

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN



### THE SUPREME SCIENCE OF KNOWING

(4:1,2) The exalted Lord said to Arjuna: I gave this imperishable Yoga to Vivasvat (the sun-god); Vivasvat passed on the knowledge to Manu (the Hindu law-giver); Manu taught it to Ikshvaku (founder of the solar dynasty of the Kshatriyas). Thus, handed down in orderly succession, the Rajarishis (royal rishis, or sages) knew it. With the long passage of time, however, O Scorcher of Foes (Arjuna), this knowledge of Yoga has become greatly diminished on Earth.

**T**HESE PASSAGES REFER TO THE GRADUAL LOSS OF knowledge during a long cycle of descent in earthly time. When the Earth, gradually descending from a higher age of relative enlightenment, entered (in 700 B.C., according to Swami Sri Yukteswar's computation) the dark age of *Kali Yuga*, the majority of mankind lost most of its former power, mental clarity, and understanding. The golden age of wisdom (*Satya Yuga*), which was a time of divine brilliance in human

understanding, gradually diminished to an age of discrimination (*Treta Yuga*); from there to an age of energy (*Dwapara Yuga*); and from that it descended to the lowest age, *Kali*, when the general understanding of mankind was centered in the thought of matter as real and substantial.

That cycle, in our own time, and since that time when the Bhagavad Gita was written, has begun its upward swing again. It was in the year 500 A.D. that the earth entered an ascending *Kali Yuga*. In 1700, it entered ascending *Dwapara Yuga*. For the past three hundred years, man has been coming increasingly to understand that matter is really a vibration of energy. Electricity was rediscovered in the early nineteenth century, and now, in the twenty-first century, humanity is becoming dependent once again on a view of reality that sees energy as fundamental to all its functioning.

When *Dwapara* descended to *Kali Yuga*, the science of yoga, the essence of which is based on an understanding of the subtle energies in the body, was lost. General understanding of this science degenerated to a definition of yoga as *Hatha Yoga*: mere physical positions and breathing exercises. *Hatha Yoga* in fact developed out of the third “limb,” or stage, of Patanjali’s exposition on the stages of enlightenment, which people mistakenly call his “*Ashtanga Yoga* system.” It is not a “system,” for what he did in fact was systematize the universal stages through which the spiritual seeker, whatever his religion, must pass. Those stages entail a gradual withdrawal of energy and attention from the outer body to the spine; raising the energy in the spine; and the gradual absorp-

tion of one's energy and consciousness in the love and bliss of God until the absorption becomes complete.

The third of these stages is *asana*, or perfect stillness of body, with an erect position and a straight spine. Patanjali, to reiterate what we've said, was describing the *stages* of withdrawal and absorption, and not specific yoga practices. The Hatha Yoga system was based on his third stage, and was intended to help yoga practitioners to achieve calmness of body and mind, physical and mental relaxation, and centering the energy in the spine.

That highest yoga was revived again by Lahiri Mahasaya of Varanasi, who received it from the great avatar Babaji in the Himalayas, giving it the name, Kriya Yoga. The Himalayan masters had perceived that it was time, in this re-ascending yuga, to resurrect the formerly held, deeper perception of man's inner nature. Paramhansa Yogananda, an outstanding exemplar of this teaching, was sent to the West to carry this ancient science to all mankind. After Swami Vivekananda, who may be described as having "broken the ice," Yogananda may be described as having taught people how to swim.

*Dharma*, during Satya Yuga, has been described as four-legged; during *Treta*, as having three legs; during *Dwapara*, as having two; and during *Kali*, as functioning on only one leg. During Kali Yuga, in other words, dharma is still able to stand, but only precariously. Man can enjoy (though with less energy, and therefore only relatively) his pleasures of the moment, but he cannot connect them to their inevitable consequences: for

example, a depletion of energy and premature old age from sexual overindulgence; a serious, permanent loss of mental clarity from overindulgence in alcoholic drink; a steady increase of selfishness and self-indulgence (these being, simply, diseases of the ego) and an excessive attachment to wealth. During Kali Yuga, it is difficult for man to perceive that every state of consciousness already contains its opposite: that, in happiness, suffering is already present; and that (fortunately) suffering already contains at its center the seeds of joy.

Thus, in these two stanzas we see hope also in the opposite reality: there exist also, in the gradual loss described by Krishna, the seeds of future renewal and reacquisition.

**(4:3) Today I have taught you, My devotee and friend, that ancient science of Yoga, the secret to the highest blessings for mankind.**

It is a thought wondrous to contemplate: As the devotee advances spiritually, he is accepted by the Lord Himself not only as a devotee, but as a friend. The relationship with God as Friend is in some ways the sweetest. For even the thought of God as Mother, which many consider the sweetest of all relationships, carries a hint of the human presumption that God *must* take care of us and pardon all our sins. As Yogananda taught people to pray, “Mother, naughty or good I am Thy child: Thou *must* release me!” When one is advanced enough, however, to think of God as Friend, there steals into the heart that sweet confidence by which one feels,

“But *of course* You love me! I am Yours; You are mine. How could either of us ever turn away from the other? We are one!”

The very science of yoga should be taught and practiced with love, and not as an invitation to ego-boosting power. Love and devotion help the seeker to grasp the true essence of Yoga, which unlocks the inner door to the highest blessings that are knowable.

**(4:4) Arjuna said: Vivasvat lived in far-off antiquity, whereas You are of recent birth. How am I to take this statement that it was You who first taught this sacred Yoga to mankind?**

Arjuna invited Krishna—for the sake of all devotees—to announce his former incarnations on Earth: many times, for human salvation.

Did Krishna really teach the yoga science from Earth’s *earliest beginnings*? How long has man been plowing earthly fields, raising cities, worshiping in lofty temples—and ever seeking the key to happiness, which only a few in every age discover to be Perfect Bliss?

Mahavatar Babaji announced to his disciple Lahiri Mahasaya that he himself was Krishna in a former earth incarnation. My Guru told me that Lahiri Mahasaya was Raja Janaka, of *Ramayana* fame. Paramhansa Yogananda said that he himself was Arjuna, to whom Krishna in that life delivered this most famous of all discourses, the Bhagavad Gita.

I myself have come to feel, after years of editing Yogananda’s writings, that our entire line of gurus—

Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Swami Sri Yukteswar, and Paramhansa Yogananda—have come back again and again for countless aeons—and perhaps even from the beginning of human history—as saviors of mankind. No doubt there are other lines of great masters also who, in their compassion for humanity in its suffering and confusion, have returned again and again to this planet.

I once asked my Guru, “Have I been your disciple for thousands of years?” He replied, “It has been a long time. That’s all I’ll say.”

“Does it always take such a long time?” I asked (wanting reassurance that I wasn’t the only laggard!).

“Yes,” was his reply. “Desires for name, fame, and so on take them away again and again.”

How long has mankind inhabited this planet? Not the few thousand years claimed in modern tradition. My Guru once stated that the time span of human history covers over fifty million years!

**(4:5) The Blessed Lord said, Many have been My births, and many also yours. I remember all of Mine, though you remember yours not.**

Had Arjuna actually forgotten his former incarnations? I doubt it! In the Bhagavad Gita he plays the role of earnest seeker. It is clear to me, however, that he was already a free soul. It was said even during his lifetime with Krishna that they had been together long before as the ancient sages Nara and Narayan.

A story was told about Nara: One day *Maya* (Satan) tried to tempt him by materializing a supernally beautiful

woman. As she stood alluringly before him, he gazed at her calmly, then materialized another hundred women, each one as beautiful as the first. What could Satan do? He had to give up!

**(4:6) Though I (a fully liberated soul) am the Lord of all creation, and am in My true Self—and abiding (ever) in My Cosmic Nature—forever unborn, yet I, by My *yoga-maya*, assume (from time to time) an outward form.**

**(4:7,8) O Bharata (Arjuna)! whenever virtue (dharma) declines, and vice (*adharma*) is in the ascendant, I incarnate Myself on earth (as an avatar). Appearing from age to age in visible form, I come to destroy evil and to re-establish virtue.**

There is a belief in India that the word avatar applies only to certain very few masters. Rama and Krishna are believed to have been avatars of Vishnu. According to legend, Kalki avatar is supposed to be Vishnu's next incarnation. I explained earlier that avatar really has a much broader meaning. It might help here to review these teachings of Sanaatan Dharma (the eternal religion).

Vishnu, to begin with, is not literally a person, but is that aspect of AUM which acts as Preserver. No master can be an avatar of Vishnu except insofar as he manifests God in the aspect of the Preserver of dharma.

My Guru once replied to me in response to a doubt I had voiced. "When you are one with God," he said, "you *are* God." There is no higher state than oneness with God.

Some religious believers insist that this saint or that one never incarnated on earth before, or that he or she was always perfect even though having lived on earth before. These are pious myths, without foundation in truth. It is true that even a master may sometimes make the statement, “I have not lived before.” His words must be understood correctly.

Krishna states here that he was never born: He then goes on to say, however, that he has appeared repeatedly on Earth. It is similarly legitimate for anyone who has transcended ego-consciousness to claim that he has never been born before, for he sees clearly that it was always God alone who appeared, through him.

Christians claim that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God. Yogananda said, “Jesus could legitimately say that, because he had attained oneness with the Christ consciousness, which is the only reflection of the Spirit (beyond creation) and is therefore omnipresent in creation. Any soul that realizes its oneness with Christ consciousness (the Kutastha Chaitanya) may rightfully be considered, in the same way, one with the only Son of God. He cannot, however, be less the Son of God than Jesus Christ was.”

Hindus, similarly, think of Krishna as a *special* manifestation of God. Yogananda explained that creating one special manifestation of Himself and labeling it unique—whether as “God” Himself or as “the Son of God”—is simply not the divine way.

Think of the vastness of the universe! A hundred billion galaxies, each one with an equivalent number of stars, and many of those stars, at least, supporting pop-

ulated planets. (Hindu tradition states, and Yogananda fully endorsed, that the universe is *filled with* living, conscious beings. So-called UFOs, he told us, are simply matters of fact.)

Then think of this little mud ball, our Earth: It is not 6,000 years old, as Christian church tradition once averred: It is very, *very* old. Think of the human race also as ancient—possibly millions of years old. And think of God, then, as having *one* special son, or as becoming one special manifestation of Himself, or even as becoming a limited succession of manifestations. God is *Infinite* Consciousness. Only Kali Yuga consciousness could have visualized Him as uniquely possessing a human form—as people believed the Earth was the center of everything, and still believed as late as the end of the nineteenth century that our sun was the center.

Once every soul encased in an ego prison realizes itself as the Infinite, and no longer one little “sliver of glass” individually reflecting the cosmic light, it *becomes* the Infinite—God Himself. There is no difference, *in essence*, between Krishna, Jesus Christ, Buddha, or any other great master. There is no difference—again, *in essence*—between them and the rest of us, once we realize ourselves as the one God who, for a time, thought himself encased in these human egos. Everything *is* God. In God, all comparisons and relativities cease. The soul of Everyman was never born; nor did it ever die. In Vedantic truth there was always only one reality, one Spirit: the Supreme Lord.

Thus, any soul that has achieved complete liberation, not only from present ego but also from the memory of

all past egoic involvement, *becomes* that Supreme Spirit. Most souls, after many incarnations of struggling to reach that state, are satisfied to remain in blissful union with God for eternity. A few only, out of compassion for mankind, preserve that little “desireless desire” which brings them back to earth as avatars for the salvation of many. No avatar, however, in ultimate Reality, can be greater than any other.

What would be the sense in God’s creating a perfect being as an example to ordinary human beings, who are struggling to attain perfection? It would be like saying, “You yourselves (poor fools!) can never be perfect, but do try, anyway!” No avatar was ever *created* perfect. All of them were once like us, imperfect human beings who were finally washed clean in the realization of their own divinity. Orthodox religionists call this concept impious, but no master ever came to earth to show people how great *he* was. All of them came to show us *our own divine potential*. Jesus Christ is quoted, in the Book of Revelation, as saying, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. . . . To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, *even as I also overcame*, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:12,21; italics added)

In this world of relativities, however, greatness is gauged in other ways. Thus, it is humanly acceptable to consider one master greater than another, or than many others, not by the standard of his *inner* greatness (his oneness with the Infinite, which is the same for all), but by the outer standard of the good he has done in the world.

My own Guru had a worldwide mission. In worldly terms, he was a very great master. I met another master, however, who (as my Guru himself told me) had achieved final liberation. This master had very few disciples, and was virtually unknown in the world. I asked this master why he didn't do more for mankind. With beautiful simplicity he replied, "I have done what God wanted done through this body." From a world-renowned master to one who was known by very few: the world would say the one was a world wonder, and the other a non-entity. In God's eyes, however—the one Unbribable Judge, whose only standard is truth itself—both men were not only completely equal, but were *one*! Indeed, they shouldn't even be considered human beings! They were the ever-blissful Brahman Himself.

These stanzas of the Gita are often translated personally in another way also, to mean that God destroys *evil-doers*. God never destroys anyone! The only thing He destroys—the only thing He *can* destroy, since He cannot destroy Himself—is evil itself: never the evil-doer.

**(4:9) One, O Arjuna! who by intuition comprehends the truth of My divine manifestations and selfless deeds in this vibratory universe, will never again, after he leaves his body (at death), need to incarnate in outward (egoic) form. (Soaring in freedom,) He will attain Me.**

The terms, "ego," and "freedom," stand in mutual contradistinction to one another. The ego is endlessly constricting to the soul, for it insists on identifying itself merely with petty expressions of its infinite potential. The

delusive freedom to “do as one likes” is self-demeaning, for it keeps one identified with his little body, whereas one’s own nature calls out in longing, “Let me soar high above the conflicting ripples of likes and dislikes. Let me rise in the endless skies of the joy of my true Being!”

To know the ways of God is to identify with those ways, rejoicing in them as *our* ways.

**(4:10) Purified by ascetic wisdom, released from attachment, fear, and anger, and completely absorbed in Me, many have attained (oneness with) Me.**

“Many have attained Me.” Truth seekers must understand that finding God is not like the supreme effort required, say, to climb Mount Everest, the accomplishment of which is more arduous (if not life-threatening) at the end than at the beginning. Finding God is the simplest, most obvious, and most supremely natural thing to do in the world! At the end, one doesn’t find oneself straining with desperate, heroic zeal to merge in Him. Rather, one *relaxes*, supremely, into perfect Bliss. Strain, tension, ardor, heroic zeal: these, for the soul, end forever. What is left is Satchidananda: ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-*new* Bliss.

**(4:11) O Partha (Arjuna)! In whatever way I am approached, in that way do I respond. All men come, by whatever path, to Me.**

**(4:12) Those who work to fulfill their earthly desires worship the gods (which are ideals in various forms; they are not idols!), aware that success of this kind can be reached with relative ease.**

Lower aims are achieved more quickly and more easily than supreme devotion to God. To build a house, one consults an architect and a builder (lower gods, in a sense); one doesn't confine himself to his meditation room and offer up prayers to God that He manifest a house! If one thinks to achieve perfect happiness in an ideal home, however, he will eventually be disillusioned. Boredom will set in, termites will invade and destroy the building. Or else, neighbors will be alienated out of envy. *Nothing* works for long in this world. When disillusionment ensues, people turn away to seek their fulfillment elsewhere. This is a roundabout way to God, but it, too, reaches toward Him at least, inasmuch as repeated disappointments do, eventually, turn one's heart to Him.

Thus, even though material fulfillment, sought in material ways or in ego-inspired appeals to some lower "god," can bring relatively speedy results, those results are like cement walls built with too much sand and too little bonding cement: they soon crumble to nothing.

**(4:13) An admixture of the three gunas (the essential qualities) with the diverse karmas of individuals produces the four castes. Though I am active in creation through these influences, know that I (in My Self) am ever actionless and unchanging.**

We have already discussed the gunas (qualities) and the caste system. The additional teaching, here, is the great truth that action itself is an illusion. God "acts, but doesn't act," for everything is a dream. A dreamer may do many things—swim, climb mountains, go to

war—yet, on waking, he sees that his body never stirred from his bed.

As Paramhansa Yogananda explained (this point, too, was touched on earlier), the motionless consciousness of Absolute Spirit is *reflected* at the heart of every atom. At the center of all movement, there is rest.

**(4:14) Though acting, I am without attachment; nor do I desire any particular outcome from (any) activity. He, similarly, who is one with Me, and identified with My nature, is unfettered by (the slightest) desire for the fruits of action.**

**(4:15) Understanding this (the nature of right action), the wise since earliest times have acted dutifully. Be like them (acting without desire for the fruits of action).**

**(4:16) What, indeed, are action and inaction? Even the wise (can become) confused on this point. I will explain the distinction, (armed with which knowledge) you will be freed from all evil.**

The “wise,” here, are those who have yet to attain the highest state, *nirbikalpa samadhi*, for actions performed with full divine awareness will obviously be dutiful always. With the wisdom achieved even in *sabikalpa samadhi*, however, from which one must still return to outward awareness, the ego can still hold the thought, “I am the doer.” In this simple thought lie the seeds of all evil: dormant, but waiting.

**(4:17) The nature of action is difficult to comprehend. To understand it, know the difference between right action, wrong action, and inaction.**

One can act with great energy, and work himself to exhaustion, yet accomplish nothing: by pushing strenuously, for example, on both sides of a door. Right action, spiritually speaking, is action with that attitude which leads to soul-freedom. That attitude includes non-attachment to the fruits of action, and acting with the consciousness that God is doing everything through one. Action inspired by His consciousness and energy, with its results offered to Him without any ego-involvement, is right action.

Right action is not necessarily that which other people consider right because it pleases *them*. It can be *relatively* right, however, if it is self-improving (either physically, emotionally, or mentally): for example, wholesome physical exercise; efforts to develop concentration and will power; to acquire clarity of thought; to develop calm upliftment and expansion of feeling. All these are right action, for they help to “prepare the troops” for the great “war of Kurukshetra.”

Wrong action is anything that nourishes the ego, whether by contracting it in selfishness or by inflating it with pride. Clearly, in the relativity of things, there can be a mixture of right and wrong action. Developing one’s physical strength, for example, can help (as Yogananda put it) to prepare the body and make it fit for God-realization. If, however, the mind has not been prepared also by right understanding, one may become proud of his physical prowess. In this case, right action can be diminished in its good effects, or even nullified, by wrong action.

Most activity in this world consists, in one way or another, of a mixture. Therefore, spiritual development,

which ought to be simple, usually becomes complex and difficult. An invading army may make great inroads on one or more fronts into enemy territory, but on other fronts may find itself beaten back. Getting all one's forces aligned in the war against evil requires consummate generalship.

Inaction, as we have seen already, is impossible. It can *seem* inactive, however, like the example of two equal forces pushing on both sides of a door without ever moving it. Thus, one may exercise physically and strengthen the muscles, but eat wrongly and thus, in other ways, weaken his body. As with right action, true inaction is possible only in God, in the perfect relaxation and rest of ecstasy.

The secret, essentially, is quite simple: Since the goal of spiritual evolution is to sublimate the ego by self-expansion into Cosmic consciousness, whatever takes one in the direction of ego-sublimation is right action. And whatever affirms the ego, or blocks efforts to sublimate it, is wrong action. And that, finally, which saps or otherwise dulls efforts at ego-sublimation, is inaction.

**(4:18) He is a yogi of true discernment who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction. He is wise among human beings, for he has attained the goal of (all) action (and is free).**

**(4:19) He who never acts motivated by personal desire, whose (ego-binding) karma has been consumed in the fire of wisdom: such a one (alone) may be considered wise.**

**(4:20) The wise, having relinquished attachment to the fruits of action, (being) ever contented and free (in**

the Self), do not (really) act even if they appear to be intensely busy.

(4:21) Even in doing physical labor (as opposed to meditative work) one incurs no (karmic limitation) who has renounced all sense of possession, who is without personal desires, and whose feelings (chitta) are controlled by the inner Self.

Performing good actions even with a wrong motive, my Guru used to say, is better than not acting at all. Inasmuch as everything in this world is relative, all action must be adjudged good or evil according to the *direction* it takes one. What is good for one person might be bad for another.

Were a Mahatma Gandhi or a Jesus Christ to awaken one morning with the resolution, “I’m tired of serving humanity. From now on I want to work hard and become a millionaire!” wouldn’t everyone, including the grossest materialist, exclaim, “That man has fallen!”? But were a lazy lout, on the other hand, to rouse himself from his bed of inaction one morning with the same resolution, wouldn’t everybody—even saints—pronounce his intention to be right and good? It is all a question of where one is coming from, and where one is going.

Digging a ditch—mere physical labor, in other words—can be either good, bad, or self-stultifying depending on one’s attitude while working. Two people can work side by side at the same job, yet one of them, motivated by ego-inspired fears or desires, acts in ego-bondage; whereas the other, having no other motivation than to please God, acts in spiritual freedom.

**(4:22) He is free from karmic involvement who is contented with whatever comes to him uninvited; who is even-minded and untouched by duality; who is without envy, jealousy, and animosity; and (finally) who views success and failure with equanimity.**

Though we have dealt with this subject before, it might be well to consider once again, briefly, the opposite case: one who allows himself to be upset by the unexpected; who is always jumping with joy or bowed down with disappointment; who is full of envy, jealousy, and hatred; and one, finally, who rejoices gleefully in success and is emotionally devastated by failure. Do such people ever know peace of mind? For one who has no inner peace, as Krishna stated earlier, how is happiness possible? What passes in worldly minds for happiness is usually nothing but emotional excitement, or (sometimes) a temporary release from some cause of agitation or suffering. Excitement leads to fear, doubt, and uncertainty. Temporary release from excitement leads not to contentment, but to eventual apathy and boredom.

It is interesting to notice how automatically people reveal, by their gestures, the way the energy is flowing in their bodies. See, when they are excited, how they jump up and down. It is because of the upward movement in the *ida nadi* in the spine. And see also how little children, who are the least inclined to control their displays of emotion, may indicate a downward movement of energy in the spine through *pingala nadi* by flinging their arms downward, stooping, stamping their feet, exhaling repeatedly with loud cries, even rolling on the ground

and pounding their fists: all these downward gestures indicating the downward direction of their energy.

Contentment is itself a virtue, and not merely a consequence. It should be practiced consciously. One should tell himself, “I need nothing! I need no one! In my Self I am free!”

**(4:23) All the effects of karma (action) are nullified (in oneself), and one achieves liberation, when ego-attachment ceases, when one becomes centered in wisdom, and when all one’s actions are offered up (in sacrifice) to the Infinite.**

**(4:24) For such a person, (both) the act of self-offering and the offering itself are, equally, aspects of the one Spirit. The fire (of wisdom) and the person making the offering are both Spirit. In this realization, the yogi, freed from ego-identification, goes straight to Brahman (Spirit).**

Any karma (action) performed has consequences—no less so in the case of a liberated master than of the worldly person. The difference is that, since the actions of a master are not performed with ego-identification, the effects of that action are not bound to ego, and flow out freely into the world, bringing only beneficial results. Their objective rewards are reaped by those who are in tune with them and accept them lovingly.

It is important for people when performing any religious ritual to understand the hidden purpose of ritual itself. If it is truly religious in nature, it serves the symbolic purpose of offering the ego up into a higher reality.

Even a simple bow is a gesture of self-offering. The ego, which is physically centered in the medulla oblongata (at the base of the brain), becomes relaxed at that point when one bows, and is offered forward. (Such at least, is the intention.) Properly, that offering should be directed to the spiritual eye in the forehead (the positive pole of the medulla). People generally, however, consider a bow to be an outward gesture: to something, or to someone, before them. *Arati* (a ceremony of waving light before an altar) is a symbolic offering of one's own light and energy up to God. *Puja* is performed by offering all the five senses, signifying ego-consciousness, up to God's representation on the altar. *Yagya* offers *ghee* (purified butter) and rice into the sacrificial fire—again, to symbolize various aspects of self-offering.

The Christian Eucharist, too, represents a commemoration of the Last Supper, and the worshiper's gratitude for what Jesus Christ brought to mankind. This ceremony is traditionally followed by receiving bread and wine, symbolic of the blessings brought to mankind by Jesus.

Hindu ritual is followed by the offering of *prasad*, to indicate—symbolically, again—the receiving of God's grace. *Arati*, too, is ended by the light being taken around to everyone, that all may receive God's light symbolically into themselves.

The entire spiritual path consists of offering up the ego to God for purification, and of receiving His grace (*kripa*) in return. Only thus can one eventually attain oneness with Him.

Religious rituals should be performed with both interiorized *consciousness* and devotion—not absent-

mindedly, with mumbled words and vague gestures. The more whole-heartedly one can immerse himself in the *feeling* as well as the *meaning* of the ritual he performs, the more he will absorb divine inspiration into himself, until his very life becomes a ritual of self-offering, or yagya, to God.

The subsequent stanzas of the Bhagavad Gita all concern themselves with the various types of rituals that are performed by different spiritual aspirants.

**(4:25) Some yogis there are who make sacrifices to the devas (deities); others see sacrifice (yagya) as an offering of the self into the cosmic fire of Spirit.**

Most people find it difficult to love God as an abstraction. He is pure consciousness, but they find it easier to endow Him with a form that represents whatever divine aspect or quality most attracts them. God is beyond all forms, and is supremely impersonal. At the same time, God has also taken on every form in the universe. He is impersonal in that He wants nothing for Himself. In each of us, however, He has become personal by encasing His consciousness in our forms. He loves us individually, on our own level of understanding. Thus, He suffers in (and for) those who suffer. Yet in Himself He is perfect Bliss. He rejoices in our earthly joys, yet in Himself is not identified with them. The case is similar to a mother and her children. When they weep, she feels their pain, but at the same time, in her self, she feels no pain.

Many people imagine that true sympathy for others means to suffer *with* them. True sympathy should,

however, be *useful*. If someone were drowning, would it help him to jump into the water and drown with him? Obviously not! One can be far more *useful* to him standing on dry land and throwing him a rope. Alternatively, if one wants to help him more closely, he'd better be sure that he himself is a strong enough swimmer. Truly to help someone who is suffering means to give him a comfort he can accept: joy, above all, and kindness, and calm understanding (from a point of wisdom higher than his own confusion and pain)—but to express such feelings outwardly only to the degree that the sufferer can receive them.

God is impersonal. With mankind, however, He is also very personal—closer to us even than our thoughts. The reason He doesn't always respond when we call Him is that, as my Guru put it, "He knows most people only want to argue with Him!"

Thus, to visualize perfect love, for example, in a form which the human mind can comprehend may mean to worship "Him" as the Divine Mother, or as one's Ideal Beloved, or as one's Perfect Friend. Whatever quality most attracts the heart's devotion can be mentally clothed in a form that, for the individual worshiper, epitomizes or expresses that quality.

The deeper one goes in devotion, especially after receiving in his heart some answer from God, the more that form which he has visualized fades into formlessness, as the state of consciousness behind one's visualization is gradually perceived to be the eternal Formless Reality.

Paramhansa Yogananda gave further advice on this subject: "Whenever God comes to you in form—as, let

us say, the Divine Mother—try to see in those eyes, not a human personality, but the consciousness of infinity.”

The fact that Krishna in this stanza refers to yogis, and not to ordinary devotees, suggests that he is speaking of the various forms in which sincere seekers worship the Supreme Lord. He would not describe yogis, whose goal is union with God, as worshiping astral gods, to whom ordinary people appeal primarily for ego-gratifying boons.

There is also a deeper meaning in this passage. In yoga practice, the meditator offers his Kundalini up to the “*devas*,” or “powers,” residing in the chakras, that all his energy may flow up the spine toward unity with God in the *sahasrara* (thousand-rayed “Lotus”) at the top of the head.

**(4:26) Other spiritual seekers offer their inner power of hearing and of their other senses into the fire of self-control. Still others offer whatever they hear or experience through their senses into the fire of a higher understanding.**

More is involved, it must be said, in offering the ego into the fire of Cosmic consciousness than the mere *thought* of doing so—even as more is involved in “conquering” a mountain than simply leaping to the top. This stanza and several more that follow it cover this subject in a variety of ways. Each one is a means of offering up the ego into superconscious expansion.

**(4:27) Others, by discrimination, offer up their sense activities, and the energy within those activities, in the**

**fires of self-control. (They ask themselves, “Who is seeing? Who is hearing? Whose energy is activating the experience of these sensations?”)**

This method of offering ego-consciousness up to cosmic expansion comes down to the question, finally, “Who am I?” First one asks, “Who is this that is eating?” “Who walks, when my body walks?” “Who, really, is breathing?” “Who thinks?” “Who is reacting with positive or negative feelings?” “Who is asking these questions?”

And finally, again, “Who am I?”

This is the approach of Gyana Yoga (the path of discrimination), but it is one that everyone should include in his sadhana (spiritual practice). Watch yourself eating, walking, breathing, conversing, thinking. Stand mentally aside from your own body and mind. Become the silent observer of your own self. Gradually you will feel inwardly detached, and will accept that you are another reality altogether: the divine soul merely dreaming everything that happens to its individual-seeming consciousness.

**(4:28) Some offer up their possessions as oblations; some, their actions; others concentrate on withdrawing their energy by yoga meditation (offering it up as an oblation); and still others, holding strictly to a vow of self-restraint, offer up all their thoughts to God, practice introspection, and seek wisdom through study of the scriptures.**

**(4:29) One practice of yoga offers the incoming breath**

**(*prana*) into the outgoing breath (*apana*), and the *apana* into the *prana*, thereby, through *pranayama* (control of the energy), rendering breathing unnecessary.**

The physical breath, as we saw earlier, accompanies the upward and downward flow of energy through the *ida* and *pingala nadis* in the spine. Indeed, it is this spinal flow of the energies, known as *prana* and *apana*, which prompts the lungs to inhale and exhale. Actually, *prana* also, more broadly speaking, means energy itself. *Prana* is *Paraprakriti* (as opposed to *Aparaprakriti*, Nature); it is immanent as opposed to overt Nature: the hidden reality behind the whole material universe.

The slow, careful, conscious circulation of energy around the spine constitutes the ancient science known (since the time of Lahiri Mahasaya in the nineteenth century) as Kriya Yoga. This circulation magnetizes the spine, and redirects the mental tendencies, called *samskaras*, toward the brain in a way interestingly reminiscent of the realigning of molecules in a north-south direction in a bar of metal. Similar to the bar magnet, the spine becomes magnetized in the sense that the energy, flowing ever more unidirectionally up toward the brain, is drawn into the deep spine, the *sushumna*, where, with the awakening of the Kundalini, it rises through the chakras, lifting all one's energy and consciousness upward toward God. Thus, the energy is brought to the spiritual eye, finally to become united with *sahasrara* (the "thousand-petaled" lotus) at the top of the head. That this yoga was taught not only in recent times (in the late eighteenth hundreds) but anciently is evidenced

by this stanza, and also by a later one, in Chapter 5 of the Gita (5:27,28), where Krishna describes the need for neutralizing the currents of prana and apana.

Sincere aspirants often wonder, “If Kriya Yoga is such an exalted science, why has it not been published in book form, so that all might learn it?” A reasonable question, certainly. The masters themselves, however, have decreed it should not be published, precisely *because* it is a teaching that transcends reason itself. Right understanding of it depends on the unfolding intuition.

Kriya Yoga, in order to be wholly effective, must be received not only intellectually (in written or spoken form), but *vibrationally*, in the form of initiation. A magnet is created either by electrical realignment of the molecules, or by close proximity to another magnet. Attunement with a God-awakened guru influences the *samskaras* (comparable to the material molecules) to flow upward to the brain.

We are dealing here with a reality subtler, and much more difficult to master, than mere molecules of metal. Without an experienced guide, even mountain climbing can be fatal—though death, in this case, only ends a single incarnation. Spiritual mistakes can be costlier, in terms of long-range suffering.

Guidance from the guru is not only helpful: It is essential. This does not mean that Kriya Yoga is dangerous. Far from it. But to take up Kriya Yoga signifies entering seriously onto the path to God. It is not a game, and should certainly be treated as a lifetime commitment. To treat it lightly is certainly, we should add, not the best of karma. Kriya Yoga initiation was formerly given only to

*sannyasis* (renunciates) whose lives were already vowed to the divine search. This restriction was lifted by Babaji, when he gave this sacred initiation to Lahiri Mahasaya. The inward reason for his relaxing the ancient proscriptions was that the earth had already entered into a new age, Dwapara Yuga, and mankind was becoming more conscious of energy. Humanity as a whole is even now more receptive to a teaching that focuses on the body's energy. Nevertheless, any yoga initiation, and especially into the ancient science of Kriya Yoga, should be looked upon as a very sacred step in one's life.

Spiritual progress without the help of a true, or *Sat*, guru, cannot but be slow, haphazard, uncertain, and sometimes dangerous. The ancient tradition in India, where spirituality has been studied for thousands of years—not as a religion, but as a practical science (“practical” in the sense of results actually accomplished)—has always insisted that a true guru is the *sine qua non* for spiritual success. Many spiritually ignorant people, even in India, insist that with literacy widespread today, and with books so easily available, spiritual teachings are accessible to virtually everyone and a guru is no longer needed. Truly, widespread literacy has had one unfortunate effect: the dissemination, not only of knowledge, but of ignorance!

True understanding comes not by intellectual reasoning, but by intuition. Inner, intuitive attunement with the consciousness of the guru is what most surely and directly brings spiritual awakening.

Has not everybody experienced, in the presence of certain people, a greater feeling of peace, harmony, and

upliftment? If relatively ordinary people can affect one in this way, how much greater must be the effect of one who is, himself, spiritually enlightened!

In the Christian New Testament it is written, of Jesus Christ, “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” That is exactly what everyone needs: the *power* to rise! Such power cannot be self-generated. The ego, as we saw earlier, is already infected with the very disease (ignorance) it wants to banish from its consciousness. Only one who has himself escaped the clutches of ego-consciousness can, with his expanded consciousness, infuse into the disciple’s awareness new insight, new understanding, and new *power* to rise spiritually.

Were such a sacred science as Kriya Yoga to be shouted from the housetops (as Ramanuja shouted the sacred mantra, “AUM *namo Narayana!*” from the roof of a temple) it would lack an essential ingredient of success. In all Indian tradition, initiation into the spiritual “mysteries” by a true guru is considered more important than the teachings themselves. Ramanuja’s love and compassion for mankind notwithstanding, his guru had been right when he enjoined secrecy on him. Perhaps Ramanuja had the spiritual power thus to initiate so many, as Sri Chaitanya, centuries later, inspired thousands with *maha-mantra* (*Haré Krishna, haré Krishna! Krishna, Krishna haré, haré! Haré Rama, haré Rama! Rama, Rama haré, haré!*). In Chaitanya’s presence, indeed, thousands were inspired, as by no means all are who exuberantly chant that mantra in the streets in modern times. The tradition is that *mantra diksha*, or initiation into a mantra, should

be spoken into the *right* ear, and conveyed, rather than only uttered, with spiritual power.

Kriya Yoga *diksha* is much subtler than *mantra diksha*. It involves not only that which can be spoken with the tongue, or uttered mentally. Required also is an *awareness* in the spine, which must come from inside. This is why attunement with the guru is so essential, particularly with Kriya practice. One should invite the guru's consciousness to awaken one's own energy within the spine. This can be accomplished only by mental, intuitive attunement with the guru: *receiving him* deeply, as it says in the Bible, into oneself.

How can one attune himself with the guru? One method is to gaze deeply into his eyes—a photograph will do—and, visualizing him at the point between the eyebrows, to call to him deeply, “Introduce me to God!” One should then listen, or feel, in the heart. The heart is the body's “radio station,” where the divine “program” is received, and where the guru's blessings and power are intuitively perceived.

Can this blessing be received at a distance? Can it be received after the guru has left his physical body? The answer—as my Guru himself told me in specific terms—is that one needs at least one physical contact with him. That contact can be transmitted through a direct line of disciples from a true guru. If, like Yogananda, he is a world savior, it is both right and fitting that those who come after him give initiation *in his name*. Thus, subsequent generations of disciples will always refer back to the supreme power of that savior (an avatar) for their ultimate blessing.

Students who have claimed discipleship to a great master, without having had at least one direct contact outwardly, show by their very auras that they have not received the same blessing in their lives as those who have honored this timeless principle.

What should one do, when he feels the guru's vibrational presence in his heart? He should release it from mental identification with the guru's physical form, and feel it radiating outward from his heart as love and bliss, until it fills the whole body. The disciple should then try to expand those blessings outward until he feels his consciousness infused by the guru. Thus, he should expand outward beyond the limited, physical identity of the ego.

The reason *mantra diksha* (initiation) is traditionally given in the right ear is partly because that is the positive side of the body. There is a special correlation also, however, between the *inner* right ear and superconscious experience. Listening there helps to attune one with AUM, the highest mantra of all, the vibrational sound of the universe or "music of the spheres."

Listening to the sound of AUM in the right ear, one should extend that sound gradually to the left ear—then, as I said earlier, to the whole body. As one *receives* AUM into his whole being, he *receives* also the guru's inner blessings and guidance. These things cannot be accomplished by tense striving, but only by deep, upward relaxation into the inner, higher Self.

**(4:30) Some, regulating the flow of energy in the body by correct diet, offer all their energies into the fire of that (upward) flow. All the above seekers understand**

**the meaning of self-offering (yagya, or sacrifice), the inner fire which consumes all the seeds of karma.**

The first part of this *sloka* is sometimes coupled with Stanza 29. Indeed, “correct diet” refers also to something deeper than mere food for the stomach. When the prana and apana are neutralized in breathlessness, the body is sustained by a higher, cosmic energy. What happens is that the body’s energy is then connected directly to the medulla oblongata, by which connection the energy flows directly from a higher source, sustaining the body cells from within.

Paramhansa Yogananda developed a system which he called “energization exercises.” These, when practiced faithfully, keep the body fit and sustained by that higher energy.

Correct diet, normally speaking, should consist of what is considered sattwic food. Such food is vegetarian, to begin with, lightly cooked or raw, but not overcooked since overcooking destroys the life force in food. Fruits and nuts are excellent. It seems unnecessary to cover this subject here, as many good books are available on the subject. An interesting story may be told here, however, to show that Paramhansa Yogananda was no food fanatic. Indeed, as he noted, health faddists are often incapable of discussing anything but the physical body and diet! To express what he considered the ideal diet, he coined a word: *propereatarianism*!

One time Dr. Lewis, his first Kriya Yoga disciple in America, when he was still a young man in his late twenties, complained to him of mysterious aches and pains

he was having. “I’ve been to a number of medical doctors,” he said, “but none of them has helped me. What can I do?”

The Master, after a brief pause, said, “The cells in your body are accustomed to eating meat. Now that you’ve adopted a vegetarian diet, they miss their former animal fare! Eat a little bit of meat therefore, once a week. Avoid beef, veal, and pork, but do eat a little lamb, chicken, or fish.” Dr. Lewis followed this advice, and his problem soon disappeared.

**(4:31) By eating the “blessed food” (prasad) left from any of these spiritual fire rituals, one attains Brahman (the Infinite Spirit). Even the blessings of this world come not to him who gives nothing of himself. How, then, can he hope for happiness in a better world?**

**(4:32) The many ways of offering up the ego are declared in the Vedas (as if) through the “mouth of Brahma.” Knowing their true purpose (which is an upward self-offering), you will be freed from all karmic bondage.**

From whatever direction one approaches a mountaintop, as long as he continues moving upward he will eventually reach the peak. What is all-important is the *direction* of one’s climb. In the spine that direction, of course, is upward. The spine is central in the human body. Whatever else one does spiritually, he must also awaken and raise the spine’s energy. This remains true even if one’s path is devotional chanting, or serving the poor and other ways of helping to relieve human suffering. He may follow the path of mental discrimination,

distinguishing what is true from what is false in this world. If, however, his energy is not raised in the spine even by these indirect means, he cannot achieve spiritual awakening. True religion—inner experience, that is to say, not mere belief—is not a question of pleasing some deity “up there.” We ourselves must raise our own awareness to the superconscious level, which for us in the physical body exists only “up there.”

Thus, yoga, and particularly the science of Kriya Yoga, is supremely practical. This teaching is universal, since it addresses the central reality of what occurs anyway on the spiritual path for every sincere aspirant, whatever his outward beliefs. Therefore it is that Krishna later on in the Gita says, “Arjuna, be thou a yogi.”

What is this “spinal highway,” as Paramhansa Yogananda called it, described in the yoga teachings? It begins with the Kundalini power, which lies as if asleep at the base of the spine. This is (in one frame of reference) the opposite pole to the heart; in another, to the medulla oblongata and the spiritual eye, and (finally) to the top of the head (the *sahasrara*). All one’s energy must at last be united in the *sahasrara*.

The first chakra, at the bottom of the spine just above the Kundalini, is called *muladhara*, which represents the earth “element.” The opening of the central passageway (*sushumna*) in the spine is referred to in this verse as the “mouth of Brahma.” This important center is the start of the long upward journey. “Here,” Krishna is saying, “is where it all begins.”

Certain occult powers are attached to this chakra, as to each of the others. People sometimes fear to meditate

on the lower chakras, thinking it might increase their connection with materialistic consciousness. It is a fact that sense-bound individuals live centered mostly in their lower three chakras. A misconception needs to be clarified here, however. When the energy flows *outward* from these centers to the physical body, it induces body-consciousness. When it flows *inward* to the chakras, however, and then *upward*, it leads to spiritual awakening. Every chakra—even at this lowest point—brings heightened spiritual awareness when its energy flows upward.

**(4:33) The inner, spiritual fire ceremony of raising awareness is superior, O Scorcher of Foes (Arjuna), to any outward act of self-offering. In this wisdom (alone) is all action (karma) consumed.**

Outward spiritual acts, meant as self-offering, have two major disadvantages: First, they act only indirectly on the energy in the spine, and are therefore less effective in the only spiritual “work” that really counts: self-transformation, which also results in the highest good for other people. Secondly, they involve the mind outwardly, keeping it restless, and causing one to forget easily such spiritual essentials as deep devotion of the heart.

**(4:34) Understand this (above all): By surrender (of self-will to the wise), by (sensitive inward and outward) questioning (of the wise), and by service (to the wise), those who have realized the truth will (be able to) convey their wisdom to you.**

This stanza is meant to be applied especially to one's own Self-realized guru, if one is so blessed as to have been drawn to one. The plural is used here, however, to indicate the need for devotees to honor all enlightened sages, generally. Surrender to the Infinite God in them, openness (whether by questioning or by deep, inward appreciation) to their uplifting influence, and support for that influence (through service to them) are important in helping the devotee to rise above the naturally narrow outlook imposed by the ego.

Paramhansa Yogananda encouraged people to add to the prayers they offer regularly to God and guru (and, perhaps, to a line of gurus) these words of invocation: "saints of all religions."

**(4:35) Having (fully) received that wisdom from a true guru, O Pandava (Arjuna)! you will never again fall into delusion, for you will behold all creation contained within your (expanded) Self, and then (behold it) in Me (beyond all creation).**

First the fully enlightened being perceives the whole universe as made of waves of vibration dancing on the surface of his oceanic consciousness. His next step, if he so wills it, is to withdraw his consciousness from involvement with Nature into what Yogananda called "the watchful state" of absolute, ever-motionless Consciousness.

**(4:36) Even the worst of sinners can, using the raft of wisdom, safely cross the ocean of delusion.**

Krishna offers this supreme encouragement to all humanity: No matter how steeped you are in bad habits, vice, self-degrading depravity, or evil, you are still a child of the same infinite Lord who created masters and saints. Divine bliss alone is your final definition forever!

Never tell yourself, therefore, “I am evil!” Never say, “I have failed!” If you accept any failure as your reality, it will be so at least for this lifetime. But if after every setback you say, instead, “I have not yet succeeded!” you can—even in this incarnation—win your private war!

Pray to God as the all-forgiving and ever-accepting Divine Mother: “Mother, whether naughty or good, I am Thy child! Thou *must* release me! Cleanse me of all sin.”

“God doesn’t mind your faults,” Yogananda used to say. “He only minds your indifference!”

**(4:37) O Arjuna, as fire burns wood to ashes, so does the fire of wisdom burn to ashes all one’s karma.**

Think of the long-abandoned Egyptian tombs. Darkness reigned in King Tut’s tomb for thousands of years, yet once it was opened light came flooding in, and the darkness of centuries was dispersed in an instant. The case is similar with every individual. No matter how deep one’s shadows of unknowing, the moment God’s light enters his consciousness there is nothing but light!

Karma is of many kinds, since karma means only action. Karma can be national, communal, family, individual: anything that proceeds from a coherent center of intention, which attracts consequences back to that

center. Karma is personal. A national leader who does evil on his people's behalf, however, will not have to bear the entire weight of that bad karma on his own "shoulders": The whole nation must accept the responsibility. Good people in that country must bear it also, though their own good karma may offset for themselves, and perhaps for a wider circle of people, any evil that must befall the nation as karmic retribution.

When an airplane crashes, not everyone who dies in that disaster does so necessarily because it was his own karma to die. The group karma of the majority of passengers might outweigh an individual, neutral karma—if, for example, his karma to live was not strong enough. It does often happen, on the other hand, that when some great disaster strikes, certain persons, unaccountably at the time, are called away or otherwise prevented from being on the scene.

Group karma is highly complex. Everyone's first duty is to improve his own karma. Indeed, the more good one does by contributing toward a general upliftment of consciousness, the more greatly will the general karma be helped also. One must begin, however, by uplifting his own consciousness.

For the individual, two kinds of karma need to be considered: *purushakara* and *prarabdha*. *Purushakara karma* is actions generated in this life under the influence, *not* of habit or desire, but of soul-guidance. *Prarabdha karma*, on the other hand, consists of present tendencies, and the results of past actions brought over from former lives.

*Prarabdha karma* is also of two kinds: those actions which, owing to present circumstances, are likely to bear

fruit in this life; and those, known as *pararabdha karma*, which are being held in abeyance until more favorable circumstances bring them to fruition.

A man may have the karma, for example, to be drowned at sea—or, of course, to be saved from drowning at sea. If he never goes near even a lake, however, and therefore is never in a position that makes drowning possible, that particular karma will have to await another life to be worked out.

Sometimes an unfortunate karma can be deferred and even offset by an opposite karma. An unavoidable temptation, for example, may be met by newly acquired inner strength that renders the temptation impotent. Karmic periods also pass, or are dissipated by offsetting actions. For example, a karmically “destined” failure may be deflected if one develops a new, more creative energy, or for that matter if one develops the wisdom to redefine the blow as a new *opportunity*, and not really failure at all!

A bad karma may loom over one like a dragon, ready to strike, but if one can find a way of either deflecting that blow or protecting oneself (like using an umbrella when it rains), even though the blow can’t be avoided one may still avoid disaster. One may also, of course, do as Saint George of English legend did: slay the dragon. Certain it is that no threat of misfortune need ever be accepted with supine resignation! A powerful will can overcome, or can at least mitigate, virtually any misfortune that may await one.

Bad karma can, for example, penetrate a weak aura, but be unable to penetrate a strong one. Again

the damage it inflicts may be minimized. If it's your karma to lose a leg, but your will is strong and you have deep devotion, you may receive only a scratch. Karmic consequences are inevitable, but how they are *received* depends on many circumstances, most of which arise in the individual.

Bad karma can also be offset by creating good karma. Good karma can be augmented by more good karma directed toward the same end. Events that affect others need not affect oneself, or at least not in the same way: The secret, in this case, is to maintain an attitude of non-attachment, not reacting emotionally. Indeed, emotional reactions can greatly augment any karmic effects. My Guru told a (probably mythical) story about a village in India in which three people died unaccountably of some disease. The villagers, distressed, repaired in a group to a solitary *sadhu* (holy man) who lived outside the village, and asked him to intercede. The sadhu meditated, and found that the disease had been caused by a demon. He summoned the demon and told him, "This village is under my protection. Leave it alone." The demon promised to obey.

A week later, at least a hundred other people had died. It seemed a veritable epidemic. Again the villagers approached the sadhu and cried, "Your prayers have not helped us. There must be a terrible curse on our village!"

The sadhu summoned the demon again and scolded him, saying, "I told you this village is under my protection. You promised to leave it alone. Now it appears you have broken your promise."

“No, I haven’t, Holy One!” protested the demon. “It’s true I killed the first three, but all the others died out of fear.”

The ultimate way to escape the results of all karma is to “evaporate” the causative ego, with its consciousness of identification with the little “cup” of the body. In deep meditation, that vapor of ego may rise and disappear altogether in the sky of infinite consciousness.

If the dragon strikes, and you are no longer there for it to seize you in its jaws; or if the rock falls from on high but you have removed yourself from the spot where it falls; or if the fickle multitudes acclaim you (and, inevitably, expose you later on to the dualistic opposite of public opprobrium) and you are not there to respond: What happens? The same actions occur, but they will not occur to you.

The *jivan mukta* (one who is “freed while living”), having dissolved his ego-awareness in infinite consciousness, no longer develops any new karma of his own. Any deed he does from then on will accrue to the benefit of others—who still, by the vortices of energy created by their own egos, can benefit from the good deeds he performs for them. He himself, however, remains untouched even by good karma. His *prarabdha karma* must play itself out, but it can no longer affect him.

When the *jivan mukta* has finally released into the free skies of Spirit the countless actions of all the incarnations that his ego lived in delusion, he becomes a *param mukta*: a supremely free soul.

**(4:38) Verily, there is nothing in this world so**

**sanctifying as wisdom. In due course of time every devotee who is successful in his practices will realize in his own Self the truth of this statement.**

**(4:39) The person of devotion who is engrossed in the infinite, having brought his senses under control, achieves wisdom, and gains that which he knows at once to be perfect peace.**

Devotees who think a conflict exists between devotional love, yogic self-control, and true (as opposed to merely intellectual) wisdom, fail to realize that all these paths (devotion, yogic practicality, and calm discrimination) lead to the same one goal, resulting in the same one realization.

The word for devotion in this sloka is *shraddha*, which usually translates as, “faith.” The reference is to that kind of devotion which doesn’t hold God at a distance by appealing to Him for divine favors, but which, like an arrow, flies straight to the bull’s eye of divine love as the heart’s natural inclination toward its own, intuitively perceived Source.

The highest culmination of perfect *shraddha* is, in fact, not love, but bliss. Love without the further aspiration toward Satchidananda (ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new Bliss) carries with it the ego-induced danger of becoming tainted by personal motive. It is good, certainly, to seek God for His love, but that love must be impersonal in the sense of wholly unselfish. Without absolute Bliss as one’s goal, even the search for Divine Love contains the danger that it may awaken the seeds of desire for *personal* love. True, divine love is always

expansive: from the little self to infinity. Its only motive is Bliss alone.

**(4:40) The ignorant, the person who lacks devotion, the doubt-ridden: all these must perish. The man of vacillating temperament finds no happiness in this world or the next. For him, supreme bliss is not possible.**

To be truly ignorant is to reject with a dull heart any offer of a way out of the mud flats of nescience. The truly ignorant, in their stupor, ask no questions of life, and recognize no opportunity for self-improvement even if it offers them everything.

Worse than being ignorant is the inability to feel devotion. High aspiration eludes such a person. Aspiration of any kind, indeed, seems to him foolish and unnecessary. To what (he asks) is there to aspire? Why strive for anything? The less energy he expends, the less energy (he believes) will be demanded of him, the fewer challenges it will throw in his way, and the more, in consequence, he will be left alone. How can those not ultimately perish who, buffalo-like, insist on wallowing in the mud of passivity? Stupidity, sloth, lack of any vital interest in anything: For people who cling to such mental sluggishness, the mechanism of their life cannot but run down very quickly. They refuse their minds and bodies even proper maintenance.

The worst case, however, is that of the confirmed doubter. He has all the intellectual equipment he needs to rise to the heights, yet his compulsion is to keep listing all the shortcomings, the drawbacks, and the mischief by

which others might try to undo him. He has the devotion, and the desire to rise to the heights, yet a cynical inner voice keeps whispering in his subconscious, “What will the end be—treachery? lack of appreciation? opposition? ingratitude?”

Paramhansa Yogananda once commented, “The doubter is the most miserable of mortals.” He was referring, not to constructive questioning, but to the nagging tendency to oppose every constructive idea, to prejudge it for no real reason at all, and to be disposed to reject everything wholesome or constructive. “It can’t be right—therefore it isn’t right! It can’t work—therefore no matter what happens, it can’t really work—even if it seems to be doing so. People can’t know what they’re doing—therefore they *must* be wrong!”

To doubt a true teacher, especially if one is his disciple—owing to arrogance or simply to a habit of mental rejection—causes seething turmoil in the mind. One assumes dejectedly that whatever the guru says must automatically be wrong: not because it has been proved wrong, nor even because one *wants* to disbelieve a conclusion that may simply be inconvenient, and not because one doubts the guru’s motives. . . . The doubter deeply desires *something true* in life, but cannot accept what he finds. A strange twist of mind rejects, not out of disinterest, but rather out of *intense* interest. His doubt is born of almost a fear of finding himself deluded in the end, when he wanted so much to be certain.

Were he indifferent, his condition might be better at least in the sense that he’d then be able to direct his interest elsewhere. The tragedy, for him, is that he desires—

his whole being yearns for—the very truths which subconscious habit impels him to reject. That habit proposes no acceptable alternative. It simply shakes its head and says, “No.” The truths he wants—so his habit tells him—cannot possibly exist. The habit gives no reason. Darkly, instead, it poses the dire warning, “What if . . . ?”

“What if all this should prove, in the end, to be chicanery? What if my guru’s motives be not so generous as they seem, and all he really wants is somehow to squeeze others for his own benefit?” Such doubts quickly develop a life of their own, and create for themselves an alternate universe: “What if—*everything!*?” One’s will power becomes paralyzed; hope withers away, and becomes in time a dry twig. The sweetness of friendship is soured by suspicion.

For all the above reasons it may be justly said that the doubter is indeed “the most miserable of mortals.”

Finally, the man of vacillating temperament can never accomplish anything worthwhile. He will never commit himself to anything. He has no loyalties. He drifts through life as his whims waft him, settling on no truth, and forever uncertain of anything.

The determinedly ignorant person can only be left alone to his own plodding rhythms. Eventually he will emerge from his self-woven cocoon: when he has suffered enough, and when, through suffering, he begins to *care* and, in the caring, to make the first, faltering attempts to develop his own latent abilities. *Then* he will emerge from his self-confinement.

The apathetic may at least be aware that there are clouds of unknowing to be blown away. Although

they've imagined that life has nothing more to offer them, when their dreams of passive contentment or resignation fade, they begin to look around anxiously for viable answers.

It is the doubter, alas, who suffers the most. His thinking processes, despite his longing to be good and to do right, become paralyzed. He yearns to find something on which he can fix as his ideal, but then tells himself that, for one reason or another, that ideal cannot exist. His tragedy is that he yearns for bliss, but finds bliss denied him by a compulsion in his nature that he can't understand. How can he overcome this self-damning tendency?

He must tell himself, "There is no road back. I have no choice but to go forward, even if it means only trudging heavily, one slow step at a time." He can expiate his karma by helping others to resolve their doubts. He can concentrate on his own yearning for truth, until the very yearning pulls him out of the dense fogs of doubt into the sunlight of a faith all the more certain because it has rejected gloomy speculation as a waste of time and energy. Helping others to resolve their doubts and uncertainties becomes, for him, a way of affirming his own solution-orientation. For him at last, supreme bliss becomes the only possible solution to every problem and difficulty in life!

**(4:41) O Winner of (true) Wealth, Arjuna! one who has dissolved all his karmas in oneness with God, and has obliterated his every doubt by wisdom, becomes completely self-possessed. (Ego-free,) no further action can entangle him.**

(4:42) Arise therefore, O Descendent of Bharata (Arjuna): Arise! Take shelter in (this greatest science of) yoga. Slash (to pieces) with the sword of wisdom the doubt you feel in your heart as to the nature of the Self (and of who you are, in reality).

Thus ends the fourth chapter, called “Gyana Yoga (Union Through Knowledge of the Divine),” of the Upanishad of the holy Bhagavad Gita, in the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna discussing yoga and the science of God-realization.