābhārata as the narration by Sañjaya.

However there is a misconception about this. The TV serials usually show Sañjaya giving a running commentary of the Bhagavadgītā (and the details of the Mahābhārata war) to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. But the fact is that it was a compiled report. Sañjaya was in the battlefield participating in the battle, but was capable of knowing what is happening in all the corners of the field. During the 18 days of the battle Sañjaya travels to the palace four times—10th evening, 15th evening, 17th evening and 19th morning—and reports to Dhṛtarāṣṭra what has happened until that point. Thus, although Bhagavadgītā transpired on the first day of the battle, it was narrated by Sañjaya on the 10th evening.

1.4.2. Time stoppage?

This is a very fancy but popular claim about the Bhagavadgītā — that time stopped when Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were conversing. However we do not get any support for this in the Mahābhārata. When the Bhagavadgītā episode is over, Mahābhārata says "Seeing Arjuna taking up his weapons again, all his army rejoiced" (Bhīṣma parva, 43.6). This means that the Pāṇḍava army saw him putting down his weapons and were unhappy then, and were waiting eagerly as to what will happen next; they were not time-frozen!

Bhagavadgītā is 700 verses in total¹³. And it takes only about 1.5 hours for a conversation that long to take place. Rather than wanting time to stop, it is more sensible to say that all others simply waited for 1.5 hours. When individuals of that stature are engrossed in such an intense conversation, no one would dare interfere!

¹³ There are some claims that the actual conversation was smaller, and that it was Vyāsa who expanded it while documenting it; but we need not take this claim seriously yet as there is no considerable evidence for it.

2. The Warrior Trembles | Chapter 1

Chapter Outline

- Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Sañjaya to describe the events (of the last ten days) on the battlefield (1.1)
- Sañjaya's narration (1.2-20)
 - Duryōdhana approaches Drōṇa (1.2); Duryōdhana's statements to Drōṇa (1.3-11)
 - Description of war beats - conchs, trumpets etc. (1.12-19)
 - Arjuna addresses Kṛṣṇa (1.20)
- Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to place the chariot in between the armies (1.21-23)
- Sañjaya's narration - Kṛṣṇa keeps the chariot in front of Bhīṣma and Drōṇa; Arjuna is overcome by grief (1.24-27)
- Arjuna describes his anxiety, and argues against the battle (1.28-46)
- Sañjaya's narration - a depressed Arjuna sits down in the chariot throwing aside his weapons

2.1. Some Psychological aspects

The statements of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sañjaya and Duryōdhana (and of course Arjuna) showcase their psychological state.

- Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the King and the elder of the Kuru family, describes the two sides of the battle as "My people vs. Pāṇḍavas". This phrase neatly summarizes the cause of the battle. The rift "mine vs. other's" in his psychology among his own family is the source of the family feud. The elder of the family, being in a responsible position, should have been impartial towards younger members of the family. Instead, throughout his life, he tried to cheat (and even kill) his brother's children in order to favor his children. This is a lesson to us that over-identification with a specific entity is the potential reason for conflicts.
- Sañjaya is officially on the Kaurava side. But his statements show that his heart is with Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍavas. When there is a cricket match between India and Pakistan, by looking at how someone is describing the match, we can guess which country they belong to. Sañjaya relishes describing the Pāṇḍava side and their conchs in so much detail (six verses), and makes only a brief mention (one and half verses) about the war beats of the Kaurava side.



Chapter 1

- Duryōdhana's statements reveal several things about his mindset. One, while describing both the sides to Drōṇa, he lists twenty warriors from the Pāṇḍava side, but names only seven from his side. Two, he uses negative words such as "given up their lives for me" to describe the kings on his side. This indicates that although his army was bigger in size, he did not see many powerful warriors on his side, and was unsure of his victory. Also, he describes his army as "protected by Bhīṣma" (who was the commander-in-chief) and Pāṇḍava army as "protected by Bhīma". This is amusing as Bhīma was not he commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍava army, Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Arjuna were. This shows that he was more afraid of Bhīma (as evident from the epic also) than anyone else in the Pāṇḍava side.

2.2. Arjuna's Arguments — Summary

Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa, in an apparently haughty manner, to place the chariot in between the two armies so that he can see who have come to support the "evil minded Duryōdhana" (1.23). And within a few minutes his haughtiness turns into grief and nervousness when Kṛṣṇa keeps the chariot in front of Bhīṣma and Drōṇa. Seeing his grandfather, teacher and other relatives on both the sides, he goes into an anxiety attack¹⁴, and subsequently argues as to why he should not wage this war:

- i. Those people (grandfathers, teachers, uncles, sons, grandsons etc.) for whose sake we earn wealth and kingdom are going to die in this battle. Therefore what is the point in waging and winning this war? How can we be happy by killing our own people?
- ii. We will be great sinners by killing these sinners.
- iii. Overpowered by greed, Duryōdhana and his people are not realizing the great destruction that will be incurred by the families in this battle. At least why can't we, being in a responsible position, withdraw?
- iv. This war will lead to large scale destruction of families. Due to this the ancient wisdom and ethos of the lineages will be lost. Adharma will creep into the families. Women of such families will become corrupt and this will lead to intermingling of the Varṇa (the purity of bloodlines will be tainted, and the societal framework will be upset). Ancestral rites will stop in such families, and their forefathers will fall. This puts into hell both families and the slayers of these families.



Having made these arguments, a dejected Arjuna concludes that he should not fight the battle even if his enemies kill him while unarmed. Throwing his weapons aside, he sits down in the chariot.

¹⁴ Failing limbs, drying mouth, trembling body, goosebumps, burning skin, unable to stand, reeling mind (1.29-30)

3. Sāṅkhya Yōga - the Foremost Teaching | Chapter 2

Chapter Outline

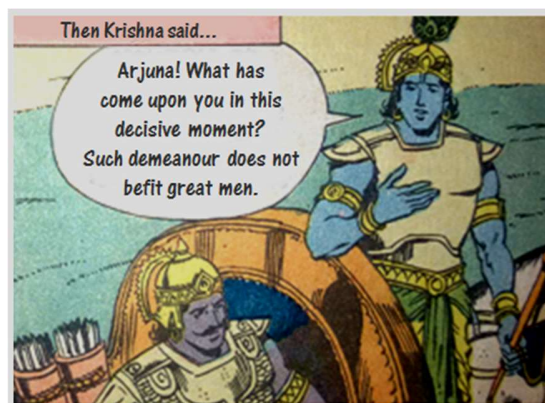
- Kṛṣṇa's whipping words condemning Arjuna's weakness (2.2-3)
- Arjuna continues his arguments, but surrenders to Kṛṣṇa (2.4-8)
- Kṛṣṇa's teachings
 - Sāṅkhya yōga (the knowledge of the Self) (2.11-30)
 - Swadharma and other simple arguments (2.31-37)
 - Karma yōga (or Buddhi yōga) (2.38-53)
- Arjuna's question on the qualities of a sthitaprajña (2.54) and Kṛṣṇa's response (2.55-72)

3.1. Arjuna Surrenders

In response to Arjuna's elaborate moaning, at first Kṛṣṇa simply lashes out at him with sharp words — "From where did this disgraceful dejection come upon you in this decisive moment? Do not yield to this impotence; it does not befit you, Arjuna! Cast off this worthless weakness of your heart and stand up!"

But Arjuna continues his moaning for some more time saying that it is better to live begging for his

food rather than fight this battle and kill his elders. However, eventually he makes a major progress — he realizes and admits that he is in delusion and that he is not thinking clearly¹⁵. He surrenders to Kṛṣṇa as a disciple and asks for his conclusive advice as to what is good (śrēyas¹⁶) for him in this situation (2.7). It is only then that Kṛṣṇa imparts spiritual wisdom to his close friend¹⁷.



¹⁵ If someone is confused but does not realize/accept that he is confused then no one can resolve his confusion, for he will not listen to anyone. A deep realization of ignorance is therefore a major step towards enlightenment.

¹⁶ Prēyas is that which is palatable (priya - like junk food), and Śrēyas is that which brings wellbeing (hita - like nutrient food). Mostly these two do not coincide. Arjuna's implication is that he is unable to see how waging this war is śrēyas. Backing off appears palatable to him at the moment.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that these two had been intimate friends for at least 50 years by then (they were in their 80s when the battle took place). And Kṛṣṇa, one of the greatest yogis to have ever walked the planet, had never instructed Arjuna with the knowledge of yoga until that point. Arjuna, the enthusiastic warrior that he was, was always busy acquiring newer weapons and fighting skills, and never had any time for spiritual learning (just like the most of us who spend our whole life earning a living, and have no time for anything more). He never asked Kṛṣṇa for it, and therefore Kṛṣṇa never taught him. It is only when Arjuna surrenders wholeheartedly that Kṛṣṇa enlightens Arjuna. Until the student surrenders and questions humbly, the teacher does not teach.

3.2. Sāṅkhya Yōga — The first teaching

But Arjuna's question was only about waging the war. What was the need for a spiritual teaching?

When he begins responding, Kṛṣṇa does not address Arjuna's arguments (summarized previously) directly. He does not tell Arjuna as to why this war has become inevitable, because it was too obvious a thing to tell to Arjuna who knows the entire background. From a personal standpoint, Arjuna knows how much of injustice was done to them by their cousins¹⁸. And from an overall standpoint, the fervent Kṣatriya mindset of the war-hungry kings, the deteriorating *dharma*¹⁹ in those times (starkly marked by the disrobing of a queen in a packed royal court) etc. were also very well known to Arjuna. The socio-political situation of the subcontinent had gradually decayed itself towards this devastating climax. The family feud among the Kurus only became a trigger for the situation to erupt. Kṛṣṇa did try to avoid this cataclysmic crash by unifying the subcontinent under Pāṇḍava's rule. And later he again tried to avoid the battle by acting as the envoy with as small a proposal as five villages for the Pāṇḍavas. Everything had failed, and war had become inevitable. The inevitability of the situation has been discussed and acknowledged hundreds of times within the Mahābhārata by several prominent individuals (including Vyāsa Mahārṣi) and it was too superfluous to tell all this to Arjuna again²⁰. Thus, Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna addresses something more fundamental — when something unpleasant becomes inevitable and must be carried out, but the person—in spite of clearly knowing all about its inevitability—is still vacillating, what is the counsel that needs to be given?

Suppose someone is playing a game of chess, and has come to a point from where he cannot win at all. And you see him all stressed up and dejected for having to lose his pawns and ultimately the game. Then you naturally tell him — "Don't worry, it is just a game; it is not the end of the world. Coins are just going out of the board for a while, not annihilated". Well, it is the same counsel that Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna. However here it happens to be about life and death, and it is not easy to say "Don't worry, it is just death; it is not the end of the world. In death we just go out of physical existence for a while, but are not

¹⁸ Arjuna himself acknowledges in the first chapter that his cousins are "ātatāyi" (anyone who tries to take away your life, property or family by force — Duryōdhana had done all the three!). And the Kṣatriya norm of the day was that a warrior should kill such a person without any second thoughts. But amusingly Arjuna says "We will become sinners if we kill these ātatāyi"! Evidently he was quite deluded. There was no point in reminding him about the wrongdoings of his cousins. And therefore Kṛṣṇa doesn't talk about it at all.

¹⁹ Dharma is a very profound word; it comes from the root "dhṛ" which means "to uphold". Simply put, it refers to upholding of the natural order of things. Social justice (nyāya) is only a part of the broader concept of dharma.

²⁰ Also, something amusing happens on the battlefield. Just a few minutes before Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira also gets depressed. Seeing the bigger army of Kauravas led by Bhīṣma, when Yudhisthira feels dejected, someone cheers him up with great confidence saying "There is no need to worry at all. Where there is Dharma, there is victory. Where there is Kṛṣṇa there is victory". Can you guess who that is? Arjuna! And few moments later he is himself depressed. Mere motivational speaking does not guarantee any inner stability.

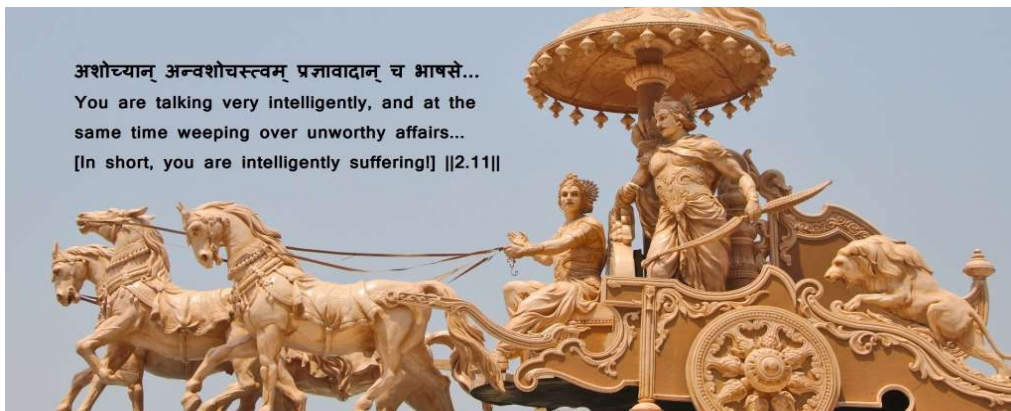
Chapter 2

annihilated". Only someone like Kṛṣṇa who has truly realized himself (and others) as beyond life and death can make this statement, not a mere intellectual who simply extrapolates the game analogy to life. In the former case it becomes the highest spiritual teaching, but in the latter case the same "don't worry, it is just death" becomes the highest level of insensitivity!

Also (just to reiterate), such statement about death is made *only* when the situation (such as a war) has become inevitable, not when it can be avoided. Therefore, such a statement that is made [to a soldier] when killing has become necessary is not to be taken as encouragement for killing. "It is just a game, it is alright to lose" is not an encouragement to lose; only after all attempts have been made to win if one is losing, such a statement is to be made. Kṛṣṇa, only after making all attempts to avoid this colossal war, makes this statement when it becomes a must. Thus, "Gītā promotes war" is a dimwitted conclusion coming out of half baked reading (or no reading!) of the Mahābhārata.

And thus Kṛṣṇa's very first teaching was about not taking the death of the physical body seriously. He affirms that death is not annihilation, and that the Self of all is indestructible. This teaching, the essence of the Upaniṣats, he calls as Sāṅkhya yōga²¹ (2.39). In this way, Arjuna's sāmānya ādhi (stress) became a pretext for him to receive teachings that deal with sāra ādhi (fundamental ignorance of one's own nature).

Before he begins instructing this knowledge, Kṛṣṇa mocks Arjuna, with an apparent smile on his face (2.10), for being a mere intellectual in his arguments, but not wise enough to see beyond birth-death — "You are speaking very intellectually (prajñā vāda), and the same time grieving for those who are not worthy of it. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead" (2.11). This statement (especially the first half) can be generalized in that the more intellectual we become the more serious, stressed and long-faced we become! Our sharp intellect that we are so proud of hardly makes us joyful and lively. We are getting entangled in words and data, and intellect has turned into a nuisance. In summary we suffer life intelligently, or even worse, we are suffering our intelligence!



²¹ This should not be equated to Sāṅkhya system of philosophy. Sāṅkhya was the common term in those days to refer to the path of Jñāna.

Chapter 2

Then Kṛṣṇa's commences his teachings of Sāṅkhya yōga, the summary of which is as follows:

- There has been no time when we were not, nor will there be a time when we will be not (our essential being transcends the construct of space-time) (2.12)
- Just as the body (dēha) passes through different stages of life, or just as people discard old cloths and wear new ones, the embodied Self (dēhī) passes from one body into another (2.13, 2.22).
- The Self is imperishable, indestructible, all-pervading, immeasurable, unthinkable, unborn, eternal and immutable. Weapons cannot cut it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it, air cannot dry it. Therefore you should not grieve (several verses).
- But that which is born—the physical existence—has death too. It is inevitable. Beings are unmanifest in the beginning (before birth), become manifest for a while, and become unmanifest again (after death). There is no need to grieve over this phenomenon (2.27-28).

The significant point to be noted in these set of verses is that while Kṛṣṇa uses plural form for dēha, he always uses singular form for the Self, even when he uses the two terms within the same sentence — "these bodies of the Self" (2.18). Thus, he is not talking about many "souls".

3.3. Arjuna's arguments countered

Kṛṣṇa then makes some simpler arguments that begin to address Arjuna's arguments more directly:

- There is no higher śrēyas for a warrior than fighting in such a dharma yuddha—a battle fought for eliminating disharmonious elements and establishing order. If you die fighting in this battle, you will obtain heaven, if you win you will enjoy the earth. (with this Kṛṣṇa has answered Arjuna's request to tell him which is śrēyas)
- Everyone must fulfill their swadharma, and a warrior's swadharma is fighting for a cause (with this Kṛṣṇa overrides Arjuna's arguments on kuladharmā)
- If you forsake your swadharma then you will become a sinner, not if you fight (with this Kṛṣṇa has countered Arjuna's arguments that he would become a sinner if he fought this battle)
- If you retreat now, your fame among people will be tarnished forever; for a respected person that is worse than death.
- Your enemies, who presently think very highly of you, will think you retreated out of fear. They will hold you lightly, abuse you and question your capability. (Arjuna said it is better if his enemies killed him while unarmed; Kṛṣṇa has countered that here — "they will not kill you, but only insult you thoroughly")

With these arguments (previous section and this section), Kṛṣṇa concludes by saying "Therefore, stand up and fight. Engage in the battle making pleasure-pain, gain-loss and victory-defeat even, and you will not incur any sin".



3.4. Karma yōga (or Buddhi yōga)

The mention of equanimity gives way to another related teaching of yoga. Kṛṣṇa now begins to describe the path of action (karma yoga) that is backed by an equanimous mind (buddhi yoga).

Before talking about karma yoga, Kṛṣṇa mentions the simplistic notion of karma prevalent in his times, and criticizes it. He condemns the propagators of "vēda vāda" (the karma kāṇḍa) who say that there is nothing apart from swarga²² and are desirous of the pleasures of the heavens. He calls such individuals—who encourage various types of karma so that merits (puṇya phala) accrue and give you higher worlds and better births—as unwise. Then Kṛṣṇa clarifies that karma yoga is to reject the fruits of the action (karma phala — both merits and demerits) altogether.

Karma yoga is comprised of two interrelated facets — giving up of the fruits of the action *and* equanimity towards gain-loss, victory-defeat etc. Usually these two aspects are mixed up (because of a widespread misunderstanding of the term "karma phala") leading to a much distorted idea of Karma yoga (with absurd statements such as "don't expect *any* result"²³). Here is some clarification in that regard.

Broadly speaking, any action has five types of outcomes: 1) Success or failure 2) Gross gain or loss (monetary) 3) Subtle gain or loss (praise-criticism, pleasure-pain etc.) 4) Experience/knowledge from the action and your personal growth, and 5) Invisible effects at a non-physical level. These are depicted in the figure.

The term karma phala refers specifically to outcome (5). Therefore when it is said that one is to *give up* karma phala, it

	Outcomes	Krishna's Advice
1	Success or Failure	Equanimity (Samatva)
2	Monetary Gain or Loss	
3	Praise or Criticism	
4	Personal Growth (Guaranteed)	Take Home!
5	Invisible effects - Merits/Demerits (Karma Phala)	GIVE UP (Phala Tyaga)



²² Heaven — the concept of heaven in sanātana dharma is not the same as in other cultures. The heaven here is only a transient stage where one expends their accrued merits in exchange for higher pleasures, and then falls back to earth.

²³ As a matter of fact, action that is performed without bearing the results in mind is tāmasika karma! (18.25)

Chapter 2

is only (5) that is to be given up, not all outcomes of the action. As for outcomes (1), (2) and (3), we are supposed to exercise *equanimity*. And (4) is anyway a guaranteed outcome in any action irrespective of success or failure — giving this up will be very absurd!²⁴

Now let us try to understand what these two facets—giving up of karma phala *and* equanimity—mean. Both of them are in fact stated by Kṛṣṇa as definitions of Yoga.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय।
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते॥२.४८॥
बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृत दुष्कृते।
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्॥२.५०॥

yōgasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya|
siddhyasiddhyōḥ samō bhūtvā samatvaṁ yōga ucyatē||2.48||
buddhiyuktō jahātīha ubhē sukṛta duṣkṛtē|
tasmādyōgāya yujyasva yōgaḥ karmasu kauśalam||2.50||

Meaning: Perform action, O Arjuna, being established in Yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure! Equanimity is called Yoga (48). Endowed with this wisdom (of equanimity), one casts off both good and evil deeds; therefore, devote yourself to Yoga; Yoga is skill in action (50).

The two definitions—"samatvaṁ yōga ucyatē" and "yōgaḥ karmasu kauśalam"—address two facets of Karma Yoga mentioned above.

Samatva — Equanimity: this pertains to the aspect of success or failure in our activities. Most of us think that success in our work is the source of our happiness (and consequently failure the source of misery). Therefore we allow the result to be the driving factor to kindle the *aliveness* in us. But the samatva aspect of karma yoga is drawing our attention to the fact that it is not the eventuality of an action that gives us joy, but the activity itself. It is activity itself that fires up the aliveness in us. We like to watch a cricket match between India and Australia; not India and Afghanistan. If it was only victory that we wanted, we would have watched the latter. But it is not so. We want the activity to be enticing, enlivening; result is secondary. It is the enthusiastic *effort* to win that gives us more thrill than winning itself. And it is the very *uncertainty* in the results that make the efforts thrilling. But we somehow delude ourselves into considering that the result is everything. Same is the case with our worldly affairs too. For e.g. we often see individuals changing their job simply because the previous job was not *challenging*. This means, the job is so easy for them that they are unable to enjoy working even though there is plenty

²⁴ Outcomes (1), (4) and (5) are always present. But outcomes (2) and (3) are sometimes absent. (5) can be dissolved through karma yoga, and the influence of (1), (2) and (3) upon us can be nullified through equanimity.

Chapter 2

of success (and money) in it. Therefore, we should consciously recognize (buddhi yoga) that our inherent tendency is to enjoy the action more than the result. If the message of equanimity is strengthened within us, the turbulence associated with the result of the worldly affairs will attenuate. We will neither get excited with success, nor get depressed with failure; because the activity (the wholehearted effort to succeed) itself makes us so exuberant that it will engulf and trivialize the results. We will gracefully and joyfully perform actions as needed. Samatva is a state of tremendous exuberance, not mere placidity.

Karmasu kauśalam — Skill in Action: This phrase is usually picked out of context by many people and explained as the skillfulness in the *performance* of actions. But we need to see in what context Kṛṣṇa is making this statement. By *kauśalam* he does not mean the skill in action per se²⁵. What he means is the skill in the *approach* behind any action so that one does not accrue more Karma as he lives in the world. If our left hand is in pain, we support it with our right hand neither with a sense of doership (kartṛtva) that "I helped this left hand", nor with a sense of enjoyership (bhōktṛtva) that "I got helped by right hand"; thus there is neither punya nor pāpa; there is no karma of any sort. One part of the system complements another part of the system. We are to see that this is true in a larger sense also, and that our individual personality, as one part of the system, is in complementarity with all other parts. This will make us realize that our sense of *individuality* is only apparent, but not existential. When our deluded sense of individuality is thus diffused, we experience a state of increased freedom from the shackles of Karma. This is the *kauśalam* that Kṛṣṇa is referring to; the skill of involving in the world without anything from there sticking to us; the skill of dissolving our Karma account²⁶.

Of course, these two facets are related to one another. The implementation of one facet enables the implementation of the other.

In relation to the aspect of karma phala, the following verse is very popular. In fact it is the most popular verse from the text.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूः मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥२.४७॥

karmaṇyēvādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karmaphalahēturbhūḥ mā tē saṅgō:'stvakarmaṇi ||2.47||

²⁵ Mere skillfulness in action is not Karma Yoga, but is just well performed Karma. If one follows Swadharmā (inherent talents/tendencies), actions will naturally be skillful. Arjuna was already the most skilled warrior. There was no need of preaching him that aspect of the skill.

²⁶ This is easier when one offers himself to become a tool in the hands of another. When you act like the 'hand', an extension of another person, without personal choices of any sort, without likes and dislikes, your karma is no more yours. But such a sense of offering is difficult for a thinking mind to appreciate. For it is voluntary slavery! We can see verse 11.33 where Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to enjoy victory, kingdom and fame (outcomes (1), (2) and (3)), but to be a tool in His hands (i.e. relinquish (5)).

Chapter 2

But because the concept of karma phala is misunderstood, this verse is also usually misunderstood as "you have no right over any outcome of your actions". One needs to understand this verse in light of the clarification provided above for karma phala.

There is another widespread misunderstanding in this verse. The term *adhikāra* is usually translated as "right". But it actually means *eligibility* or *qualification*²⁷. It is worth noting that in Samskr̥ta language there is no word for "rights"! The ancient society functioned based solely on responsibility (swadharma) without anyone having to *demand* their rights. This is because performance of one's swadharma automatically fulfills someone else's needs; there was no need to demand it. This is a positive outlook towards the structuring of society, whereas "rights" gives a negative shade to the picture.

And thus the translation of the verse would be:

Meaning: Your eligibility is to action only, never to its fruits; do not become the cause of the fruits [by working with an individuality], nor let your attachment be to inaction.

Since it is said "do not become the cause of the fruits", some may sit idle and say "then I will not act at all". That is why Kṛṣṇa immediately asserts in the last quarter of the verse "do not sit idle". We should act to exhaust our saṃskāra (subconscious habitual tendencies) and dissolve the rigid patterns clouding our intellect. But with constant contemplation we should take care that our actions are not reinforcing the old saṃskāra, or developing new ones. This is the other way of looking at the *skill* of karma/buddhi yoga.

Kṛṣṇa concludes his teachings by saying "Arjuna, you are now a mere intellectual with a lot of information but no experience of yoga. When your intellect transcends the muddy delusion, and gets established in samādhi, you will attain yoga". That is, Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna that he may not understand right away everything that Kṛṣṇa said (that the Self is imperishable, immutable etc.). But for now he should engage in Karma yoga—act as per his swadharma with the *skill* and *equanimity* described above—which will make him eligible to grasp the Truth firsthand.

3.5. Qualities of a Sthitaprajña

Arjuna now gets curious with the phrase "intellect established in samādhi" and asks Kṛṣṇa the following question: "What is the description of a sthitaprajña? How does he speak? How does he sit? How does he walk?" (2.54) In the term sthitaprajña, sthita means "established", and prajña refers to consciousness, or the Self. Thus, it refers to an Enlightened being where the sense of exclusive individuality has dissolved.

²⁷ This also is not the exact meaning. These ancient concepts (such as dharma and adhikāra) do not have any precise words in modern languages.

Chapter 2

On a lighter note, this question by Arjuna to Kṛṣṇa is comical. Arjuna has been Kṛṣṇa's best friend for decades, and has witnessed his serenity and blissfulness first hand. Having spent so many years with a sthitaprajña, he is eventually asking the same sthitaprajña about the qualities of a sthitaprajña! This is like a husband asking his wife, who has cooked delicious food for him for several years "I wonder what a good cook is like!" It will surely be taken as a criticism by her. However, Kṛṣṇa responds very calmly without getting irritated at all. For he is a sthitaprajña without an ego wanting recognition by others.

The last eighteen verses of the second chapter are Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna describing the qualities of a sthitaprajña. The following is a summary of these qualities (with verse numbers in the bracket):

1. Has given up all mind-born desires (55); all desires enter him without causing any turbulence in him just as water enters the unmoving ocean (70)
2. Finds absolute contentment in the Self (55)
3. Is not anxious in adversities (duḥkha), and has no craving for pleasures (sukha) (56)
4. Neither rejoices on receiving good/auspicious, nor hates on receiving bad/inauspicious (57)
5. Is free from attachment, fear and anger (56)
6. Is not bound (anabhisnēha) by anything or anyone (57)
7. Withdraws the senses from the sense-objects like the tortoise which withdraws all its limbs (58)
8. And moves amongst objects with the senses under restraint (64)
9. Is awake to what is night (invisible) to other beings, and considers what the other beings are awake to as night (pale) (69)
10. Is free from the clutches of the identities of "Mine" and "Me" (71)

(1) and (2) basically means that a sthitaprajña is done with all the psychological drama, has transcended the realm of citta, and is established in the realization of his true being. Desires spring from a sense of incompleteness, and drive us to find fulfillment. But when one realizes he *is* complete by his own nature, desires lose their power over him. All the remaining qualities follow from this central quality. Note that most of us live our entire life giving so much importance to our mind and its acrobatics. Mind—which is just a tool to transact with the world—has become the entirety of our life, and we are not experiencing the actual "life", the throbbing chaitanya that we are.

(3) and (4) highlight the quality of samatva. This does not mean a state of inertness, but means stability. An inert entity cannot move at all (tamas), an unstable entity moves only where external forces make it go (rajas), and a stable entity moves where it wants to move (and not where others make it go — sattva). Since a sthitaprajña has realized himself as the perennial bliss, external phenomena do not *determine/direct* his movements anymore (towards pleasures and away from pain). This is like a war-tank

Chapter 2

that simply goes where it wants to go no matter what is in front of it; the surroundings do not determine its movements. A sthitaprajña will act as per the larger good (dharma) without being disrupted by any personal pleasure or pain, whereas we are always guided by our personal pleasures and pains.

(5) and (6) continue the same idea. *Detachment* doesn't mean that he does not *involve* in the world; it only means that he does not get *entangled*. He involves with objects, people etc without getting carried away by them. Similarly, the compulsive forces of anger and fear no more dictate to him; but he may consciously use these as needed like an artist on a stage. He has mastery over the psychological elements.

Similarly (7) does not mean that he is devoid of sensations and is oblivious to the world. As (8) clarifies, he has mastery over the on-off switch of his senses. While we helplessly go on and on with the impulses of the sense organs, he can engage in the world but with the switch always under his control.

(9) is from a riddle like verse (69) and needs to be understood correctly. Whatever self-absorptive joy a Yogi is awake to is night for all the beings because they are *unable* to see it. But whatever psychological joy all the beings are awake to is night for the Yogi because he *sees* (paśyataḥ) it to be pale. Thus, the worldly experiences of ordinary beings is night for the yogi not because of his inability to experience it, but because he sees it to be trivial in front of his experience of the Self.

(10) is already covered by all the above. His actions are no more determined by personal joy or sorrow, gains or losses. His actions are always in tune with the larger picture of existence.

In general, one should always remember that spiritual qualities (such as "detachment") are never *negation*, but are *transcendence*. Extremes (like inertness and stability) look similar and people often confuse transcendence as negation. Being incapable of something is not spiritual!

3.6. Caution to Practitioners

While describing sthitaprajña, Kṛṣṇa also cautions the practitioners as to how the turbulent senses violently carry away the mind (and thereby the intellect) of even a wise man just as wind carries away a boat on waters (2.60, 2.67). He deciphers the sensual downfall step by step so that we can be careful when there is an onset of such a pattern in our mind:

ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते।
सङ्गात् सञ्जायते कामः कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते॥ २.६२॥
क्रोधात् भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः।
स्मृतिभ्रंशात् बुद्धिनाशः बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति॥ २.६३॥

Chapter 2

*dhyāyatō viṣayān puṃsaḥ saṅgastēṣūpajāyatē|
saṅgāt sañjāyatē kāmḥ kāmāt krōdhō: 'bhijāyatē||2.62||
krōdhāt bhavati sammōhaḥ sammōhāt smṛtivibhramaḥ|
smṛtibhramāsāt buddhināśaḥ buddhināsāt praṇāśyati||2.63||*

Meaning: When a man thinks of the objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises (2.62). From anger comes delusion; from delusion the loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes (2.63).

Our dormant residua (vāsanā) become active when we are exposed to a situation/object/person conducive to that residua (Patañjali yōga sūtra 4.8). If it is something that is in the "like" (rāga) box, then that particular situation/object/person begins to run in the mind in a loop. Due to repeated thinking a compulsive stickiness develops with it; that cittavṛtti, the vortex, gradually becomes powerful and begins to suck us into it. With our energy flowing in the direction, a desire arises to physically possess the object/person. In some cases it may be possible to accomplish it, and in some cases we fail. If we succeed we will anyway start the process all over again with something new. But mostly our desires will be so lofty and unrealistic that they do not materialize. That leads to frustration and anger, which is nothing but temporary madness as we ourselves admit sometimes - "I am mad at you". This leads to delusion—veiling of our working memory (database) and rational brain (processor)—or "amygdala hijack" as modern neuroscience calls it. We see how friends who know each other since decades forget all the good moments between them in a flash when a misunderstanding arises; the memories which may have pacified the present situation is knocked out of the picture. Without proper data the "thinking brain" is paralyzed and makes wrong conclusions. With both database and processor disrupted, such a person talks and behaves irrationally and cannot be convinced of anything. He will become self-destructive in that intense delusion.

So, what is the solution? Not expose ourselves to the objects of the world at all? No. By constant practice, we are to develop the awareness so as to identify the above pattern right in the beginning where it is easy to snub it. Eventually the pattern itself will not recur.

Block 2: Chapters 3-6

Chapters covered:

- 🚩 Chapter 3 (Karma Yōga)
- 🚩 Chapter 4 (Jñānakarmasannyāsa Yōga)
- 🚩 Chapter 5 (Karmasannyāsa Yōga)
- 🚩 Chapter 6 (Ātmasaṁyama Yōga)

The essence of Karma Yōga that was presented in the second chapter gets elucidated further in the next three chapters owing to questions by Arjuna; thus the term 'karma' in all these chapter names; the other terms (jñāna, sannyāsa) indicate the concepts discussed in the respective chapters (fourth chapter is sometimes called Jñāna Yōga). Key points in these chapters include the concepts of yajña, yajña cakra, karma-akarma-vikarma etc. Chapter six describes dhyāna yōga (yōga of meditation) as a prescription for someone who has purged himself of the outward bound tendencies of the mind through karma yōga.

As specified in the previous block, not all the chapters are explored equally deeply in this study material. In this block chapter six will be covered in more detail (similar to second chapter) as compared to the other chapters.

"When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow"

- Mahatma Gandhi

4. Karma Yōga - Act to Express, not Impress | Chapter 3

Chapter Outline

- Arjuna confused between Sāṅkhya yōga and Karma yōga (3.1-2)
- Kṛṣṇa elaborates the path of Karma yōga
 - Mere inaction leads to hypocrisy, not salvation (3.3-9)
 - One should fulfill their role in the yajña cakra, the cosmic cycle (3.10-16)
 - Only an ātmajñāni is exempt from this. However to set an example, even they act (3.17-29)
 - Swadharma (3.33-35)
- What compels humans to commit errors? Arjuna questions and Kṛṣṇa answers (3.36-43)

4.1. Sāṅkhya yōga or Karma yōga?

After listening to the teachings of Sāṅkhya yōga (the knowledge that the Self is imperishable, immutable etc.) and Karma yōga (practice of samatva buddhi & giving up karma phala), Arjuna gets confused between the two. Since Kṛṣṇa ends his teachings by praising ātmajñāna and sthitaprajña, Arjuna asks "If you say jñāna is superior to karma, then why are you engaging me in this terrible action? You are confusing me with your ambiguous words. Please tell me which is better for me" (3.1-2)

This can be considered as the central discussion of the Gītā the conclusion of which is of immediate consequence to Arjuna. Kṛṣṇa's response to this query is spread out across the Gītā (especially chapter 3-6) and needs an overall study.

From Arjuna's question we can infer the following:

- a) Although Kṛṣṇa did not explicitly specify this, Arjuna correlates the practice of Sāṅkhya yōga to renunciation of karma (karma sannyāsa and dedicating time for self-enquiry), and the practice of Karma yōga to performance of karma²⁸. This correlation happens explicitly in the fifth chapter where Arjuna repeats the question (5.1-5).
- b) Arjuna is trying to draw a universal rule out of Kṛṣṇa's teachings — that karma sannyāsa is the better option for attaining ātmajñāna irrespective of who the individual is and what the situation is.

Kṛṣṇa agrees with (a) and rejects (b). Here is a compilation of what Kṛṣṇa explains in this regard:

²⁸ Kṛṣṇa discusses karma sannyāsa and karma yōga in the Mahābhārata when Sanjaya comes to Pāṇḍavas for a peace treaty. Arjuna had heard it and he must have recollected it here.

Chapter 3

- Sāṅkhya yōga and Karma yōga are two paths prescribed to people according to their temperament (3.3). Both of them lead to the same result (5.4-5). Śrī Śāṅkarabhāṣya clarifies this as follows. The general instruction of the Vedas is to follow householder life after student life (followed by retirement and renunciation)²⁹; this is the path of karma yōga. But for a few mature individuals sannyāsa is allowed immediately after student life; this is the path of karma sannyāsa or sāṅkhya yōga.
- When one is not yet devoid of saṅkalpa (resolutions, intentions, motives) he must engage in karma yōga; once he has purged himself of such outward habitual tendencies of the mind through karma yōga, śama (withdrawal) or karma sannyāsa (sādhanā in solitude) is prescribed (6.3). Without going through karma yōga, sannyāsa is very difficult to accomplish (5.6).
- Thus, karma yōga is necessary for cittaśuddhi (cleansing the citta) (5.11). But karma yōga does not mean simply and compulsively diving into action. Only if karma is consciously performed with the proper awareness (samatva buddhi and giving up karma phala) it will lead to cittaśuddhi (5.12); or else it will lead to further entanglement (it will then become karma rōga, the disease of karma!).
- As per Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna is not ready for renunciation of karma — "Even if you try to quit the battlefield now, your inner tendencies will drag you to battle sooner or later" (18.59-60). This answers Arjuna's question "Which one is better for me?" Earlier in the fifth chapter too, when Arjuna insists that Kṛṣṇa should tell decisively which of the two is better for him, Kṛṣṇa answers "Both karma yōga and karma sannyāsa lead to salvation; but karma yōga is better between the two" (5.2) This does not mean that karma yōga is superior at all times and for everyone, but implies that karma yōga is suitable for Arjuna (Śāṅkarabhāṣya) as explicitly clarified in the eighteenth chapter.
- Someone whose outward tendencies are not yet subsided will not attain jñāna (naiṣkarmya - explained later) by merely renouncing activity (3.4). He will become a hypocrite (mithyācāri) who restrains his limbs on the outside but munches sensual objects within (3.6). Just like Arjuna, most of the society at any given point in time would not have the cittaśuddhi necessary for karma sannyāsa. Therefore almost all of us would be hypocrites if we renounced karma. That is why karma yōga is given more emphasis in the Gītā as compared to karma sannyāsa. The latter is described in chapters 6 and 13.
- Kṛṣṇa also tells an additional reason for why Arjuna should choose karma yōga (3.20-26) — Public follows whatever a leader or a great person does. Therefore to keep the larger system undisturbed, one (especially someone already in a prominent position in society) should act even if he has the eligibility to renounce. For this Kṛṣṇa gives the historical example of King Janaka, and a contemporary example of himself. Most people are not eligible for renunciation; therefore in order not to confuse them, a wise man (although he has no dependency on karma) must act and encourage others also to act.

²⁹ The four stages or āśramas of life are Brahmacharya, Gṛhastha, Vānaprastha and Sannyāsa.

4.2. Yajña Cakra

Since karma yōga is suitable for Arjuna (and most people), Kṛṣṇa first elaborates the concepts associated with this path. Among those, yajña cakra is explained in the third chapter (3.14):

"Beings come forth from food; food is produced from rain; rain from yajña; yajña is born of action"

The first aspect is obvious. As put forth in Brahmānandavallī of Taittirīya upaniṣat: "From earth were born the herbs. From the herbs was produced food. From food was born man. That man, such as he is, is surely a product of the essence of food" (2.1.1) Food not only supplies us energy to perform work, but also *becomes* the body. Beings are just food that they have consumed (and food in turn is just earth).

The second aspect also does not require any explanation. We know rains are essential for agriculture.

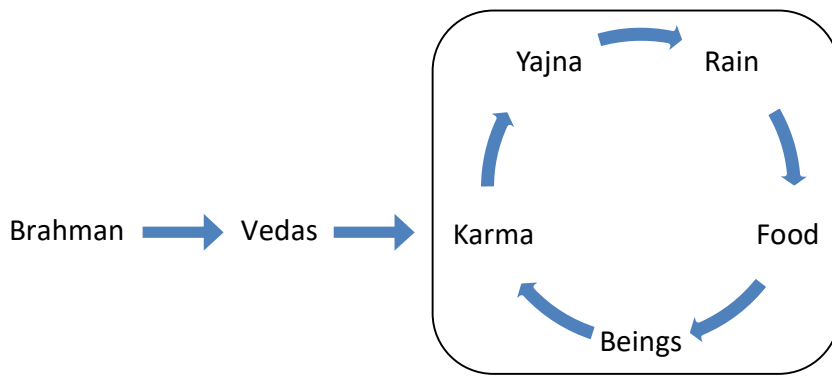
The third aspect is referring to daiva yajña (also called as dravya yajña; fire sacrifices) — a specialized technique that the Vedic civilization had discovered to maintain harmony with the energy forms (dēvatā) of the energy realm (adhidaiva). Presently we are too much preoccupied with the matter realm (adhibhūta) and manage only this part both individually and collectively. But just like we have subtler layers to our being (apart from the annamaya layer), creation at large also has subtler layers to it. Managing the material layer (food, clothing etc.) of our society, no matter how well done, is not the end of the game. In the Vedic civilization dravya yajña, which uses fire as a medium between matter and energy, was the technology that maintained the health of the system at the subtler layers, especially the energy realm (prāṇamaya). Energy in its nascent form is abstract, intangible and not in our direct experience; we experience energy only as the *activity* of the material sheath. Thus, health of the energy sheath would refer to the rhythms (regulated activity) of Nature. Earth is an organism and it has biological rhythms just like any living system that is part of it; disrupted rhythms would mean ill-health of the prāṇamaya sheath. Dravya yajñas saw to it that the rhythms of the planet remained resilient and healthy, an important aspect of which was timely rains³⁰. "Rain is produced from yajña" should be interpreted as timely rains; rains in inappropriate amounts (excessive or scarce) and irregular timings do more harm than good.

³⁰ There is much more to yajña than this; timely rain is just one aspect of the much bigger and deeper picture of this Vedic science. Inducing health in the energy layer by offering certain substances into fire, arranging certain material objects, chanting certain mantra, and other procedures is called *consecration*. Consecrated spaces are less prone to inauspicious events; they stabilize the psychology of the people who come into its sphere etc. Reading the epics we see how great an emphasis was laid on yajñas in ancient India. Every household was performing agnihōtra (a short fire sacrifice procedure) everyday along with other occasional daiva yajñas. This means entire civilizations lived in consecrated spaces. Every cell of the organism was engaged in some energy-processing which kept the energy of the overall system vibrant. Today although the procedures for these yajñas are still available, awareness about them is largely lost. Many ridicule them as baseless; it is just that we have become too insensitive to experience and appreciate any aspect of creation apart from gross matter.

Chapter 3

Further, it is karma (as per the Veda) that makes a dravya yajña possible, and karma is performed by beings — here the cakra (cycle) is complete. Without this link (yajña performed by beings) the cycle remains broken and unsustainable. Therefore someone who does not follow this cycle is condemned as living a wasteful life (3.16). But remember that this is mandated only for householders (gṛhastha) following the path of karma yōga, not for karma sanyasī as clarified again by Kṛṣṇa (3.17-18)

Finally Kṛṣṇa says, since the yajñas are performed as instructed by the Veda, and since Veda is not from any individual but is from the source of creation, the all-pervading reality of Brahman is present in the yajñas (3.15). This means, one is in tune with the source when he performs the yajñas. Figure below depicts the summary of this discussion:



Although achieving harmony with the energy forms (dēvatā) is the primary purpose of the yajñas (3.11-12), dāna — distribution of food, clothes and other things is also an essential part of the yajñas. After the dēvatās are fed with the fire-sacrifices, and beings (humans, animals, birds etc.) with food, the performer of the yajña is supposed to consume the remainder (yajñaśiṣṭa). Kṛṣṇa declares that such a person liberates himself, whereas someone who cooks just for himself is a thief; he eats only sin (3.13; 4.31)

Presently human beings are mostly busy indiscriminately sucking resources out of the planet, and have lost the attitude of offering back to Nature. We do not recognize the interconnectedness and interdependency of the system, and have constipated ourselves into imagined individualities acting like some standalone entities without regard to fellow-beings³¹. In medical terms, we have become the cancer cells of the cosmic organism, and the organism would obviously work against us. Thus the teaching of

³¹ We think by paying money for whatever we consume, we are done with our responsibility towards Nature. This attitude is only making our psychological boundaries stronger. Unless we offer something back wholeheartedly with gratitude, we will not open ourselves up to the rest of the existence. Today there is a trend in India wherein people feed animals because some astrologer advises them to do so to nullify their karma and eliminate their personal problems. The astrologer may not know why he is advising it, but it is an act of yajña nonetheless. This is not to promote astrology or anything, but only to highlight that we shouldn't need astrologers and the fear of planets to make us feed animals! And funnily enough, here too people just pay money to someone to feed the animals; yes, it is better than nothing, but why not feed them with our own hands and experience the connection?

Chapter 3

yajñacakra becomes ever more relevant today. The process of yajña and dāna not only induces health in the cosmic organism, but also liberates the individual from his constricted identities by invoking a state of offering in him. When an individual opens himself up to the system and lives in tune with it, he is akin to a healthy cell of the organism, and a healthy cell receives all the necessary support from the organism. This can be called as "grace". Grace always is. It is just that we have to make ourselves available to it.

4.3. Swadharma

In the third chapter Kṛṣṇa ends his teaching with the following verse:

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥३.३५॥

śrēyān svadharmō viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt |
svadharmē nidhanam śrēyaḥ paradharmō bhayāvahaḥ ||3.35||

Meaning: One's own dharma (swadharma), even if it is devoid of merit, is better than well-discharged dharma belonging to others (paradharma). It is better to die performing swadharma; paradharma is fearful.

Kṛṣṇa had already brought up swadharma in the second chapter when he said "If you forsake your swadharma then you will become a sinner". Here he is emphasizing it further. This concept is repeated and elaborated in the eighteenth chapter also which we will cover here itself.

Along with swadharma, Kṛṣṇa also uses words such as "swabhāva" and "swakarma". Swabhāva refers to one's inherent nature (specifically to talents and skills). Every system has parts, and every part has a specific role to play in the system. Every picture has colours, and every colour has a specific place in the picture. Similarly, every society has many individuals, and every individual has a specific skill that can fulfill the needs of the rest of the society. Some specific skills come naturally to each individual; only it must be noticed and harnessed during the process of education. Based on this observation the vedic society was categorized broadly into four varṇas — brāhmaṇa (teachers, researchers), kṣatriya (warriors, administrators), vaiśya (businessmen, farmers), śūdra (assist the other varṇas). Each varṇa had certain privileges and proportionate responsibilities. Just as there are no good and bad colours in a picture there are no good and bad varṇa (in fact varṇa literally means colour; it refers to the shade of the personality). It is only through the proper arrangement of all colours that the picture becomes meaningful. It is only through the proper arrangement of all the varṇas that a society becomes meaningful. If red tries to occupy the place of blue, or green that of yellow, that picture will look weird. Similarly, individuals are mandated to perform swadharma — actions in tune with their swabhāva, and are refrained from performing

Chapter 3

- Work becomes more and more effortless, and thereby the sense of "doership" slowly vanishes, which leads one to karma yōga. That is why we see that many great achievers in their respective fields do not feel that they have done anything great; in their experience it is quite effortless! In contrast if we follow paradharma, even a small task looks like a great achievement. For instance, if a father looks after his baby for a day he will boast about it as a great achievement, whereas for the mother it is quite effortless. Mothering is not father's swabhāva!
- Individuals would act to merely *express* their swabhāva, and not to *impress* anyone else. A cuckoo sings melodiously not to impress anyone, but just to express itself; it is its nature to sing. Same would happen with human beings when swadharmā is followed. One would depend no more on the "thanks" or on the appreciation of others to feel useful and uplifted. This means every individual has gratitude towards all others, but has no expectation that others be grateful to him. A lot of unclaimed gratitude! The whole society brims with such sāttvik emotions.

The other point Kṛṣṇa brings out in relation to swadharmā is that *all* actions have some inherent shortcoming (18.48). For e.g. a teacher's work involves punishing the students, a brāhmaṇa's life involves begging for food, a kṣatriya's life involves killing etc. Since these shortcomings are in the very nature of the karma, he clarifies that one who is following swadharmā will not incur sin for these shortcomings. Kṛṣṇa is telling this in response to Arjuna's doubt that killing will make him a sinner.

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥१८.४७॥

śrēyān svadharmō viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt |
svabhāvaniyatam karma kurvannāpnōti kilbiṣam ||18.47||

Meaning: Swadharmā, even if it is devoid of merit, is better than well-discharged paradharma. He who performs actions ordained by his inherent nature (swabhāva) incurs no sin.

Note that the first half of this verse is same as that of 3.35. Repetition indicates that it is a significant teaching. Indeed, it is an essential stepping stone for the practice of karma yōga.

4.4. Kāma and Krōdha — *The Enemy*

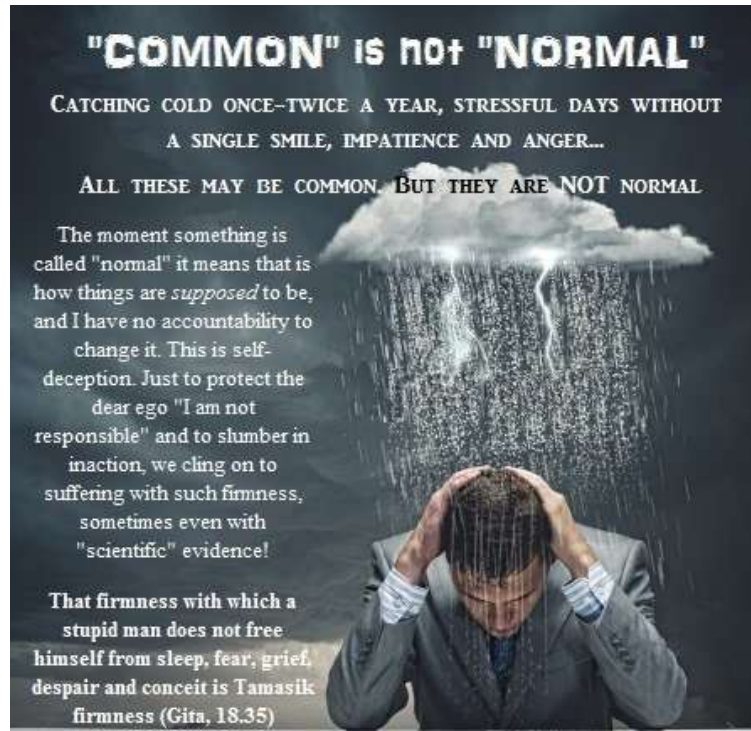
Arjuna then questions — "Then impelled by what does man commit sin, though against his wishes, constrained, as it were, by force?" (3.36) The clause "then" here refers to Kṛṣṇa's teaching in the third chapter; it indicates "If being in tune with the yajñacakra and following swadharmā brings about harmony and spiritual growth, then why does one deviate from it and commit ignoble acts?"

Chapter 3

To this Kṛṣṇa answers "kāma-krōdha" (3.37). Interestingly, he does not use dual form here, but uses singular indicating that desire and anger are one and the same; one is present in the other (see 2.62). He qualifies the couple as "born out of Rajas", "all-sinful" and "all-devouring" (or insatiable) and concludes that this is *the* enemy of human beings. Again in the fifth chapter he talks about the "mental speed born out of kāma-krōdha", and in the sixteenth chapter refers to kāma-krōdha-lōbha as the three doors to hell.

Here Kṛṣṇa is not blacklisting *all* desires. Later he himself endorses kāma that is in tune with dharma (7.11). It is the fundamental premise of the Vedic culture that worldly desires (kāma) and material wealth (artha) must strictly be within the framework of dharma for one to attain liberation (mōkṣa). But when one is not guided by the higher goal of spiritual accomplishment, he will obviously confer ultimate priority to the worldly affairs itself, and consequently develop indiscriminate desires to possess indefinitely — it is this *materialistic* attitude that Kṛṣṇa is condemning. Have a family, but only with the goal of self-realization; have wealth, but only with the goal of self-realization. When this is the guiding principle, we will naturally not invest more of ourselves into the worldly affairs. We will not sleep over them, but will invest in them only as much as to use them as staircase towards spiritual progress.

Sometimes people who have learnt about the concept of swabhāva and swadharma, idiotically argue that "Anger is my swabhāva, and therefore I must follow it to find fulfillment"! This is the same blunder as in relation to health — we have begun considering disease as normal, and health as an achievement. Similarly we consider anger, stress etc. as normal and as our swabhāva! But they are merely diseases eclipsing our actual swabhāva³³, and thereby our natural state of ātmajñāna (3.39). Just because they are *common*, does not mean that they are *normal*!



³³ Consequently we say "I do not know what I like to do" as if there are two people within!

5. Inaction, In action, and Beyond action | Chapters 4-5

Chapters Outline

- Kṛṣṇa says he had imparted yōga to the ancient Kings (4.1-3); Arjuna questions (4.4)
- Kṛṣṇa declares that he is the Supreme born to establish Dharma (4.5-8)
- Teachings of Karma yōga continued
 - Karma-Akarma-Vikarma (4.16-23)
 - Generalization of the concept of yajña (4.24-32)
 - Supremacy of jñāna yajña (4.33-42)
 - How should a seeker approach a Guru (4.34)
- Arjuna repeats his previous question (5.1); karma yōga and karma sannyāsa (5.2-6)
- Witness attitude in karma (5.8-9)
- Spiritual accomplishment is to be done *here* before death (5.19, 23)
- Kāma and krōdha are vēga (5.23)

5.1. Kṛṣṇa Enters Yogic State

This chapter begins with an apparently odd affirmation from Kṛṣṇa — "I taught this Yōga to Vivasvān, he taught it to Manu, and Manu to Ikṣvāku. Yōga that was thus handed down through the royal sages was subsequently lost in time. What I am teaching you now is the same Yōga" (4.1-3). Vivasvān, Manu and Ikṣvāku were Kings in the Sūryavaṁśa (Sun dynasty), around twenty generations prior to Śrī Rāma. Therefore Arjuna promptly asks "You taught Vivasvān? How?! You are my contemporary, and he is an ancient King" (4.4). Here onwards, Kṛṣṇa's tone in the Gītā changes completely. Here onwards he is no more a personality with a specific identity, but the all-inclusive Supreme Being or the Lord (Īśvara).

Until this point in the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa had been mostly³⁴ referring to the imperishable ultimate in third person terms 'that', 'this', 'brahma' etc. (e.g. 2.17, 3.15). But merely speaking of the ultimate takes a great yogi to that very state; his individuality would dissolve to find oneness (union, yōga) with the supreme³⁵. That Kṛṣṇa was in the exalted state during Gītā was acknowledged by himself later in the Mahābhārata. After the war, when Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to repeat the teachings of the Gītā, he says: "I cannot repeat what I

³⁴ Once in second chapter he refers to himself as the ultimate (2.61), and towards the end of the third chapter this affirmation becomes stronger (3.30). Fourth chapter onwards this becomes full blown.

³⁵ Any number of yogis have exhibited this. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is a modern example. As he goes into devotional ecstasies sometimes he would point at himself and say "This is Mother herself" But *extremes look similar!* Even nut cases say such things, not because of dissolution of their individuality, but hardening of it!

Chapter 6

preached you. I discoursed to you on Supreme Brahman, having established myself in Yōga" (Aśvamēdhika parva, chapter 16 [Anugītā])³⁶

Established thus in a state of union with the Supreme, Lord Kṛṣṇa utters these very popular statements:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥४.७॥
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥४.८॥

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata |
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaham ||4.7||
paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |
dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yugē yugē ||4.8||

Meaning: O Arjuna, whenever there is a decline of dharma and rise of adharma then I manifest Myself! For the protection of the noble, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma, I am born in every age.

For the devotional these verses give goose bumps, for someone who worries that the world is going to the dogs they assure of resurgence, and for the intellectual they reveal the fundamental nature of creation.

As pointed out earlier dharma is that which helps human beings to liberate themselves from limited identities and realize their true nature, and adharma is that which drags them compulsively into worldliness and entangles them. In the context of the society as a whole, dharma refers to a *sustainable* framework that facilitates human *enlightenment*; it refers to a system living according to which evolution of human consciousness is greatly and effortlessly catalyzed³⁷. And when a society is unfavorable to such evolution, there is said to be a rise of adharma. Dharma vs Adharma should therefore be viewed as Consciousness vs Compulsiveness or Sustainable vs Unsustainable.

So, the Lord says — whenever there is a rise of adharma, I manifest Myself to set it right. And setting right may involve a major reboot as in Mahābhārata. We indeed see that whenever ignorance and

³⁶ This is not to refute the popular theory that Kṛṣṇa is an avatāra of Lord Viṣṇu, or to contest the claims of some schools that Viṣṇu is the ultimate God. Since this is an academic study of the Gītā as a Yōgaśāstra, all these are not pertinent here; it is only apt here to view Kṛṣṇa as a Yōgēśvara (master of yōga) rather than alluding to him as God.

³⁷ This is the most fundamental conception of dharma and is called as sanātana dharma (eternal dharma). All other conceptions of dharma—swadharmā, kuladharmā etc.—are rooted in this. Something that may look "wrong" on the surface may be well rooted in sanātana dharma. Today the idea of "good-bad" or "right-wrong" is very superficial and is not guided by such strong basis; thus the endless debates on every small issue. But if not spiritual enlightenment, we can at least consider *sustainability* as the basis of the definition of "good-bad"; this is indeed happening as United Nations recently set "Sustainable development goals" for itself.

Chapter 6

adharma rises, some individuals emerge to dispel it. The nature of their work may vary—some provide transformative guidance (like Buddha) and some engage in dynamic action (like Kṛṣṇa). The degree of their energy, reach and impact etc. may also vary. When the degree of manifestation of the Divine becomes very special in some, we call them vibhūti, and when it becomes extraordinarily exceptional, we call them avatāra (descent of the Divine).

Entropy or disorder is an inherent condition of Prakṛti. Any designed system needs to be constantly monitored for it to remain useful towards the intended purpose. Human societies are also subject to the same constraint. Unconsciousness (compulsiveness) keeps creeping in, and disorder enters into human minds and societies. And it is not that we set the direction once and it will keep running forever in that direction. Consciousness levels need to be constantly kept up. Even the Lord says here that he needs to manifest again and again to set things right! Īśvara too acknowledges the nature of Prakṛti. If things were set right in one stroke, Prakṛti would lose its meaning.

Lord manifests and acts out of no compulsion (4.6, 9, 14) and has nothing to be gained or achieved through karma (3.22); but we do. So these verses teach us an important message from the perspective of practice of karma yōga: we don't exist to improve the world; but the world exists to improve us. We are to use the world as a gym (and the challenges it throws as weights to be lifted) and mature ourselves. That is the primary objective of all our karma, not the improvements that it causes in the world. The support that is rendered to the world by our karma is only a byproduct, and is temporary. Even if we set something right, it is bound to relapse in due course of time. But the evolution of our consciousness that occurs in this process is fully ours and that cannot be reversed.

5.2. Karma-Akarma-Vikarma

The teachings of karma yōga continue in this chapter, foremost of which is that of karma-akarma-vikarma. There are various interpretations of these terms (and the related verses) by different commentators. Here we will base our discussion on Śāṅkarabhāṣya.

Kṛṣṇa opens up the topic by saying "Even scholars are confused in recognizing karma and akarma" (4.16) indicating that the concept is not straightforward. In the subsequent verse he adds "vikarma" to it, and further emphasizes that the nature of karma is very complex (4.17).

The word "karma" refers to śāstravīhita karma — activities prescribed by the śāstras for your role in the society (swadharma). This includes nitya-naimittika karma (sandhyāvandana, agnihōtra etc.) that everyone should perform along with the specific activities as per their varṇa and the stage of life (āśrama).

Chapter 6

"Vikarma" refers to niṣiddha or forbidden karma. For e.g. as discussed earlier, following paradharma is vikarma. Similarly, if someone in student life performs activities prescribed for householder life (mixing up of the āśrama dharma), it is vikarma. And karma such as stealing is a vikarma for anyone.

"Akarma" requires some explanation. Usually, the prefix "a" or "niḥ" in Samskr̥ta signifies negation (like the "un" or "im" in English). For e.g. anitya means impermanent. But in spiritual teachings these prefixes sometimes indicate not mere negation, but transcendence. For e.g. nirguṇa does not mean "devoid of guṇa", but means "transcendence from guṇa" (guṇātīta). If a simple example has to be given: movies are projected on a screen, but the screen transcends all the movies. The difference between negation and transcendence is that in negation there is absence, whereas in transcendence there is a leap to a higher context that supports the lower context but is untouched by it.

Thus the word akarma (or naiṣkarmya) can mean two things: 1) Inactivity (or actionlessness) 2) Transcendence from karma. Throughout the Gītā both the connotations are used by Kṛṣṇa and we should be careful to identify them. As a rule whenever he condemns it he is referring to "inactivity" (e.g. 2.47), and whenever he appreciates it he is referring to transcendence (3.3; 18.48).

In fact, he had laid the foundation for the karma-akarma discussion in the beginning of the third chapter. The phrase "naiṣkarmya sthiti/siddhi" is popularly used as a synonym to ātmajñāna³⁸. Therefore, when Arjuna questions him as to why he should engage in karma if jñāna is the ultimate goal, although Arjuna did not explicitly use the word naiṣkarmya, Kṛṣṇa, as though reading Arjuna's mind, clarifies "One cannot attain naiṣkarmya by simply refraining from karma" (3.3). Here he is pointing out that naiṣkarmya means not negation of karma, but transcendence from it. In the fourth chapter he is addressing the same with special attention.

What does transcendence from karma mean? How is ātmajñāna a state of naiṣkarmya? We can look at it from two angles.

1) What we call as karma is basically *amplification*. For e.g. a car is designed in such a way that if I move my foot, an entire car moves. Movement is amplified several million times. Similarly, if we take this a step backward, it is the minute activity of the neurons that is amplified as the movement of the foot. If we take this further backward, as per some modern theories, it is the extremely minuscule spacetime events that cause neural firing. Thus karma is getting amplified in several levels. But it cannot be that it is an endless chain of smaller and smaller activity; there has to be an end, and the natural mathematical end to this is *stillness*. This is what the scriptures conclusively affirm too; our true nature is Stillness. But it is

³⁸ Jñāna, Bhakti, Yōga and Naiṣkarmya are four names of the same enlightened state from the perspective of the four streams of yōga — Jñāna yōga, Bhakti yōga, Rāja Yōga and Karma yōga.

Chapter 6

not inert stillness; it is the source of all karma! When we thus realize our true nature to be absolute Stillness, we transcend karma. We would be in naiṣkarmya although there is karma on the surface.

2) In ātmajñāna, extremes meet. De-identification from all specific entities leads also to identification with the whole existence at once³⁹ (our problem is that we are in between — identification with only a few particular things); and all-inclusive identification too implies transcendence from karma. Karma means an interaction of two entities. Any system has parts and when we are identified with certain parts only, we see activity (interaction with other parts). But when we embrace the whole system at once, karma is transcended. For e.g. I say I eat food as I see myself as a specific body. But the body is a piece of earth, so is the food I am eating. One part of earth is eating another part of earth. From the perspective of earth as a whole no eating is happening; the net effect is nil. Therefore an ātmajñāni, as he has an all-inclusive identification with the cosmos, transcends karma. He sees that the consumed, the consumer, the process of consumption etc. are all the same reality (4.24)

Now we are ready to take on a riddle like statement from Kṛṣṇa:

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येत् अकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।
स बुद्धिमान् मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥४.१८॥

karmanyakarma yaḥ paśyēt akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ |
sa buddhimān manuṣyēṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt ||4.18||

Meaning: He who sees akarma in karma and karma in akarma, he is wise among men; he is a Yogi and performer of all actions.

Here there are two parts:

a) Seeing akarma in karma — here akarma is being used in the profound sense, i.e. transcendence from karma. When someone has realized his true nature, he sees himself as absolute Stillness and is identified with nothing (or is identified with the entire existence). Hence for him there is no karma at all even if he is engaged in a lot of karma from a mundane standpoint (4.20).

b) Seeing karma in akarma — here akarma is being used in the simpler sense, i.e. inaction. For someone who has not realized his true nature, "I am not doing" is also happening out of a strong individuality and doership. Thus, this "not doing" is a doing; it is karma in the disguise of akarma (3.6).

³⁹ "When you attain jñāna, you will see all the beings within yourself" (4.35)

5.3. An Assortment of Yajñas

Subsequently, Kṛṣṇa generalizes the concept of yajña and lists many types of yajña.

- Daiva yajña: fire sacrifices (mentioned in the yajña cakra) to maintain harmony with the dēvatās
- Brahma yajña: dissolving the individuality into the one reality (ātmajñāna)
- Saṁyama yajña: offering the sense organs into the fire of restraint
- Viṣaya yajña: offering regulated sense-objects into the fire of the sense organs
- Ātmasaṁyamayōga yajña: offering all the activities of the senses and the prāṇa (inner functions) into the fire of self-restraint
- Dravya yajña: offering material objects to a noble cause
- Tapō yajña: offering oneself to self-imposed disciplines (vrata) such as fasting
- Yōga yajña: practice of prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra etc.
- Svādhyāya yajña: study of the Veda for enhancing knowledge
- Jñāna yajña: developing ātma-anātma vivēka (discrimination between self and non-self)
- Prāṇayāma yajña: offering prāṇa into apāna (inhalation), offering apāna into prāṇa (exhalation), and halting both prāṇa and apāna (retention)
- Niyatāhāra yajña: attaining mastery over a particular prāṇa through food regulation, and offering the remaining prāṇas into that

Kṛṣṇa praises all the people engaged in any of these yajña, and condemns an "ayajña"—someone not engaged in any form of yajña—as undeserving of both this world and any other worlds⁴⁰ (4.31). Someone who is not disciplining himself in any form in the name of freedom is only becoming more and more compulsive, and regressing in evolution.

After listing all these yajña, in conclusion Kṛṣṇa extols Jñāna yajña — developing discrimination of the self and the non-self through scriptural study, guidance of the Guru, and contemplation (i.e. jñāna yōga). He praises jñāna yajña with the phrases "Jñāna yajña is superior to all types of material yajña" (4.33), "Eventually all karma culminates in jñāna" (4.33), "The fire of jñāna burns all karma into ashes" (4.37), "There is nothing in existence that is more sacred than jñāna" (4.38). He assures here that even the most sinful of all can cross over the ocean of sins with the boat of jñāna (4.36). Note that this is an assurance given to someone who is willing to change the course of their life, and is not an encouragement to commit more sins. *Assurance is never encouragement.* This will be discussed further in the next block.

⁴⁰ We can apply this statement to the various forms of Yōga. It doesn't matter which school one is following, all are yōga practitioners; it is better than not practicing any form of Yōga.

5.4. How to approach a Guru

In the course of this discussion, Kṛṣṇa clarifies and resolves a significant issue in relation to questioning, śraddhā (faith/conviction), surrender and suspicion.

While emphasizing jñāna as the ultimate goal, he advises Arjuna that to attain ātmajñāna he should approach a Guru as a seeker. Here he lists three qualities of a seeker: 1) Praṇipāta (prostration, attitude of surrender) 2) Paripraśna (questioning) and 3) Sēvā (serving the Guru)

The first two are apparently contradictory. Our usual idea is that once you have surrendered to someone and have utmost faith in them, you should not question what they say. Whenever someone questions some tradition, elders usually say that it should not be questioned and should be followed with faith. This attitude exists because people have confused "questioning out of inquisitiveness" and "questioning out of suspicion". Since latter type of questioning is more prevalent (as in news channels), all questions get branded as against faith. But questions by themselves are not against faith. In fact sincere questions rise out of deep faith/conviction.

Questions arise because something seems odd, and you want an explanation for it. For e.g. if a physics professor is teaching General theory of Relativity of Einstein, many aspects of the theory will defy common sense. Therefore a student may raise a question about it. Here the student is asking the question not to *challenge* the theory (or Einstein or the professor), but to get explanations as to *how* it is so. Question is arising out of the conviction that the theory is right, not out of suspicion towards it. But if you fall into suspicion mode, the moment something seems odd, you will straightaway presume that something is wrong with the theory; thereafter no one can convince you what the theory really says as you have already made a [negative] *conclusion*. You will no more put any effort to understand the theory. All your questions and efforts thereafter will only be to challenge and ridicule the theory; no answer will matter to you anymore⁴¹. Thus Kṛṣṇa says "saṁśayātmā vinaśyati" (a suspecting man perishes) (4.40).

Thus we should question out of conviction. But how does the conviction come? Should we have conviction no matter what is said? In case of physics, theories are proved by experiments, and therefore a new student will naturally have conviction on its legitimacy. But what about spirituality?

For instance, spirituality claims "You are not the body or mind, you transcend both". Now this is an apparently odd claim. But just because it is counterintuitive we cannot brush it aside in a hurry. We may not be able to obtain objective proof (pratyakṣa pramāṇa) for such lofty spiritual claims in a laboratory as

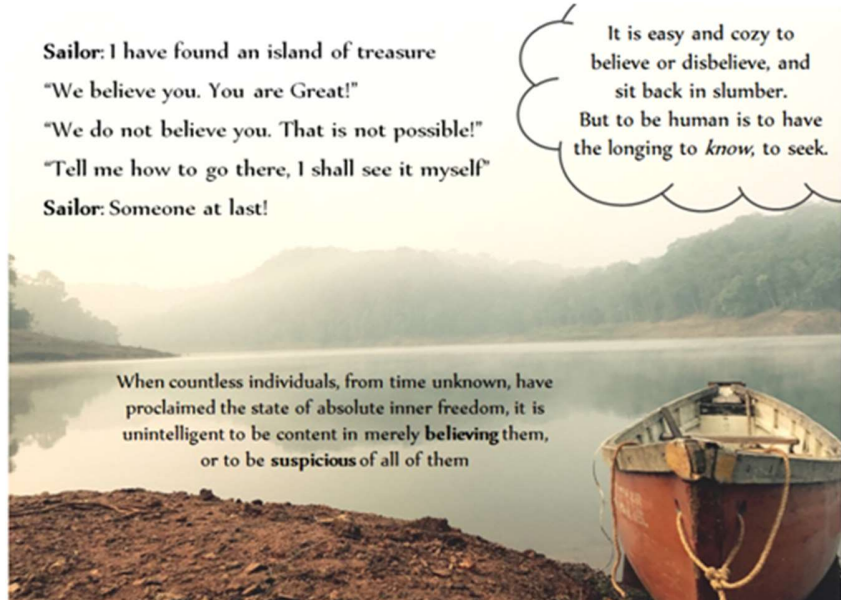
⁴¹ Indeed, the major problem of today's generation is that we quickly yield to some conclusion without much exploration or study; impatient/lazy intellect is the trademark of this century. Most of the discussions reveal that people involved have already decided something, and are discussing only to assert.

Chapter 6

in physics (because they are subjective experiences), but we surely can *infer* (anumāna pramāṇa) the higher possibilities—grand qualities such as equanimity amidst great turmoil—that have been exhibited by spiritual masters in every age. And consequently, the words of such beings become āgama pramāṇa⁴²; for they not only claim that they have experienced something, but also explain how we can also get there⁴³. Also, we should ask ourselves — if spirituality was all dummy without any substance to it, why is it that so many individuals in every age endorsed it? If it was fundamentally baseless, how is it that these spiritual disciplines survived for thousands of years without any forceful imposition by anyone? Therefore, suspecting and ridiculing the entire gamut of spirituality is outright idiocy.

On the other hand there is another problem of simply believing things without trying to experience them firsthand (because of laziness to put the efforts). Many people have great faith on Kṛṣṇa; but they do not attempt to study and adopt

the teachings of the Gītā! While some quickly suspect and disbelieve, some others quickly believe. Both are not very different in that both are ignorant and are not honest enough to accept that "I do not know". Believers simply utter the lofty statements present in the scriptures without any personal exploration or experience of



the same. This is like claiming marks for the derivation of an equation in the mathematics examination without actually deriving it, saying "I have complete faith on my teacher who derived it in the class!"

Therefore only when surrender and questioning go together something worthwhile happens. Śraddhā and questions are therefore complementary, not contradictory. "Śraddhāvān labhatē jñānam" (4.39) — a man of śraddhā surely attains jñāna.

⁴² In fact even in case of science a new student has no personal understanding (nor the ability to understand) of the proof to begin with. She goes by inference (seeing the technological advancements) and faith on the scientists (because they provide a method to experiment and understand it ourselves), and only in the end comes to a direct understanding of the theoretical-experimental proofs. Similarly in spirituality a seeker goes by inference (seeing the human advancement in the masters) and faith (because of the methods provided for personal realization).

⁴³ But if someone claims that he has a spiritual realization that is reserved only for him, then there is no point in believing him, disbelieving him or questioning him. We may as well just ignore him.

5.5. Karma Yōga or Karma Sannyāsa?

Since Kṛṣṇa ends the fourth chapter by emphasizing jñāna and the phrase "sanyastakarmāṇam" (4.41), Arjuna gets confused again, and repeats what he had asked in the beginning of the third chapter — "Once you praise sannyāsa and another time yōga; tell me conclusively as to which is better for me" (5.1) This part of the text has already been discussed in section 4.1.

5.6. Sākṣī bhāva — Witness attitude

It is described in this chapter as to how a ātmajñāni performs actions.

While seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, speaking, excreting, seizing, and even opening and closing the eyes, convinced that it is merely the senses that are engaged in the sense-objects, a jñāni sees that "I do nothing at all". (5.8-9)

From the perspective of practice, this is akin to the idea of *mindfulness* popularized by the Buddha. Instead of being absent minded, one should be uphold awareness in the smaller activities of daily life. This cultivates the power of concentrate which can then be shone on any desired target object or idea. The keen observation of the bodily activity also lets one gradually realize the distance between "me" and the body and develops ātma-anātma vivēka.

5.7. Self-Realization — Here, Not in some other world!

There is a widespread notion among people that after death we go to God. Attaining to realization at the moment of death is certainly a possibility, but not a surety (this is discussed in chapter 8). Therefore, simply waiting until the death moment for it to happen is unintelligent, and is not sanctioned by Kṛṣṇa. The last verse of the second chapter says: "Someone who has attained to the state of Brahman will be established in it during death moment *also*" (2.72). This is telling us that the state is attained while alive, and that it is merely held onto during the moment of death.

In the fifth chapter this affirmation is very direct:

- "Creation (birth-death cycle) is overcome in this very world by those whose minds are established in equanimity" (5.19)
- "He who is able, while still here in this world, to withstand, *before* the liberation from the body, the speed born of desire and anger—he is a Yogi, he is a happy man" (5.23)

The latter verse also forms the basis for the Yogic definition of stress which has been elaborated in the study material of Yoga Philosophy and Health.

6. Dhyāna Yōga - The *Incoming* | Chapter 6

Chapter Outline

- Conclusion of the yōga-sannyāsa discussion (6.1-4)
- You are your friend, you are your enemy (6.5-6)
- Samtva emphasized (6.7-9)
- Description of Dhyāna and Dhyāna yōgi (6.10-32)
- Arjuna's question on the fickleness of mind (6.33-34) and Kṛṣṇa's response (6.35-36)
- Arjuna's question on yōgabhraṣṭa (6.37-39) and Kṛṣṇa's response (6.40-47)

6.1. And we are back to Sāṅkhya yōga

Having explained karma yōga in very much detail in three chapters, Kṛṣṇa now returns to sāṅkhya yōga (or karma sannyāsa) that deals with enquiring into one's true nature. However, since he clads the core sādhanā of self-enquiry with the prescriptions of āsana, prāṇāyāma etc. this chapter gets identified with Rāja yōga (supported by Haṭha yōga). In the Gītā it is called as Ātmasaṁyama yōga⁴⁴ or Dhyāna yōga.

As summarized in Unit 4, Kṛṣṇa concludes the yōga-sannyāsa discussion saying that when one is not yet devoid of saṅkalpa (resolutions, intentions) he must engage in karma yōga; and once purged of such outward habitual tendencies of the mind through karma yōga, he becomes meditative by his own nature; for such a dhyāna yōgi, śama (withdrawal) or karma sannyāsa (sādhanā in solitude) is prescribed (6.3). When this śama is complete, such a person engages no more in sense-objects and karma⁴⁵, and renounces all saṅkalpa; then he is called as a yōgārūḍha (6.4). Ārūḍha means "ascended". Here the word yōgārūḍha is used with two connotations. In 6.3 it refers to someone who has ascended dhyāna yōga, someone whose śama is in progress and is turning more and more inward. In 6.4 it refers to someone who has ascended the final state of yōga, someone who is established in himself, i.e. an ātmajñāni⁴⁶.

6.2. You are your friend, you are your enemy

Before going on to describe a yōgārūḍha, Kṛṣṇa utters a couple of verses to encourage Arjuna towards attaining the exalted state:

⁴⁴ Recall that this was one of the yajña listed in the fourth chapter.

⁴⁵ Renunciation involves both of pleasures and actions. Giving up only actions but not pleasures is hypocrisy. Also, recall that some yōgārūḍhas may choose to engage in the world to lead others.

⁴⁶ This dual connotation is common. For e.g. "Bhakta" actually refers to someone who has dissolved himself in the object of his devotion. But it is also used to refer to someone who is on the path of Bhakti. Same with "Yogi".

Chapter 6

One should uplift himself by himself; one should not let himself down. Because you alone are your friend, you alone are your enemy (6.5). Someone who has conquered himself (his citta) by himself is his friend; otherwise, just like an external enemy, he is his enemy (6.6).

Tāmasik personalities are a combination of [my problem is outside] + [someone else is responsible for it; I cannot do anything]. Rājasik personalities are [my problem is outside] + [I will take charge and combat them]. Sāttvik ones are [my problem is within me] + [I alone can take care of it]. Rajas is obviously better than Tamas, but Sattva is better than Rajas also. It is sattva that Kṛṣṇa is highlighting here.

Tamas is the despicable human habit to find some or the other external entity to blame for our condition. If things succeed, it is of course because of me; but if things fail it is that man over there. Or if there is no one down here that we can blame, then it is that big man called "God" up there. This is a foul game. It is like "Heads, I win; tails, you lose"!⁴⁷ We think that the moment someone else is blamed, we are free of accountability. But what we forget is that by doing so we also give up the freedom and possibility to change our life by ourselves.

In Rajas people take accountability for all their experience of life, but will consider external situations as the source of their inner experiences. So they will be determined to *make things happen* in the world. This is certainly better than tamas, but is not a solution; because no matter how well the world is managed, it will never be one hundred percent in our hands. We cannot hope to have the external situations exactly the way we want it always. If our inner state is dependent on the external situations, then we will be on a major rollercoaster trip with continuous ups-downs.

In the mode of Sattva, we come to realize that our inner experience of life is fully ours. No one is sitting within us to make us feel in a certain way. The external situations are merely triggers, and are not causes. We may consciously choose to respond to them in any way we want. But it is just that we have gone into an automated compulsive mode such that for a particular trigger we compulsorily feel and react in a certain way. Mere realization of this fact is a major step, and will spontaneously change the direction of our efforts. We will then endeavor to conquer our citta instead of conquering the world⁴⁸.

In an organization, the employees down in the hierarchy complain about issues within the organization to the ones higher in the hierarchy. That is understandable. But suppose the CEO of the organization sits and whines about things in his own company! When some employee goes to him with a concern, the CEO

⁴⁷ It is fine if someone remembers God at all times and surrenders all his karma to Him; that would become karma yōga fuelled by bhakti yōga. But doing it selectively is neither bhakti nor karma yōga.

⁴⁸ This does not mean that a Sāttvik person does not try to *make things happen* in the world at all. It is just that he does not consider it as the solution for his inner situation. Also, when someone conquers his own citta, external situations automatically get managed well as a natural by-product. Citta is our interface to the world; if that is fixed, the interactions with the world will also be fixed.

Chapter 6

says "Yes, I know, but what can we do?" This would be ridiculous. A CEO should take action to correct things; if he does not have that power he is not a CEO.

Similarly, we should decide if we are servants of our life, or Kings of our life. Only servants complain and wait on others to correct things; Kings take action. Only then can we do justice to "Rāja yōga".

And as clarified above, here "taking action" does not refer to managing the world well (that is Rajas), but getting a hold on our citta. The CEO should manage his own company to solve his problem, not someone else's company; other companies will automatically have a good relation with him when he manages his company well. Similarly, to achieve inner wellbeing, we should become the Kings of our life, not someone else's life by trying to control them. When we have conquered ourselves, there is anyway no need to control others; they are spontaneously drawn and embraced.

6.3. Samatva — Prime quality of Yōgārūḍha

Whatever was referred to as sthitaprajña in the second chapter is referred to as yōgārūḍha in the sixth chapter. And similar to the qualities of sthitaprajña, Kṛṣṇa describes the qualities of yōgārūḍha (6.7-9; 29-32) with special emphasis on samatva. Here we will discuss them as pointers for our practice.

In verses 7-9, Kṛṣṇa enunciates three possible applications of samatva in our life.

1) Samatva towards experiences (6.7). This is further divided into three types:

Physical (hot and cold): This aspect is the easiest to practice samatva with, and a practitioner should start here. Yōga is not against comfort; it is only against compulsion with comfort⁴⁹. Instead of imposing conditions on ourselves that "I necessarily need this much comfort", one should go about without paying much attention to the different physical situations that come and go (unless they threaten your survival!). There is a nice description in the Mahābhārata of how the young Pāṇḍavas, who were princes living in luxury, were least bothered when they had to spend a few months in a Brāhmaṇa's house begging for their food and sleeping on the floor (this is after they escape from the house of wax where Duryōdhana tries to burn them alive). They would lie down on the grass mats, speak about weaponry and battle formations, and go to sleep as if everything is normal!

Emotional (joy and sorrow) and Intellectual (praise and insult): As we are becoming more of psychological beings and intellectual beings, this aspect becomes more important. This would require a lot of explanation; a summary has been covered in the first block in the context of karma yōga. This is necessary because someone who wants to turn inward cannot afford to have the key to his joy kept

⁴⁹ In fact this is a general rule. Yōga is never fundamentally against anything. It never brands something as universally *bad*. It is always only against compulsiveness, the only enemy of consciousness.

Chapter 6

in the hands of the world. To begin with, at least the conviction that world is the source of my joy should be shaken up from its roots. Śrī Rāma stands out as an exceptional example in this regard. On a particular day, it is announced that he would be coronated as the crown prince the next day; the whole city rejoices, and amidst all the celebrations he is calm and composed. The next morning not only is the decision reversed, but he is also exiled into forest for fourteen years; everyone plunges into unimaginable sorrow, and he is again calm and composed without even a hint of worry on his face. Merely reading such episodes induces some samatva in us!

2) Samatva towards objects (6.8) — seeing stone, mud and gold with an equal eye. From the standpoint of a yōgārūḍha it refers to his realization that everything in the universe is basically different shapes of the same stuff. Another perspective is that every object in existence has its place, and no object is more important than others. A knife has its use and a needle has its. A stone has its use and a gold piece has its. None can do the job of the other.

3) Samatva towards people (6.9). Here he lists nine types of people that one encounters in life:

Suhṛt — Good hearted people, well-wishers; Mitra — Friend; Ari — Enemy; Udāsīna — Indifferent (they have nothing to do with you); Madhyastha — Mediator (between you and others); Dvēṣya — Hateful (for no apparent reason - there are many of these!); Bandhu — Relatives; Sādhu — Noble people in the society; and Pāpi — Ignoble people in the society (the last two do not necessarily have a personal relationship with you).

Here it must be noted that *equality does not mean uniformity*; and equal eye (samadarśana) does not mean uniform treatment (samavartana). The latter would just be a robot, not a conscious being.

For e.g. a mother with two children will respond differently to the different personalities of the children. Depending on the background and their attitude behind the actions, the mother may punish one for a mistake, and pardon the other for the same mistake. Note that different responses are coming not out of bias, but out of equal eye. Thus, different responses to similar situations do not necessarily mean discrimination as a superficially logical mind usually thinks.

Extending the same idea, a yōgārūḍha has no bias towards anyone because he sees just one undivided existence. He will respond to each type of person as needed by the situation; the difference in his response will be rooted in equal eye, not discriminatory eye.

The other qualities described in relation to yōgārūḍha are:

- Jñānavijñānatṛptātmā (6.8) — no more searching for knowledge in scriptures or in the world
- Kūṭastha (6.8) — is so firmly rooted in the realization of the one that he is *immovable*

Chapter 6

- Sees all beings in him, and him in all beings (6.29)
- Sees Me everywhere, and sees everything in Me (6.30) — the above is reiterated from the perspective of Bhakti
- Sarvatra ātma upamya (6.32) — treating all beings as how he would treat himself.

6.4. Dhyāna yōga described

Kṛṣṇa's description of Ātmasaṁyama yōga or Dhyāna yōga can be divided into two parts: preparation for dhyāna, and the practice of dhyāna (similar to bahiraṅga and antaraṅga yōga of Patañjali's Aṣṭāṅga yōga).

6.4.1. Preparations for dhyāna

General instructions: A dhyāna yōgi should be in solitude without possessing any objects and any desires to possess (6.10). He should be peaceful within (having purged the outward tendencies through karma yōga), fearless and be following the disciplines of brahmacarya (begging for food, serving the Guru etc.)

Food and sleep: Do not eat too much, nor avoid eating. Heaviness of stomach and starvation are both not conducive for meditation⁵⁰. Similarly, do not sleep too much, nor become sleepless (6.16). Food, sleep, recreation, amount of exertion in the activities etc. should all be moderated by a practitioner (6.17).

Āsana (seat and posture): In a clean place one should make a seat for himself by laying kuśa grass, skin (of tiger, kṛṣṇamṛga [blackbuck]⁵¹ etc.) and cloth on top. The place should be neither too high nor low from the surrounding area (6.11). Then he should sit steadily with his body, head and neck aligned (6.13).

Prāṇāyāma and Pratyāhāra: This was mentioned towards the end of the fifth chapter. Prāṇa and Apāna should be equalized by practice; i.e. automatic suspension of breath should be achieved. The external sensations should be kept external (5.27); this includes both cutting off sensations (by closing the eyes etc.), and not paying attention to any incoming sensations.

6.4.2. Practice and development of dhyāna

Having sat in a steady posture and mastered the breathing process, without seeing anywhere else (i.e. without opening the eyes every now and then) one should focus on the point between the eyebrows (6.13)⁵². This is to develop concentration or dhāraṇa.

⁵⁰ Here we may also add that sātṭvik food should be consumed as it supports dhyāna yōga. Sātṭvik food (and also rājasik, tāmasik food) is described in the seventeenth chapter.

⁵¹ These skins are said to have a certain energy impact on us. But there is no need to get too caught up with this as it is only one of the aids. Also, this is being said in a time when forests were in abundance.

Chapter 6

Then Kṛṣṇa talks of two options for directing this dhāraṇa: the dhyāna yōgi can either fix his mind on the Supreme, or on the Self.

a) First he says that the dhyāna yōgi should be *maccitta* and *matpara* (6.14). One may fix his mind on an object of enjoyment, but he does not (and cannot) consider it to be the ultimate. Only when there is the conviction that something is the ultimate, the dhāraṇa will be deep and steady. Therefore both *maccitta* and *matpara* are specified (Śāṅkarabhāṣya); the dhyāna yōgi should fix his citta on me, the Lord, acknowledging Me to the ultimate goal (para). Such a yōgi will attain nirvāṇa (6.15). This type of dhyāna is driven by Bhakti.

b) Or the dhyāna yōgi should fix his mind on his Self (6.18). By using willpower and the intellect (enquiry), gradually the mind should be subsided (turned inward) and fixed on the Self (6.25). Whenever the mind drifts away due to lack of firmness, it should be repeatedly brought back to the Self (6.26).

When the self-awareness is unbroken it becomes like the unwavering flame of a lamp in a windless place (6.19)⁵³. Kṛṣṇa describes the state of self-realization in a set of verses (6.20-23):

- With practice the mind becomes quiet and niruddha⁵⁴ — inhibitive or inward bound, as opposed to exhibitivite or outward bound.
- The yōgi, seeing the Self by the Self, finds absolute contentment in his Self.
- He experiences limitless joy that is beyond the reach of the senses.
- Does not consider any other gain as superior to this.
- Having established in the Self, not even the greatest tragedy disturbs him.
- This is Yōga — *separation from the union with sorrow*.

Finally, to uphold that both Self-realization and God-realization are one and the same, Kṛṣṇa says that a yōgi "sees all beings in him, and him in all beings" (6.29) and "sees Me everywhere, and sees everything in Me" (6.30).

⁵² This verse uses the phrase "focussing on the tip of the nose". But prominent commentators agree that this refers to the point where nose begins (i.e. the point between the eyebrows), not where it ends. There is no significance given to the tip of the nose anywhere in the haṭhayōga texts, nor any mention of focussing on it. Also, "between the eyebrows" was mentioned earlier in the Gītā itself (5.27).

⁵³ Kṛṣṇa himself is an example for what he is teaching here. Yudhiṣṭhira once sees Kṛṣṇa absorbed in meditation, and this is what he describes: "What is this wonder of wonders, you are rapt in meditation! All the five prāṇas (like breathing) in your body are restrained. Your delighted senses are absorbed into your mind. And all the Guṇas are absorbed into your Self (kṣētrajñā). The hair on your body stands erect. Your mind and intellect are both still. You are still like the flame of a lamp in a windless place, and as immobile as a rock" (Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva, ch. 46).

⁵⁴ The phrase "cittaṁ niruddhaṁ yōgasēvayā" by Kṛṣṇa here is similar to "yōgaḥ cittavṛti nirōdhaḥ" of Patañjali.

6.4.3. Yōga defined in terms of viyōga

The above discussion contains the third explicit definition of Yōga in the Gītā⁵⁵. The verse is as follows:

तं विद्यात् दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योग सञ्ज्ञितम्
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगो निर्विण्ण चेतसा॥६.२३॥

*taṁ vidyāt duḥkhasamyōgaviyōgam yōga sañjñitam
sa niścayēna yōktavyō yōgō nirviṅṇa cētasā*||6.23||

Meaning: Separation from the union with pain/sorrow is known as Yōga. This Yōga should be practised with determination and with an undesponding mind.

This is a unique definition wherein yōga (union) is defined in terms of viyōga (separation). And there is also a tinge of sarcasm in it. Human beings have mastered the art of misery, and are experts in becoming miserable no matter where we are placed, so much so that we are *one* with sorrow (duḥkhasamyōga). As pointed out earlier we begin to consider that grimness, stress etc. are *normal*. We constantly need something from the world (objects, people, situations... Wi-Fi!) to *charge* us with "joy"; and if we are left on our own without this supply from the world, we immediately fall back to some boredom and sorrow. But in self-realization this reverses. The union with sorrow is severed, and one becomes blissful by his own nature.

6.5. But mind is very restless!

When Kṛṣṇa finishes his discourse on dhyāna yōga, Arjuna asks a very basic question — "This yōga that you speak of, I don't see how firmness is possible in it. The mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding. I deem it as difficult to control as to control the wind" (6.33-34)

Kṛṣṇa does not disagree with him and says "asamśayaṁ" — undoubtedly the mind is restless and difficult to control; but it is not impossible. Through abhyāsa and vairāgya it can be restrained⁵⁶ (6.35).

The aspect of abhyāsa—perfection through continuous and long-term repetition—is not new to Arjuna. He had become the best archer of his times through relentless abhyāsa. He had pleased Lord Shiva through intense meditation and austerities. But all these were driven by the desires for worldly gains. He was a warrior who was determined to acquire weaponry and fighting skills. That aspiration made his focus steady and strong. He could meditate on Shiva to get weapons; but he is saying meditation is

⁵⁵ There are several implicit definitions as well. For instance in 2.53, yōga is described as samādhi, a state of absorption; in 10.7, yōga is mentioned as the power through which the Supreme manifests in the world.

⁵⁶ These two are presented as the fundamental aspects of yōga in the yōga sūtra of Patañjali also — "abhyāsa vairāgyābhyām tannirōdhaḥ" (1.12)

Chapter 6

difficult if the goal is yōga! Similarly, all of us would undergo abhyāsa when there is some enticing worldly achievement at stake. But when it is to realize our true nature, the intensity vanishes and we say abhyāsa is difficult and that the mind is very difficult to control!

It is clear from this that the restlessness of the mind is rooted in disinterest. And this disinterest, in turn, is merely because, unlike the worldly endeavors, we have no idea what is at stake. Since we do not know the grandeur of the state of ātmajñāna, we do not get the necessary conviction to engage in abhyāsa towards realizing it. As discussed earlier unless we consider something as "para", the ultimate possibility, the mind does not get fixed onto it⁵⁷.

But when one realizes the futility of trying to find fulfillment in the world one will naturally turn away from it. This is vairāgya, and is necessary for a practitioner of yōga. Until the saturation with the worldly affairs comes about, meditation on the Self or Supreme is a farfetched idea (because it would not be considered as the ultimate possibility); and when one gives up on the world as a solution to finding fulfillment, the longing for a true solution will also develop. Then, noticing that such a solution has been affirmed in every age by countless masters, the conviction for yōgābhyāsa towards ātmajñāna (or bhakti towards the Lord) will also come about.

6.6. Yōgabhraṣṭa

The last section of the sixth chapter addresses Arjuna's question on Yōgabhraṣṭa⁵⁸ — "If someone, though he has śraddhā, wanders away from yōga due to lack of efforts, then having failed to attain perfection in yōga what end does he meet? Fallen from both, does he not perish like a separated cloud, supportless and deluded on the path of Brahman?" (6.37-38). Here "both" refers to karma yōga and dhyāna yōga (Śāṅkarabhāṣya).

To this Kṛṣṇa's gives an assuring response:

Either in this world or in any other world, such a person (one who is committed to yōga) does not perish. None who does good (yōgābhyāsa) will ever come to an ill fate (6.40). After death he will attain to the worlds that the virtuous ones attain and live there for a long time. Subsequently, he will be born in a pious and aristocratic family (6.41). Or, he will be born in a family of yōgis; such a birth is very difficult to obtain (6.42). There he will come in touch with the knowledge that he had earlier acquired in

⁵⁷ How much the mind delves into something depends on how much *significance* we have given to it. We cannot have great significance given to something and at the same time hope not to think much about it (or vice versa).

⁵⁸ *Yōgabhraṣṭa* does not mean, as Indian students may come to think, a corrupt Yōgi! Here *bhraṣṭa* refers to *fallen*.

Chapter 6

the previous birth, and consequently strives even more for perfection in yōga (6.43). The momentum of the abhyāsa of his previous life will automatically draw him into it (6.44).

Here we are being reminded that just as there are worldly saṁskāras that pull us towards mundane affairs, we can also develop yogic saṁskāras through regular practice that drag us into yōga no matter how many lifetimes pass. No yōgābhyāsa is ever wasted. Furthermore, a conducive birth is also assured to a yōgi. A financially affluent family means that the yōgi need not spend any time taking care of his survival needs, and can straightaway concentrate on the practice of yōga. Or a family of yōgis (that is not necessarily wealthy) means that his spiritual inclination will receive all the support from the family (which is rare!); or it could also be so that his Guru is within the family itself (like in the Upaniṣat stories where father happens to be the Guru as well), which is a true jackpot for a spiritual seeker.

~ End of First Half ~

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[youtube.com/jijnasu](https://www.youtube.com/jijnasu)

[instagram.com/jijnasuvvasudeva](https://www.instagram.com/jijnasuvvasudeva)

“Krishna can never be understood until you have studied the Gita, for he was the embodiment of his own teaching.”

- Swami Vivekananda

“When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

“Do not go through the Gita. Let the Gita go through you”

- Swami Chinmayananda

“The Bhagavad-Gita is a true scripture of the human race, a living creation rather than a book, with a new message for every age and a new meaning for every civilization.”

- Sri Aurobindo