BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

HOME STUDY COURSE

With Sanskrit Text, Transliteration,
Word-for-Word Translation,
A Free Translation in English,
An Exhaustive Commentary
in English
Based on Śāṅkarabhāṣyam

by

Swami Dayananda Saraswati

ARSHA VIDYA GURUKULAM

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

It is said that a human birth is not easy to achieve. If we look at it from an evolutionary standpoint, there are millions of years between the ape and the human being. In other words, the monkey did not become a person overnight. Even from the standpoint of reincarnation, where human birth is said to be a result of one's own past actions, *karma*, it is not easy. And once you have this human body, whether it be due to *karma* or to the natural selection inherent in evolution, you are no longer in the hands of nature. You now have the rare capacity, called free will, to initiate a further process of evolution. The whole process, then, is in your own hands.

An animal, on the other hand, is fulfilled once it survives a few years and produces an offspring. The cow, for example, need not do anything more than reach physical maturity in order to be an adult. It need not do anything to be evolved emotionally. There is no such thing as an emotionally mature cow. The only goal of a cow's life is to survive to adulthood and, as an adult, to survive as long as it can. Once it has become an adult, the cow is mature in every way.

A human being also has to become an adult physically. Otherwise, one's life is unfulfilled. To become an adult physically, you need only survive by appeasing your hunger and thirst and avoiding fatal accidents and diseases. You need not do anything special. The process is a very natural one, made possible by the survival instinct common to all living beings. Hence, after a few years, you find that you have become an adult.

Until you are a physical adult, you are in the hands of nature. Nature takes care of your physical growth until you can no longer say, 'I am a child.' Emotional maturity, however, does not happen in the same way. Unlike physical maturity, emotional growth is purely in your own hands. Unlike a cow, one need not be mature just because one happens to have an adult physical body. Inner maturity is a process that you have to initiate because you are a human being enjoying a faculty of choice.

THE HUMAN PURSUIT

Whatever is fundamentally sought after by every human being is called *puruṣārtha* in Sanskrit. Although each individual seeks something peculiar, there are four ends that everyone seeks, whether he or she is an Eskimo in Alaska or someone living in a remote village in India. The universal ends most commonly sought after are security and pleasure — *artha* and *kāma*. The remaining two *puruṣārthas* — *dharma* and *mokṣa*, to be explained below — can also be accomplished by a human being.

That which gives you any kind of security — emotional, economical, or social, is called *artha* in Sanskrit. *Artha* may be in the form of cash or liquid assets, stocks, real estate, relationships, a home, a good name, a title, recognition, influence, or power of any kind. Such accomplishments boost one's ego and therefore also provide some security for the ego. And although each person seeks various forms of security at a given time, that he or she is seeking security is common to all.

Seeking pleasure is another *puruṣārtha*, called *kāma* in Sanskrit. It, too, takes many forms. For instance, sensory pleasures may be anything from seafood or ice cream onwards. Examples of intellectual pleasures are those derived from playing certain games, solving puzzles or riddles, and studying certain bodies of knowledge. Thus, we have varieties of pleasures.

Anything that satisfies your senses, that pleases your mind, that touches your heart and evokes in you a certain appreciation, is *kāma*. Any form of pleasure you derive from your home, for example, or from a relationship is *kāma*. Music and travel are also *kāma*, not *artha;* because, by pursuing them, you are seeking pleasure, not security. You do not go to Hawaii or the Bahamas to seek security. In fact, you lose some security, in the form of money, when you go to these places. Because you happen to have some money, you travel for pleasure, not for security.

There is another form of pleasure derived from seeing the stars on a beautiful night, enjoying the sunrise, a flower, a playing child, or a beautiful painting, for example. Because this pleasure is neither sensory nor intellectual, I will call it aesthetic pleasure. Even though such pleasures go beyond one's senses and intellect, they are still *kāma*.

DHARMA AS A HUMAN END

There is a third *puruṣārtha*, *dharma*, that is neither *artha* nor *kāma*. *Dharma* is a word with many meanings, as we shall see. Here, it refers to the pleasure born of harmony, the pleasure derived from friendship, sharing, helping another person, and so on. For example, when you are able to relieve someone's suffering, you experience a joy that is not *kāma*. This form of pleasure is different from both *artha* and *kāma* in that you do not usually seek out a person in pain in order to pick up some pleasure. It is not the same as going to Hawaii or to a concert. You happen to come across someone in pain, you are able to alleviate the person's discomfort, and you feel happy.

A doctor who does not work purely for financial gain enjoys this kind of pleasure. Charity works in the same way. Those who are able to discover joy in such work do so, I would say, because there is inner growth and understanding, a certain sensitivity on their part. This sensitivity is also required to understand love, for to love another person thoroughly is to understand the other person, for which one should be educated, cultured. If a person has not learned through experiences, if a person is not cultured, what kind of

joy can he or she get out of life? For such people, there can be only sensory pleasures, eating, for example. But many simple joys are lacking in their lives. Thus, the gain in one's life is commensurate with what one knows.

It seems that a certain professor of medicine, in his introductory class, said, 'What your mind does not know, your eyes do not see.' What he meant was that, without medical knowledge the cause for a disease would continue to elude a person, even though the symptoms are everywhere. The eyes may see the symptoms, but the mind does not know. In life also, the more I know, the brighter life is, because I cannot see more than what I know. This is not to imply that I should necessarily get more out of life, only that my life is to be lived properly, fully, which implies a lot of understanding.

Living does not simply mean dragging yourself around from day to day — from bed to work, back home and to bed again. The whole process repeats itself until the weekend comes. Then you drag yourself to some recreation in the hope of forgetting yourself — which is why recreation becomes so important. In fact, your whole life can be a recreation. Someone once asked a Swami, 'Swamiji, do you not take any holidays? You seem to be working every day.' In fact, the Swami's life is one long holiday.

If you enjoy what you do, life is very simple. If you do not enjoy what you do, then you have to do something to enjoy, which can be very costly. On the other hand, any pleasure that comes out of one's maturing process is a different type of joy. Not hurting someone, or doing the right thing at the right time, for instance, gives you joy — if not immediately, later. Suppose you have postponed doing something, like the laundry, vacuuming, or letter writing, the day you decide to do it — and do it, you find that there is a joy in finally having done it — a joy that is neither pleasure nor security. It is just doing what is to be done; it is *dharma*, a very big topic that we will discuss later. For now, it is enough to know that as you grow in your understanding, your *dharma* also grows.

These, then, are three of the four *puruṣārthas* — *artha*, *kāma and dharma*. Because of the importance we place on *dharma*, the order can now be reversed — *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. *Dharma* accounts for your maturity. The more mature you are, the more *dhārmika* you are. In order to be mature, an understanding of *dharma* and conformity to it become of prime importance in one's life. Thus, *dharma* occupies the first place among these three human ends. Without violating *dharma*, doing what is to be done, you pursue *artha* and *kāma*, security and pleasure. This is how these three universal human pursuits are to be understood.

MOKṢA: FREEDOM FROM WHAT?

Even though it comes last, *mokṣa* is a very important *puruṣārtha*, as we shall see. *Mokṣa* is recognised as a pursuit only by a very few people in any given generation. Because a certain appreciation, a certain maturity or insight, about life and its struggles

is required to understand *mokṣa*, people do not discerningly pursue it, although everyone is in fact, always seeking freedom in one form or other.

Although we think of freedom in a very positive way, the word *mokṣa* is actually defined in a negative sense. There is something binding you, from which you want to become free and that freedom is *mokṣa*. We say, for example, that a man who is not in jail has freedom, whereas if he is in jail, he does not. Because he cannot choose to come out, he has lost his freedom of mobility and wants to gain it. He wants freedom from the shackles of jail.

If you are using crutches because of a leg fracture, you want freedom from the crutches. Similarly, an infant requiring the help of the wall or mother's hand in order to stand wants to be free of the wall or the hand and therefore strives to stand on his or her own. Freedom, then, is always freedom from something.

Mokṣa means freedom from something I do not want. And because *mokṣa* is a *puruṣārtha*, a human end common to all, wanting to be free is not peculiar to me alone. Everyone wants to be free from certain things that are common to all. That I am attached to particular forms of security, *artha*, reveals a certain fact about myself — that I am insecure. That I also seek pleasures, *kāma*, reveals that I am restless, that I am not satisfied with myself. I have to do something in order to please myself, which means that I am displeased with myself.

If you are always seeking security and pleasure, when will you make your life? When will you really be able to say, 'I have made it! You can say that only when you see yourself as secure and are pleased with yourself. Then you are free; you have *mokṣa*.

Mokṣa does not mean salvation. In fact, there is no word in Sanskrit for salvation, which is just as well, since salvation implies a certain condemnation of yourself. It implies that someone has to salvage you, has to save you, which is not what is meant by *mokṣa* at all. The word *mokṣa* refers only to the freeing of myself from certain fetters. The basic ones are the notions that 'I am insecure' and 'I am displeased with myself.'

I must see myself as secure and be pleased with myself as I am. Only then do I have *mokṣa*. If I am secure and pleased with myself, what situation is going to change that? I require no security or a situational change whatsoever to be secure and at peace.

This should be understood well. You spend your entire life manipulating the world to please yourself. In the process, you find that two hands and legs, five senses, and a mind are not enough to contend with all the factors involved. There are just too many events and situations, as well as natural forces, over which you seem to have no control.

FREEDOM IS FREEDOM FROM SEEKING

With my limited powers and limited knowledge, I find that I can never measure up to the demands of gaining the securities and pleasures that I seek. This is why life seems to be a problem. Only when you reach thirty-nine or forty, when you undergo what is sometimes referred to as the 'Mid-life crisis,' do you begin to understand this. Even though you may think your marriage or your job is your crisis, actually you are the crisis. Your crisis has nothing to do with marriage or any of the other situations in your life. Your tendency, however, is to find a scapegoat for every problem you have and the immediate scapegoat available is often your partner in life.

When we look into our various pursuits – *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*, we find that, what we really seek is none of these. We seek only freedom from being a seeker. Everyone is a seeker pursuing *artha* and *kāma* mainly and, to some extent, *dharma*. But, ultimately, everyone is seeking only *mokṣa*. Therefore, *mokṣa* alone is the real end. In other words, freedom from being insecure is what we seek when we seek security. When I seek certain securities, I am not really seeking the securities themselves. I am seeking freedom from being insecure. This distinction should be clearly understood.

The shift in emphasis that this distinction represents is what we call learning. Seeking security is very natural. For an uninformed person, one who does not think about or understand his or her own ideas and urges, security is a particular thing and is always taken to be outside oneself. That – 'I am insecure' – is a totally accepted conclusion for such a person, a conclusion that is never doubted or questioned.

Various philosophies have arisen from this insecurity. One person says, for instance, that money will not give you security, while another person says it will – but only here on earth, not later. Later security, we are told, can only be gained by doing certain prescribed acts. Thus, we have varieties of religions and philosophies, all of which have been born out of accepting that, 'I am insecure' and that, security is something outside of oneself.

Even as a child, one's security depends on the constant availability of protection, love, and care of one's parents. On the other hand, once the child has grown up, the situation is reversed. Now the parents' security depends on the attention of the child. Parents often feel neglected by their grown up children who are now occupied with their own lives. Once a child has grown up, security is no more in the parents; it lies elsewhere.

THAT I LACK IS THE PROBLEM

As a child I was insecure and now also I am insecure. There is a constant shift in what I take to be securities, which is considered to be a normal life for everyone. No one, however, deserves to have this problem. Security is not the problem. That I lack

something is not the problem. The problem is that 'I' lack. This difference must be seen clearly.

What I lack is always variable — I lack iced tea; I lack children; I lack a house. What one lacks is always peculiar to the individual at a given time and place in one's life. This differs from individual to individual, from culture to culture. However, this 'I lack' is common to all and is entirely different from what I lack. I may lack a healthy body, a taller body, a thinner body, a turned-up nose, longer eyelashes, or a different skin colour. And this may only be the beginning of an endless list! But the fact that I conclude that 'I lack' is universal.

For instance, what can you do if your height is less than you would like it to be? The most you can do is to wear high-heeled shoes, which does not really make you any taller. In fact, in the eyes of others you may be shorter. It is only when you are being recruited for a basketball team that anyone else thinks about your height. Height is your complex. I do not think about your height until you get into high-heeled shoes and try to walk. Only then do I see your height because you have drawn my attention to it; and I immediately cut it down by a few inches. I may actually reduce it more than the actual height of your heels. You not only fall short of my expectation, but also you become shorter than what you really are!

Thus, if you have a complex with reference to your height, you are stuck. If you were a wire or something stretchable, your height could be increased but, here, no stretching is possible. Similarly, there are a lot of things that you are stuck with because the things you are not, known and unknown, are countless. And what you lack you can never totally fulfil. The more you go after what you lack, the more you breed what you lack because what you lack has a knack of multiplying itself. It is like going to the supermarket to pick up a few things you lack and coming home with a few more desires to be fulfilled when you get your following week's paycheque. This is why we say desire is like fire that leaves a black trail after itself. No matter how much you feed it, fire never says, 'Enough!' Similarly, human beings can never say 'Enough!' to securities and pleasures.

INSECURE PLUS INSECURE IS NOT SECURE

When, then, are you going to completely fulfil your *arthas* and *kāmas*? I am not saying you should not seek out security; that is not the emphasis here. We are only trying to understand the very pursuit itself. Money definitely has its value. But, if you think that there is security in money, or in anything else, the process of seeking becomes endless. The insecure me, the one who wants to be secure, does not really become secure by the addition of what I consider to be securities. No one can say, 'I am secure,' even with all possible securities.

As long as I require crutches, the sense of insecurity centred on me will remain with me. Feeling secure because I have crutches does not mean I am secure. I feel secure only because of the crutches, whereas the sense of insecurity centred on me remains.

Suppose I am insecure and what I think is secure is as insecure as I am. For example, if one insecure person marries another insecure person in order to be secure, the result is not security. All that results is a marriage between two insecure people. Can there be a greater hell anywhere? When two such people come together, it is a problem because insecurity plus insecurity do not make security, only double insecurity.

There is a story about a man who, as he was bathing by the side of a river, slipped and was swept away by the current. Because he could not swim, he prayed, 'Oh! Lord, please help me!' Just then a log came along and, catching hold of it, the man said, 'My God! God is great!' Then he realised that the log had fur on it — and hands also. He had thought he was holding on to a log, but now he realised that the 'log' was holding on to him. Still he thought that the Lord was saving him. He found, however, that the Lord was a grizzly bear that, having fallen from a tree, had also been swept up by the current. Once he realised he was holding on to a bear, he wanted to escape, but the bear already had too tight a hold on him.

WHO HOLDS ON TO WHAT?

Similarly, you do not know which holds what or who holds whom. You may have thought you were holding on to something, only to find that you cannot give it up, which means that it is holding you. This is a problem. Any habit is the same. An alcoholic was once a free person. When he or she took the first drink, the person poured the alcohol into the glass and, then, holding on to the glass, drank from it — no problem. However, after some time the person finds that he or she does not drink at all. As soon as 'Happy Hour'[1] arrives, the bottle tells the person, 'Come here,' and he or she goes like a zombie. Then the bottle says, 'Come on, pick me up!' And the person picks it up. It says, 'Come on, pour me into the glass! Drink!' And the person drinks. Then, it says 'One more, one more.' And the person takes more and more alcohol without his volitional control. Who is this person now, the one who was previously free? Does he or she drink? Or does the drink, drink the person?

In so many situations, no one knows who holds on to what. I see no difference between the grabber and the grabbed, the holder and the held. Even inert things like drinks, cards, or dice, have the capacity to grab me — to say nothing of relationships, since people are equally insecure. Therefore, an insecure me plus anything in this world that happens to be within the framework of time is not going to make me secure. This we

---

[1] *The time in a bar when drinks are served at reduced prices.*

should understand well. We are not trying to develop a particular attitude here, just a simple appreciation of the facts.

THE FACTS OF INSECURITY

That I am insecure is a fact and that I seek securities is also a fact. That which I consider secure is not secure because it also is finite. This, too, is a fact.

You may think that, by giving away whatever securities you have, you will become secure. One man did this. He gave away his house, his business, and his bank balance, and went to a Swami. But the Swami was also insecure and wanted to have a following of disciples. Previously, the man was on a husband trip, a father trip, a business-money trip, and now he is on another trip — a Swami-*ātmā*-trip minus a house, wife, children, money and so on. To think that subtraction is going to help, when addition does not, is nothing but a lack of understanding. And if *artha* is like this, *kāma* is the same.

No pleasure is going to be lasting. Take music, for instance, You buy a recording of a hit song. Why is this song a hit? Because, like a hit man, it knocks off all the other songs out of the running. Last month's hit song has been hit and is no longer a hit song. It only gathers dust on your tape deck. No one bothers about it any more.

Similarly, your attitude is always changing. What made you happy before no longer provides the same joy. You get tired of everything. Even if God were around you all the time, you would eventually want some privacy. This constant changing is natural because you are basically displeased with yourself. Therefore, you are pleased only now and then. The only silver lining in life is one's hope. This is all that keeps you going. Perhaps hope is nature's way of enabling you to survive so that you can discover nature herself.

Suppose those moments of pleasure, which are so few and far between, were denied to a given person, suppose they were not there at all, do you think a self-conscious human being, the displeased human being, would want to live? He or she would surely commit suicide. And, in spite of these moments of pleasure, if a person thinks there is no possibility of being happy, either because of a loss of some kind or an apprehension of some great calamity, the person would choose not to live. This is the thinking behind all suicides.

Therefore, moments of pleasure are worthwhile because they keep you going. The hope is that you will discover that you do not need a mother-in-law to be displeased; you need only yourself. If you close the doors, put aside the world and sit in an easy chair and try to be with yourself, then you will understand whether you are pleased with yourself or not. You will find that you do not require a world of perception, a world of books or anything to be displeased. All that you require is yourself. After just a few

minutes of sitting with yourself, you want to get up and go out or take a shower – anything other than sitting with yourself.

THE WORLD IS NOT THE CAUSE OF YOUR PROBLEMS

To be displeased, then, requires nothing but yourself. It is not the world that displeases you; you are displeased with yourself. And whatever pleases you is going to be time-bound, all of which we will see as we study the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Because any *kāma*, any pleasure, you pick up is limited by nature – in terms of time, content, and degree, the one who is displeased remains in spite of occasional moments of pleasure. Therefore, we have now discerned the problem to be the conclusion about myself that, 'I am displeased.' This is a fact that is not going to be altered just because I pick up moments of pleasure. That I am insecure does not change merely because I acquire or give up certain securities. Thus, the only solution is to see myself secure and pleased with myself. But how is it possible to do this?

If, with all these securities and pleasures, I am displeased with myself, how am I going to see myself pleased without them? This is where the teaching called *Vedānta* comes in and tells you that your problem is not one of lacking something, but of not knowing that you do not lack anything. It converts all one's pursuits into a pursuit of knowledge.

In the vision of *Vedānta*, there is no reason for you to be displeased with yourself because you are totally acceptable to yourself – not in terms of attitude, but in reality. It is not a belief; it is a fact, a discoverable fact. Only something that can be discovered is a fact; and the discoverable fact here is that you lack nothing. You are totally free. This is a vision of you and this is the heart of *Vedānta*, the heart of this teaching. The problem that 'I lack' is thereby converted into ignorance, the cause of which I do not know for the time being. Until I come to know, the vision assumes the status of a promise.

YOU ARE THE PROBLEM; YOU ARE THE SOLUTION

Vedānta defines the problem as not what you lack, but that you lack, and says that you are the solution because you are the problem.

There are two types of problems. One has its solution outside the problem and the other has its solution within the very problem itself. The solution to the problem of feeling cold, for example, is outside the problem in the sense that you have to cover yourself, go to the fireside, or go out into the sun. You may even decide to go to the Bahamas. When the solution to a problem is outside, it means that you have to do something to solve the problem. If hunger is your problem, you, have to feed the hunger by eating food, which is also outside. The solution to a jigsaw puzzle, however, is within

the problem, within the puzzle itself. Because the solution is within the problem. There is no problem, in fact. The only problem is you and the solution is also you. When you do not understand something, it is a problem for you, whereas when you do understand, there is no problem. The understanding is the solution. In the vision of *Vedānta*, you have no problem, in fact.

Then, you may ask, how can I recognise that I do not have a problem? This seems to be one more problem to add to the ones I already have. But is it? One problem is not there – the problem of self-non-acceptance. Because, in the vision of *Vedānta*, the self is acceptable. What else do you want really? The only problem any human being has is self-non-acceptance. Therefore, you are the problem and you are the solution. Now your pursuit becomes one of knowing yourself and it can be a game – fun, all the way. This, then, is the teaching.

A discriminative analysis of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* leads one to a certain fundamental human problem. Once this human problem has been discerned, you will take special steps to resolve it, even though you may continue to pursue *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*. The solution to this original fundamental problem is called *mokṣa*.

MOKṢA IS NOT SALVATION

Mokṣa, as we have said, is not an equivalent to salvation, as is commonly thought. Nor is it some kind of accomplishment other than yourself. As freedom from something, however, *mokṣa* could be considered a negative accomplishment of sorts. Nevertheless, there is nothing more positive than *mokṣa*.

Once we say 'freedom,' the question is, 'Freedom from what?' and the answer is simply, 'Freedom from something I do not want.' No one wants freedom from what he or she wants. Therefore, no one wants freedom from *artha* or *kāma*, securities and pleasures. We want *artha*, *kāma*, a little bit of *dharma* plus *mokṣa*.

Mokṣa is not freedom from *artha* or *kāma*. That, which *artha* provides, *mokṣa* cannot provide. But that which *mokṣa* provides cannot be provided by *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma* combined. A person who has *mokṣa* also has the freedom to pursue the other three human ends, *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*, if he or she so chooses. This, then, is real freedom and not freedom from these pursuits.

And who is it that undertakes these pursuits? The person, called *puruṣa* in Sanskrit, meaning any person young or old, man or woman, Indian or American. This *puruṣa*, the person, is the one who is after *artha* and *kāma*.

ALL ACTIONS HAVE A PURPOSE

A human being never undertakes a deliberate activity without it having a purpose. Even involuntary actions have a purpose, but here, we are talking only about those

actions that are voluntary. Voluntary, deliberate actions always presuppose a desirer, whose desire is never for the action as such, but for the result, the object of desire. There is always some end in view.

An object that you have cannot become an object of desire if you know you have it. However, you may have something and not recognise that you have it and, therefore, it may become the object of your desire. Thus, the clause 'if you know you have it,' is important here. For instance, you cannot desire a head over you shoulders, since you already have one. Even if you have such a desire, no one can fulfil it; not even the Lord. If you were to ask him why, in spite of all of your devotion and prayers, he has not fulfilled your desire, he could only say, 'I cannot give you what you already have.' When I tell you that I cannot give you something, there are only two possible reasons for my response. One is that I am incapable of giving it to you, due to my lack of knowledge, power, or resources. The other possibility is that I can give it to you, but you do not deserve it, you are not qualified to receive it. Therefore, either you are not qualified to receive it or I am not qualified to give it to you.

Here, however, the incapacity to give you a head over your shoulders is because you are asking for something you already have. How, then, can even God give you one? If you want one more head, being God, he can give you a second head, although I do not know how a second head is going to help you, if the one you already have has not helped you. But he can give it to you. You will have to tell him, of course, where you would like it put. But do not ask him to give you a head over your shoulders. What you have, he cannot give you.

Although you cannot desire an object that you know you have, you can always desire an object that you do not have. There are many things that you do not have, like a green card, a new house, another job, a promotion, a wife, a husband, or children, a trip to a particular place — anything you do not have, you can desire. Thus, what you do not have can become an object of your desire.

Without a purpose, there is no effort, no deliberate activity. Therefore, the *puruṣa*, the person undertakes activities for accomplishing different ends — mainly *artha* and *kāma*, but also *dharma*. If this is so, there is a very important question to be asked, 'Do I want *artha* and *kāma* for the sake of *artha* and *kāma* themselves?' The answer to this question is what distinguishes the entire Vedic vision of human life from one's usual way of looking at it.

WHY DO I SEEK OUT SECURITIES AND PLEASURES?

Is *kāma* for its own sake? Is it for the sake of pleasure? Is it just for fun? If so, then with it or without it, you are the same. You go for it just because you go for it. In other words, it is nothing more than a fancy. But is this really the case? Are *artha* and *kāma*, which we are seeking in life, for their own sake or are they for myself? The *Veda*

says that every object of my desire is for my sake alone — *ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati*.[1]

We only desire that which we know. No one can desire an object that is unknown to him or her. None of you has a desire for 'Gagabugan,' for instance. An unknown Gagabugan cannot be an object of desire. In fact, there is no such thing as Gagabugan. No amount of coaxing will cause you to get into your car and go to buy Gagabugan. But, you always have a reason for getting into your car. Some desire is always being fulfilled. Thus, an unknown object does not become an object of desire.

Only known objects become objects of desires. There are of course, some known objects for which I do not have a desire — scorpions, cancer, etc., for example. In fact, the more I know of such objects, the more I want to be rid of them. Also, an object that has been known and loved by me need not always be desirable to me. I may have no desire for it whatsoever a few years down the road. No one performs an action or undertakes a course of action without an end in view. Whether the end is right or not can only be discovered later. One may change one's view, or give it up altogether, for a variety of reasons. We have all done this. But what is desirable now, I will definitely seek out. Therefore, one who desires a particular end, any *artha* or *kāma*, does so for his or her own sake.

Suppose you say, 'No, Swamiji, it is not for my sake; it is for the sake of my son.' This only means that your 'me' has become a little extended, but it always reduces to 'me.' Your 'me' can extend to the community in which you live, to your religion and to your nation also. It is your ego — an extended ego — and the more extensions, the healthier the ego. Still, the end is always for your sake alone.

PRAYER IS ALWAYS FOR ONE'S OWN SAKE

Even if you offer a prayer, for whose sake is the prayer? For God's sake? Is God in such difficulty that you have to pray for him also? If God requires our prayers in order to survive, then to whom should I pray? If you are praying to God for God's sake, then for God's sake, please give it up! When one says, 'For God's sake,' it is only an expression. You do not do anything for God's sake.

It is also often said that one should 'Serve God.' Is it that, God has too much work to do and therefore needs our help? Of course not. Your service and your prayer is for your sake alone. There is nothing wrong with that. If you pray for your mother, father, children, humanity and all living beings, you do so because you can only be happy if others are happy. How can you be happy if everyone else is unhappy?

We see this in games, for instance. In tennis, you always start with love — like marriage! — and then fight to the bitter end. One person wins and the other loses. The

---

[1] *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 2.4.5*

one who wins, throws his or her racket into the air and says, 'Wonderful! I won!' Whereas, the one who loses, never throws his or her racket into the air, although it may be thrown to the ground in a gesture of defeat! And when the winner approaches the net, still ecstatic and gasping for breath, to shake hands with the loser, the elation subsides a little, because every human heart knows what it is to be on the other side. Thus, when others are unhappy, you cannot be happy.

Desiring *arthas* and *kāmas*, then, I make certain efforts; and if these efforts do not seem to be enough, I make another effort called prayer. Prayer is neither an *artha* nor a *kāma*; it is *dharma*. Through prayer, you want to gain some invisible result which will give you *artha* and *kāma*. Although spiritual seekers do not pray for *artha* and *kāma*, they do pray for knowledge and maturity, which again is for one's own sake alone. This aspect of the human personality is very important and is basic to the vision of *Vedānta*.

When you know that, whatever you do, is for your own sake, everything becomes meaningful. You find that what you do has its place and everything falls into place. Nothing is more efficacious than anything else; no one action is more important than another. Each action becomes important in its own sphere and is meant for producing its own result. Can we say that the ears are better than the eyes or that the eyes are better than the ears? No, we require both. If I see you shouting at me but cannot hear what you are shouting, I cannot respond to you properly. Eyes have their own sphere, as do the ears. Similarly, each organ – the kidney, liver, heart, lung, and so on – has its own sphere, each one as important as any of the others.

But in order for everything to fall into its place, the starting point must be proper. Here, the proper starting point is knowing that any action I perform is always for a given end and that end is for my sake alone. *Vedānta* takes this statement one step further to cover certain important relationships. A wife is dear to her husband not for her sake, but for his sake. Similarly, the husband becomes dear to his wife for her sake, not for his sake. If I understand that everything I do is for my own sake alone, then even my relationships would be very objective. I will not go about saying, 'I did so much for you' – the starting point for all kinds of trouble.

FREEDOM FROM BEING A WANTING PERSON

That I want *artha* and *kāma* reveals that, I am an insecure and unhappy person from two different standpoints. What do I really want? Do I want the actual *artha* and *kāma*, the objects themselves or do I want security and happiness? Because I want security and happiness, all *arthas* and *kāmas* are reduced to security and happiness alone.

If I am insecure, I naturally seek security and if I am unhappy, I seek happiness. However, it is not the security itself that I want. What I really want is freedom from insecurity. In terms of security, I am wanting. In terms of fullness and happiness also, I

am wanting. Therefore, I want freedom from being a wanting person and, in order to be free from being a wanting person, I have to see myself as secure. I have to see myself as one who does not lack anything and I can see myself in this way alone when I have no sense of lack.

If I am insecure and unhappy, and I see myself as secure and happy because of some kind of self-hypnotism, for instance, then I am under yet another delusion. It is better to be insecure than to be deluded into thinking that I am secure. If I know I am insecure, then at least I can be objective and thereby understand my problems.

Thus, one has to be secure in order to see oneself as secure. To be able to say, 'I am happy,' one has to be happy to understand the happiness we talk about. I can therefore see myself as secure and happy either by becoming so or by already being so. I am using two different words here, 'becoming' and 'being' for a reason. We generally see ourselves as insecure and unhappy and then try to become secure and happy. The whole process of living, the struggles in our lives, are all a process of becoming — being insecure, we seek to become secure.

In the final analysis, people are all after the same thing. One may seek this and that, but over the shoulders of seemingly different ends, we see two common ends — being secure and being happy. My hope is that one day I will become secure, that one day I will become happy. Therefore, even when we are seeking *artha* and *kāma*, we are all seeking freedom from being insecure and unhappy. This must be clearly understood.

MOKṢA AS THE END IN LIFE

Given that everyone wants freedom from being a wanting person, everyone wants *mokṣa*. When it is put in this way, it looks as though *mokṣa* is just another end. In fact, it is not another end; it is the end, the end behind all ends. We refer to *mokṣa* as another end, another *puruṣārtha*, only because people do not recognise it as the only end, even though they seek freedom from insecurity. Recognising this end is the culmination of one's life; the end of *saṃsāra* — insecurities and unhappiness.

The culmination of one's life is not ageing; it is the ability to discern yourself as one who is secure and happy. This discerning is part of growing up. Once the fact that you are secure and happy has been discerned, even though you may continue in your various *artha* and *kāma* pursuits, you have taken the necessary step for *mokṣa*. However small the step, the step has been made. Having 'stepped into' this teaching, the necessary step has been taken.

You should not be alarmed by the word *mokṣa*. You need not worry about what will happen to your family if you study and become enlightened. Believe me, your family will be happy because they will no longer have to deal with your insecurities and unhappiness. Also, by trying to gain enlightenment, the pressure you were feeling will

definitely be less because you now have something better to accomplish in life. Otherwise, life is a problem.

Marriage, for example, cannot be an end in itself. If it is, there will be problems, and the marriage will end. Marriage is a means, not an end, whereby husband and wife each seek freedom from insecurity. Freedom from insecurity is their common end and they help each other. Together, as companions, they make the journey. This most significant aspect of marriage is acknowledged in the seven steps of a Hindu marriage ceremony. Only when these seven steps have been taken has the marriage taken place. Each of the seven steps represents one aspect of the couple's journey, for which there is a destination, *mokṣa*.

Discerning *mokṣa* as the end in life and seeking it make one's life meaningful. They do not prevent a person from seeking *artha* and *kāma*. In fact, without them, life is just a rat race. One should always remember that the truth of the rat race is that, even after the race, the winning rat continues to be a rat. The vision is now clear; freedom is seeing myself as a secure and happy person, free from being insecure and unhappy.

The whole struggle in life stems only from insecurity and unhappiness. One thinks that by adding some security, one will become secure. In this way, life is one of becoming; and, in the process, one becomes hurt, aged, and has all kinds of things happen to him or her. If the fundamental problem is not discerned, one's life is wasted. All that is achieved is that one human life has been spent. The good thing about all of this is that, the Veda says you always have another chance — and another and another! While this may provide some satisfaction, it is not a solution to the fundamental problem.

Now, if there is no 'becoming free,' and I have to be free, then I must already be free. Moreover, if I am already free and I seek freedom, then I am seeking something that I already am. I know that I want freedom, but I do not know that I am free. Therefore, not knowing I am already free is the problem.

If there is ignorance of oneself, in order to know oneself, there should be a means of knowledge. And it is a fact that what can be known by one means of knowledge cannot be known by another means of knowledge. For example, what can be known by the eyes, in terms of colour and form cannot be known by the ears, in terms of sound. Similarly, what can be inferred can only be inferred at a given time and place.

The basic means of knowledge available to me for knowing things other than myself is perception. But the self, myself, cannot be an object of perception like sound *(śabda)*, touch *(sparśa)*, a form or colour *(rūpa)*, a taste *(rasa)*, or a smell *(gandha)*. Only those objects which have the attributes of sound, form or colour, smell, taste, and touch can be known as objects of my senses; whereas the self is the one who uses this

means of knowledge, perception. Therefore, I cannot employ perception as a means of knowledge to know myself.

One's perception can be enhanced by microscopes, telescopes, and various other instruments, thereby gathering better data and increasing one's capacity to make more accurate inferences based on perception. These better data definitely question one's previous understanding. For instance, because you see the sun rising in the eastern sky and setting in the west, you conclude from your perceptual data that the sun rises and sets. And the earth is stationary. However, seeing the sun move does not mean that it moves. The sun can appear to be moving but, if you go to the North Pole, you will see that the sun does not move from east to west. You now have better data because of which you revise your earlier conclusion. This new conclusion then becomes the basis for additional data and inferences.

Similarly, if we put a stick in a glass of water, the stick looks bent. You may think that the water has the capacity to bend the stick, but when you pull it out, you see that it is not bent. Your conclusion or knowledge now is that it does not bend, that it only appears to be bent while in the glass of water. Perception is negated by conclusive knowledge. That the stick appears to be bent when it is not is now understood as an optical illusion. Conclusions based on better data are all valid and all conclusions are arrived at through a means of knowledge, *pramāṇa* — inference in this case.

The question now becomes, can the self, myself, who uses inference and perception, become an object for either of these means of knowledge? It cannot. And yet, at the same time, I must know myself.

WHAT MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE IS THERE FOR KNOWING MYSELF?

I do know that I exist and, to know this, I do not require a means of knowledge, as we shall see more clearly later. All I need to know is what I am. Am I as I conclude? Am I insecure? What are the reasons for concluding that I am insecure? We will also see all of this more in detail, later. But, for now, it is enough to know that ignorance is the main reason that I see myself as insecure.

Ignorance is the main reason for any error. But, here, the error is typical and wherever an error is typical, there are other incidental reasons that make it so. Suppose you mistake a rope for some other object. What kind of a mistake do you make? You do not take the rope to be an elephant. Such a mistake is not possible. But you could take the rope to be a snake or any number of other similar-looking objects. You cannot, however, mistake it for something totally dissimilar.

Similarly, there is self-ignorance leading to certain typical conclusions on the part of every being — that I am insecure, unhappy, and so on. There are, thus, incidental causes for such conclusions as well as the prime cause, ignorance, which we are dealing

with here. Knowledge alone can dispel ignorance and knowledge cannot take place without a means of knowledge — even knowledge that is picked up accidentally, like the knowledge of Penicillin, for example.

Knowledge picked up accidentally does not preclude a means of knowledge. In fact, there was a great deal of knowledge leading to the accidental discovery of Penicillin — the greatest discovery of the century, I would say, since it has revolutionised the quality of human life. Infections that were once fatal succumb to this wonder drug and certain innovative surgeries, such as heart transplants, can now be performed, thanks to Alexander Fleming, who stumbled upon this particular knowledge.

'Stumbling upon,' serendipity, is also a means of knowledge. If the scientist who discovered Penicillin had not been qualified, he would not have had the knowledge to question why the strain of bacterium he was culturing had been destroyed by a particular fungus. When he found the bacteria dead, he would have just said, 'They died. Better luck next time.' Instead, he had the capacity to look into the whole situation and, using the proper means of knowledge, experiments, and so on, he concluded that, this particular fungus destroys bacteria.

Knowledge itself is never stumbled upon. All that is stumbled upon is a particular situation leading to the knowledge. For knowledge to take place, you have to recognise the situation and this recognition is what is meant by knowledge. But, the self can never be stumbled upon, even if you remove all your thoughts, as some people maintain. Which self will you stumble upon? Who is it that is stumbling and what is it that is being stumbled upon? If you are ignorant of your self and remove all the thoughts you previously had, what will you be? You will still be ignorant — without thoughts. Then, if you conclude that you are enlightened because you have removed all thoughts, the conclusion will be a thoughtless conclusion.

THOUGHTS NEED NOT BE ELIMINATED

This you must know. The enlightened mind is not brought about by the elimination of thoughts. Knowledge always comes because of an appropriate means of knowledge. There is no way of altering knowledge and there is no replacement for a means of knowledge. Therefore, what can be known by a given means of knowledge can be known only by that means of knowledge. There is no accommodation here. If you have to see a colour, what accommodation can there be? Only the eyes will see colour; your nose certainly will not. There is no other means for knowing colour except the eyes.

Because I cannot stumble upon my self, will I not remain ignorant in spite of anything I might do? And if so, might one not also ask, 'is it not enough just to be a devotee? Why should I study all these books? Why should I have this knowledge? As a devotee, will I not gain *mokṣa* when I die?'

You may think that, because of your devotion, you will go to heaven and sit with God. However, you will still be ignorant. In addition, how long will it be before you become bored there and want to come back? On the other hand, the reward for all your prayers, offered either in this life or in previous lives, is stumbling upon the means of knowledge for knowing the *ātmā* or even understanding what a means of knowledge is. This is all stated in the Vedas. What is the means of knowledge to know the self then? We have seen that it has to be other than perception and inference and, therefore, can only be external means — words. For facts that I cannot know by perception and inference, words, *śabda*, can be a means of knowledge. And those words are called Veda. They are with us, meaning that they are with humanity. We refer to them as 'revealed' and look upon them as a means of knowledge for truths that can be neither inferred nor perceived.[1] This acceptance of the Veda as a *pramāṇa* is what is meant by *śraddhā*.

THE VEDA AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

Suppose I were to say, 'The *Veda* says that there is such a thing as heaven,' can you prove it? Can you disprove it? If it can be proven, it is not knowledge exclusive to the *Veda*. Since we cannot prove or disprove it, the *Veda* is the *pramāṇa* for knowing about heaven.

Anything that cannot be proved or disproved is the sphere of the *Veda* and is its definition as well. That there is a heaven, that there is an afterlife, that there is not an end of everything and everyone, cannot be proved. Nor can you prove that, for all your actions, right and wrong, there are invisible results, accrued to your account, called *puṇya* and *pāpa*.

The *Veda* says that *puṇya* is the result of good action and *pāpa* is the result of wrong action. The *Veda* also says, along with some supporting logic, that *pāpa* accrued to our account has to be paid for with pain. This is called the law of *karma*. Can you disprove such statements? Can you prove them? You can neither prove them nor can you disprove them.

There are a number of other things mentioned in the *Veda*. For instance, we are told that by performing a certain ritual, we will receive a specific result, either immediately or later. Suppose you perform a ritual for the sake of having a child, called

---

[1] प्रत्यक्षेणानुमित्या वा यस्तूपायो न बुध्यते।
एतं विदन्ति वेदेन तस्माद् वेदस्य वेदता।।
pratyakṣeṇānumityā vā yastūpāyo na budhyate
etaṃ vidanti vedena tasmād vedasya vedatā — Ṛgveda-bhāṣya
People know through the Vedas that which cannot be known through perception or inference. Therefore the Vedas are a means of knowledge.

Putrakāmeṣti. You have made every effort possible and the best medical advice available has assured you that there is no reason for you not to have a child. But, then, something is denying you this particular gift. Since you are dealing with an unknown factor, and you want a specific result, you perform a specific prayer, not a broad-spectrum prayer. This specific prayer takes care of the unknown factor that is denying you the gift of a child — and a child comes to you. All of this is stated in the *Veda*. Because this ritual and its result is given by the *Veda*, you accept it — along with all the other statements made therein. The spheres covered in the *Veda* are only those that are not available for perception and inference.

The first portion of the *Veda* deals with various rituals, prayers, *karma*, *puṇya*, *pāpa*, and so on, and is called the *pūrvabhāga* or the *karmakāṇḍa*. The end portion of the *Veda* deals with certain facts about the nature of the self that cannot be stumbled upon by any other means of knowledge at our disposal. This is called the *jñānakāṇḍa* or the *Vedānta* or the *uttarabhāga*.

When we say that something is beyond one's inference or perception, we do not mean that it is beyond the mind. We mean that, it is not available for one's inference or perception. Still, it has to be known and any knowledge takes place only in the mind. Therefore, where does self-knowledge take place? Only in the mind — *manasā eva anudraṣṭavyam*. Because all knowledge has to take place in the mind, you cannot go 'beyond the mind' to gain self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge is a peculiar knowledge in that, it is not knowledge of an object. It is knowledge of myself, for which the means of knowledge is the last portion of the *Veda*, in the *Upaniṣads*, collectively called *Vedānta*. Any statement that reveals the truth of oneself, the nature of oneself, with all fallacies removed, is *Vedānta*, whether it is in Sanskrit, some tribal dialect, or any other language. Although the literal meaning of the word '*Vedānta*' is 'the end of the *Veda*,' the word 'Veda' itself means 'a body of knowledge.' This body of knowledge is available for the humanity. All that one has to do is make use of it.

REVEALED KNOWLEDGE — APAURUṢEYA-PRAMĀṆA

How has this knowledge come about? We can say, that it has come about by revelation. But, to do so, requires a certain understanding of the word 'revelation.' Anyone can say, 'I had a revelation yesterday.' God always comes in dreams, it seems, and tells certain people all sorts of things. I can also say I had a dream in which God came; but, in my dream, God said, 'I never come in dreams!'

The statement that 'The entire Veda and hence *Vedānta* is a revealed knowledge' is not an immature statement, as we will come to understand. The entire Veda is a body of knowledge that was not authored by any person. It was revealed to the *ṛṣis* directly. That is why the *ṛṣis* are not the authors of the *Veda*. They are the seers of the *mantras*

— *mantra-draṣṭāraḥ* and not *mantra-kartāraḥ*. Therefore the *Vedas* are considered to be *apauruṣeya*, not born of human intellect. They are considered to be a *pramāṇa* because, they reveal some thing that is not available to us through perception or inference be it the knowledge of various ends and means in the *karma-kāṇḍa* or the knowledge of the self in the end portion of the *Vedas*. Thus my definition of *Vedānta* is that, it is a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa* in the form of words. The sphere of this means of knowledge is 'you.' It talks about 'you.'

You now have a means of knowledge, which you did not have before. Originally, you had only inference and perception, which you cannot press into service to know yourself. Naturally, then, you look for an appropriate means of knowledge and find that there is none available to you other than the one that is outside of you.

An appropriate means of knowledge must tell you something valid about yourself. In other words, it cannot be fallacious. When something is said about you, it can either be true or untrue, something that is subject to personal validation. The word 'revelation' here is to be understood in terms of an appropriate means of knowledge. The first step towards self-knowledge, then, is accepting *Vedānta* as a revealed means of knowledge.

How do we know that, *Vedānta* is a means of knowledge? What is the proof? Is there a proof for a means of knowledge? If *Vedānta* is a means of knowledge for the self, it requires neither inferential nor perceptual proof. All that is required is that it should not contradict what you know inferentially or perceptually.

HOW DO YOU PROVE THAT VEDĀNTA IS A PRAMĀṆA

Vedānta cannot be disproved as a means of knowledge and it requires no proof other than self-validation. Let us suppose that a man who was born blind undergoes a new surgical procedure, at the age of thirty-five, that will enable him to see. The surgery is considered to be a success, there are no complications, and the doctors are convinced that the man will see. After removing the bandages, the doctor says, 'Please open your eyes.' But, keeping his eyes closed tightly, the man says, 'Doctor, I will only open my eyes when you prove that I can see.' What can the doctor do now? He is being asked to prove that the man's eyes are a means of knowledge, that they are capable of sight. But how can he do that? He can only say, 'I think you will be able to see. The surgery went very well and there is no reason why your eyes should not see.' Even if the doctor forces the man's eyes open, the only proof that he will be able to see is the sight registered by the eyes themselves.

Vedānta says that you are the solution to your problem and that there is no other solution. You have already tried to resolve the problem in a number of different ways. *Vedānta* does not promise anything. It does not say you will become the solution; it says you are the solution. To become the solution, implies a certain commitment and

investment, meaning that you may find it or you may not, since every 'becoming' is fraught with uncertainty.

In the Vedic vision of the reality, everything that is known and unknown is *Brahman*, and that *Brahman* you are — *tat tvam asi*. Gaining this vision, one finds oneself free from all the limitations imposed upon oneself due to ignorance and error.

TWO COMMITTED LIFE-STYLES

To gain this vision, the *Veda* prescribes two committed life-styles. One is a life of activity — *pravṛttimārga* and the other a life of renunciation of activity — *nivṛttimārga*. *Śaṅkara* introduces his *bhāṣya* to the *Bhagavadgītā* with the exposition of this two-fold *dharma* as it is revealed by the *Veda*. Here, *dharma* can be understood as a religious or as a spiritual pursuit.

The *Veda* talks about action or activity — *karma*, meaning not only religious activities, but also those that we consider as secular. All activities, whether religious or secular, are considered to be *dharma;* and thereby become duties. This is what is meant by the life-style of *pravṛtti*, whereas the life-style of *nivṛtti* is called renunciation — *sannyāsa*.

The life-style of *pravṛtti* is two-fold; a *pravṛtti* for achieving security and pleasures, here and in the hereafter, and a *pravṛtti* for the purpose of one's own maturity, for the purification of oneself — *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*, as we shall see later. The same acts of prayers and other religious activities are done for both purposes.

There are, therefore, two types of people who follow the *pravṛttimārga*. Both the types follow the *Veda*, but one group does so for the purpose of gaining immediate pleasures and securities. This group also follows the *Veda* for the unseen results of good deeds to be converted into better forms of security or pleasure later, either here or in the hereafter. The second group of people follow the *Veda* and engage in various actions for the sake of *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi* with *mokṣa* as their end in view. People belonging to both these groups accept the *Veda* as a means of knowledge — *pramāṇa*, and are called *vaidikas*. And because they are *vaidikas*, they are referred to as believers — *āstikas*.

BELIEVER AND NON-BELIEVER

In English, we use the words 'atheist' and 'theist' purely with reference to whether or not a person believes in God. It is not so in *vaidika-dharma*. Here, one may believe in the *Veda* and not believe in a personal God at all. Such a person interprets the *Veda* in such a way that there is no such *Īśvara*, no creator at all. Thus, there can be a *vaidika*, one who accepts the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa*, who is an *āstika*, a believer, who believes in the *Veda*, but does not believe in God as a person.

For us, then, *āstika* means someone who believes in the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa* and *nāstika* is one who does not. Given this definition, there are many *nāstikas*, people who do not accept the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa* and who are religious. For instance, a follower of Buddha, although a *nāstika*, should not be dismissed as irreligious. Such people are religious in their own way. However, in our view, a Buddhist is a *nāstika* based on our definition of *āstika* and *nāstika*. Similarly, a person who follows Mahavira, a Jain, is also a *nāstika*. The *Sāṅkhya* philosopher, *Kapila*, and his followers, on the other hand, are *āstikas*, *vaidikas*. They accept the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa*, but they do not accept *Īśvara*. One who follows the Vedic rituals, but who does not accept an *Īśvara*, is also an *āstika*.

Although Buddhists and Jains are *nāstikas*, they both believe in *karma*. They believe there is an afterlife and that there is such a thing as *nirvāṇa*, liberation or *mokṣa*, which is gained after a number of births. That is their belief and they have their own arguments to support it.

When *mokṣa* is the end in view, the two committed life-styles — *pravṛttimārga* and *nivṛttimārga* must be properly understood. They are stated very clearly in the *Vedas* and are again presented in the *Gītā* as well as by *Śaṅkara* in his opening commentary.

ALLOWING THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

If I am the solution, I have no reason either to deny what *Vedānta* says or to prove that it is correct. Just as, in our earlier example, the man had to open his eyes to prove that he could see, so too, the only proof that *Vedānta* is a means of knowledge is in allowing it to work. I should let the words do their magic on me. 'Words' refers to a certain knowledge born of the words. Words are not just words. They can reveal and thereby remove my ignorance.

The words need not always give rise to indirect knowledge; they can also give direct knowledge. When the *Veda* talks about heaven, the knowledge is definitely indirect. In fact, it is a belief. There is a description giving you some indirect knowledge about heaven, if indeed there is one. Every tradition has its own description of heaven and we understand it from that description.

The *Veda*, then, reveals the self by saying that it is beyond words and, at the same time, uses words to make you see the truth of yourself. Therefore, the self is not 'beyond words' in the usual sense of the term. It is something entirely different, highly technical, as we will see, and may take some time to understand.

When words are about an object away from myself, the knowledge is indirect and when they are about an object around myself, the knowledge is direct. Suppose I hold up an orange. You know it is a fruit, but suppose you do not know what kind of fruit it is.

Then I tell you it is an orange. You now know that it is an orange. Then you want to know how it tastes and I tell you how it tastes. That is not enough. You have to taste it actually. You also have to taste some other oranges as well. Only then you come to know more or less, all about an orange. When you smell an orange, peel it, and eat it, not knowing that it is an orange, and I say, 'This is an orange,' the knowledge is direct knowledge, immediate knowledge.

Now, I ask, 'Do you exist or not?' 'I exist. I am,' you say. Then I ask, 'Who are you?' To this question, there are many answers — all of which reveal, 'I am insecure.' However, I say, 'you are secure.' This is not just a statement. I have a whole methodology of teaching. I take you through all the steps logically and then I say, 'Therefore, you are secure.' Is this knowledge immediate, direct, or mediate, indirect? It is immediate, direct knowledge. *Vedānta* is therefore a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge, and you have no other way to proceed except to expose yourself to it, taking it as a means of knowledge. You need to understand exactly what *Vedānta* is saying. And if you do not understand, if you have questions, then you should make an effort to understand.

If what *Vedānta* says is untenable, I should see how untenable it is and examine the untenability. Perhaps it is my understanding that is untenable and what is said is tenable. If that is the case, then, I correct my understanding and keep on correcting it, thereby seeing what *Vedānta* has to say.

THE GĪTĀ AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

The *Gītā*, of course, is not as voluminous as the Vedas, which contain all the *Upaniṣads*. The *Upaniṣads* are the original source book which is understood with the help of books like the *Gītā*, since these books present the same material very cogently in an easily understood form. This is why the *Gītā* is referred to as the *gītāśāstra*.

There are seven hundred verses in the *Gītā*, contained in eighteen chapters, the first chapter and the initial few verses of the second chapter providing the context. We have, then, the entire *gītāśāstra* in seventeen chapters wherein the two-fold *dharma* of a committed life-style for *mokṣa* is unfolded.

Because the *Gītā* is a book *(grantha)* that unfolds this *dharma*, it is looked upon as a *pramāṇa-grantha*, even though the *Upaniṣads* are the *pramāṇa*, not being born of a given intellect. The *Upaniṣads*, meaning the *Vedas*, form the means of knowledge. But the *Gītā* is also looked upon as a *pramāṇa* because it upholds and unfolds what the *Veda (śruti)* says. If the *Gītā* said anything not in keeping with the *śruti*, it would definitely not be considered a *pramāṇa-grantha*. The *Gītā* would not be studied, nor would *Śaṅkara* have written a commentary on it.

The *Gītā* is accepted as *pramāṇa-grantha* because of its affinity and fidelity to the *Veda*. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* himself confirms in the *Gītā* that, what he is saying has already been said in the *Veda*. Further more, the *Gītā* is presented by *Vyāsa* who is considered to be the editor of the *Vedas*.

The four *Vedas*, collectively referred to as the *Veda*, existed even before *Vyāsa*. He was the one who grouped them properly so that a designated person in a given family could study one particular *Veda* and then hand it over to each succeeding generation. Because *Vyāsa* knew the *Vedas* so well, he was considered to be all-knowing (*sarvajña*). In the middle of the vast, beautiful word tapestry of his epic, *Mahābhārata*, *Vyāsa* presented the wisdom of the *Vedas*, in the form of the *Gītā*. It shines in the midst of the much larger work like a pendant jewel. These eighteen chapters are therefore considered to be an authentic *pramāṇa*.

The first argument for the *Gītā* being a *pramāṇa*, then, is that it does not contradict what the *Veda* says. It expounds and illustrates what the source book says. The second argument is that it is presented by *Vyāsa*. Thirdly, *Vyāsa* presents *Kṛṣṇa* as an *avatāra* of the Lord. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* is looked upon as an *avatāra*, a particular form the Lord has assumed for achieving certain limited ends.

If the concept of *avatāra* is accepted, *Kṛṣṇa* as an *avatāra* is Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, *Īśvara* himself. Therefore, when *Kṛṣṇa* talks in the *Gītā*, *Īśvara*, the Lord, is talking. What is said is the word of *Bhagavān (bhagavad-vacana)* and *Bhagavān* is telling us what the *Veda* says. This again makes the *Gītā* a *pramāṇa-grantha* for the believers. When *Bhagavān* himself is talking about what is said in the *Vedas*, what else do we want? Because the *Gītā* is *bhagavad-vacana*, the word of *Bhagavān*, it is a *pramāṇa*.

THE MEANING OF BHAGAVĀN

Bhagavān[1] is the one who has *bhaga*, the six-fold virtues in absolute measure. These are: all knowledge, *jñāna*; total dispassion, *vairāgya*; the capacity to create, sustain, and resolve, *vīrya*; absolute fame, *yaśas*; all wealth, *śrī;* and overlordship, *aiśvarya*.

---

[1] भगः अस्य अस्ति इति भगवान्।

The one who has bhaga is called Bhagavān. It is said in the Viṣṇu-purāṇa:

ऐश्वर्यस्य समग्रस्य वीर्यस्य यशसः श्रियः।

ज्ञानवैराग्ययोश्चैव षण्णां भग इतीरणा।।

aiśvaryasya samagrasya vīryasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ

jñāna-vairāgyayoścaiva ṣaṇṇāṃ bhaga itīraṇā

(Viṣṇu-purāṇa — 6. 5. 74)

Total and absolute overlordship, power, wealth, dispassion, fame and knowledge are known as bhaga.

To have all knowledge, *jñāna*, is to be free from all ignorance. Thus the one who has all *jñāna* does not require a mind, perception, or a means of knowledge with which to know. If we require a mind to know, there is always ignorance. Thus, whoever is endowed with a mind in order to know cannot be *Bhagavān*. We will see later how it is possible to be one with *Bhagavān*. *Bhaga*, therefore, is *jñāna*, all knowledge.

Total, absolute, dispassion is also called *bhaga*. The one who has total, absolute dispassion, *vairāgya*, has no longing, no insecurity. He or she is full. *Vīrya* is absolute power or *śakti* meaning the capacity to create, to sustain, and to resolve. The one who has this absolute power is called the Almighty.

Absolute fame, *yaśas*, means all fame, including your own or anyone else's. This is also *bhaga*. One who is endowed with the ability to sing, for example, may gain some fame, a ray of glory, but that fame belongs to the Lord, the one who has all fame. The Lord also has all wealth, all resources — *Śrī*. Any wealth you may have really belongs to *Bhagavān*, the Lord, and you are only a trustee of whatever resources you happen to have.

Finally, the one who is not caused, who is not ruled by anyone, who is not subject to the laws of someone else, has the *bhaga* called *aiśvarya* — *overlordship*. We, as individuals have to go by the laws of nature; we cannot go against them. Even an engineer who is responsible for planning, commissioning, and running a thermal plant cannot touch a live wire without facing the consequences. In other words, the engineer cannot behave as he or she likes merely because he or she caused the electricity to be generated. It was because of the laws alone that the engineer was able to generate electricity in the first place.

The one who does not subject himself to the law or laws of another is the Lord. If the Lord is ruled by someone else, then that someone else becomes the Lord; and it is this Lord that we are talking about. These six absolute virtues, then, constitute *bhaga* and the one who has this six-fold *bhaga* is *Bhagavān*.

BHAGAVADGĪTĀ; THE LORD'S SONG

There are a variety of *Gītās* — the *Anugītā*, *Uttaragītā*, *Kāmagītā*, *Pāṇḍavagītā*, *Haṃsagītā*, *Siddhagītā*, *Rāmagītā*, *Uddhavagītā*, *Gaṇeśagītā*, etc.; but the most popular one is the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The title *Bhagavadgītā* means the song (*gītā*) of the Lord (*Bhagavān*). It is considered a song because it is in the form of verse and therefore pleasing. It has only two meters — *anuṣṭubh* and *triṣṭubh*, making the *Gītā* easy to recite and remember. The *Gītā* is also pleasing because it has a subject matter that is highly desirable to all.

The word *Bhagavadgītā* is feminine in gender because the *Veda*, the word *śruti*, is feminine, further revealing that, what is said in the *Gītā* is said in the *śruti*. And who

is *Bhagavān* here? *Kṛṣṇa* is *Bhagavān*. *Kṛṣṇa* is the one who has proved that he has the six-fold *bhaga* and is therefore looked upon as *Bhagavān*. Once you understand the meaning of *Bhagavān* as the one who has *bhaga*, *Kṛṣṇa* being *Bhagavān* presents no problem at all.

One can look at the title *Bhagavadgītā* in an another way — as a song that has *Bhagavān* as its subject matter. This is similar to saying 'electronic knowledge,' — knowledge whose subject matter is electronics. Therefore, we can take the title, *Bhagavadgītā*, to mean either *Bhagavān's gītā* or a *gītā* (song) that has *Bhagavān* as its subject matter.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GĪTĀ

This *Bhagavadgītā*, with *Bhagavān* as its subject matter, actually has two aspects, because both a life of activity and a life of renunciation are presented. One is *yoga-śāstra* in that it talks about *karma-yoga* and the other is *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*. Its subject matter, therefore, implies both activity and the renunciation of activity.

Since both the life-styles are meant for *brahma-vidyā*, *brahma-vidyā* is its real subject matter. It is this *brahma-vidyā*, that is pursued by a *sannyāsī* to the exclusion of all else — a *sannyāsī* being the one who has given up all *karmas*.

While a *sannyāsī* pursues only *brahma-vidyā*, a *karma-yogī* pursues *brahma-vidyā* plus *karma*. How does a *karma-yogī* pursue *karma*? With a certain attitude whereby the *karma* that is done becomes *yoga* for him or her. Because both *brahma-vidyā* and *karma-yoga* are found in the *Gītā*, its subject matter is two-fold — *brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra*.

BRAHMA-VIDYĀ: KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS

Brahma-vidyā means, the knowledge of what is. What is *Brahman*? What is *Īśvara*, the Lord? What is the reality of the world, *jagat*? What is the nature of the individual, *jīva*? What is the truth of oneself, *ātmā*? What is the relationship between the *jīva*, the *jagat* and *Īśvara*? What is the reality of each of them? Is there anything common among them? Are they all one or are they separate entities? *Brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*, reveals all of this.

To gain this *brahma-vidyā*, there are certain qualifications mentioned, which *karma*-yoga alone can provide. To help one gain these qualifications, *karma-yoga* is discussed in detail in the *Gītā*. Because both *karma-yoga* and *brahma-vidyā* are dealt with, the *Gītā* is considered complete and referred to as *gītāśāstra*.

This is what is meant by one particular verse praising the *Gītā*: *gītā sugītā kartavyā kim anyaiḥ śāstra-vistaraih* — the *Gītā* has to be studied well; what is the

use of studying other elaborate works? The completeness of the subject matter unfolded by the *Gītā* is highlighted here.

People always say that whenever they are in trouble, they go to the *Gītā* and their problem is solved. Maybe they do find answers in the *Gītā* because one can read into it whatever one wants. Be that as it may, the *Gītā* has something of its own to give. Do you want what it has to give? That is the question.

UNDERSTANDING THE GĪTĀ

To know what the *Gītā* says requires inquiry, *vicāra*. In the introduction to his commentary on the *Gītā*, *Śaṅkara* says:

> तदिदं गीताशास्त्रं समस्त-वेदार्थ-सार-सङ्ग्रहभूतं दुर्विज्ञेयार्थम्।
> *tadidaṃ gītāśāstraṃ samasta-vedārtha-sāra-saṅgrahabhūtaṃ durvijñeyārtham*
>
> The sense of the *gītā-śāsatra*, which is in the form of the essence of the meanings of all the words of the Vedas, is difficult to grasp.
>
> तदर्थ-आविष्करणाय अनेकैः विवृत-पद-पदार्थ-वाक्यार्थ-न्यायम् अपि अत्यन्त-विरुद्ध-अनेकार्थत्वेन लौकिकैः गृह्यमाणम् उपलभ्य अहं विवेकतः अर्थनिर्धारणार्थं संक्षेपतः विवरणं करिष्यामि।
> *tadartha-āviṣkaraṇāya anekaiḥ vivṛta-pada-padārtha-vākyārtha-nyāyam api atyanta-viruddha-anekārthatvena laukikaiḥ gṛhyamāṇam upalabhya ahaṃ vivekataḥ arthanirdhāraṇārthaṃ saṅkṣepataḥ vivaraṇaṃ kariṣyāmi.*
>
> By many commentators, in an effort to clearly expound its meaning, this has been expounded in the form of treatises that deal with the words of this text, the meanings of the words, the meanings of the sentences, the logic involved, etc. Seeing that they are fraught with vagueness and contradictions, in order to ascertain the correct meaning with due discrimination, I am writing this brief commentary.

The essence of any knowledge is sometimes expressed too cryptically to be understood. Because the *Gītā* is the essence, one naturally has to know the entire *śāstra* to fully appreciate what the *Gītā* is saying. Even though *Arjuna* had a certain background, it was not easy for him to understand. He had to ask questions. If it was not easy for *Arjuna*, it is definitely not going to be easy for someone in our own time who does not have the same background, being so far removed from both *Arjuna* and the *Vedas*. For such a person, the *Gītā* will be as difficult to understand as any other text of

Vedānta. The knowledge of oneself is in the form of words. But since the subject matter is something very unique, the knowledge is not easily accessible through words. At the same time, words are employed to reveal the self immediately. Therefore, one requires not only the teaching, *Vedānta*, as a *pramāṇa*, but also a teacher, a *guru*.

THE NEED FOR A TEACHER

There are two letters in the word *guru*, '*gu*' meaning darkness or ignorance, and '*ru*' meaning the one who removes it. Thus, a *guru* is one who removes darkness of ignorance by teaching the *śāstra*. The teaching is the *śāstra* and the teacher is also the *śāstra*. As a teacher, then, I do not use the *śāstra*; rather, what I teach is *śāstra*.

What does this mean? The teaching itself comes to life when it is handled in a certain way. Otherwise, all you have are so many dead words. Even though the teaching is a *pramāṇa*, there is a methodology employed for unfolding the words. A teacher, a *guru*, is one who is able to unfold the meaning of these words. The words are already there and their meanings are already there. They need only to be unfolded for your comprehension, just as an artist unfolds his vision on the canvas.

WHO IS THE FIRST GURU?

The problem then is – who is the first *guru*? I answer that question by asking, 'Who is the first father?' When you tell me who the first father is, I will tell you who the first *guru* is. Either way, it is the same. Thus, if you say that the Lord the creator is the father, then, he also must have a father, which means that he cannot be the Creator. Therefore, there is no father for the one whom you call the Lord.

Someone claimed that the first father was a monkey, which is an inferential conclusion. You will find, however, that this monkey also had a father, who had a father, who had a father, until finally you give up. Because you are into infinite regression, you had better give up! Or you may decide that the first father was one who was not a son. He was only a father, one we call the Lord.

Thus if we assume that the first father is the Lord, then, the first *guru* is not going to be different from that Lord. And, from the Lord downward, there is a teacher-student lineage, called *guru-śiṣya-paramparā*. The entire *paramparā* is praised in the following verse :

सदाशिवसमारम्भां शङ्कराचार्यमध्यमाम्।
अस्मदाचार्यपर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम्।।

sadāśivasamārambhāṃ śaṅkarācāryamadhyamām
asmadācāryaparyantāṃ vande guruparamparām

> I salute the lineage of teachers, beginning with *Śiva*, the Lord, (linked by) *Śaṅkarācārya* in the middle, and extending down to my own teacher.

Thus, when you salute the teacher, your salutation goes to the Lord in whom the lineage has its beginning. To point out one of the links, *Śaṅkarācārya* is mentioned as being in the middle, meaning somewhere in the flow between the Lord and one's present teacher. The word 'middle' having been used, there must also be an end. If the beginning is Lord *Śiva* meaning the Lord, one who is all fullness, all knowledge, and the middle is *Śaṅkarācārya*, then who is the end? — my teacher, *asmadācārya*.

Because I am here today, I know there has been no break in the flow between the first father and myself. Similarly, since this knowledge is coming to me right now, I know it has been kept alive by one teacher giving it to another and, thus, there has been no break between my teacher and the Lord. I salute this *guru-parampara*.

HOW TO CHOOSE A GURU

To choose a *guru* can also be a problem. Do you find the teacher with the longest or the whitest beard? So much is said by so many, everyone claiming to know the truth. Given all this confusion, first and foremost, I would say that the best teacher is one who looks at the whole human problem as an error.

If someone says you have a problem, then that person is going to manipulate you. If, however, the person says that the problem that you seem to have is an error, then he or she is objective. And, if the problem is real, no one will be able to resolve it.

If the situation is factually real, how can it be changed? If I am really an inadequate and limited person, then there is no way of my solving the problem of inadequacy, with or without help. The limited is always limited. But, here, there is no need to say, 'if I am a fraction of the whole, I will always be a fraction of the whole.' If I am the whole, the conclusion that I am a fraction is an error and the way out is to see myself in the proper light. Thus, the one who says the problem is an error and that it is a universal error, not your own personal error, may be a *guru*.

In order to know that I am the whole and therefore acceptable to myself, it is said, 'May one go to a teacher, *gurum abhigacchet*.' What kind of a teacher? The *Veda* itself says that, the teacher should be one who is well informed in this teaching and who is well rooted in this knowledge — one who is a *śrotriya* and a *brahma-niṣṭha*.[1] But how

---

[1] तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम्।

tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham.

(*Muṇḍakopaniṣad – 1.2.12*)

do I know whether someone is well informed or not? If I want to study higher mathematics and do research in topology, I need only find someone who has studied higher mathematics and specialised in topology. If I find a person who has published numerous credible papers on topology, I can assume that he or she knows the subject matter. I can then decide to study with this person until he or she proves otherwise.

In *guru*-seeking, however, there is a problem because this knowledge, being spiritual knowledge, is different. How do you know the person has this knowledge and has undergone the discipline of learning unless you already know something of it yourself?

The society should be informed enough for one to be able to find out whether a person knows or only pretends to know. The person could also be deluded, not pretending to know, but thinking he or she knows. Such people do not know what they do not know.

Previously, in Indian society, this was not a problem because everyone is supposed to become a *sannyāsī* eventually. One did not start another life after retirement. But nowadays, people plan their retirements early. Still, the best retirement plan to be ever conceived is *sannyāsa*, which was meant to be the last stage of one's life. Having been married and so on, the time comes when you just walk out — not because of a quarrel or because you want to marry another person. Walking out is considered a part of married life and is appreciated by both husband and wife as its ultimate aim. At this stage, they have matured and are independent enough for a life of *sannyāsa*.

This kind of retirement plan requires no social security, only the maturity to walk out as a renunciate. Since the Indian society respects the *sannyāsa* stage of life and the *Veda* enjoins it, naturally the basic needs of a *sannyāsī* are taken care of by the society. Although some people postpone this stage of life, every one is expected to become a *sannyāsī* in the end.

THE GURU AS A RENUNCIATE

To be a *sannyāsī* means that one already has the knowledge or is seeking it. Even as a householder, one is supposed to study in order to gain self-knowledge. Once a person becomes a *sannyāsī*, he or she has no daily duties, except studying and teaching. Thus, in every village, you will find a few *sannyāsīs* coming and going, or permanently staying there, so that the society knows who knows what, just as we know who is a professor of mathematics and who is not. To do research in mathematics or electronics, we have no doubts about whom we should go to and which institution we should attend.

For gaining that knowledge, may one properly approach a teacher who is a śrotriya and a brahmaniṣṭha.

There is, therefore, no problem in choosing a teacher for such knowledge in such a society.

If you know exactly what you are seeking and whether or not the person is recognised as having the knowledge, to that extent, you can know whether the person knows or not. However, if people do not know these things, then they are totally gullible, in spite of their expertise in other fields. For such people, anyone can pass as a *guru*.

A person who has undergone this discipline of knowledge is a scholarly person and is called a *śrotriya*. Therefore a *guru* is a scholar, whereas a scholar need not be a *guru*. To be a *guru*, a committed pursuit is also necessary. One who is committed to this knowledge is called a *brahma-niṣṭha*. This is an important point to understand.

If the knowledge is used to gain security, the person is insecure. Moreover, because the knowledge is 'I am secure,' the person does not really know anything about it and is therefore not qualified to teach it. Such a person is self-seeking and has no knowledge to give you. All that he or she can give is a collection of words, for which you do not require a teacher. You need only a book and a dictionary!

The teacher you require is one who employs these words and makes them meaningful. To do this, a teacher must necessarily be free from being insecure so that he or she is not seeking recognition or security. The proof of a teacher's knowledge is in the teaching methodology, in the person's communicative ability and the content of what he or she communicates. Thus, you go to a teacher who is well informed in this teaching and one who is committed to it, one who has no other pursuit.

And how should you go to a teacher? With an attitude that indicates you are ready to serve the teacher, meaning you are ready to do what is to be done in order to gain this knowledge because of your love for it. Nothing is too much and no distance is too far. This attitude is not damaging to you because you have chosen the right teacher. Hence there is no question of the person exploiting you if he or she is a *guru* — true to the definition of the word *guru*. A *guru* exploits no one. Thus, whatever you can do, you will do. That is your attitude. Only then can the teaching begin.

THE GĪTĀ AS A DIALOGUE

The entire *Gītā* is a dialogue. In fact, all the teaching is in the form of a dialogue, although the methodology of the teaching does not necessitate the presentation of characters and the dialogues between them. After all, we are not interested in knowing the names of the teacher or the taught. We are only interested in the teaching itself. But, then, the characters involved in the dialogue are presented in the form of a story, an *ākhyāyikā*, in order to tell us something about ourselves.

We find the same approach in the *Upaniṣads* where many names of people are cited. If *tat tvam asi* — that thou art, is the message, why not just talk about that

message? Why are all these stories brought in? Only to reveal the method of teaching, the *sampradāya*, how we have to learn, and what type of knowledge it is.

THE FOUR TYPES OF DIALOGUES

There are different types of dialogues. One is a discussion involving two or more people who are interested in finding out the facts about a certain subject matter. They are all exploring. In this type of discussion, there is no teacher-student relationship. Each person is equally placed, even though one person may know a little more than the others about the subject matter. They are all interested in understanding. This kind of discussion among equals, any collective study among students, for example, is called *vāda* and is naturally healthy and is traditionally an important component of study. It is said that a student gains a quarter of his knowledge by such discussion.[1]

There are also two unhealthy types of dialogue that we should be aware of. One is the dialogue that takes place between two people who are already committed to different beliefs. Such a discussion, called *jalpa*, is governed purely by each person's wit. Any discussion between two fanatics falls into this category. Each of them is convinced that the other person is totally wrong and tries to win the other over to his or her particular belief, although there is no basis for the discussion.

Suppose you have a belief and I have another belief. Your belief may be right and mine may be wrong. On the other hand, my belief may be right and yours may be wrong. Or both of us may be wrong! Both of us may be right also! How, then, can either of us insist that 'I alone am right'? The difference between a believer and a fanatic becomes obvious here.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OPEN, INQUIRING MIND

The difference between a scientist and a believer is also worthy of notice. One may adhere to a belief, but everyone must necessarily have a mind, which is open to

---

[1] *With reference to gaining any empirical discipline of knowledge, there is a verse that says:*

आचार्यात् पादमादत्ते पादं शिष्यः स्वमेधया।

पादं सब्रह्मचारिभ्यः पादं कालक्रमेण च।।

ācāryāt pādamādatte pādaṃ śiṣyaḥ svamedhayā

pādaṃ sabrahmacāribhyaḥ pādaṃ kālakrameṇa ca

A student obtains one quarter from the teacher, one quarter by one's own intelligence, one quarter from the fellow students, and one quarter in time.

The third quarter refers to vāda.

explore and know. That open, inquiring mind, the mind of a scientist, is an entirely different mind from that of a believer.

We can and must respect the beliefs of others, but we cannot have a discussion based on such beliefs. Both of us may be wrong. A discussion between two people, both of whom are committed to certain beliefs, is purely a dialogue between two missionaries. It is better to respect the other person's belief and have a simple human relationship. Discussions are useless. All you can do is ask, 'What is your belief?' Some people are curious. If you are curious, you can ask, but I myself would not ask because the other person is acceptable to me, along with his or her beliefs. I need not know what they are. This is a healthy attitude to have towards a person. But any discussion, *jalpa*, based on beliefs, is useless. No one wins and no one loses. Each person always comes back with better arguments. *Jalpa*-discussions, therefore, are useless; they have no value.

There is another type of discussion called *vitaṇḍā*, wherein one person makes a statement with which the other person always disagrees. Why? Merely because the other person said it. Due to jealousy or some other reason, one person always tries to prove the other wrong. Such a discussion is also useless.

A fourth type of discussion, one that concerns us here, is called *saṃvāda*, a discussion between a teacher and a student, *guru-śiṣya-saṃvāda*. In the teacher-student relationship, the student has already accepted the other person as a teacher and therefore looks up to him or her. Although there is a dialogue between them, the attitude is entirely different, the discussion being based on the student's acceptance that 'I am a student and this person is my teacher.' This attitude prevails until or unless the person thought to be a teacher proves to be otherwise.

The moment you discover the person has nothing to teach, you can become friends. However, when you have to learn from someone, you look up to that person. If you do not understand what the teacher is saying, you give the benefit of the doubt to the teacher, even though he or she may sometimes appear to be contradictory, seeming to have said something previously that is not in harmony with what is being said now, as we will see in the *Gītā*.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT

In a *guru-śiṣya-saṃvāda*, the subject matter can be anything. Here, in the *Gītā*, the subject matter is *brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra* — in one word, *Vedānta*. The *guru* is *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa*, referred to as *Vasudeva's* son, and the student is *Arjuna*, called *Pārtha* here because he is *Pṛthā's* son. He is also called *Kaunteya*, the son of *Kuntī*. *Arjuna* has a number of other names — *Dhanañjaya*, *Savyasācī*, *Guḍākeśa*, and so on, but *Arjuna* is his popular name.

Between *Arjuna*, the student, and Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, the teacher, there is a discussion and *Gītā* is the body of knowledge being taught. Therefore, the *Gītā* is called a *saṃvāda*.

GIVING THE TEACHER THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

If it looks as though the teacher is being contradictory, the student gives the benefit of the doubt to the teacher. This is what is expected of a student. As a student, one need not take the blame upon oneself.

The teacher can be asked a question — 'Previously such and such was said and now this is being said. Why is this difference?' You said *Brahman* is without qualities, *nirguṇa* and now you say it is with qualities, *saguṇa*. How can *Brahman* be *saguṇa*? You say it is beyond the mind, and that it is not available as an object for the mind. At the same time, you say, one sees oneself, the *ātmā* with the mind (*manasā paśyati*). How can one see the *ātmā* with the mind? And how is one going to know that one is seeing the *ātmā*? It looks as though the *śruti* herself is contradictory. To say that *Brahman* cannot be objectified by the mind but has to be recognised by the mind seems to be a contradiction. But it is not a contradiction; it is perfect. If it looks like a contradiction to the student, then he or she can ask a question, a *praśna* and when the student waits for the right time to ask a question, it is called a *paripraśna*, based on his or her faith, *śraddhā*, in the teacher.

As a teacher, one cannot contradict oneself. A teacher who contradicts himself or herself does not know the subject matter. Nor can a teacher simply learn along with a student and teach, since this creates situations wherein both the teacher and the student may suddenly discover a new fact never known to either of them before, a fact that contradicts everything they knew thus far. This is not why one goes to a teacher. Teaching is not meant to be exploratory. Therefore the teacher should know exactly what he or she is talking about and not be contradictory.

The attitude implied by the term *guru-śiṣya-saṃvāda* is especially relevant here. Since the entire teaching is itself a means of knowledge, it is not a philosophical speculation. Moreover we are not attracted to this kind of learning out of a simple academic interest. The teaching has a value and the value is myself alone. The teaching is about myself. I have a value for freedom and this value makes me want to know. As a person, I want to be free and I want to learn for no other purpose than to be free. Since there is a value there, and the teaching itself is a means of knowledge, there must necessarily be a certain attitude on my part towards this teaching and the teacher.

That the teaching has to come from a teacher in the form of a dialogue is because it is something to be understood — something to be followed, not swallowed. In a belief, there is nothing to follow, only something to swallow, something to accept totally, without question. Any questioning that may take place is meant only to establish what

the belief is, which is not really questioning at all. This is why there are so many attempts to establish historical proofs that a certain person existed. Whether someone existed or not is not the issue. The teaching is the issue.

Therefore, if you look into the teaching, if you are interested in what is being taught, your whole attitude and approach will be different. Here, a dialogue implies a teaching that is received from a teacher, meaning that this knowledge has to be received from a teacher and the subject matter has to be understood.

TWO TYPES OF SUBJECT MATTER

There are two types of subject matter, *sādhya-viṣaya* and *siddha-viṣaya*. *Sādhya* is that which is yet to be accomplished and is accomplished by doing something — by an action. If you want to know how to go to heaven, for example, first you have to know what heaven is and then you have to decide to buy a ticket. You are told that *puṇya*, the ticket for heaven can be gained by doing good deeds. You must also hold on to the *puṇya* you have earned, which means that you must not do any improper actions, *pāpa*, while you are earning your ticket to heaven. Only then will you go to heaven after death. All this is very straightforward for a person who has *śraddhā* in the Veda being a *pramāṇa* and is not something that can be logically arrived at.

Any question related to *sādhya* is only to understand how to do something, like cooking, for example. An Indian woman who wants to know how to make pizza will ask certain questions. The situation is very simple — you just tell her how to do it a few times until she knows how and the topic is over. It is just a matter of whether she has understood what you have said. There is an order governing how everything is to be done. Certain elements are involved and, therefore, must be understood. What has to be done is also to be understood. And that's the end of it. One may do it or not do it. By practice, one eventually acquires the knack of it. If a person keeps on making pizza, hopefully with some sympathetic people around, he or she will certainly master the art of pizza making.

This is *sādhya*, then. There is no questioning here. When the subject matter is something you have to accomplish later, when it is dealing with means and ends (*sādhana* and *sādhya*), proper questioning is not a part of the whole approach. This is true even if the subject matter is a Vedic ritual.

Again, when it comes to actions there are many choices available. You can do it this way or that way; you need not do it at all; or you can do something else entirely and achieve the same result.[1]

---

[1] कर्म — कर्तुं शक्यम् अकर्तुं शक्यम् अन्यथा वा कर्तुं शक्यम्।

karma — kartuṃ śakyam, akartuṃ śakyam, anyathā vā kartuṃ śakyam.

Action — may be done, may not be done or may be done differently.

There is more than one way to go to heaven. There are a hundred different ways, one of which one can choose. Why anyone would want to go is another matter. Thus, when a *sādhya-viṣaya* is involved, there can be choice. But this is not so with a *siddha-viṣaya*.

NO CHOICE IN KNOWLEDGE

There is no choice involved, however, when what is to be accomplished is already accomplished, *siddha*, but not understood. Unlike action, knowledge is not open to choice; it is always true to its object. For example, knowledge of an apple is always true to the object — apple, even if I will it to be otherwise. Nor do I have a choice in knowledge, once the means of knowledge and the object of knowledge are aligned. If my eyes are open, and if they are not defective, and if the mind is not elsewhere, I will necessarily see what is in front of me. What choice do I have?

To know an already accomplished fact requires proper questioning in order to remove whatever that may be blocking the knowledge from taking place. Why should you be denied the knowledge of yourself once it is unfolded? What exactly is the obstruction? Is it that you do not follow what is being said? Once the obstructions have been identified, they have to be removed, one by one, because you are *Brahman*. The whole pursuit, then, is one of removing all doubts.

Because this is the knowledge of an already accomplished fact, the knowledge has to be immediate; it cannot be indirect. If it does not happen in spite of the teaching, then there is some obstruction, which is in the form of error, vagueness, or doubt. The obstructions are removed in the dialogue between the teacher and the student.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF QUESTIONING

Where there is understanding involved, questioning is imperative. This does not mean that you should question all the time. What is meant is that a questioning mind is necessary because, without questioning, you can never gain clarity. Therefore, the teaching itself consists of a number of questions. As teachers, we ourselves raise questions and keep answering them. If the student still has questions, he or she should ask those questions in order to know, since we are not dealing with simple belief here. And if we find that something is a belief, we can say, 'This is a belief,' thereby ending the matter.

We do not try to establish a belief, beyond establishing that it is a belief. For example, the statement, 'This is my mother,' is a belief because there is no way of proving it. How do you know two babies were not switched? There may be a lot of corroborative evidence, but still it is a belief. It is not direct perception. There are many beliefs and there is nothing wrong with beliefs — as long as we understand them as beliefs. However, there are also many things we have to know, and where we have to

know questions are very important and are allowed. The *Gītā* was presented as a dialogue between a teacher and a student to emphasise that the subject matter is one for understanding, not for believing.

COMMENTARIES ON THE GĪTĀ

Śaṅkara says that he is writing this commentary on the *Gītā* so that people could analyse and understand what the true meaning of the *gītā-śāstra* is, although it had already been so elaborately commented upon by others. These earlier commentaries, no matter how definitive they were, sometimes differed from one another, and, in some cases, were even opposed to each other. Since these various works were confusing to those who did not have a clear understanding of the *śāstra*, *Śaṅkara* decided to undertake this work in order to clarify what the *Gītā* is actually saying.

Since *Śaṅkara's* time, there have been numerous commentaries and translations in various languages with varying degrees of clarity. None has matched *Śaṅkara's* analysis of the *Gītā*. His commentary is extremely cogent and consistent from the beginning to the end. For instance, whenever the topic of *bhakti* comes up, he discusses it, in its proper context. Wherever *Īśvara* is mentioned, even though Lord *Kṛṣṇa* uses the first person singular, *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear that, what was meant was the Lord, *Īśvara*, *paramātmā*.

When the *Gītā* is analysed properly, the analysis must be rational. It should not go against reason. A commentary on the *Gītā* should be in keeping with the words that are there. It should honour all the rules of grammar and syntax. What was said before and what is said later should also be taken into account.

THE NEED FOR INQUIRY

Since the *Gītā* is a book that contains only what is said in the *Upaniṣads*, this is all the more reason for any commentary on it to be reasonable. Nothing should contradict the source book. Our understanding of the *Gītā* should definitely be in keeping with all these various factors. Only then can there be real understanding. Whether the *Gītā* says this or that is something that must be understood. We are not trying to make the *Gītā* say what we want to say. We are trying to understand what it says and, for this, we need to inquire and be objective.

This is why before approaching the *Gītā*, a few verses called the *Gītā-dhyānam* are sung in praise of it, whereby we invoke the Mother *Gītā* to reveal the truth contained in the *gītā-śāstra*. These verses are a prayer to the *Gītā* herself, to the *Gītā* as the mother *śruti* and to the *Gītā* as *Bhagavān*, the Lord. It is only after we have invoked the *Gītā* in this way, do we try to extract the exact meaning of what the *Gītā* has to say.

The *Gītā* is like a mirror, just as the *Upaniṣads* are a mirror of words wherein we can see ourselves very clearly. If the world is not separate from me and if *Īśvara* also is not separate from me, then I should be able to see this truth in the words of the *Gītā*. The prayer is for the sake of understanding the *Gītā* properly, which is understanding myself.

In the brief discussion of the *Gītā-dhyāna*-verses that follow, you will come across sentences requiring further elucidation and more clarity in order for you to enjoy their meaning completely. This clarity will come as the *Gītā* is unfolded.