

ANANTA SATSANG • SACRED TEXTS

एके साधें सब सधे

Ekai Sādhe Sab Sadhai

*Accomplish the One,
and All Is Accomplished*



Swami Ramsukhdas

*Seven Discourses on the One Aim
of Spiritual Practice*

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Seven Discourses on the One Aim of Spiritual Practice

Swami Ramsukhdas

This is a fresh, complete English reading edition translated paragraph by paragraph. The official Hindi PDF controls all text it contains. That PDF omits printed page 45; the missing page has been restored from PDF page 49 of a physical 1994 Gita Press scan preserved by the Internet Archive. The source map records this witness change explicitly. The modern eBook wrapper, the cover, a duplicate of printed page 63, and the empty closing wrapper are not treated as translation paragraphs.

The printed book is a thematic anthology of seven discourses, not a sequential seven-step course. Across changing subjects, its governing thread is the one supreme spiritual aim: belonging to and attaining Bhagavān while all duties and practices are ordered toward that end.

Reader's Orientation

New readers may begin with *The Accessibility of Devotion*; readers concerned with continuity of practice may begin with *Unbroken Spiritual Practice*; and conceptually inclined readers may begin with *The Reality to Be Known in the Gītā*. The author's oral satsang voice uses questions, concrete examples, and deliberate repetition; this edition preserves that movement rather than recasting the talks as a self-help manual.

Terminology Guide

Sādhaka, *sādhana*, and *sādhya* mean seeker, spiritual practice or means, and goal. *Dṛḍha bhāva* is firm inner resolve; *kalyāṇa* is the highest good or spiritual welfare; *bhagavat-prāpti* is attainment of Bhagavān or God-realization; *akhaṇḍa sādhanā* is unbroken spiritual practice; *jñeya-tattva* is the Reality to be known; and *upāsanā* is worship or devotional nearness, literally 'sitting near.' Bhagavān, Paramātmā, Hari, and Prabhu are retained as distinct divine names.

Title Page and Publisher's Note

No. 432

Om. Salutations to the Supreme Self.

You alone are my mother, and You alone my father; You alone are my kinsman, and You alone my friend. You alone are knowledge, and You alone are wealth; You alone are everything to me, O God of gods.

Swami Ramsukhdas

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Śrī Hari.

A Humble Submission

This book is a collection of seven discourses that issued from the speech of the revered Swami Shri Ramsukhdasji Maharaj and were published from time to time in *Kalyāṇa*. These discourses disclose the profound mysteries of spiritual practice in a deeply affecting, simple, and engaging manner. It hardly needs saying that their contents are the fruit of long reflection upon the Bhagavad Gītā and other scriptures, enriched by the experience of Swamiji's life of spiritual practice, purified through austerity. The book has therefore become exceedingly useful both for seekers and for those who wish to advance upon the path of practice. It gives fitting answers to nearly all the questions that naturally arise in a seeker's life.

The following subjects are illuminated in order: (1) the benefit of firm resolve, (2) the accessibility of devotion, (3) the Reality to be

known in the Gītā, (4) the fulfillment of human life only through attaining Bhagavān, (5) unbroken spiritual practice, (6) how the highest good may come to everyone, and (7) the meaning and true nature of the word *upāsanā*. Each subject is supremely useful for a seeker to understand. Without firmness of inner resolve, earnestness will not arise in any practice. The Gītā and other works on spiritual practice set forth four principal paths: Jñāna-yoga, or Sāṅkhya-yoga; Bhakti-yoga; Karma-yoga; and Dhyāna-yoga. Of all these paths, devotion is the easiest. Those who follow the path of knowledge must know the true nature of the Reality they seek to know. The aim of all four paths is solely to attain Bhagavān; otherwise they could not be called “yoga.” This human body has been given to us precisely for the attainment of Bhagavān. Merely to live, after all, is something animals, birds, insects, and moths all do. Until spiritual practice becomes unbroken-so long as its thread keeps snapping from time to time-the hope of success in it will remain no more than an idle hope. Although every practice is useful according to differences in spiritual fitness, it is still natural for the seeker to ask what means is beneficial for everyone. Those who follow the way of *upāsanā* especially need to understand the meaning and true nature of that word. Thus this small book has become highly beneficial for seekers. It is hoped that those who desire the highest good will derive proper benefit from it and fulfill their lives.

Submitted by Hanuman Prasad Poddar

Śrī Hari.

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The Benefit of Firm Resolve

Śrī Hari.

The Mystery of Spiritual Practice

There is a saying: “Why ask the road to a village you do not intend to visit?” If the firm conviction arises, “There is a certain thing I simply will not do in my lifetime,” how could that act occur at all? If one is not to watch films, one simply will not watch them. If one is not to indulge in addictions such as bidis and cigarettes, one simply will not. If one is to stop drinking tea from today, one simply stops. The matter is finished. If one is not to lie anymore, why would one lie? A falsehood could no longer come out. In this way, if a firm resolve is formed to adopt every virtue and right conduct and to abandon every vice and misconduct, that resolve can take shape very quickly and then pass effortlessly into conduct.

One very useful means to this end is to make ourselves firm in resolve. In every matter, once we have considered what should be done, we should do just that. Our thinking thereby matures and our intention becomes firm. Likewise, once we give our word, we should strive to act accordingly. If we have spoken with the utmost firmness, we should strive to keep that word even at the cost of life. Death may come, but now we shall act only in this way. If we cultivate such firmness of resolve in small matters, our character is reformed. Once character is reformed, even the greatest principles upon which we decide take firm root. This practice of forming and sustaining an inner conviction is very easy and exceedingly excellent.

When people enlist in the army, they enter their names and understand, “Now I have become a soldier.” Once that conviction arises, the question naturally occurs to them: what should a soldier do? They are then trained, and the training takes root in them. In the same way, a dispassionate person becomes a renunciant in order to undertake spiritual practice. The thought comes, “I have become a *sādhū*,” and the question “What should a *sādhū* do?” arises of itself. When he is then told how a *sādhū* should conduct himself, speak, rise, and behave, he grasps the discipline of the *sādhū*, because he understands, “I am a *sādhū*; I must now live accordingly.”

Likewise, let a person regard himself as a seeker: “I am a seeker who worships, meditates, and practices.” Whenever discourses or books say, “A seeker should act in this way; a seeker should not be restless; he should not waste time; he should worship and meditate upon Bhagavān at all times; he should renounce bad company; he should keep holy company and study sacred texts,” he will naturally make a special effort to embody all the duties prescribed for a seeker, because he regards himself as one. What a seeker needs will therefore enter him and become firmly established. But a person who does not regard himself as a seeker may hear these teachings in *satsaṅga* or a lecture, or read them in books, yet they will not take special root in his heart, nor will he form an intimate relation with them.

Many brothers and sisters engage in spiritual practice and maintain a daily discipline of japa, recitation, and the like, yet they regard that discipline as work to be done for an hour or an hour and a half. During the remaining time they think, “I am a householder; I have these particular tasks; I belong to this household, caste, and social and religious station. I must worship Bhagavān for an hour or so,

recite the Gītā, and perform kīrtana. If *satsaṅga* is available daily, I shall attend daily; if it is available for twelve months, I shall attend for twelve months. I have completed the *satsaṅga*-another round is over.” This is their attitude. For that reason no special transformation occurs: they do not approach the *satsaṅga* as something to be received and assimilated.

There is a great difference between looking at something with the intention of receiving it and looking merely to satisfy curiosity. We listen as though satisfying curiosity or entertaining the mind, and therefore the teaching does not take root. We should regard *satsaṅga*-indeed, spiritual practice itself-as something to be received, and hold the conviction that we are to worship and meditate upon Bhagavān continually. Whatever work we perform is also Bhagavān’s alone and is to be done solely for Him. If every action is performed in relation to Bhagavān from this standpoint, immense benefit can result.

The Accessibility of Devotion

Reflection makes it clear that present-day life has become extremely expensive and pleasure-laden because people have abandoned their own education, civilization, and culture. The prices of necessities have greatly increased, while earnings from business, employment, and other occupations remain small. For these reasons it is becoming very difficult to find time for the pursuit of the supreme good. At the same time, because life has taken a merely material aim, it has become sorrowful and surrounded by many anxieties.

To bring coolness and peace to beings scorched by the threefold suffering, compassionate sages and saints have taught many disciplines—Jñāna-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Karma-yoga, Haṭha-yoga, Aṣṭāṅga-yoga, Laya-yoga, Mantra-yoga, Rāja-yoga, and others. In truth, each of these, when practiced according to one's fitness, brings attainment of the Supreme Self and supreme peace. Yet for people of the present age—stained by the impurity of Kali, their minds like fish immersed in the waters of sense-objects, and possessed of little life, strength, and understanding—the one exceedingly accessible and important means to supreme peace and bliss is devotion. Its true nature is loving remembrance of Bhagavān. Describing devotion to His mother in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata, Bhagavān Kapiladeva says:

“Merely upon hearing My qualities, the mind flows uninterruptedly toward Me, who dwell in every heart, just as the waters of the Gaṅgā flow to the sea. Such causeless and unobstructed devotion to the Supreme Person is declared to be the mark of devotion beyond the guṇas. Even when offered residence in My realm, sovereign power equal to Mine, nearness to Me, a

form like Mine, or even union with Me, such people do not accept them without service to Me. That alone is called the ultimate Bhakti-yoga: by it a person crosses beyond the three guṇas and becomes fit for My own divine state.”

In other words, as the current of the Gaṅgā flows unbroken toward the ocean, so, merely upon hearing Bhagavān’s qualities, the movement of the mind comes to flow without interruption, like a stream of oil, toward Him who indwells every heart; and selfless, exclusive love arises for the Supreme Person. This is said to be the mark of devotion beyond the guṇas. Even if offered them, such selfless devotees will not abandon His worship to accept residence in His realm, sovereign power equal to His, nearness to Him, likeness of form, or even the liberation of union. Bhakti-yoga, which rejects even liberation for the sake of serving Bhagavān, is itself called the supreme human end and the goal. Through it a person crosses the three guṇas and attains Bhagavān’s own state-His supramundane nature of divine love.

Śrī Madhusūdana Ācārya likewise writes in the *Bhakti-rasāyana*:

“Devotion is said to be the mind’s movement toward the Lord of all, melted by the observance of the ways of Bhagavān and made continuous like an unbroken stream.”

That is, devotion is the uninterrupted movement-like a stream of oil-toward Bhagavān, the Lord of all, of a heart melted through the observance of the disciplines belonging to Him.

These definitions establish that devotion to Bhagavān is precisely remembrance of Him filled with exclusive, undivided love.

The Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā is the nectar of Bhagavān's own words, a supremely confidential and mysterious scripture. Of the seven questions Arjuna asks at the beginning of its eighth chapter, the last is: "O Bhagavān, how are You known at the final moment? In other words, how can beings attain You at the time of death?" Answering, the fifth verse says that whoever leaves the body at life's end remembering Him alone undoubtedly attains Him. Therefore, Arjuna is told to remember Him at all times while also performing battle-his obligatory duty. With mind and intellect thus placed in Him, Arjuna will undoubtedly attain Him (Bhagavad Gītā 8.7).

Regarding attainment of the Supreme Self in His qualified yet formless aspect, Bhagavān says:

"With a mind disciplined through the yoga of repeated practice, wandering nowhere else, one who continually contemplates the divine Supreme Person attains Him, O Pārtha." (Bhagavad Gītā 8.8)

That is, O son of Pṛthā, it is the rule that a being who continually contemplates with a mind disciplined by the repeated practice of meditation upon the Lord and that goes nowhere else attains the divine Person of supreme radiance-the Lord Himself. Bhagavān says in the following verse:

"One should remember the all-knowing, primeval ruler, subtler than the subtle, the sustainer of all, of inconceivable form, radiant like the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance." (Bhagavad Gītā 8.9)

That is, the person who remembers the Supreme Self as omniscient, beginningless, ruler of all, subtler than the subtlest, sustainer and nourisher of all, inconceivable in form, eternally conscious and

radiant like the sun, and the pure compact mass of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss far beyond ignorance, attains the Supreme Person alone.

In the eleventh verse of this chapter, Bhagavān praises that Supreme Brahman and promises to describe it in connection with attaining the unqualified, formless Supreme Self. In the twelfth verse He teaches the method of attaining it, and in the next He says:

“Whoever departs, leaving the body while uttering Om, the one-syllabled Brahman, and remembering Me, attains the supreme destination.” (Bhagavad Gītā 8.13)

That is, the person who leaves the body while uttering “Om,” Brahman in the form of the single syllable, and contemplating Me as its meaning, attains the supreme destination.

Bhagavān has thus taught means of attaining the Supreme Self in both His qualified and unqualified aspects. Yet because both disciplines require repeated yogic practice, they contain difficulty. Bhagavān therefore now reveals how easily He Himself may be attained, saying to His beloved friend Arjuna, the son of Kuntī:

“The person of undivided mind who remembers Me constantly and day after day—for that yogī, ever united with Me, I am easy to attain, O Pārtha.” (Bhagavad Gītā 8.14)

“O Arjuna, son of Prthā, I am accessible to the person who remembers Me, the Supreme Lord, perpetually and continually with an undivided mind. Such a yogī, continually absorbed in Me, can attain Me with ease.”

You will notice that throughout the Gītā the word “accessible” (*sulabha*) occurs only here, in this verse. The sole cause of this

accessibility is constant and continuous remembrance of Bhagavān with undivided love. You may ask: if the Lord is so accessible merely through remembrance, how can He be remembered without knowledge of His true nature? The answer is that, in accordance with whatever you have so far read, heard, and understood from scripture about Bhagavān's nature, you should hold unwavering faith in that nature, take refuge in Him, and earnestly apply yourself to repeating His supremely purifying and majestic Name and contemplating His auspicious divine form. Hold the firm assurance that whatever deficiency remains in your understanding of His nature will certainly be completed by that compassionate Lord, your supreme well-wisher, through His gift of right knowledge. Bhagavān Himself says in the Gītā:

“Solely out of compassion for them, I, dwelling in their innermost being, destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the radiant lamp of knowledge of Reality.” (Bhagavad Gītā 10.11)

When Bhagavān is worshiped lovingly in this way, the Supreme Lord Himself assumes responsibility for our *yoga-kṣema*: the gaining of what has not yet been obtained and the safeguarding of what has been obtained.

True *bhajana* is that in which Bhagavān is served, and the finest service is rendered lovingly through the mind. Such loving service of the Lord through the mind becomes possible in its proper form only when we have an intimate sense of belonging with Him; and that belonging with the Lord can arise only when we cease to base our relationship and belonging upon the other things of the world.

If we reflect carefully, we shall see that no one here except the Lord is truly our own. Every material thing other than Him that comes

within our seeing, hearing, or understanding is continually leaving us—that is, continually passing away.

Saint Kabīr therefore says:

“Day by day it leaves you—why cherish love for it? Kabīr says: this foul body, woven of the guṇas, has deceived many.”

Hence the important and accessible means of attaining the Lord is to regard no one else as one’s own and to remember Him alone with love and undivided devotion.

To attain this undivided orientation, it is essential to understand that the individual self stands between the Supreme Self and nature. So long as it remains turned toward the products of nature—intellect, mind, senses, vital breath, body, and the related possessions and people—it cannot relinquish every other support and take refuge in the Supreme Self alone. The firm conviction, “No one is mine; and although I belong to the entire world for the purpose of serving it, in truth I belong to none but the one Supreme Self,” is supremely powerful in making a person single-minded.

The Gītā therefore uses such important phrases as “with a mind that goes nowhere else” (8.8), “by exclusive yoga alone” (12.6), “who serves Me with undeviating devotion” (14.26), “those who think of Me alone” (9.22), “their minds fixed on Me” (10.9), “become one whose mind is in Me” (9.34; 18.65), “keep your mind continually in Me” (18.57), “with your mind in Me, you shall cross every difficulty” (18.58), “place your mind in Me alone” (12.8), and “with mind and intellect offered to Me” (8.7). Declaring attainment of the Supreme Self as the fruit, these and many other statements greatly glorify contemplation and worship of Bhagavān with undivided devotion. Thus one whose understanding assigns ultimate importance to

none but Śrī Bhagavān is single-minded-one who remembers Him with undivided love. As for the word *satatam*, “constantly,” continuous contemplation becomes possible only through knowing our eternal, unbroken relationship with the Lord.

Attend here to the following saying of Śrī Kabīrdāśji:

“Wherever I walk, I make the sacred circuit; whatever I do is worship. Whenever I sleep, I bow full length; I know no other Deity.”

For such a yogī, ever united with Him, Bhagavān is accessible of Himself. We have created the difficulty by forming relationships with temporary things apart from Him that cannot remain forever. Once that obstruction is removed, our eternal, continuous, unbroken relation with Bhagavān is already self-established. We should therefore form no ultimate bond with another, but continually unite ourselves with that one Lord who is our supreme well-wisher, the highest friend of every being, and causelessly compassionate; our sense of “mine” should rest in Him alone. Then compassionate Śrī Hari will Himself accept us as His own, just as He accepted His supremely beloved friend Arjuna and said:

“Abandoning all dharmas, take refuge in Me alone. I shall free you from every sin; do not grieve.” (Bhagavad Gītā 18.66)

That is: “O Arjuna, relinquishing in Me all dharmas—all obligatory actions—come for refuge to Me alone, the omnipotent Supreme Lord and support of all. I shall release you from every sin; do not grieve.”

It is a rule that whatever we ourselves create, however it may be, naturally seems dear to us. In the same way, because this entire

universe was created by the Lord and belongs to Him, it is naturally dear to Him:

“This whole universe is My creation; My compassion rests equally upon all.”

What then need be said of one who turns away from every other direction and becomes the Lord’s alone? Such a person is supremely dear to Him:

“Among them, whoever relinquishes pride and māyā and worships Me with mind, speech, and body-whether man, one of neither sex, woman, or any moving or unmoving being-whenever abandons deceit and worships Me with their whole being is supremely dear to Me.”

Sutīkṣṇaji similarly says in the *Mānasa*:

“This is one pledge of the Treasure-house of Compassion: dear to Him is the one who has no other refuge.”

There can therefore be no doubt that Bhagavān becomes accessible to one whom He Himself regards as dear. Śrī Bhagavān says to Arjuna with His own lips:

“But those who dedicate all actions to Me, regard Me as supreme, and worship Me while meditating upon Me through exclusive yoga-for those whose minds have entered Me, O Pārtha, I soon become the deliverer from the ocean of mortal worldly existence.”
(*Bhagavad Gītā* 12.6-7)

That is: “Those devoted to Me alone who offer every action to Me and worship Me, the Supreme Lord in qualified form, through undivided Bhakti-yoga and continuous contemplation-for those

loving devotees whose minds are fixed in Me, O Pārtha, I swiftly become the deliverer from the ocean of worldly existence in the form of death.”

The Reality to Be Known in the Gītā

According to the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, “that which is to be known” means the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Self. Reflection suggests that the term refers to what can be known, what is worthy of being known, or what must be known. Of these three, the first thing capable of being known is the world, for this perishable world is known through the senses or the inner faculty. Even the instruments through which we know the world actually belong within this knowable world. Knowledge of the world is useful, but it is knowledge for the sake of relinquishing it. Thus, although the world can be known, it is to be relinquished. In truth, the Supreme Self alone is the Reality that must be known. The Gītā states this clearly:

“Through all the Vedas, I alone am to be known.” (15.15)

“I am that which is to be known, the purifier.” (9.17)

In the thirteenth chapter, Śrī Bhagavān calls the twenty means to knowledge “knowledge” and explicitly identifies the Supreme Self as the Reality known through those means:

“I shall declare that which is to be known, knowing which one tastes immortality: beginningless, supreme Brahman, which is said to be neither existent nor nonexistent.” (Bhagavad Gītā 13.12, as numbered in the printed source)

In the first quarter of this verse, Bhagavān promises to describe the Reality to be known; in the second, He declares immortality to be the fruit of knowing it; in the third, He names it together with its defining mark; and in the fourth, He declares its transcendent character—that it can be called neither existent nor nonexistent. The

verse thus describes the Supreme Self in His unqualified, formless aspect. The next verse describes Him in His qualified yet formless aspect:

“With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads, and faces everywhere, with ears everywhere in the world, That remains enveloping all.” (Bhagavad Gītā 13.13, printed-source numbering)

That is, His hands and feet are everywhere; His eyes, heads, and faces are everywhere; His ears are everywhere; and He remains encompassing all. Just as every ornament is present throughout a lump of gold, every picture potentially exists in pigment, and every script in ink, so, although electricity is one, the different devices through which it operates give its actions different forms. The same electricity freezes ice, heats a stove, raises and lowers a lift, drives trams and trains, transmits sound and records it, turns a fan, and gives light. Thus we see it perform many strange and mutually contrary functions. In the same way, the many strange and apparently contrary operations of the world-creation, continuance, dissolution, and others-proceed from the one Supreme Self; yet the Supreme Lord remains one. Because people do not understand this truth, they ask why, if the Supreme Self is one, some in the world are happy and others unhappy. They do not know that the Brahman which is unqualified, formless, and beyond mind, speech, and intellect is itself the qualified, formless Supreme Lord who creates, sustains, and dissolves the universe. Establishing the unity of these two, the Gītā says:

“Appearing through the functions of every sense, yet devoid of every sense; unattached, yet sustaining all; beyond the guṇas, yet the experiencer of the guṇas.” (Bhagavad Gītā 13.14, printed-source numbering)

Though devoid of every sense, He performs the functions of all the senses; though unattached, He sustains and nourishes all; and though altogether beyond the guṇas, He is their experiencer. And:

“Outside and within all beings, the moving and the unmoving; because of Its subtlety, That is incomprehensible; It is far away and also near.” (Bhagavad Gītā 13.15, printed-source numbering)

He is outside and inside every being, and He alone is every moving and unmoving creature. Because He is supremely subtle, He cannot be made an object of knowledge: He is “smaller than the smallest.” The cognition by which inert objects are known is subtler than those objects, while the knower is subtler still than cognition. How, then, could the knower become an object known? The revealed scripture likewise asks, “By what, dear one, could the Knower be known?” Through His conscious power alone, intellect, mind, and senses become capable of knowing their respective objects.

That Reality to be known is the farthest of the far and the nearest of the near. Considered spatially, the body is nearer than the earth, the vital breath nearer than the body, the senses nearer than the vital breath, the mind nearer than the senses, the intellect nearer than the mind, and the individual self nearer than the intellect; nearer still is the all-pervading Supreme Self who impels and illumines even that self. Considered outwardly, the earth is farther than the body, water farther than earth, fire farther than water, air farther than fire, space farther than air, the cosmic mind farther than space, the great principle farther than mind, the Supreme Self’s nature farther than the great principle, and the Supreme Self Himself farther beyond even nature. Spatially, therefore, He is the farthest of the far.

Likewise in time, the Supreme Self is both farthest and nearest. He alone is truly present now, for every inert thing is perishing at every moment and therefore possesses no enduring being of its own. Even if one grants it a kind of existence, nearer still is He who is true Being itself. Looking backward through days, fortnights, months, seasons, half-years, years, ages, cycles of four ages, cosmic days, half-lifetimes of Brahmā, Brahmā's full life, and before them all, "Being alone was this in the beginning, dear one-one without a second." The Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Self, existed as Being free from distinctions within its own kind, from other kinds, or within itself. Likewise into the future-beyond moments, instants, measures of time, watches, days, fortnights, months, seasons, half-years, years, ages, four-age cycles, cosmic days, Brahmā's half-life and full life-the Supreme Self alone will remain: "What remains is called the remainder." Thus at the farthest reach too, that Reality alone is present.

The awareness within which space, time, and objects appear is knowledge whose very nature is consciousness. All space, time, and objects appearing within it fail to remain stable even for an instant and appear only as ceaseless change. In change there is no stable thing, only activity; and even that activity merely appears. In truth, activity too fails to endure there, and knowledge alone remains. That knowledge is pure consciousness, present exactly as it is. It alone must be known:

*"Having known which, nothing further remains here to be known."
(Bhagavad Gītā 7.2)*

Upon knowing it, what had to be known is known and what had to be attained is attained; complete fulfillment results. Nothing

remains to be known, obtained, or done. That Reality to be known is:

“Undivided within beings, yet appearing as though divided; know That as the sustainer of beings, their devourer and their source.” (Bhagavad Gītā 13.16, printed-source numbering)

It is undivided within beings divided into countless forms: the one Reality, free of all division, appears as though divided. The same Reality gives being and conscious vitality to many individuals. Because it brings forth the universe it is called Brahmā; because it sustains the universe it is called Viṣṇu; and because it dissolves the universe it abides in the form of Mahādeva.

“That is the Light even of lights.” The Supreme Self is the very light of every light. The sun, for example, illumines material objects such as pots and cloth and reveals both their presence and their absence. The eye, remaining unchanged, reveals whether sunlight is present or absent. The mind, remaining one and the same, reveals both the act of the eye’s seeing and whether the eye functions properly or improperly. The intellect, itself remaining unchanged, reveals the mind’s many pure and impure modifications. The Self reveals whether even the intellect is functioning properly or improperly. In the same way, the Supreme Self, pure consciousness, illumines the total creation, its countless activities, and its inactive states.

He is therefore the Light even of lights and wholly distinct from the darkness of ignorance. His nature is knowledge alone; He alone is to be known; and He may be attained through the twenty means beginning with humility and freedom from pretence, taught in Bhagavad Gītā 13.7-11. He dwells always and forever in every heart. Bhagavān has said clearly:

“I am seated in the heart of all.” (Bhagavad Gītā 15.15)

And:

“The Lord dwells in the heart-region of every being, O Arjuna.”
(Bhagavad Gītā 18.61)

That alone is the all-pervading Supreme Self, the ground of all and the form of all; That alone is entirely worthy of being known. Where the world and the nature that develops into the forms of the world are altogether absent, the same Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Self, is called “unqualified and formless.” When that Supreme Self is seen together with nature as the cause of creation, He is understood as qualified yet formless. When we see Him as creator, sustainer, and dissolver of the entire universe, that same Reality is known in the forms of the three deities-Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Mahādeva.

When dharma declines and adharma increases, that same Supreme Self descends in the many forms of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and others in order to protect the righteous, destroy the wicked, and re-establish dharma. According to the teachings of the saints, the same Supreme Self appears as light in seekers’ experience. The saints describe Him as the divine Husband and the Lord of the deathless realm, and also teach that He sends swan-like saints from that realm into the world to spread devotion and deliver the world. He is called Lord of divine Vaikuṇṭha, Lord of divine Goloka, Lord of divine Sāketa, Lord of divine Kailāsa, Lord of the divine abode, Lord of Satyaloka, and by many other names. His attainment is described in the Gītā and other scriptures by many expressions: attainment of the Supreme Self, liberation, the supreme station, the supreme abode, the primal station, supreme peace, the state free from affliction, nirvāṇa-the attainment of supreme peace-and others. That supreme Reality

beyond all else is the Reality to be known in the Śrī Gītā. Describing the nature of its attainment, Bhagavān says:

“Having gained which one considers no further gain to be greater, and established in which one is not shaken even by the heaviest sorrow.” (Bhagavad Gītā 6.22)

After attaining that state, one is never shaken. A person is ordinarily disturbed for two reasons: first, when hoping to obtain something greater than what has already been obtained; and second, when suffering arises in the condition in which one abides. Removing both causes, Bhagavān says that no gain exceeds attainment of the Reality to be known. In the realized person’s vision no greater gain appears, because no Reality greater than it exists; and in a great knower of Reality there remains no sense of being the enjoyer of happiness. When separate individuality is absent, who could be disturbed even if the greatest suffering arose, and how? Such a great one remains forever established without modification and goes beyond the guṇas. Bhagavān says:

“O Pāṇḍava, one who neither hates illumination, activity, or delusion when they arise nor longs for them when they cease; who sits as though indifferent and is not shaken by the guṇas, remaining firm in the knowledge, ‘The guṇas alone operate’; who is alike in pleasure and pain, established in the Self, regarding clay, stone, and gold alike; steadfast, equal toward pleasant and unpleasant, equal in blame and praise of oneself; equal in honor and dishonor, equal toward the sides of friend and enemy, and free from egoistic undertaking of every action—that person is said to have gone beyond the guṇas.” (Bhagavad Gītā 14.22-25)

That is, O Arjuna, such a person neither resents the illumination produced by sattva, the activity produced by rajas, or the delusion produced by tamas when they arise, nor desires them after they subside. Seated like an impartial witness, he cannot be shaken by the guṇas. Knowing that “the guṇas alone operate among the guṇas,” he remains united with the Supreme Self, the compact mass of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, and does not move from that state. Continually established in the Self, he regards pleasure and pain alike and holds clay, stone, and gold in equal regard. He is steadfast, sees pleasant and unpleasant alike, and remains equal toward his own blame and praise. He regards honor and dishonor alike and is impartial toward friend and enemy. Free from the pride of personal agency in every undertaking, such a person is called one who has gone beyond the guṇas.

This is the fruit of realizing the Reality to be known in the Gītā.



Human Life Is Fulfilled Only through Attaining Bhagavān

Human Life Is Fulfilled Only by Attaining God

The human body has been given solely for the attainment of the Supreme Self. That attainment is called liberation while living, knowledge of Reality, liberation, attainment of divine love, attainment of perfection, fulfillment, and by other such names. On the gross physical level there is no difference between human and nonhuman creatures: every body is composed of the five elements. The embodied living beings within them are all conscious parts of the one Supreme Lord—“An eternal portion of Me alone has become the living being in the world” (*mamaivāṁśo jīvaloke*, Bhagavad Gītā 15.7).

There are two kinds of birth: a birth for undergoing the fruits of past action and a birth in which action may be performed. Human birth belongs to the latter and is therefore a field of spiritual practice. Gosvāmījī calls it “the ladder to heaven, hell, and liberation.” Its greatness lies in this: according to actions performed in a human birth, one may attain liberation or birth among the gods, immobile beings, animals, birds, insects, and so forth. The enjoyments undergone in each condition are likewise ordained by actions done in human life. A human being has full freedom to act. In other births the living being undergoes the pleasure and pain produced by earlier good and evil deeds and keeps revolving through the cycle of worldly existence:

“Through 8.4 million forms this imperishable living being wanders from birth to birth.”

Since beings in other forms lack freedom to perform new action, the roads to liberation are obstructed there. Out of causeless love for every living being, the Lord of all sometimes bestows a human birth, giving the being an opportunity to strive for final release from the succession of sorrow:

“Sometimes, moved by compassion, the causelessly loving Lord gives a human body.”

Some people say that a human being should set a goal for life, because once a goal is set, effort and action will follow accordingly. That statement is sound, yet reflection shows that God has already determined the goal of human life. God first fixes the goal for the living being and then grants that being a human body so that the goal may be accomplished. A person therefore has no need to invent a new goal; what is needed is to recognize the goal already appointed.

God has given human birth for this very purpose. Thinking, “Let this living being work for its highest good,” He sends it into human birth and provides in that birth every means of liberation and deliverance—means that are exceedingly accessible, simple, and altogether important. Gosvāmījī therefore calls the human state “the abode of spiritual practice,” “the gateway to liberation,” and “the boat for crossing the ocean of becoming”:

“An abode of practice and the gateway to liberation...”

“The human body is a boat for crossing the ocean of becoming; My grace is the favorable wind.”

A question now arises: when a person is born with a definite goal, why does he fail to hold to it and wander in other directions? When

he enters life bearing the sacred aim of attaining the Supreme Self, why does he not devote himself to the means that attain it? Why does he begin to act against that goal? There is only one answer: he forgets his goal-his preordained aim-and loses remembrance of it.

Arjuna's example makes this intelligible. Śrī Kṛṣṇa asked him, "Arjuna, have you listened to the teaching of the Gītā with a concentrated mind? Has your delusion born of ignorance been destroyed?" Looking joyfully toward the Lord with eyes wide open, Arjuna replied, "Lord, my delusion has been destroyed. I have regained memory. All this has happened through Your grace. I have returned to my former state." Here "memory" means neither a new experience nor newly acquired knowledge. There had once been an experience and knowledge, but the covering of delusion concealed it and it was forgotten. Through the Lord's instruction in knowledge, that covering was destroyed and the earlier awareness shone forth again-the forgotten truth was remembered.

The Vaiśeṣikas similarly define memory:

"Memory is cognition produced solely by a latent impression."

Likewise, Mahārṣi Patañjali, the author of the Yoga system, identifies memory with a previously experienced object:

*"Memory is the non-loss of an experienced object."*¹

¹ That is, memory is the experienced object's not remaining concealed-its becoming manifest again.

Arjuna's words "I have regained memory" (*smṛtir labdhā*, Bhagavad Gītā 18.73) support the same meaning. They show that he had indeed forgotten the goal. The principal cause of that forgetfulness was delusion, which is why the Lord asked, "Has your

delusion born of ignorance been destroyed, O Dhanañjaya?” (18.72). The word *moha* confirms the point still more clearly. Grammatically it comes from the verbal root *muh vaicittye*. The word *vaicittya* denotes loss or absence of consciousness. Arjuna was therefore conscious first and afterwards became possessed by delusion. Freedom from delusion means the recovery of prior awareness.

Until his intellect had crossed beyond the mire of delusion, he was not ready to obey the Lord’s command. In Bhagavad Gītā 2.52 the Lord points to this very thing: “When your intellect crosses beyond the mire of delusion.” Only when delusion has been wholly removed is right awareness recovered. Then Arjuna openly says:

“I stand firm, my doubt gone; I shall carry out Your word.”
(Bhagavad Gītā 18.73)

The foregoing discussion shows that life’s goal, purpose, or aim has already been established; we do not have to create it. We need only recognize it. Once it is recognized, the means of attaining it become easy. The difficulty lasts only until recognition.

Such is the power of delusion that it can seize even a person who, after attaining human life, remains alert and strives for liberation, catching him in a moment of carelessness. The Mahābhārata gives Arjuna as an example. He had fully participated in every preparation for war. On the sacred field of Kurukṣetra, the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava armies stood in formation and announced battle with the tremendous sound of conches. Arjuna too loudly sounded Devadatta. The clash of weapons was about to begin. Fully alert and behaving like a duty-bound warrior, he commanded the Lord, “Place my chariot between the two armies, O Acyuta” (*senayor*

ubhayor madhye ratham sthāpaya me 'cyuta, Bhagavad Gītā 1.21), so that he might see whom he must fight.

Hearing those spirited, heroic words, the Lord at once placed the chariot between the armies and directed Arjuna to look upon the Kuru lineage. The moment Arjuna saw his own relatives, loved ones, teachers, and kinsmen arrayed for battle on both sides, grief overwhelmed him. The result of war seemed still more terrible and grievous than war itself. Instead of any happiness from the destruction of his clan, he saw an unfolding succession of total ruin. His own life lost all value, and death seemed preferable to the slaughter of his family. He saw wrong in duty, harm in the good, and disaster in what was meaningful. Through possessiveness and familial attachment he came to regard withdrawal from the battle as the highest duty.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa denounced this terrible delusion, calling it defilement and impurity and exposing its consequences with such words as “unworthy of the noble,” “not leading to heaven,” and “bringing infamy.” Yet delusion had colored Arjuna so deeply that he continued to regard his own feelings as best and merely repeated what he had already said. He argued forcefully: “How can revered Grandfather Bhīṣma and Ācārya Droṇa be struck with arrows? After the heinous crime of killing our teachers, we would obtain only enjoyments of wealth and desire stained with their blood—not dharma or liberation. In my judgment, therefore, this war has no justification.” Delusion so mastered Arjuna that he turned away from duty. The infinite Lord dispelled it through the Gītā’s great teaching. The Gītā is thus an unfailing medicine for the delusion of every deluded human being.

Until a human being advances toward fulfillment of the goal fixed for him, he does not rise above the ordinary forms of embodied life. Human life should therefore be regarded as fulfilled only in striving to recover the forgotten awareness that brings one's deliverance and highest good. Instead of practicing for the purpose for which this rare body was given, a person assigns primacy to body, senses, and life-breath, becomes attached to wealth and materials of enjoyment, and forgets the purpose. This is commonly the condition of humanity.

Close attention shows that the same energy now spent in the contrary direction could, if directed with discernment, open the path to liberation. Yet people remain absorbed in forming countless plans to obtain heaven, wealth, pleasure, or fame, believing that this alone gives life value. They thereby devise for themselves the very scheme that casts them once more into the cycle of birth and death. The Lord says in the Gītā:

“One should raise oneself by oneself and never degrade oneself, for oneself alone is one's friend and oneself alone is one's enemy.”
(Bhagavad Gītā 6.5)

Instead of striving for the Self's deliverance, modern humanity acts as its own enemy. A person who possesses worldly honor seeks still more; the wealthy search for greater wealth; an author longs for undying fame after death; the builder of great structures dreams of making worldly renown permanent; and a religious preacher works to construct an atmosphere of personal celebrity. Thus human effort runs not toward the goal but in the opposite direction. The more intensely distinction is sought there, the farther one moves from humanity's true end, for all such pursuits reinforce individuality. A person should efface that individuality and

establish his true nature in its place. Every effort should be directed toward realization of one's conscious nature.

Suppose someone goes on pilgrimage to bathe at a sacred place. He lodges in a rest house away from the fair but becomes so occupied with improving the lodging, arranging an excellent kitchen, and gathering articles of comfort that he never bathes at the sacred ford, beholds the deity or the holy place, attends the festival, or meets saints. We would call such a person ridiculous. In the same way, a human being has come to attain God but becomes absorbed in accumulating and enjoying things:

“They came to worship Hari, but busied themselves carding cotton.”

Our goal is not the acquisition of enjoyments, yet all effort is directed toward them. Attaining God is the principal goal of human life, but no effort is made for it. Body, senses, life-breath, mind, intellect, wealth, prosperity, and objects of enjoyment are merely means. They have been made the goal, while the true goal has been entirely neglected.

For the living being's welfare, God has established four human aims: dharma, wealth, desire, and liberation. Their fields of expression are the four social orders and four stages of life, and they are pursued through action. The four aims are four forms of desire, while their attainment may be said to depend on two means. Destiny predominates in obtaining wealth and objects of desire; effort predominates in attaining dharma and liberation.

If wealth is made subservient to desire and directed merely to fulfilling desire, wealth is destroyed. If dharma is joined to desire, dharma is destroyed. Conversely, wealth devoted to dharma

becomes dharma; dharma devoted merely to wealth takes on the character of wealth. Dharma and wealth can thus supplement and produce one another. But when an attempt is made to join them with anger, both are destroyed. Dharma practiced without craving, and wealth acquired without craving, both aid liberation. Even the regulated enjoyment of sense objects, when free of selfish desire, can clear the road to liberation. A person should therefore relinquish attachment, pursue wealth and desire under dharma and without selfish motive, use wealth well, and partake of permissible enjoyments without attachment. This alone is progress toward true humanity.

Similarly, members of all four social orders can attain true liberation or perfection by following the duties prescribed for them in the Gītā. One intent on the Self's highest good proceeds along the appointed path of duty, unaffected by the storms of the sensory world, and rests only after attaining perfection. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says:

"A person devoted to his own work attains perfection." (Bhagavad Gītā 18.45)

The author's printed explanation adds: "A person who remains engaged in his own work without attachment attains perfection."

In the same way, all four stages of life fully assist the fulfillment of the human goal. Two are principal: the householder's and the renunciant's. The student stage prepares one for household life, and the forest-dweller stage prepares one for renunciation. If, while acquiring education and practicing dharma as a student, dispassion toward wealth and desire arises, one may take the vow of lifelong celibacy and accomplish one's highest good within that stage alone. If reflection and discernment do not remove the desire for wealth

and enjoyment there, household life is provided for the student who will later marry. Living as a householder, one should pursue wealth and desire under dharma so as to understand the true nature of enjoyments. This too is movement toward the goal, making possible the teaching:

“From dharma comes dispassion, and from yoga knowledge; the Veda proclaims that knowledge bestows liberation.”

Practicing household life according to dharma must produce dispassion. Household life means limited enjoyment. Limited enjoyments, as representative samples of limitless possible enjoyments, are provided so that the householder may keep the goal in view, experience them under scriptural rule, understand their nature, turn away from them, and apply himself earnestly to attaining the Supreme Self. By using the goods he receives to serve God present as the people, without selfish motive, he may attain the Supreme Self through service as well.

While serving God in the form of the people, one should regard both the materials of service-wealth and other resources-and the instruments of service-body, senses, and so forth-as belonging to the very ones being served. When the conviction becomes firm, “I am employing these materials, which belong to them, in their own service,” one’s possessive relation to them is severed. In accordance with the prayer, “O Govinda, I offer to You alone what is Yours,” they are offered to the one served. One then understands that every object and store of enjoyment in one’s possession exists solely to fulfill the purpose of service, and possessiveness toward them disappears entirely. The inert element in the living being merges back into the inert world, and when identification with it has been

severed, one becomes spontaneously established in one's conscious nature.

To make this principle easier to understand, one should know that the senses are used in three ways: (1) to understand the nature of enjoyments, (2) to serve others through them, and (3) to maintain the body for the sake of attaining the Supreme Self. Each will now be considered separately.

Understanding the nature of enjoyments. The point is that enjoyments contain only limited pleasure. To experience how much pleasure they contain, we must also experience the pain of their absence, for the greater the pain of lacking an enjoyment, the more pleasure its presence seems to give. Thus deprivation is required as well; without lack there can be no such pleasure. Moreover, while an enjoyment is consumed, the capacity to enjoy declines while the desire to enjoy keeps increasing. Objects of enjoyment are impermanent and perish from moment to moment. Once they are gone, memories formed by enjoying them become a source of pain. Their true nature becomes known through this very experience.

The principle of serving others. Until a person knows what is favorable and unfavorable, he cannot relinquish harmful things and actions and serve others through beneficial ones. While serving, he should regard the articles of service as belonging to those whom he serves. He will thereby become free from possessiveness and attachment toward them. So long as possessiveness and attachment remain, the conflict of attraction and aversion persists.

Maintaining the body means engaging with sense objects without attraction or aversion. The Lord says in the Gītā:

“But one who moves among sense objects with the senses under control and free from attraction and aversion, with the self disciplined, attains serenity.” (Bhagavad Gītā 2.64)

The author’s printed explanation reads: “The self-controlled person who engages with sense objects through senses brought under control and freed from attraction and aversion attains *prasāda*, the serenity of the inner faculty.”

Thinking about objects with attraction and aversion causes a person’s fall, because contemplation plants in the heart the seed of attachment, and attachment is the root of every calamity. It can destroy the intellect and bring about one’s ruin:

“From the destruction of discernment, one perishes.” (Bhagavad Gītā 2.63)

Yet engagement with sense objects free of attraction and aversion also brings serenity. Such engagement should be undertaken with restraint, after relinquishing attraction and aversion, solely to maintain the body and not from an attitude of enjoyment. Only then does it become a cause of liberation.

It has thus been explained that a householder may attain the Supreme Self while fulfilling household dharma. Or he may enter the forest-dweller stage and attain Him through excellent practices of forbearance and restraint. Or, having become qualified for renunciation, he may enter the renunciant stage and attain the Supreme Self through constant contemplation of Brahman, inwardly and outwardly renounced.

The living being is the knot joining the inert and the conscious. Through the inert element, a person desires pleasure and

accumulation; through the conscious element arises the longing for liberation-the desire to attain God. However powerful the desire for enjoyment may become, it cannot extinguish the desire to attain the Supreme Self. Inertness may cover consciousness for a time, but it cannot destroy its existence. On the contrary, when the desire to attain the Supreme Self becomes strong and intense, the desire for enjoyment ceases to exist, because both enjoyments and the desire for them are impermanent, while the Supreme Self and His love are eternal.

The desire to attain the Supreme Self itself becomes divine love. Love and God are one. The stage of practice lasts only while even the slightest desire for enjoyment remains. When the desire to attain the Supreme Self-the longing for liberation and thirst for love-becomes the principal desire, the desire for enjoyment disappears. As soon as it disappears, the eternally attained Supreme Self is attained. A human being thus reaches the goal naturally and becomes fulfilled: everything to be done has been done, everything to be attained has been attained, and everything to be known has been known. In this lies the fulfillment of human life.



Unbroken Spiritual Practice

A very beautiful question has been asked. Two questions have come: first, how can spiritual practice become unbroken? Second, what are the natures of the practice, the goal, and the seeker, and how do they become one? Together these are really one question. Another person asks, “I belong to God and God is mine-this seems like something new. How am I to understand it?” These questions are of the same kind and have one answer.

The special reason a seeker cannot understand “I belong to God and God is mine” is that his sense of identity with the body has become firm. Because that imagined unity has hardened, the truth does not enter his understanding. In reality he has no relation of identity with the body; it has merely been assumed: “The self bewildered by ego thinks, ‘I am the doer.’” The assumption has grown so firm that it appears completely true.

But once the feeling “I belong to God and God is mine” becomes equally firm, the bodily assumption cannot remain. A little reflection makes this directly evident. We once had no relation to this body or its relatives. Ninety or a hundred years ago, none of those now sitting here had any relation even to the present body, much less to its relatives. A hundred years from now there will again be no relation to these bodies; how then could a relation to their relatives remain? Every brother and sister can understand this through reflection.

Understand firmly this maxim: “What does not exist at the beginning and end is likewise nonexistent in the present.” What truly exists now is only what existed at the beginning and will remain at the end. Our relation with this body and its relatives did

not exist before and will not exist at the end; therefore it does not truly exist even now. If our real relation is not with the body, with whom is it? It is with the Lord. Our relation with God alone is true. The relation to body and family is assumed, while the relation to the Lord is self-evident.

At the root of any mistaken assumption is not-knowing. Not-knowing does not come into being; it is beginningless. It does not arise, though it can depart. Ask someone, “Do you know French?” He may answer, “No.” Ask, “Since when do you not know it?” and the question makes no sense. This is why Vedānta regards ignorance as beginningless.

Still one may insist, “We want to know where this not-knowing came from.” The real answer has already been given, but another answer is: it came when you regarded as your own what was not your own. Why did you do that? First, through ignorance; the assumption is an effect of ignorance. Second, you had accepted the thing in order to discover its true nature, but forgot that purpose and simply settled into treating it as your own.

Indian śāstra ordains for the twice-born that one first observe the student stage and afterward become a householder. Students are of two kinds: (1) the lifelong celibate and (2) one who will marry after completing study. The first remains in the student stage or passes directly into renunciation and preserves celibacy for life. The second properly completes the student stage and its concluding bath, enters household life, and later proceeds in order to the forest-dweller and renunciant stages.

Why are there two kinds? The human body has been received to attain the Supreme Self, and anyone who seeks Him must renounce

the world. We become afraid on hearing this. Yet renouncing the world does not mean running away from here. If we go to a forest, is the forest not part of the world? Is the body we take there not part of it? Renunciation means relinquishing egoity and possessiveness toward body, senses, inner faculty, mind, intellect, life-breath, and other such things. If you wish to attain the Supreme Self, you cannot retain egoity and possessiveness toward worldly things. This is certain.

When we attempt renunciation, what obstructs the road is attraction to enjoyments and attachment to acquisition and pleasure. In the student stage we may decide to relinquish these things and advance toward the Supreme Self. Through reflection, discernment, scripture, and instruction we try to give them up, yet their compulsion may be so strong that we cannot. We are then told, “Enter household life and examine what these objects really are.” Those able to relinquish them through discernment are told to remain lifelong celibates. The paths differ because aspirants differ.

Why, then, is household life adopted? So that an attraction to enjoyment that reflection could not remove may be experienced, known, understood in its true nature, and then relinquished. Household life was instituted for renunciation, not for attachment and permanent entanglement. Such attachment is not our culture.

Just as we enter household life for renunciation, so through ignorance we initially entered into relation with the body for the sake of eventually renouncing it. We called it ours for that purpose. Why had renunciation not occurred earlier? Because we were unable to relinquish it; therefore we adopted the household stage.

Having adopted household life, what should one do? Observe it according to scriptural discipline. The discipline at once limits enjoyment by place, time, and object and prescribes how it may be taken. There remain a relation to limited things and a relation of regulated enjoyment. This is dharma: live as a householder according to dharma. Unrestrained enjoyment then becomes impossible. Life becomes regulated, and the remarkable aim of renunciation remains present. Together these must produce dispassion:

“From dharma comes dispassion, and from yoga knowledge; the Veda proclaims that knowledge bestows liberation.”

“From dharma comes dispassion”: if you marry one woman, enjoyment is limited. You live in one household, one family, one house; this is called yours and that is not. But how is even this truly yours? When the whole world is one, how can one house, one family, or only so many rupees be yours? A sample from the totality of things has been entrusted to you. Deal justly with this sample, support all concerned, and partake of its pleasures. Experience the sample-for what purpose? Renunciation. The practice of dharma certainly produces dispassion. The Bhāgavata says:

“If dharma, though perfectly performed, does not generate love for the narrations of Viṣvaksena, it is nothing but labor.”

If dharma is carefully practiced but love for the Lord’s feet does not arise, dharma was not truly practiced; there was only exertion-“nothing but labor.” Engaging with objects according to dharma produces dispassion because the purpose is to remove attraction. When attraction is strong, a person disregards dharma and enjoys objects for attraction’s own sake; that can only increase

attachment. Even old age then brings no dispassion. If one enjoys merely in order to enjoy, under attraction and to obtain pleasure, dispassion will not arise even over the lifetime of Brahmā. But when one's purpose is to know their nature and relinquish them, regulated enjoyment brings distaste. Saints have said:

“Flower and noise, bubble, fire and air-all is mud, water, and earth. We have seen this world: it is nothing but a deceptive screen.”

And:

“Tasting and tasting, I abandoned it all-the savor of māyā is bitter. Drink the nectar of the Name again and again each moment; Rāma has become dear to me.”

When the savor of māyā tastes bitter, it drops away by itself. We formed a relation with the body for renunciation, just as a householder forms a regulated relation with one wife. But we forgot the purpose. That is ignorance-foolishness.

Remember now: “We entered into relation with it only to relinquish it.” We are to examine it for that purpose and, having seen it, let it go so that the mind never runs toward it again. Possessiveness toward the body is merely assumed. If we have not abandoned it-if it has not fallen away from us-then let us know its true nature. Once that is known, no relation with it will remain.

In His grace, God has formed the world so beautifully that no thing ever remains in one condition. Through action He teaches beings that whatever they enter into relation with will not stay as it is. One may playfully say that a contest of wills has arisen between God and the living being. The being says, “I shall form relations.” God says,

“Child, I shall break them.” The being says, “I am a child”; God says, “I shall not let childhood remain.” “I am young”; “I shall not let youth remain.” “This is my large family”; “I shall not let it remain.” “I possess so much wealth”; “I shall not let it remain.” “I am very healthy”; “I shall not let that remain.” “I am ill”; “I shall not let that remain either.” God says, “With whomever you form a relation, I shall keep severing it. You will go on joining; I will go on breaking.”

What does it mean for us to break relation? Form no new one; the old relation will break by itself, for it is destined to fall away:

“In the end they will abandon you, fool! Why do you not abandon them now? When the opportunity has passed, the mind will repent.”

We entered the relation only to understand its nature, not to preserve it.

Even the relation formed with those whom you regard as saints, great souls, dispassionate renunciants, and good people is actually formed in order to break other relations. This may sound bitter, but it is so. One leaves household life, becomes a renunciant, and forms a relation with a guru-not merely to preserve a personal relation with the guru. The guru says, “Brother, your relation is with the eternal true nature. Your relation with all these others will not remain. You formed a relation with me so that every other relation might be severed, not so that you might die clinging to me.” The mistake is to regard any formed relation as eternal. We made that mistake because we accepted a relation with the body. What should we do now?

Because of the feeling “I am the body,” the truth “I belong to God and God is mine” does not enter understanding. Identification with

the body is the obstruction. The living being truly belongs to the Supreme Self, and the Supreme Self belongs to the living being: this is the real relation. Good saints and great souls therefore teach only this: “You belong to the Supreme Self and He belongs to you. You are not this body.”

So long as the sense of “I” remains joined to the body, practice cannot be unbroken. What is unbroken and what is fragmentary? The sense “I am” is unbroken. Whenever you are asked, your answer is, “I am.” Whether you remember it, fall into deep sleep, or entirely forget it amid activity, the identity “I am of this social order and this stage of life” is remembered without deliberate recollection. The moment awareness returns, the feeling “I am” appears, followed by the same name, village, social order, stage, and familiar condition—even in dreams. Whatever is joined to the “I” is continuous. We attach the “I” to the world instead of God and then want worship to be continuous. That is impossible. Hear it with either ear; accept it or do not. Evidence may come or not. Brother, I have no doubt. If you doubt, you may decline to accept it; I do not insist.

Even after years of holy company and worship, devotion does not become continuous. Among several reasons, a principal one is that practice has not been joined to the ego-sense. One performs practice but inwardly thinks of the world. What one *is* feels real; what one merely *does* feels imitative. Only the real can be continuous. How can an imitation be unbroken? It is performed and lapses, performed again and lapses again.

If you seek unbroken practice, understand or at least accept, “I belong to God.” Relation with the Lord brings the responsibility that there is now nothing else to do: practice alone is to be done. I said

before, “Practice alone is to be done-not that practice is also to be done.” Our brothers and sisters “also” practice: spend an hour or two on this too, give it two or four months of the year, while household work of course *has* to be done. The world remains the “has to,” and practice the “also.” So long as you accept relation with the world in this way, that relation will remain centered in the world.

Reflection shows that relation with the world neither existed nor will remain. Even that statement is from the gross standpoint; subtly considered, no relation exists even for a moment. The Ganges flows without remaining still for a single instant. Grossly we say, “Water has flowed past this step since yesterday; it is the same today at the same level.” Subtly, not for one moment is the water where it was yesterday or even an instant ago. If it remained in the same place after one moment, it should remain forever-but where is it still even for one moment? Body, senses, mind, intellect, and life-breath likewise never remain unchanged:

“All conditioned things change from moment to moment, except the power of consciousness.”

You have invested belonging in what changes every moment; therefore your real belonging is hidden from you. How then can “I belong to God and God is mine” be understood? In truth God alone is one’s own, and nothing else is. Look deeply: no other thing is yours. If even the body is not yours, how could anything else be yours merely because it is related to the body?

If you ask, “What should we do now? Possessiveness appears so firm-how can it be removed?” there is a simple and excellent method available to every sister and brother, young or old, educated

or uneducated. Divide the seeker's one life into two: the real and the make-believe. An actor regards the costume and role he assumes as make-believe, not real, while he regards his own sense of self as real. Likewise, the bodies we have assumed are not our true nature; they are costumes, and we are the wearers who project "I" and "mine" upon them. We belong to God and have taken a costume from the world. Today the matter is reversed: we regard ourselves as belonging to the world and make divine worship into the costume.

Worship performed as a role can therefore never, never, never become firm and unbroken. How could a costume be unbroken? It lasts while the role is played and not afterward. We must reverse this: "I belong to God and God is mine." Before this body I was not the body and it was not mine; afterward too this "I" and "mine" will not remain, but the self will remain. Regard the body as God's, and it is God's. If you do not, it simply belongs to nature.

The one who played the child has now become old. Your body, company, group, dress, time, age, and years are none of them the same, yet you say, "I am the same." What an astonishing fact! Everyone experiences it, but no one attends to it. In reality none of those is "I." I am simply I-the unbroken one-because the one present in childhood is present today. Which of your materials remains the same? Neither intellect, thoughts, aims, nor purposes, yet you are the same. Body, circumstances, place and time, companions, possessions, condition, goal, education, and ideas have all changed. How then can your true relation be with them?

All this is costume and role. You, the knower of it all, are distinct from it, and that knowing self belongs to God. The rest belongs to the world. An actor receives his role and costume from the

theatrical company; even the stage belongs to the company. Wearing the company's costume, on its stage, he acts for the owner's pleasure and for the pleasure of the audience. The audience's pleasure too is for the owner, since without it the actor receives no reward. In the same way, perform the very best actions appropriate to every role you have assumed, but know it as a role. This is the practice of dharma.

A play has a script teaching each actor which lines to speak. Similarly, our scriptures tell the householder, man, woman, and son how each should act. Perform every role for the welfare and satisfaction of the people, so that they may say, "Household life is exceedingly useful-wonderful!" Perform it well, yet never from desire for applause. Do it only to dissolve personal attachment and obey the Lord's command through the assigned role, without taking the role as ultimately real. This is Karmayoga.

Acting in this way naturally removes attachment. Hence the saying, "From dharma comes dispassion." If one abandons dharma and consumes objects through attachment, no dispassion can ever arise from such enjoyment-it is impossible. Let dispassion remain the aim and scriptural discipline the rule. Perform the role as well as possible, yet know it as a role. Neglecting the role is a mistake; regarding it as ultimately real is also a mistake. Fulfill it without deficiency and without believing it real.

What follows? Money earned while wearing a theatrical costume goes to your home, and money earned outside the costume also goes to the same home. In the same way, when you sit in solitude for worship and meditation, you are directly worshiping your own Lord; when you work as a householder, you are playing a role in the world. Yet both have worship as their meaning. Both are entered in

God's account, and worship becomes unbroken. If meditation, kīrtana, and holy company are "God's worship over there," while ordinary dealings and business are "my work over here," worship cannot be continuous. Let every action belong to God.

"Therefore, O Kaunteya, perform action for His sake..." (Bhagavad Gītā 3.9)

"Even by performing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection." (Bhagavad Gītā 12.10)

When one acts for God and performs the Lord's work, worship extends everywhere; whenever the work stops, the mind turns immediately to Him. A merchant works for money. The moment the shop closes, he thinks about money, considers it, and counts it. Though shop and market are closed, he sits under a lamp adding the cash. Why? Because money was the purpose of the business; the mental current returns to that for which the work was done.

Why, likewise, does a householder perform household duties? To attain the Lord. When the work stops, the mind instantly rests in Him. On beginning business, one attends to how money will be produced; whether money is consciously remembered or not, the work is for money. Its goal and underlying remembrance remain continuous. In the same way, if worship and meditation are for the Lord and household work is also for the Lord, continuity pervades every action. One who grasps this continuity is the *sādhaka*, the seeker; maintaining it is *sādhana*, the practice; and attaining the Unbroken through it is the *sādhya*, the goal. Then all these become one of themselves.

Thus both questions have been answered: how to understand "We belong to God," and how worship can become unbroken.



How May Everyone Attain the Highest Good?

Question-How can everyone attain their highest good?

Answer-It occurs to me that if you, I, and all of us practise what I am saying, everyone's highest good will be attained. First of all, our purpose should be our own deliverance. Let this be our one desire, our one request, our need and necessity. There is also a saying:

Perfect the one, and all is perfected; pursue all, and all is lost.

By perfecting one thing, every task is accomplished; if we try to accomplish every task separately, not one of them is accomplished. The first necessity, therefore, is to withdraw the tendencies of the mind from every direction and turn them solely toward our own highest good. Spiritual practice should then continue without interruption in accordance with this purpose. We must consider how to establish that continuity.

The things before us are work and occupation, time, persons, objects, and so on. Many kinds of work present themselves as duties. We also have time-the span of life given to us in the form of days and nights, months and years. Third, there are persons before us: parents, wife and children, relatives, and others. Fourth, there are objects such as money and a house. We must perform different actions in relation to them. At one moment it is time for satsang, so attend satsang; when it is time to eat, eat; when it is time to rest, rest; when a book is to be read, read it. In the same way, one must earn a livelihood, cook, care for children, sleep, cleanse the body, bathe in the Ganges, and so forth. These different occupations come before us at different times.

Thus there will be divisions of work and of time. Persons and objects will likewise be divided into “ours” and “not ours.” Yet it is neither within our power nor proper to make all these distinct things one. How, then, can the purpose be one? We should remove their separateness through right understanding. How? Objects and persons will remain distinct, their uses will differ, time will remain divided, and occupations will remain different. They should remain so; there is nothing wrong in that. Then what single practice can we undertake, and how? Although our purpose is one, so many objects confront us. We must earn money to support the family, obtain things for it, rest at the proper time, sleep, eat, and drink. All this will remain diverse. How, then, can there be a single purpose? This question arises.

Here one special point must be understood. We perform different-works for what? When the “for what”-the purpose-becomes many, we become trapped. At one time our purpose is learning, at another fame, then wealth, honour, distinction, or health. At times the aim is attainment of God, and at others worship and meditation. With such divided purposes we cannot practise continuously. “Pursue all, and all is lost”: no task reaches fulfilment. Our one intention should therefore be that we will do every work for love of the Lord-for God’s pleasure.

On waking, think: “What is to be done now? I am to obey God’s command, act for God, and do God’s own work.” Suppose the task is washing your hands and face. You should experience this as God’s work. If you say, “How can I regard it as God’s work? I am washing my own hands and face,” then understand that by calling them your own you regard yourself as belonging to yourself, not to God. If you do not regard yourself as God’s, the purpose will not be fulfilled.

What will result? Bondage-what else? What has always happened will continue.

One may ask how this body can be regarded as God's. The answer is: when we seek to attain God and belong to God, our body too belongs to God. While washing the hands, understand that this body is one tiny, insignificant part of God's infinite creation. Just as the smallest grain of dust or sand is not separate from the earth, so too is this body. It is exceedingly small within the infinite cosmos, yet it too belongs to God. Thus experience: "I am washing my face; I am doing God's work. I am washing my hands; I am doing God's work."

I say this to make a very important point understood; it is not a jest. Even while defecating or urinating, experience that you are doing God's work. This disposition should arise naturally from within. If the body belongs to God, is cleaning it not God's work? If we clean someone's latrine or sweep someone's house, are we not doing the householder's work? Likewise, because this body belongs to God, relieving and cleaning it is God's own work. Bathing is God's work; washing clothes is God's work; cooking is God's work; eating too is God's work. Let there be no action that is not God's. If we do not yet experience that every act is God's work, let us begin by accepting it as such.

Just as every work belongs to God, all time belongs to God. We should not divide time into "this is for worship" and "this is for ordinary work." If worshipping God is God's work and cooking is also God's work, then all time belongs to God. The divisions of work and time disappear. A seeker should never say that one period is for worship and another is not. The forms of worship do differ: at one time repetition of the Name and meditation were worship; now

cooking is worship. What does worship mean? Service of God. When work is done for God, that service itself is worship. God's work is necessarily worship. Eating too is worship of God, and that time also belongs to God. Never think that mealtime is not God's time. If, while earning one's livelihood, one experiences all work as God's, all time becomes God's.

You may ask whether sleep too is God's work and sleeping-time God's time. Yes-but this must be put into practice when you lie down. Do not sleep merely to obtain sleep, comfort, or pleasure. Then why sleep? Until now, while sitting, walking, and moving about, you were doing God's work; now for five or six hours you are to worship God while lying down, because this body belongs to God. Walking it about is its work, earning a livelihood is its work, and stretching it out to give it some rest is also its work. Yet even then, what we do is God's work. By sleeping, we are to worship God-not seek comfort or pleasure. Go to sleep with this understanding.

Until sleep comes, remain at God's feet and keep contemplating Him. Experience His gracious hand and compassionate gaze upon you. As a mother sits holding her child in her lap and bestows her tenderness on the child lying at her feet, so feel: "I lie at God's feet. His grace is upon me. He looks at me compassionately; His hand rests upon my head." Continue contemplating and repeating His Name. The time spent lying down has thus become worship. If sleep comes, let it come. There is no anxiety about whether it comes, for our concern is not to acquire sleep but to remain at God's feet. We belong to the Lord. If sleep comes, we perform His work in the form of sleep; if it does not, we perform His work in the form of contemplation.

Thus every occupation and every moment belongs to God. Persons remain to be considered. Our brothers and relatives, parents, wife and children, family members, loved ones and associates—all these persons also belong to God. Since they are God's, how are God's people to be served? Just as an exemplary daughter-in-law serves her mother-in-law, so the mother-in-law must fulfil her duty toward the daughter-in-law: she is to give her happiness, not seek happiness for herself. Our aim is not to take happiness for ourselves but to consider how happiness may be given to her.

Remember Mother Sita and Mother Kausalya. Kausalya said that she had never even asked Sita to adjust a lamp-wick and had not allowed her feet to touch the hard ground. Such was Kausalya's care; yet Sita said, "I am exceedingly unfortunate, for I did not serve you." Each regretted only that she had not served enough. The daughter-in-law did not think, "My mother-in-law gave me no happiness," nor the mother-in-law, "My daughter-in-law did none of my work." The sole thought is to do the Lord's work: serve the other, act for her welfare and happiness, and seek to accommodate her.

Likewise, all our relations belong to God. We seem to divide people into "our family or community" and "not ours." "They are our family" means that serving this family is our first duty, because we are indebted to it and must repay that debt first. Those who do not seem to be ours should also be served whenever their need is greater; then make time and serve them first. Why serve? For God's pleasure, because they belong to God. "They are ours" means only that they should receive special service, since they particularly expect service from us. Serve them first and especially, but regard them as God's, not mine. The apparent sense of "mine" should

mean, “I am to give them happiness; therefore they are my family.” Keep this feeling awake.

Objects remain. Different objects have different uses: a plate and glass serve one purpose, a pen another. Why are they put to these distinct uses? For God’s pleasure; they are to be employed in His service. From the standpoint of their relation to God, there is no division into ours and another’s. Still, we should first employ what is called ours. In this way, objects are used to serve the Lord and His people.

What is the conclusion? There is no work that is not God’s, no moment that is not God’s, no person who is not God’s, and no object that is not God’s. What remains except uninterrupted worship? Worship and spiritual practice then continue of themselves.

तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च। (भगवद्गीता ८.७)

tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca

“Therefore remember Me at all times, and fight.”

“Remember Me at all times, and fight.” Here “and fight” means: perform whatever necessary duty arises from time to time, but perform it by God’s command and for His pleasure. What else did Arjuna do? When he was about to kill Karna, Karna said, “Arjuna, you act unjustly.” God said, “Arjuna, shoot Karna with an arrow.” Arjuna replied, “I need not judge justice and injustice; I must obey the Lord’s command. The Lord commands: kill him.”

The Lord is not visibly present before us, however. Therefore consult God’s word, and search your heart to see whether you would want others to behave toward you in the same way. If you would not, do not behave so. If God Himself directly commands,

responsibility for judging justice and injustice no longer rests upon us. When God is not visibly before us, His commands are the Gita and other scriptures. Consult them; act justly according to them and do no injustice. If you cannot understand from them, do not be anxious. Keep your intention pure, and understanding will come.

There was once a holy man travelling in a boat with many other people. By chance the boat was swept away in midstream. As it was carried violently along, the boatman said, "Remember your chosen deity! The boat is no longer under our control. The current is strong, and there is a whirlpool ahead; we may sink. Remember the Lord." Some began to weep and others to remember God. The holy man had a water-pot beside him. He began chanting, "Victory to Sita and Rama, victory, victory to Sita and Rama; victory to Sita and Rama, victory, victory to Sita and Rama," and repeatedly scooped river-water into the boat. People cried, "What are you doing?" But who could make him listen? He kept filling the boat while repeating, "Victory to Sita and Rama, victory, victory to Sita and Rama." Soon the boat- -swung around into the proper current, where the boatman could control it. The boatman said, "There is no longer anything to fear; the bank is near." Hearing this, the holy man began throwing the water out of the boat, still chanting, "Victory to Sita and Rama, victory, victory to Sita and Rama...." The people said, "Are you mad? Why do you behave like this?" "What is wrong, brothers?" he asked. They replied, "Have you no compassion? You have become a renunciant. Your garb is a holy man's, but you act like a fool. What if everyone had drowned?" He said, "Compassion would arise only if I were separate. I remain a holy man; how could I do a fool's work?" They said, "When the boat was swept away, you poured water into it; when it began leaving the whirlpool, you threw the water out. You do the opposite of what should be done." "I do

not act oppositely,” he replied, “but correctly.” “How is that correct?” they asked.

He explained: “It is correct because I do not know the whole. I understood that God wished to sink the boat. If that was His will, I too should help. When the boat escaped the current, I understood that He did not wish to sink it; then I should act in accordance with His will, so I began throwing the water out. Having become a renunciant, I have no concern with my own living or dying; I must merge my will in God’s will. I do not know the whole. Had I known from the beginning that God was only playing and did not intend to sink the boat, I would not have poured in water. But at that moment I did not understand this. I thought He wished to sink the boat—that this was His signal.”

This is the mark of a devotee who has taken refuge. That saint could act so; but I tell you that if a boat begins to sink, do not pour water into it—yet do not weep at all. Understand that all is well, that it is a matter of great delight and joy, and that some hidden auspiciousness lies within it.

I have heard another such account. Years ago there was a monastery whose abbot was a very good and learned man, and a great devotee of God. Once the Ganges rose tremendously. A violent torrent came down from the mountain behind the monastery, as though it would cut away the building and carry it off. The senior abbot—whose name I no longer remember—became very happy, deeply moved with joy at the thought, “Now we shall enter Mother’s lap,” meaning the Ganges. Everyone else feared that the building would be swept away, while he rejoiced.

What happened? The torrent brought mass after mass of stones, which formed a heap. The water then flowed off to one side and the building was saved. So it was saved. In the saint's heart there had been only the feeling that he was going into Mother's lap. Consider: does a child feel joy or sorrow in its mother's lap? That was his joy. Outwardly the prospect was drowning beneath an immense flood, yet he rejoiced. What does this prove? In what we do, we must follow God's command; in what happens, we must always remain glad. Whether- -pleasure comes or pain, remain happy in whatever event occurs. Everything that happens is in God's hands, while action is in ours. Therefore do everything by God's command. Whatever happens, rejoice: "Wonderful! Wonderful! The Lord's grace is great." Do not judge an event as right or wrong; see instead who is doing it, by whose command and signal it occurs.

Everything happens as Gopala wills.

In pain, sorrow, and adversity there is God's special grace. Are these the fruit of sin or of merit? If they are the fruit of sin, does undergoing that fruit preserve the sins or destroy them? Is the destruction of sins God's grace or lack of grace? Think, "I am being purified; God is bestowing grace," and remain delighted. With every stab and pang, experience God's great grace: the Lord is purifying you. When a goldsmith accepts gold for his work, he heats and beats it thoroughly, removing every impurity; this means he will now make it his own. Likewise, having accepted us, the Lord now cleans His own property. We should therefore remain joyful.

The point is that nothing in what happens can truly be inauspicious; we must bring gladness to it, because it rests in God's hands. What we do must be done by His command, never against it. These are the only two matters: what happens and what we do. Our whole life

then becomes spiritual practice, and we may remain delighted at all times. We do not remain so, and therefore must be told that our attention is not here; if it were, life could be lived in this way.

Not one minute in the twenty-four hours need be without spiritual practice. What time remains in which practice does not occur? Every moment is practice. What tendency or act remains that is not worship of God? Thus the instruction “remember Me at all times” is fulfilled. It is said:

यत्क्षणं यन्मुहुर्तं वा वासुदेवं न चिन्तयेत्।

yat-kṣaṇaṁ yan-muhūrtaṁ vā vāsudevaṁ na cintayet

*“Whatever instant or moment one does not contemplate
Vasudeva...”*

*Hanuman says, “Lord, adversity is only this:
when remembrance and worship do not take place.”*

Then our adversity is gone. Where can adversity remain? All time, all work, every object, every person, and every relationship belong to God; nothing is ours. Mind, intellect, body, and life-breath-all belong to God:

त्वदीयं वस्तु गोविन्द तुभ्यमेव समर्पये।

tvadīyaṁ vastu govinda tubhyam eva samarpaye

“Your own thing, O Govinda, I offer to You alone.”

The printed explanation is: “Your own thing, O Lord, is offered at Your feet.” Remain delighted in this attitude.

What do we possess? God is ours. Because God is ours, there is joy; delight and glad abandon must surely follow.

Let the Compassionate One bear the care; my mind is ever joyful.

There are God and ourselves. A division has been made between us: all delight has fallen to our share and all care to God's. If You do not worry, why should I? Let God worry. God is great; let the Great One bear the great cares. The devotee Narsi received a letter containing an enormous list: "Bring all these things if you wish to come." From time immemorial it has been customary to write God's name at the top of a letter. When Narsi read the letter and saw God's name at its head, he began to dance:

Reading the letter, Narsi became absorbed in joy.

Articles worth hundreds of thousands and millions were required. So many things were listed that, on reading and hearing them, Narsi began to dance with happiness and sing:

The One whose name is written above will fill the wedding-gift.

Narsi will sit and sit, and worship the Lord.

When a letter concerning some task of your family or relations arrives, the burden falls upon the person whose name stands at the top. Does any burden fall on the children? They think only, "There is a wedding-wonderful! We shall enjoy ourselves and eat sweets." "You will enjoy yourselves, certainly, but do you know how much your father must spend?" What concern have they?

What delight! If someone asks Narsi, "In whose reliance are you going?"-what need is there even to ask? "God Himself will fill our wedding-gift. Come along, brother; you too will eat delicious food!" What worry or care is ours? We are simply rejoicing.

Let the Compassionate One bear the care; my mind is ever joyful.

Govinda, says Ramdas, will sustain the one He has brought forth.

We are free of every worry and care. We have taken refuge in the Lord; all work has become God's. There is only delight. We have never descended from God's court. Some clever little children begin to cry whenever their mother tries to put them down from her lap. They have discovered a very good device. Likewise, let us remain in God's lap and never come down.

Therefore Narada says in the Bhakti-sutras:

तदर्पिताखिलाचारिता तद्विस्मरणे परमव्याकुलतेति।

tad-arpitākhilācāritā tad-vismaraṇe parama-vyākulateti

“All conduct is offered to Him, and there is supreme anguish at forgetting Him.”

All one's conduct is offered to God, and at forgetting Him there is supreme anguish, great alarm-as though God had set the child down from His lap. Therefore resolve: “We shall remain in His lap and never come down. Whether You give sorrow or happiness, what is that to us?” The child remains in the lap; if the weight is burdensome, it is the mother who bears it-what can the child do? We will not come down. “Lord, we shall remain at Your feet, in Your lap, and stay absorbed in delight.” Depart from this satsang only in happiness and joy. What has happened? What, what happened? Delight happened! The “what” has been left behind: “what” implies a question, and no question remains for us. We dwell with God, do God's work, and remain in God's court.

There is delight alone; with the Lord there is joy alone. If one asks what happiness is for, then what is sorrow for? What is worry for? If any worry exists, “let the Compassionate One bear the care.” We simply rejoice. From this very moment, remain absorbed in gladness. Whether walking, moving, rising, or sitting, there is

delight at every moment. Such a person's mind naturally contemplates God; no deliberate effort to contemplate Him remains necessary. In this glad absorption contemplation occurs by itself. Dhruva therefore said:

विस्मर्यते कृतविदा कथमार्तबन्धो।

vismaryate kṛta-vidā katham ārta-bandho

“How could You be forgotten by one who knows what You have done, O Friend of the distressed?”

How could we forget You? How could You ever be forgotten? Tell us how. The mother in this one birth loves us only a little; if even she remains in memory, how could the Mother who has loved us through infinite births be forgotten? How could the ever-loving Lord be forgotten? Our task is merely to lie at His feet and face Him. The Lord Himself remembers us. Listen carefully to this: even when we do not remember God, He remembers us. How can this be known? Do you not grow weary and feel confined by the situation in which you live-by family, money, body, and occupation? Why? You feel confined when God remembers you, when He pulls you toward Himself. Even so, we seize that very situation again. But God does not wish any being to remain caught in pleasures, money, or family. There is no condition in which one does not receive a jolt. If there is, tell me. The jolt comes precisely when- -God remembers us in a special way: “Ah! Where have you forgotten yourself? Remember Me. Why do you wander after abandoning Me?” Yet we become entangled again. If God did not remember us, the desire for happiness would never arise in us, for God alone is the very form of supreme happiness and supreme bliss. Our desire is really for God. God remembers us and draws us toward Himself, but He does not compel us.

The essence is this: all works belong to God, all time belongs to God, all persons belong to God, and all objects belong to God. If this experience remains continuous during every action, spiritual practice can become uninterrupted-and thereby everyone's highest good is assured.



The Meaning and Nature of Upāsanā

The word *upāsanā* means “sitting near”: *upa* + *āsanā*. It is formed from these two words. Anything may become the object of one’s *upāsanā*—wealth, honour, or any object of this world or the next. The mind remains near whatever one desires, and this itself becomes one’s worship. In truth, however, worship should be directed toward Reality. One should worship the Supreme Self, not a product of nature.

The Gita describes three kinds of worship:

ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना।

अन्ये सांख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे॥ (भगवद्गीता 13.24)

*dhyānenātmani paśyanti kecid ātmānam ātmanā / anye
sāṅkhyena yogena karma-yogena cāpare*

*“Some behold the Self in themselves through meditation; others
through the discipline of knowledge, and still others through the
discipline of action.”*

The printed explanation is: “Some realize the Supreme Self through the discipline of meditation, some through Sāṅkhya, and some through the discipline of action.” The Gita thus presents three paths of worship: devotion, knowledge, and action. Whatever is done to attain Reality is called *upāsanā*. All this is nothing but the Supreme Self. He alone is present at the beginning, middle, and end:

मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव। (भगवद्गीता 7.7)

mayi sarvam idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva

“All this is strung on Me like clusters of jewels on a thread.”

The printed gloss says that the entire moving and unmoving universe is interwoven in Him as beads upon a thread. Both the real and the unreal are the Supreme Self. Worship of Reality in this way is the method of bhakti-yoga. Worship according to Sāṅkhya-yoga abandons the unreal:

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः। (भगवद्गीता 2.16)

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ

“The unreal has no being; the real never ceases to be.”

The printed gloss is: “The unreal has no existence, and the real has no absence.” The real is worshipped. Karma-yoga too is worship of the real. God has said:

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति। (भगवद्गीता 2.40)

nehābhikrama-nāśo 'sti

“Here no effort made is ever lost.”

In two verses of the Gita’s seventeenth chapter (17.26-27), five explanations of the word *sat* are given: “in the sense of reality and goodness” (*sad-bhāve sādhu-bhāve ca*), “likewise in an auspicious act” (*praśaste karmaṇi tathā*), “steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity, and gift” (*yajñe tapasi dāne ca sthitiḥ*), and “action performed for that” (*karma caiva tad-arthīyam*).

Sat, the real, means that which is, which is never destroyed and is present everywhere. This world changes every moment; yet, supported by the real, it appears true even though it is visibly perishable. Goswami Tulsidas says in the *Manas*, Bālakāṇḍa:

जासु सत्यता ते जड़ माया। भास सत्य इव मोह सहाया॥

jāsu satyatā te jaṛa māyā / bhāsa satya iva moha sahāyā

“By His reality insentient māyā appears as though true, aided by delusion.”

The world appears true, but is not truly so. At the root of every object's arising is an eternal principle on whose support it appears. That principle needs no other light; it is self-luminous. By its reality alone this entire impermanent world appears.

तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति। (मुण्डकोपनिषद् 2.2.10)

tasya bhāsā sarvam idaṁ vibhāti

“By Its radiance all this shines.”

In Sāṅkhya-yoga the unreal is relinquished and the real alone contemplated and meditated upon. True worship is the entirety of spiritual practice directed toward that principle.

The body of childhood has changed. Companions, possessions, feelings, aims, and senses have all changed, yet “I am the same” has not changed. That I am the same is true. Place, time, object, and person all fall within that real; Reality remains exactly as it is. We have invested belief in the unreal:

कर्ताहमिति मन्यते। (भगवद्गीता 3.27)

kartāham iti manyate

“One thinks, ‘I am the doer.’”

Out of folly, one believes oneself the agent. All actions are performed by the total power:

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि। (भगवद्गीता 3.27)

prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni

“They are being performed by nature.”

Understand that every action is being performed by the power of the whole, and therefore:

नैव किञ्चित् करोमीति। (भगवद्गीता 5.8)

naiva kiñcit karomīti

“I do nothing at all.”

Do not introduce the notions of agency and enjoyership into any action.

A doubt now arises: the stirrings of the mind do not cease. The error lies at the root. In trying to remove a stirring, we seek to erase its effect instead of removing its cause. The cause is that we have taken the mind in which the stirring arises to be ours. Do not regard it as yours; it belongs to nature. The stirring occurs through nature’s existence and is merely a change taking place within it. This is called worship according to Sāṅkhya-yoga.

God alone is beyond the real and unreal and pervades them: “All this is strung on Me” (Gita 7.7). Before an earthen vessel is made there is clay, after it is made there is clay, and when it breaks apart there is still only clay. The same may be said of the world. While the world exists, the Supreme Self is; before the world appeared, the Supreme Self was; and when the world dissolves, the Supreme Self alone remains. The pot’s name, shape, and colour make it useful; likewise this world of name and form is useful. The Supreme Self made it. It is the Supreme Self-where could anything else have come from? Arising from Him and dissolving into Him, this world is the Supreme Self. This is worship according to bhakti-yoga.

Desirelessness is natural and self-evident; desire is manufactured. Consider: we now desire wealth, honour, and recognition, but these

desires were not present before. In childhood we played with stones and pebbles. We knew very little and had no special desire; now desires keep multiplying. At one time we desire one object, at another a different one; now wealth, then honour. We must therefore admit that desires arise and also pass away; they do not endure. People say, “Desire does not disappear,” but I say it is God’s supreme grace that no desire-whether for the body or for wealth-lasts. The childhood desire for play disappeared, and the many desires that followed it also disappeared.

The same is true of possessiveness. It is attached and can be relinquished. It joins when attached to someone and breaks when severed. Sisters born into one family feel great mutual affection, but after marriage their relationship becomes joined to the husband’s family, and their possessiveness toward the former family diminishes. When one’s own brother is adopted into another household, the former possessiveness toward him no longer remains. Look even at one’s own body. In childhood our mother held us in her lap and nursed us-how strong her possessiveness was! Now that we are adults, does the same-possessiveness remain in the mother today? When we grow old, will it not diminish still further? Thus the worldly objects toward which we direct possessiveness will not remain. But the greed, sin, and other consequences produced by possessiveness certainly remain. In business, goods come and are sold while only profit or loss remains with us. Likewise, possessiveness leaves only sin and anguish in our hands; its “profit” is grief and anxiety. A grown son dies: he did not exist before his birth and does not exist now, so why do we worry? The anxiety and grief we undergo are the sole profit of possessiveness.

Once, in the presence of the revered Seth Shri Jayadayaaji Goenka, a man asked: “If everything is the Supreme Self, then the sins we commit are also performed by the Supreme Self. ‘And whatever states are sāttvic’ (Gita 7.12)-that too would be worship of the Supreme Self. Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and others attained that same Supreme Self despite committing such injustice. Why, then, should we bind ourselves by performing duty?”

The revered Sethji replied, “As we worship, so will be the object of worship we meet. Worship in that manner and you will meet God in the form of sorrow. Is sorrow not God? Worship the form you desire. If you act like Ravana, you must also possess such power that none but God can kill you; then your highest good may be attained. But if someone else kills you on the way, what will become of you? You will be deprived of deliverance.”

जिज्ञासुरपि योगस्य शब्दब्रह्मातिवर्तते। (भगवद्गीता 6.44)

jijñāsuraḥ api yogasya śabda-brahmātivartate

“Even one who merely seeks to know yoga passes beyond the Vedic word.”

The printed gloss is: “Even the inquirer into yoga passes beyond Śabda-brahman.” There is no deception on this true path. Everything is the Supreme Self. This means that one person seeks the with-form and another the formless. Among those who seek form, one seeks Vishnu, another Rama, Krishna, Shakti, Shiva, and so on. Whatever form evokes one’s reverence, respect, and love is attained by worshipping that form. Then, through God’s grace, one realizes the true Reality beyond mind and speech.

Karma-yoga too is worship of the real. Attachment to the fruit must be abandoned. People say, “Possessiveness and attachment do not

disappear.” But does attachment always remain exactly the same? Does a mother’s earlier affection remain unchanged later? Does the attraction toward a woman in youth remain the same in old age? Consider any object: after building a house or obtaining jewellery and clothes, does the joy of the first few days remain unchanged? Reflect: no object in the world endures. Had we directed this affection, possessiveness, and attachment toward God instead of perishable objects, we would have fulfilled the purpose of life.

All worldly objects are perishable. Nothing can truly be gained from them; they merely soil the inner faculty and bring unrest. Mother and son share great affection. While the son acts in accordance with his mother, it remains; but when he grows up and, following his wife, acts against his mother, the mother’s possessiveness cannot remain the same—it breaks by itself. Possessiveness is like an unripe thread that snaps under the slightest contrary pull. Renouncing possessiveness is not difficult; maintaining it is difficult. It never remains uniform but keeps changing. This proves that love has not yet found its true place.

A five-year-old child searches for his own mother. Other mothers may sit nearby and, when asked, say that they are his mother, but the child accepts none of them. If his own mother were there, he would go into her lap.

ममैवांशो जीवलोके। (भगवद्गीता 15.7)

mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke

“The living being in this world is truly a part of Me.”

The Gita therefore says:

यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः। (भगवद्गीता 6.22)

yaṁ labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tataḥ

“Having attained which, one regards no other gain as greater.”

The printed gloss gives the same sense. Karma-yoga is the abandonment of desire for the fruit. The desireless attitude is indicated by “and action done for That” (*karma caiva tad-arthīyam*, Gita 17.27), “in this there is no loss of effort” (*nehābhikrama-nāśo ’sti*), and “even a little of this dharma” (*svalpam apy asya dharmasya*, Gita 2.40), and so on.

If possessiveness is not relinquished, progress toward the Supreme Self is difficult. Mother and son, husband and wife, brother and brother may have great affection and possessiveness; yet the slightest obstruction to their preference or blow to self-interest makes that possessiveness disappear. Goswami Tulsidas therefore says:

*Mother, father, kinsmen, son and wife; body, wealth, home,
friends and family-*

*gather every thread of possessiveness toward them and bind your
mind to My feet with one strong cord.*

In truth, people do not wish to renounce possessiveness; they continually grasp new attachments and desires. If relinquishing possessiveness seems difficult, at least stop forming new bonds. One leaves home to become a renunciant, then forms possessive bonds with male and female disciples. Join possessiveness to the One who is real, apart from whom no one is truly ours. The greatness of saints lies in severing our bonds with all else and joining us to the one Supreme Father, the Lord. They join the wandering being to the real: yours is He who says,

ममैवांशो जीवलोके। (भगवद्गीता 15.7)

mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke

“The living being in this world is truly a part of Me.”

Serve and honour everyone through your relation to Him. A wife serves her husband’s family only through her relation to her husband; likewise, serve everyone through your relation to God. “A relationship is acknowledged through none but Rama.” Make God your own. This is upāsana—“sitting near” God.

According to karma-yoga, one worships through the performance of duty after renouncing possessiveness, attachment, and desire. According to jñāna-yoga, one worships by knowing the Supreme Self. According to bhakti-yoga, one worships by accepting God. The attainment reached through the discipline of knowledge is also reached through the discipline of action:

यत्सांख्यैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तद्योगैरपि गम्यते। (भगवद्गीता 5.5)

yat sāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tad yogair api gamyate

“The state attained by the followers of knowledge is also reached by the followers of yoga.”

एकमप्यास्थितः सम्यगुभयोर्विन्दते फलम्॥ (भगवद्गीता 5.4)

ekam apy āsthitaḥ samyag ubhayor vindate phalam

“Established rightly in even one, a person obtains the fruit of both.”

The printed gloss explains: “The supreme abode attained by the followers of knowledge is also attained by desireless karma-yogis, because one who is firmly established in either one obtains the Supreme Self, the fruit of both.” Karma-yoga too worships by accepting the Lord. To move after withdrawing the mind from the

world and to sit near God is worship of Him. Is repeating the Name or performing recitation and ritual for a short while true worship? True worship means remaining intent upon Him at all times. Just as the mind stays engaged with one's family at every moment, it should remain intent on the Supreme Self at all times while one walks and moves about. This is true worship, and it certainly reaches fulfilment.

The human body has been given for this very purpose. Had it been given for the world, worldly attainment would have been accomplished-but it has not. The human body is therefore for attaining the Supreme Self, and He alone should be worshipped. The influence of worship cannot be concealed, however one may try. Someone has said:

*Worship in the netherworld, and it will appear in the sky;
conceal it or submerge it-the fragrance of musk cannot be
suppressed.*

One who has begun to move toward the Supreme Self, or who has attained Him, undergoes a change in conduct- his body, strength, and intellect all become different. His influence transforms the surrounding atmosphere. Nature regards herself as fulfilled, and the things of the world consider themselves fulfilled when they come into his service.

