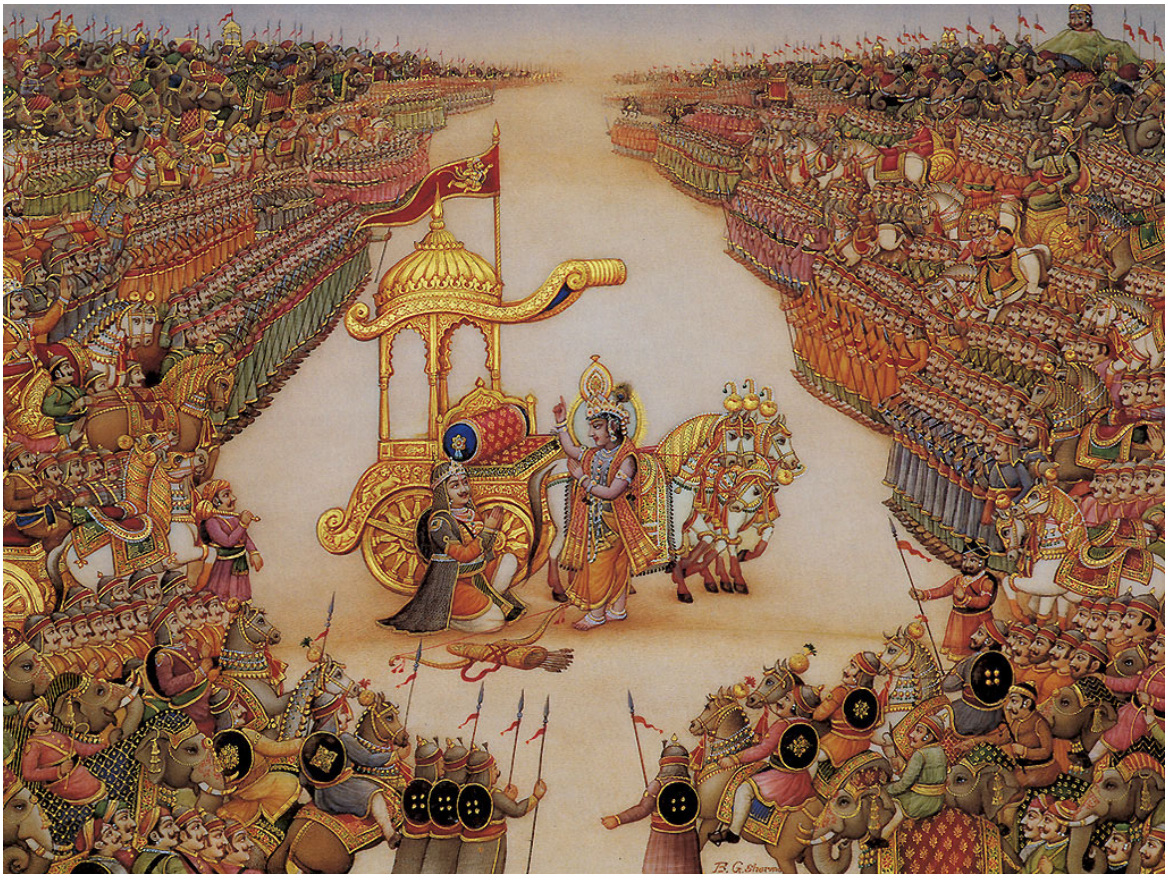


William Quan Judge
Essays on the Bhagavad-Gita



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We here reproduce William Quan Judge's enlightening essays on the first seven chapters of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. They were first published in *The Path* between 1887 and 1895 under the *nom de plume* "William Brehon." They, together with notes on the remaining chapters by Robert Crosbie, are now available in print by the Theosophy Company and by the Theosophical University Press (but without Crosbie's notes) in paperback and online: <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gita/bg-eg-hp.htm>

EDITORS

Essay 1

The Despondency of Arjuna

If the title of this sacred Hindu poem were paraphrased, it would read:

The Holy Song of God Himself, who, at the beginning of Kali yuga or the dark age, descended upon earth to aid and instruct Man.

GITA means song, and BHAGAVAD is one of the names of Krishna. Krishna was an Avatar. According to the views of the Brahmins, we are now in Kali-yuga, which began about the time of Krishna's appearance. He is said to have descended in order to start among men those moral and philosophical ideas which were necessary to be known during the revolution of the Age, at the end of which — after a brief period of darkness — a better Age will begin.

The composition of this poem is attributed to Vyasa and, as he is also said to have given the Vedas to men, a discussion about dates would not be profitable and can well stand over until some other occasion.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a portion of the *Mahabharata*, the great epic of India. The *Mahabharata* is so called because it contains the general history of the house of Bharat, and the prefix *Maha* signifies great. Its more definite object, however, is to give an account of the wars of the Kurus and Pandus, two great branches of the family. And that portion included in our poem is the sublime philosophical and metaphysical dialogue held by Krishna with Arjuna, on the eve of a battle between the two aspirants for dominion.

The scene of the battle is laid on the plain called "Kuru-kshetra," a strip of land near Delhi, between the Indus, the Ganges, and the Himalayan mountains. Many European translators and commentators, being ignorant of the psychological system of the Hindus — which really underlies every word of this poem — have regarded this plain and the battle as just those two things and no more; some have gone so far as to give the commercial products of the country at the supposed period, so that readers might be able, forsooth, in that way to know the motives that prompted the two princes to enter into a bloody internecine conflict. No doubt such a conflict did take place, for man is continually imitating the higher spiritual planes; and a great sage could easily adopt a human event in order to erect a noble philosophical system upon such an allegorical foundation.



In one aspect history gives us merely the small or great occurrences of man's progress; but in another, any one great historical epoch will give us a picture of the evolution in man, in the mass, of any corresponding faculty of the Individual Soul. So we see, here and there, Western minds wondering why such a highly tuned metaphysical discussion should be "disfigured by a warfare of savages." Such is the materializing influence of Western culture that it is hardly able to admit any higher meaning in a portion of the poem which confessedly it has not yet come to fully understand.

Before the Upanishads can be properly rendered, the Indian psychological system must be understood; and even when its existence is admitted, the English speaking person will meet the great difficulty arising from an absence of words in that language which correspond to the ideas so frequently found in the Sanskrit. Thus we have to wait until a new set of words has been born to express the new ideas not yet existing in the civilization of the West.

The location of the plain on which this battle was fought is important, as well as are also the very rivers and mountains by which it is bounded. And as equally needful to be understood, or at least guessed at, are the names of the respective princes. The very place in the *Mahabharata* in which this episode is inserted has deep significance, and we cannot afford to ignore anything whatever that is connected with the events. If we merely imagine that Vyasa or Krishna took the sacred plain of Kurukshetra and the great battle as simply accessories to his discourse, which we can easily discard, the whole force of the dialogue will be lost.

Although the *Bhagavad-Gita* is a small work, there have been written upon it, among the Hindus, more commentaries than those upon the *Revelation* of St. John among the Christians.

I do not intend to go into those commentaries, because on the one hand I am not a Sanskrit scholar, and on the other it would not tend to great profit. Many of them are fanciful, some unwarrantable; and those that are of value can be consulted by anyone anxious to pursue that line of inquiry. What I propose here to myself and to all who may read these papers is to study the *Bhagavad-Gita* by the light of that spiritual lamp — be it small or great — which the Supreme Soul will feed and increase within us if we attend to its behests and diligently inquire after it. Such at least is the promise by Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* — the "Song Celestial."

In the few introductory lines with which I took up this subject, it was stated that not being a Sanskrit scholar I did not intend to go into the commentaries upon the poem in that language. The great mass of those commentaries have looked at the dialogue from various standpoints. Many later Hindu students have not gone beyond the explanations made by Shankaracharya, and nearly all refuse to do more than transliterate the names of the different personages referred to in the first chapter.

But there is the highest authority for reading this poem between the lines. The Vedas themselves say that what we see of them is only "the disclosed Veda," and that one should strive to get above this *disclosed* word. It is here clearly implied that the undisclosed Vedas must be hidden or contained in that which is apparent to the outer



senses. Did we not have this privilege, then surely would we be reduced to obtaining true knowledge solely from the facts of experience as suffered by the mortal frame, and fall into the gross error of the materialists who claim that mind is only an effect produced by the physical brain-molecules coming into motion. We would also have to follow the canonical rule, that conscience is a safe guide only when it is regulated by an external law such as the law of the church, or of the Brahmanical caste. But we very well know that within the material, apparent — or disclosed — man, exists the *real* one who is undisclosed.

This valuable privilege of looking for the inner sense, while not straining after impossible meanings in the text, is permitted to all sincere students of any holy scriptures, Christian or Pagan. And in the poem itself, Krishna declares that he will feed the lamp of spiritual wisdom so that the real meaning of his words may be known; so too the Upanishads uphold the existence of a faculty together with the right to use it, whereby one can plainly discern the real, or undisclosed, meaning of holy books. Indeed, there is a school of occultists who hold, as we think with reason, that this power may be so developed by devoted persons, that even upon hearing the words of a holy book read in a totally unfamiliar language, the true meaning and drift of the strange sentences become instantly known.¹ The Christian commentators all allow that in studying their Bible the spirit must be attended to and not the letter. This *spirit* is that *undisclosed* Veda which must be looked for between the lines.

Nor should the Western student of the poem be deterred from any attempt to get at the real meaning by the attitude of the Brahmins, who hold that only Brahmins can be told this real meaning, and, because Krishna did not make it plain, it may not be made plain now to Sudras, or low caste people. Were this view to prevail, then the whole Western body of students would be excluded from using this important book, inasmuch as all persons not Hindus are necessarily of Sudra caste. Krishna did not make such an exclusion, which is only priestcraft. He was himself of shepherd caste and not a Brahmin; and he says that anyone who listens to his words will receive great benefit. The sole limitation made by him is that one in which he declares that these things must not be taught to those who do not want to listen, which is just the same direction as that given by Jesus of Nazareth when he said, “cast not your pearls before swine.”

But as our minds work very much upon suggestion or clues and might, in the absence of any hints as to where those clues are placed, be liable to altogether overlook the point, we must bear in mind the existence among the Aryans of a psychological system that gives substance and impulse to utterances declared by many Orientalists to be folly unworthy of attention from a man of the nineteenth century civilization. Nor need we be repulsed from our task because of a small acquaintance with that Aryan psychology. The moment we are aware of its existence in the poem, our inner self is ready to help the outer man to grasp after it; and in the noble pursuit of these great philosophical and moral truths, which is only our eternal endeavor to re-

¹ We have in mind an incident where a person of some slight development in this direction, heard read several verses from the Vedas in Sanskrit — with which he had no acquaintance — and instantly told what the verses were about. — W.B.



alize them as a part of our being, we can patiently wait for a perfect knowledge of the anatomy and functions of the inner man.

Western Sanskritists have translated many important words into the very lowest of their real meanings, being drawn away from the true by the incomplete Western psychological and spiritual knowledge, or have mixed them up hopelessly. Such words as *karma* and *dharma* are not understood. *Dharma* means *Law*, and is generally turned into *duty*, or said to refer merely to some rule depending upon human convention, whereas it means an inherent property of the faculties or of the whole man, or even of anything in the cosmos. Thus it is said that it is the duty, or dharma, of fire to burn. It always will burn and thus do its whole duty, having no consciousness, while man alone has the power to retard his “journey to the heart of the Sun,” by refusing to perform his properly appointed and plainly evident dharma. So again, when we read in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that those who depart this life “in the bright half of the moon, in the six months of the sun’s northern course,” will go to eternal salvation, while others, “who depart in the gloomy night of the moon’s dark season while the sun is in the southern half of his path,” ascend for a time to the moon’s region, to be reborn on this earth, our Orientalists tell us this is sheer folly, and we are unable to contradict them. But if we know that the Aryans, with a comprehensive knowledge of the vast and never inharmonious correspondence reigning throughout the macrocosm, in speaking thus meant to admit that the human being may be or not in a state of development in strict conformity to the bright or dark moon, the verse becomes clear. The materialistic critic will take the verse in the fourth chapter, which says that “he who eats of the ambrosia left from a sacrifice passes into the supreme spirit,” and ask us how the eating of the remnants of a burnt offering can confer salvation. When, however, we know that Man is the altar and the sacrifice, and that this *ambrosia* is the *perfection of spiritual cultivation* which he eats or incorporates into his being, the Aryan is vindicated and we are saved from despair.

A strange similarity on one point may be noticed between our poem and the old Hebrew record. The Jews were prepared by certain experiences to enter into the promised land, but were unable to do so until they had engaged in mighty conflicts with Hivites, Jebusites, Perizzites, and Amalekites. Here we find that the very opening verse signalizes a war. The old, blind king Dhritarashtra asks his prime minister to tell him what these opposing forces of Pandus and Kurus have been doing assembled as they are resolved upon war. So too the Jews assembled upon the borders of the promised land, resolved on conflict, and sustained in their resolve by the declarations of their God who had brought them out of the darkness of Egypt, carried on the fight. Egypt was the place where they had, in mystic language, obtained corporification, and stands for antenatal states, for unformed chaotic periods in the beginning of evolution, for the gestation in the womb. We are on the eve of a gigantic combat, we are to rush into the midst of “a conflict of savages.” If this opening verse is understood as it was meant, we are given the key to a magnificent system, and shall not fall into the error of asserting that the unity of the poem is destroyed.

Dhritarashtra is blind, because the body, as such, is blind in every way.

Someone has said — Goethe I think — that the old pagan religions taught man to look up, to aspire continually toward the greatness which was really his to achieve,



and thus led him to regard himself as but little less, potentially, than a god; while the attitude of man under the Christian system is one of humility, of bowed head and lowered eyes, in the presence of his God. In approaching the “jealous God” of the Mosaic dispensation, it is not permissible to assume an erect position. This change of attitude becomes necessary as soon as we postulate a Deity who is outside and beyond us. And yet it is not due to the Christian scriptures in themselves, but solely to the wrong interpretation given them by priests and churches, and easily believed by a weak humanity that needs a support beyond itself on which to lean.

The Aryans, holding that man in his essence *is God*, naturally looked up to him and referred everything to him. They therefore attributed to the material of the body no power of sight or feeling. And so Dhritarashtra, who is *material existence*, in which thirst for its renewal inheres, is blind.

The eye cannot see nor the ear hear, of themselves. In the Upanishads the pupil is asked: “What is the sight of the eye, and the hearing of the ear?” replying that these powers reside solely with inner organs of the soul, using the material body as the means for experiencing the phenomena of material life. Without the presence of this indwelling, informing, hearing and seeing power — or being — this collection of particles now deified as *body* is dead or blind.

These philosophers were not behind our nineteenth century. Boscovich, the Italian, Faraday, Fiske and other moderns, have concluded that we cannot even see or know the *matter* of which these bodies and the different substances about us are made up, and that the ultimate resolution is not into atoms finely divided, but into “points of dynamic force”; and therefore, we cannot know a piece of iron, we only know the *phenomena* it produces. This position is an ancient Aryan one, with another added — that the real perceiver of those phenomena is the *Self*.

It is only by an acceptance of this philosophy that we will ever comprehend the facts of nature which our science is so laboriously noting and classifying. But that science ignores a large mass of phenomena well known to spiritualists here and to ascetics in Asia, because the actual existence of the Self as the final support of every phase of consciousness is denied. “The disappearance of the ascetic is a possibility.” But the West denies it, while it is doubtful if even spiritists will admit that any living man can cause that phenomenon known as “form” to disappear. They are, however, willing to grant that a “materialized spirit form” may disappear, or that some mediums are living who have disappeared while sitting in a chair, either as an actual dissipation of molecules or by being covered as with a veil.²

In those instances the thing happened without knowledge or effort on the part of the medium, who was a passive agent. But the Eastern ascetic, possessing the power of disappearing, is a person who has meditated upon the real basis of what we know as “form,” with the doctrine ever in view, as stated by Boscovich and Faraday, that these phenomena are not realities per se, and adding that all must be referred to the Self. And so we find Patanjali in his compilation of yoga aphorisms stating the matter. In his twenty-first aphorism Book III, he says that the ascetic being aware that

² For an instance see Olcott’s *People from the Other World*, respecting a female medium.— W.B.



form, as such, is nothing, can cause himself to disappear.³ It is not difficult to explain this as a species of hypnotism or psychologizing performed by the ascetic. But such sort of explaining is only the modern method of getting out of a difficulty by stating it over again in new terms. Not until it is admitted that the Self eternally persists, and is always unmodified, will any real knowledge be acquired by us respecting these matters. In this Patanjali is very clear in his seventeenth aphorism, Book IV, where he says:

“The modifications of the mental state are always known, because the presiding spirit is not modified.”

We must admit the blindness of Dhritarashtra, as body, and that our consciousness and ability to know anything whatever of the modifications going on in the organism, are due to the “presiding spirit.”

So this old, blind rajah is that part of man which, containing the principle of thirst for existence, holds material life. The Ganges bounding his plain on one side typifies the sacred stream of spiritual life incarnated here.

At first it flows down unperceived by us, through the spiritual spheres, coming at last into what we call matter, where it manifests itself but yet remains unseen, until at last it flows into the sea — or death — to be drawn up again by the sun — or the karma of reincarnation. The plain is sacred because it is the “temple of the Holy Ghost.” Kurukshetra should then read: “The body which is acquired by karma.” So the king does not ask what this body itself has been doing, but what have the followers of material existence, that is the entire host of lower elements in man by which he is attached to physical life, and the followers of Pandu, that is the entire set of spiritual faculties, been doing on this sacred plain.

It follows then that the enumeration of generals and commanders gone into by the prime minister in reply to the king must be a catalogue of all the lower and higher faculties in man, containing also, in the names adopted, clues to powers of our being only at present dimly guessed at in the West or included in such vague terms as brain and mind. We find these generals given their appropriate places upon either side, and see also that they have assigned to them various distinctive weapons, which in many cases are flourished or exhibited in the preliminary movements, so that our attention may be drawn to them.

Salutation to Krishna! the Lord of Devotion, the God of Religion, the never failing help of those who trust in him.

We now have discovered that the poem is not disfigured by this account of a conflict that begins in the first chapter; to be then dropped while the two great actors retire to their chariot for a discussion. This description of forces, and the first effect on Arjuna of his survey, show us that we are now to learn from Krishna what is the duty

³ The aphorism reads: “By performing Sanyama — restraint (or meditation) — about form, its power of being apprehended (by the seer’s eye) being checked, and luminousness, the property of the organ of sight, having no connection with its object (that is the form), the result is the disappearance of the ascetic.” — W.B.



of man in his warfare with all the forces and tendencies of his nature. Instead of the conflict being a blemish to the poem, it is a necessary and valuable portion. We see that the fight is to be fought by every human being, whether he lives in India or not, for it is raging on the sacred plain of our body. Each one of us, then, is Arjuna.

In the Sanskrit, the first chapter is called “Arjuna-Vishad,” which in English means, “The despair and despondency of Arjuna.” Some have called it “The Survey of Army”; but while truly an army is surveyed, that is not the essential meaning intended. It is the result of the survey we are to consider; and that result upon Arjuna who is the person most interested — the one who is the chief questioner and beneficiary throughout the whole action of the poem — is despondency.

The cause of this despondency is to be inquired into.

Arjuna, in the flush of determination, and before any analysis of either the consequences to himself or to others who might become involved, entered the conflict, after having chosen Krishna as his charioteer. The forces are drawn up in line of battle, and he rides out to survey them. At once he sees ranged against him relatives of every class, in their turn preparing to destroy others, their relatives, friends and acquaintances as well as Arjuna’s, who are enlisted on his side. Turning to Krishna, he says that he cannot engage in such a war, that he perceives only evil omens, and that even if the opposers, being ignorant, may be willing to fight with such dreadful consequences in view, he cannot do so, but must give up the battle ere it is begun. Thereupon:

Arjuna, whose heart was troubled with grief, let fall his bow and arrows, and sat down on the bench of his chariot.

Every student of occultism, theosophy or true religion — all being the one thing — will go through Arjuna’s experiences. Attracted by the beauty or other seductive quality, for him, of this study, he enters upon the prosecution of it, and soon discovers that he arouses two sets of forces. One of them consists of all his friends and relations who do not view life as he does, who are wedded to the “established order,” and think him a fool for devoting any attention to anything else; while the general mass of his acquaintances and those whom he meets in the world instinctively array themselves against one who is thus starting upon a crusade that begins with his own follies and faults, but must end in a condemnation of theirs, if only by the force of example. The other opponents are far more difficult to meet, because they have their camp and base of action upon the astral and other hidden planes; they are all his lower tendencies and faculties, that up to this time have been in the sole service of material life. By the mere force of moral gravity, they fly to the other side, where they assist his living friends and relatives in their struggle against him. They have more efficiency in producing despondency than anything else. In the poem, it is referred to in the words addressed by Arjuna to Krishna:

I am not able to stand; for my understanding, as it were turneth round, and I behold inauspicious omens on all sides.

All of us are brought to this study by our own request made to our higher self, who is Krishna. Arjuna requested Krishna to be his charioteer, and to drive him forth between the two armies. It does not matter whether he now is consciously aware of



having made the request, nor whether it was made as a specific act, in this life or in many another precedent one; *it was made and it is to be answered at the right time*. Some of us have asked this many times before, in ancient births of ours in other bodies and other lands; others are making the request now; but it is more than likely in the case of those who are spurred on to intense effort and longing to know the truth, and to strive for unity with God, that they have put up the petition ages since. So now Krishna, the charioteer of this body with its horses — the mind — drives us forth so that we may stand with our higher self and all the tendencies connected with it on one side, and all the lower (but not all necessarily evil) principles on the other. The student may, perhaps, with ease face the crowd of friends and relatives, having probably gone through that experience in other lives and is now proof against it, but he is not proof against the first dark shadow of despair and ill result that falls upon him. Every elemental that he has vivified by evil thinking now casts upon him the thought,

“After all, it is no use; I cannot win; if I did, the gain would be nothing; I can see no great or lasting result to be attained, for all, all, is impermanent.”

This dreadful feeling is sure in each case to supervene, and we might as well be prepared for it. We cannot always live on the enthusiasm of heavenly joys. The rosy hue of dawn does not reach round the world; it chases darkness. Let us be prepared for it, not only at the first stage, but all along in our progress to the holy seat; for it comes at each pause; at that slight pause when we are about to begin another breath, to take another step, to pass into another condition.

And here it is wise, turning to the 18th, and last, chapter of the poem, to read the words of the immortal master of life:

From a confidence in thine own self-sufficiency thou mayest think that thou wilt not fight. Such is a fallacious determination, *for the principles of thy nature will compel thee*. Being confined to actions by the duties of thy natural calling, *thou wilt involuntarily do that from necessity*, which thou wantest through ignorance to avoid.

In this, Krishna uses the very argument advanced by Arjuna against the fight, as one in its favor. In the chapter we are considering, Arjuna repeats the old Brahmanical injunction against those who break up the “eternal institutions of caste and tribe,” for, as he says, the penalty annexed is a sojourn in hell, since, when the caste and tribe are destroyed, the ancestors, being deprived of the rites of funeral-cakes and libations of water,⁴ fall from heaven, and the whole tribe is thus lost. But Krishna

⁴ This reference by Arjuna is to the immemorial custom of the son, or descendants, offering to the departed, at stated times, funeral-cakes and water, called “Sradha and Pinda” — one of the so-called superstitions of the Hindus.

It has always been a grave question with me whether the boasted “freedom from superstitions” of Western 19th century civilization is an unmixed good, or any evidence of real progress. All such ancient forms have been swept away, and with them nearly every vestige of true religious feeling, leaving only an unquenchable thirst for money and power. In the present ignorance of the true reason at the bottom of these forms, the assertion is made that they mean nothing whatever. But in the Catholic church it is continued, and to some extent believed in, as is shown in their masses for the dead; surely these masses would not be offered if supposed to have no effect on the state of those for whom they are offered.

Although greatly corrupted and debased, it is in this church alone that these old practices are preserved. *Sradha* and *Pinda* are now neglected, because the inner constitution of man, and the constitution of the macro-



shows, as above, that each man is naturally, by his bodily tendencies, compelled to do the acts of some particular calling, and that body with its tendencies is merely the manifestation of what the inner man is, as the result of all his former thoughts up to that incarnation. So he is forced by nature's law — which is his own — to be born just where he must have the experience that is needed. And Arjuna, being a warrior, is compelled to fight, whether he will or no.

In another chapter, the institution of caste is more particularly referred to, and there we will have occasion to go into that subject with more detail.

As stated in the last paper, the substratum, or support, for the whole cosmos, is the presiding spirit, and all the various changes in life, whether of a material nature or solely in mental states, are cognizable because the presiding spirit within is not modifiable. Were it otherwise, then we would have no memory, for with each passing event, we, becoming merged in it, could not remember anything, that is, we would see no changes. There must therefore be something eternally persisting, which is the witness and perceiver of every passing change, itself unchangeable. All objects, and all states of what Western philosophers call mind, are modifications, for in order to be seen or known by us, there must be some change, either partial or total, from a precedent state. The perceiver of these changes is the inner man — Arjuna-Krishna.

This leads us to the conviction that there must be a universal presiding spirit, the producer as well as the spectator, of all this collection of animate and inanimate things. The philosophy taught by Krishna holds that at first this spirit — so called, however, by me only for the purpose of the discussion — remained in a state of quiet with no objects, because as yet there was no modification. But, resolving to create, or rather to emanate the universe, IT formed a picture of what should be, and this at once was a modification willingly brought about in the hitherto wholly unmodified spirit; thereupon the divine Idea was gradually expanded, coming forth into objectivity; while the essence of the presiding spirit remained unmodified, and became the perceiver of its own expanded idea. Its modifications are visible (and invisible) nature. Its essence then differentiates itself continually in various directions, becoming the immortal part of each man — the Krishna who talks to Arjuna. Coming like a spark from the central fire, it partakes of that nature, that is, the quality of being unmodifiable, and assumes to itself — as a cover, so to speak — the human body⁵ and thus, being in essence unmodified, it has the capacity to perceive all the changes going on around the body.

This *Self* must be recognized as being within, pondered over, and as much as possible understood, if we are to gain any true knowledge.

We have thus quickly, and perhaps in an inadequate way, come down to a consideration of Arjuna as composed of all these generals and heroes enumerated in this chapter, and who are, as we said, the various powers, passions and qualities included in the Western terms “brain and mind.”

cosm, are not understood in such a way as to make the ceremony of the slightest use. — W.B.

⁵ It is also, of course, inherent in all nature. — W.B.



Modern physical, mental and psychological sciences have as yet but scratched the surface of that which they are engaged in examining. Physical science confessedly is empiric, knowing but the very outposts of the laws of nature; and our psychology is in a worse state. The latter has less chance for arriving at the truth than physical science, because scientists are proceeding to a gradual demonstration of natural laws by careful examination of facts easily observable, but psychology is a something which demands the pursuit of another method than that of science, or those now observed.

It would avail nothing at present to specify the Aryan nomenclature for all the sheaths — as they call them — that envelop the soul, because we as yet have not acquired the necessary ideas. Of what use is it to say that certain impressions reside in the *Anandamaya* sheath. But there is such an one, whether we call it by that name or by any other. We can, however, believe that the soul, in order to at last reach the objective plane where its experience is gained, places upon itself, one after the other, various sheaths, each having its peculiar property and function. The mere physical brain is thus seen to be only the material organ first used by the real percipient in receiving or conveying ideas and perceptions; and so with all the other organs, they are only the special seats for centralizing the power of the real man in order to experience the modifications of nature at that particular spot.

Who is the sufferer from this despondency?

It is our false personality as distinguished from Krishna — the higher self — which is oppressed by the immediate resistance offered by all the lower part of our nature, and by those persons with whom we are most closely connected, as soon as we begin to draw them away from all old habits, and to present a new style of thinking for their consideration.

For Arjuna, sinking down upon the seat of that chariot which is his body, fell back upon his own nature and found therein the elements of search and courage, as well as those previous ones of gloom which arise first, being nearer the natural man. Reliance and pressure upon our own inner nature, in moments of darkness, are sure to be answered by the voice of Krishna, the inner guide.

The first consequences of the despondency

Are to make us feel that the battle we have invited ought not to be carried on, and we then are almost overwhelmed with the desire to give it up. Some do give it up, to begin it again, in a succeeding life, while others like Arjuna listen to the voice of Krishna, and bravely fight it out to the end.

“Thus, in the Upanishads, in the holy *Bhagavad-Gita*, in the science of the Supreme Spirit, in the Book of Devotion, in the colloquy between the Holy Krishna and Arjuna, stands the first chapter by name:

“THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA.”

Salutation to the god of battles, to the charioteer, to him who disposeth the forces aright, who leadeth us on to victory, with whom alone success is certain: that he may guide us to where the never-dying light shineth: Om!



THE FIRST ABYSS

Salutation to the prowess of Krishna! May it be with us in the fight, strengthening our hearts that they faint not in the gloomy night that follows in the path of the day.

The first chapter is ended. In one aspect, the *Bhagavad-Gita* is a personal book. It is for each man; and it is in that way we have so far considered it. Some have called it obscure, and others a book which deals solely with the great principles of nature; with only great questions of cosmogony; with difficult and bewildering questions relating to the first cause; and still others think it is contradictory and vague. But this first scene in the great colloquy is plain. It has the din of arms, the movement of battalions and the disposition of forces with their generals. No one need feel any hesitation now, for we are face to face with ourselves. The weak man, or he who does not care for truth no matter where it leads, had better shut the book now. Unless he can go on reading the poem with the fixed intention of applying it to himself, it will do him no good whatever. He may say, however, that he will read it for what it may seem to contain, but if he reads to the end of time and does not fairly regard this first lecture, his knowledge gained further on will be no knowledge. It is indeed the book of the great mystery; but that problem was never solved *for* anyone; it must be settled and solved *by* each one *for himself*.

No doubt it was for this reason that Vyasa, to whom the poem is attributed, placed this conflict, in which the principal characters are Arjuna and Krishna, at the outset. It would have been easier to have made them sit down for a philosophical discourse beforehand in which reasons pro and con regarding any battle would be discussed, and then, after all that was done, to show us Arjuna, encouraged and equipped, entering upon the war sure of victory because he had spent much time in dispelling his doubts. But instead of doing this he pictures the impetuous Arjuna precipitating the battle before he had considered whom it was he had to fight.

It does not appear in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that Krishna had induced Arjuna, as was the case, to make the war for the purpose of regaining his kingdom. While stirring him up to it Krishna had wisely refrained from telling that which Arjuna finds out on the first day, that he had to oppose all these friends, kinsmen and preceptors. It was a wise reticence. If we completely apprehended the enormous power of our passions and various tendencies, most of us would throw up the fight in advance; for nothing would persuade us that any power within could withstand such overwhelming odds. For us then the incitement to fight is found, not so much in any conversation that we hold now with Krishna, but in the impulses which are carried across, again and again, from incarnation to incarnation.

We take up the gage over and over, life after life, in experience after experience, never completely defeated if we always look to Krishna — our higher self. And in the tale of Arjuna we find this also. For in a succeeding book, called *Anugita*, is an account of the hero walking with Krishna through the Palace of Maya. The battle over, for the time, Arjuna tells his friend that he has really forgotten much that he had told him (in the *Bhagavad-Gita*) and asks for a succinct repetition. This is given to him by the great warrior.



The palace of Maya is this body of illusion, built up around us by desire. In our last birth we had all the advice given in this poem, and walking today through the palace, which sometimes seems so lovely, we now and then have reminiscences from the past. Sometimes we stoutly take up the fight; but surely, if we have listened to the guide aright, we will compel ourselves at last to carry it out until finished.

In coming to the conclusion of this first chapter, we reach the *first abyss*. It is not the great abyss, albeit it may seem to us, in our experience, to be the greatest. We are now vis-a-vis our own despair, and doubt its companion. Many a student of theosophy has in our own sight reached this point — all true students do. Like a little child who first ventures from the parent's side, we are affrighted at what seems new to us, and dropping our weapons attempt to get away; but, in the pursuit of theosophy it is not possible to go back.

Because the abyss is behind us.

There is in nature a law that operates in every department whether moral or physical, and which may now be called that of undulation and then that of inhibition; while at other times it reappears as vibration, and still again as attraction and repulsion, but all these changes are only apparent because at bottom it is the same. Among vegetables it causes the sap to flow up the tree in one way and will not permit it to return in the same direction. In our own blood circulation we find the blood propelled from the heart, and that nature has provided little valves which will not permit it to return to the heart by the way it came, but by the way provided. Medical and anatomical science are not quite sure what it is that causes the blood to pass these valves; whether it is pressure from behind communicated by the heart, or the pressure by atmosphere from without which gently squeezes, as it were, the blood upon its way. But the occultist does not find himself limited by these empirical deductions. He goes at once to the center and declares that the impulse *is* from the heart and that that organ receives its impulse from the great astral heart or the akasha, which has been said by all mystics to have a double motion, or alternate vibration — the systole and diastole of nature.

So in this sense the valve in the circulation represents the abyss behind us that we cannot re-pass. We are in the great general circulation and compelled, whether we like it or not, to obey its forward impulse.

This place of dejection of Arjuna is also the same thing as is mentioned in *Light on the Path* as the silence after the storm. In tropical countries this silence is very apparent. After the storm has burst and passed, there is a quietness when the earth and the trees seem to have momentarily ceased making their familiar, manifold noises. They are obeying the general law and beginning the process of assimilation.

And in the astral world it is just the same. When one enters there for the first time, a great silence falls, during which the regulated soul is imbibing its surroundings and becoming accustomed to them. It says nothing but waits quietly until it has become in vibration precisely the same as the plane in which it is; when that is accomplished then it can speak properly, make itself understood, and likewise understand. But the unregulated soul flies to that plane of the astral world in a disturbed state, hurries to speak before it is able to do so intelligibly and as a consequence is not understood,



while it increases its own confusion and makes it less likely that it will soon come to understand. People are attracted to the astral plane; they hear of its wonders and astonishments and like a child with a new toy in sight they hurry to grasp it. They refuse to learn its philosophy because that seems dry and difficult. So they plunge in, and as Murdhna Joti said in a former article in this magazine, they then “swim in it and cut capers like a boy in a pool of water.”

But for the earnest student and true disciple the matter is serious. He has vowed to have the truth at whatever cost, willing to go wherever she leads — even if it be to death.

So Krishna, having got Arjuna to where the battle has really begun, where retreat is not possible, begins to tell his loved disciple and friend what is the philosophy that underlies it all and without which success cannot be compassed.

We should not fail to observe at this point, that when Arjuna threw down his bow and arrows, the flying of missiles had already begun. We cannot say that when the philosophical discourse began between these two the opposing forces declared a truce until the mighty heroes should give the signal, because there is nowhere any verse that would authorize it, and we also can read in the accompanying books that all the paraphernalia of war had been brought onto the field and that the enemy would not desist, no matter what Arjuna might do. Now there is a meaning here, which is also a part of the great abyss the son of Pandu saw behind him, and which every one of us also sees.

We enter upon this great path of action in occultism mentally disposed towards final victory. This mental attitude instantly throws all the parts of our being into agitation, during which the tendencies which are by nature antipathetic to each other separate and range themselves upon opposite sides. This creates great distress, with oftentimes wandering of the mind, and adds additional terror to our dark despair. We may then sink down and declare that we will fly to a forest — or as they did once in Europe, to a monastery — so as to get away from what seems to be unfavorable ground for a conflict. But we have evoked a force in nature and set up a current and vibration which *will go on* no matter what we do. This is the meaning of the “flying of arrows” even when Arjuna sat down on the bench of his chariot.

At this point of our progress we should *examine our motive and desire*.

It has been said in some theosophical writings of the present day, that a “spiritualized will” ought to be cultivated. As terms are of the highest importance we ought to be careful how we use them, for in the inner life they represent either genuine, regulated forces, or useless and abortive things that lead to nothing but confusion. This term “spiritualized will” leads to error, because in fact it has no existence. The mistake has grown out of the constant dwelling on “will” and “forces” needed for the production of phenomena, as something the disciple should strive to obtain — whether so confessed or not — while the real motive power is lost sight of. It is very essential that we should clearly understand this, for if we make the blunder of attributing to *will* or to any other faculty an action which it does not have, or of placing it in a plane to which it does not belong, we at once remove ourselves far from the real knowledge, since all action on this plane is by mind alone.



The old Hermetic statement is: “*Behind will stands desire,*” and it is true.

Will is a pure, colorless force which is moved into action by *desire*. If desire does not give a direction, the will is motionless; and just as desire indicates, so the will proceeds to execute.

But as there are countless wills of sentient beings constantly plying to and fro in our sphere, and must be at all times in some manner acting upon one another, the question arises: What is that sort of knowledge which shows how to use the will so that the effect of counteracting wills may not be felt? That knowledge is lost among the generality of men and is only instinctive here and there in the world as a matter of karmic result, giving us examples of men whose will seems to lead them on to success, as Jay Gould and others.

Furthermore, men of the world are not desiring to see results which shall be in accord with the general will of nature, because they are wanting this and that for their own benefit. Their desire, then, no matter how strong, is limited or nullified: (1) by lack of knowledge of how to counteract other wills; (2) by being in opposition to the general will of nature without the other power of being able to act strongly in opposition to that too.

So it follows — as we see in practice in life — *that men obtain only a portion of that which they desire.*

The question next arises: Can a man go against the general will of nature and escape destruction, and also be able to desire wickedly with knowledge, and accomplish, through will, what he wishes?

Such a man can do all of these — except to escape destruction. That is sure to come, no matter at how remote a period.

He acquires extraordinary knowledge, enabling him to use powers for selfish purposes during immense periods of time, but at last the insidious effects of the opposition to the general true will makes itself felt and he is destroyed forever.

This fact is the origin of the destruction-of-worlds myths, and of those myths of combats such as between Krishna and Ravana, the demon god, and between Durga and the demons.

For in other ages, as is to again occur in ages to come, these wickedly desiring people, having great knowledge, increase to an enormous extent and threaten the stability of the world. Then the adherents of the good law can no longer quietly work on humanity, but come out in force, and a fight ensues in which the black magicians are always destroyed, because the good adepts possess not only equal knowledge with the bad ones, but have in addition the great assistance of the general will of nature which is not in control of the others, and so it is inevitable that the good should triumph always. This assistance is also the heritage of every true student, and may be invoked by the real disciple when he has arrived at and passed the first abyss.

“And when the Great King of Glory saw the Heavenly Treasure of the Wheel, he sprinkled it with water and said: ‘Roll onward, O my Lord, the Wheel! O my Lord, go forth and overcome!’”



Essay 2

Application to the Speculative Doctrines

“And now, under the Lotus in the Heart,
glows the lamp of the Soul.
Protected by the gods who there stand guard,
it sheds its soft rays in every
direction.”

A mighty spirit moves through the pages of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It has the seductive influence of beauty; yet, like strength, it fills one as with the sound of armies assembling or the roar of great waters. Appealing alike to the warrior and the philosopher, it shows to the one the righteousness of lawful action, and to the other the calmness which results to him who has reached inaction through action. Schlegel, after studying the poem, pays tribute to it in these words:

By the Brahmins, reverence of masters is considered the most sacred of duties. Thee therefore, first, most holy prophet, interpreter of the Deity, by whatever name thou wast called among mortals, the author of this poem, by whose oracles the mind is rapt with ineffable delight to doctrines lofty, eternal, and divine — thee first, I say, I hail, and shall always worship at thy feet.

The second chapter begins to teach philosophy, but in such a way that Arjuna is led on gradually step by step to the end of the dialogue; and yet the very first instructions from Krishna are so couched that the end and purpose of the scheme are seen at the beginning.

Although philosophy seems dry to most people, and especially to minds in the Western world who are surrounded by the rush of their new and quite undeveloped civilization, yet it must be taught and understood. It has become the fashion to some extent to scout careful study or practice and go in for the rapid methods inaugurated in America. In many places emotional goodness is declared to exceed in value the calmness that results from a broad philosophical foundation, and in others astral wonder seeking, or great strength of mind whether discriminative or not, is given the first rank. Strength without knowledge, and sympathetic tears without the ability to be calm — in fine, faith without works — will not save us. And this is one of the lessons of the second chapter.

The greatest of the ancients inculcated by both symbols and books the absolute necessity for the acquirement of philosophical knowledge, inasmuch as strength or special faculties are useless without it. Those Greeks and others who recorded some of the wisdom of the elder Egyptians well illustrated this. They said,

that in the symbols it was shown, as where Hermes is represented as an old and a young man, intending by this to signify that he who rightly inspects sacred matters ought to be both intelligent and strong, one of these without the other being imperfect. And for the same reason the symbol of the great Sphinx was established; the beast signifying strength, and the man wisdom. For strength when destitute of the ruling aid of wisdom, is overcome by stupid



astonishment confusing all things together; and for the purpose of action the intellect is useless when it is deprived of strength.

So, whether our strength is that of sympathy or of astral vision, we will be confounded if philosophical knowledge be absent.

But, so as not to be misunderstood, I must answer the question that will be asked, "Do you then condemn sympathy and love, and preach a cold philosophy only?" By no means. Sympathy and emotion are as much parts of the great whole as knowledge, but inquiring students wish to know all that lies in the path. The office of sympathy, charity, and all other forms of goodness, so far as the effect on us is concerned, is to entitle us to help. By this exercise we inevitably attract to us those souls who have the knowledge and are ready to help us to acquire it also. But while we ignore philosophy and do not try to attain to right discrimination, we must pass through many lives, many weary treadmills of life, until at last little by little we have been forced, without our will, into the possession of the proper seeds of mental action from which the crop of right discrimination may be gathered.

Arjuna asks Krishna:

As I am of a disposition which is affected by compassion and the fear of doing wrong, my mind is bewildered. Tell me truly what may be best for me to do! I am thy disciple, wherefore instruct me in my duty, who am under thy tuition; for my understanding is confounded by the dictates of my duty, and I see nothing that may assuage the grief which drieth up my faculties, although I were to obtain a kingdom without a rival upon earth or dominion over the hosts of heaven.

Krishna, now the guru — or spiritual teacher — of Arjuna, makes a reply which is not excelled anywhere in the poem; pointing out the permanence and eternal nature of the soul, the progress it has to make through reincarnation to perfection, the error of imagining that we really do anything ourselves, and showing how all duties must be performed by him who desires to reach salvation. The words used by the Blessed Lord in speaking of the soul cannot be added to by me. He says:

The wise grieve not for dead or living. But never at any period did I, or thou, or these kings of men, not exist, nor shall any of us at any time henceforward cease to exist. As the soul in the body undergoes the changes of childhood, prime, and age, so it obtains a new body hereafter; a sensible man is not troubled about that. But the contact of the elements, O son of Kunti, which bring cold and heat, pleasure and pain, which come and go and are temporary, these do thou endure, O Bharata!⁶ For that man whom, being the same in pain and pleasure and ever constant, these elements do not afflict, is fitted for immortality. There is no existence for what does not exist, nor is there any non-existence for what exists. . . . Know this, that that by which all this universe is created is

⁶ In this verse, the 14th, Krishna calls Arjuna by two names: first — as son of Kunti (his mother), and second — as Bharata (descendant of the mighty Bharata). He is reminded of his earthly origin in the beginning when reference is made to the elements that produce bodily sensations; and at the end, when adjured to endure these changes, his attention is directed to a great and powerful, spiritual, paternal ancestor. All of this is significant. — W.B.



indestructible. No one can cause the destruction of this inexhaustible thing. . . . He who believes that this spirit can kill, and he who thinks it can be killed, both of these are wrong in judgment. It is not born, nor dies at any time; it has no origin, nor will it ever have an end. Unborn, changeless, eternal both as to future and past time, it is not slain when the body is killed. How can that man, O son of Pritha, who knows that it is indestructible, constant, unborn, and inexhaustible, really cause the death of anybody or kill anybody himself? As a man abandons worn-out clothes and takes other new ones, so does the soul quit worn-out bodies and enter other new ones. Weapons cannot cleave it. Fire cannot burn it, nor can water wet it, nor wind dry it. . . . It is constant, capable of going everywhere, firm, immovable, and eternal. It is said to be invisible, incomprehensible, immutable. Therefore, knowing it to be such, thou art not right to grieve for it.

This is the same doctrine as is found in the *Isavasya-Upanishad: The Identity of all Spiritual Beings, and Resignation*. And by “spiritual beings” is meant all life above the inorganic, for man is not admitted to be material. There is only one life, one consciousness. It masquerades under all the different forms of sentient beings, and those varying forms with their intelligences mirror a portion of the *One Life*, thus producing in each a false idea of egoism. A continuance of belief in that false ego produces a continuance of ignorance, thus delaying salvation. The beginning of the effort to dissipate this false belief is the beginning of the Path; the total dissipation of it is the perfection of yoga, or union with God. The entry upon that Path *cannot be made until resignation is consummated*; for, as the *Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* say:

All this, whatsoever moves on earth, is to be surrendered to the Lord — the Self. When thou hast surrendered all this; then thou mayest enjoy.

If this be true, then how necessary to consider philosophy so as to be able to cut off the false belief. And how useless to pursue occultism merely for your own benefit. You may know all about currents and polarities, about any and every phenomenon possible in the astral world, but with the death of your body it is lost, leaving to you only the amount of real spiritual advance you happen to have made. But once resign and all is possible. This will not ruin your life nor destroy any proper ideals; poor and petty ideals had better be at once lost. It may seem that all ideals are gone, but that will be only the first effect of taking this step.

We must be ready to say at any moment under whatever circumstances, whether expected or unexpected: “It is just what I in fact desired.” For only those ideals can be dissipated which rest upon a lower basis than the highest aim, or which are not in accord with nature’s (God’s) law. And as our aim ought to be to reach the supreme condition and to help all other sentient beings to do so also, we must cultivate complete resignation to the Law, the expression and operation of which is seen in the circumstances of life and the ebb and flow of our inner being. All that can be gotten out of wealth, or beauty, or art, or pleasure, are merely pools of water found along our path as it wanders through the desert of life. If we are not seeking them their appearance gives us intense pleasure, and we are thus able to use them for our good and that of others just so long as the Law leaves them to us; but when that superior



power removes them, we must say: "It is just what I in fact desired." Any other course is blindness. All the passing shows of life, whether fraught with disaster or full of fame and glory, are teachers; he who neglects them, neglects opportunities which seldom the gods repeat. And the only way to learn from them is through the heart's resignation; for when we become in heart completely poor, we at once are the treasurers and disbursers of enormous riches.

Krishna then insists on the scrupulous performance of natural duty.⁷

And considering thine own duty as a Kshatriya, thou art not right to waver. For there is nothing better for a Kshatriya than lawful war.

In order to see more clearly the occasion for his insistence upon performance of duty, we must remember that at the opening of the battle Arjuna "threw down his bow and arrows." This, in India, meant that he then resolved to desert the circumstances in which karma had placed him and *to become an ascetic*, or, as has been frequently proposed by Western students, he wished to get away from a state of society which offered apparent obstruction to spiritual culture. But Krishna refers him to his birth in the Kshatriya — or warrior — caste, and to the natural duty of a Kshatriya, which is war. The natural caste of Arjuna might have been represented as that of merchant, but wisely it was not, for this is the book of action, and only a warrior fitly typifies action;⁸ so his natural duty will stand for whatever be that of any man. We are not to shirk our karma; by abhorring it we only make new karma. Our only true course is to "let the motive for action be in the action itself, never in its reward; not to be incited to action by the hope of the result, nor yet indulge a propensity to inertness." This advice and the direction to see the one Spirit in all things and all things in *It* (ch. xiii) express the gist of the *Bhagavad-Gita's* teaching as to the proper attitude to be assumed by those striving after salvation.

In verse 40 Krishna alludes to this system as being one of initiation:

In this no initiation is lost, nor are there any evil consequences, and even a little of this practice saves from great danger; there is no destruction of nor detriment to one's efforts.

Although not proclaimed in the newspapers nor advertised here and there through Secretaries, Delegates, and "Doors," this is the mother and the head of all systems of initiation. It is the progenitor of the mystic Rosicrucians, who have adopted the *lotus*

⁷ Some students, as well as critics, have said that theosophy teaches a running away from family and from the world, and that neither knowledge nor salvation can be gained without a ridiculous asceticism which would upset the natural order. This is wrong. And when it is believed to be a fact — now asserted by me in confidence of support from all real theosophists — that the Blessed Masters who ordered the founding of our Society constantly read and inculcate the *Bhagavad-Gita's* philosophy, we perceive that such assertions against the Society's aims are incorrect. — W.B.

⁸ My opinion is that the Kshatriya caste is the greatest. The Brahmins, it is true, have always had more veneration paid them as being spiritual teachers and thus representing the *head* of Brahma; but in some of the Aryan sacrifices there is an occasion when the Kshatriya ranks the Brahmin. The latter are more the conservators of true doctrine; but when the time comes for the "gods to descend in order to establish a new harmony on earth," they always begin with a warrior. Osiris who educated and solidified the Egyptians was a warrior, and the mysterious Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham, was prophet, priest, and king, that is — warrior. Then, too, the warrior caste could learn and speak the Vedas as well as engage in war, whereas the Brahmin's only duty was that of a teacher and not fighter. The Kshatriya therefore stands in the position of mediator between the action of the body of Brahma and the calm inaction of Brahma's head. — W.B.



and changed it into a *rose*,⁹ and all the other hundreds of initiating occult societies are merely faint and incomplete copies of this real one; but, unlike those, *it* has never dissolved. It is secret, because, founded in nature and having only real Hierophants at the head, its privacy cannot be invaded without the real key. And that key, in each degree, is the *aspirant himself*. Until that aspirant has become in fact the sign and the key, he cannot enter the degree above him. As a whole then, and in each degree, it is self-protective.

Thus including all other systems, it is the most difficult of all; but as at some time, in this life or in a succeeding age, we must perforce enter this *Lodge*, the attempt at entry might as well be made at once. Of this we will speak in our next.

In my last I said that a system of initiation is spoken of which is the mother of all others, and that all the rest are mere exoteric copies or perversions of the real. In order that the idea intended to be expressed may be made clear, it is to be stated that the system is not confined to India, but at the same time it is true that the Western world has up to this time been so deeply engaged in the pursuit of mere money and external enjoyment that no body of Hierophants has taken up its actual residence in Europe or America as yet. There is very little force in the objection that, if those Adepts have such powers as have been ascribed to them, they could very easily have a residence here and overcome all the influences of the place. If it were in the least necessary that they should be here, no doubt can there be that they would come. But as all of the work required to be done, all that could possibly be accomplished, is to be achieved by the messengers sent out into each country who, so to say, prepare the ground, with the assistance of the Adepts, for others who follow them, there would be a waste of energy if the Hierophants appeared in person. Nor are those messengers dismayed by the critical attitude of those persons who, wanting a sign, continually deny that the help for the workers is afforded because the givers of it cannot be seen; and it can also be admitted that even the workers themselves are not continually in receipt of instruction or telegrams showing how and where to work. They are men and women who possess a faith that carries them through a long course of effort without a glimpse of those who have sent them. Yet at the same time some of them now and then see very plain evidence of the fact that they are constantly assisted.

That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and succession,
We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,
Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers: nor
anything that is asserted,

⁹ The probability is that the Rosicrucian “rose” was altered from the *lotus* because the latter flower was not understood in Europe, whereas the rose was; and the rose is the nearest to the lotus, taken all in all. In Japan the *lotus in the heart* is adhered to; they say that by directing attention to the heart, it is found to burst open into a lotus of eight petals, in each of which resides one power, while in the center sits the lord of all. — W.B.



We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,
They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade,
Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.

[Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*]

So all this preparation is similar to that of the primeval forest by the early settlers in America; it is as yet hardly a tilling of the soil, but rather a clearing off of trees and weeds. This is not because they are unable to do more, but because the weeds and trees are there requiring to be removed before the Elder Ones can usefully push on in person the further development.

When the materials are all prepared and ready the architects shall appear.

All human beings are working through this system of initiation, and for that reason it includes all the exoteric societies. Very often the Masters in this have appeared in those when they saw an opportunity for sowing the seed, which, although for a time to be enclosed in the shell of formalism, was to be preserved for future use; just as the Egyptian mummy held in its hand for centuries the germ that blossomed and bore fruit in our day. And since man in all his struggles must be helped, they have assisted in political changes where a hope was held out for the rise of a beneficent era.¹⁰ The great mass of men are not with their own knowledge engaged in the work of this powerful and impregnable *Lodge*, but they will knowingly engage therein at some point in the course of their long evolution. And yet at every hour of each day these Masters are willing and anxious to meet those who are clear-eyed enough to see their true destiny, and noble-hearted so as to work for “the great orphan, humanity.”

Then, further, none of us, and especially those who have heard of the Path or of Occultism or of the Masters, can say with confidence that he is not already one who has passed through some initiations with knowledge of them. We may be already initiated into some higher degree than our present attainments would suggest, and are undergoing a new trial unknown to ourselves. It is better to consider that we are, being sure to eliminate all pride of that unknown advance we have made. Having so concluded, we know that this long life is in itself another initiation, wherein we succeed or fail just as we learn the lesson of life. Some, I know, will not hasten to adopt this view, for they desire the Law to work in the manner appointed by them; they wish to have a sign or a password or a parchment or some wonderful test propounded, to which they shall be ready to submit at a certain time and place. But this is not the manner of it, and all true students know that. Surely if the little circumstances of life are not understood, if they have yet power to light the torch of anger or blow up the smouldering fire of lust, no set time or tournament will be offered for you by the

¹⁰ It has been asserted by some Theosophical writer that these Adepts were concerned in the formation of the American Republic, and either were here in person or sent Messengers. — W.B.



Masters of this *Lodge*. Those set times and larger tests *are* given and have in their place to be overcome, but they belong to the day when you have raised the arch of attainment all perfect but the keystone — that is found or lost in the appointed trial.

Reaching to the actual door of this Lodge is the Path that I spoke of in my last, and leading to that Path are many roads. We might as well attempt to enter the Path in this incarnation as to wait for succeeding lives.

There is great encouragement in Krishna's words to Arjuna in the second chapter:

In this system there is no destruction of or detriment to one's efforts; even a very small portion of this duty delivereth a man from great fear.

This refers to the law of karma. Every point of progress gained is never in reality lost. Even did we die at a time when our lives were not stainless, the real level of our development would not be lowered, for upon reassuming a mortal body in some after life on this earth we take up the thread just where we dropped it. In a later chapter (vi) Krishna says that we

come in contact with the knowledge which belonged to us in our former body, and from that time we struggle more diligently toward perfection.

Patanjali also says the same thing, and all the Aryan sacred books concur in the opinion.¹¹ The thoughts and aspirations of our life form a mass of force that operates instantly upon our acquirement of a body that furnishes the corresponding instrument, or upon our so altering our mental state as to give it opportunity for action. The objection that this would be a suspension of energy is not tenable, since such a thing is well known in the physical world, even if called by some other name. We are not obliged to rest on that objection, as it by no means follows that the energy is suspended; it has its operation in other ways.

The encouragement given by Krishna leads us to consider what method is offered for entering upon the Path. We find it to be a right knowledge of the spirit. This right knowledge is found in the second chapter.

As by all illuminated sages, the ultimate truth is first declared by the Blessed Lord as we have seen, and in the very chapter wherein right action is insisted upon as the way to liberation. He then, proceeding to explain himself further, points out errors common to humanity, and certain false views that prevailed in India then, as they do now.

VERSE 41: In this system there is only one single object of a steady, constant nature, O son of Kuru. Those who do not persevere, and whose principles are indefinite, have objects with many ramifications and without end.

In the men thus described, desires for worldly or intellectual acquisitions prevail and, desires being infinite as also capable of producing endless modifications of desire, there is no concentration possible. This also has an application to the methods of our present scientific schools, which indulge in an eternal seeking for so-called facts before general principles are admitted. One single branch of investigation with

¹¹ See Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms*, Book 2; and *Vishnu-Smriti*, chap. xcvi, v. 11.



them has endless ramifications that no human being could compass in a lifetime. Then:

Not disposed to meditation and perseverance is the intention of those who are devoted to enjoyments and dominion, and whose minds are seduced by that flowery sentence which is proclaimed by the unwise, who delight in texts from the Vedas, O son of Pritha, and say, "There is nothing else than that," being covetous-minded and considering heaven as the very highest good; offering rebirth as the reward of actions, and enjoining many special ceremonies for the sake of obtaining pleasures and dominion, and preferring the transient enjoyment of heaven to eternal absorption.

This is better understood when some of the ideas held in India regarding sacrifices and ceremonies are known. In the Occident sacrifices have long gone out of use, as there appeared to be no reason for them. And yet it must seem strange to the reflective mind that Christian nations should claim redemption through the Jews whose prophet enjoined sacrifices, and when Jesus himself said that not one jot or tittle of the law should pass away. In the place of the sacrifices of the East, the West has adopted a mere theory to be embraced, together with an uncertain moral code to be followed, with a result which is the same as that claimed by the Hindus — save only in one respect. That difference lies in the doctrine of reincarnation. The Christian looks for an eternal reward in heaven and knows nothing of reincarnation on earth, while the Hindu relies upon pleasure to be had in heaven — called *Svarga* — and a continuation of it upon earth by reason of a fortunate rebirth. They have special ceremonies, certain sorts of sacrifices, penances, prayers, and actions, the result of which is a rebirth on earth in a royal family, or with great riches, or in any other sort of pleasant circumstances; and also a sure admittance to heaven. Some ceremonies procure entrance into a delightful state after death which will last for incalculable periods of time.

Now no one of these sorts of procedure leads us to the ultimate, but all are causes of karma and of delusion: therefore Krishna did not approve them to Arjuna. And his warning is useful to theosophists who are students or wish to become such. With them the false view warned against by Krishna has altered itself into a craving for phenomena, or to perform some action that shall bring them the favor of Mahatmas, or a morbid fear of making karma, or else an equally accentuated desire to acquire good karma. They should abandon those attitudes and carefully study the following verses, trying to incorporate their true meaning into their very being.

The subject of the three Vedas is the assemblage of the three qualities. O Arjuna! be thou free from these three qualities, from the ordinary influence of the natural opposites, reposing on eternal truth, free from worldly anxieties, self-possessed. . . . Let, then, the motive for action be in the action itself, never in its event. Be not one whose motive for action is the hope of reward. Let not thy life be spent in inaction. Depend upon concentration, perform thy duty, abandon all thought of the consequence, and make the event equal to thee, whether it terminate in good or evil; for such an equanimity is called Yoga (union with God).



By far inferior to union with wisdom is action. Seek an asylum, then, in wisdom alone; for the miserable and unhappy are so on account of the event of things. Men who are endued with true wisdom dismiss, by means of this concentration, alike successful and unsuccessful results. Study then to obtain this concentration of thy understanding, for such concentration is a precious art.

Wise men, who have abandoned all thought of the fruit which is produced from their actions, are freed from the chains of birth in this world, and go to the regions of eternal happiness.

When thy reason shall get the better of the gloomy weakness of thy heart, then shalt thou have obtained all knowledge which has been or is to be taught. When thy understanding, by study brought to maturity, shall be fixed immovably in contemplation, then shall it obtain true wisdom.

The first portion of this paper was designedly enlarged in order to precede the above. The last quoted verses contain the essence of what is called Karma-Yoga, or, as it might be translated, *concentration and contemplation while engaged in action*. It is difficult, just as it is difficult to enter upon the Path, and if we desire to tread that aright we must know what we should do as true travelers. Krishna seems to me to here settle the dispute as to whether faith or works will save us. Mere faith will not do it, because in every act of faith there is some action. And it would appear to be impossible to acquire true faith without at once turning it into that sort of action which our faith shows us must be done, as it were, in evidence; yet action, pure and simple, will not be a cause of liberation, inasmuch as action, or karma, will produce new karma. We must therefore seek for concentration in order that we may be able to do those actions which the All-Wise presents to us to be done, remaining the while unaffected. We have nothing to do with the results; they will come of themselves, and are beyond us; they are already done so far as we are concerned. But if we perform either an act of faith or an action of the body, hoping for any result — no matter what — we become to that extent attached to the consequences, and thus bound by them. It matters not whether those consequences be good or bad. Many will think that it is well to have attachment to good consequences, since that has been the received opinion. But this is unwise, because the only reason for it is found in the idea that thereby one is somewhat better than some other persons who are enamored of evil results and desire to see them come to pass. This idea produces separateness, and is opposed to that *identity* without the realization of which there can be no true knowledge. We should therefore be imitators of the Deity, who, while acting as he does in the manifestation of universes, is at the same time free from all consequences. To the extent that we do so we become the Deity himself, for, as we follow the dictates of the Lord who dwells in us, we resign every act upon the altar, leaving the consequences to him.

The attitude to be assumed, then, is that of doing every act, small and great, trifling or important, because it is before us to do, and as a mere carrying out by us as instruments of the will of that Deity who is ourself. Nor should we stop to inquire whether the act is of any use to the Lord within,¹² as some ask. For, they say, of

¹² *Isvara*, the particular manifestation of Brahman in each human being. — W.B.



what possible benefit to him can be the small hourly acts which, as soon as done, are forgotten? It is not for us to inquire. The act that pleases that Lord is the act which is done as presented with no attachment to its result, while the act that is unpleasing to him is the one which we do, desiring some result therefrom.

This practice is the highest; that which some day we must and will learn to perform. Other sorts are inculcated in other writings, but they are only steps to lead us at last to this. Therefore I said, Let us enter the Path as soon as we can.

We are still on the second chapter. If my object were merely to skim through the poem, showing where it agreed with, differed from, or reconciled the various systems of philosophy that were followed in India, we could have long ago reached the end of the book. But we are looking at it in one of its aspects — the one most important for all earnest students — the personal interior view that aids us to reach Moksha.¹³ From this standpoint we can easily defer a consideration of the philosophical discussion to a later period.

Let us take up some of the instruction given in the portion of the second chapter just finished. The remainder of the lecture is devoted to a reply from Krishna to Arjuna's question as to what is the description, appearance, carriage, and conversation of the man who has attained to steady meditation.

Krishna says that "the subject of the three Vedas is the assemblage of the three qualities." These three qualities are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, and are separately treated in a succeeding chapter. Now *sattva-guna*¹⁴ is a pure, high quality, the opposite of *tamas-guna* which is darkness and indifference. Yet the remarkable advice is here given, "be thou free from these three qualities." It is a very great wonder that this has not been pounced upon before as showing that Krishna directs his follower to renounce the quality of goodness, and thus directly encourages wickedness, but as that is immediately followed by the direction to "repose upon eternal truth," possible critics have been perhaps deterred by the seeming paradox. It is evident at once that a higher sort of *sattva* is referred to in the words "eternal truth." *Sattva* is the Sanskrit for truth, and is not qualified when its place among the three qualities is given, so that, when the disciple frees himself from this ordinary *sattva*, he is to take refuge in its eternal counterpart. Further, the instruction is not to *renounce* truth or either of the other two qualities, but to remain freed from the influence or binding force that any sort of quality has upon the human ego.

It is difficult for a great being such as Krishna to convey to the inquiring mind these high themes, and so, perforce, language must be used that forever has two meanings — it continually retreats before us, going from one to the other. *Sattva* — truth — had to be taken to express the highest quality of any being who possesses them, and yet, when we begin to speak of the highest conceivable state in which attributes are absent, we still use the same word, only adding to it *eternal*.

¹³ Salvation.

¹⁴ Quality of Truth or purity.



The essence of the instruction given by Krishna is *to become devoted*, as he says, “Therefore give thyself up to devotion.” He prepared the way for that by showing, as adverted to in the last article, how erroneous it was to follow even the special ceremonies and texts laid down for the people in the Vedas. Those ceremonies procured either rewards in heaven, or upon the earth during subsequent lives as well as in those in which the ceremonies were performed. We can more easily understand what Krishna meant if we will suppose him to be referring to a doctrine that in those days was precisely similar in its scheme of rewards to the old-fashioned Christian belief that, by following the Scriptures, one secured happiness and prosperity on earth and great bliss forever in heaven with the saints. This is declared by him to be a deluding doctrine. He does not say that the rewards as laid down will not follow the practice, but implies that they will. But as the wheel of rebirth will eternally revolve, drawing us inevitably back to a mortal body, we are continually deluded and never succeed in attaining to God — that being the goal for us all.

Heaven, whether it be that of the Christian or of the Hindu, is what Buddha called a thing or state that has a beginning and will have an end. It may, surely, last aeons of time, but it will come to an end, and then the weary task of treading the world — whether this or some other one — has to be recommenced. Hence Krishna said that men were deluded by those flowery sentences proclaiming a means of reaching heaven, than which there was nothing better.

Doubtless there are many students who, believing in the possibility of reaching heaven, say that they are willing to take the risk of what may happen after the enjoyment for such a long period is ended. But those risks would not be taken were they well understood. They are numerous and great. Many of them cannot be stated, because, in order to be understood at all, more must be known of the power of mind and the real meaning of meditation. But the ordinary risks are found in what we may roughly, for the present, call delayed karma and unspent affinities.

The power of these two has its root in the vast complexity of man’s nature. Such is its complexity that a man cannot, as a complete being, ever enjoy heaven or any state short of union with the divine. Learned theosophists talk of a man’s going to devachan, and of his being here on earth suffering or enjoying karma, when as a fact only a small part of him is either here or there. When he has lived out his life and gone to devachan, the vast root of his being stands waiting in the One Life, waiting patiently for him to return and exhaust some more karma. That is, in any one life the ordinary man only takes up and exhausts what karma his bodily apparatus permits. Part of the power of karma is in the “mysterious power of meditation,” which exhibits itself according to the particular corporeal body one has assumed. So the man may in this life perform “special ceremonies” and conform to texts and doctrine, attaining thereby the reward of heaven, and still have left over a quantity of that “mysterious power of meditation” unexpended; and what its complexion is he does not know. Its risk therefore is that it may be very bad, and, when he does return from heaven, his next body may furnish the needed apparatus to bring up to the front this mass of unexpended karma, and his next compensation might be a sojourn in hell.

In reassuming a body, the “mysterious power” spoken of reaches out to numberless affinities engendered in other lives, and takes hold of all that come in its reach. Other



beings once known to the man arrive into incarnation at the same time, and bring into action affinities, attractions, and powers that can only act through them and him. Their influence cannot be calculated. It may be good or bad, and, just as he is swayed by them or as his sway the other being, so will work out the karma of each. Krishna therefore advises Arjuna to be free from the influence of the quality, so that he may obtain a *complete* release. And that freedom can only be attained, as he says, by means of devotion.

These effects, divergencies and swaying, are well known to occultists, and, although the idea is very new in the West, it is not unknown in India. This law is both an angel of mercy and a messenger of justice, for, while we have just stated its operation as among the risks, it is also a means whereby nature saves men often from damnation.

Suppose in some life long past I had a dear friend, or wife, or relative, with whom my intimacy was interior and deep. Death separates us, and in subsequent lives he devotes himself to truth, to wisdom, to the highest in him, while I go on careless of all but pleasure in the present. After many lives we meet again as either friends or acquaintances. At once the old intimacy asserts itself, and my former friend — although maybe neither of us knows it — has a strange power to touch my inward life, and wakes me up to search for truth and my own soul. It is the unexpended affinity, and by its aid nature works my salvation.

Then we should both seek devotion. This devotion is what is inculcated by the Adepts to their chelas. It involves a mental abnegation not agreeable to our modern mind, but that must be acquired or real progress is impossible. We must by means of this mental devotion to the divine, which means abnegation of all the rest, dismiss all results of our actions. It is not ours to say what shall be the result of an action; the Law will bring about a result much better, perhaps, than we had imagined. If the results, if the passing daily circumstances, are not those we expected, then by means of devotion we accept them as just what the Law intended. But if we fix our desire on accomplishing even a seeming good result, we are bound by that desire, no matter whether our wish is accomplished or not.

This exhortation to devotion is at once the most simple and the most difficult. Some deride it because they want powers and “development”; others because they think it too simple; but the wise student, even when he cannot at first grasp its meaning, will revolve it in his mind, strive after it, and make it a thing to be attained by him.

We have seen that devotion must be attained by that student who desires to reach enlightenment. This is what is meant by Krishna’s reply to Arjuna, at the conclusion of the second chapter.

When he has put away all desires which enter the heart, and is satisfied by the Self in himself, he is then said to be confirmed in spiritual knowledge.

It is not possible to be wholly given up to the dictates of the Spirit while any desires that come into the heart are permitted to engross the attention.

Of course the person described here is one who has gone much higher in development than most of us have been able to. But we ought to set up a high ideal at which



to aim, for a low one gives a lower result at the expense of the same effort. We should not put before us an aim less than the highest merely because it seems that our success will not be as great as we think it ought to be. It is not so much the clearly perceived outward result that counts, as the motive, effort, and aim, for judgment is not passed upon us among the things of sense where human time exists, but in that larger sphere of being where time ceases, and where we are confronted by what *we are* and not by what we have done. That which we have done touches us only in mortal life among the delusions of material existence; but the motives with which we live our lives go to make up our greater being, our larger life, our truer self. Do actions we must, for no mortal can live without performing actions; those bring us back to earth for many weary incarnations, perhaps to final failure, unless the lesson is learned that they must be done with the right motive and the true aim. That stage reached, they affect us no more, for, like Krishna, we become the perfect performers of all action. And in so far as we purify and elevate the motive and the aim, we become spiritually enlightened, reaching in time the power to see what should be done and what refrained from.

Many would-be occultists leave out of sight this chapter's teaching. Devotion has no charms for them; they leave it to those who would be good men, no matter what their creed or philosophy, and attention is paid to reading books, either new or old, upon magic, upon ceremonial, or any other of the manifold delusions. Nor is this erroneous practice newly risen. It was common among the alchemists, and the result in some cases is that students now waste valuable years in mastering ceremonial, Rosicrucianism, talismanic lore, and what not, as laid down in the books, while all of it is either useless mental lumber or positively dangerous.

I do not mean it to be understood that there never was real Rosicrucianism, or that ceremonial magic yields no results, or that there is no science of talismans. There are realities of which these, as now known, are shadows. But we might as well expect to find the soul by attentively studying the body, as to know the truths behind the influence of talismans or ceremonial magic by studying the books now extant upon those subjects. The mediaeval so-called magicians have left a mass of writings that are now a delusion and a snare for students, theosophical and non-theosophical. In these are minute directions for various sorts of practices, but they are all the attempts of men to enable mortals, by methods altogether outward, to control the astral or natural world. Success did not come to these practitioners, nor will much else save failure be the portion of those of our own day who follow their directions. In most cases of the old European so-called sorcerers and writers on magic, their published lucubrations are only salves to disappointed vanity; in the rest, mere reduplications of formulae left by their predecessors. Paracelsus positively declares that true magic is within the man — a part of his inner nature, potential at first, active after development, and that ceremonies or formulae are the veriest rubbish unless the person using them is himself a magician.

In the practice of ceremonial magic, where certain geometrical and other figures are to be used with the aid of prayers and invocations, there lies positive danger. This danger is increased if the student follows the practice for the sake of gain or glory or power or mere wonder seeking — all of these being selfish. In this ceremonial the op-



erator, or self-styled magus, surrounds himself with a circle or an arrangement of triangles, the use and purpose of which are to protect him from whatever sprites he may arouse. Mark that well! It is for *protection*. Protection of this sort would not be needed or thought of unless a fear lurked inside that the shades or demons had power to hurt. So at the outset, fear, the product of ignorance, is fully present. The next important thing to be noted is that a sword has to enter into the conjuration. This is advised because the demons are said to fear sharp steel. Now Jesus said that he who lived by the sword should perish by the sword. By this he meant just what we are talking about. Ceremonial magic involves at almost every step the use of a sword. After the invocator or magus has used the ceremonial, say with success, for some time, he at last creates within his aura, or what Swedenborg called his sphere, a duplicate of what he had previously used and pictured on the floor or walls. In this he is no longer master, for, it being placed in that part of his nature of which he is ignorant, the sword of metal becomes an astral sword with the handle held by the demons or influences he unwisely raised. They then attack him where no defense can be interposed — on the astral and mental planes, and, just as surely as the wise man's words were uttered, he at last perishes by the weapon he himself used. This danger, thus roughly outlined, is no mere figment of the brain. It is positive, actual, immanent in the practice. No book study will give a man the power to make the constitutional changes, as well as psychical alterations, needed before he is commander of immaterial forces. But these latter may be temporarily evoked and made acquainted with us by pursuing certain methods. That is the beginning. Their turn is sure to come, and, obeying a law of their nature, they take what has sometimes been called their "revenge." For all such practices call only upon the lower, unspiritual part of our nature, and that clothes such beings with corresponding attributes. Their "revenge" consists in bringing on inflammations in the moral character which will eventuate in a development of evil passions, atrophy of concentration, destruction of memory, ending at last in a miserable conclusion to life, and almost total failure to use the opportunities for progress presented by that incarnation. Therefore I said, it is all either useless mental lumber or positively dangerous.

In history and in our own experience there is abundant evidence that the *Bhagavad-Gita* is right in saying "spiritual knowledge includes every action without exception," and that it is to be attained by means of devotion. Ignorant men who had no access to books have by their inward sense perceived the real truth of things, not only those round about them, but relating to the larger concerns of nature. Jacob Boehme was wholly unlettered, but he knew the truth. His writings show an acquaintance, not to be then gained from books, with the true doctrines found in the Hindu scriptures and secret books. In Germany today are men known to me, who, more unlearned yet than Jacob Boehme was, know many things still mysteries for our learned theosophists who can boast of college education. The reason is that these men have attained to devotion, and thereby cleared away from before the eye of the soul the clouds of sense whose shadows obscure our view of truth. I do not decry or despise learning; it is a great possession; but if the learned man were also a devoted one in the sense of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, how much wider would be the sweep of his intellect no one could calculate.



Learning of the human sort is not despised among the highest occultists, even among the adepts. They use it and acquire it. They accumulate *the record* of the experiences of seers and devoted men of small learning for long periods of time, until a great master of both learning and devotion arises who, by reason of his profound knowledge joined to devotion, can make the wonderful deductions in the possession of the Lodge respecting matters so far beyond us that they can with difficulty be imagined. But this again proves that devotion is the first and best, for these extraordinary Masters would not appear unless devotion had been the aim of their existence.

Without devotion a vast confusion arises within us that has been likened by some to a whirling motion, by others to the inrushing, overpowering flow of turbid waters. Boehme calls it in some aspects the *turba*. It is the delusion produced by the senses. And so Krishna, in closing the second lecture, says:

Let a man, restraining all these, remain in devotion when at rest, and intent on me alone; for he whose senses are under his control possesses spiritual knowledge. Attachment to objects of sense arises in a man who meditates upon them; from attachment arises desire; from desire passion springs up; from passion comes bewilderment; from bewilderment, confusion of the memory; from confusion of the memory, destruction of the intellect; from destruction of the intellect he perishes.

But he who approaches the objects of sense with senses free from love and hate and beneath his own control, having his soul well-disposed, attains to tranquillity of thought. In this tranquillity there springs up in him a separation from all troubles. For the mind of him whose thoughts are tranquil soon becomes perfect in concentration.

A very beautiful portion of the *Sanatsujatiya* (ch. 2) may be read with profit here.

“Some say, that freedom from death results from action; and others that death exists not. Hear me explain, O King! have no misgiving about it.

“Both truths, O Kshatriya, have been current from the beginning. The wise maintain what is called delusion to be death. I verily call heedlessness death, and likewise I call freedom from heedlessness immortality. Through heedlessness, verily, were the demons vanquished; and through freedom from heedlessness the gods attained to the Brahman. Death, verily, does not devour living creatures like a tiger; for, indeed, his form is not to be perceived. . . . heedlessness develops in men as desire, and afterwards as wrath, and in the shape of delusion. And then traveling in devious paths through egoism, one does not attain to union with the Self Those who are deluded by it, and who remain under its influence, depart from this world, and there again fall down [into generation]. Then the deities [*i.e.* the senses] gather around them. And then they undergo death after death. Being attached to the fruit of action, on action presenting itself, they follow after it, and do not cross beyond death. And the embodied self, in consequence of not understanding union with the real entity, proceeds on all hands with attachment to enjoyments. That, verily, is the great source of delusion to the senses: for by contact with unreal entities, his migrations are rendered inevitable; because, having his inner self contaminated by contact



with unreal entities, he devotes himself to objects of sense on all sides, pondering on them only. That pondering, verily, first confuses him; and soon afterwards desire and wrath attack him. These lead children to death. But sensible men cross beyond death by their good sense. He who, pondering on the Self, destroys the fugitive objects of sense, not even thinking of them through contempt for them, and who, being possessed of knowledge, destroys desires in this way, becomes, as it were, the death of Death itself, and swallows it up.”

The second chapter ends with a declaration of what is the sort of death that results in union with the divine, preventing absolutely any return to incarnations upon earth. It is found in the sentences:

That man who, casting off all desires, acts without attachment to results, free from egotism and selfishness, attains to tranquillity. This is the condition of the Supreme Being, O son of Pritha! Having obtained this, one is not troubled; and remaining in it, even at the time of death, he passes on to extinction (or union with) the Supreme Spirit.

Those are the last words of the second chapter.

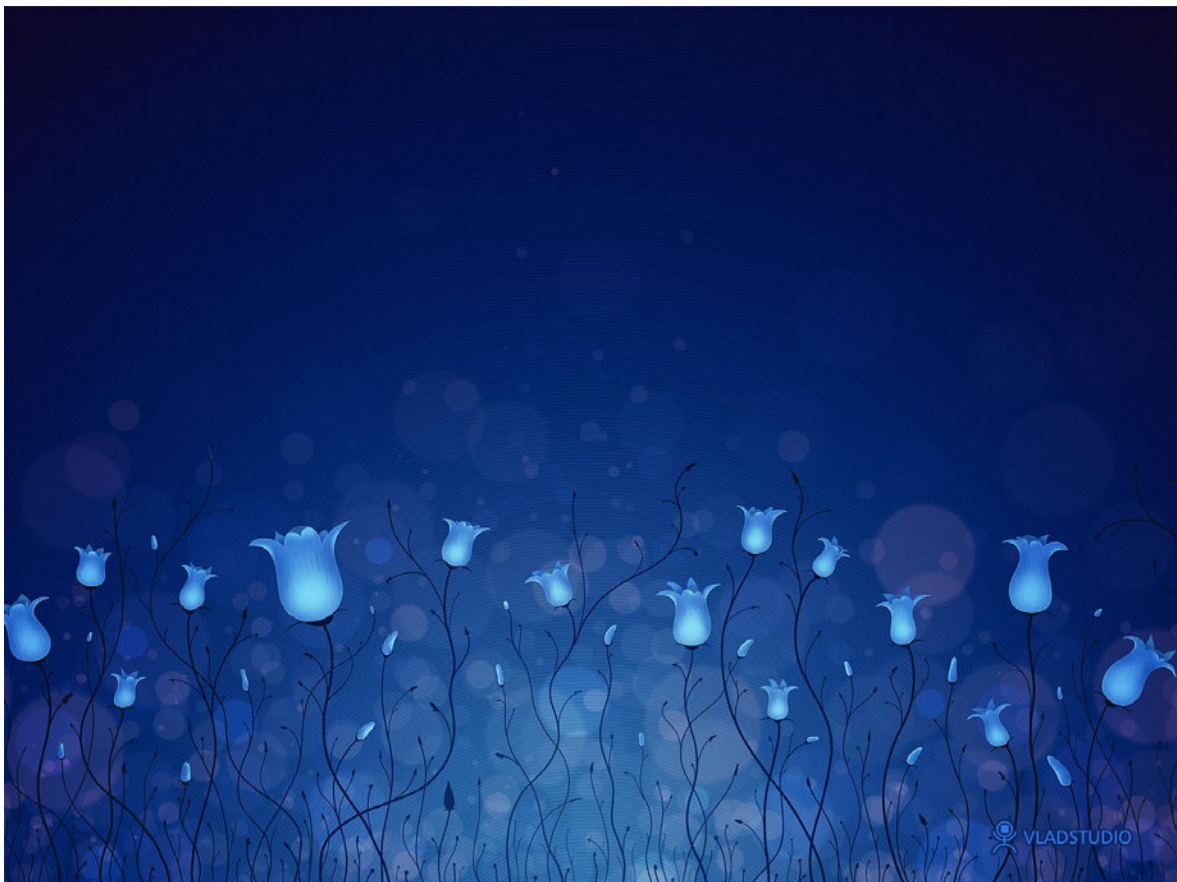
Any other mental attitude at the time of passing away will surely cause us to acquire a mortal body again.

Krishna’s declaration brings up before us, not only the practices previously inculcated, but also the whole subject of death. For, in order to know how to “think of Him at the moment of death,” or to have that tranquillity which only perfection of devotion confers, we must find out what death is, and whether it is solely what we see going on at the decease of a human being, or more than can be gauged with the eye. A little reflection shows that what is seen and noted by physicians and spectators is but the withdrawal of the soul and energy from the outer envelope called “body.” While that is going on, the person may accept rites of the church or profess adherence to any sort of doctrine whatever, even with his last outward sigh speak of heaven with its bliss awaiting him. But that is only the first step. It leaves his visible features calm and happy, perhaps, in expression; his relatives close his eyes — they call it death. He, however, has only begun to die. The soul has yet to pass through other envelopes beyond the ken of friends, beyond even the dying man’s present control. All now depends upon the whole course and kind of thought in which he indulged during the life of the body. For the soul has to pass along the road by which it came, and that way is lined with the memories of a lifetime; as these memories rise up they affect the departing entity, causing it to be either disturbed from concentration on the Supreme Being, or assisting to a greater perfection. If, then, some few years only near the close of life were devoted to the sort of practice inculcated by Krishna, the memories of the years previously spent in following after desires will throw a cloud over the soul and absolutely prevent it from attaining that state from which return to earth is impossible without our consent. It is more perfectly illustrated by considering life as a grand musical movement that is brought to a close by using at once all the tones sounded throughout the whole preceding portion. The result will be a combined sound, expressing neither the highest nor lowest notes, or the sweetest or less sweet, but the resultant of all. And this last sound is the fixed vibration that governs the en-



tity, sounding all through him, and throwing him into the state to which it corresponds or of which it is the key. Thus it is easily seen that in each thought lie the possibilities of a harmony or a discord for life's conclusion.

“Guided by the clear light of the soul, we have considered thy teachings, O holy sage! They have been efficacious for the removal of the obscurities surrounding Ishvara's abiding place in us; we are delighted and refreshed; may thy words remain with us, and, as a spring refreshes the earth, may we be refreshed by them!”



Essay 3

The Right Performance of Action

The first two verses of this chapter express a doubt arising in Arjuna's mind, and contain a request for its solution and for a method by which he may attain perfect knowledge — salvation. They are:

If, according to thy opinion, O thou who givest all that men ask! the use of the understanding be superior to the practice of deeds, why then dost thou urge me to engage in an undertaking so dreadful as this?

Thou, as it were, confoundest my reason with a mixture of sentiments; with certainty declare one method by which I may obtain happiness, and explain it unto me.

The doubt arose because the Blessed Lord had declared that Arjuna must reach salvation by the right use of his understanding, and yet also must perform the dreaded act of opposing, perhaps slaying, his friends, tutors, and relatives. The request is the same as is repeated nearly every day by serious students and for which an answer is demanded.¹⁵ It is for *one* single method, *one* practice, *one* doctrine, by means of which the student may obtain that for which he seeks, whether he has formulated it as happiness or only as a thirst for wonderful knowledge and power.

Arjuna's doubt is the one which naturally arises in one who for the first time is brought face to face with the great duality of nature — or of God. This duality may be expressed metaphysically by the words *thought* and *action*, for these mean in this the same as *ideation* and *expression*. Brahman, as the unmanifested God, conceives the idea of the Universe, and it at once expresses itself in what is called creation by the Christian and by the scientist evolution. This creation or evolution is the action of God. With him there is no difference in time between the arising of the idea and its expression in manifested objects. Coming down to consider the "created" objects, or the planes on which the thought of God has its expression through its own laws, we find the duality expressed by action and reaction, attraction and repulsion, day and night, outbreathing and inbreathing, and so on. When face to face with these, one is first confused by the multiplicity of objects, and we strive to find one simple thing, some law or doctrine, practice, dogma, or philosophy, by which, being known, happiness can be secured.

Although there *is* one single Vehicle, to use a Buddhist term, yet it cannot be grasped in the beginning by the student. He must pass through sufficient experience to give him a greater consciousness before he can understand this one *Vehicle*. Could that unique law be understood by the beginner, could it be possible to lift us by one word to the shining heights of power and usefulness, it is certain that Those who do know would gladly utter the word and give us the sole method, but as the only possible way in which we can get true happiness is by *becoming* and not by intellectually

¹⁵ See *Lucifer* of April and May, 1888, in articles "Practical Occultism" and "Occultism and the Occult Arts." — (Ed.)



grasping any single system or dogma, the guardians of the lamp of truth have to raise men gradually from stage to stage. It was in such an attitude Arjuna stood when he uttered the verses with which this chapter opens.¹⁶

Krishna then proceeds to tell Arjuna that, it being impossible for one to remain in the world without performing actions, the right practice is to do those actions (duties of life whether in war or peace) which must be done, with a heart unattached to the result, being satisfied to do what is deemed the will of the Lord within, for no other reason than that it ought to be done. He sums it up in the words:

But he who, restraining his senses by his heart, and being free from attachment to the results of action, undertakes active devotion through the organs of action, is worthy of praise.

This he illustrates by referring to those whom he calls “false pietists of bewildered soul,” who remain inert with their bodies, restraining the organs of action, while at the same time they ponder on objects of sense which they have merely quitted in form. He thus shows the false position that it is useless to abandon the outer field of action while the mind remains attached to it, for such mental attachment will cause the ego to incarnate again and again upon earth. A little further on in the chapter he refers to a great yogi, one Janaka, who, even while a saint possessed of perfect knowledge which he had obtained while engaged in affairs of state, still performed actions.

These peculiar verses next occur:

The creator, when of old he had created mortals and appointed sacrifice, said to them,

“By means of this sacrifice ye shall be propagated. It shall be to you a cow of plenty. By means of it do ye support the gods, and let these gods support you. Supporting one another mutually, ye shall obtain the highest felicity. For, being nourished by sacrifices, the gods will give you the desired food. He who eats the food given by them without first offering some to them, is a thief indeed.”

At the outset I confess that these and succeeding verses do not appear easy to explain to Western minds. Although I have had some acquaintance with Occidental reasoning based on Occidental knowledge, it seems hopeless in the present century to elucidate much that is in this chapter. There are numerous points touched on by Krishna for which I find no response in Western thought. Among these are the verses on sacrifice. To say all I think about sacrifice would only expose me to a charge of madness, superstition, or ignorance; it certainly would on every hand be received with incredulity. And while sneers or disbelief have no terrors, it is needless to advert to certain points in the chapter. Yet in passing them by, some sadness is felt that a

¹⁶ It is to be noticed that Arjuna and Krishna constantly change the names by which they address each other. When Krishna is dwelling on one subject or upon something that has to do with a particular phase of Arjuna's nature, he gives him some name that has reference to the quality, subject, or other matter referred to, and Arjuna changes the name of Krishna whenever he has need. As in these first verses, the name used for the Blessed Lord is *Janardana*, which means “giver of all that men ask” — meaning thereby to refer to Krishna's potency in bringing to fulfillment all wishes. — W.B.



high civilization should on these subjects be so dense and dark. Although Moses established sacrifices for the Jews, the Christian successors have abolished it both in spirit and letter, with a curious inconsistency which permits them to ignore the words of Jesus that “not one jot or tittle of the law should pass until all these things were fulfilled.” With the culmination of the dark age¹⁷ it was, however, natural that the last vestige of sacrifice should disappear. On the ruins of the altar has arisen the temple of the lower self, the shrine of the personal idea. In Europe individualism is somewhat tempered by various monarchical forms of government which do not by any means cure the evil; and in America, being totally unrestrained and forming in fact the basis of independence here, it has culminated. Its bad effects — vaguely as yet shadowing the horizon — might have been avoided if the doctrines of the Wisdom-religion had been also believed in by the founders of the republic. And so, after the sweeping away of the fetters forged by priestly dogma and kingly rule, we find springing up a superstition far worse than that which we have been used to call by the name. It is the superstition of materialism that bows down to a science which leads only to a negation.

There are, however, many willing minds here who have some intuition that after all there can be extracted from these ancient Hindu books more than is to be found if they are merely studied as a part of the lispings of infant humanity — the excuse given by Prof. Max Muller for translating them at all. It is to such natural theosophists I speak for they will see that, even while advancing so rapidly in material civilization, we need the pure philosophical and religious teachings found in the Upanishads.

The peculiar explanation of the Mosaic sacrifices advanced by the mystic, Count Saint-Martin,¹⁸ needs only a passing allusion. Students can think upon it and work out for themselves what truth it contains. He holds that the efficacy of the sacrifices rested in magnetic laws, for the priest, according to him, collected the bad effects of the sins of the people into his own person and then, by laying his hands upon the scapegoat (as in one sacrifice), communicated those deleterious influences to the poor animal who in the wilderness exhaled them so far away as not to affect the people. It is suggested that Moses knew something of occult laws, since he was educated by the Egyptians and initiated by them. But Saint-Martin goes on to say that

the Jews were directed to kill even the animals in the land because the death of animals infected with the impure influences of those nations preserved the Jews from the poison; whereas in sacrifices the death of clean animals attracted wholesome preservative influences, [and that] pure and regular influences attached to certain classes and individuals of animals, and that *by breaking the bases in which they are fixed* they may become useful to man, and we should thus read *Lev. xvii, 11*:

“It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”

¹⁷ My readers may not agree with me that this is the dark age, inasmuch as that is the term applied to a period now past. That time, however, was a part of this; and this is even darker than that, as we think. — W.B.

¹⁸ See *Man: His Nature and Destiny* (1802). — W.B.



He then says that the virtue of sacrifices comes through the rapport that man has with animals and nature; and,

if the Jews had observed the sacrifices faithfully, they would never have been abandoned, but would have drawn upon themselves every good thing they were capable of receiving. . . . The extraordinary holocausts at the three great festivals were to bring down upon the people such active influences as corresponded to the epochs, for we see bulls, rams, and lambs always added to the burnt sacrifices . . . Some substances, mineral, vegetable, and animal, retain a greater proportion of the living and powerful properties of their first estate.

In these views Saint-Martin had some of the truth. But Moses ordained some sacrifices as a religious duty from sanitary reasons of his own, since the unthinking tribes would perform devotional acts willingly which, if imposed only as hygienic measures, they might omit.¹⁹ The burnt offerings were, however, founded upon different views, very like those at the bottom of Hindu sacrifices, and the law of which is stated in these words from our chapter:

Beings are nourished by food. Food has its origin from rain. *Rain is the fruit of sacrifice.* Sacrifice is performed by action.

It is not contended by either Brahmans or their followers that food will not be produced except from sacrifice performed according to Vedic ritual, but that *right food*, productive in the physical organism of the proper conditions enabling man to live up to his highest possibilities, alone is produced in that age where the real sacrifices are properly performed. In other places and ages food is produced, but it does not in everything come up to the required standard. In this age we have to submit to these difficulties, and can overcome them by following Krishna's instructions as given in this book. In a verse just quoted the distinction is made between food naturally produced without, and that due to, sacrifice, for he says, "For, being nourished by sacrifices, the gods will give you the *desired* food." Carrying out the argument, we find as a conclusion that if the sacrifices which thus nourish the gods are omitted, these "gods" must die or go to other spheres. And as we know that sacrifices are totally disused now, the "gods" spoken of must have long ago left this sphere. It is necessary to ask what and who they are. They are not the mere idols and imaginary beings so constantly mentioned in the indictments brought against India by missionaries, but are certain powers and properties of nature which leave the world when the Kali-yuga or dark age, as this is called, has fully set in. Sacrifices therefore among us would be useless just at present.

There is, however, another meaning to the "revolution of the wheel" spoken of by Krishna. He makes it very clear that he refers to the principle of reciprocity or brotherhood. And this he declares must be kept revolving; that is, each being must live according to that rule, or else he lives a life of sin to no purpose. And we can easily believe that in these days this principle, while admired as a fine theory, is not that which moves the people. They are, on the contrary, spurred by the personal selfish

¹⁹ In India there are numerous religious observances having in view sanitary effects. For instance the cholera dance — a religious matter — in which, while disinfecting camphor is burned in heaps, a curious flower-umbrella-dance is engaged in with religious chants and music. — W.B.



idea of each one becoming better, greater, richer than his neighbor. If continued unchecked it would make this nation one entirely of black magicians. And it was to counteract this that the Theosophical Society was founded, with the object of inducing men to once more revolve this wheel of brotherly love first set in motion by the “creator when of old he had created mortals.”

Krishna then proceeds to exhort Arjuna again to perform the duties appointed to him, and urges him to do it on the ground that he being a great man should set a good example that the lower orders would follow; saying,

He who understands the whole universe should not cause these people, slow and ignorant of the universe, to relax from their duty.

Knowing that, under the great cyclic laws which govern us, periods arrive even in the worst of ages when good examples of living imprinted on the astral light cause effects ever increasing in intensity, until at last the “gods” before referred to begin in distant spheres to feel the force of these good actions and to return again to help mankind on the recurrence of a better age, he implores Arjuna to be the very first to set the good example.

In such an age as this, the ritualistic sacrifice of a different age which has indeed a magical effect becomes a sacrifice to be performed by each man in his own nature upon the altar of his own heart. And especially is this so with theosophists of sincerity and aspiration. Being born as we are in these days, among families with but small heritage in the wave of descent from unsullied ancestors, we are without the advantage of great natural spiritual leanings, and without certain peculiar powers and tendencies that belong to another cycle. But the very force and rapidity of the age we live in give us the power to do more now in fewer incarnations. Let us then recognize this, and learn what is our duty and do it. This portion of the chapter ends with a famous verse:

It is better to do one’s own duty, even though it be devoid of excellence, than to perform another’s duty well. Death is better in the performance of one’s own duty. Another’s duty is productive of danger.

Krishna having said to Arjuna that a certain class of men, being without faith, revile the true doctrine and perish at last, bewildered even by all their knowledge, Arjuna sees at once a difficulty growing out of a consideration of what, if anything, induces these men to sin as it were against their will. He sees in this the operation of an unknown force that molds men in a manner that they would not allow if conscious of it, and he says:

Instigated by what does this man incur sin, even against his will, O descendant of Vrishni, impelled, as it were, by force?

To this Krishna replies:

It is desire; it is passion springing from the quality of rajas, voracious, all-sinful. Know that it is hostile to man in this world. As fire is surrounded by



smoke, and a mirror by rust,²⁰ as the foetus is involved in the womb, so is this universe surrounded by this quality. Knowledge is surrounded by this, and it is the constant enemy of the wise man — a fire which assumes any form it will, O son of Kunti! and is insatiable. Its empire is said to be the senses, the heart, and the intellect. By means of these it surrounds knowledge and bewilders the soul. Therefore do thou, O best of Bharatas! in the first place, restraining thy senses, cast off this sinful impetus which devours spiritual knowledge and spiritual discernment.

They say that the senses are great. The heart is greater than the senses. But intellect is greater than the heart, and that which is greater than intellect is He. Knowing that it is thus greater than the mind, strengthening thyself by thyself, do thou O great-armed one! slay this foe, which assumes any form it will and is intractable.

Deep reflection upon this reply by the Great Lord of men shows us that the realm over which the influence of passion extends is much wider than we at first supposed. It is thought by many students that freedom can be quickly obtained as soon as they begin the study of occultism or the investigation of their inner being of which the outer is only a partial revealment. They enter upon the study full of hope, and, finding great relief and buoyancy, think that the victory is almost won. But the enemy spoken of, the obstruction, the taint, is present among a greater number of the factors that compose a being than is apparent.

Krishna has reference to the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The first is of the nature of truth, pure and bright; the second partakes of truth in a lesser degree, is of the nature of action, and has also in it the quality of badness; the third, *tamas*, is wholly bad, and its essential peculiarity is *indifference*, corresponding to darkness, in which no action of a pure quality is possible.

These three great divisions — or as it is in the Sanskrit, *gunas* — comprehend all the combinations of what we call “qualities,” whether they be moral, mental, or physical.

This passion, or desire, spoken of in the chapter is composed of the two last qualities, *rajas* and *tamas*. As Krishna says, it is intractable. It is not possible, as some teach, to bring desire of this sort into our service. It must be slain. It is useless to try to use it as a helper, because its tendency is more towards *tamas*, that is, downward, than towards the other.

It is shown to surround even knowledge. It is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in every action. Hence the difficulty encountered by all men who set out to cultivate the highest that is in them.

We are at first inclined to suppose that the field of action of this quality is the senses alone; but Krishna teaches that its empire reaches beyond those and includes the heart and the intellect also. The incarnated soul desiring knowledge and freedom

²⁰ The ancient form of mirror is here referred to. It was made of metal and highly burnished. Of course it was constantly liable to get rusty. And our own silvered mirror is liable also to cloud, owing to the oxidizing of the coating. — W.B.



finds itself snared continually by *tamas*, which, ruling also in the heart and mind, is able to taint knowledge and thus bewilder the struggler.

Among the senses particularly, this force has sway. And the senses include all the psychical powers so much desired by those who study occultism. It does not at all follow that a man is spiritual or knows truth because he is able to see through vast distances, to perceive the denizens of the astral world, or to hear with the inner ear. In this part of the human economy the dark quality is peculiarly powerful. Error is more likely to be present there than elsewhere, and unless the seer is self governed he gets no valuable knowledge, but is quite likely to fall at last, not only into far more grievous error, but into great wickedness.

We must therefore begin, as advised by Krishna, with that which is nearest to us, that is, with our senses. We cannot slay the foe there at first, because it is resident also in the heart and mind. By proceeding from the near to the more remote, we go forward with regularity and with certainty of conquest at last. Therefore he said, "In the first place, restrain thy senses." If we neglect those and devote ourselves wholly to the mind and heart, we really gain nothing, for the foe still remains undisturbed in the senses. By means of those, when we have devoted much time and care to the heart and mind, it may throw such obscurations and difficulties in the way that all the work done with the heart and mind is rendered useless.

It is by means of the outward senses and their inner counterparts that a great turmoil is set up in the whole system, which spreads to the heart and from there to the mind, and, as it is elsewhere said: "The restless heart then snatches away the mind from its steady place."

We thus have to carry on the cultivation of the soul by regular stages, never neglecting one part at the expense of another. Krishna advises his friend to restrain the senses, and then to "strengthen himself by himself." The meaning here is that he is to rely upon the One Consciousness which, as differentiated in a man, is his higher self. By means of this higher self he is to strengthen the lower, or that which he is accustomed to call "myself."

It will not be amiss here to quote from some notes of conversation with a friend of mine.

"Our consciousness is *one* and not many, nor different from other consciousnesses. It is not *waking consciousness* or *sleeping consciousness*, or any other but *consciousness itself*.

"Now that which I have called consciousness is Being. The ancient division was:

<i>Sat</i> , or Being;		These together are called <i>Sat-chit-ananda</i> .
<i>Chit</i> , or Consciousness, Mind;		
<i>Ananda</i> , or Bliss.		

"But *Sat* — or Being — the first of the three, is itself both *Chit* and *Ananda*. The appearing together in full harmony of Being and Consciousness is Bliss or *Ananda*. Hence that harmony is called *Sat-chit-ananda*.



“But the one consciousness of each person is the Witness or Spectator of the actions and experiences of every state we are in or pass through. It therefore follows that the waking condition of the mind is not separate consciousness.

“The one consciousness pierces up and down through all the states or planes of Being, and serves to uphold the memory — whether complete or incomplete — of each state’s experiences.

“Thus in waking life, *Sat* experiences fully and knows. In dream state, *Sat* again knows and sees what goes on there, while there may not be in the brain a complete memory of the waking state just quitted. In Sushupti — beyond dream and yet on indefinitely, *Sat* still knows all that is done or heard or seen.

“The way to salvation must be entered. To take the first step raises the possibility of success. Hence it is said, ‘When the first attainment has been won, *Moksha* (salvation) has been won.’

“The first step is giving up bad associations and getting a longing for knowledge of God; the second is joining good company, listening to their teachings and practicing them; the third is strengthening the first two attainments, having faith and continuing in it. Whoever dies thus, lays the sure foundation for ascent to adeptship, or salvation.”

We have come to the end of the third chapter, which is that upon *Devotion through Action*, or in Sanskrit, *Karma-yoga*. It has in these three chapters been distinctly taught that devotion must be obtained, sought after, desired, cultivated. The disciple must learn to do every act with the Divine in view, and the Divine in everything. As it is said in the *Brihad Nandikesvara-Purana*:

While taking medicine one should think of Vishnu or the all-pervading; while eating, of Janardana, the All-Giver; while lying down, of Padmanabha; while marrying, of Prajapati, the Lord of Creatures; while fighting, of Chakradhara; while traveling in a foreign land, of Trivikrama; at the time of death, of Narayana; at the time of reunion with friends, of Sridhara; after dreaming bad dreams, of Govinda; at the time of danger, of Madhusudana; in the midst of a forest, of Narasinha; in the midst of fire, of Jalasaya, or the one lying on the water; in the midst of water, of Varaha; on the mountain, of Raghunandana; while going, of Varuma; and in all acts, of Madhava.

All these names are the names of Vishnu in his various powers and appearances. It is seeing Krishna in everything, and everything in him. This at last we must do, for Ishvara, the spirit in each of us, is none other than Krishna. Therefore let us think of him and fight; while entangled in this dense forest of existence, let us think of him, the Lion our guard, the Sage our guide, the Warrior our sure defense and shield.



Essay 4

Spiritual Knowledge

In the third chapter Krishna approached the subject of yoga — or union with the Supreme and the method of attainment — and now in the fourth openly speaks of it. He had told Arjuna that passion is greater than either heart or mind, having power to overthrow them, and advised Arjuna to strengthen his hold on his real self, for by means of that only could he hope to overcome passion.

In the opening of this chapter we come across something of importance — the doctrine that in the early part of a new creation, called manvantara in Sanskrit, a great Being descends among men and imparts certain ideas and aspirations which reverberate all through the succeeding ages until the day when the general dissolution — the night of Brahma — comes on. He says:

This deathless Yoga, this deep union,
I taught Vivaswata, the Lord of Light;
Vivaswata to Manu gave it; he
To Ikshvaku; so passed it down the line
Of all my royal Rishis. Then, with years,
The truth grew dim and perished, noble Prince!
Now once again to thee it is declared —
This ancient lore, this mystery supreme —
Seeing I find thee votary and friend.

Exoteric authorities agree that Vivasvat is a name for the sun; that after him came Manu, and his son was Ikshvaku. The latter founded the line of Solar Kings, who in early times in India were men of supreme knowledge. They were adepts every one, and ruled the land as only adepts could, for the darker ages had not come on, and such great Beings could naturally live among men. Everyone respected them, and there was no rebellion even in thought, since there could be no occasion for complaint. Although Vivasvat as a name for the sun reveals nothing to our Western ears, there is a great truth hidden behind it, just as today there is as great a mystery behind our solar orb. He was the Being appointed to help and guide the race at its beginning. He had himself, ages before, gone through incarnation during other creations, and had mounted step by step up the long ladder of evolution, until by natural right he had become as a god. The same process is going on today, preparing some Being for similar work in ages to come. And it has gone on in the limitless past also; and always the Supreme Spirit as Krishna teaches the Being, so that he may implant those ideas necessary for our salvation.

After the race has grown sufficiently, the Being called the Sun leaves the spiritual succession to Manu — whether we know him by that name or another — who carries on the work until men have arrived at the point where they furnish out of the great mass some one of their own number who is capable of founding a line of Kingly Priest Rulers; then Manu retires, leaving the succession in the hands of the Royal Sage, who transmits it to his successors. This succession lasts until the age no longer will permit, and then all things grow confused spiritually, material progress in-



creases, and the dark age, fully come, ushers in the time before dissolution. Such is the present time.

Up to the period marked by the first earthly king called Ikshvaku, the ruler was a spiritual Being whom all men knew to be such, for his power, glory, benevolence, and wisdom were evident. He lived an immense number of years, and taught men not only yoga but also arts and sciences. The ideas implanted then, having been set in motion by one who knew all the laws, remain as *inherent ideas* to this day. Thus it is seen that there is no foundation for the pride of ideas felt by so many of us. They are not original. We never would have evolved them ourselves, unaided; and had it not been for the great wisdom of these planetary spirits in the beginning of things, we would be hopelessly drifting now.

The fables in every nation and race about great personages, heroes, magicians, gods, who dwelt among them in the beginning, living long lives, are due to the causes I have outlined. And in spite of all the sneers and labored efforts of scientific scoffers to show that there is no soul, and perhaps no hereafter, the innate belief in the Supreme, in heaven, hell, magic, and what not, will remain. They are preserved by the uneducated masses, who, having no scholastic theories to divert their minds, keep up what is left of the succession of ideas.

Arjuna is surprised to hear one whose birth he knew of declaring that Vivasvat was his contemporary, and so asks Krishna how that can happen. Krishna replies, asserting that he and Arjuna had had countless rebirths which he saw and recollected, but Arjuna, being not yet perfect in yoga, knew not his births, could not remember them. As in the poem Arjuna is also called *Nara*, which means Man, we here have an ancient postulation of reincarnation for all the human family in direct and unmistakable words.

Then very naturally he opens the doctrine, well known in India, of the reappearances of Avatars. There is some little dispute among the Hindus as to what an Avatar is; that is, whether he is the Supreme Spirit itself or only a man overshadowed by the Supreme to a greater extent than other men. But all admit that the true doctrine is stated by Krishna in the words:

. . . I come, and go, and come. When Righteousness
Declines, O Bharata! when Wickedness
Is strong, I rise, from age to age, and take
Visible shape, and move a man with men,
Succouring the good, thrusting the evil back,
And setting Virtue on her seat again.

These appearances among men for the purpose of restoring the equilibrium are not the same as the rule of Vivasvat and Manu first spoken of, but are the coming to earth of Avatars or Saviors. That there is a periodicity to them is stated in the words "from age to age." He is here speaking of the great cycles about which hitherto the Masters have been silent except to say that there are such great cycles. It is very generally admitted now that the cyclic law is of the highest importance in the consideration of the great questions of evolution and man's destiny. But the coming of an Avatar must be strictly in accordance with natural law — and that law demands that



at the time of such an event there also appears a being who represents the other pole — for, as Krishna says, the great law of the two opposites is eternally present in the world. So we find in the history of India that, when Krishna appeared so long ago, there was also a great tyrant, a black magician named Kansa, whose wickedness equaled the goodness of Krishna. And to such a possibility the poem refers, where it says that Krishna comes when wickedness has reached a maximum development. The real meaning of this is that the bad karma of the world goes on increasing with the lapse of the ages, producing at last a creature who is, so to say, the very flower of all the wickedness of the past, counting from the last preceding Avatar. He is not only wicked, but also wise, with magic powers of awful scope, for magic is not alone the heritage of the good. The number of magicians developed among the nations at such a time is very great, but one towers above them all, making the rest pay tribute. It is not a fairy tale but a sober truth, and the present prevalence of self-seeking and money-getting is exactly the sort of training of certain qualities that black magicians will exemplify in ages to come. Then Krishna — or howsoever named — appears “in visible shape, a man with men.” His power is as great as the evil one, but he has on his side what the others have not — spirit, preservative, conservative forces. With these he is able to engage in conflict with the black magicians, and in it is assisted by all of us who are really devoted to brotherhood. The result is a victory for the good and destruction for the wicked. The latter lose all chance of salvation in that manvantara, and are precipitated to the lower planes, on which they emerge at the beginning of the next new creation. So not even they are lost, and of their final salvation Krishna speaks thus:

Whoso worship me,
Them I exalt; *but all men everywhere*
Shall fall into my path; albeit, those souls
Which seek reward for works, make sacrifice
Now, to the lower gods.

He also declares that the right and full comprehension of the mystery of his births and work on earth confers upon us nirvana, so that rebirth occurs no more. This is because it is not possible for a man to understand the mystery unless he has completely liberated himself from the chains of passion and acquired entire concentration. He has learned to look beneath the shell of appearances that deceives the unthinking mind.

This brings us to a rock upon which many persons fall to pieces. It is personality. Personality is always an illusion, a false picture hiding the reality inside. No person is able to make his bodily environment correspond exactly to the best that is within him, and others therefore continually judge him by the outward show. If we try, as Krishna directs, to find the divine in everything, we will soon learn not to judge by appearances, and if we follow the advice given in this chapter to do our duty without hope of reward and without trimming ourselves with a desired result in view, the end will be peace.

Krishna then adverts to various systems of religious practice, and shows Arjuna that they all lead at last, but after many births, to him, by reason of the tendency set up. The different schools are taken up in a few sentences. His dictum is that they “de-



stroy sins,” meaning that a certain purification of the nature is thus accomplished, which is followed upon death by a longer stay in devachan, but it is only to one single practice he awards the distinction of being that which will bring about union with the Supreme Spirit. After enumerating all, not only the performance but also the omitting of sacrifice, he shows Arjuna that spiritual knowledge includes all actions and burns to ashes the binding effects of all work, conferring upon us the power to take nirvana by reason of emancipation from the delusion that the lower self was the actor. The perfection of this spiritual knowledge is reached by strengthening faith and expelling doubt through devotion and restraint. Then occurs a verse, almost the same as one in the New Testament, “the man of doubtful mind enjoys neither this world nor the other, nor final beatitude.”

He that, being self-contained, hath vanquished doubt,
Disparting self from service, soul from works,
Enlightened and emancipate, my Prince!
Works fetter him no more! Cut then atwain
With sword of wisdom, Son of Bharata!
This doubt that binds thy heart-beats! cleave the bond
Born of thy ignorance! Be bold and wise!
Give thyself to the field with me! Arise!

These strong words end the chapter. They are addressed to those who can be strong, and not to the ever-doubting one who believes neither his own thoughts nor the words of others, but who is forever asking for more. But there can be no uncertainty about the cause of doubt. As Krishna says:

It springs from ignorance, and all we have to do is to take the sword of knowledge and cut all doubts at once.

Many will say that they have been always looking for this that they may have peace, and that so many systems are presented for their consideration they are unable to come to any conclusion whatever. This would seem very true on a view of the thousand and one philosophies placed before us with varying degrees of clearness by the exponents of them. But it has appeared to us that they can all be easily sifted and divided into classes where they will range themselves under two great heads — those which permit nothing to be believed until the miserable mass of mediocre minds have said that they at last accept this or that, and those which have each a little of what may possibly be true and a great deal that is undeniable nonsense. The doubter is a devotee of the first school, or he is an adherent partly of one and partly of the other; and in the latter case is torn almost asunder by the numberless conventional ideas which bear the stamp of authority coercing him into an acceptance of that which revolts his judgment whenever he permits it to have free exercise. If you tell him that the much-lauded mind is not the final judge, and that there are higher faculties which may be exercised for the acquirement of knowledge, he disputes on the lines laid down by learned professors of one school or another, and denies the validity of proofs offered on the ground that they are instances of “double cerebration,” and what not. To such as these the chapter will not appeal, but there are many students



who have sincere doubts, and with those the difficulty arises from ignorance. They are afraid to admit to themselves that the ancients could have found out the truth; and the reason would appear to be that this judgment is passed from a consideration of the merely material state of those people or of the present nations who in any degree follow such philosophies. Our civilization glorifies material possessions and progress, and those who have not these boons cannot be the possessors of either truth or the way to it. But the keepers of truth have never said that we will be neither rich nor civilized if we follow their system. On the contrary, in the days when Krishna lived and taught his system there was more material glory and power than now, and more knowledge of all the laws of nature than every one of our scientists put together have in their reach. Hence if anyone teaches that the reign of the doctrines of the Masters will be the knell of all material comfort and progress, he errs, and sows the seeds of trouble for himself and his friends. Why, then, is it not wise to at once admit that there may be truth in these doctrines, throw away all doubt, and enjoy the light coming from the East?

So long as doubt remains there will be no peace, no certainty, nor any hope of finding it in this world or the lives upon it hereafter, and not even in the vast reaches of other universes on which we may live in future ages; the doubter now will be the doubter then, and so on while the wheel revolves for the millions of years yet before us.

If we follow the advice of the great Prince, our next step will be to assume, in view of patent facts of evolution, that certain great Beings exist who long ago must have trod the same road, and now possess the knowledge with the power to impart as much as we are able to take. To this Krishna refers in these words:

Seek this knowledge by doing honor, by prostration, by strong search, and by service; those gifted with this knowledge, who perceive the truth of things, will teach this knowledge to thee.

And such are the exact words of the Masters of our Society. They do not reward or teach merely because we so wish it to be, nor because we value ourselves at so much; our valuation of ourselves is not theirs. They value us at the real and just rate, and cannot be moved by tears or entreaties not followed by acts, and the acts that delight them are those performed in their service, and no others.

What, then, is the work in which they wish to be served?

It is not the cultivation of our psychic powers, nor the ability to make phenomena, nor any kind of work for self when that is the sole motive.

The service and the work are in the cause of humanity, by whomsoever performed. And all those now standing with their mouths open, waiting for what they are pleased to call food, may as well know that they will get nothing unless the work is done or attempted.

Let this right attitude be taken, and what follows is described in this chapter:

A man who perfects himself in devotion finds springing up in himself in the progress of time this spiritual knowledge, which is superior to and comprehends every action without exception.



The fourth chapter is ended. Let all our doubts come to an end!

“What room for doubt and what for sorrow can there be in him who knows that all spiritual beings are the same in kind, differing only in degree.”



Essay 5

Renunciation of Action

The name of this chapter in Sanskrit is “Karmasannyasayog,” which means “The Book of Religion by Renouncing Fruit of Works.” It has always seemed to me to be one of the most important in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. As the poem is divided into eighteen parts, this one is just beyond the first division, for the whole number are to be put into six groups of three chapters each, and we have finished four.

Arjuna is supposed to bring forward the objections raised by, or views belonging to, the two great Indian schools called the Sankhya and the Yoga, one of which advised its votaries to renounce all works and to do nothing whatever, while the other called for the performance of works. The divergent views naturally caused great differences in practice, for the followers of one would be found continually working, and those of the other continually doing nothing. Hence we find, in India, even at the present day, great numbers of ascetics who remain inert, and encounter on the other hand those who go on making karma with a view to salvation.

A very little reflection will show the student that the only result of action, as such, will be a continuation of action, and hence that no amount of mere works will in themselves confer nirvana or rest from karma. The only direct product of karma is karma. And this difficulty rose before Arjuna in the fifth conversation. He says:

Thou praisest, Krishna, the renunciation of works; on the other hand, devotion through them. Declare to me with precision that one only which is the better of these two.

Whereupon Krishna replies:

To cease from works
Is well, and to do works in holiness
Is well; and both conduct to bliss supreme;
But of these twain the better way is his
Who working piously refraineth not.
That is the true Renouncer, firm and fixed,
Who — seeking nought, rejecting nought — dwells proof
Against the “opposites.”

The meaning of the teacher has been by some suggested to be that, inasmuch as the life of the ascetic is very hard, almost impossible for the majority of men, it is wiser to now perform good acts in the hope that they will lead one hereafter to a favorable birth in such surroundings that complete renunciation of action — outwardly — will be an easy task, and that the two sorts of practice were not intended to be laid before the student for selection, nor is he put in a dilemma compelling him to choose. I think such is not the meaning, but that, on the contrary, the seemingly easy alternative of performing actions properly is in reality the most difficult of all tasks. And no matter how much we may wait for a favorable birth, for a much hoped-for environment which will not only permit the new sort of life but, in fact, urge it upon us, it will never arrive for us until we have learned what is the right performance of action.



This learning can never be acquired by a renunciation of works now. Indeed, it may be taken for granted that no person will be able to renounce the world unless he has passed through the other experience in some life. A few may be found who attempt to do so, but if they have not been through all action they cannot proceed. The character of the man himself inwardly is the real test. No matter how many times during countless births he has renounced the world, if his inner nature has not renounced, he will be the same man during the entire period, and whenever, in any one of his ascetic lives, the new, the appropriate temptation or circumstance arises, he will fall from his high outward asceticism.

That our view as to the extreme difficulty of *right renunciation through action* is correct, we may refer to what Krishna says further on in the chapter.

Yet such abstraction, Chief!
Is hard to win without much holiness.

Krishna praises both schools, telling Arjuna that the disciples of each will arrive at a like end; but he says that right performance of action is the better. Now we must reconcile these two. If one is better than the other and yet both conduct to the same goal, there must be some reason for making the comparison, or hopeless confusion results. Acting upon his apparent equal endorsement, many seekers have abandoned action, thereby hoping to gain salvation. They ignored the sixth verse, which reads:

O thou of mighty arms, it is difficult to attain true renunciation, *without right performance of action*; the devotee *rightly performing action attains to true renunciation* before long.

Here again is a higher place assigned to performance of action. It seems clear that what Krishna meant was that renunciation of action in any one life, followed by the same conduct in all the subsequent lives thereby affected, would at last lead the renouncer to see how he must begin to stop that kind of renunciation and take up the performance of actions while he renounced the fruit of them. This is thought by many occultists to be the true view. It is well known that the ego returning to regeneration is affected by the actions of his previous births, not only circumstantially in the various vicissitudes of a life, but also in the tendency of the nature to any particular sort of religious practice, and this effect operates for a length of time or number of births exactly commensurate with the intensity of the previous practice. And naturally in the case of one who deliberately renounced all in the world, devoting himself to asceticism for many years, the effect would be felt for many lives and long after other temporary impressions had worn off. In going on thus for so many births, the man at last acquires that clearness of inner sight which brings him to perceive what method he really ought to follow. Besides also the natural development, he will be assisted by those minds whom he is sure to encounter, who have passed through all the needed experience. Additional support for these suggestions is found in the sixth chapter, in the verses referring to the rebirth of such disciples:



So hath he back again what heights of heart
He did achieve, and so he strives anew
To perfectness, with better hope, dear Prince!
*For by the old desire he is drawn on
Unwittingly.*²¹

What we are to endeavor to understand, then, is how to renounce the fruit of our actions, which is what Krishna means when he tells us to perform actions as a renunciation. The polluting effect of an act is not in the nature of the mere thing done, nor is the purifying result due to what work we may do, but on either hand the sin or the merit is found in the inner feeling that accompanies the act. One may donate millions in alms, and yet not thereby benefit his real character in the least. It is very true that he will reap material rewards, perhaps in some other life, but those even will be of no benefit, since he will be still the same. And another may only give away kind words or small sums, because that is all he has to give, and be so much benefited by the feeling accompanying each act that his progress up the ascending arc toward union with spirit is rapid. We find in the Christian Testament Jesus of Nazareth enforcing this view in the parable of the widow's mite, which he regarded as of more value than all that had been given by others. He could not have referred to the intrinsic value of the coin given, nor to the act as thus measured, for that quantity was easily ascertained; he only looked to the inner feeling of the poor woman when she gave all that she had.

No matter in what direction we see ourselves acting, we perceive how difficult it is to be true renouncers. And we cannot hope to reach the perfection of this better sort of renunciation through action, in the present life, be it the one in which we have begun, or be it the twentieth of such effort. However, we can *try*, and such is our duty; if we persevere, the tendency toward the right understanding will increase with each life more rapidly than would otherwise be possible.

And even in the high aim found in aspiration to discipleship under a master, or even to adeptship, we encounter the same difficulty. This aspiration is commendable above most that we can formulate, but when we coldly ask ourselves soon after that aspiration has been formed, "Why am I thus aspiring; why do I want to be near in sense to the Master?" we are obliged to admit that the impelling motive for acquiring the aspiration was tinged with selfishness. We can easily prove this by inquiring in the forum of our own conscience if we had the aspiration for ourself or for the great mass of men, rich and poor, despicable and noble; would we be able to feel content were we suddenly told that our deep longing had given the boon to others and that we must wait ten lives more? It is safe to say that the answer would be that we were very sorry. In the twelfth verse we find the remedy for the difficulty, as well as the difficulty itself, clearly stated thus:

The right performer of action, abandoning fruit of action, attains to rest through devotion; the wrong performer of action, attached to fruit thereof on account of desire, remains bound.

²¹ The italics are my own. — W.B.



These instructions will be very difficult for all who are living for themselves and who have not in some small degree begun to believe that they are not here for their own sake. But when we feel that there is no separation between us and any other creature, and that our higher self is leading us through all the experiences of life to the end that we shall recognize the unity of all, then, instead of continually acting contrary to that object of the higher self, we try to acquire the right belief and aspiration. Nor need we be deterred, as some are, by the extreme difficulty of eliminating the selfish desire for progress. That will be the task during many lives, and we should begin it voluntarily as soon as it is known, instead of waiting for it to be forced in upon us through suffering and many defeats.

A common mistake made by students is corrected in this chapter. It is the habit of many to say that, if these doctrines are followed to the letter, the result is a being who cares for nothing but the calmness which comes from extinction in the Supreme Spirit — that is, the extreme of selfishness. And popular writers contribute to this ridiculous impression, as we can see in the numerous articles on the subject. Among those writers it is the sequence of the “personal aggrandizement idea,” which is the bane of the present age, as occultists think, but the chief beauty of it in the eyes of those to whom we refer. Krishna puts it clearly enough in the twenty-fifth verse:

Effacement in the Supreme Spirit is gained by the right-seeing sage whose sins are exhausted, who hath cut asunder all doubts, whose senses and organs are under control, and *who is devoted to the well-being of all creatures*.

If the last qualification is absent, then he is not a “right-seeing sage” and cannot reach union with the Supreme. It must follow that the humblest imitator, everyone who desires to come to that condition, must try to the best of his ability to imitate the sage who has succeeded. And such is the word of the Master; for he says in many places that, if we expect to have his help, we must apply ourselves to the work of helping humanity — to the extent of our ability. No more than this is demanded.



Essay 6

Self-Restraint

More than one subject is treated in this chapter. It ends what I call the first series, as the whole eighteen chapters should be divided into three groups of six each.

Renunciation, equal-mindedness, true meditation, the golden mean in action, the unity of all things, the nature of rebirth and the effect of devotion upon it and devachan, are all touched upon.

It is a most practical chapter which would benefit students immensely if fully grasped and followed. The mistakes made many thousand years ago by disciples were the same as those of today. Today, just as then, there are those who think true renunciation consists in doing nothing except for themselves, in retiring from active duties, and in devoting their attention to what they are pleased to call self-development. On the other hand are those who mistake incessant action for true devotion. The true path is between these two.

The forsaking of worldly action — called *sannyasa* — is the same as what is known in Europe as the monastic life, especially in some very ascetic orders. Adopted selfishly under a mistaken notion of duty it cannot be true devotion. It is merely an attempt to save oneself. The course adopted by some theosophical students very much resembles this erroneous method, although it is practiced in the freedom of the world and not behind monastery walls.

To be a true renouncer of action and a devotee one must put the problem on another plane. On the physical brain plane there is no way of reconciling a contradiction such as appears to exist in the direction to perform actions and yet renounce their performance. It is exactly here that many readers of the *Bhagavad-Gita* stop and are confused. They have for so long been accustomed to thinking of the physical and living in it, the terms used for their thought are so material in their application, that, seeing this contradiction, they say that the book will not benefit them. But considering the difficulty from the view that the real actor is the mind, that acts are not the dead outward expressions of them, but are the thoughts themselves, we can see how one can be both a renouncer and a devotee, how we can outwardly perform every action, multitudes of them, being as active as anyone who is wrapped up in worldly pursuits, and yet be ourselves unattached and unaffected.

Duty and the final imperative — the “what ought I to do” — comes in here and becomes a part of the process. The actions to be performed are not any and every one. We are not to go on heedlessly and indiscriminately doing everything that is suggested. We must discover what actions ought to be performed by us and do them for that reason and not because of some result we expect to follow. The fact that we may be perfectly certain of the result is no reason for allowing our interest to fasten upon that. Here again is where certain theosophists think they have a great difficulty. They say that knowing the result one is sure to become interested in it. But this is the very task to be essayed — to so hold one’s mind and desires as not to be attached to the result.



By pursuing this practice true meditation is begun and will soon become permanent. For one who watches his thoughts and acts, so as to perform those that ought to be done, will acquire a concentration in time which will increase the power of real meditation. It is not meditation to stare at a spot on the wall for a fixed period, or to remain for another space of time in a perfectly vacuous mental state which soon runs into sleep. All those things are merely forms which in the end will do no lasting good. But many students have run after these follies, ignoring the true way. The truth is that the right method is not easy; it requires thought and mental effort, with persistency and faith. Staring at spots and such miscalled occult practices are very easy in comparison with the former.

However, we are human and weak. As such we require help, for the outer self cannot succeed in the battle. So Krishna points out that the lower self is to be raised up by the help of the higher; that the lower is, as it were, the enemy of the higher, and we must not allow the worse to prevail. It will all depend upon self-mastery. The self below will continually drag down the man who is not self-conquered. This is because that lower one is so near the thick darkness that hangs about the lower rungs of evolution's ladder it is partly devil. Like a heavy weight it will drag into the depths the one who does not try to conquer himself. But on its other side the self is near to divinity, and when conquered it becomes the friend and helper of the conqueror. The Sufis, the Mohammedan mystical sect, symbolize this in their poetry relating to the beautiful woman who appears but for a moment at the window and then disappears. She refuses to open the door to her lover as long as he refers to their being separate; but when he recognizes their unity then she becomes his firm friend.

The next few verses in the *Gita* outline that which is extremely difficult — equal-mindedness, and intentness upon the Supreme Being in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, success and failure. We cannot reach to this easily, perhaps not in many lives, but we can try. Every effort we make in that direction will be preserved in the inner nature and cannot be lost at death. It is a spiritual gain, the riches laid up in heaven to which Jesus referred. To describe the perfection of equal-mindedness is to picture an adept of the highest degree, one who has passed beyond all worldly considerations and lives on higher planes. Gold and stones are the same to him. The objects he seeks to accomplish are not to be reached through gold, and so it and the pebbles have the same value. He is also so calm and free from delusion of mind and soul that he remains the same whether with enemies or friends, with the righteous or the sinners.

This high condition is therefore set before us as an ideal to be slowly but steadfastly striven after so that in the course of time we may come near it. If we never begin we will never accomplish, and it is far better to adopt this high ideal, even though failing constantly, than to have no ideal whatever.

But some are likely to make a mistake herein. Indeed they have done so. They set up the ideal, but in a too material and human manner. Then they thought to walk on the chosen path by outward observance, by pretending to regard gold and stones as the same to them, while in their hearts they preferred the gold. Their equal-mindedness they confined to other people's affairs, while they displeased and alarmed all relatives and friends by the manner of riding this hobby and by wrong



neglect of obvious duty. Truly they sought for equal-mindedness, but failed to see that it can only be acquired through right performance of duty, and not by selecting the duties and environments that please us.



Essay 7

Spiritual Discernment

This chapter is devoted to the question of that spiritual discernment by means of which the Supreme Spirit can be discerned in all things, and the absence of which causes a delusion constantly recurring, the producer of sorrow. Krishna says that this sort of knowledge leaves nothing else to be known, but that to attain it the heart — that is, every part of the nature — must be fixed on the Spirit, meditation has to be constant, and the Spirit made the refuge or abiding-place. He then goes on to show that to have attained to such a height is to be a Mahātmā.

Among thousands of mortals a single one perhaps strives for perfection, and among those so striving perhaps *a single one knows me as I am*.

This points out the difficulty to be met in any one life, but is not cause for discouragement. It simply makes clear the fact, and thus also punctures the boastful claims of those who would pretend to have reached perfection but do not show it in their acts.

He then gives an eightfold division of his inferior nature, or that part of the Universal One which can be known. This is not the nature of man, and does not oppose the theosophical sevenfold system of human principles. No particular theosophical classification for the divisions of nature has been given out. It would, on the one hand, not be understood, and on the other, disputes leading to no good end would follow. He might as well have stated the twenty-fivefold division held by some other school. This “inferior nature” is only so relatively. It is the phenomenal and transient which disappears into the superior at the end of a kalpa. It is that part of God, or of the Self, which chose to assume the phenomenal and transient position, but is, in essence, as great as the superior nature. The inferiority is only relative. As soon as objective material, and subjective spiritual, worlds appear, the first-named has to be denominated inferior to the other, because the spiritual, being the permanent base, is in that sense superior; but as an absolute whole all is equal.

Included in the inferior nature are all the visible, tangible, invisible and intangible worlds; it is what we call nature. The invisible and intangible are nonetheless actual; we know that poisonous gas, though invisible and intangible, is fatally actual and potential. Experiment and induction will confer a great deal of knowledge about the inferior nature of God and along that path the science of the modern West is treading, but before knowing the occult, hidden, intangible realms and forces — often called spiritual, but not so in fact — the inner astral senses and powers have to be developed and used. This development is not to be forced, as one would construct a machine for performing some operation, but will come in its own time as all our senses and powers have come. It is true that a good many are trying to force the process, but at last they will discover that human evolution is universal and not particular; one man cannot go very far beyond his race before the time.

Krishna points out to Arjuna a gulf between the inferior and the superior. This latter is the Knower and that which sustains the whole universe, and from it the inferior



nature springs. So the materialistic and scientific investigator, the mere alchemist, the man who dives into the occult moved by the desire for gain to himself, will none of them be able to cross the gulf at all, because they do not admit the indwelling Spirit, the Knower.

The superior nature can be known because it is in fact the Knower who resides in every human being who has not degraded himself utterly. But this must be admitted before any approach to the light can be made. And but few are really willing, and many are unable, to admit the universal character of the Self. They sometimes think they do so by admitting the Self as present, as contiguous, as perhaps part tenant. This is not the admission, it leaves them still separate from the Self. All the phenomenal appearances, all the different names, and lives, and innumerable beings, are hung suspended, so to say, on the Self. Thus:

And all things hang on me as precious gems upon a string.

A number of pre-eminently great and precious things and powers are here enumerated and declared to be the Self; while next the very delusions and imperfections of life and man are included. Nothing is left out. This is certainly better than an illogical religion which separates God from the delusions and cruelties of nature, and then invents a third thing, in the person of a devil, who is the source of human wickedness. All this further accentuates the difficulties in the way. Krishna says the illusion is difficult to surmount, but that success can be attained by taking refuge in the Self — for he is the Self. The entire congregation of worshipers who are righteous find favor with the Self, but those who are spiritually wise are on the path that leads to the highest, which is the Self.

This means, as Krishna says, that those who with the eye of spiritual wisdom see that the Self is all, begin to reincarnate with that belief ingrained in them. Hitherto they had come back to earth without that single idea, but possessed of many desires and of ideas which separated them from the Self. Now they begin to return fully at rest in the Self and working out their long-accumulated karma. And at last they become what was mentioned in the opening verses, a mahatma or great soul.

There is, however, a large number of persons who are in the class which has been deprived of spiritual discernment “through diversity of desires” or who have not yet had discernment for the same reason. The verse reads as follows:

Those who through diversity of desires are deprived of spiritual wisdom adopt particular rites subordinated to their own natures, and worship other Gods.

Although these words, like the rest of the colloquy, were spoken in India and to a Hindu, they are thoroughly applicable in the West. Every mode of thought and of living may be called a rite gone over by each one as his conscious or unconscious religion. A man adopts that which is conformable, or subordinate, to his own nature, and being full of desires he worships or follows other gods than the Supreme Self. In India the words would more particularly mean the worship, which is quite common, of idols among those who are not educated out of idolatry; but they would also mean what is said above. In the West these “other gods” are the various pleasures, objects, aims and modes of life and thought, be they religious or not, which the people adopt. They have not the many thousands of gods of the Hindu pantheon, each one for



some particular purpose, but it comes to the same thing. The idol-worshiper bows to the god visible so that he may attain the object of his heart which that god is supposed to control. The Western man worships his object and strives after it with all his heart and mind and thus worships something else than the Supreme Imperishable One. The god of one is political advancement, of another — and generally of most — the possession of great wealth. One great god is that of social advancement, the most foolish, hollow and unsatisfactory of all; and with it in America is yoked the god of money, for without wealth there is no social pre-eminence possible except in those cases where official position confers a temporary glory. The mother often spends sleepless nights inventing means for pushing her daughter into social success; the father lies wakefully calculating new problems for the production of money. The inheritors of riches bask in the radiance coming from their own gold, while they strive for new ways to make, if possible, another upward step on that road, founded on ashes and ending at the grave, which is called social greatness. And out of all this striving many and various desires spring up so that their multiplicity and diversity completely hide and obstruct all spiritual development and discernment.

But many who are not so carried away by these follies attend to some religion which they have adopted or been educated into. In very few cases, however, is the religion adopted: it is born with the child; it is found with the family and is regularly fastened on as a garment. If in this religion, or cult, there is faith, then the Supreme Self, impartial and charitable, makes the faith strong and constant so that thereby objects are attained. In whatever way the devotee chooses to worship with faith it is the Supreme which, though ignored, brings about the results of faith.

A curious speculation rises here; it may be true, it may be not. It can be noticed that millions of prayers are recited every month addressed to the One God, all through Christendom, asking various favors. Millions were offered for the conversion to a better life of the Prince of Wales — they failed. The rain ceases and prayers are made, but the dryness continues. Candles are lighted and prayers said to stop the earthquake which is destroying the city — the quakings go on until the impulse is ended and the city ruined. It is perfectly impossible to prove answers to prayer in enough cases to convince the thoughtful. Now the speculative thought is that perhaps the prayers offered to an unmanifested God have no effect, for to be effectual the Being appealed to must have a separate existence so as to be able to intervene in separated manifested things. Christians do not possess the statistics of results from prayer offered to gods in Oriental countries. The usual cases brought forward in the West are such as the orphan asylum, for which nothing is asked except in prayer. But in India they have institutions similarly — but not so lavishly — supported and no asking alone save to the particular patron god. It is a matter of strong, constant faith which carries the thoughts of the prayer into the receptive minds of other people, who are then moved by the subconscious injected thought to answer the request. Now if the prayer is offered to an unseen and unknown God the faith of the person is not firm, whereas perhaps in the case of the idol-worshiper or of the Roman Catholic addressing himself to the Mother of God with her image before him, the very presence of the representative is an aid to constancy in faith. All this applies of course to prayers for personal and selfish ends. But that prayer or aspiration which is for spiritual light



and wisdom is the highest of all, no matter to whom or what addressed. All religions teach that sort of prayer; all others are selfish and spiritually useless.

Although the strength of the devotee's devotion and faith for any God or object is due entirely to the Supreme Self, no matter if the faith be foolish and the God false, yet the reward obtained is said to be temporary, transitory, sure to come to an end. But unlike Western religious systems this is declared to be a matter of law instead of being determined by sentiment or arbitrarily. The sentences in which I find this are as follows:

But the reward of such short-sighted men is temporary. Those who worship the Gods go to the Gods, and those who worship me come unto me.

Man, made of thought, occupant only of many bodies from time to time, is eternally thinking. His chains are through thought, his release due to nothing else. His mind is immediately tinted or altered by whatever object it is directed to. By this means the soul is enmeshed in the same thought or series of thoughts as is the mind. If the object be anything that is distinct from the Supreme Self then the mind is at once turned into that, becomes that, is tinted like that. This is one of the natural capacities of the mind. It is naturally clear and uncolored, as we would see if we were able to find one that had not gone through too many experiences. It is movable and quick, having a disposition to bound from one point to another. Several words would describe it. Chameleon-like it changes color, sponge-like it absorbs that to which it is applied, sieve-like it at once loses its former color and shape the moment a different object is taken up. Thus, full of joy from an appropriate cause, it may suddenly become gloomy or morose upon the approach of that which is sorrowful or gloomy. We can therefore say it becomes that to which it is devoted.

Now "the Gods" here represent not only the idols of idol-worshippers, but all the objects and desires people run after. For the idols are but the representatives of the desired object. But all these gods are transitory. If we admit the existence of Indra or any other god, even he is impermanent. Elsewhere it is said that all the gods are subject to the law of death and rebirth — at the time of the great dissolution they disappear. The vain things which men fix their minds on and run after are of the most illusory and transitory character. So whether it be the imaginary gods or the desires and objects the mind is fixed on, it — that is, those who thus act — has only a temporary reward because the object taken is in itself temporary. This is law and not sentiment.

Pushing into details a little further it is said that after death the person, compelled thereto by the thoughts of life, becomes fixed in this, that or the other object or state. That is why the intermediate condition of kama-loka is a necessity. In that state they become what they thought. They were bigots and tortured others: those thoughts give them torture. Internal fires consume them until they are purified. The varieties of their different conditions and appearances are as vast in number as are all the immense varieties of thoughts. I could not describe them.

But those who worship or believe in the Self as all-in-all, not separate from any, supreme, the container, the whole, go to It, and, becoming It, know all because of its



knowledge, and cease to be subject to change because It is changeless. This also is law, and not sentiment.

The chapter concludes by showing how the ignorant who believe in a Supreme Being with a form, fall into error and darkness at the time of their birth because of the hold which former life-recollections have upon the mind. This includes the power of the skandhas or aggregates of sensations and desires accumulated in prior lives. At birth these, being a natural part of us, rush to us and we to them, so that a new union is made for another lifetime. In the other life, not having viewed the Self as all and in all, and having worshiped many gods, the sensations of liking and disliking are so strong that the darkness of rebirth is irresistible. But the wise man died out of his former life with a full knowledge of the Self at the hour of death, and thus prevented the imprinting upon his nature of a set of sensations and desires that would otherwise, upon reincarnation, lead him into error.

This is the chapter on Unity, teaching that the Self is all, or if you like the word better, God: that God is all and not outside of nature, and that we must recognize this great unity of all things and beings in the Self. It and the next chapter are on the same subject and are only divided by a question put by Arjuna.

