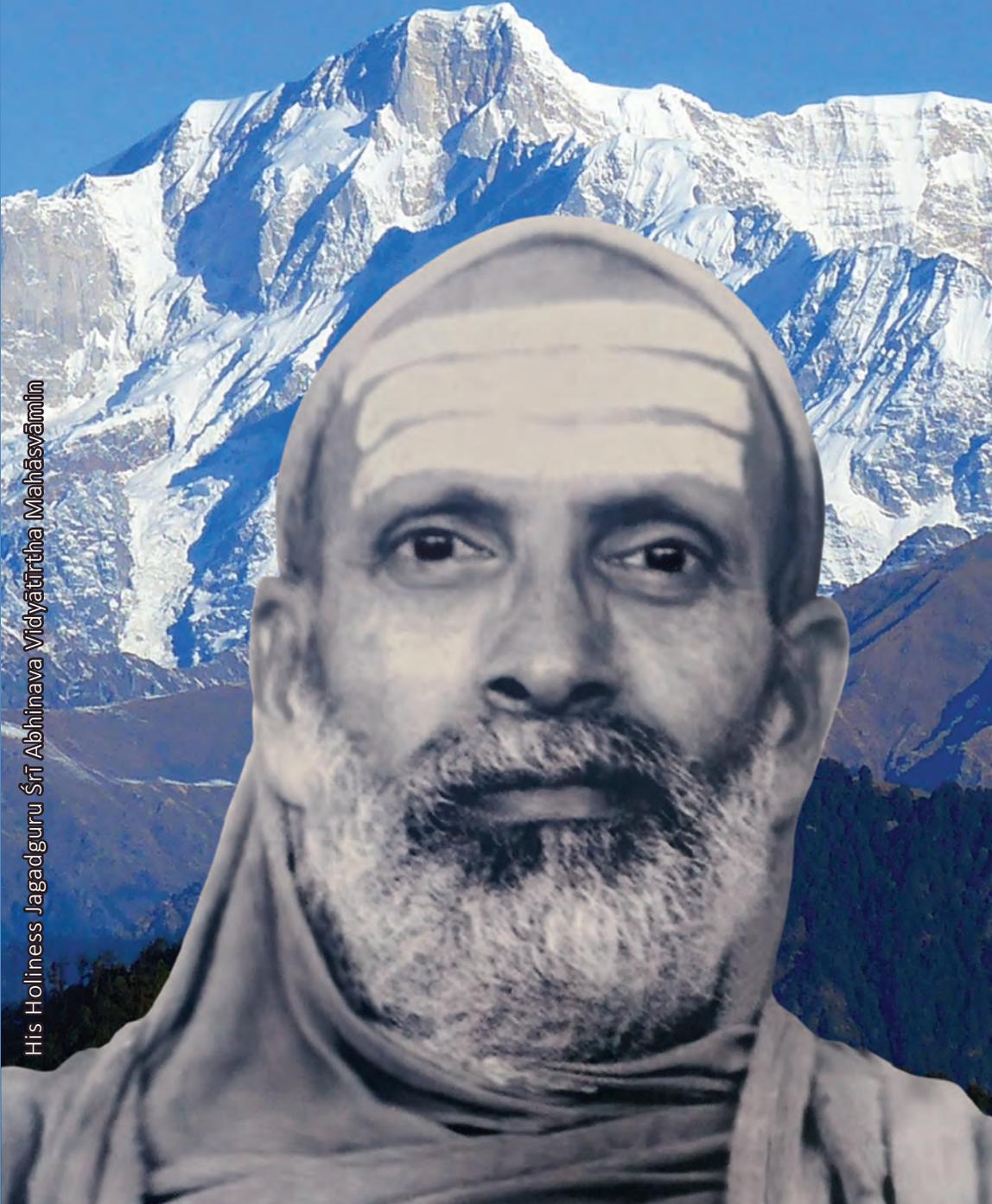


From Sorrows to Bliss



His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāśvāmin

From Sorrows to Bliss

Definitive Answers, Motivating Narratives,
Scriptural Expositions and Incisive Essays of
His Holiness Jagadguru
Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin



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Dedication



श्रुतायां यदुक्तौ न हि श्राव्यशेषः सुरूपे च दृष्टे न दृश्यावशेषः ।
नतेऽङ्घ्रौ न कृत्यं दयाप्तौ न लभ्यं न माहात्म्यसीमा च येषां भजे तान् ॥

(I worship Him whose greatness has no limit, on hearing whose words, nothing remains to be heard, on seeing whose graceful form, nothing remains to be seen, on prostrating before whose feet, nothing remains to be done and on obtaining whose grace, nothing remains to be attained.)

**This book is humbly dedicated at the lotus feet of
His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin.**



Salutations to the Jagadgurus



**Jagadguru Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha Mahāsvāmin,
the 36th Shankaracharya and the present Pontiff
of Sringeri Sri Sharada Peetham along with His disciple
Jagadguru Śrī Vidhuśekhara Bhāratī Svāmin**



His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin

14th December, 1935. It was a cold winter night at Sringeri, a hamlet in Southern India. While the whole village was fast asleep, in His abode at Narasimhavana, on the banks of the gently flowing Tunga, a sage in His teens was seated motionless, engaged in deep meditation. His breathing was hardly perceptible. His very silence was radiating peace. He was radiant with *tejas*, like a *yogin* of yore. Hours lapsed but the sage was blissfully oblivious of the passage of time, absorbed as He was in the infinite *Brahman*, a state which the scriptures describe as *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the acme of *yoga*. The intensity of His *nirvikalpa-samādhis* of the preceding days had been such that He was disinclined towards everything concerning the external world. That day, He was hardly aware of even partaking of food. By the evening, His mind was so intoxicated by the bliss of *Brahman* that even His religious rituals, which He normally performed with much focus, fared very badly. Before retiring to His room in the night, He skipped His food as He felt too disinclined to eat. There, the saint sat down and straightaway went into *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. The night was almost over and He showed no signs of waking up from His trance.

The saint would have continued to remain in that state, engrossed in *Brahman*, until His body would have fallen off on its own. However, divine design was different. Impelled by a *preraṇā*, a divine instruction, His *Guru* arrived at the scene before the night ended and chanted *praṇava* to awaken His disciple from *samādhi*. Slowly, the saint's chest heaved to accept some air and His eyes opened. He became aware of His body and the presence of His *Guru*. As instructed by His *Guru*, He restrained His mind from again plunging into *samādhi*.

Next morning, the *Guru* again spoke to His young disciple, "I knew that Your mind was becoming more and more absorbed in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Last night, the Lord made it clear to Me that Your *samādhi* had become so intense that You would not emerge from it on Your own. Unless aroused from *samādhi*, You would remain in it till physical death. You have transcended any need for *samādhi* as You are unswervingly established in *Brahman*. Regulate your *samādhi* and the introversion of mind."

The *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* describes the sixth and seventh planes of Knowledge thus: "In the sixth plane, one emerges from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* only when awakened by the persons nearby. Such a *yogin* is termed a *brahmavid-varīyān* (greater knower of *Brahman*)... The *yogin* who has reached the

seventh plane called *turīya* never emerges from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* either by himself or in response to the efforts of another. Such a *yogin* is called a *brahmavid-variṣṭha* (the best knower of *Brahman*).”

The saint whose establishment in the Absolute was of such a high order was none other than His Holiness Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin, the 35th Jagadguru Shankaracharya of the Sringeri Sri Sharada Peetham. His Guru was Jagadguru Śrī Candraśekhara Bhāratī Mahāsvāmin, the 34th pontiff of the Peetham, who Himself was a thoroughly dispassionate saint and a renowned *jīvanmukta*.

His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin was born in Bengaluru on 13th November, 1917. His *upanayana* was performed on 4th May, 1930. He renounced the world and embraced *samnyāsa* on 22nd May, 1931. With the direct guidance of God and His *Guru*, He intensely engaged in spiritual practices right from the day of His renunciation and these culminated in His enlightenment and establishment in the Supreme Brahman on 12th December, 1935. His Holiness adorned the Peetham as its Pontiff for 35 years (1954-1989). During this period, He extensively toured the country spreading *dharma*, expounding the philosophical Truth and gracing people in myriad ways. He was a visionary instrumental in the setting up of various religious and secular institutions to benefit the public. He attained *mahāsamādhi* on 21st September, 1989.

Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin’s flawless character, noble virtues, intense dispassion, deep devotion to God and His *Guru*, thorough grasp of *Vedānta*, profound meditation, direct realization of the Supreme and *jīvanmukti* made Him stand out as a living testimony to the scriptural statements about enlightened sages. Exceptionally kind and egoless, He was an accessible *Guru* par excellence who touched the hearts of the hundreds of thousands who came into contact with Him, mitigated unhappiness, conferred happiness and uplifted people, even to the extent of liberating them once and for all from the bondage of *samsāra*. His very life is a teaching for every one.

This publication, ‘**From Sorrows to Bliss**’, comprises the invaluable teachings of His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin presented in four parts namely, *Definitive Answers*, *Motivating Narratives*, *Scriptural Expositions* and *Incisive Essays*.

Vidyashankar Krishnan
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I - DEFINITIVE ANSWERS	1
Guru	2
Īśvara	6
Worship of Īśvara With Form	9
Mental Worship	10
Gaṅgā	11
Vedas	11
Distinctness of the Ātman From the Body	16
Rebirth	18
Fate and Free Will	19
Dharma	22
Ahimsā	28
Uprooting Desire	30
Mastery Over Anger	31
Karma-yoga	32
Devotion	35
Study of the Vedānta-Śāstra	40
Brahmacarya	42
Samnyāsin	44
Controlling the Mind	46
Dhyāna	49
Nirvikalpa-Samādhi	54
Nādānusandhāna	58
Lambikā-Yoga	59
Kuṇḍalinī	62
Amanaska-Yoga	64

Māyā	66
Waking State and the Dream State	70
Nature of Bondage	73
The Means to Attain Mokṣa	75
Differing Views In Advaita Texts	76
Jñānin	77
PART 2 – MOTIVATING NARRATIVES	81
Insidious Attack of Desire	82
Harmfulness of Anger	83
Veda Determines What is Dharma	87
Spotlight on Speaking the Truth	87
Truth and Silence	88
Subtle Aspects of Truthfulness	89
Vedic Chanting Should be Error-Free	92
Parents and Children	93
Thankfulness	94
Benefits of Charity	97
Charity in Keeping with Capacity	97
Lord Rāma and the Profundity of Dharma	98
Though Unseen, God Exists	105
Atheist in a Quandary	105
God’s Merciful Justice	106
Jīva, the Reflection, and God, the Prototype	107
Anyone Can Tread the Path of Devotion	108
Forms of God	110
Light on Idol Worship	111
Gopuras Induce Humility	113
Significance of Śivarātri	113

To Which Deity Should a Person Pray	114
Characteristic of a Great Devotee	114
Concentration	115
Fate and Free Will	116
Influence of Food on the Mind	124
How a Householder Should Conduct Himself	125
Karma-yoga	127
Fitness for Knowledge of the Supreme	130
Contentment	131
The Feeling, “Mine,” Kills Peace	132
The Source of Happiness	134
Entrapment in Eddies	135
Need for a Guru	136
The Sadguru Graces All Immaculately	136
Where Censure is a Blessing	139
The Sadguru Rewards Unstinted Guru-Sevā	145
Teaching Through Silence	146
Brahma’s Advice: “Da, Da, Da”	147
Essentiality of Humility	148
Some Errors of Disciples	149
Teachers to Avoid	150
The Hypocrisy of Pseudo-Advaitins	154
Search Without Dismantlement	156
Superficial Knowledge	156
Overlooking What is Immediate	156
Upaniṣads are a Flawless Means of Knowledge	157
Unreal Can Point to the Real	158
Recognition of Identity	158

Mind, the Cause of Bondage and Liberation	159
Renunciation of Everything	162
Illusoriness of the World	165
Vision of Unity	169
Lessons from Śuka's Life	171
PART – 3 SCRIPTURAL EXPOSITIONS	179
Eight Great Qualities	180
Stages of Devotion	183
Prostrate, Surrender and Become Blessed	184
The Nectar of Devotion	186
Fundamental Tenets of the Bhagavadgītā	189
True Advaitins and Pseudo-Advaitins are Poles Apart	191
Essential Prerequisites For Knowing the Supreme	192
The Source of All Evil	195
Three Impure Tendencies	197
God, the Universe's Cause	201
God is Neither Partial Nor Cruel	203
No Total Change of Brahman Into the World	205
The Greatest Secret	207
Atman is Self-effulgent Consciousness	209
Liberation of Sages with Divine Missions	211
PART 4 – INCISIVE ESSAYS	215
Worship of Īśvara	216
Demonstration of the Need for the Śāstra	223
Direct Knowledge of the Ātman	228

PART 1

DEFINITIVE ANSWERS

This part is a record of many questions posed to His Holiness and His answers. Most of the dialogues presented here took place in Tamil and the rest in Hindi and in Kannada and they have all been rendered into English. His Holiness cited scriptural passages in Sanskrit. The translations of these have been put in italics and the references given as footnotes. The dialogues have been grouped under 31 heads and include even answers that have not been reported earlier; what was published earlier has been freshly edited and partially reordered by the disciple who had compiled them. As can be seen, His Holiness's answers about different forms of meditation, samādhi (the acme of meditation), enlightenment and the state of a jīvanmukta (one liberated while living) bear the stamp of His direct experience.

1. GURU

Disciple: Is a *Guru* necessary for one who desires *mokṣa* (liberation)?

His Holiness: Very much.

D: What is the chief characteristic of a *Guru*?

HH: A *Guru* should be a *jñānin* (one who has realised the Truth). Further, he should be interested in the well-being of his disciple.

D: Nowadays, many pose as sages. Such being the case, how is one to identify a real *Guru*?

HH: No specific rules exist regarding this. If we are very sincere, *Īśvara* Himself will lead us to a *Guru*. We can see for ourselves whether the person whom we wish to have as a *Guru* is a *jñānin* and desires our well-being. Though it is difficult to conclude whether one is a *jñānin* or not, we can use the description of a *jñānin* contained in the *Bhagavadgītā* as a yardstick. However, while doing this, it should be remembered that the description was not given to select *jñānins*.

D: What should be the attitude of the disciple towards his *Guru*?

HH: He should not view the *Guru*, *Īśvara* and *Ātman* as different. It is said:

*Salutation to Him who is manifest variously as Īśvara, Guru and Ātman.*¹

The disciple should always follow the instructions of his *Guru*. Regardless of any contrary opinion of others, he should treat his *Guru*'s directions as final.

D: Can one who has not attained *jñāna* bestow the knowledge of the *Ātman* on another?

HH: *One cannot comprehend the Ātman even by deep enquiry if one is taught by a person who has not realised the Ātman. When taught by the teacher who is a jñānin, one attains liberation.*²

D: Is it wrong on the part of a spiritual aspirant to listen to others

¹ *Manasollasa* I.30

² *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* I.2.8

commenting adversely on his *Guru* or *Īśvara*?

HH: Yes.

D: What should he do in such a situation?

HH: If the person who criticises is amenable to reason, he may be asked not to criticise. If not, the disciple should leave his presence.

D: What may a person desirous of going to a *Guru* and leading a spiritual life do prior to the attainment of a *Guru*?

HH: He can worship *Īśvara* mentally. There is no restriction in doing this. The method of performing such mental worship has been elucidated in the *Mṛtyuñjaya-mānasapūjā-stotra*, *Śiva-mānasapūjā-stotra*, etc. It is good to develop devotion towards *Īśvara* by dedicating the fruits of all actions to Him. Firm dispassion should be acquired by means of discrimination. Sincere prayer is potent in enabling one to get a proper *Guru*.

D: At what age should spiritual practices be commenced?

HH: The earlier we start, the better. Were not Prahlāda and Dhruva young boys when they began their spiritual practices?

D: Is the *Guru's upadeśa* necessary for one interested in material life?

HH: Is a doctor necessary for one affected by a disease?

D: Yes.

HH: If a person desires pleasure in worldly life, does he get it to the extent that he wants? Not at all. Even to attain worldly happiness, would it not be wise to seek guidance? The blessings of a knower of the Truth are extremely potent. Hence, whatever may be the way of life desired, it is advisable to seek the grace and guidance of a saint.

D: Though some people wish to carry out the instructions of their *Guru*, they do not always act accordingly. They also have a wrong idea that they can get happiness through some other means. How are such thoughts to be prevented?

HH: Will not even a worldly person have an impression regarding a saint to the effect, "He is much more knowledgeable than I am?"

D: Yes.

HH: Will not a *Guru* consider the well-being and the difficulties of his disciple?

D: Yes.

HH: The *Guru* is concerned with our welfare. He knows more than we do. He has understood our difficulties. Since this is so, if he gives us some advice, will it not be for our own good? If the disciple firmly establishes such an idea in his mind, he will act according to his *Guru*'s instructions. When difficulties arise in following the instructions, he should think, "It is good for me to act as per his instructions." Then, vacillation will cease.

D: Some people hesitate to disclose their problems to their *Guru*. Hence, when it is difficult to carry out his orders, they get the doubt, "My *Guru* has given this advice for my own good. But there are certain difficulties in following it. I am of limited capacity. How then am I to act as per his instructions?"

HH: Is it not sheer foolishness if a person hides facts about his disease when he goes to a doctor? Therefore, we should spell out our difficulties to our *Guru* without any hesitation. It is our duty. Even if that is not done, as the *Guru* is a knower of the Truth, his instructions will be only in accordance with the will of *Īśvara*. This being the case, whatever he says will be appropriate for us. If we do not have the capacity to follow his instructions, even that capacity will be obtained by his grace. An ideal disciple will indeed act as per his *Guru*'s instructions and not give place to thoughts such as, "Is it possible for me to do as he says? Shall I try something else?" If we follow our *Guru*'s instructions, it does not mean that we are unintelligent. It only implies that we have surrendered ourselves, for our own good, to a power superior to us.

D: Is it possible for even a heinous sinner to progress in spiritual life if he obtains a great *Guru*'s grace?

HH: If the blessings of *Īśvara* and the *Guru* are got, even the worst sinner can progress. However, we should not be careless thinking, "We will progress in life just by the power of grace."

D: Sometimes, even those who have committed many ill-deeds become the recipients of the blessings of great souls. Certain others are quite moral. Still, they are seen to be deprived of similar blessings. Holy ones are not guilty of favouritism. Why then should such disparity be observed?

HH: We should infer the cause from the effect. A certain person is morally inferior to another. Yet, it can be seen that he enjoys divine

grace to a greater extent. There should be some reason behind this. What could it be? The cause may be analysed thus: “If the present life of the sinner is looked into, no reason can be found. However, enquiry into this birth alone is insufficient as there has been a birth previous to this. There, he might have done very many good deeds. Therefore, he becomes a recipient of divine grace in this birth. Hence, it can be inferred that even though he may not be leading a morally sound life now, as he is receiving a saint’s blessings, he should have acquired *punya* (merit) in his previous birth itself.” It is wrong to infer that a saint is partial. Nothing remains to be attained by a *jīvanmukta* (one liberated while alive). “I have a liking towards this person. Therefore, I should shower my blessings on him. The other individual is not a favourite of mine. So I need not bless him” – such notions are not entertained by him. Whether he chooses to bless others or not, he stands to gain nothing, as he has attained what is to be attained.

D: If it is only due to merit acquired in the previous birth that one gets divine grace, will not grace become an object “bought” by *punya*?

HH: The light of a lamp falls on its surroundings. One may study the *śāstras* in that light, while another may pay no attention to it and sleep. The great souls are always showering their grace. Each one can derive benefit depending on one’s own mentality. If one takes a big vessel to a pond, one can bring a large quantity of water. Just because a small vessel can hold little water, it does not mean that the vessel itself is the limit for the capacity of the pond. Similarly, if a person has acquired merit in his previous birth, he might get the good company of a great soul. However, he may not fully utilise the opportunity. Another one, though not having got the same opportunity may, by exploiting the available chance to the greatest extent possible, soon become the recipient of the grace of a sage.

D: If the *Guru* has blessed his disciple with his *pādukās*, how should the disciple respect them?

HH: Whatever reverence he has towards his *Guru* should be there towards the *pādukās* also. Every day, after devoutly prostrating before them, he should place sandal paste and flowers on them. It may seem good to perform *abhiṣeka* to them daily. If, however, they be made of wood and if the disciple desires that they be with him for long, he himself can decide how sensible it would be to offer *abhiṣeka* daily. If he pays respects to his *Guru*’s *pādukās*

with sincerity or if he prays to them with true devotion, he shall get the fruits of the very same actions done directly in his *Guru*'s presence. So he should never be careless as regards the *pādukās*.

D: If a disciple desires to meditate on the *pādukās*, how should he proceed?

HH: He can meditate on the *Guru*'s feet as adorned by the *pādukās*.

D: How should a disciple conduct himself in the presence of his *Guru*?

HH: He should have a reverential attitude towards him. He should serve him whenever he gets an opportunity. However, he should also get his permission before doing so. If any clarification is required, he can ask him when he is not engaged in any activity. He should be sincere in his studies, always thinking that it is his great fortune to learn from his *Guru*. He should constantly keep in mind the instructions of his *Guru* and lead his life accordingly.

2. ĪŚVARA

D: Some people get a doubt as to whether *Īśvara* really exists or not. This is because they are unable to see Him. Cannot *Īśvara*, by some means, reveal to them His existence so as to induce *śraddhā* (faith) in them?

HH: *Īśvara* Himself seems to have been caught in a fix. If He were to give *darśana* to them, He would have to assume some form. On seeing the form, people may say, "You have a form. Therefore, you are not omnipresent and cannot be *Īśvara*." If He does not give them *darśana* by assuming a form, they may say, "We do not see *Īśvara*. Hence, there is no *Īśvara*." Thus, there are some people who will not believe in *Īśvara* regardless of whether He takes a form or not. In this situation, what indeed can *Īśvara* do? Variety is the nature of the world. We have the group of atheists also. Faith in *Īśvara* can be induced and further developed, but there is no use in attempting to induce it by force. Arguments could be advanced and the true experiences of many devotees could be cited. Many wonderful incidents that have taken place could be narrated. What has been made known in the *śāstras* could be quoted. Still, if one does not believe that *Īśvara* exists, what can be done?

D: Can a devotee see *Īśvara*?

HH: You mean with form?

D: Yes.

HH: *Īśvara*, though without form, can take one for the sake of His devotees. If we have limitless devotion, we can definitely see *Īśvara*'s form. There is no doubt at all about this.

D: Does Your Holiness mean that one can see *Īśvara*'s form mentally or that one can perceive Him even with the eyes?

HH: *Īśvara* is capable of giving *darśana* both ways.

D: Does Your Holiness say that He can be seen, talked to and touched?

HH: Yes. If there is pure devotion, *Īśvara* is sure to reveal Himself. When He does appear, why cannot one talk with Him?

D: Can this happen even in this *kaliyuga*?

HH: What link is there between a devoted person seeing *Īśvara* and the *kaliyuga*?

D: Who can get *Īśvara*'s vision?

HH: He who longs exclusively for *Īśvara* can see Him. Limitless devotion compels *Īśvara* to come to us.

D: How can one know whether the experience one had in connection with *Īśvara* is real or not?

HH: For him, who has had a real experience, such a doubt will not arise.

D: What about the others? Can they not think that his experiences stem from hallucination or self-hypnosis?

HH: What does one who has had the experience lose by others not accepting it? The acceptance or rejection by others does not affect the experience of that person in the least. Though this is the case, I will give a more direct answer to your question.

Suppose that *Īśvara*, while appearing in a vision, gives a fruit or some other object to His devotee. If the fruit remains with the disciple even after *Īśvara* disappears, then it can be realised that the experience was real. Such an experience changes the mentality of the devotee. Though the experience may have lasted only for a short duration, its impact lasts long. Further, those who have had such experiences become capable of transforming others. If the person who has had the divine experience is quite healthy, why should he start concocting things all of a sudden? If a person is to

get involved in self-hypnosis, he can do that any time. On the other hand, special experiences of the kind being considered are not had whenever one desires them. By such an analysis, a true experience can be differentiated from a hallucination.

- D: Why is there so much suffering in this world? Since it is *Īśvara* who created this world, is He not responsible for these troubles?
- HH: A person experiences misery only because of his past deeds. One's actions must bear fruit. Due to the fructification of one's previous misdeeds, one suffers in this birth. It is wrong to say that *Īśvara* is the cause of these sufferings. Human beings have the freedom to follow the injunctions of the *śāstras* or to transgress them. A person acquires *puṇya* (merit) or *pāpa* (demerit) as a result of his actions and *Īśvara* just gives the fruits of those actions. When it is said that it is the foul deed of a previous birth that causes suffering in this birth, one may ask about the cause of the suffering experienced in that previous birth. The answer is, "It is the *karma* (action) of the births prior to that birth." As *samsāra* (cycle of birth and death) has no beginning, it is improper to seek to identify a first birth in which we started life without any *karma*. While creating the universe at the commencement of each *kalpa*, *Īśvara* manifests what was in the previous *kalpa*. He does not create anything fresh from nothing.
- D: It is said that *Īśvara* is aware of the past, present and future. If He knows what is going to happen, then it means that people's future actions are completely predetermined. If that is the case, a person is fully bound by the dictates of destiny and cannot be held responsible for his actions. On the other hand, if a person has freedom to decide the course of events, then the future is not pre-fixed. In such a case, even *Īśvara* cannot know the future with certainty. Therefore, how can one say that He is omniscient?
- HH: The world is a play of *Māyā*, while *Īśvara* is the Controller of *Māyā*. In this sense, everything goes on according to His will, which is what appears both as the free will of people and as fate. If regarded in this way, the statements that He is omniscient and that everything need not occur according to just the dictates of fate can be simultaneously true.

The issue can be considered in another way too. Let us suppose that a boy does not at all prepare for an examination. Then, can we not say with certainty that he will not pass? Just because we say

this, can it be said that the student does not have the freedom to read or not to read? Definitely not. In the same way, if we take it that *Īśvara* has understood His creation in its entirety, then also there is no difficulty in asserting that *Īśvara* is omniscient and that destiny alone is not the deciding factor.

3. WORSHIP OF ĪŚVARA WITH FORM

F (Foreigner): Do Hindus worship many Gods?

HH: We believe that there is only one Supreme Lord who has no form and who is responsible for the creation, sustenance and annihilation of the entire universe. However, He assumes many forms for the sake of His devotees. With whatever name and in whichever form His devotees seek Him, accordingly do they worship Him. You might have heard of Indra, etc. These terms refer to divine positions held at different times by the souls that have acquired adequate virtue. You should not confuse the occupants of such posts with the previously mentioned Supreme Being.

F: Will Your Holiness kindly say something about worship of idols?

HH: We do not worship mere stones. If we did, then, on seeing a stone idol, we would have addressed it as, “O Stone” and not as “O Lord.” We use idols as aids to our worship, realising that it is He who resides in them. In the temple deities, divine presence is installed through the *kumbhābhiṣeka* performed to consecrate the idols. This is strengthened by the sincerity and *tapas* (austerity) of the priests performing the *pūjā* and by the special characteristics of certain idols. Though without form, *Īśvara* is capable of giving *darśana* to His devotees. He indeed does so.

F: During *pūjā* I saw Your Holiness pour water, milk, etc., on the *Śiva-liṅga*. What do these acts signify?

HH: During *pūjā*, we ceremonially worship *Īśvara*. In its course, we give Him a bath and that was the *abhiṣeka* that you saw. We wipe Him with a cloth and then offer Him food. Though the limitless and formless *Īśvara* is not in need of anything, our devotion makes us perceive and worship Him in idols. In terms familiar to you, *abhiṣeka* is a ‘shower-bath’ that we give *Īśvara*.

4. MENTAL WORSHIP

- D: Some people desire to perform *pūjā* but find no suitable opportunity. They are also unable to meditate properly. What can such spiritual aspirants do to have one-pointed concentration of the mind?
- HH: They can practise *mānasika-pūjā*.
- D: What is *mānasika-pūjā*?
- HH: *Mānasika-pūjā* is mental worship of *Īśvara*. Flowers, incense, etc., are required for *pūjā*. Here, we imagine all the accessories, conceive that *Īśvara* has come and offer them to Him.
- D: How should *mānasika-pūjā* be practised?
- HH: “*Īśvara* has come. I should welcome Him. I should offer Him an *āsana* (seat)” – contemplating thus, we welcome Him and offer Him an *āsana*. After He adorns the *āsana*, we wash His feet and His hands. For His *ācamana*, we give Him pure water. He accepts that. We then bathe Him. Proceeding thus, we complete the *pūjā* mentally. We do so with the conviction that He accepts our mental offerings and service.
- D: What is to be done if *Īśvara*’s form does not remain steady during *mānasika-pūjā*?
- HH: One can keep before oneself a picture of one’s *iṣṭa-devatā* (chosen Deity). The mental *pūjā* may be done while looking at the picture. After some time, the *pūjā* can be continued with the eyes closed, conceiving that *Īśvara* is present at that place. If the form becomes unsteady, the eyes can be opened for a while.
- D: Is there any restriction in doing *mānasika-pūjā*?
- HH: There is no restriction. It can be done at any time and in any way. Charming effects are seen if *Īśvara* is worshipped mentally. The mind becomes purified and His grace is obtained. To get an idea about *mānasika-pūjā*, *stotras* like the *Śiva-mānasapūjā-stotra* and *Mṛtyuñjaya-mānasa-pūjā-stotra* may be studied.
- D: Is everyone permitted to practise *mānasika-pūjā*?
- HH: Yes. There are no restrictions.
- D: How long should *mānasika-pūjā* be done?
- HH: It can be done for any length of time. Initially, it may be difficult

to practise it for a long time. But, with repeated practice, one will find increasing delight in it.

5. GAṄGĀ

- D: It is believed that the river Gaṅgā effaces one's sins. Does it?
- HH: Yes. Why is there any doubt about it?
- D: If Gaṅgā removes one's sins, can one commit any sin and then get rid of it by bathing in the Gaṅgā?
- HH: A dip in the Gaṅgā will remove those sins that are unknowingly done or knowingly done once for which we are repentant. It is not fair to expect Gaṅgā to free one from an intentional sin done with the idea, "I will bathe in the Gaṅgā and get rid of it." However, one need not have even an iota of doubt regarding the greatness of Gaṅgā. Crores of people travel long distances with the firm faith that they will be purified by a bath in the Gaṅgā. *Īśvara* does not let their faith go unrewarded."

There is a story in this connection. Once, Pārvatī asked Śiva whether Gaṅgā would remove the sins of all. By way of answering, Śiva took on the appearance of an old man and took Pārvatī, in the garb of His aged wife, to the banks of Ganges. He told Her that He would pretend to be drowning and that She should raise an alarm. She screamed to attract the attention of the passers-by and sought their help. People rushed to rescue Him. Pārvatī, however, stopped them and, as earlier instructed by Śiva, said, "Only that person who has not the slightest trace of sin can touch My husband." Only one among the throng dived in without the least hesitation and rescued Him. Surprised, Pārvatī asked the rescuer if he was free from all sins. He replied, "Did I not enter the Gaṅgā to save your husband? My sins vanished at that very instant." Śiva later told Pārvatī, "All one's sins are surely washed away if one has such faith in the Ganga."

6. VEDAS

- D: It is said that the *Vedas* are *anādi* (without a beginning). Are they?
- HH: Yes. They are like the breath of the Supreme Being.
- D: Some say that the *Vedas* were authored thousands of years ago by

the Aryans and that the *Upaniṣads* were written much later. Is there any flaw in accepting this view?

HH: This view is not acceptable to us. If the *Upaniṣads* were written long after the *Vedas*, why should the *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* now be considered as constituting the seventh, eighth and ninth *praśnas* of the *Taittirīya-āranyaka* at all places? If it is accepted that *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* was written at a particular place and after *Vedas* were written, why should all people consider it as part and parcel of the *Veda*? Further, why should they accept it as belonging to that very position to which it is assigned?

Let us suppose that the *Vedas* were written many years ago. Were the ‘authors’ of the *Vedas* sincere, or were they intent on cheating others? The *Vedas* speak about sacrifices that should be performed to attain heaven. We can get this knowledge only from the *Vedas*. Hence, if Vedic authors were sincere, they could not have written on their own about the sacrifices to attain heaven. On the other hand, suppose that they were frauds. Why should they themselves have performed these sacrifices?

Those who teach the *Vedas* are particular that during recitation no error should occur either in the words chanted or in the *svaras* (intonations). Why are they so particular? Merely because those who had taught them the *Vedas* had instructed them that the exact words and their *svaras* are vital and that any error would not bring benefit. Proceeding likewise from a student of the *Veda* to his *Guru* and, further, to his *Guru’s Guru* and so on up to the so-called authors of the *Vedas*, it will be seen that they too should have held the belief that the *svaras* are very important. Why did the so-called authors of the *Vedas* insist on the proper *svaras* in spite of the fact that it would be easier to learn the *Vedas* without *svaras*? Is it not because of their having known that *Vedas* are holy and that no changes whatsoever should creep into them? They could not have considered books written by themselves as very holy. Hence, they could not have been the authors of the *Vedas*.

Even scholars accept that *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed thousands of years ago. We find that Rāma of Ayodhya knew the *Vedas*. We also come to know that Rāvaṇa, who ruled over Lanka, knew the *Vedas*. How could the *Vedas* have spread so widely even at that ancient age? It takes many years to learn even a portion of the *Vedas*. In the days of yore, the *Vedas* were studied without the aid of books. They could have spread over vast regions and the

recitation technique could have been carefully preserved only if studied by all in the same fashion, with the conviction that they are holy.

If the *Vedas* were written by primitive men, how is it that they are so potent? Apparently incurable ailments have been cured by Vedic means. People have come across such incidents. If the *Vedas* were merely ordinary books written in olden times, they could not have had such potency.

In the light of points such as these, we confidently consider *Vedas* to be the direct teachings of the Supreme Being.

- D: If the *Vedas* emerged from the Supreme, how are different *ṛṣis* associated with various *mantras*? *Ṛṣis* are the authors of the *mantras*, are they not?
- HH: *Ṛṣis* are not the authors of the *mantras* with which their names are associated. Sages acquired the realisation of the essence of the *mantras* from God and made them known in the world. They did not produce the *mantras* on their own. Brahmā taught the *Vedas* at the time of His creation of man. Being a manifestation of the Lord, Vyāsa subsequently took the diminished capacity of the people of the *kaliyuga* into consideration and codified the *Vedas*.
- D: We find many stories in the *Vedas*. Are they accounts of historical events?
- HH: No. The stories do not relate to actual worldly incidents. The *Vedas* are like the breath of the Supreme Being and have no beginning. So they are not the records of the historical events of any age. The *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad*, for instance, contains a dialogue between Sage Yajñavalkya and King Janaka. This is not the retelling of a conversation between two individuals who lived in some specific period. An event similar to that narrated could have occurred at some time but it cannot be said that this is what has been cited in the *Upaniṣad*. The stories in the *Vedas* aid one's comprehension of the scriptural instructions.
- D: Long ago, through the process of evolution, man gradually came into being. In the early stages, his brain was much less developed than the human brain is now. He led a primitive existence. In due course, his brain improved to the present level. The Lord could have then taught him the *Veda*. Is there any flaw in conceiving thus? If we have it this way, the findings of palaeontologists are

not contradicted and, at the same time, it is admitted that the *Veda* was revealed by *Īśvara*. What does Your Holiness have to say about this?

HH: This is unsatisfactory. Simultaneous with His creation of man, the Lord should have taught him the *Veda*. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

At the outset, having created mankind along with yajñas, the Creator said...¹

Yajñas (scriptural sacrifices) have the *Vedas* for their basis. For a *yajña* to be performed, the *Veda* is needed. Thus, the Lord's words imply that *Īśvara* taught the *Veda* when He created the world. If we do not accept this view, we cannot give logical replies to many queries. If a primitive man predated the *Veda*, he could not have known what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*. Since, the norms of righteousness and unrighteousness were not revealed to him by God, did God simply treat his actions as virtuous and reward him or just treat them as sinful and punish him? If his actions fetched him the rewards of righteousness, we are forced to conclude, "Before the *Veda* came into being, good fruits were obtained for whatever one did but after *Veda* came to light, one also reaps unpleasant fruits for one's actions." Is this fair? Further, can one accept the conclusion that before the *Veda* came to light, one did not have to go to hell at all as one always secured good results, whereas after the revelation of *Veda*, the possibility of going to hell arose? If the view that all actions led to bad consequences were accepted, then also the implication is queer.

Therefore, at the outset itself, the Lord should have revealed the *Veda*. That is to say, He should have, at the outset itself, made known what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*. Thus, it is improper to hold that the *Veda* came to light only much after the appearance of man.

D: Scientists have obtained numerous fossils that establish that many millions of years ago dinosaurs lived and held sway in the world. Further, fossil and other evidence establishes that much after that there lived human-like beings whose brains were less developed than those of modern humans. Must fossils and other such evidence be unavoidably disregarded for maintaining the traditional view

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* III.10

about the *Vedas*? Or, is it possible to somehow support the traditional view logically even while acknowledging fossils, etc.

HH: There is no need to disregard fossils and the like. Here is a possible reconciliation based on an example. Let us suppose that you have a dream in which you see yourself as a ten-year-old boy. Should you not logically conclude that you must have been a child earlier?

D: Yes.

HH: Did the dream start from the time you were a babe?

D: No. The dream begins suddenly revealing me as a ten-year-old boy.

HH: That is, even though it suits logic to say that in the dream you should have been a small boy initially, in reality it was not so. Do you agree?

D: Yes.

HH: It is not proper to extrapolate backwards in time because of the abrupt commencement of the dream. A traditional view is that the world came about abruptly like a dream. It has been stated in the *Veda-bhāṣya* on the fifth *mantra* of the *Nāsadiya-sūkta* of the *Rg-veda* that just as light spreads all over in a trice when the sun rises, likewise creation occurred in a trice. Going by this, it is possible that humans appeared with a developed brain. What I have given you is a glimpse of one kind of reconciliation. Other varieties of reconciliations too can be advanced.

D: Is it mandatory that the *Veda* must be learnt only from *Guru*? Can one not learn it on one's own, such as by means of a tape recorder?

HH: The *Veda* must be learnt only from a *Guru*. Hence, it is been said:

*All learning by heart of the Veda is preceded by its having being learnt by heart by the Guru.*¹

If one attempts to learn it from a recorded tape, it can never be true *vedādhyayana* (study of the *Veda*). If a parrot says, "Come here", a person generally does not assign value to the words and go to the parrot. On the other hand, if another person calls him with the same words, he goes to the caller. The difference lies not in the words but only in the speakers. *Vedādhyayana* is characterised by a *śiṣya* listening to his *Guru* reciting the *Veda* and then repeating the same.

¹ *Ślokavārtika* 1.1.7.366

It is not learning with the aid of recorded sound. A recorded voice does not have the sanctity and power of a *Guru* chanting the *Veda*.

D: The *Rudra-prśna* is chanted during *śiva-pūjā* and the much has been stated about the greatness of these *veda-mantras*. However in some portions of the *Rudra-praśna*, there are prayers for material benefits.

HH: So what?

D: Can a person who desires *mokṣa* alone chant these *mantras*? After all he is not interested in the material benefits prayed for.

HH: The *śāstras* say that even *saṁnyāsins* can chant the *Rudram*. It is well known that *saṁnyāsins* should not desire material objects.

D: How are they allowed to chant the *Rudram*?

HH: Whenever one chants *vedamantras*, it does not mean that one has to desire the objects mentioned there. *Mantras*, such as the *Rudram*, are very sacred. If the mind does not long for what is prayed for, purity of the mind and the grace of *Īśvara* are obtained. Further, the objects concerned are not thrust upon one by virtue of the chant. So *saṁnyāsins* also can definitely chant the *Rudram* and, through it, secure the grace of God, purity of the mind and knowledge of the Supreme.

7. DISTINCTNESS OF THE ĀTMAN FROM THE BODY

D: Many scientists maintain that consciousness has inert matter as its fount. They maintain that consciousness emerges when inert matter acquires a particular form, such as that of a brain. Is this contention incorrect?

HH: This view is like that of the ancient *Cārvākas*. It is not correct. Why does a scientist say that consciousness arises from inert entities and that there is no distinct entity called consciousness?

D: Since consciousness is found only where the body or, to be more specific, the brain exists. Consciousness is not seen where there is no body or brain.

HH: Such reasoning is flawed. Objects are seen by us when light is

present. They are not perceived when light is absent. Would it be right to conclude from this that perception is a quality of light?

D: How can perception be a quality of light? It cannot be.

HH: Though perception occurs in the presence of light and not when light is absent, nonetheless, perception is not a quality of light. Likewise, though consciousness is noticed where there is a body or brain and is not noticed in the absence of a body or brain, nonetheless, consciousness is not a property of the body or brain. The moon is, by itself, devoid of luminosity. However, at night, we experience the light of the sun reflecting in the moon. Like the moon, the body or brain has, by itself, no light of consciousness, but functions as the medium for the special manifestation of consciousness. Consciousness, like the bright sun, has independent existence, apart from the body or brain.

The *śāstras* are the highest *pramāṇa* (means of valid knowledge). There is no finality in our logic. One reason may appear to us to be right and unassailable but if a highly intelligent person were to argue against it, we may be forced to admit that what we thought right is wrong. Yet another logician may falsify the arguments that led to our changing our views. Mere logic thus lacks finality. Logic that has the scripture as its basis is decisive and deserves to be resorted to. The *Vedas* were taught by the Lord and are free from defects that could invalidate them. They clearly make known that consciousness that is the *Ātman* is distinct from the body. Therefore, we should accept this. The direct realisation of the *jñānins* that the *Ātman* is pure consciousness is in complete accord with what the *śāstras* say. In fact, the *Ātman* transcends the scope of scientific investigation because It is beyond the ken of the senses, is bereft of activity, is devoid of qualities, is formless and is true intrinsic nature of the very scientist who strives to pinpoint it. So there is no question of its existence being disproved by any scientific investigation.

Can any scientist conclusively demonstrate that consciousness arises from inert matter? No. None has done so done yet. Let us suppose that a scientist claims that he has created consciousness in his laboratory. How can he establish without any room for doubt that consciousness was not already present but unapparent in the inert material used by him and that it subsequently just became manifest? He cannot do so. As it cannot be conclusively shown by him that consciousness stems from inert matter, there is no

necessity to subscribe to his claim.

Undoubtedly, many are the benefits that we get from science. However, because science has great value, it does not follow that the view of some scientists that consciousness has a purely material basis is well-founded and worthy of acceptance. At any rate, it is untrue that science establishes materialism. It is a fact that many great scientists were and are theists. Hence, dedication to science does not call for the denial of consciousness distinct from matter.

Our *śāstras* state and also give numerous reasons to show that the *Ātman* is different from the body. So we should not entertain any doubt or misconception in this regard.

8. REBIRTH

D: The *śāstras* say that rebirth exists. Is there any rational evidence in favour of this?

HH: Yes. There are many logical reasons supporting rebirth. One person suffers much in this world, while another lives happily. What is the cause? We see such differences even in young children who have done nothing in the present birth to justify such joy or misery. In order to rightly account for such differences, one must accept the existence of rebirth. It is only proper to say that we suffer now as a result of sins committed by us in our previous births and that we have joy now due to the virtuous deeds of our past.

Some people have memories of their previous births. I learn that scientists are investigating this aspect. Some of the investigated persons who recalled their previous births described certain scenes and incidents that were subsequently verified. Without any earlier experiences, how could such recollections arise? Subject to their being factual, such memories support the existence of rebirth.

Our *śāstras* prescribe certain *prāyaścittas* (expiations) to get rid of some diseases. On the performance of the ordained expiatory *karmas*, cures are seen. How can the remedial *karmas* directed to nullify the sins of a previous birth cure a disease of this birth if there were no rebirth at all? If it is said that mere faith cures the disease, it cannot be explained why, when the *prāyaścittas* are performed with faith but not in accordance with the prescriptions, the desired result is not obtained.

Some young children are seen to possess talents and understanding that are extraordinary for their age. They could not, in the normal course, have acquired such proficiency and that too almost naturally. They could, however, have acquired their skills and understanding in an earlier life. The case of such precocious children favours the existence of rebirth.

If we do not accept rebirth, we would be forced to conclude that, “*Īśvara* is partial for He has kept some people happy and some others unhappy. He has no mercy either because beings experience misery.” Nobody associates such defects with *Īśvara*. Hence, it is logical to accept rebirth.

Not even a fool engages in an activity unmotivated by and without any conception of utility in it. A new-born babe sucks its mother’s milk even without being trained by anyone to do so. Presumably, this is because of its awareness that satisfaction can be had from mother’s milk. Such awareness could not have arisen in this birth prior to its suckling for the first time. Therefore, the child should have acquired that knowledge in an earlier birth.

If we do not accept rebirth, it has to be said that after death a person shall dwell forever in heaven or in hell. Is this logical? Not at all. As a rule, that which has a beginning must have an end. Stay in heaven has a beginning and so must have an end.

Further, consider the case of a baby that has suffered a premature death. It could have acquired neither *puṇya* nor *pāpa*. Will the baby be condemned to hell, or will it raised to heaven? If its destination is hell, it has to take up punishment for no fault on its part. If we accept the other alternative, heaven, we are led to concede that the baby experiences heavenly pleasures even though it has no *puṇya* to its credit. The non-acceptance of rebirth results in such absurd conclusions.

What I have mentioned here are just a few reasons from amongst a host of them that establish rebirth on a logical basis.

9. FATE AND FREE WILL

- D: Do we have the power to overcome fate? On the one hand, the *śāstras* say that one can conquer fate. For instance, it is said:

The river of tendencies flows along the auspicious and evil paths.

By means of effort and manliness, one should direct it along the auspicious path.¹

This shows that free will is more powerful than fate. On the other hand, it is also said:

What is not destined to happen will not happen. What is to happen will not be otherwise.²

Will Your Holiness kindly clarify?

HH: First of all, one should know what *prārabdha* (fate) is. This should be understood along with its mechanism of fruition. Those actions of the previous births that are yielding fruits now constitute the cause of this birth. It is this set of actions that we call *prārabdha*. It does not force one along a good or evil path. *Karmas* that have started yielding fruits gradually lead one by stimulating tendencies of likes and dislikes in the mind. Hence, Lord Kṛṣṇa has said:

Everybody, including a knower, acts according to his nature. Nature compels beings. What can restraint do?³

Having expounded this verse, Śāṅkara-bhagavatpāda considers the objection: “If everyone acts as compelled by nature, there is no place for *śāstras* at all. Such being the case, what is the purpose of the *śāstra* saying, ‘Be righteous’?” He then points out that the next *śloka* provides the response. That verse is:

Attachment and aversion are rooted in the senses, towards their objects. One must not come under their sway. They are indeed one’s foes.⁴

Thus, it is clear that if we conquer likes and dislikes, we will no longer be under their sway. We should, therefore, shed likes and dislikes and then voluntarily function in keeping with the scriptural teachings. You asked whether *prārabdha* (fate) could be overcome. The reply is, “It can certainly be overcome.” If it is that *prārabdha* cannot be overcome, a person cannot be held responsible for his actions at all. He would not have any choice.

I earlier said that the *karma* that is now fructifying is *prārabdha*. It is what we did in the previous births. Hence, *prārabdha* cannot

¹ *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* II.9.30

² *Pañcadaśī* VII.168

³ *Bhagavadgītā* III.33

⁴ *Bhagavadgītā* III.34

be stronger than effort. We can change the tendency created by our earlier actions by suitable exertion in this birth. However, if the tendency caused by the *karma* of our previous birth is very strong, we will have to put in a proportionally stronger effort to counter it. This is true in most of the cases. Of course, one's freedom is not absolute.

An illustration is a cow tethered to a post. It can roam about freely only to the extent of the length of the rope. It cannot go beyond. Similarly, the fate of the country, the free will of other people and our former actions place a limit to our freedom.

A person may board a train but the train may meet with an accident. In the same way, sometimes, one might have answered a question paper satisfactorily but the expected result might not materialise. One should not give room to worry on seeing all this. Almost anything may be attained in spiritual life by effort. One may be destined to be a householder but with the blessings of a *Guru* and by effort, one can lead the life of a *brahmacārin* and, later, that of a *saṁnyāsīn*. Though the consequences of earlier *karmas* have to be experienced, the intensity of *prārabdha* can be decreased by the grace of *Īśvara*. The negative effects of *prārabdha* can also be reduced to a great extent by means of medicines, *japa*, *homa*, *pūjā*, *dhyāna* and *satsaṅga* (company of great souls).

D: If, according to one's horoscope, one would live for eighty years, does it mean that one will not die before that? Similarly, if another is to have a very short span of life, can he not live beyond that age?

HH: It is possible for one to live longer or shorter than predicted.

D: Does Your Holiness then mean that the horoscope is read wrongly or that casting of the horoscope is itself wrong?

HH: No.

D: In that case, what is predicted with the horoscope as basis is useless. Hence, no purpose is served by the *Jyotiṣa-śāstra*. Is this the view of Your Holiness?

HH: No.

D: Will Your Holiness kindly explain?

HH: The horoscope merely indicates the effect of *karmas* that one had done in the previous births. In this birth, by exercising free will, we can definitely change the course of events. If we earn the grace

of the Lord, like Mārkaṇḍeya, then we can live longer than we are destined to. Similarly, by falling into evil ways, we can spoil our health and die earlier than we are supposed to. Further, we hear astrologers say, “If one acts as follows, the effect of that *karma* will be reduced.” If the verdict of the horoscope is immutable, what is the use of such expiations?

Nobody need to fear a horoscope. It is only an indicator of what is to come. We can certainly alter destiny if it is unfavourable. Another point to be remembered is that destiny can very well be favourable. In such a case, our efforts will readily bear fruit.

10. DHARMA

D: How is one to decide what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*?

HH: Any action ordained by the *śāstras* is *dharma* while that which is prohibited is *adharma*. In deciding about *dharma*, Manu says:

*The Veda, Smṛti (texts written by sages with the Veda as basis), the conduct of the noble ones and mental satisfaction – these four are the evident marks of dharma.*¹

The *Veda* is the foundation of all *dharma*. The *Smṛti* that is in consonance with the *Veda* is also a *pramāṇa* (a valid means of knowledge). *Ācāra* (traditional practice) of the noble ones, who revere the scripture, is another *pramāṇa*. Next, there is the one’s mental satisfaction with respect to what is not out of line with the scripture. These enable us to determine what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*.

D: Cannot a conduct be *dharma* in one circumstance but *adharma* in another?

HH: It can. In this regard, we necessarily have to take recourse to the *śāstras*. Mere logic will not do. If a person who steals from a house is arrested, he might argue, “I stole only from a prosperous person’s house. This loss is insignificant by his standards, whereas it has given me an opportunity to fill my stomach. Therefore, what is wrong in this stealth?” Will a judge ever accept this? He will not, because it is contradictory to what is laid down in the penal code. The judge is bound to punish him. Likewise, what is prescribed as

¹ *Manu-smṛti* II.12

righteous in the *Veda* is indeed *dharma*. What is prohibited by it is *adharmā*. We do not have the competence to decide for ourselves by mere logic.

- D: If we commit a mistake unknowingly, will we incur sin?
- HH: When doing so, if we are unaware that it is wrong, not much sin results. The performance *sva-dharma* destroys the demerit arising from mistakes committed out of ignorance. There is no need for a special expiation. Prayer to *Īśvara* is also effective in effacing the sin of what is done out of ignorance. When there is an opportunity for one to know what is wrong but still one does not make efforts to know, sin will accrue. One should try to know, at least to some extent, what the scripture specifies as right and as wrong.
- D: Will it not be convenient to have a single *dharma*, common for all? Is it necessary to have it as, “This is *dharma* for one; that is *dharma* for another?”
- HH: Suppose shirts of the same size are distributed to a motley group of people and each one is required to wear the shirt received. Is giving such an instruction proper and is it feasible for everyone to do so? No. Different physical sizes must be considered. Likewise, different *dharmas* have been prescribed for people in keeping with the differences in their competence. Though there are some variations because of this reason, nonetheless, *sāmānya-dharmas* are common to all.
- D: What is *sāmānya-dharma*?
- HH: Manu has said:

*The dharmas common to all, as declared by Manu, are abstinence from injury, truthfulness, abstinence from theft, purity and restraint of the senses.*¹

One should not even think of causing misery to another. Even if one just entertains such a thought, it is violation of *ahiṃsā*. It is wrong to assume that only physical pain constitutes *hiṃsā* (injury). Next comes *satya* (truthfulness). That utterance which does not cause misery to others and is also factual is *satya*. If the fact is so disclosed as to harm others, it is improper. Even speech that is pleasant but not factual is not *satya*. Therefore, it is that which is good to others in addition to being factual. Abstaining from stealing

¹ *Manu-smṛti* X.63

others' belongings is *asteya*. Refraining from stealing implies that another person's property should not even be mentally coveted. "Let whatever belongs to another person, be with him. I shall give something of mine to others" – such a mentality should be ours. *Śauca* is purity. This is of two types. One is bodily purity. Bathing, wearing clean dresses etc., pertain to this category. The other is mental purity. Clothing may be clean but if the mind is not, true *śauca* cannot be realised. *Indriya-nigraha* comes next. When an object is seen or a sound heard, the mind might be attracted towards it. *Indriya-nigraha* is the restraint of the senses from going out to external objects. Regulating the *indriyas* or the senses is indeed *indriya-nigraha*. These five *dharma*s are common to all.

D: Is there any benefit in observing the *sāmānya-dharma*s?

HH: In him, who follows *dharma*, the good effect is certain to be seen. Hence, everyone born as a human being should necessarily adhere to *dharma*.

D: We see so many people indulging in *adharma* and also that they are only reaping rich benefits. The reason for this may be the *karma* of the previous birth. But the present acts of *adharma* do not seem to yield fruit at all. Why?

HH: It is erroneous to say that an act of *adharma* does not fructify at all. It does yield fruits, but some time later. *Īśvara* has boundless mercy. He gives a sinner an opportunity to rectify himself. If the sinner refuses to change, *Īśvara* punishes him. As regards the result of *adharma*, Manu has said:

The adharma that is done does not immediately yield fruit, unlike a cow (that is ready for milking); but, when repeated, it fructifies gradually (like seeds sown in the field) and completely destroys the doer of adharma.¹

One apparently flourishes by adharma (such as treachery), then perceives prosperity (by acquiring lot of wealth) and then conquers foes. Finally, however, one is completely destroyed.²

D: If it is very difficult to adhere to *dharma*, what is to be done?

HH: However great the inconvenience may be, one should not allow

¹ *Manu-smṛti* IV.172

² *Manu-smṛti* IV.174

one's mind to drift towards *adharma*. With great effort, *dharma* should be followed, as it will give us benefits sooner or later. After one's death, one's relatives go away, discarding one's body. Only *dharma* and *adharma* accompany one. So, only *dharma* can save us in the other world and also in the next birth in this world. Never will he, who protects *dharma*, be left helpless. That is why it is said:

*Dharma protects one who protects dharma.*¹

This is very much true. Even if the result is not perceived now, the effect will definitely be experienced. Further, it is our duty to act according to *dharma*. “Has *Īsvara* not provided me with all sorts of comforts and benefits? Did He not save me while I was helpless in my mother's womb? Should I not be grateful to Him?” – considering thus, one should act according to the injunctions of the *Veda*, which is like His breath. One should adhere to *dharma* at least with this perspective.

D: Much wealth is required to perform the *yāgas* prescribed by the *Vedas*. How then there is scope for a poor person to follow *dharma*?

HH: In the *śāstras* it has been said that one should follow *dharma* to the extent of one's capacity. In following *dharma*, he who is wealthy can construct a temple. If a person does not have wealth, he can go to the temple constructed by the affluent, offer his obeisance and thereby acquire merit. Hence, there is equal scope for both classes of people to adhere to *dharma*. The difference lies only in the particulars of *dharma* to be followed. If he who is poor donates a rupee for a noble cause, he acquires high merit, but if a wealthy person having lakhs of rupees donates a rupee or a half, he will not get the same benefit.

D: We see certain people who stick to their *anuṣṭhāna* but cause suffering to others. Is this permissible?

HH: No. It is said:

*I will make known in half a śloka what has been said in crores of texts. Helping others is punya. Troubling others is sinful.*²

If one causes misery to others, it is certainly sinful. However, if a

¹ *Mahābhārata* III.31.7 (BORI critical edition)

² *Nitya-nīti* 34

person abstains from *dharma* thinking that others would be happy only if he does not follow *dharma*, it is improper. This is because, though the *śāstras* prescribe the practice of *dharma* without causing pain to anybody, the word ‘anybody’ here means ‘any good person’. The *īśvara-pūjā* that we do may not be to the liking of an atheist. But on that account, we should not abandon *pūjā*. We can just continue with it but refrain from abusing the atheist.

D: Is it necessary for a spiritual practitioner to take note of the social and civil regulations, for no sin accrues by not adhering to them?

HH: These regulations should be followed as faithfully as the scriptural injunctions. It is we who set up these rules and that too, only for our convenience. Hence, it is unbecoming of a wise person not to follow them.

D: How will any sin accrue by not obeying these laws?

HH: No sin may accrue but if we transgress these codes of conduct, we will have to face appropriate punishments. For instance, there is a rule that one should keep to the left of the road while driving. If we overlook this, we may meet with an accident. This is, of course, a form of punishment.

D: With the passage of time, strict adherence to the scriptural injunctions has become difficult. Cannot the *śāstras* be modified somewhat to cater to this difficulty?

HH: We should never be short-sighted in our views. Just because accepting bribe has become a common affair, are we justified in enacting legislation to permit it? That would only help its intensification. We should, likewise, not seek to modify the *śāstras*. Consideration of changes in our ways of living is inherent in our *śāstras*. “Follow to the utmost extent possible” is what they grant. We, in our present condition, should abide by them to the maximum extent possible. Lord Kṛṣṇa has said:

Even a little of this dharma saves one from great fear.¹

In the light of this, how are we justified in attempting to modify the *śāstras*?

This apart, one who wishes to bring about a change in *śāstras* should be a knower of the past, present and future. Without even

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* II.40

knowing the mechanism by which *karmas* yield fruit, how can we change the *śāstras*? We just cannot. This is because we are incapable of asserting with certainty, “Follow this. Even if it be difficult now, you shall derive benefit from it later.” We are unaware of what is in store for us in the future birth, nor are we aware of the happenings of the previous births. In short, we are not omniscient and so are incompetent to modify the *śāstras*.

D: *Yāgas*, such as *Atirudra* and *Sahasracandī*, are being performed at several places. Expenditure is incurred for them. Some people raise the objection that the money could have been utilised to uplift the downtrodden instead of wasting it on *yāgas*. Is the objection valid?

HH: The expenditure on these *yāgas* is but an insignificant fraction of what we spend on material pleasures. How can we object even to this? Further, gratified by the holy offerings, the Lord showers on us His returns that are many times greater than our meagre offerings. For instance, pleased by the *Atirudra*, *Īśvara* brings about sufficient and timely rains. It cannot therefore be said that expenditure on *yāgas* is a waste.

We sow seeds and reap the crop. As against this, is it sensible to say that sowing seeds is a waste and that we could have eaten the seeds instead? Like seeds sown, *yāgas* yield precious fruits. The *śāstras* do not expect a poor person to perform a *yāga* involving much expenditure. That the scriptures command us to adhere to *dharma* to the maximum extent possible by us is a pointer to this. The expenses in *yāgas* are therefore only for our betterment. It is improper to look upon these expenses as a waste.

D: Some object that Hinduism speaks of what one should do for one’s good but not about doing something for the sake of others. What is Your Holiness’s opinion as regards this?

HH: This view is incorrect. Our *śāstras* speak of the necessity of purity of the mind for attaining *mokṣa* and compassion as essential for mental purity. Compassion manifests in the alleviation of the suffering of others. It is therefore wrong to say that helping others has not been prescribed in our *śāstras*. Our *śāstras* say that we should get rid of our *ahamkāra* (ego) and that we should be same-sighted towards all. Incarnations of the Lord have been spoken of in the *Itihasas* and *Purāṇas*. Why did the Lord incarnate many times? Was He in need of anything? No. He manifested only for the sake of others. The kindness that He demonstrated in His

incarnations such as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa is an ideal for us.

The Lord has specified in the *Bhagavadgītā* what kind of devotee is very dear to Him. He has said:

He who hates no being, who is friendly and compassionate, who is free from the sense of 'mine' and egoism and is the same in joy and sorrow and is forbearing...¹

In this verse, it is taught that there should be no hatred towards anybody and that we should be friendly and compassionate towards all. Our prayer is:

May everyone be happy.²

No differentiation between friend and foe is made. We pray for the well-being of all creatures.

Jñānins, who have reached the end of the path to liberation made known by the scripture, have no bondage whatsoever and to them, the world is an appearance. Yet, they are full of compassion. They effect great good to the world by their presence itself even when they remain still. Become like them is our aim.

11. AHIMŚĀ

D: As *ahimsā* has been prescribed in the *śāstras* as a preeminent *dharma*, must it be observed at all times and under all conditions?

HH: The *śāstras* speak of two categories of resolves, viz., *vrata* and *mahāvrata*. *Mahāvrata* is a vow that should be observed always, under all circumstances. Considerations of time and circumstantial limitations can apply to a *vrata*. A *śamnyāsin* should follow *ahimsā* as a *mahāvrata*. For others, it can be a *vrata*. One who lacks mercy is not a human being at all. Everyone should have mercy on the distressed.

D: We kill some insects unknowingly. Therefore, how can *ahimsā* we be observers of *ahimsā*?

HH: The *ahimsā* characterised by not intentionally causing harm can be observed as a *vrata* and I meant this. Even the thought of harming

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* XII.13

² *Śrīmadrāmāyaṇa-pārāyaṇa-samāpana-śloka* 1

others is a violation of ahimsā.

D: Suppose a scorpion or a poisonous snake approaches a person with the intention of harming him. Should he just be a spectator because he upholds *ahimsā*?

HH: No. He can remove the snake or scorpion.

D: Will this not violate *ahimsā*?

HH: No; because he only saved himself and did not deliberately cause injury.

D: If one is very docile, will not others take advantage of this and cheat one? Will they not create troubles through various means?

HH: Undue mildness in transactions is not called for. It is true that a *samnyāsin* should uncomplainingly tolerate all woes. However, for a person engaged in worldly transactions, suitable gentleness is adequate.

D: If one troubles or irritates me without reason, what should I do?

HH: You should be calm mentally but may object or feign anger. You should not give room to anger that makes you lose control over yourself. What I said does not imply that you should always pretend to be angry. Be patient to the extent possible. Present an appearance of anger only after a certain limit is exceeded.

(The questions that follow are from a soldier who had served in the Army.)

D: Will sin accrue to me since I have been responsible for the death of many people?

HH: No.

D: Is not killing prohibited?

HH: Did you kill them due to hatred?

D: No.

HH: You only did your duty and followed the orders given to you. You did that action for the sake of the nation and not for your own sake. Is it not so?

D: Yes.

HH: That is why I said that you would not incur sin. If you had killed anyone out of animosity or for your selfish end, you would have

been a sinner. However, you stuck to your duty for the sake of the nation. Lord Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, “For a *kṣatriya*, waging a righteous war is an act of virtue and not a sin.” You soldiers are in the position of the *kṣatriyas* referred to by the Lord.

12. UPROOTING DESIRE

- D: Many spiritual aspirants make efforts to conquer desires but desires keep springing up again and again. What is the reason for this?
- HH: To conquer desires, first of all, there should be a firm resolve to that effect. A *brahmacārin* may be advised not to sleep in the afternoons. If does not have the conviction that he should follow the advice, he may not sleep for some days, but when feeling tired on some day may think, “What is wrong if I sleep just today?” Hence, a spiritual aspirant should have the determination to overcome longings. Some spiritual aspirants do not practise *viveka* (discrimination). Still, they expect their desires to vanish. They will not. The reason for this is that their *vairāgya* (dispassion) is not well-established. *Vairāgya* develops from *viveka* and when dispassion becomes deeply rooted, desires become completely vanquished. To overcome desires, other spiritual disciplines should also be faithfully practised. In the initial stages, one may not have an inclination for them but if one abandons them on that account, how will one’s desires go away? One should sincerely practise *karma-yoga*, *mānasika-pūjā*, contemplation of the Lord, etc. If *dhyāna* is also practised, it is highly laudable. Study of the *śāstras* is important.
- D: Desires sometimes subside and appear to have been conquered but manifest all of a sudden. Is there any reason for this?
- HH: I will give you an illustration. Suppose there is a spring, one end of which is fixed to a wall. If we keep stretching the other end, the spring yields and elongates. No sooner do we stop pulling it than it returns to its original size. The mind is like a spring attached to the wall of the world. Like the spring stretched by force, the mind that is held down through effort remains quiet for a time. Then, like the released spring reverting to its initial condition, the released mind becomes undisciplined as before. When a desire raises its head, some spiritual aspirants suppress it thinking, “I

should not give room for it now.” That desire lies low in the mind for the time being and later bursts forth when the opportunity arises. Hence, spiritual aspirants should understand desire’s nature, clearly recognize that it is detrimental to them and practise the means to uproot it. If its root is cut, there is no scope for it to arise suddenly. For him who finds it difficult to get rid of desire, *satsaṅga* (company of the spiritually great) is essential. By the influence of great souls, the minds of those who reverentially come to their presence become peaceful. The *śāstras* should be dedicatedly studied. They make known that sense-objects really do not give happiness. Though we have faith in the *śāstras*, our faith is generally not unreserved. Hence, we sometimes have improper notions such as, “Why not I enjoy this?” Even to get rid of such thoughts, it is important to study the *śāstras* again and again.

13. MASTERY OVER ANGER

D: How is anger to be conquered?

HH: “I am in no way profited by my anger. This person is chiding me. What do I lose by that? Nothing. Then why should I give room to anger?” – if one entertains such thoughts, anger will eventually subside.

D: Is thinking on the above lines sufficient?

HH: Further thought may be necessary. “If I now abuse this person due to my anger, it may seem that I have established dominance. However, in reality, have I not become a slave to my anger? In attempting to dominate a rival, I have been conquered by another. Anger not only overpowers me, it spoils my intellect and tempts me to do what I should not do. Why should I become a slave to this anger? I will get much more benefit and satisfaction by the control of anger than by abusing any person” – one should think thus. If one is alert, the advent of anger can be sensed. If its rise is foreseen, effort can be made to control it before it manifests. Half the anger will subside the moment its arousal is recognized. However, many are aware of their anger only after it has erupted. Even such people can develop the habit of sensing it before it erupts.

D: Will anger create obstacles to spiritual progress?

HH: Yes. The Lord has mentioned desire, anger and greed as the triple

gates to hell. An angry person does not think of what he is doing and even resorts to dangerous steps. He eventually incurs sin. Anger destroys him through his sins. Therefore, no place should be given to anger.

- D: Does ‘giving no place to anger’ imply that one cannot instruct subordinates in a stern manner?
- HH: Directives should be given wherever they should be. Otherwise, an official may not be effective in places like offices. ‘Giving no place to anger’ only means that ideas such as, “I should harm this person or take revenge on him” should not be permitted. At the outset, instructions can be given calmly. If they are not adhered to, one may take recourse to stern language to convey that they should be carried out. However, anger must not be allowed to rise and upset one’s calmness.

14. KARMA-YOGA

- D: What is the role of *karma* (action) in spiritual life?
- HH: If actions are done for the sake of *Īśvara*, without attachment to the fruits of actions, mental purity is attained.
- D: If there is no attachment to the results, will not actions be done inefficiently? When one is not interested in success or failure, one will not put forth one’s best. Is this not a logical conclusion?
- HH: Not at all. A spiritual aspirant who is unattached will perform his actions properly, as he does his duty as an offering to the Lord. Would any devotee like to offer to the Lord that which is improper? He will not. He who practises *karma-yoga* will not indulge in a bad deed. Further, he will offer all actions to the Lord. On account of devotion to *Īśvara*, he will strive to act to the best of his ability. As against this, he who has attachment to the fruits of actions will be bogged down by longings.
- D: Has this been spoken of in the *śāstras* also?
- HH: Yes. Lord Kṛṣṇa has said:

He who is without attachment, without ego, endowed with firmness and enthusiasm and unaffected by success and failure – such a one

is termed as a *sāttvika* (pure) doer.¹

D: Suppose a person acts with an idea that dedication of the results to *Īśvara* will ensure success in endeavours. Is he a practitioner of *karma-yoga*?

HH: No. This is because he has not truly renounced attachment to the fruit of action.

D: What makes practice of *karma-yoga* difficult?

HH: Attachment to objects and lack of devotion towards *Īśvara*. A person having attachment may say that he has dedicated everything to *Īśvara*, but, actually, will not have been able to do so. In the absence of staunch devotion to the Lord, the ideas, “Everything should be dedicated. It is my duty to do so” will not be there. This again makes whole-hearted practice of *karma-yoga* difficult.

D: Is it enough if one is unattached to the results or should everything be positively dedicated to the Lord?

HH: If it is to be *karma-yoga*, one must dedicate everything to Him.

D: Will Your Holiness kindly give an illustration to show that strong attachment to the fruit can be an impediment and that one who practises *karma-yoga* can perform one’s duty in a befitting manner?

HH: Let us suppose that a student takes an examination and that he is very much desirous of success. What happens if he does not fare well in a particular subject? He becomes worried. He may then not perform well even in the next day’s examination. This is because of the persistent worry that he had not fared well in the previous examination. On the contrary, he who is unattached, prepares whole-heartedly. As he reads without worry, he will act better. Further, he will not be troubled by lack of interest. He will feel, “I do this for the sake of *Īśvara*. Therefore, at least considering it as my bounden duty, I should be sincere.” Even if he were not able to answer some question correctly, he will not be bogged down by anxiety.

D: Who is competent to practise *karma-yoga*?

HH: Anybody can practise *karma-yoga*. By the practice of *karma-yoga*,

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* XVIII.26

the mind becomes very pure. Devotion towards *Īśvara* deepens. Realisation of the Truth dawns only in a pure mind. Hence, everyone should constantly resort to *karma-yoga*. All can derive benefit from it.

D: Is it sufficient to dedicate merely the fruits of actions to *Īśvara* or should one dedicate the actions themselves?

HH: It is great to dedicate the actions themselves. If that is not possible, at least the results should be dedicated. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa has spelt out a sequence of increasingly simpler practices. He has said:

*Fix your mind on Me. Concentrate your intellect on Me. You shall dwell in Me alone. There is no doubt about this.*¹

*If you are incapable of fixing your mind firmly on Me, endeavour to reach Me by repeated practice.*²

*If you are not capable of even repeated practice, perform actions for My sake. Even by performing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection.*³

*If you are unable to do even this, then, seeking refuge in Me alone, dedicate the fruits of all actions to Me, with a disciplined mind.*⁴

D: If one is engaged in *karma-yoga*, will one perform many actions?

HH: One need not. Actions may be classified into six categories. They are: (1) *nitya-karma*, (2) *naimittika-karma*, (3) *kāmya-karma*, (4) *niṣiddha-karma*, (5) *upāsanā-karma*, and (6) *prāyaścitta-karma*. *Nitya-karma* is that which has to be done regularly at the scheduled time. *Sandhyāvandana* is an example of this. *Naimittika-karma* is not governed by a recurring time restriction. Some of the *karmas* to be done during eclipses can be cited as instances of this. *Nitya* and *naimittika karmas* are ordained by the *śāstras*. Their non-performance leads to sin. *Kāmya-karma* is that done to fulfil a wish. The *śāstras* do not prescribe such *karma* as obligatory. One does these only because of one's desire. *Niṣiddha-karma* is that which the *śāstras* prohibit. *Upāsanā-karma* is related to contemplation. Finally, *karma* for expiating a sin is *prāyaścitta-karma*. These six

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* XII.8

² *Bhagavadgītā* XII.9

³ *Bhagavadgītā* XII.10

⁴ *Bhagavadgītā* XII.11

types can be simplified by considering only four categories: *nitya*, *naimittika*, *kāmya* and *niṣiddha karmas*. One should not indulge in *niṣiddha-karma*. *Kāmya-karma* could be given up. However, one must perform *nitya* and *naimittika karmas*. He who practises *karma-yoga* will not get involved in all sorts of actions. Whichever act is necessary, he will do without attachment. Basically, he will be concerned with *nitya* and *naimittika karmas*.

D: One dedicates one's actions to *Īśvara* to obtain His grace. In such a situation, how can it be said that one does not have attachment to the grace of *Īśvara*? Does one not perform actions with the target of securing it?

HH: From one viewpoint, what you say is correct. However, if, instead of being attached to material benefits, one is attached to *Īśvara*, no bondage will be produced. On the other hand, we will gradually become unbound. However, in ideal *karma-yoga*, dedication is done without even expecting *Īśvara*'s favour. There should only be the idea, "It is my duty to offer this to *Īśvara*." Bhagavatpāda says in the *Gītā-bhāṣya*:

*Perform actions just for the sake of Īśvara, giving up even the attachment of the form, "Let God become favourably disposed towards me."*¹

D: In practising *karma-yoga*, how can one ascertain whether one has made progress or not?

HH: I said that there should be no attachment to the fruit of action. Is one unattached when one desires to know whether or not one has made progress in the path of *karma-yoga*? However, if one has a doubt about one's progress in the spiritual path, one can introspect, "Is my mind pure? Am I peaceful? Am I carrying out all actions without any worry and for the sake of *Īśvara*?" This self-analysis will show whether one is following *karma-yoga* properly or not.

15. DEVOTION

D: Performing *bhajans* is considered an act of devotion. Some others say that performance of *nitya-karmas* is devotion. Which of these is true devotion?

¹ *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya* II.48

HH: Bhagavatpāda has said in the *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇī*:

Amongst the means to obtaining liberation, devotion reigns supreme.¹

He has also defined devotion. He has said that devotion is profound meditation on one's own true nature. This is the definition of lofty devotion. However, none but a few can have this kind of devotion. Others need to be prescribed a lower, simpler kind of devotion. Śrī Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, while speaking of devotion, has said that devotion is of three kinds. The first kind is associated with the idea, "I belong to *Īśvara*." The second is having the notion, "*Īśvara* is mine." An illustration is Yaśodā's love for the child, Kṛṣṇa. If great affection towards *Īśvara* is cultivated, the idea, "*Īśvara* belongs to me" can develop. Superior to even this is the knowledge, "I am that Supreme Being."

D: How can the notion, "I am that Supreme Being" be termed *bhakti*?

HH: An ordinary devotee is prepared to accept that he is different from *Īśvara* but an ideal devotee, being unable to put up with even this separation, desires "I must merge with my Lord." Finally, he does attain that realisation. So, this should be termed as the highest form of devotion. Lord Kṛṣṇa has said that He regards a *jñānin* as the greatest devotee.

D: What form of devotion should ordinary people have?

HH: As long as the feeling, "I am the body" exists, it is good to consider oneself as a servant of the Lord. Then, one will not desire anything from *Īśvara*. One will consider serving the Lord as one's duty. When the Lord said to *Prahlāda*, "I shall bestow a boon upon you," *Prahlāda* replied:

He who expects something from Īśvara is not a servant; he indeed is a merchant.²

D: If that is so, is it erroneous to consider the performance of *bhajans* as devotion?

HH: No, it is not. Even that is an act of devotion. Sage Nārada, while speaking of devotion, has said:

¹ *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇī* 32

² *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* VII.10.4

Devotion is of the nature of supreme love for Īśvara.¹

Various kinds of love for Īśvara have been presented as devotion by Śaṅkara-bhagavatpāda in the *Śivānandalaharī*. He has said:

Just as the seed of an aṅkola tree attaches itself to that tree, just as an iron piece goes to a magnet, just as a chaste woman has affection for her husband, just as a creeper clings to a tree and just as a river merges with the ocean – if thoughts are thus ever fixed on the pair of lotus feet of Īśvara, it is termed as bhakti.²

The first example is that of the seed of the *aṅkola* tree attaching itself to the tree. In the same way, in the initial stages, the devotee turns his mind towards Īśvara. The second illustration is that of an iron piece moving towards a magnet. In the first stage, the devotee had to do something. But here, his mind goes towards Īśvara naturally. If one keeps thinking of Īśvara, one's mind will go to Him by itself. The magnet attracts the iron piece. Likewise, Īśvara attracts His devotee to Himself. The third illustration is about a chaste wife. The wife loves her husband and he loves her in return. Likewise, the devotee and Īśvara deeply love each other. The fourth example is that of a creeper entwining a tree. The tree's beauty is enhanced by the creeper entwining it. In the same way, the devotee's extreme devotion enhances the glory of the Lord. The analogy of the river merging with the ocean refers to supreme devotion. Just as a river, on merging with the ocean, cannot be distinctly identified, the devotee with limitless devotion becomes one with the Lord. These are the different gradations in devotion. Therefore, performance of *bhajans* is also an act of devotion.

- D: Some people say that it is sufficient if one does *bhajans* and ask as to why *nitya-karmas* should be performed. Is this view correct?
- HH: No. Proper performance of *nitya-karma* is itself an act of devotion. Let us suppose that there is a master and that he has a servant. If that servant, without discharging the duties assigned to him by his master, just indulges in eulogy, will the master be pleased with him? No. Īśvara is our master. He has specified through the *Vedas* and *Smritis* how we should lead our lives. If we discard His injunctions and confine ourselves to praising Him, how will He be pleased? So one should perform *nitya-karmas*. As a supplement to that, one

¹ *Nārada-bhaktisūtra* 2

² *Śivānanda-laharī* 61

is welcome to do *bhajans*, etc.

D: How are we to cultivate devotion towards the Lord?

HH: How does attachment to any object arise in us? If we keep thinking positively of a particular object, attachment towards it develops. If we repeatedly think of some action as important, attachment arises towards it. Likewise, if we incessantly think, “He is Supreme. There is immense happiness in contemplating on Him”, devotion towards *Īśvara* will become firmly established.

D: Why should one be devoted to *Īśvara*?

HH: He has bestowed upon us all that we have. Hence, we ought to be grateful to Him. He grants material and spiritual attainments and so we should be attached to Him. Though normally these can be reasons, it is better to be devoted to *Īśvara*, regarding devotion to Him as something that we just must have. Devotion ought to be natural. That is true devotion and it does not depend on any logical reason. *Īśvara* is most lovable and the steadfast devotee’s mind spontaneously goes to Him.

D: It is quite natural that if one has great affection for one’s *iṣṭa-devatā*, one will not have the same attachment to other deities. Can one with a liking for Śiva have hatred towards Viṣṇu?

HH: Having hatred is neither good nor acceptable to the *śāstras*. The formless *Īśvara* assumes a form only to shower His grace on His devotee. *Īśvara*, by Himself, is devoid of form. The Lord manifests Himself in the manner in which His devotee desires to see Him. It is improper to have notions of difference such as, “Śiva is different from Viṣṇu.” While one may be particularly attached to one’s *iṣṭa-devatā*, one should not look down upon other deities.

D: Is there anything special about the path of devotion?

HH: Anybody can follow the path of devotion. There is no restriction at all. Moreover, it can be followed easily. One naturally has *prīti* (love). If it is turned towards *Īśvara*, it becomes devotion. In the path of *jñāna* or *dhyāna*, one may have to face many difficulties during practice. Only after having advanced to a certain extent, one enjoys great joy. Such is not the case with the path of devotion. We can experience great joy even before reaching an advanced stage. Even while contemplating on the Lord, we can enjoy bliss. Hence, in the path of devotion, there is happiness right from the beginning. Devotion is the means and also the end. This is another

exceptional feature.

D: Sometimes, while reciting *stotras*, a person may commit some mistakes. He may not be aware of them. Is this a grave fault?

HH: It is always better to understand the meaning of *stotras* that we chant. Knowledge of the meanings helps us in focussing our minds. However, if certain mistakes occur without our knowledge, we need not be unduly concerned. *Īśvara* considers only what is in the heart. He is not swayed by external appearances.

An unlearned one says “viṣṇāya” (incorrect usage to convey ‘for Viṣṇu’), while the learned one says “viṣṇave” (correct usage to convey ‘for Viṣṇu’). Both acquire the same puṇya. Lord Viṣṇu grasps the feeling.

An ignoramus may say *viṣṇāya* instead of *viṣṇave*, as would be uttered by a learned man. Both secure the same *puṇya*, as *Īśvara* takes in the devotional feeling. Śrī Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita has explained this by means of an illustration. Devotees offer flowers to *Īśvara* and attain liberation. Manmatha wanted to shoot an arrow made of flowers at Śiva. By doing so, he sought to hinder Śiva’s penance. The Lord did not accept the flowers. On the contrary, He reduced Manmatha to ashes. In spite of the commonness in the use of flowers, the devotees obtain the highest end, while Manmatha perished. The inner attitude is thus of prime importance.

D: Is it improper to pray to *Īśvara* for wealth, to perform well in an examination or for anything else?

HH: I do not say that such prayer is wrong but it is unnecessary. *Īśvara* knows what is good for us and is capable of providing everything. He is compassion personified and omniscient. Such being the case, it is best to pray thus: “You are in my heart and that is sufficient. Do as You think fit.”

If one acquires a *kāmadhenu* (wish-fulfilling cow), is it wise to use it for ploughing? Is not *Īśvara* like a *kāmadhenu*? Of course, if one prays for specific ends, it cannot be considered wrong; *Īśvara* responds to such prayers too.

D: *Īśvara* does not need anything. Nevertheless, it has been said that everything should be offered to Him. What is the reason for this?

HH: *Īśvara* does not need anything, but is it not our duty to surrender our hearts to Him? It certainly is. Therefore, we must always offer

our minds to *Īśvara*. That is to say, we should always keep thinking of *Īśvara*. The Lord says:

*Think of Me and fight.*¹

By this, He emphasizes the need to think of Him at all times. If we offer anything to *Īśvara*, He will certainly accept our offering. The Lord Himself has said:

*Whatever you offer Me with devotion – a leaf, flower, fruit or water – that I do accept.*²

*Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as a sacrifice, whatever you donate, whatever austerity you perform, - do all these, O son of Kunti, as an offering unto Me.*³

D: Sometimes worries prevent the mind from turning towards *Īśvara* and divert its attention. What is to be done with regard to such hurdles?

HH: Why should a true devotee have any worry? While travelling in a train, should one keep one's luggage on the head or on the floor? We would call a person a fool if he carries his luggage on the head. Whatever goes on in this world happens only as per His will. Should we not be carefree, with the feeling that *Īśvara* does everything only for our good? If we worry, is it not tantamount to lack of the belief, "*Īśvara* protects us. He gives us that which is good for us?"

D: Though this is so, worries sometimes arise of their own accord.

HH: This is pointer to the fact that devotion has not become intense. One should make efforts to develop devotion and to get rid of worries. If one truly surrenders to *Īśvara*, one can live comfortably and be happy too.

16. STUDY OF THE VEDĀNTA-ŚĀSTRA

D: Why is the dedicated study of the *Vedānta-śāstra* needed?

HH: To clarify the truth to a spiritual aspirant. Doubts can arise if we

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* VIII.7

² *Bhagavadgītā* IX.26

³ *Bhagavadgītā* IX.27

do not correctly understand the teaching of the scripture. Repeated study of the scripture clears such doubts. Firm faith in *Vedānta* is established. Scriptural study enables one to realise as a fact what is taught by the *Guru* and is the final import of the scripture.

D: What are the works that Your Holiness would recommend?

HH: For a spiritually advanced aspirant, the *Māṇḍūkya-upaniṣad* alone is sufficient. Gauḍapādācārya's *kārikās* and Bhagavatpāda's *bhāṣya* thereon meticulously bring out its import. The *Muktika-upaniṣad* says about the *Māṇḍūkya-upaniṣad*:

The Māṇḍūkya alone is sufficient to give liberation to those keen on liberation.¹

The *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* is a fine text. The *Bhagavad-gītā*, which emerged from the Lord Himself is very important. Bhagavatpāda's works, Śrī Vidyāraṇya's *Pañcadaśī*, etc., can also be studied.

D: How long should one study the *śāstras*?

HH: Till the knowledge of the Supreme Truth arises. Thereafter, it is not required. It is said:

Just as one desirous of grains discards the chaff, so also he who is desirous of liberation should abandon the study of the śāstras.²

D: Which verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* are particularly delightful to Your Holiness?

HH: *He who is free from malice towards all beings, who is friendly as well as compassionate, who has no feeling of mine and is free from egoism, to whom pleasure and pain are alike, who forgives all, who is ever content and of controlled mind, who is endowed with firm conviction and whose mind and intellect are in Me – that devotee of Mine is dear to Me.³*

D: Do not these verses refer to the characteristics of a *jñānin*? This being the case, will the verses be useful to a *mumuṣu* (one who aspires for liberation)?

HH: Bhagavatpāda has clarified that the attributes that are natural for a *jñānin* are also those that spiritual aspirants should cultivate with effort. If people have no animosity towards any being, are friendly

¹ *Muktika-upaniṣad* I.26

² *Amṛtabindu-upaniṣad* 18

³ *Bhagavadgītā* XII.13-14

and are compassionate as taught by the Lord, they will be happy and the world will be peaceful.

17. BRAHMACARYA

D: Is it necessary for a person desirous of only *mokṣa* to observe *brahmacarya* (celibacy) throughout life?

HH: It is advantageous for one who has *vairāgya* and longs for *mokṣa* alone. In fact, married life is a big bondage. He who observes lifelong *brahmacarya* can devote himself fully to realise the Supreme Being. The path is tougher for *grhasthas* (householders) as they have many responsibilities. Further, they have to deal with distracting pleasures that are impediments to immersion in spiritual practices.

D: If such is the case, why do the *śāstras* permit married life?

HH: Not all people desire *mokṣa*. Further, only a handful of persons are competent to observe *brahmacarya* throughout their life. Therefore, to enable others to attain the Supreme by leading a good life, the *śāstras* permit marriage. What the *śāstras* permit is a regulated married life.

D: It has been mentioned in many places in the *śāstras* that progeny is necessary for a person. Will Your Holiness kindly give reason for this?

HH: One deeply studying the *śāstras* can realise that such statements are meant only for people who do not have intense desire for *mokṣa* and whose minds are not free from sexual desire.

We learn from *śāstras* that a person with intense *vairāgya* need not lead a married life. The *Upaniṣads* say:

*On the very day he gets intense vairāgya, he should renounce.*¹

*Let him take to samnyāsa from the stage of a brahmacārin or householder or vānaprastha (he who has retired to a forest).*²

*What shall we do with progeny?*³

¹ *Jābāla-upaniṣad* 4

² *Jābāla-upaniṣad* 4

³ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* IV.4.22

- D: Some people raise objections by asking how society can function if all observe *brahmacarya*. What is Your Holiness's view in this regard?
- HH: From among a thousand, one person intensely desires *mokṣa*. Even among those striving for it, only a few are committed to observing *brahmacarya* for life. Hence, the issue does not arise.
- D: May women too remain unmarried to practise spiritual disciplines?
- HH: Yes, they need not marry if they are serious about leading a spiritual life. Before resolving to remain unmarried for life, they ought to give thought to the control of mental urges and take care of their circumstances.
- D: Does Your Holiness opine that householders cannot get *jñāna* and attain *mokṣa*?
- HH: No. They too can attain *jñāna* and *mokṣa*. However, their path is tougher. An unmarried *mumukṣu* (one keen on *mokṣa*), especially one who is a *saṁnyāsin*, can remain away from causes of mental distraction and lead a life directed wholly to the attainment of *mokṣa*. Householders, however, have to live with familial responsibilities and deal with situations that are unfavourable. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to contend that they cannot secure *jñāna*. Janaka and such other householders were *jñānins*.
- D: We read about *ṛṣis* in the *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas* and also learn that they were householders. Does it not follow that according to our holy texts many a householder was a *jñānin*?
- HH: The words *ṛṣi* and *jñānin* are not synonyms and we cannot assert that all the *ṛṣis* were *jñānins*. Moreover, it cannot be maintained that every *ṛṣi* who was a *jñānin* attained his realization of the Supreme only after he became a householder and not earlier itself, when he was observing *brahmacarya*. Further, not all *ṛṣis* were married. We all accept that Śuka, Sanat Kumāra, etc., were great *ṛṣis*. There were undoubtedly *jñānins* and were also celibates.
- D: If one wants to live as a *naiṣṭhika-brahmacārin* (lifelong celibate), is it good to take a suitable *vrata* (vow)?
- HH: A spiritual aspirant can take such a vow if he is firm in his decision, dispassionate and is not pestered by sexual desire. The *vrata* taken will give him spiritual strength. However, before taking a vow of *naiṣṭhika-brahmacarya*, he should recognise that great sin will

accrue to him if there is any transgression of the vow.

D: Does Your Holiness opine that vulgar thoughts arising in the mind of a *brahmacārin* impair his *brahmacarya*?

HH: Certainly. Even if a vulgar thought arises accidentally in his mind, it is not a good sign. If he were to voluntarily allow or encourage such thoughts, it would be a kind of violation of *brahmacarya*. While a vulgar dream does not, per se, give rise to sin, bad thoughts of the waking state are transgressions of *dharma*.

D: In order to successfully observe the vow of lifelong *brahmacarya*, what should one do and what should one avoid?

HH: Wrong perspectives, vulgar conversations, bad company, immoral books and the like should be avoided. Regular physical exercise is beneficial as it favours health and combats indolence. The observer of *brahmacarya* should bear in mind that it is valuable, that sense-objects do not actually give happiness and that what one eats influences the mind. He should avoid foods disfavoured by the scripture for spiritual aspirants, such as onion, garlic, meat, liquor and very salty, hot or pungent items. He should do *yogāsanas* and *prāṇāyama*.

D: What are the benefits of being firmly established in *brahmacarya*?

HH: He who is established in *brahmacarya* attains one-pointedness of the mind and advances quickly in the path to liberation. He is able to uplift another.

D: Do spiritual aspirants who are detached, undisturbed by sexual desires and wish to observe *naiṣṭika-brahmacarya* have the blessings of Your Holiness?

HH: My blessings are always there for such persons. I would be glad if there were more like them.

18. SAMNYĀSIN

D: When and what actions should be renounced?

HH: Unnecessary actions should not be done. A spiritual aspirant ought not to attempt to renounce all his activities at the outset but should dedicate them to *Īśvara*. As his mind becomes purer and purer through his *karma-yoga*, he becomes increasingly detached and his

mind starts to turn inward and away from activity. He becomes bent on realizing the Truth. That is the ripe time to renounce the world and become a *saṁnyāsin*.

D: Should *saṁnyāsa* be taken up before or after the attainment of *jñāna*?

HH: The *saṁnyāsa* taken up after the dawn of *jñāna* is called *vidvat-saṁnyāsa* while that taken before the attainment of knowledge is termed *vividiṣā-saṁnyāsa*. The former is superior to the latter.

D: What state of mind qualifies a person for *saṁnyāsa*?

HH: After properly analysing the world, he concludes that he will not get any lasting happiness from it and heads towards a committed spiritual life. When he becomes naturally indifferent to actions and same-sighted towards the pair of opposites such as pleasure and pain, he becomes fit for *saṁnyāsa*.

D: Can one take up *saṁnyāsa* even at a young age?

HH: Yes, provided one has intense *vairāgya*.

Let him take to saṁnyāsa on the very day that he attains intense vairāgya.¹

D: Are there any regulations for a *saṁnyāsin*?

HH: There are regulations for those who have taken up *saṁnyāsa* but have not attained *jñāna*. However, there are no obligatory regulations for *saṁnyāsins* who have realised the Supreme.

D: If a *saṁnyāsin* does not get *bhikṣa* (food obtained by begging) for some days, should he make efforts to obtain food or should he keep quiet thinking, "I will not try to get it even if my spiritual life is hurt.

HH: The *saṁnyāsin* who has realised the Truth need not worry about food or death. However, if an unenlightened *saṁnyāsin* feels that his spiritual practices will be compromised, he may, if he wishes, make some more effort for *bhikṣā*.

D: Does not the word *cāturmāsya* mean four months? But nowadays, *saṁnyāsins* remain in a place only for two months. Has this been permitted in the *śāstras*?

HH: Yes.

¹ *Jābāla-upaniṣad* 4

- D: Do *saṁnyāsins* need to observe *ahimsā* as a *mahāvratā*?
- HH: Yes. *Samnyāsins* must practise *ahimsā* at all times. For them, it is a *mahāvratā*.
- D: Do *saṁnyāsins* have the duty to guide others spiritually?
- HH: There is no rule that a *saṁnyāsin* must guide others towards realisation. There is nothing wrong if he remains in seclusion. If, however, motivated by compassion, a *saṁnyāsin* who has realised the Supreme advises others, then that is the great good fortune of the disciples. Many enlightened *saṁnyāsins* have done so in the past and several are doing so now.
- D: Is there any rule to the effect that all those who have attained *jñāna* should necessarily take up formal *saṁnyāsa*?
- HH: No. If *Īśvara* feels that it would be better if they remain in the midst of the world, He will keep them in an *āśrama* (stage of life) other than *saṁnyāsa*. However, this does not imply that life as an enlightened householder is superior to life as an enlightened monk.
- D: Why would a person who has realised the Truth desire *saṁnyāsa* or make any effort to become a *saṁnyāsin*.
- HH: It is not that a person who has become fully enlightened longs for *saṁnyāsa* or strains himself to become a *saṁnyāsin*. Unmotivated to engage in actions, he gives them up effortlessly and having become a *vidvat-saṁnyāsin*, lives absorbed in bliss, as a *jīvanmukta* (one liberated while having a body).

19. CONTROLLING THE MIND

- D: Many people find it difficult to do *dhyāna* as their mind wanders in many directions. What advice would Your Holiness give to enable such people to practise *dhyāna* well?
- HH: Actually, *dhyāna* is a secret. The *Guru* instructs only after keeping in mind the competence of the disciple. As for mind-control, though it is difficult it is quite possible.
- D: Some people say that it is just impossible for them to control the mind. What about them?
- HH: Give a bundle of hundred rupee notes to the person who says that it is just impossible to control his mind. Ask him to count the notes

without making mistakes. After he finishes this task, ask him if his mind wandered while he was counting. You will indeed get the reply, “It did not.” The mind does not wander while a person is counting his salary. What is the reason for this? It is only the feeling that there should not be any error. Why will the mind wander if such a feeling is had while practising *dhyāna* also?

Arjuna says:

O Kṛṣṇa! The mind is restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate. I think controlling it is more difficult than restraining the wind.¹

Lord Kṛṣṇa responds:

O son of Kunti! No doubt it is difficult to control the mind. Yet, by practice and dispassion, it can be controlled.²

D: What is *abhyāsa* (practice)?

HH: *Abhyāsa* is effort to keep the mind focussed. It involves constantly repeating in the mind the thought of one’s object of concentration.

D: In what sense is the word *vairāgya* (dispassion) used here?

HH: Indifference to worldly and heavenly pleasures is *vairāgya*. It is the foundation for spiritual life.

D: How should dispassion be cultivated?

HH: *Vairāgya* can appear in many ways. When one’s close relative dies, one may not want anything in this world. Such dispassion is temporary and is not spiritually significant. Steady dispassion is born of *viveka* (discrimination). For instance, we discriminate between *sat* (that which is ever existent, the reality) and what is other than *sat*. The *vairāgya* that is produced by such analysis remains steady. An easier analysis is, “No sense-object is actually a cause of joy.” This is a lower grade of *viveka*. One can develop *vairāgya* even through such *viveka*.

D: How can it be said that happiness is not at all derived from objects? When something desired is eaten or when some other enjoyment is had, happiness does arise.

HH: No. If carefully analysed, it will be perceived that happiness is not obtained from objects. If a certain thing is to be the cause of

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* VI.34

² *Bhagavadgītā* VI.35

another, the rules of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* (concordance and discordance) should be satisfied. The existence of the effect when the cause is present is *anvaya* (concordance). The absence of the effect in the absence of the cause is *vyatireka* (discordance). Consider an example. Mud is the cause of a pot. Only if mud exists can the pot exist. This is *anvaya*. When there is no mud, there is no pot. This is *vyatireka*. For a cause-effect relationship to exist, *anvaya* and *vyatireka* should be satisfied. If an object is to be the cause and happiness the effect, the said rule must be satisfied between the two. However, it is not. Hence, objects cannot be the cause of happiness.

- D: Will Your Holiness kindly explain this with an illustration?
- HH: Suppose that a boy is eating a sweet. Let us now analyse whether that dish is the cause of happiness. If the boy is given the sweet when he is ill, it does not make him happy. Thus, no happiness is derived though the eatable is present. Further, even in the absence of the sweet, the boy can be happy, in the company of friends. Therefore, the sweet dish cannot be the cause of happiness.
- D: When one object is absent, we get happiness through another object. Hence, even if an isolated object cannot be the cause, why cannot objects collectively become the cause of happiness?
- HH: Even this assumption does not hold good. Everyone experiences happiness during deep sleep. On waking up we say, "I slept happily. I was aware of nothing." During deep sleep, no object whatsoever is present. Nevertheless, we do enjoy sleep. So it cannot also be said that a collection of objects is the cause of happiness. It cannot also be asserted that even if one object is absent, some other object is always present to give happiness.
- D: If objects do not cause happiness, how does a person get happiness when a desired object is obtained?
- HH: It is only because of mental peace. When a person desires an object, his mind is restless because of longing. Hence, during that period, there is no happiness. When the object is secured, the desire for it subsides. Hence, the mind becomes peaceful, and one enjoys happiness. Subsequently, a desire for something else arises and mental quietude is lost. Consequently, happiness disappears. When that desire is consummated, there is peace again and, hence, happiness.

Normally, a person does not perceive that there is a gap separating two thoughts and does not realise that the happiness is due to mental peace. Further, one also falls prey to the wrong notion that an object is what is responsible for happiness.

- D: If one recognises that mental peace gives happiness and not objects, can one thereby get *vairāgya*?
- HH: Yes. If one repeatedly notes that happiness does not stem from objects and that they are worthless, one becomes dispassionate. For example, one wanting to neutralise the desire for wealth could think, “I have to work hard to earn money. Even preserving the earned money is difficult. There is pain when it is lost or becomes spent. Wealth thus causes not happiness but unhappiness.” To tackle desire for women, a person can reflect, “Her body is full of blood and flesh.” By repeatedly thinking in this fashion, desires can be neutralised. Dispassion makes the mind unwavering, peaceful and fit for *dhyāna*. A dispassionate person can attain the Supreme state.

20. DHYĀNA

- D: What is meant by *dhyāna*?
- HH: *Dhyāna* is the state wherein the mind concentrates on just one object.
- D: What is the main advantage of practising *dhyāna*?
- HH: If mental concentration is achieved by practice, the mind can then be turned towards *Īśvara*, and being thus purified, it can be directed towards the *Ātman*, which is formless and devoid of attributes. By doing this, one attains the *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the highest peak of *dhyāna*, and therein one realises the Truth.
- D: Though so good, why is meditation very difficult to practise?
- HH: The difficulty in controlling the mind is indeed the reason.
- D: How can the mind be controlled?
- HH: The Lord has said that practice and dispassion are the means.
- D: What are the obstacles to get *dhyāna*?
- HH: Do you ask about obstacles during meditation or those arising at other times?

D: I am asking about the obstacles that prevent one from attaining *samādhi* (culmination of *dhyāna*) during meditation.

HH: The first among the obstacles is *vikṣepa*; that is, the mind wanders in all directions. This is the foremost obstacle. The second is the mind attaining a dull state. Of course, *vikṣepa* is absent. Even this is bad. If one attains an inert condition similar to sleep, one will not reach the Supreme state. *Sakaṣāya* is the third obstacle. This is a state wherein there is neither *vikṣepa* nor mental inertness. It gives a sort of happiness, but in it the seed of desire is not destroyed. This is unlike *samādhi*. One should carefully go beyond even this. Gauḍapādācārya has said:

If the mind is in a state of torpor, it should be woken up. If it is dispersed amongst objects, it should be calmed down. If it is latent with the seed of desire, that condition should be recognised. One should not disturb the mind established in equipoise.¹

D: How can we calm down the distracted mind?

HH: We should turn the mind repeatedly to the object of meditation. With growth of dispassion, *vikṣepa* subsides. During meditation, the conviction that meditation alone is important should exist. The feeling that the form or sound being meditated upon is actually present is useful in focussing the mind.

D: What is to be done if the mind becomes dull or sleepy?

HH: If a person is alert, he can discern that his mind is becoming passive and dull. By sensing the onset of torpor and awakening and focussing the mind, he can deal with dullness. The *japa* being done mentally may be intensified. The mind will then become alert. But if, in spite of effort, the mind continues to drift into the state of torpor, it is advisable to take a small break, have a walk and then recommence *dhyāna*. On certain occasions, the mind should not be forced to meditate. If there is tiredness, it is advisable to commence *dhyāna* after a break. But, if indolence is the reason for the dullness, one should force the mind to continue with meditation.

D: Is it necessary to do *japa* during *dhyāna*?

HH: While doing *saguṇa-upāsanā*, *japa* is useful in the beginning. It helps the mind to be calm. As the mind locks on to the object of *dhyāna*, *japa* ceases of its own accord. Thus, there is often no need

¹ *Gauḍapāda-kārikā* III.44

to stop *japa* wilfully.

D: How should meditation on a form be practised?

HH: Techniques vary and different aspirants have to be instructed differently. A common code of instructions cannot be prescribed. I shall spell out one method. One can proceed with the notion that one's *iṣṭa-devatā* (favourite deity) is seated in the lotus of one's heart. If one finds it difficult to visualise and focus on the pertinent form of the Lord, one can take the aid of a picture of the deity. *Japa* should be done while looking at the picture. Then, after partially closing the eyes, one should try to meditate on the deity, with the idea that one is actually seeing the deity. The mind may focus for a while, without wandering. But once the mind starts wandering, one can open one's eyes and look at the picture again. This can be followed by meditation, with the eyes partially closed. If the attempt is repeated in this manner, the form of the *iṣṭa-devatā* will remain in one's mind, without the need for looking at the picture. This is one of the methods of practising meditation. Meditating on sound is another method. Maṛṣi Patañjali prescribes the general rule:

Or, by meditating on any desired, permitted object.¹

The *Guru* determines the method that is best suited to his disciple.

D: Is it advisable to do meditation when one is not keeping good health?

HH: That depends on the extent of ill health. Those who have progressed considerably in meditation will be able to meditate whenever they wish to. But those who are still in the beginning stages may be able to meditate only when they are keeping good health. Increasing the practice of meditation yields correspondingly better fruits. This does not, however, imply that one should sit so long as to strain the mind. Experts in meditation can concentrate for hours together. But if one who is not versed in meditation tries to sit for hours in *dhyāna*, only unpleasant memories will be generated. Also, headache or some other pain may make its appearance.

D: How should *nirguṇa-dhyāna* (meditation on the Self devoid of attributes) be practised?

HH: While doing *nirguṇa-dhyāna*, one need not take the aid of any divine form or *japa*. It is suited to those who have attained high

¹ *Yoga-sūtra* I.39

levels in the practice of *dhyāna*. Meditation on that which is bereft of form and attributes is *nirguṇa-dhyāna*. It leads to *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the highest state of meditation. No unique method exists for practising it. One of the methods for this is as follows. First, the rise and fall of thoughts should be just watched, with the conviction that there is no connection between oneself and the thoughts. Gradually, the thoughts automatically subside. Another method consists in directly putting a stop to all mental wandering and then firmly thinking, “I am pure consciousness and bliss.” During *nirguṇa-dhyāna*, awareness of the body is absent.

D: Why do some experience bodily jerks at times during meditation?

HH: It normally means that the body is weak. It can also be due to the influence of the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*. Meditation can be continued without worrying about minor jerks.

D: Where should meditation be performed?

HH: In a calm and pure place.

D: Many desire meditation sincerely but still are not able to do it properly. Why is it so?

HH: It may seem that they greatly long for meditation, but is it actually so? No. Even a little analysis of the life of most people shows that they do not attach adequate importance to meditation. Sleep, food, office, examination, etc., get higher priority than meditation. If it is time for the office, that is the end of meditation. Further, even when they sit for meditation, they do not sit with the idea, “Let anything happen in this world. I need only meditation now.” This apart, meditation is difficult in this birth for those who have not practised it much in their previous births. By the same rule, those who had practised much meditation will now find *dhyāna* easy. Swimming is initially difficult. It becomes easy with practice. That is the case here also.

D: When one is seated for meditation, will the resolve, “I am not going to give room to any worry or worldly thought” be helpful?

HH: Yes.

D: It stands to reason that he who has intense *vairāgya* should be easily able to forget the world when he sits for meditation. However, we see some persons with intense dispassion who are unable to meditate well. Will Your Holiness clarify why this is so?

HH: Normally, *dhyāna* is easy for those who have intense dispassion. However, because of their not having duly practised mediation in their previous births, some deeply dispassionate ones may experience difficulty in achieving intense focus during meditation.

D: If one is defeated again and again when trying to meditate, will not one become disheartened and irritated?

HH: Giving place to disheartenment or irritation is equivalent to one standing as an obstacle in one's own way. Even to get a degree, one has to go to college and study for years. What then need be said about the effort required to achieve success in *dhyāna*, which is very subtle and far superior? Not only do people not put in the same effort as they do for earning a degree but they object that they feel irritated and frustrated. You can judge for yourself how fair this is.

Mahaṛṣi Patañjali has said in his *Yogasūtras*:

It becomes firmly rooted when practised for a long time, without any break and with sincerity.¹

If people could successfully accomplish *dhyāna* in days or a few months, the sage's aphorism would be meaningless.

D: Even those who are able to get good meditation may experience fluctuations in their level of meditation. Their meditation is deep on some days but on some others, it is unsatisfactory. What should be done to get good meditation always?

HH: Ill health, unrestricted food, laziness, worries, desires, etc., remain as impediments to *dhyāna*. Hence, if we remove these obstacles, *dhyāna* will become steady. If the problem persists, then, without giving any room for worry, further efforts should be made. If meditation gets spoilt because of a particular powerful obstacle, one should, with the guidance of a *Guru*, remove it by a specifically directed effort. All this apart, advantage can be taken of the fact that the mind is naturally peaceful at certain times of the day, such as dawn and dusk.

D: Is *dhyāna* alone sufficient to control desires?

HH: Those who attain the highest state of meditation, namely *samādhi*, can destroy desire through it. For others, meditation alone can be insufficient. Mental impressions are generated or strengthened when

¹ *Yoga-sūtra* I.14

one thinks of or resorts to objects of desire while one is not in meditation. These tendencies tend to overpower those produced during meditation. Hence, when one is not doing meditation, one should assiduously cultivate dispassion by the perception of faults in objects. Studying scriptural texts daily and contemplating on the ideas expressed therein help one to conquer desires. The company of saints is greatly helpful in curbing longings.

21. NIRVIKALPA-SAMĀDHI

- D: What is *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: It is highest *samādhi* wherein there is no awareness of the distinction of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing. The *Ātman* is realised in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*.
- D: Does one's breathing fully stop when one is in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: No, breathing persists to a minute extent.
- D: Is there in *nirvikalpa-samādhi* the manifestation of bliss or only the absence of sorrow?
- HH: There is not only the absence of sorrow but also the manifestation of supreme bliss.
- D: I heard that *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* (a plenary mental activity having the *Ātman* for its basis) is present in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. Your Holiness said that there is no awareness of the distinctness of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. If so, will the knowledge of *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* be there in *samādhi*?
- HH: No. When one is in the state of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, one will not be aware of the presence of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*.
- D: If so, how can it be said that the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* existed during *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: One can know that by means of inference and scriptural statements. If recollection is to arise, there should have been a preceding experience. When the mind comes down from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, there is a memory to the effect that supreme bliss was experienced earlier. For the memory to be present, there should have been an experience. If there is to be an experience connected with the mind, there should have been a thought. That mental *vṛtti* is

called *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*.

D: An object is required for a thought to arise in the mind. What is the object of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*?

HH: Just the *Ātman*.

D: When an object is perceived, the mind assumes its form. Only then does knowledge of the object arise. In dreams too, the mind assumes the form of what is seen, with the difference that the senses do not play a role. Thus, in both waking and dream states, the *vṛtti* assumes the form of an object. Your Holiness said that the *Ātman* alone is grasped by the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*. How can the *Ātman* become an object of the *vṛtti* as It does not have any quality or form at all?

HH: When it is said that the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*'s object is the *Ātman*, what is implied is that the mind is so extremely pure at that time that it just cannot be discerned distinctly from Brahman. The mind is then like a pure crystal. The effulgent *Ātman* manifests in it clearly. Just as a crystal, when placed in the vicinity of a red flower appears red, so also is the nature of the *Ātman* assumed by the mind. This *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* is the one that destroys ignorance.

D: Will a single experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* be sufficient to attain *brahma-jñāna*?

HH: Normally, it is not sufficient. During *nirvikalpa-samādhi* the *Ātman* is experienced. After emergence from that state, the experience gradually begins to fade. However, just after coming down from it, everything is perceived as the *Ātman*. Nothing distinct from the *Ātman* is discerned. To cite an example, one feels, "I am a big ocean. It is in me that the bubbles constituted by the world are produced." The experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* must be had to be understood. Verbal descriptions are woefully inadequate.

If one gets the experience of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* repeatedly, one's *jñāna* becomes stable. After the realisation becomes stable, the mind is destroyed and one becomes a *jīvanmukta*.

D: Why does one descend from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

HH: If *prārabdha* is not exhausted, one is obliged to emerge from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. We can find different illustrations for this in the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*.

D: Can the *Ātma-jñāna* be attained only by means of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

HH: Clear knowledge of the *Ātman* is had through enquiry. The knowledge that stems from the teaching of the *Guru* and the *śāstra* and is rendered free from doubts by enquiry is manifested clearly by *nirvikalpa-samadhi*. It does so by eliminating all disturbing influences. *Nirvikalpa-samādhi* is a wonderful means. However, it does not by itself bring about the realization of the Truth which liberates one from bondage. On the other hand, it is only when backed by the teaching of the *Guru* and *śāstra* and enquiry that it serves to manifest, without impediment, the realization of the Truth.

D: During *nirvikalpa-samādhi* will there be any awareness of one's body and one's surroundings?

HH: No.

D: Can one be awakened from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

HH: In most cases, it can be done with some difficulty. Sometimes, it becomes almost impossible to wake one up. All this depends on the depth of the *samādhi*.

D: Can one predetermine the duration of one's stay in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

HH: Yes, if there is sufficient practice. If a suitable resolve is made before going into *samādhi*, one can descend from the exalted condition at the predetermined time. For example, if one thinks, "I will do *pūjā* in an hour" and goes into *samādhi*, then one can come down from *samādhi* after being in that state for exactly one hour.

D: Will Your Holiness kindly explain the experiences that precede the onset of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

HH: It is impossible to give a precise description and the steps preceding *nirvikalpa-samādhi* are not unique. However, I will give a rough account of what can happen. First, awareness of the body and the surroundings gradually vanishes. Then, only the thoughts of the mind are perceived. As meditation proceeds further, mental activity subsides. One feels, "I have become infinite like the sky." Then comes a great blissful experience. After this, there is a sudden change and awareness of the distinction of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing ceases. That experience is beyond words.

D: What is the procedure to be adopted to attain *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?

HH: Usually, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* can be attained if one repeatedly gets *savikalpa-samādhi*.

- D: Will the awareness of the distinction of the seer, the seen and the act of seeing cease in *savikalpa-samādhi* also?
- HH: No. It ceases only in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. The term *savikalpa-samādhi* itself shows that this is a *samādhi* with awareness, though very mild, of the distinction of the seer, seen and seeing present.
- D: Will the joy got in *savikalpa-samādhi* be the same as that in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: No. The joy of *nirvikalpa-samādhi* is unparalleled. But it can be said that the happiness obtained in *savikalpa-samādhi* is extremely great when compared to any worldly pleasure.
- D: Can it be said that liberation will definitely be had by one who arranges for his death in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: It cannot be said so. *Mokṣa* is attained when *jñāna* becomes thoroughly unobstructed and fructifies. If one has not attained full enlightenment and one arranges to have oneself killed in *samādhi*, there would be scope for rebirth.
- D: Can it be said that if one dies while in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, one can attain *jñāna* easily in one's next birth?
- HH: Yes.
- D: Is there a possibility for one to fall from spiritual life even after attaining *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: Yes, there is the possibility of a fall, until complete, firm realisation of the Truth arises. I have come across persons who have slipped after *nirvikalpa-samādhi*.
- D: Can *nirvikalpa-samādhi* be obtained by means of drugs, self-hypnosis, and such else?
- HH: No.
- D: Is it possible to feel thirst, hunger etc., immediately after the mind comes down from prolonged *nirvikalpa-samādhi*?
- HH: These are normally not felt. Rarely, a little body ache may be felt due to the body having remained erect and motionless for long.
- D: Will Your Holiness say something about *nirvikalpa-samādhi* from personal experience?
- HH: (Smiling) Do you think that all the while I was merely repeating like a parrot what is contained in the *śāstras*?

22. NĀDĀNUSANDHĀNA

- D: What is meant by *nādānusandhāna*?
- HH: Generally speaking, it is also a kind of meditation.
- D: How can it be practised?
- HH: There are a few ways. I shall mention one of them. The ear, nose and mouth should be closed with the fingers and the sound that is heard inside one's ears should be carefully listened to.
- D: How is one to breathe if the nose and the mouth are closed completely?
- HH: I did not mean that the nose should be shut completely.
- D: Is there any benefit in paying attention to the sound produced inside?
- HH: Yes. It is essential to make the mind one-pointed. This can either be done by fixing the mind on a form or by paying attention to a sound. External sounds are attenuated when the ears are closed. However, the internal sound is clearly apprehensible. By directing attention to that sound, the mind becomes one-pointed.
- D: How is one to concentrate on the sound heard internally?
- HH: One can focus the mind on it just as one would concentrate on an external sound. This is because the internal sound can be heard when the ears are closed.
- D: While meditating in this manner, is it necessary to concentrate on a form?
- HH: No. Fixation of the mind on the sound within is sufficient.
- D: What will result if the mind is fixed on the sound?
- HH: Gradually, the mind becomes more and more peaceful. External sounds and other disturbances cease to distract the concentration. The sound heard from inside becomes very clear. With the passage of time, different internal sounds are heard. Finally, all sounds cease and the mind plunges into *samādhi*.
- D: Can we see the manifestation of any special power when meditating on the internal sound?
- HH: Sometimes, one can hear the sounds or conversations that originate far away. However, one should be indifferent to clairaudience and

just continue with one's meditation. One's spiritual progress will suffer if one turns to clairaudience and the like that may manifest.

- D: Is *nādānusandhāna* better than meditation on a form?
- HH: What is best for one may not be so for another, as the qualifications and aptitudes of spiritual aspirants vary. A *Guru* may, therefore, prescribe *nādānusandhāna* for some disciples and meditation on a form for some others.
- D: Is there any speciality in *nādānusandhāna* as compared to other methods?
- HH: (Smiling) Even a person who is not proficient in *nādānusandhāna* ought not to be disturbed by external sounds and external forms since his ears and the eyes are closed. You can consider this itself as a speciality!
- D: Is there any difficulty in practising this type of meditation?
- HH: (With a smile) Will there not be pain when the hands are used to close the ears for a long duration?
- D: Are there other methods of practicing *nādānusandhāna*?
- HH: I have watched some Buddhists practising meditation with using a bell that rings for a long duration. Two persons sat facing each other. They alternately ring the bell and concentrated on the sound. There are other such methods of focus on sound in vogue.

23. LAMBIKĀ-YOGA

- D: I have read that Śrī Vidyātirtha (the tenth *Jagadguru* of the Sringeri Sharada Peetha) spent his last days in *lambikā-yoga*. Will Your Holiness kindly explain what is meant by *lambikā-yoga*?
- HH: During *lambikā-yoga*, nectar flows down from the *sahasrāra-cakra* situated in the head. That nectar causes hunger and thirst to disappear and confers good health.
- D: How should one practise *lambikā-Yoga*?
- HH: According to *haṭha-yoga* texts, the tendon at the lower part of the tongue should be cut a little. Medicines should then be applied to heal the wounded portion. The lower portion of the tongue should then be cut to a further extent. Simultaneously, the tongue should be stretched, little by little. Soon, the tongue becomes thin and

elongated. When this elongated tongue is stretched, it should reach the region between the eyebrows. The tongue should now be folded back and thrust upwards. When meditation is practised after this, nectar flows down.

D: Does meditation of this nature cause physical pain and dumbness?

HH: It cannot be guaranteed that there will be no pain but it is wrong to say that one will become dumb. The voice will be clear.

D: How will the nectar taste? Will one know by experience that it is flowing down?

HH: There is no need to say that the nectar is tasty. It can surely be experienced as it flows down to the throat.

D: Will hunger and thirst disappear completely once the nectar is tasted?

HH: It cannot be assumed that they disappear forever. They are normally not felt for some time, but reappear later. So long as the effect of the nectar lasts, the body is not in need of food and water and does not grow weak.

D: Has Your Holiness seen anybody who has cut his tongue in the prescribed manner?

HH: Yes. I have seen one person. He had a clear voice. He demonstrated *lambikā-yoga* by folding his tongue and pushing it upwards. He was making a peculiar sound. Finally, he succeeded in obtaining nectar.

D: Would any external sound or disturbance have caused harm?

HH: Yes. Excessive disturbances could have been fatal.

D: Is there any other easier way of obtaining nectar than cutting the lower part of the tongue?

HH: Certainly, there is. What I told you now is the *haṭha-yoga* method of obtaining the nectar. For some, it descends during meditation due to their pertinent practice in the previous birth. My *Guru* (His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Candraśekhara Bhāratī Mahāsvāmin) has told me about the flow of nectar.

D: In which kind of meditation does nectar flow?

HH: Usually during *saguṇa-dhyāna*.

D: Since the nectar is said to flow down from the head, can one come

to the conclusion that nectar is stored there? Is it not surprising?

HH: Whether it is surprising or not, is irrelevant. The existence and descent of nectar are directly experienced. Besides being tasty, the nectar also frees one from hunger and thirst. So there is no room for doubt. However, neither the nectar present in the *sahasrāra* in the head, nor what flows down to the throat is detectable by others. It is not something gross.

D: If *lambikā-Yoga* is taught to all, then countless people suffering from hunger can be benefited. Is it not?

HH: Only extremely few will successfully obtain nectar and so the practice cannot be made universal. The effort required to succeed is tremendous and would act as a deterrent even to those assiduous practitioners who may be keen on tasting the nectar.

D: Has Your Holiness noted any characteristic in persons who have experienced this flow of nectar?

HH: Yes. For some people, a little quantity of water oozes from the crown of the head. However, this is unrelated causally to the flow of nectar.

D: When would the water ooze from the head?

HH: It may come any time. Even while taking food.

D: How much?

HH: More or less one *uddharaṇī*-full.

(An *uddharaṇī* is spoon-like and is used during *anuṣṭhāna*.)

D: Is what emerges water or any other fluid resembling water?

HH: (Smiling) Water.

D: Will there be any inconvenience on account of the flow of water?

HH: There is no inconvenience at all. The water that emerges needs to be removed with a cloth. Otherwise, it will flow down the face.

D: What is the reason for such flow of water?

HH: It can flow. That is all.

D: Has Your Holiness made effort to make nectar descend?

HH: I neither pay attention to such *siddhis* nor do I make effort to obtain it. It just comes as it pleases. I do not make any effort to get it or

to prevent it.

- D: Your Holiness pointed out that nectar could descend in some people even if the lower part of the tongue is not cut. What can such people do to initiate or facilitate the flow?
- HH: While practising *saguṇa-dhyāna*, they could keep the tongue folded back, with the tip at the rear of the upper palate. If the practice of their past births is suitable, this would be of some help.
- D: Would it not be beneficial to spiritual aspirants to get over the need for food and water by recourse to *lambikā-yoga*?
- HH: No. The aim of those aspiring for liberation should only be the securing of the realisation of the Supreme and, thus, liberation. Turning attention to dealing in an extraordinary way with hunger and thirst is also a kind of distraction from the goal. *Lambikā-yoga* came naturally to sages like Śrī Vidyātīrtha and so they allowed it. If, however, a beginner spends his time on this, he will be wasting his precious time. We should take care that the mind does not deviate from the goal.

24. KUṆḌALINĪ

(*Kuṇḍalinī* is the Supreme Power in the form of a snake. The *suṣumnā-nāḍī* is a subtle tube passing through the central canal of the spine. Seats of manifestation of *śakti* (power) are present in the *suṣumnā-nāḍī* and within the head. They are called *cakras* and resemble lotuses. If the *kuṇḍalinī* comes to these locations, *śakti* manifests in a special way. Generally, the *kuṇḍalinī* lies asleep in the *mūlādhāra-cakra*, at the base of the *suṣumnā-nāḍī*. One attains *samādhi* when the dormant *kuṇḍalinī* awakens, rises from the *mūlādhāra-cakra* and ascends, via the *suṣumnā-nāḍī*, to the *sahasrāra-cakra*, which is in the head.)

- D: Do the *kuṇḍalinī* and the *cakras* really exist?
- HH: *Kuṇḍalinī* is the embodiment of the Divine and is a source of power. There is no gross serpent actually coiled up at the base of the spinal cord. Nor again are there gross lotuses in the spinal cord. The *kuṇḍalinī*'s arousal and ascent up the back can be felt. Stages in the manifestation of *śakti* are apprehended. These correspond to the ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī* to the various *cakras*.
- D: Why have the *cakras* been presented as lotus-like and why has a

description of the divinities therein been provided?

- HH: Contemplation of the *kuṇḍalinī* and the *cakras*, as described in the *Tāntrika* texts, does cause manifestation of power and expansion of awareness. Physical effects can also be seen. One would die if one does not breathe for a long time. But, during the practice of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga*, one can sit for long, with breathing suspended. I have seen some who obtained powers by contemplating on the *cakras*. Special powers can be acquired through *kuṇḍalinī-yoga*. The description of the *cakras* serves even this end. However, for those who ardently desire liberation, all such powers are irrelevant and for them, *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* serves a higher purpose.
- D: How can one awaken the *kuṇḍalinī* that is dormant in the *mūlādhara-cakra*?
- HH: It may be awakened through suitable meditation and through *prāṇāyāma*. Other methods are also there.
- D: How is one to practise *prāṇāyāma*?
- HH: There are different forms of *prāṇāyāma*. One should learn them directly from a qualified *Guru* before practising them.
- D: Will Your Holiness explain a simple form of *prāṇāyāma* that can be practised during *anuṣṭhāna*?
- HH: One should sit in a firm position and keep the back straight. *Prāṇāyāma* is practised by breathing in through one nostril, retaining breath for some time and then exhaling through the other nostril. Next, air should be drawn in through the nostril used earlier for exhalation. Ordinary *prāṇāyāma* has got three parts. They are *pūraka*, *kumbhaka* and *recaka*. Breathing in is *pūraka*, retaining the breath is *kumbhaka* and breathing out is *recaka*. One will not find it difficult if these are done in the ratio of 1:2:2. What I mentioned now is a variant of the standard ratio of 1:4:2. To obtain special benefits, the *jālandhara-bandha*, *uḍḍiyāna-bandha* and *mūla-bandha* too should be performed in the course of *prāṇāyāma*. These should be learnt from a teacher. Improper practice of the *bandhas* is harmful.
- D: Should one retain air long enough to cause discomfort?
- HH: No. Care should be taken while doing *prāṇāyāma* to see that discomfort never sets in. If it does, the durations of inhalation, retention and exhalation may be proportionately reduced.

- D: What are some benefits of *prāṇāyāma*?
- HH: It purifies the *nāḍīs* and makes the mind calm. It is a form of expiation. It also helps to arouse the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī*.
- D: It is said that when the *kuṇḍalī* reaches the *sahasrāra-cakra*, the spiritual practitioner attains deep *samādhi*. Will everybody who attains *samādhi* be aware that his *kuṇḍalinī* has ascended to his head?
- HH: No. A spiritual aspirant may attain *samādhi* even without awareness of the awakening and upward travel of the *kuṇḍalinī*. There has been such lack of awareness in persons who have attained *samādhi* through just *Vedānta*. They can, if they want, experience the ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī* to the *sahasrāra*. Though what I have just spoken of has not been described in the prominent *Tāntrika* works and in the *Haṭhayoga-pradīpika*, it is something borne out by experience.

25. AMANASKA-YOGA

- D: One feels happy when one remains motionless and calm. Hence, may one sit quietly for some time, even with the eyes open, to obtain mental peace?
- HH: Yes. Sages like Yājñavalkya have spoken of a practice of this form, called *amanaska-yoga*.
- D: What is *amanaska-yoga*?
- HH: It is a state of mind wherein no thoughts appear. True *amanaska* is had only when the mind is destroyed in *samādhi* and one becomes a *jīvanmukta*. Normally, we dwell on different objects. It appears that thoughts occur continuously. Careful observation, however, reveals that there are gaps between successive thoughts. The *Ātman* clearly shines in the gaps. People do not note this, as the interval between thoughts is very short. Bhagavatpāda writes in the *Laghu-vākyavṛtti*:

*A thread covered by pearls is seen between two pearls. Likewise, consciousness is covered by thoughts is clear between thoughts.*¹

In a garland made of pearls, the thread is hidden in the places where the pearls are present but in-between two pearls, the thread

¹ *Laghu-vākyavṛtti* 10

is seen. Likewise, the *Ātman* of the form of pure consciousness is not apparent when a thought is present but it is patent in the interval between the end of one thought and the rise of another. We can obtain great happiness if we calmly enlarge the gap between one thought and another.

D: Can this be practised even with the eyes open?

HH: As I pointed out, the aim is to see that no thought arises in the mind. So there is no harm in keeping the eyes open. It is sufficient if the mind does not wander towards external objects. While practising, one should remain calm and quite free from worries. No effort should be made to do or dwell on anything. If any thought arises in the mind, its continuance should be discouraged.

D: What indication is there to show that one is progressing in the path of *amanaska-yoga*?

HH: The mental peace and happiness that one derives is an indication of progress.

D: Is it not difficult to see to it that no thought arises in the mind?

HH: It is difficult to attain the zenith of thoughtlessness. But the mind can be kept peaceful to a considerable extent.

D: Do mundane people also have the power to still the mind?

HH: Do not all people sleep?

D: Yes.

HH: How?

D: I am at a loss to know the import of Your Holiness's question.

HH: People lie down. After that, how do they go to sleep? They close their eyes and remain quiet. Soon, sleep envelops them. Is it not?

D: Yes.

HH: We note that during deep sleep, people are thoroughly at peace. They have rendered their minds thoughtless. Of course, this is achieved involuntarily. Is it not so?

D: Yes.

HH: Therefore, it can be said that all can still the mind. Mundane people still it during deep sleep without any effort and without being conscious of it. In the path of *amanaska-yoga*, one thoroughly

silences the mind in the state of wakefulness.

D: Can *amanaska-yoga* be done in any place?

HH: It may be practised anywhere but there should be facilities to sit comfortably. How can one practise it while running a race?

D: Are there any ill effects?

HH: No.

D: What should one be careful about, when practicing *amanaska-yoga*?

HH: (With a laugh) One should not go to sleep! Sleep should be averted by being alert.

26. MĀYĀ

D: In dim light, a rope may falsely appear as a snake. Similarly, the Supreme Being appears as the world. This, I have learnt from the *śāstras*. If a rope is to falsely appear as a snake, someone different from both the snake and the rope is necessary. Similarly, if Brahman appears as the world, an observer, distinct from Brahman and the world, is necessary. Such an entity is not there. Therefore, is the illustration proper?

HH: An analogue can never match the original perfectly. If it does, then it will be non-different from what is sought to be illustrated. The rope-snake example is advanced only to show that one thing can falsely appear as another. Only this aspect of the illustration should be considered and not the existence of a perceiver different from the rope and snake.

D: For a person to mistake a rope for a snake, he must have seen a real snake earlier. Else, the wrong notion of a snake cannot arise in him. Thus, the mistake presupposes the existence of a real snake. In the same way, if the Supreme Being is to be mistakenly seen as the world, there should be a real world. Is it wrong to argue in this manner?

HH: Yes. It is wrong. To mistake a rope for a snake, knowledge of a snake is necessary. It is incorrect to say that only a real snake can produce such knowledge. I will give an example. A person mistakes a tree to be a ghost. He saw a ghost in a dream had by him earlier.

When he sees the tree now, he misapprehends it to be the ghost dreamt of by him. Did that ghost really exist? No, because it was seen only in a dream. Everyone knows that whatever is seen in the dream is unreal. So, it is only the knowledge of the snake that is necessary and not a real snake. Similarly, for the Supreme Brahman to appear as the world, there is no need for a real world to exist.

D: Is *Māyā* real? If it is, then it will be wrong to say that Brahman is *advitīya* (non-dual). Nor can we assert that *Māyā* does not exist, since we are able to see the effects of *Māyā*. Will Your Holiness please explain the perplexing nature of *Māyā*?

HH: *Māyā* cannot be said to be ‘*sat* (absolutely real)’ because it is destroyed the moment true *jñāna* dawns, just as a dream disappears when we wake up. Hence, there is no second entity called *Māyā*, different from Brahman, just as there is no dream-object apart from the dreamer. *Māyā* cannot also be termed ‘*asat* (non-existent)’ as we can see its effects in the form of the world. That is why it has been said, with logic as the basis, that *Māyā* is neither *sat* nor *asat*.

D: It is said that everything except Brahman is false. Then, are not the *Vedas* also false? If so, will not *Advaita* philosophy, which is based on the *Vedas*, be untrue?

HH: Advaitins say that the world is untrue from the standpoint of the Absolute. They do not, however, deny the empirical validity of the world. From the *vyāvahārika* (empirical) standpoint, to the extent that the world is admitted to be true, so are the *Vedas*. The *Vedas*, whose reality is no less than that of the world, give rise to the knowledge that is potent enough to sublimate the ephemeral world. What shines thereafter, is just the non-dual Brahman. Thus, *Advaita-vedānta* is quite in order.

Further, no damage will be done even if it is postulated that the *Vedas* are not real. This is because even an unreal thing can give us a real effect. For example, assume that a tiger chases us in our dream. We may wake up due to the fear produced. Here, the unreal tiger brings about the real effect of waking up. Hence, even if we say that the *Vedas* are unreal like the world, undoubtedly liberating knowledge can arise from its teachings. In this way too, it can be seen that *Advaita* philosophy is quite in order.

D: Scientists gather information about and analyse the world. If the world itself is unreal, is the research carried on by scientists meaningless?

HH: No. We do not say that studying the world and analysing its laws are pointless. The empirical utility of science is unquestionable. This much, however, is certain that none can truly establish, "The world is definitely like this." A bat recognises the presence of an object by means of ultrasonic waves. What it perceives is different from what we see. Similarly, if we had the X-ray vision, our perception of an object would be different from what it is now. Which of these perceptions is the right one? Either all these different conceptions are valid or all of them are invalid. If an object is to be known as it is, our scrutiny of it should not alter its condition in any way. Physicists, however, accept that the scrutiny of an electron alters its state. Our apprehension of an object is influenced by factors other than the bare object. When, for instance, we see a room through a dark glass, everything therein appears dark as compared to what it appears when we look through a clear glass. We perceive things only as the mind "shows" them to us. Hence, it can only be said, "This is the universe as we understand it" and not, "The cosmos is decidedly only like this."

D: It is said that *Māyā* is the cause of all bondage. Why does *Māyā* exist?

HH: As far as a *jñānin* is concerned, there is nothing called *Māyā*. The Supreme Being alone exists. Thus, with regard to him, there is no scope for this question at all. Questions and answers are possible only in the realm of duality, in the realm of *Māyā*. If such a question is to be answered logically, one should have understood the nature of *Māyā*. However, the moment one grasps the true nature of *Māyā*, it vanishes totally and Brahman alone shines. Thus, it is not fair to expect a proper answer to this question, as the question itself is faulty. *Māyā* itself is like a big question mark. The Supreme Being is non-dual but *Māyā* creates this appearance of duality. This indeed is the power of *Māyā*.

In the absence of adequate light, a rope may seem to be a snake. Seeing this, one may ask, "Why should the rope appear as a snake when they are two different entities?" The answer is, "It does so on account of one's ignorance." Suppose one asks, "Why does this ignorance exist?" This question cannot be answered. A person who has no misconception ever sees the rope only as a rope. The question is baseless as far as he is concerned, for, to him, the rope never appeared as a snake.

Next, take the case of a person who has the wrong notion that he is seeing a snake. He too cannot answer the question because, as

far as he is concerned, what is in front of him is indeed a snake, not a rope. Let us consider a third man's view. He initially mistakes the rope to be a snake. Later, he realises that it is a rope. Suppose, he is asked, "Why did the rope appear to you as a snake?" His reply will be, "It was due to my misconception." He is then asked, "Why does this misconception exist?" He will not be able to answer. This is because he now sees only the rope and the misconception being asked about is totally absent.

Some questions have no answer because of the fallacy inherent in the question. What answer can be given to the question, "Where is the beginning of a circle?" The questioner asks this question with the misconception, "A circle has a beginning." It is the question that is improper. Likewise, the question, "Why does *Māyā* exist?" is inappropriate.

- D: Would Your Holiness explain how one could surmise that the world is illusory; something conjured by *Māyā*?
- HH: The seed of a banyan tree is small. If it is broken, only smaller pieces are seen. But a big banyan tree grows from it. Does this not, at first sight, seem to be a magical feat? From the sperm of a person, a baby is born and gradually becomes a big man. Does this also not seem like magic? So, one can consider the world to be an illusory projection.

What we see in our dream greatly matches what we see in the waking state. Hence, we cannot say with certainty that the two are different.

If we keep on posing the question, "why" with regard to anything of the world, we finally end up with the answer, "I do not know." Such should be the case if the universe is illusory. Let us suppose that we see in a dream a huge elephant within a small room. The doors of a room are very small. If one starts enquiring in the dream as to how the elephant came into the room, the conclusion will be, "I see the elephant but I cannot understand how it came in." Similar is the case with what is shown by one who practises *indrajāla*. In such cases something is seen but no satisfactory explanation can be given. The world too is inexplicable in this manner and so, presumably, is like a dream or an illusory projection.

After waking up from the dream considered, we would say, "Actually, there was no elephant, no small room and no entry of an elephant into the room." On realising the Truth, the world is

negated in the same way. The words of the *Veda* are:

Know prakṛti (primordial nature) to be Māyā.¹

D: If the world is just an appearance, why has its creation been spoken of in the *śāstras*?

HH: If a child asks about the sun, what do we say? We reply that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. We do know that the earth rotates and that there is no actual rising and setting of the sun. Still, we say that the sun itself rises, just to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the child. Similarly, when one seeing the world gets a doubt as to its origin, the *śāstra*, being like a mother, speaks a little about the world. Then, it leads the enquirer stage by stage and finally explains the Truth. The final description of the Truth is:

Not this, not this.²

27. WAKING STATE AND DREAM STATE

D: Is the waking state different from the dream state?

HH: It is not when considered from the standpoint of the Truth.

D: Then, does it mean that everything is a fabrication of the mind?

HH: Yes.

D: Will Your Holiness please explain?

HH: In the dream state, we see a world that appears to be real when we are witnessing the dream. We see a world in the waking state. This also seems to be real. We experience joy and sorrow in the waking state. Likewise, we experience them in the dream too. Therefore, both the states are similar.

D: In the waking state, if a book is placed on a table, it remains at the same place the next day also. However, a book placed on a table in the dream is not to be found there when one wakes up the next morning. Considering this difference, can it not be said that the waking state is real while the dream state is unreal?

HH: Suppose, for example, that you keep a book on the table in a dream. Then you go to do some other work in that dream itself. On

¹ *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* IV.10

² *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* II.3.6

returning, will not the book be found in the same place?

D: Yes, it will be there.

HH: This example should have cleared your doubt. In this waking state, if a book is kept at a spot, it remains in the same place. Similarly, during a dream, a book remains where it is placed. No doubt, a book of the dream state vanishes when one wakes up but, then, similar is the case of a book of the waking state vanishing when one goes to sleep.

D: There seems to be another difference also.

HH: What is it?

D: Some others see us sleeping. They can assert that we were asleep. So dreams are unreal.

HH: Let us assume in the course of a dream you see yourself sitting and daydreaming. In your dream, some people see you sitting. As far as they are concerned, your sitting at that place is real but what you are imagining is unreal. Is it not?

D: Yes.

HH: Were you really sitting near those people?

D: No.

HH: The reason is that both your sitting at that place and your being observed by other people belong to the dream. Similar is the case with people watching another sleep.

D: The waking state continues for years, while a dream persists only for minutes or an hour. What about this difference?

HH: If this reasoning is adopted, you will have to answer the following question. If one dream lasts thirty minutes and another ten minutes, will you say that the dream that lasted thirty minutes is more real than the dream that lasted ten minutes?

D: No.

HH: Therefore, just by giving the reason that the waking state lasts longer than a dream, it cannot be concluded that the waking state is more real than the dream state. Further, the passage of time too is something imagined. In a dream, one may think that a long time has lapsed but, with regard to the waking state, only ten minutes might have passed.

D: I accept that the world in the waking state is very similar to the world experienced in the dream. However, a fresh doubt has arisen.

HH: Ask without any hesitation.

D: We are not aware that whatever we experience in the waking state is unreal. Why?

HH: In the course of a dream, are you usually aware that it is unreal?

D: No.

HH: When is it known by you that the perception had in the dream is false?

D: Only when I come to the waking state.

HH: Likewise, we will realise unmistakably that the world of the waking state is false only when we awaken from this dream of the waking state.

D: When will one wake up from this dream?

HH: When one attains the realisation that one is the *Ātman*, which is devoid of all bondage and is of the nature of Supreme bliss.

D: When will such a realisation occur?

HH: When one wholly purifies one's mind and fixes it on the *Ātman*.

D: What role do the *Guru* and the *śāstras* play in this matter?

HH: The teachings of the *Guru*, which are in accordance with the *śāstras*, produce the knowledge of the Truth.

D: Do not the *śāstras* and the teachings of the *Guru* belong to this unreal world? If so, how can they generate the knowledge of the Truth?

HH: These teachings also belong to the world. Still, right knowledge can dawn because of them. Let us assume that in a dream, a tiger is chasing us. We may wake up on account of fear. In the same way, the dictates of the *śāstras* and the teachings of the *Guru* wake us up from this big dream.

D: Then, what is creation?

HH: Perception is creation. There is no creation other than perception. Perception of a thing is its origination.

D: Are *Īśvara* and the *Guru*, then, real or false?

HH: They are, in truth, the *Ātman* that is the nature of absolute existence, pure consciousness and infinite bliss. However, the body of the *Guru* and any form of *Īśvara* are false. In reality, there is neither cause nor effect. When there is no real creation, how can *Īśvara*'s role as a creator be real, on par with His intrinsic nature? It is said:

*There is no dissolution of the cosmos, no creation, none who is bound, none who strives, none who desires liberation and none who is liberated. This is the ultimate Truth.*¹

One has bondage as long as one deems that one has bondage. He who deems that he is free is indeed free. That is why it has been said:

*He who considers himself liberated is a liberated one. He who feels that he has bondage is bound.*²

Therefore, one should get rid of the wrong impression that one has bondage.

D: Is the removal of the wrong idea that one has bondage the means to attain *mokṣa*?

HH: Yes. So far, I was speaking with the *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda* (perception-is-creation view) in mind. This, however, is not suitable for many people because, owing to the absence of intense dispassion, they cannot correctly imbibe it. People accept that the dream state is unreal. If told that the waking state is equally unreal, they would be unconvinced about this or feel ill at ease. Since only few are qualified to correctly comprehend the *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda*, embrace it and become liberated, the *śāstras* teach this in only select places.

28. NATURE OF BONDAGE

D: Does bondage really exist?

HH: No. If bondage is real, how can it be destroyed by knowledge?

D: Who has got bondage?

HH: He who has the delusion that he has bondage.

D: Who has the misconception that he is bound?

¹ *Gauḍapāda-kārikā* II.32

² *Aṣṭāvakra-gīṭā* I.11

HH: You first answer that.

D: The *Ātman*.

HH: The *Ātman* is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. It does not have any kind of bondage. This is the conclusion of the *śāstras*.

D: If the bondage is not for *Ātman*, it should be for the mind.

HH: The mind is an inanimate object. How can it have bondage? It is not at all possible for an inanimate object to have bondage.

D: If the bondage is neither for the *Ātman* nor for the mind, how can bondage be present at all?

HH: Did you think of all the possibilities?

D: I have not considered a combination of the *Ātman* and the mind because that is meaningless.

HH: Why?

D: Since the nature of the *Ātman* is quite different from that of the mind, how can they unite?

HH: Are heat and light the attributes of iron?

D: No.

HH: Are they the attributes of fire?

D: Yes.

HH: What happens when a piece of iron is heated for a long time?

D: It becomes white-hot and glows.

HH: That is so. If you were not already aware that heat and light are the qualities of fire, would you not consider them to be the attributes of the heated iron as they are seen in it?

D: Yes.

HH: The mind is inert and the *Ātman* is of the nature of consciousness. Bondage is only for the *jīva*, who, like the heated iron, is a blend of the mind and the *Ātman*. It is not as though bondage is for the *Ātman* alone or the mind alone. In reality, the *jīva* is the *Ātman*. The *jīva* experiences bondage as long as he is unaware of his true nature. When the *jīva* realises his true nature, he gets freed from rebirth.

D: In that case, even *mokṣa* cannot be permanent.

HH: Why?

D: Because that which has a beginning should also have an end. *Mokṣa* is produced when *jñāna* dawns and so, has a beginning.

HH: The objection is not valid as there is no real bondage. Bondage is unreal and is because of ignorance. When ignorance is destroyed through knowledge, all bondage ceases. *Mokṣa* is nothing but abidance in one's true nature as Brahman. We do not say that *mokṣa* something actually attained by the *Ātman*.

29. THE MEANS TO ATTAIN MOKṢA

D: What is the means to *mokṣa*?

HH: *Brahma-jñāna* alone is the direct means to *mokṣa*. The *śāstras* say: *Mokṣa is attained only on account of jñāna.*¹

*Only on knowing Him, one becomes deathless. There is no other way to immortality.*²

D: Does it follow that action is not the direct cause of liberation?

HH: Yes. The *śāstras* are conclusive in this regard. For example, the *Mahānārayaṇa Upaniṣad* teaches:

*Mokṣa is not attained by means of actions.*³

D: When does *jñāna* dawn?

HH: *Jñāna* arises when the mind becomes pure.

D: Will not the mind attain purity if actions are performed in a spirit of dedication to *Īśvara*?

HH: Yes. It will.

D: Then, should not *karma* also be said to be the cause of *mokṣa*? This is because the mind becomes pure when *karma* is performed in a spirit of dedication to *Īśvara*. *Jñāna* dawns in a pure mind and

¹ (Unidentified, oft-quoted) *smṛti*

² *Taittirīya-āranyaka* III.13.1.2

³ *Mahānārayaṇa-upaniṣad* XII.14

mokṣa is, thereby, attained.

- HH: Your reasoning itself shows that *karma* is not the direct means to *mokṣa*. Everybody knows that clay is the cause of a pot. Similarly, the one who makes the pot is also its cause. Now, is the father of the potter also a cause of the pot? After all, but for his father, the potter would not have been born and but for the potter, the pot would not have been produced.
- D: The father of the potter cannot be considered as a cause, for if he is, we will be forced to regard the potter's grandfather, great-grandfather, etc., also as causes.
- HH: If the same reasoning is applied, it can be seen that *karma* is never the direct cause of *mokṣa*. Further, that which stems from *karma* has a beginning and so, has an end. Hence, if *mokṣa* results from *karma*, it cannot be permanent. However, the *śāstras* say that *mokṣa* is permanent. Hence, it should be understood that *jñāna* alone is the direct cause for *mokṣa* and nothing else.

30. DIFFERING VIEWS IN ADVAITA TEXTS

- D: We find differing views in the *Advaita* texts. For instance, some speak of the *jīva* as the reflection of *Brahman* in *avidyā*, while some others speak it as *Brahman* delimited by *avidyā*. Some speak of the presence of multiple *jīvas*, while some say that there is only one *jīva*. What is the reason for such differing views?
- HH: *Advaita* philosophy, which stems from *śāstras* and is elucidated by *Bhagavatpāda*, has some variety just as the *Gaṅgā* branches severally before merging with the ocean. However, all *Advaitins* agree that:
- Brahman is real, the world is unreal and the jīva is Brahman alone, and not different from It.*¹
- Further, the followers of *Bhagavatpāda* are unanimous that *jñāna* alone is the cause of *mokṣa*.

The variations seen are in the description of the world, God and the individual self. The different views serve to cater to the needs of aspirants of differing competence and temperament. To a highly competent and advanced aspirant, the *eka-jīva-vāda* (the view that

¹ *Brahmajñānāvalīmālā* 20

there is only one *jīva*) is appealing. Difficulty may arise if others are also taught this. So, for them, *nānā-jīva-vāda* (the view that there are many *jīvas*) is presented. Sureśvarācārya has clarified:

*Through whatever mode of exposition a person gets the knowledge of the inner Ātman, that is appropriate here; the mode is not rigidly settled.*¹

31. JÑĀNIN

- D: Whom does the *śāstra* speak of as a *jñānin* or *jīvanmukta*?
- HH: He who has obtained the direct realisation of the *Ātman*; he who has attained the complete realization that he is the Supreme *Brahman*.
- D: Is a *jñānin* beyond virtue and sin?
- HH: Yes.
- D: Then, since no merit or sin is acquired by a *jñānin*, will he conduct himself in any manner whatsoever?
- HH: A *jñānin* will not normally do so. His mind should have become extremely pure before he attained *jñāna*. This purity persists after the dawn of knowledge. Sureśvarācārya has observed:
- If a person who has realised the non-dual Truth were to behave as he pleases, then what difference is there between him and a dog with regard to consuming what is impure?*²
- A *jñānin* is an ideal for others.
- D: How can the mind of a *jñānin* be active after the realisation of the *Ātman* and how can the experience of joys and sorrows occur in it?
- HH: Let us suppose a person is spinning a wheel. If he takes his hands off the wheel, it will come to a stop only after a few more rotations. *Prārabdha* is the cause of the *jñānin*'s body. Once *jñāna* is attained, identification with the body and mind ceases. Nonetheless, as long as *prārabdha* (the actions of the past birth that are fructifying) remains, like the momentum of the wheel, the *jñānin*'s body and mind continue to act. While from an observer's perspective, he has *prārabdha* and experiences its fruits, from his standpoint, he has

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad-bhāṣya-vārtika* I.4.402

² *Naiṣkarmya-siddhi* IV.62

no *prarabha*, no joys and sorrows and no body and mind.

D: Is a *jñānin*'s abidance in the Supreme constant in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep?

HH: Yes.

D: What will be his experience when he perceives the world?

HH: "Nothing is different from me; there is no universe apart from the *Ātman*; it is the *Ātman* that appears as the universe" – he knows this as a matter of experience.

D: Why are *jñānins* full of compassion?

HH: Prior to the dawn of knowledge, a *jñānin*'s mind should have been very pure, for *jñāna* dawns only in a very pure mind. So compassion should have been cultivated by earlier. This manifests itself more prominently after his realisation of the Truth. *Jñānins* are ever satiated. What is worth attaining has been attained by them. Hence, it can be said that the life of a *jñānin* is only for the good of others.

D: Can *jñānins* have devotion to *Īśvara*?

HH: When a *jñānin* can and does feel, why should he be incapable of devotion to *Īśvara*? The Lord's divine qualities, attraction and glory are infinite. Consequently the very pure mind of the *jñānin* is intensely attracted to God. His devotion is wholly unmotivated by any expectation. We read in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*:

Even sages who revel only in the Ātman and are without any bond (or have given up even the study of texts) are devoted, without any expectation whatsoever, to the Lord. Such is the excellence of the Lord.¹

D: To which world will a *jñānin* or a *jivanmukta* go after death?

HH: He will not go to any world. He just remains as Brahman. After his death, we refer to him as a *videha-mukta*. The *śāstras* say that he who has attained *jñāna* becomes immortal. He realises Brahman here itself. After death, he is not differentiated from Brahman.

D: Will a *jñānin* desire *samādhi*? Is there any need for him to remain in that state?

HH: A *jñānin* has neither craving for, nor the need to remain in *samādhi*.

¹ *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* I.7.10

Be it *samādhi* or distraction, they are mental states. He is beyond all these. Considering the depth of a *jñānin*'s experience of *samādhi*, it is said that one *jñānin* is superior to another. This is with regard to an observer. That is, as far as an observer is concerned, gradations, such as, "He is a greater *jñānin*", are there. But as far as the *jñānins* are concerned, there is no such differentiation at all. A *jñānin* who engages in activities is referred to as a *brahmavid*. If a *jñānin* has the practice of going into *nirvikalpa-samādhi* and coming out of it on his own, he is a *brahma-vidvara*. If he can be awakened from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* only by the efforts of others, he is a *brahmavid-varīyān*. A *brahmavid-varīṣṭha* is one who never emerges from *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. His body perishes while he is in *samādhi*. As a *brahmavid-varīṣṭha* has the best *prārabdha*, he is deemed the greatest *jñānin*. All these gradations are from the viewpoint of others and not at from from the standpoint of the *jñānin*.

D: How does a *jñānin* conduct himself in times of joy and pain?

HH: Since he knows that he is the *Ātman* that is untouched by any sorrow and since his mind is extremely pure, he does not become perturbed or despondent. He is like a soldier who does not cease firing even though he is wounded. A *jñānin* does not give room to ill will even if another person causes him misery.

D: Can a *jñānin* experience dreams?

HH: Why not? Even he does get dreams. Just as the *jñānin* sees the world of the waking state as having no existence apart from the *Ātman*, he apprehends the world of a dream as having no existence apart from the *Ātman*. I just told you the actual state of affairs.

D: Will all *jñānins* have various *siddhis* (supernatural powers)?

HH: No. If the *prārabdha* of a *jñānin* is such that he should have *siddhis*, we can see them in him. If the *jñānin* so desires, he can get *siddhis* but it is improbable that he will want them.

D: Do *siddhis* indicate the attainment of an exalted spiritual state.

HH: No.

D: Do *siddhis* have any significant impact on a *jñānin*?

HH: No. He is indifferent to their presence and absence. If some *jñānin* is possessed of *siddhis* and, on some occasion, there is a *dharma*-related requirement to employ some *siddhi*, he may use it without any attachment, for the good of the world. His doing so will have

no negative effect whatsoever on his dispassion and steadfastness in the *Ātman*.

D: What are some of the fruits of becoming a *jñānin*?

HH: A *jñānin* is not reborn. Even while having a body, he is free from bondage. He becomes one who has done whatever needs to be done and has attained whatever needs to be attained. He see only himself, the *Ātman*, everywhere. He is full of bliss. He can enlighten and liberate his disciples. Being liberated even while embodied is the greatest accomplishment. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* says:

*When the Supreme Ātman, which is both superior as the cause and inferior as the effect, is realised, the knot of the heart is destroyed, all doubts come to an end and one's actions become dissipated.*¹

¹ *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* II.2.8

PART 2

MOTIVATING NARRATIVES

Stories conceived by His Holiness as also scriptural stories recapitulated by Him are included here, together with His explanations and conclusions. This material is based on what He narrated in His public discourses and in private and is presented under 54 headings.

1. Insidious Attack of Desire

A group of monkeys dwelt in a forest. One day, the leader declared, “Humans fast on *ekādaśī* days and thereby obtain *punya*. We too shall fast on *ekādaśī*.” So, on the next *ekādaśī*, all of them assembled and sat on the ground, with their eyes closed. After some time, one of them said, “We are unsafe sitting motionless on the ground. A herd of elephants passing by may trample us. It is also possible that a passing tiger may maul us. Further, as we are tree-dwellers, remaining continuously on the ground is uncomfortable for us. So why not we climb the trunks of trees and remain at the start of the branches? We will be safer and yet will not be close to the fruits at the end of the branches.” His suggestion was appreciated by them and they implemented it.

Some time passed. Another monkey said, “A cheetah can attack us here. Were we to go to the end of the branches, we will be better off. Cheetahs cannot come there because the portions concerned will not support their weight. Further, we can easily save ourselves by jumping to the next tree. We can also save ourselves easily from snakes. We could sit facing away from the fruits, keeping a watch on the ground and the tree trunks.” This idea too was liked by all and immediately implemented.

Some more time passed. Then, one monkey said, “Continuously watching the ground is terribly boring. Why not we take turns to spot danger? The rest of us can then feel free to look around and thereby avert boredom. Surely, no fast will get broken even if our eyes were to momentarily fall on a fruit.” “He is right,” felt the others. Soon, they were frequently eying the fruits.

It was not long before a monkey opined, “While we are seated here, we might as well feel the fruits to identify the ripe and juicy ones. That will make our task of foraging easier tomorrow. After all, we will be hungry then and would not like to spend much time picking the right fruits to eat.” There was no voice of dissent. Soon, the monkeys got busy feeling the fruit, with their hands lingering for a while on the good ones.

An aged monkey then said, “Not only will we be hungry tomorrow morning but also weak. Setting out for forage will be difficult. So, let us pluck the good fruits now and keep them ready for eating tomorrow.” “A wise suggestion,” thought the others and began to pluck fruits.

A little later, another aged monkey said, “One cannot pick good fruits merely by feeling them. Smelling them is also necessary. After all, a fruit may be nice to feel but may smell bad. Definitely, we would not like to eat any foul-smelling fruit.” The others agreed. So all of them began to

smell the fruits plucked and to throw away those whose smell they found unsatisfactory.

Some time passed. Another aged monkey said, “From experience, I know that even a fruit that is nice to look at, good to feel and pleasant to smell can have a rotten core or worms. Thus, tasting fruits by biting each of them is necessary to confirm that the fruits we will be eating tomorrow morning are truly nice. Surely, we would not want to get a stomach-ache by eating bad fruits in the morning. Our *ekādaśī* fast will remain unbroken even if each of us were to taste a piece of fruit but take care not to swallow it.” The suggestion was regarded wise and implemented.

In but a few minutes, the monkeys began swallowing the delicious pieces of fruits in their mouths. That was the end of their fast.

Underestimation of the power of the senses to unsettle the mind, flawed self-justification for one's actions, overconfidence and making of compromises where one should not are among the factors that cause a person to have a moral or spiritual fall.

2. Harmfulness of Anger

Śaṅkara and Hari were resident students of Sanskrit literature at a *pāṭhaśālā*. They shared a room along with two others. It was *paurnamī*. There were no classes that day and the students were in their rooms. Śaṅkara was seated in his corner reading the portion of Kālidasa's *Raghuvamśa* that his preceptor had taught a couple of days earlier. Hari and his two room-mates were chatting.

Hari: Have you heard of any elephant that is terrified of rats and which jumps, runs and creates an earthquake on seeing one.

Companions: No.

Hari: I know of one. Śaṅkara is that elephant. He is so fat that he weighs as much as a pachyderm. He is mortally scared of rats. Yesterday evening, when he was seated under the *aśvattha* tree, a rat passed by. Our elephant jumped up and ran. He tripped on a banana peel and fell. There was a minor earthquake. Poor Mother Earth! What a blow she received!

Hari burst out laughing and so did his friends. Śaṅkara, who heard all that was said, lost his temper. His face red and his breathing shallow, he vituperated Hari and called him names. Hari turned and walked out of the room. After a few minutes, Śaṅkara's other two room-mates went out to attend to some work.

The moment they left, Śaṅkara tiptoed to Hari's corner, picked up Hari's *Raghuvamśa* book, hid it and resumed his seat. Hari entered. He appeared upset on not finding his book but did not say anything. He automatically assumed that Śaṅkara was the culprit. So, when Śaṅkara went to answer the call of nature, Hari brought a vessel of water and threw it on Śaṅkara's bedding. Śaṅkara did not realize what had happened when he returned.

A teacher who taught Hari and Śaṅkara had observed from the hall all that had transpired. He entered the room. The two boys prostrated before him. He sat down and asked them also to do so. Then, he told them a story.

Teacher: On a wintry night, a person was sleeping with a blanket pulled over him for warmth. He woke up when he felt something moving on the blanket, near his ankles. In the dim light, he was able to make out the figure of a rat. Without a second thought, he picked up a bottle containing water that was by his side and hurled it towards the rodent. The bottle grazed the rat's tail, struck the man's feet and broke. He yelled in pain; his bedding became wet. He cursed the rat and looked around for it. He found that it was hiding in a corner, not far from him. Wanting to terminate the rat's life, he swung his arm swiftly and succeeded in catching the rodent by its tail. Desperate to escape, the rat bit him. Feeling sharp pain, he relaxed his grip. The rat scurried away. Well, Śaṅkara, what do you think of the man?

Śaṅkara: He was a thorough fool.

Teacher: Why do you say so?

Śaṅkara: The man tried to kill the rat with a bottle, which was certainly not appropriate for the purpose. He did not realize that he would be hurting himself by his action and that he would be unable to sleep comfortably thereafter because his bedding would get wet. Catching the rat by its tail was a stupid thing to do, for he virtually forced the rat to bite him.

Teacher: When Hari made fun of you, you could have laughed at yourself. Alternatively, you could have let the matter rest, thinking, "I am fat. It is also true that I am scared of rats and that, yesterday on seeing a rat, I jumped up, ran and fell. Sarcastic embellishments apart, Hari's narrative is not false." Instead, you lost your temper. Just as the rat disturbed the man of the story, Hari's ridicule disturbed you. The bottle hurt the man and wet his bedding. Your anger too affected you in two ways.

Śaṅkara: How?

Teacher: Did you mean all the things that you told Hari in anger?

Śaṅkara: No, I was so excited that I could not think rationally and choose my words then.

Teacher: The ability to think logically and act sensibly is a very valuable asset of humans. You temporarily lost that ability. Did you not?

Śaṅkara: I admit I did.

Teacher: That was a major, immediate setback for you just as the blow on the feet was for the man. After you snapped at Hari, you tried to continue with your studies. Were you able to concentrate as before?

Śaṅkara: For some time, I could not. My mind was agitated and the thought that Hari had humiliated me in the presence of my friends kept recurring.

Teacher: Just as the man was unable to sleep in comfort that night because of the wetness of his bed, you were unable to attend to your studies for some time because of your mental agitation. The man did not realize the consequences of his hurling the bottle. He only thought he was going to get rid of the rat. You did not think of the consequences of your anger. You only thought of putting Hari in his place. Do you agree?

Śaṅkara: Yes.

Teacher: Hari, tell Śaṅkara what you did to his bedding and why.

Hari: Śaṅkara, you hid my book. In retaliation, I threw water on your bedding.

Teacher: Irritated with the rat, the man caught it by its tail and it bit him. To punish Hari for having teased you, you hid his book. Because you did so, you have a wet bedding.

Śaṅkara: I now clearly see that there is much in common between the foolish man and myself.

Teacher: I know that you have a quick temper. Try to change yourself. Remember that anger harms the very person who gives room to it. It temporarily deprives him of his precious God-given gift of rational thinking and sensible behaviour. It agitates the mind and destroys peace. It does not give the least happiness; no man feels happy when he is angry. Lord Kṛṣṇa has spoken of anger as one of the gateways to hell.

Śaṅkara: If I give up anger, will not people take advantage of my resulting docility?

Teacher: A person should be patient and should not give room to anger. This does not mean that he must allow people to ride roughshod over him. He can be firm and even give a strong verbal response when the situation necessitates it. A boss may have to reprimand an indolent subordinate who is not amenable to soft words. In such situations, anger may be feigned but mental composure must be retained.

Śaṅkara: I understand the importance of conquering anger and shall do my best to reform myself.

Teacher: Hari, there was no need for you to tease or provoke Śaṅkara. People normally resent censure and humiliation. Because of what you did, Śaṅkara gave you a good dressing down. His rebuke hurt you, did it not?

Hari: Yes, that is why I left the room. For some time, I continued to feel ill at ease.

Teacher: Śaṅkara foolishly hid your book but your retaliation too was unwise. Had Śaṅkara found out later that you had wet his bedding, he would have hurt you for what you did. You are familiar with the *Mahābhārata*. You know that when Droṇa sought help from Drupada, the latter insulted him. So, after training the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, Droṇa got Arjuna to capture Drupada and took possession of half of Drupada's kingdom. Drupada, for his part, performed a sacrifice and obtained a son who would slay Droṇa. Dhṛṣṭadyumna killed Droṇa during the *Mahābhārata*-war when the latter laid down arms on being told by Yudhiṣṭhira that Aśvatthāma had died. Later, Aśvatthāma avenged his father's death by slaying Dhṛṣṭadyumna. What a chain of reactions!

Hari: In future, I shall try to keep the feelings of others in mind and abstain from unwisely initiating retaliatory measures.

Teacher: Both of you should apologize to each other and be friends as before.

The boys did as told. Śaṅkara then returned Hari's book; Hari put Śaṅkara's bedding in the sun to dry.

Anger harms the one who gives room to it in more ways than one. It is, as declared by the Lord Himself, a gateway to hell. Hence, it is in the interest of everyone to give no quarter to anger. A person should be patient. However, if the situation necessitates it, he may simulate anger; even then, he should not become mentally agitated.

3. The Veda Determines What is Dharma

A lawyer argued, “Your Honour, my client should not be treated as guilty. It is true that he stole. But there is a reason for that. He was forced to commit the theft because his family was starving. With the stolen money, he not only helped himself but also his family. While stealing, he did not destroy any property. In fact, he did not even damage the lock as he used a duplicate key. The money that he took away was meagre compared to the rich man’s hoard of black money. My client performed a service to the Government by unearthing black money. This apart, the wealthy man has so much cash that this little depreciation ought to mean nothing to him.”

How would the judge respond to such an argument? He would presumably declare, “I am not interested in such arguments that ignore the law of the land. Stealing is an offence under the Indian Penal Code. Even you admit that your client did steal. So I am duty-bound to punish him.” Then he would hold the lawyer’s client guilty and send the thief to jail.

Judges determine whether an act is a punishable offence or not by relying on the penal code and not on fanciful arguments that disregard the penal code. Likewise, to determine what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*, a person must turn to the *Veda* and not to mere reasoning that is independent of the scriptures. The penal code, having been formulated by humans, may require occasional revision. However, the *Vedas*, which emerged from Īsvara, are ever flawless.

4. Spotlight on Speaking the Truth

A person stole some goods. He was accosted and made to take an oath that he would answer truthfully. He said, “As long as there is life, I shall speak the truth.” He was then cross-examined. He flatly denied that he had stolen anything. On the basis of his testimony, he was let off. A friend of his, who had participated in the vile act, asked him, “Why did you utter falsehood so brazenly in spite of the oath that you took?” The man nonchalantly replied, “I did not lie. All that I had said was true. I agreed to spell out the truth as long as there was life. I had an insect in my hand. Before I started answering, I crushed the insect to death. Hence my statement, ‘I shall speak the truth as long as there is life’, continued to hold.”

This is an example of sophistry. When a person has something in mind but makes equivocal or confusing statements so as to cause the listener

understand something else, he is guilty of having deviated from the truth. To speak the truth, as insisted upon by the scriptures, one's words should accord with one's thoughts. The next point to be noted with regard to veracity is that one should speak what is pleasant. But uttering what is pleasant does not imply speaking what is not factual.

A mischievous person decided to fool a friend of his. He went to his friend and said in an excited voice, "Are you not aware that you have won ten lakhs in a lottery? How can you sit here so calmly?" The friend was dumbfounded. When his amazement decreased a little, he began to build castles in the air. In the meantime, the prankster left. Finally, the man took up a newspaper to have the pleasure of seeing his lottery-ticket number there. When he could not find it, his exultation gave way to total dejection. This is an example of a pleasant untruth.

One should not irresponsibly verbalize a distressing truth. Following a massive heart-attack, a person was convalescing in a hospital. One day, his son was involved in a road accident and died. A person who had witnessed the accident rushed to the hospital and exclaimed to the heart-patient, "Do you know what has happened? Your son has died!" The patient, who was very fond of his son, could not bear the terrible news. As his heart was already weak, he breathed his last. The conduct of the person who conveyed the bad news was blameworthy.

To sum up, one should speak the truth. Further, one's words should be pleasant and beneficial to others. Distressing truths ought not to be irresponsibly verbalized and words should not be chosen so as to mislead others.

5. Truth and Silence

Once, three persons were proceeding to heaven in a celestial vehicle which had come to collect them. On their way, they chanced to behold a snake that was just about to swallow its prey, a frog. One of the three commented, "O serpent! Do you not have any compassion for the frog? Spare its life." The irritated snake cursed, "How dare you deny me my food? May you go to hell." Sad to say, the man went to hell.

The second man, who was bewildered on seeing this, supported the snake's stance and said, "The frog is but your natural food. You can surely eat it." Now, the frog became wild and retorted, "How dare you suggest that I be eaten! You have no kindness. May you suffer the tortures of hell." The man fell from the celestial vehicle. The third man, who remained silent, reached heaven.

This story illustrates that, on certain occasions, remaining silent is even better than speaking the truth.

6. Subtle Aspects of Truthfulness

After the death of Droṇa, Karṇa became the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava forces. In an encounter with Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula and Sahadeva were worsted and injured. Humiliated and in much pain, Yudhiṣṭhira withdrew from the battlefield to his tent to take some rest. The battle raged on. After a while, being anxious about Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna wanted to see him. So leaving the Pāṇḍava forces under the control of Bhīma, he asked Kṛṣṇa to take him to Yudhiṣṭhira's tent.

When Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna came to pay their respects, Yudhiṣṭhira wrongly assumed that Karṇa had been killed by Arjuna. He sought to know the details. Arjuna explained to him that till that point of time, he had not been successful in putting an end to Karṇa's life. He averred that he would definitely do so.

On hearing Arjuna's words, Yudhiṣṭhira felt greatly dissatisfied and gave way to wrath. He severely censured Arjuna saying, "Unable to defeat Karṇa, and moved by fear, you have left Bhīma in command of the forces and come away here. Had you told me long ago that you would not fight Karṇa, I would have taken my decisions in a different manner. You promised that you would kill Karṇa but have not fulfilled your promise. Your chariot has been fashioned by Viśvakarma and on it, there is a flag with the symbol of Hanumān. You have the Gāṇḍīva bow with you. Sri Kṛṣṇa Himself is your charioteer. Still, out of fear of Karṇa, you have run away and come here. Give away your Gāṇḍīva to Kṛṣṇa. Let Him do the needful by killing Karṇa. Alternatively, give your Gāṇḍīva to somebody else. You are unfit to have it. Shame on you! Shame on your prowess! Shame on your Gāṇḍīva!"

Yudhiṣṭhira's rebuff stung Arjuna enough to make him lose his temper. He started to pull out his sword. Seeing this, Kṛṣṇa asked him, "What is it that you are trying to do? There are no foes here. Why do you want to pull out your sword?" Arjuna said, "I am going to kill Yudhiṣṭhira. I had secretly vowed that if anyone were to tell me, 'Give away your Gāṇḍīva', I would certainly slay him. Now, in fulfilment of my promise, I am going to murder Yudhiṣṭhira, for he has insulted me by asking me to give away the Gāṇḍīva to another and regarded me as unfit for wielding it."

Kṛṣṇa said, "Shame on you, Arjuna! Nobody who knows the true nature of *dharma* would behave the way you intend to. Upholding the truth is most exalted. However, the nature of truth, as upheld by noble persons,

is not readily comprehensible. There are occasions when a person may tell a lie without incurring sin. For instance, one can utter a falsehood to save one's life or to protect oneself from complete ruin or for the well-being of a holy one. By doing so, one does not become guilty of unrighteousness. There are also occasions when, by bluntly speaking the truth, one incurs not merit but sin."

Kṛṣṇa then narrated the story of a man named Kauśika who was not very learned but who wanted to be truthful. He was well-known as a speaker of the truth. One day, when he was seated, certain people ran past him. A short while later, he saw a gang of dacoits. They approached him and asked him about the whereabouts of the persons they were following. Deeming utterance of truth to be priceless, Kauśika indicated where the people had gone. The dacoits resumed their pursuit and finally massacred them. Kṛṣṇa then explained that by virtue of his factual speech, Kauśika not only did not acquire merit, he incurred sin. The Lord said that in the circumstances, Kauśika should have remained silent. Alternatively, if his silence itself would have been a hint to the effect that the persons had run in that direction, he could have misled the dacoits.

Kṛṣṇa clarified to Arjuna that Yudhiṣṭhira was in great pain and had been humiliated by Karṇa. Karṇa had attacked Yudhiṣṭhira even after the latter had stopped fighting. Thus, Yudhiṣṭhira was in a sad plight when he censured Arjuna. Further, by his sharp words, he sought to exhort Arjuna to bring about the death of Karṇa, for he knew that Arjuna had the requisite capacity. The Lord explained that since Yudhiṣṭhira was a noble person who deserved to be venerated by Arjuna and since his words could be satisfactorily justified, it would be thoroughly improper for Arjuna to slay him; such an act would be a gross violation of *ahimsā*, which is paramount.

Arjuna requested Kṛṣṇa to unequivocally specify what he should do, for, on the one hand, it was wrong for him to assassinate Yudhiṣṭhira and, on the other, he had to fulfil his vow. The Lord said, "When extreme scorn is inflicted on a great, highly-respected person, he dies, as it were. The *Atharva-Veda* teaches that speaking disrespectfully to an august leader is tantamount to slaying him without extinguishing his life. Taking recourse to this scriptural pronouncement, fulfil your vow by insulting Yudhiṣṭhira. Thereafter, fall at his feet and seek his forgiveness. Being pious and understanding, he will excuse you."

As instructed by Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna began to rudely reproach Yudhiṣṭhira. "You have escaped to this place that is far removed from the battlefield and are fully dependent for your safety on the prowess of your well-

wishers. What a contrast there is between you and the heroic and powerful Bhīma! Unlike him, you are quite unfit to find fault with me. You are addicted to gambling. It is because of you that we lost our kingdom and had to face severe hardships,” said Arjuna.

As he finished his tirade, he was overcome with remorse. He again drew out his sword. Seemingly surprised, Kṛṣṇa queried, “What is the problem now?” Arjuna said that he intended to get rid of his body with which he had behaved in an unbecoming manner towards his elder brother who was truly worthy of being worshipped by him.

The Lord stopped him saying, “Think of how terrible it would have been if you had slain Yudhiṣṭhira. It was only to avoid that unrighteous act that you spoke rudely to him. Why, then, are you drowned in grief? You want to commit suicide but that is something that wise men never do. If you kill yourself, the sin you shall incur will be more than the sin that would have accrued to you had you assassinated your brother; you will experience overwhelming agony in hell. Self-glorification is on par with suicide. So, eulogize yourself and thereby commit the equivalent of the self-killing you intended to indulge in.”

Arjuna then began to boast, “With the sole exception of Lord Śiva, the wielder of the bow Pināka, there is none who is a match for me in archery. I can single-handedly destroy the entire world with its inhabitants. I was the one who earlier defeated the kings ruling in the various directions and made them subservient to you, O Yudhiṣṭhira. I have now destroyed half the Kaurava forces.” Having been saved by the Lord from the sins of breaking his vow, slaying Yudhiṣṭhira and committing suicide, Arjuna paid obeisance to his brother and begged to be forgiven.

Having propitiated Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna readied himself to return to battlefield. “My life is for doing what is pleasing to you,” he asserted. In the meantime, Yudhiṣṭhira, who had earlier listened silently to Arjuna’s stinging rebuke, became dejected and felt that he was despicable. He said, “I am a vile sinner who has caused all of you so much trouble. I deserve to be killed. Bhīma is fit to rule and should become the monarch, not I who am impotent. I shall depart for the forest.”

Yudhiṣṭhira got up from his cot to leave but Kṛṣṇa fell at his feet and pleaded, “Arjuna could not falsify his vow to kill anyone who asked him to give the Gaṇḍīva to another. Hence, in keeping with my advice, he spoke disrespectfully to you and thereby fulfilled his promise. We seek refuge in you. Prostrating before you, I beseech you to kindly forgive our

transgressions. You desired the death of Karna. Today, he shall be slain and the earth shall drink his blood.”

Thoroughly appeased, Yudhiṣṭhira lifted Kṛṣṇa up and said to him, “Arjuna and I were deluded and would have drowned in the ocean of calamity and sorrow. You saved us. Your wisdom is the boat that enabled us to safely reach the shore.”

This episode of the *Mahābhārata* shows that while one must ever adhere to the truth, truthfulness has several subtle aspects. When issues are complex, one should rely upon the conduct and the advice of great people.

7. Vedic Chanting Should be Error-Free

A poor pundit had unmarried daughters. He was at a loss as to how he could find the money to get them married. A friend told him, “Musicians get handsome rewards.” Consequently, the desire to learn singing sprouted in his mind. He found out that to train his voice, he would have to practise singing for long. Hence, he sat under a tree at the outskirts of his village and practised singing. But what emerged from him was mere cacophony.

A ghost that had earlier been a musician inhabited that tree. It was not able to bear the pundit’s murder of music. So, it told him, “I am a music-knowing ghost. This tree is my home. Your cacophony is making it impossible for me to stay here. Go elsewhere.” The pundit replied, “Why should I go? I want to earn money and for that I want to become a songster by ardent practice. This is my chosen place for practice.”

The ghost said, “Since it is money that you want, I will tell you how you can get it. I shall possess the princess. The king will have his physicians attend to her. However, they will be unable to cure her. You seek the king’s audience. Tell him that the princess is possessed by a ghost and that you can exorcize it and cure her. With the king’s permission, go to the princess and sing there as you are doing now. I, who cannot bear your atrocious singing, will immediately leave the princess. She will get cured. The king will handsomely reward you. Thereafter, there will be no need for you to come here and kill music.”

The man agreed and the ghost’s plan was successfully executed by them. As a consequence, the man was able to get more than enough money to get his daughters married, while the ghost was able to live in peace on its tree. Just as the music-knowing ghost of the story was put off by the poor man’s cacophony, Vedic scholars feel ill at ease when someone chants the holy Vedic Mantras incorrectly in their presence.

While bad singing might exceptionally fetch rewards as illustrated in the tale, incorrect chanting of the *Veda* invariably results in sin accruing to the person who chants. Care must be taken to learn and chant the *Veda* correctly, without errors in either the words or the intonations. While there is no rule that a person should learn music, it is obligatory on a qualified man to learn Vedic Mantras from a teacher and to chant them correctly. By fulfilling this duty, the chanter acquires Puṇyam; by neglecting it, he incurs sin.

8. Parents and Children

There was a beautiful child whose parents were poor. A wealthy childless couple lived nearby. They approached the child's parents and requested, "Please allow us to adopt your child." The mother was hesitant. However, the father said, "We are poor and cannot afford to give our dear one good food, clothing or comforts. Our child will, after all, be living in the next house and so we can see it every day. It would be in the child's interest for us to part with it." Reluctantly, the mother agreed.

The child was given all comforts in its new home. However, with the passage of time, the rich couple forbade the child's parents from coming to see it. The mother was taken aback and wept copiously. But what could the poor lady do except reconcile herself? One day, the rich man's servant told her, "The child has small-pox and nobody is willing to go near it." "Oh, my child!" cried the mother, and rushing to the affluent man's house, took her dear one in her arms.

The story shows that a mother's love for her child is intense and unconditional. Parents strive for the welfare of their children. They put up with innumerable sufferings and inconveniences for the sake of their offspring. So, it is not surprising that the *Veda* declares, "Revere your mother as a god. Revere your father as a god." Manu states that the mother is ten times more venerable than the father. In any case, it is impossible for a person to repay his debt of gratitude to either of his parents. Were he to be ungrateful to them, he would be committing a heinous sin for which there is no expiation.

The scriptures speak of the duties of a son towards his parents. When his parents are alive, he should obey them. After they have passed away, he should perform the *śrāddha* ceremony every year. The performance of *śrāddha* at least once at Gaya is deemed laudable.

A person wished to send some money to a relative living in another town. So, he went to the post-office and obtained a money-order form. Having

filled it, he submitted it at the pertinent counter along with the money he wanted to give his relative. His money remained at the post-office but an equivalent amount of cash was delivered to his relative.

In a similar manner, by the power of God, what is offered by a man with faith at a properly-performed *śrāddha* ceremony reaches those for whom the offering is intended in a form beneficial to them, regardless of whether they dwell in the world of manes or have been reborn on the earth. The *śrāddha* ceremony benefits the performer too, for he obtains much *punya* and the blessings of the manes. Were he to abstain from performing *śrāddha*, he would be guilty of giving up his scripturally-ordained duty and would incur sin.

Parents, for their part, should try to inculcate good habits and righteousness in their children.

9. Thankfulness

A man threatened to file a criminal complaint against a rich businessman for defrauding him and also causing injury to his subordinates due to negligence. The affluent man felt perturbed and discussed his problem in depth with a law-knowing friend. The friend told him that he was in for great trouble. He advised him to immediately engage a leading lawyer and also suggested the name of an advocate. The rich man promptly rang up the lawyer concerned and sought an appointment. He also briefly mentioned his problem. The lawyer told him that as he was leaving on a vacation in a couple of days, he was not in a position to take up the case. The affluent man pleaded but the lawyer was firm.

That evening, the advocate was surprised to find the rich man waiting at his house. The potential client pleaded so much that the lawyer finally told him, “Send the case details to my office tomorrow morning. I shall read the papers and then convey my decision about accepting or not accepting the case to you over the phone.” The next morning, when the advocate went to his office, he found the rich man there in person. After hearing the details of the problem and reading the pertinent documents, the advocate said, “Your position is pretty weak. Much preparatory work and reading need to be done to defend you. I am hard pressed for time and also plan to leave tomorrow on a holiday. So, I suggest that you contact some other lawyer.” “Please do not refuse me,” begged the rich man. “I have come to you for succour as did Vibhīṣaṇa to Rāma. I am counting on you. Kindly do not let me down. No matter what your fees and other expenses in connection with the case may be, I am ready to

pay. Money is no criterion.” Moved by the entreaties of the man, the advocate decided to cancel his vacation and take up the man’s case.

Soon, a warrant of arrest was issued against the rich man. He promptly rang up his lawyer and, breaking into sobs, stuttered, “Help me! I will die of misery if I have to spend even 24 hours in confinement.” The lawyer effectively rebutted the points raised by the prosecution against his release and persuaded the judge to grant him bail. After his release, his friend told him that his lawyer had been very forceful. However, the man was not particularly thankful and said, “Perhaps, getting me out on bail was, in any case, a simple task.”

The main case soon came up for hearing. The lawyer conducted the defence in a brilliant manner. Further, for reasons unknown to the prosecution, its main witness went back on what he had told the police. So, the man was acquitted. He perfunctorily thanked his lawyer and, full of joy, went out to celebrate. That evening, when he was relaxing at his house, his servant received a phone call and informed him that his lawyer wished to speak to him. He, however, asked his servant to convey that he had gone out. The lawyer left a message asking him to call back. The rich man did not bother to do so. Instead, the next day, he left on a holiday.

When he returned, he received a bill from the lawyer. Summoning his secretary, he told the man to meet the lawyer and to somehow get the fees reduced to the extent possible. The secretary did as he was told. Disgusted with the haggling of the secretary, the lawyer said, “I am sick with him. I should never have taken up his case. Let him pay what he wants or nothing at all.” The rich man then paid only about 50 percent of what he was required to.

His friend, who had recommended the lawyer to him, said, “Earlier, you waited at his house and office and pleaded with him to help you. You even said that you had come to him for succour as Vibhīṣaṇa had approached Rāma. Yet, having won the case, you not only did not go to see him but even avoided his phone call. You earlier said that money is no criterion. Now, you are unwilling to pay even the modest bill received by you. Are you not ashamed of yourself?” The rich man nonchalantly replied, “There is nothing for me to be ashamed of. Actually, the case against me was weak. The lawyer’s role was inconsequential. So, why should I pay him much? Do not refer to Vibhīṣaṇa and Rāma in the present context for, unlike this lawyer, Rāma did not present Vibhīṣaṇa a bill for granting him protection. It is only because of his love of money that this advocate cancelled his vacation and took up my case. He has done me no favour whatsoever.”

There are people who behave even with regard to God the way the rich man did towards his lawyer.

Once, a villager had climbed to the top of a palm tree situated at some distance from his village when he heard the growl of a tiger. He then saw the tiger walking up to the base of the tree, sitting down there and looking up. He was feeling quite uncomfortable on the tree and knew that he could not remain there for long. So, in an attempt to drive away the tiger, he waved his hand and shouted at it. The tiger growled in response.

Fearful of life, the man prayed to his favourite deity, “O goddess, if I emerge from this ordeal unhurt and reach home safe, I shall sacrifice a goat to you.” After this, the man saw the tiger slowly rise and begin to walk away from him. Gaining some courage, he climbed down a little. He looked down again and found that the tiger was no longer nearby and was continuing to move further away. His fear came down. He thought, “I will have to spend hundreds of rupees to purchase a goat to sacrifice. People offer the goddess not only goats but also hens. A hen is far cheaper than a goat. So, why not I immolate one?” Hence, he mentally conveyed to the goddess, “I shall offer you a hen instead of a goat.” He then began to move down further.

When his descent was more than half complete, he took a look around and noticed that the tiger was not visible. His fear decreased even further. He reflected, “Even a hen is costly. So, why not I sacrifice another animal that is somewhat of the same size as a hen?” Consequently, he told the goddess that he would immolate a bandicoot. He soon reached the ground. He looked around and found the tiger to be nowhere around.

He thought, “It is true that it doesn’t cost me anything to trap a bandicoot and kill it. However, it is difficult to catch a bandicoot. My goddess has saved my life. As a quid pro quo, I should offer her a life. It is not necessary that I sacrifice only a bandicoot; any living creature will do.” Deciding thus, he picked up a small crab that was on the ground and crushed it. He felt satisfied that he had fulfilled his promise to his goddess and went home, quite happy with what he had done and glad to be safe.

People normally seek human or divine help when in trouble. The tendency to ignore or forget a benefactor once one’s problem has ceased is wrong and must be countered. Ingratitude is a sin that has no expiation. A true devotee’s mind is centred on God regardless of whether all is fine or whether he is in deep trouble. Kunti, it is said in the Bhāgavata, went to the extent of requesting Kṛṣṇa, “O Teacher of the world, let calamity always befall us for, when You come to our aid, we will have Your

transmigration-effacing vision.” In the Rāmāyaṇa, it is said, “By virtue of His self-control, Rāma does not recall even a century of wrongs done to Him but is satiated even with a single favour done to Him.

10. Benefits of Charity

People think that wealth will give them great happiness and the fulfilment of desires. For the sake of wealth, a person goes to the extent of doing what is improper. He does not feel inclined to give the Government what is due to it. So, it becomes necessary for him to prepare a false account. On getting caught, he pays a bribe to save his skin. He feels that, somehow, he must amass more and more money. But then, there crops up the problem of where he is to keep it. There would be a tax problem if he were to deposit in a bank. Therefore, he is forced to keep it in a box, lock it and ensure that the box remains in a safe place.

When he performs *sandhyā-vandana*, the thought of the box comes to his mind. When he sits for the worship of God, again, the thought of the box crops up in his mind. When does he finally become freed from this thought? Only on the day he dies and departs. His zealously-guarded wealth then completely passes to others without his knowledge.

Such a man would have loved to take his wealth with him to the next world. He might have thought, “I have somehow earned money and so far kept it with me. I do not at all want to part with it even after death. If possible, I would like to place it on my head and carry it with me.” To such a person, Nīlakaṇṭha-dīkṣita has given a humorous but valuable advice. He has said, “If you desire to take your wealth with you after death, then donate it, while you are alive, to a good, deserving person. What will happen if that is done? The wealth will get transformed into *punya*. Regardless of whether or not you have a head after death, it is certain that the wealth will accompany you in the form of *punya*.”

The scriptures prescribe the giving of gifts to the deserving as an antidote for greed. So, charity, apart from bringing about happiness in others, greatly conduces to the spiritual well-being of the donor. A person who loses some money feels unhappy. But he feels happy, not sad, when he voluntarily gives the same amount to a poor student who is not in a position to pay examination fees. Charity can thus make not only the receiver but also the donor happy.

11. Charity in Keeping with Capacity

A person was advised by a holy man to gift a vegetable a day and told that he would attain great merit by doing so. The poor man strictly

followed the advice. After death, he was reborn in a royal family and grew up to become a king. He was able to recall what he had done in his past birth. So, he continued to gift a vegetable a day. Surprisingly, after death, he was reborn as a beggar. The man was unable to comprehend the reason and so sought the advice of the holy man who had earlier blessed him.

From the sage, he learnt that prior to becoming a king, he had been very poor and so a gift of a vegetable a day was sufficient to give him a lot of virtue. On the other hand, as a king, he was endowed with affluence. So, thereafter, the gift of just a vegetable a day was quite insufficient to earn him merit of any consequence. The person realized that the extent of charity needed to earn a certain degree of merit depends upon one's financial capacity to give.

12. Lord Rāma and the Profundity of Dharma

The *śāstras* declare that one must obey one's parents. However, a complex situation arises when the instructions of one's father and mother are antithetical. Then, obedience to the father entails disobedience to the mother and vice versa. Lord Rāma Himself had to face such a situation. His resolution of the moral dilemma is instructive.

On learning of Daśaratha's intention to install Rāma as prince regent, Kaikeyī's maid Mantharā poisoned the queen's mind against Rāma. So, when Daśaratha went to see her, Kaikeyī asked him to make a solemn vow to the effect that he would fulfil her keen desire. The unsuspecting emperor obliged. Kaikeyī then called upon the Devas to bear witness to her husband's oath. Invoking the two boons that Daśaratha had offered her on an earlier occasion, she demanded that Bharata be installed as prince regent and that Rāma be sent away to the forest for 14 years. Shocked, Daśaratha pleaded with her to change her mind and even fell at her feet. But she refused to relent. Though he loved Rāma very dearly, being a man of his word, Daśaratha was unable to turn down Kaikeyī's demand. So he sent for Rāma.

When Rāma came to His father's chamber, He found the king grief-stricken. When He sought to know the reason, Kaikeyī told Him about the emperor's promise and of the boons that she had sought from him. Rāma assured her that He would definitely proceed to the forest and spend 14 years there. He said that even if He had been commanded just by her, He would have gladly parted with the kingdom in favour of Bharata. "How much more gladly," said He, "shall I part with it when commanded by My father and that too with the intention of pleasing you

and for honouring the pledge given by him.” Such being the case, stated Rāma, He felt upset that instead of personally telling Him about Bharata’s installation, the emperor gently shed tears, with his eyes riveted on the ground. He told Kaikeyī that as His mother, she had greater authority over Him than His father. He presumed that she did not see any trace of virtue in Him and hence felt the need to approach His father instead of commanding Him on her own. He assured her that He would leave for the forest on that very day after taking leave of Kausalyā.

He then proceeded to see His mother. She was, at that time, engaged in her morning worship. On seeing Him, she warmly embraced Him. As gently as possible, He told her what had transpired. But she immediately fell down unconscious. On regaining her senses, she expressed her anger at the turn of events. She told Him, “Just as Your father is venerable to You, so am I, Your mother. Further, I have been diligently discharging my duties as a mother and am extremely fond of You. You should not go to the forest. I refuse to grant You leave. Remain here and practise *dharma* by serving me. Attending upon the mother is deemed to be most virtuous.

“A son of the Sage Kaśyapa stayed on at home, engaged in the service of his mother. As a consequence, the disciplined *tapasvin* ascended, after death, to heaven and attained the position of Prajāpati, the Lord of creation. Emulate this example. A single hour in Your company means more to me than mastery over all living beings. On the other hand, if You leave me and go, I shall be plunged into unbearable sorrow. In fact, I shall take a vow of fasting unto death. Were You to depart, the onus of my suffering and death shall be upon You and You shall incur great sin. Samudra inflicted suffering upon his own mother. Hence, he had to suffer hellish tortures. Do not go his way.” Since Kausalyā explicitly forbade Rāma from going to the forest, the Lord was forced to deal with contradictory commands from His mother and father.

Rāma told her that Daśaratha had offered Kaikeyī two boons and so had to grant them. Though what Kaikeyī had asked Daśaratha hurt him intensely, and though he loved Rāma extremely, still it was because he was an unswerving adherent of the truth that he had acquiesced to Kaikeyī. Thus, Daśaratha’s act was in conformity with *dharma*.

A son was duty-bound to obey his father. There were instances of great persons acting in accordance with the instructions of their father even when the directives were inappropriate. For example, Sage Kaṇḍu killed a cow in deference to his father’s command even though he knew it to be a sin. Likewise, in obedience to the order of his father Jamadagni, Paraśurāma killed his own mother Reṇuka who had entertained lustful

thoughts on seeing king Chitraratha. In the present case, the command of Daśaratha was righteous and so there was all the more reason for Him, as a son, to obey it.

Rāma went on to explain to Kausalyā that her directive was not correct. As Daśaratha's wife, she ought to be his companion in the path of righteousness. It was wrong for her to thwart her husband's adherence to *dharma*. Further, Daśaratha was the emperor. His subjects were duty-bound to obey him. So, his directives had to be respected not only by Him but also by her.

Rāma thus explained that while His father's command conformed to *dharma*, His mother's directive did not, and that in the present case, the right course of action for Him was to obey His father and go to the forest. He requested Kausalyā to await His return. On hearing Rāma's explanation, she agreed with Him. She, however, wished to accompany Him to the forest. He told her that it was not right for her to disregard her righteous, aged husband and live with Him, her son. Further, Daśaratha was already suffering much because of His impending departure and was feeling miserable at being betrayed by Kaikeyī. It would be downright cruel for her to leave him at this stage because his grief would then be too much for him to endure.

Kausalyā appreciated what Rāma had to say and finally gave Him her complete blessings. She said, "My son, depart with an unswerving mind. May *dharma*, which You scrupulously observe, protect You. May You live long protected by Your truthfulness. And by virtue of the service You have done to Your father and mother, may the Devas ever bestow happiness on You as You roam about in the forest. I shall happily behold Your return to Ayodhyā." Having received His mother's blessings, Rāma prostrated before her and took leave of her.

Ahimsā is highly eulogized. A person is advised not to harm even one who is inimical. Obviously, he ought not to injure one who bears no ill-will towards him. Does that mean that a strong man should be a passive spectator to violence perpetuated by evil persons against those who are harmless and unprotected? Rāma had to tackle a question of this kind.

After Rāma's departure to the forest from Ayodhyā, on an occasion, He visited the *āśrama* of Śarabhaṅga. The sage honoured Him and then ascended to the realm of Brahma. The hosts of sages assembled there approached Rāma. They told Him that *rākṣasas* were obstructing their rituals and austerities and were also killing many of them. They did not want to curse the ogres to save themselves, as they would be thereby

wasting their *tapas*. They beseeched Rāma to protect them from their tormentors. Rāma told them that they ought to command Him rather than make a request to Him. He assured them that He would slay the troublesome *rākṣasas*.

Thereafter, as had been suggested by Sage Śarabhaṅga, Rāma went to the hermitage of Sage Sutīkṣṇa and spent the night there. Then, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa headed towards the Daṇḍaka Forest. Sītā expressed to Rāma Her misgivings about His resolve to kill the *rākṣasas*. She told Him that it was terrible for a man to be cruel to one who bears no enmity towards him. She stated that the ogres had done Him no harm and so He was not justified in attacking them. Further, wielding of weapons was incompatible with forest-life. If He wished, He could don the role of a warrior after His return to Ayodhyā.

She told Him that by His taking up arms, there was a possibility of His misusing them. She cited the story of a truthful and pious ascetic who dwelt in a forest. Indra wanted to obstruct the sage's *tapas*. So, he assumed the guise of a warrior with a sword. The warrior came to the sage and, depositing his sword with the ascetic, requested him to take care of it. The warrior then went away. The sage felt it was his duty to pay attention to the sword and see that it was not stolen. So, he began to take it with him even when he went to pluck fruits. In the course of time, he began to use the sword that he was carrying. Gradually, he became cruel and turned away from austerities. As a consequence of his cruelty, he went to hell.

Sītā emphasized that Rāma was so well-acquainted with *dharma* that none was really capable of teaching Him. Because of Her holding Him in high esteem, She was not making any effort whatsoever to instruct Him. However, because of Her great affection for Him, She did not want that He should ever err in any way. Hence, She was reminding Him about the *dharma* that He already knew.

Rāma appreciated Her concern. He told Her that it was the duty of a *kṣatriya* to protect those who were suffering and that it was for that purpose that they wielded weapons. Harmless sages were being troubled and killed by the *rākṣasas*. So, it was His duty to save them by combating the ogres. Moreover, the sages had sought His protection. It was incumbent upon Him to provide succour to those who sought refuge in Him. Also, in response to their appeal, He had promised them full protection. Truth being extremely dear to Him, He could give up His life but not a promise, especially one made to the holy sages. Having heard Rāma's explanation, Sītā's misgivings ceased.

A related episode pertains to the killing of Vāli. In the course of their search for Sītā who had been abducted by Rāvaṇa, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa encountered a demon named Kabandha. From Kabandha, they learnt that, to find Sītā, they should first approach Sugrīva, the monkey-chief who lived on Rṣyamūkha, the mountain adorned with the catchment of Pampā Lake. So, the brothers proceeded there. They were met by Hanumān who enquired about the details of their life. He then reported the arrival of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Sugrīva. Sugrīva gladly approached them and offered his hand of friendship to Rāma. Rāma and Sugrīva solemnized their bond of friendship in the presence of fire. Sugrīva lamented that he was suffering much because of his brother Vāli. He explained that when his father died, his brother, the valorous Vāli, was crowned king. Thereafter, Sugrīva lived with Vāli, respecting and obeying his brother.

One night, a demon named Māyāvi came to the outskirts of the town and challenged Vāli to a fight. Vāli immediately rushed out, accompanied by Sugrīva. When Māyāvi saw both the brothers standing boldly, he took to his heels. Vāli and Sugrīva chased him. After some time, he ran into a hole in the ground. Vāli decided to follow him. Sugrīva wished to accompany Vāli but was ordered by his brother to stand guard at the entrance of the hole till he returned. Vāli went inside and Sugrīva heard the roar of his brother. He waited there for one full year but Vāli did not come out. Sugrīva then observed a stream of blood flowing out. He heard the sound of the demon but not the roar of his brother. Presuming his brother dead, he blocked the entrance of the hole with a big rock and returned to Kiṣkindhā. There, the ministers crowned him king.

After some time, to his delight, Vāli returned. Sugrīva explained the situation to him and readily offered the throne back to his brother. However, Vāli was very furious with Sugrīva and accused him of betraying him. He drove him out of the capital and also usurped Sugrīva's wife for his own enjoyment. Sugrīva escaped to the Rishyamūkha Mountain, which Vāli could not approach because of a curse that he had received. Sugrīva implored Rāma to kill Vāli and save him. Rāma readily agreed to do so. Sugrīva then tested Rāma's might by subjecting Him to two tests. Thereafter, he gained full confidence in Rāma.

Rāma told him to fight with Vāli, adding that He would do the needful. However, when Rāma saw Vāli and Sugrīva engaged in combat, He found that they looked so much alike that He was unable to identify Sugrīva. He did not discharge an arrow to kill Vāli, lest the one He strike down be Sugrīva. Injured, Sugrīva ran away. Rāma explained to him the

reason why He had not acted and asked him to again challenge Vāli. Lakṣmaṇa put a garland of flowers upon him to serve as a mark of identification. Sugrīva returned to Vāli's fort and roared out a challenge.

Vāli was about to rush out when his wife Tārā restrained him. She told him that the very fact that Sugrīva had returned so quickly after having been severely mauled implied that he had found an ally. She had learnt from the spies who had reported to their son Angada that two Ikṣvāku princes named Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were in the region. She suspected that Sugrīva must have sought the friendship of Rāma. She told Vāli that as per the data she had received, Rāma was equal in might to Indra, the Lord of *devās*, and was extremely righteous. She advised Vāli to desist from fighting with Sugrīva and to patch up with him.

Vāli did not pay heed to her advice and said that if Rāma was so righteous, He would have no occasion to attack him. He emerged from his palace to fight with Sugrīva. The two brothers engaged in a very severe combat. Gradually, Sugrīva began to lose ground and was about to be overpowered. At that juncture, Rāma shot an arrow and severely wounded Vāli. Vāli, however, did not die immediately by virtue of the power of a gold chain gifted by Indra that he wore. He lay mortally wounded on the ground.

Addressing Rāma, he said, "I have done You no harm, nor have I committed any offence in Your kingdom. So, You did wrong in striking me. If You had wanted to attack me, You should have challenged me to a duel and fought with me. Instead, You injured me while I was engaged in combat with another. From what I have heard about You, I believed that You are fully endowed with virtues such as forgiveness, righteousness, valour and meting out punishment only to evil-doers. I also took into consideration Your excellent pedigree. That is why, though I was warned by Tārā, I came out to fight Sugrīva with the full confidence that You would never stoop so low as to strike me while I battled my brother. Now, I realize that though putting on an appearance of being virtuous, You are quite sinful.

"Monkeys such as I dwell in forests and subsist on fruits and roots, while men such as You dwell in towns and require different kinds of cooked food. So, what ground is there for any animosity between us? Men hunt animals for their flesh and skin. However, it is forbidden for a *kṣatriya* to eat the flesh of a monkey. Further, it is not permissible for noble people to wear the skin of a simian or use its skin and bones. Hence, there is no justification for You even to hunt me as an animal.

“Instead of obliging Sugrīva in the hope of recovering Your wife, You could have approached me. Regardless of whether Your wife has been held captive on an island or below the ground, I would have brought Her back to You in a single day. I would have also tied Rāvaṇa and delivered him to You.

“It would have been appropriate for Sugrīva to ascend the throne only after my death in the normal course. Now, however, for his sake, You have sinfully inflicted a mortal wound on me. What justification do You have for Your action?”

Rāma gave a detailed reply to the objections. He said, “This land too falls under the jurisdiction of the kings of Ikṣvāku Dynasty, for their ancestor Manu bequeathed it to them. The country is now ruled by emperor Bharata who is extraordinarily virtuous. He and his representatives are dedicated to upholding the paramount kingly duty of duly chastising evil-doers.

“As per the dictates of *dharma*, a younger brother and a virtuous pupil are like one’s own son. Sugrīva is your younger brother. Yet, though he was blameless, you behaved very unfairly with him and drove him out of Kiṣkindhā. His wedded wife Rumā is your virtual daughter-in-law. Yet, you took possession of her and, blinded by lust, have been cohabiting with her. Hence, you are guilty of a heinous crime. Death is the punishment ordained for a man who lustfully associates with his daughter, sister or his younger brother’s wife. Acting as a royal Kṣatriya who is a representative of king Bharata here, I have awarded you that very punishment.

“At the time when My irrevocable friendship with Sugrīva was solemnized, I gave My word, in the presence of other monkeys, that I would get back for him his wife and his sovereignty. How could a man like Me ever allow a promise to remain unhonoured? This too is a reason for My striking you.

“You complained that you were struck when engaged in combat with your brother. Remember that you are only a monkey. It is not a practice of men to challenge an animal to a fight and only then to kill it. A hunter, for example, kills a deer regardless of whether it is attentive or careless and regardless of whether it faces him or away from him. You being a monkey, it is irrelevant whether you were fighting someone or not when you were pierced by My arrow.

“In a pair of verses accepted as authoritative by those versed in *dharma*, Manu has declared, ‘Men who have perpetuated sins become free from

faults on being punished by kings and ascend to heaven like those who have performed virtuous deeds. A thief gets absolutely freed from sins either through punishment or by being pardoned and allowed to go free. However, a king who does not punish a sinner incurs that man's sin.' You had committed a terrible sin. By punishing you, I have freed you from that sin. Now you can ascend to heaven."

Vāli was fully satisfied with Rāma's explanation. With joined palms, he told Rāma, "What You have said is absolutely correct. Forgive me for the unbecoming and harsh words I uttered by mistake." He then beseeched Rāma to protect his young son Angada and to establish the best of relationships between Sugrīva and Angada. Rāma benevolently granted his request.

13. Though Unseen, God Exists

A boy refused to believe the existence of anything that he could not see, inclusive of air. His father pointed to the fluttering leaves of a tree and said, "See the role of air, which you deny." "You are showing me the leaves, not the air. Where is air?" retorted the boy. The father quickly pressed shut the boy's nostrils and mouth. Experiencing suffocation, the boy struggled to free himself. In less than a minute, the father released him. "You blocked my breathing. It hurt," protested the boy. The father queried, "What is it you wanted to breathe in?" "Air," said the boy, conceding its existence.

Imperceptibility does not always imply non-existence. God, like air, cannot be grasped by the eye but certainly exists. It is He who originates, sustains and annihilates the cosmos.

14. Atheist in a Quandary

A minister, who was an atheist but had great regard for me, came to see me. During his conversation with me, he commented, "Our ancients were very wise indeed. Long ago, people were discharging their duties properly. Though some of them might have erred, generally speaking, policemen were not required in large numbers to maintain law and order. The reason was that people had faith in Īśvara and the *śāstras*. Consequently, they feared His punishment. Nowadays, people like me proclaim that God does not exist and that *dharma* is meaningless. We thought that people would be captivated by such rhetoric and that they would be guided by us. However, our scheme backfired. People fear none now and heedlessly violate the law of the land. They give very little importance to ethics. We eliminated God from the scene but could not

get a suitable replacement to ensure discipline. I feel that the ancients wisely conceived a God and propagated what they had imagined.”

As can be seen, even an atheist will do well not to deny God!

15. God’s Merciful Justice

One day, when Rāma and Sītā were dwelling on the north-eastern base of the Chitrakūṭa Mountain, not far from the Gaṅgā, a crow pecked at Sītā. The vicious crow was actually Indra’s son. She sought to drive the bird away by hurling a clod of mud at it but it defiantly remained in Her vicinity. Sometime later, while Rāma slept on Her lap, the wicked bird sharply attacked Her breast. Again and again, it tore at Her bosom. Her blood wet Rāma. She woke up Rāma and, on seeing Her injured chest, He demanded to know who was responsible for it. He then himself beheld the crow in front of Sītā, with its talons stained with blood. The bird quickly hid itself in the ground.

Angry, Rāma invoked the *brahmāstra* in a blade of *darba*-grass and hurled it at the hidden son of Indra. The bird flew as swiftly as it could all over the world but was unable to shake off the missile. Indra, the Devas and the sages refused succour. So finally, it sought refuge in Rāma. Though the crow deserved to be killed, Rāma compassionately offered it protection. He told the bird, which had arrived helpless, “The *Brahmāstra* cannot be rendered futile. Hence, you yourself suggest a way out.” The crow replied, “Let Your arrow destroy my right eye.” Rāma acceded to its plea and hence the *astra* blinded its right eye but spared its life.

Rāma thus meted out justice and yet exhibited great compassion. It is noteworthy that mercy did not cause Rāma to reduce the death penalty to some unjustly minuscule punishment such as the loss of a single feather. The heinous act of Indra’s son is an example of the saying, “He who is in the grip of lust neither feels ashamed of himself nor fears the consequences of his behaviour. Such is the ruinous nature of lust.”

There was a judge whose misguided compassion caused him to pardon even hardened criminals. He felt that as a votary of *ahimsā*, he ought not to subject even murderers and rapists to the prolonged suffering of life imprisonment or deprive them of their lives. On an occasion, a man who was guilty of repeated, armed robbery and murder was brought before him. The prosecution’s case against the man was iron clad. Yet, the judge ruled that the prosecution had not established its case beyond reasonable doubt and set the man free with a warning. The unrepentant criminal did not waste much time before commencing his despicable acts.

A few days later, he broke into the judge's house itself. He managed to open the safe containing valuables. As he was getting ready to decamp with his loot, the judge's wife, who had been awakened by sounds, saw him and tried to raise an alarm. Without a moment's hesitation, the dacoit strangled her to death and escaped. All this would not have happened if the judge had not discarded justice in favour of his thoroughly misguided compassion.

No physical, verbal or mental sin committed by a person either in this or an earlier birth fails to fructify in the form of suffering experienced by the doer. Scripturally-prohibited behaviour indulged in this birth often yields its consequence only in a future birth and so some mistakenly imagine that God lets off wrong-doers. The current prosperity of a debased individual stems from his *punya* of an earlier birth and is like the inherited property of a wastrel. God, being just, awards punishment to a sinner but, being compassionate, mitigates the suffering awarded to a penitent man to the maximum extent possible without making a travesty of justice. His functioning is not foolish like that of the judge of the example considered. Just as repentant first-time wrong-doers are looked upon leniently by judges but unrepentant, habitual offenders are severely punished by them, God is lenient towards those who unknowingly commit a misdeed on multiple occasions or knowingly commit it once but comes down hard on those who knowingly and repeatedly sin.

It is said, "The sin of an earlier birth troubles the doer in the form of disease in the present birth. It is neutralized by recourse to medicines, gifts, sacred recitation, *homas* and worship of God." Further, "There is expiation for a sin committed unknowingly or once with knowledge. However, what remedy is there for a misdeed repeatedly performed with attention?" While a person may be able to escape the arm of the law of the land, he cannot ever escape God's law of Karma. Justice and compassion find perfect consummation in God.

16. Jīva, the Reflection, and God, the Prototype

A foolish person looked at a mirror and saw a clear reflection of his face. He found it to be ugly. He mused over the possible reason. He noticed that the reflection had a blank forehead; there was no *tilaka* on it. His aesthetic sense induced him to apply vermilion on the reflection's forehead. But when doing so, he moved his face slightly. Consequently, the vermilion spot went out of alignment. He tried to re-position the vermilion over the reflection's forehead but again failed. After several

such failures, the foolish man realized that it was impossible to directly beautify the image. He then applied *tilaka* on his own forehead and was pleasantly surprised that it immediately appeared on the image at the right place.

To improve the reflection, it is necessary to adorn the original face. Likewise, if we seek happiness, we should worship God. This is because a relation between God and the *Jīva*, the individual soul, as postulated by the scriptures, is that between a face and its reflection. The mind is a servant of the *Jīva*. A serf's duty is to please his master. How is the mind to please its master, the *Jīva*? If it directly strives for the welfare of its lord, its efforts will be futile; they would be on par with the fool's attempt to directly beautify his reflection. However, if it were to direct itself towards *Īśvara*, joy would accrue to its master. Bhagavatpāda has charmingly elucidated this point in a verse addressed to Lord Narasimha.

17. Anyone Can Tread the Path of Devotion

In order to tread the path of devotion, is any special qualification a sinequa-non? This is an oft-raised query. A popular verse supplies the reply in the form of rhetorical questions.

The verse commences with the rhetorical query, "What was Dharmavyādha's profession?" Dharmavyādha was a butcher. He carried on his duties without any attachment and dutifully served his parents. As a result of this, he was recognized as a great follower of *dharma*. The *Mahābhārata* contains a story about him.

A certain *brahmacārin*, by virtue of his penance, acquired some powers. A bird innocently put its droppings on his head. The celibate looked up enraged and the bird was reduced to ashes. Puffed with conceit at the spontaneous manifestation of his supernatural ability, he proceeded for *bhikṣā*. He went to a house and begged for food. The lady of the house asked him to tarry a while as she was serving her husband. This infuriated the *brahmacārin*. However, the lady calmly replied, "I am no bird to be burnt up by you."

The continent one was amazed that the lady knew about the incident. Humbled, he sought her guidance. She directed him to Dharmavyādha who gave him detailed instructions. The teaching was particularly pertinent to the *brahmacārin*, who had ignored his obligation to his father and mother. Dharmavyādha was greatly blessed by the Lord, though his profession was deprecated by many. Thus, one's profession poses no restriction for treading the path of devotion.

The next consideration is age. Should one be of a prescribed age to be a devotee? The verse under consideration asks, “What was Dhruva’s age?” Dhruva’s father Uttānapāda had two wives. Dhruva’s stepmother Suruci did not like him. Once, when he wished to sit on his father’s lap, his desire was frustrated because Suruci wanted Uttānapāda to fondle her child. Weeping, he went to his mother Sunīti. Unfortunately, Sunīti was not in a position to help him. She asked him to pray to the Lord.

With determination in his heart, Dhruva retired to a forest. Sage Nārada saw the boy and, being immensely pleased with him, initiated him into the worship of Lord Nārāyaṇa. Dhruva sat absorbed in meditation. So pleased was the Lord with his love that He manifested before him and declared that he would earn the love of his father, and later become a great king. The Lord continued that after his death, he would constantly abide in the firmament as the pole star. Since Dhruva was a young boy when he obtained a vision of the Lord, it is clear that there are no age restrictions for treading the path of devotion.

Is great scholarliness needed? The verse asks, “What was the learning of Gajendra?” Gajendra was an elephant who lived with his wives. He was a great devotee of the Lord. One day, a crocodile grasped his foot with its jaws. A great struggle ensued between the two. The crocodile gradually gained the upper hand. Despairing for life, Gajendra called out to the Lord to save him. Lord Viṣṇu rushed to the spot, slayed the crocodile and liberated Gajendra. Gajendra, an uneducated elephant, was thus able to acquire the grace of the Lord. Hence, absence of learning is no bar for devotion.

Should one be high-born? Is it necessary that one should only be a Brahmin in order to gain the grace of the Lord? The verse asks, “What was Vidura’s caste?” Vidura was born to a servant-maid. As such, he was not a high-caste individual. When Lord Kṛṣṇa came to Hastināpura as an envoy of the Pāṇḍavas, He chose to stay, not in the royal palaces offered to him by the Kaurava princes, but in Vidura’s house. This shows that the Lord does not regard low caste as any bar for resorting to and succeeding in the path of devotion.

Maybe factors such as profession, age, learning and caste do not matter. But could it be that great grit and manliness are essential? The verse asks, “What was Ugrasena’s manliness?” Ugrasena was Kamsa’s father. The demon Kamsa had imprisoned his father and usurped power. Kamsa’s nephew was none other than Lord Kṛṣṇa. When He was brought to Mathura, He killed Kamsa in a duel and restored Ugrasena to the throne. Thus, even one who was lacking in prowess was graced by the Lord.

Is physical charm something that captivates the Lord's attention? "Was Kubjā a bewitching damsel?" is the counter-query contained in the verse. When Lord Kṛṣṇa arrived at Mathurā, a hunchbacked woman, who was certainly no belle, offered scents to Him. The Lord was satisfied and blessed her. Her deformity gave way to beauty. Thus, absence of a delightful appearance does not preclude the reception of Īśvara's grace.

People are often pleased by affluence. Is the Lord too like that? The counter-question in the verse is, "Did Sudāma have great wealth?" Sudāma was a boyhood friend of Lord Kṛṣṇa. They studied together and later parted, Kṛṣṇa becoming a royal prince and Sudāma a devoted Brahmin householder. Sudāma suffered intensely on account of his poverty. However, he bore it with great fortitude. Unable to withstand the problems of penury, his wife requested him to go and see his friend, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Overjoyed at the thought of meeting his beloved friend, he consented.

His wife gave him some puffed rice. Sudāma went and met Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord received him with due honour. Sudāma felt ashamed to offer the puffed rice he had brought. But Lord Kṛṣṇa was quick to notice it and asked for it. The Lord began eating it. After some time, His consort Rukmiṇī stopped him. When Sudāma returned, he found a palatial mansion at the location of his old, dilapidated house. He saw that his wife and children were expensively clad. He realized that it was the Lord who had made him affluent. It is clear that the Lord ignores factors such as richness.

What is God concerned with? He considers only devotion. Where there is devotion, He is satisfied. It follows that there are no specific qualifications needed for treading the path of devotion.

18. Forms of God

A person was on his way to his place of work, wearing a shirt, trousers and a tie. A friend tapped him on the shoulder and said, "I am really glad to see that you are dressy. This is the type of dress that is needed for you to be successful as a sales representative." The man came home in the evening, changed into a Dhoti and sat down to chant the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*. A friend who dropped in just then remarked, "It is true that while going to work, you have to dress like an Englishman. But it is this dress that suits you. I prefer to see you like this."

The story reveals that a person, when attired differently, pleases different people. God is formless but, for the sake of His devotees, He assumes different forms. The *Purāṇas* describe numerous manifestations of the

Lord. The scripturally-described forms of Śiva, Viṣṇu, etc., do have implicit meanings.

For instance, Śiva has ten hands. The ten hands denote the ten directions, inclusive of top and bottom, and convey the omnipresence of God. Śiva is well-known as the three-eyed one. The sun, moon and fire constitute these eyes. He has the crescent moon in His crest. This moon stands for knowledge. Śiva's wearing it in his matted locks is a pointer to the Lord being endowed with pure knowledge. "God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent and there is naught but Him," is a common inner meaning of the descriptions in the *Purānās*.

19. Light on Idol Worship

A person purchased a mud idol of Vināyaka and began worshipping it on Vināyaka-caturthī. At the end of three days of *pūjā*, he carried the idol and immersed it in a river. This was seen by a friend of his who had hardly any knowledge of idol worship and was puzzled by what he saw.

Friend: You were worshipping the idol with great faith. Yet, now, you have thrown it into the river. Why?

Worshipper: Originally, the idol had no sanctity and was just a beautifully-shaped piece of mud. Then, at the commencement of worship on Vināyaka-caturthī day, I duly invoked Lord Gaṇeśa into it. Thereafter, it became sacred. Treating it as the Lord Himself, I performed *pūjā* to it. At the end of the stipulated period of worship, I requested the Lord to withdraw His special presence in it. The idol lost its sanctity and became just a piece of mud. It was that mud piece which I immersed into the river.

Friend: How is it possible for a mere piece of mud to become holy and to then revert to its original state? Further, how can a devotee have the capacity to effect such transformations?

Worshipper: Consider an example. There is an ordinary man with whom we are all familiar. We are able to meet him whenever we wish. If he desires to see a high-ranking government official, he has to struggle to get an appointment. At the suggestion of people like us, he contests an election and, because of our votes, wins.

He then gets appointed as a minister. Thereafter, if we want to see him, we have to fix up an appointment. The very officials whom he had difficulty in meeting, now come to him and carry out his orders. He is provided with security and good accommodation. After his tenure as minister, he contests an election again. This time, the people do not vote for him as before and hence he loses. Thereafter, as before, he becomes

a common man. The special privileges and the authority of a minister are not his any longer.

People like us, by our votes, cause this ordinary man to become a minister and then we revert him to his earlier state. Likewise, in response to the devotee's *āvāhana*, invocation, the Lord specially graces an idol and the idol then becomes holy. Having accepted the devotee's worship, the Lord withdraws His special presence in response to the devotee's request; the idol loses its sanctity.

An idol in a temple may have originally been a part of a rock on a hill; people might have walked over that rock and may have even urinated on it. A sculptor fashions what is an ordinary rock into a beautiful idol by chiselling it. Even then, it does not become holy. It, however, becomes sanctified when it is duly consecrated in a temple. Thereafter, people worship it. The very sculptor, who earlier delivered hammer blows to it, prostrates before it and does not so much as touch it.

Friend: Why did you make reverential offerings to the idol during your worship? After all, it did not even move a millimetre to accept anything.

Worshipper: When a venerable guest comes to our house, it is in our holy tradition to receive him with honour. He is offered a seat and his feet are washed. He is fed. Devotees see in the idol not just mud or stone but the living presence of God. They hold that God does accept what is offered to Him, though the idol itself does not stretch out its hand to take what is given. That is why, in the course of my worship, I offered God a seat, just as I would, to a holy one who comes to my house. Then, I offered *pādya*, water, to wash His feet. Subsequently, I fed Him; this was my offering of *naivedya*.

Suppose a guest proves unworthy of the respect that is shown to him by misbehaving with a female in the host's house or by pilfering costly items. It is likely that the host will hand him over to the police. In the case of God, there is no possibility of His ever proving unworthy of the devotee's worship. Hence, devotees never discard the idol they worship in the middle of the *pūjā*.

Friend: On *Vināyaka-caturthī*, Gaṇeśa is worshipped in many places at the same time. Which idol does He choose to specially abide in? What influences His choice?

Worshipper: All idols wherein God is properly invoked become sanctified. Wherever there is a drop in pressure, air rushes there. Likewise, God, who

is everywhere, specially occupies all the idols where He is worshipped, regardless of the number and the location of such idols.

Friend: In some places, the food that is offered is very small in quantity and in others, it is very large. Is not the former insufficient for a deity and the latter excessive?

Worshipper: No. In the *Vedas*, it is said that the offering gets modified in accordance with the wishes of the deity to whom it is offered. What is important is that if a devotee were to resolve to offer a certain number of *modakas* (sweetmeats of a particular kind), say 1000, in a *Gaṇapati-homa*, that is the number he must offer. He should not think, “This is too much for Gaṇeśa to eat,” and offer less. Actually, the Lord needs nothing but accepts and becomes sated with whatever is offered by a worshipper with devotion.

20. Gopuras Induce Humility

Two friends were walking along a road. One of them was a braggart and an egoist to the core. He told his friend, “Who else can achieve as much as I? I am indispensable at my place of work and earn a fat sum.” He carried on in this fashion, listing his various achievements. The two happened to pass by a temple with a massive *gopura*. The braggart’s friend told him, “Just have a look at this *gopura*.” The egoist turned around and beheld it. Being an architectural wonder of gigantic proportions, it filled him with awe. As he stood gazing at the *gopura*, he felt insignificant. He realized that compared to the huge structure, he was but an insect-like creature. It was an ego-shattering experience for him.

Our ancients built massive *gopuras* to induce humility in people.

21. Significance of Śivarātri

Once, Brahma and Viṣṇu were quarrelling as to who was the greatest of all. Śiva appeared before Them in the form of a *liṅga*. Viṣṇu sought to locate the foot of Lord Śiva and for that purpose, took up the form of a boar. Assuming the form of a swan, Brahma went in search of the Lord’s head. Neither of Them were able to locate what They intended to. Hence, Their pride was crushed. They realized that the Supreme Being, the Omnipresent Lord, is the greatest of all.

This story is not meant to differentiate the Trinity, nor is it meant to induce the feeling that Viṣṇu is inferior to Śiva. Its primary purpose is to show that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Lord of the cosmos is the greatest. The manifestation spoken of in the narration is said to

have occurred on *Śivarātri*, which falls on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of *Māgha*. One should observe a fast that day and keep awake throughout the night, engaged in the worship of Śiva. It is meaningless to forego sleep but not spend the night thinking of God.

What is the fruit of performing *pūjā* throughout the night? A reply to this query is found in a verse which means, “O Eyes! It behoves you to carefully keep awake this night which is most auspicious and sacred. If you do so, a companion resembling you shall manifest between both of you.” The idea is that one becomes akin to Śiva Himself if one offers worship on *Śivarātri*.

22. To Which Deity Should a Person Pray

A Brahmin stood hesitant on the banks of a river in spate, waiting to cross over. He enquired of a Muslim who happened to come that way about the means to reach the farther shore. “Trust in God and jump in, my friend,” said the latter. “He will take you across.” But the Brahmin was shrewd. He did not want to take unnecessary risks. So he told the Muslim, “You dive in first. Then I will follow.” “Very well,” said the Muslim. Catching hold of his beard and saying, “Allah-Ho-Akbar,” he took off. Somehow, he managed to ferry himself across.

Now, the Brahmin mustered a little courage. He prayed to Ganeśa, the destroyer of obstacles. No sooner did he jump than the thought struck him that he would have a greater chance of survival if he prayed to Śiva, Ganeśa’s father. Hence, he sought refuge in Śiva as he plunged. Ganeśa thought that His great father would protect the Brahmin. Śiva, on the other hand, expected Ganeśa, who had jurisdiction over obstacles, to save the man. Neither offered help. The doubting Brahmin had his fatal trip.

A person should realize that it is the same Lord who has manifested as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Ganeśa, etc. Hence, he should not imagine that one deity is less potent to help him than another. It is, however, perfectly legitimate for a person to have an *Iṣṭa-devata*, a preferred deity, such as Śiva. He ought to think, “It is my beloved Śiva who has taken the forms of all the other divinities, such as Viṣṇu,” rather than, “Viṣṇu is different from and inferior to Śiva.” A person with such an outlook will be fully at ease in any duly-consecrated temple and will not be troubled by thoughts, such as, “If I pray to Viṣṇu, will Śiva be displeased with me?”

23. Characteristic of a Great Devotee

Once, Nārada went to Lord Sri Viṣṇu and asked Him, “Who is your greatest devotee?” The Lord said, “There is a farmer who is truly devoted

to me.” Nārada grew angry at this and exclaimed, “What! Am I not your foremost devotee? How can that poor despicable farmer be as devoted as I am?” The Lord told Nārada to go and see the man for himself. Nārada scrutinised the activities of the farmer. Every morning, the farmer got up, prayed to God and then attended to his domestic tasks. Thereafter, he went to the fields and sat in silence for a while absorbed in the thought of God. He then attended to his agricultural duties. His next prayer was reserved for the evening.

Nārada returned to Lord Viṣṇu and protested, “What is this? The farmer does not even repeat Your name often. How is he great?” Lord Viṣṇu said, “Before I answer, I shall give you a task. Take this cup that is full of water and go round the streets. Then return to Me. Ensure that not a drop of water spills.” Grasping the cup, Nārada set out. No sooner had he walked a few paces than the fear that a drop or two might spill gripped him. It possessed him to such an extent that his mind failed to think of anything other than the water in the cup. On the completion of his task, he returned to the Lord.

Lord Viṣṇu asked him, “How many times did you recite my name while you were on the streets?” Nārada was taken aback and said, “How could I chant Your name? I was too busy to do that; I had, after all, to ensure that no water spilled.” The Lord said, “The farmer was also busy like you. Despite that, he thought of Me. That is what made him great.”

One morning, Yudhiṣṭhira came to behold Lord Kṛṣṇa. He found Him seated motionless, in deep meditation. When Kṛṣṇa opened His eyes, Yudhiṣṭhira respectfully asked Him, “You are the creator and destroyer of the cosmos and are without a beginning and an end. Yet, you were in deep meditation. Could you kindly tell me the significance of Your meditation?”

Kṛṣṇa replied, “Lying on a bed of arrows, Bhīṣma has fixated his mind on me. Hence, my mind locked onto him.” Though pierced by numerous arrows and in deep pain, Bhīṣma thought of Kṛṣṇa with such intensity that he completely drew the Lord’s mind to himself.

24. Concentration

Droṇācārya impartially expounded the nuances of archery to both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. At the end of their course, he gave them a test. “See that small bird sitting on the tree,” said the *Guru*. “You will have to shoot it down with an arrow.” He called his disciples, one by one, and asked, “What do you see now?” Each of the disciples replied, “Sir, I

see the bird, the tree and also the surroundings.” The *Guru* told them, “You have not mastered archery.” Finally, Arjuna’s turn came. Droṇa asked him the same question. Arjuna answered, “Revered sir, I see only the bird and nothing else.” The master asked him to release the arrow. The disciple obeyed and the bird fell.

This story brings out the praiseworthiness of intense concentration on one’s target or the task on hand. Focussing the mind on God during meditation is certainly very important, particularly for a spiritual aspirant. However, many say that they are unable to meditate because their minds keep wandering. Quite often, a major reason for their poor concentration is the inadequacy of their interest in meditation.

A person was given a packet of hundred-rupee notes to count. As he was busy counting, a friend called him. He, however, did not hear the call and so did not look up. Only after he had finished his task, he noticed the presence of his friend. He told him, “My whole attention was on the notes because I knew that any error in my counting would have proved costly for me.”

This man regarded his task as important and so was able to suitably direct his attention. In like manner, if a man regards meditation as extremely important and feels that he stands to lose greatly by inattention during meditation, it is likely that he will succeed in focussing his mind on God.

25. Fate and Free Will

The fields of two farmers were identical in size and had similar kinds of soil. They worked equally hard, tilled their lands well and sowed seeds of uniform quality. The rainfall over the fields was neither excessive nor scanty and so the crops grew well. At the appropriate time, they commenced their harvesting. Before they left for their homes on an evening, they were able to behold with joy large heaps of grains, the result of their efforts. There was hardly any difference in the yields obtained by them.

That night, while they slept, there was a very heavy downpour on one land and only a light drizzle on the other. The next morning, when they went to their lands, one was dismayed to find that the rain had ruined his grains while the other felt relieved that his heaps of grain were intact.

Thus, notwithstanding the similarity in their efforts, the results they obtained were markedly dissimilar. It was the unfavourable destiny of one farmer and the favourable fate of the other that led to the loss of the

former and the gain of the latter. Those who have faith in the *Vedas* and *śāstras* and are logical do not regard the experiences of humans as just fortuitous.

Two students wrote an examination. The boy who had studied better answered all except two questions well. The other managed to answer just two questions correctly. The examiner was an impartial but a lazy man. He scrutinized two of the first boy's answers. They happened to be the incorrect ones. Assuming the other answers too to be incorrect, he awarded the boy low marks.

Then, he took up the second boy's answer book. The answers he selected for checking happened to be the correct ones. Taking it for granted that the remaining answers were also correct, he awarded the boy concerned high marks. On seeing the results, the boy who had studied better grieved, while the other rejoiced. Thus, hard work fetched a poor result and poor preparation yielded good marks. Here too, the hand of destiny is seen.

There was a poor man who was a wastrel and a drunkard. His wife gave birth to twins. Gazing lovingly at her children, she told her spouse, "They look regal." The husband laughed and announced that he would name them Cakravarti and Bhūpati, ironical names for the members of a poverty-stricken family. To make ends meet, the wife used to work as a domestic servant in the house of a very affluent couple. After becoming a mother, she started taking her children with her to her place of work as there was no one at her hut to take care of them. Being good, understanding people, her employers did not mind in the least.

Unlike the twins' father, their mother was very keen that they be sent to school. So, when they were five years of age, she admitted them into a government school that provided free education. The twins took to their school as a fish to water. Cakravarti was particularly fond of his mother and hence insisted on helping her for some time at her employer's house every day before going to school. Bhūpati, for his part, swept the hut and washed the utensils used by his mother for cooking. Thereafter, he proceeded to school and joined his brother.

The affluent couple had a son who was almost the same age as the twins. He had been born five years after their marriage. They doted on him. Just before the woman had conceived, they had sought the blessings of a holy man for begetting progeny. That man used to wander from place to place and sustained himself on food obtained by begging. So, he was

commonly known as Akiñcana; the word means, “He who has nothing”. Believing that his wife had conceived because of the holy man’s blessings, the husband named their son, the heir to an immense fortune, Akiñcana. Akiñcana made friends with Cakravarti and the two spent some time with each other every morning.

When Cakravarti was nine years old, his beloved mother died. His alcohol-loving, good-for-nothing father had the habit of scolding and beating his children on the flimsiest grounds. Because of his wife’s demise, he had to make do with less money than before and this made him highly irascible. To ease the financial situation, Cakravarti started to work at Akiñcana’s house in the mornings and in the evenings, before and after his school timings. His brother Bhūpati decided to do the cooking, cleaning and washing at their hut.

Akiñcana and Cakravarti became quite close. One day, Akiñcana asked his mother, “Can I take Cakravarti with me by car every day and leave him at his school? After all, his school is almost on the way to mine.” “Certainly,” said his mother, “I myself wanted to suggest this.” Akiñcana and Cakravarti thereafter left for school together.

One day, the car in which they were travelling was involved in a major accident. The driver died on the spot. Akiñcana’s legs were pinned in the wreckage and soon a minor fire broke out. By the time he was pulled out by some good Samaritans, he sustained significant burn injuries; his legs were badly damaged. Cakravarti phoned Akiñcana’s parents and they summoned an ambulance. Akiñcana was rushed to the hospital, screaming in pain. There, the doctors were forced to amputate his legs. The amputation and the extensive burns caused Akiñcana agony. After a month of intense suffering, he appeared to be on the road to recovery. Unexpectedly, he contracted pneumonia. The doctors did their best to cure him but he did not respond to their treatment and died.

Akiñcana’s parents were devastated. Their sorrow declined with the passage of time but every time they passed or entered Akiñcana’s room, they felt miserable and nearly broke down. After six months had passed, they paid a visit to the holy man, Akiñcana. He advised them, “Sell your house and shift to another town; also adopt a son.” The advice appealed to them and they decided to act according to it.

Akiñcana’s mother told her husband, “We have known Cakravarti for a long time and he is, undoubtedly, a well-behaved boy. Akiñcana was so fond of him. Why not we adopt him instead of some unknown boy?” He readily agreed, for he too had a good opinion of Cakravarti. They talked

to Cakravarti about their intention and, finding his response favourable, approached his father. They expressed their wish to adopt Cakravarti and offered the man a substantial sum of money. The wastrel had no hesitation in parting with his son; as far as he was concerned, Bhūpati was there to attend to his house.

Cakravarti had been sickly since childhood but he quickly acquired robustness because of the good food and excellent medical care he received in his new home located in an unpolluted hill-station. His adoptive parents developed deep affection for him; they sent him to an excellent school and eagerly satisfied his every wish. They never spoke to him harshly; the question of their giving him corporal punishment did not arise at all.

Everything was going right for Akiñcana. Then, for no major fault committed by him since birth, the good boy lost his legs, suffered terribly for weeks and finally passed away. As for Cakravarti, he suffered because of sickness, poverty, the death of his beloved mother and the bad treatment meted out to him by his father. He had not done anything wrong since birth to merit so much suffering. After Akiñcana's parents adopted him, the picture changed completely for him. The road accident about whose occurrence the boys had no inkling and over which they had no control, radically altered the course of their lives. Destiny that had been smiling at Akiñcana began to frown at him. On the other hand, fate, which had been scowling at Cakravarti, began to smile at him.

Many examples such as these can be given to highlight the power of destiny, which is actually nothing but actions performed by a person in an earlier life that have begun to fructify and are responsible for the present birth. Likewise, there is no dearth of instances in favour of the power of effort stemming from the exercise of free will.

Aśvapati, the pious and just ruler of Madra, was desirous of progeny. So, chanting the *Gayatrī-mantra*, he offered thousands of oblations into fire every day. Pleased with him, Goddess Sāvitrī manifested before him and told him that his longing would find fulfilment. In due course, a daughter was born to him. The king named her Sāvitrī, in honour of the Goddess who had graced him. When she came of age, he sent her along with his minister on a tour to enable her to identify a prospective husband. When she returned, the celestial Sage Nārada was with Aśvapati. She said that she wished to marry Satyavān, the son of Dyumatsena.

Dyumatsena was a firm adherent of *dharma* and had ruled Śālva. He always spoke the truth and so did his wife. Hence, they named their sole

son Satyavān. When Satyavān was still a child, Dyumatsena lost his eyesight. Taking advantage of the situation, a neighbouring king invaded Śālva successfully. As a result, Dyumatsena was forced to leave for the forest with his son and wife. On seeing Satyavān in the forest, Sāvitrī felt that he was the ideal husband for her.

Nārada said that Satyavān was very handsome, valorous like Indra, forbearing like the earth and self-controlled. But, added the sage, he had one great shortcoming and this was that he was destined to die in one year. On hearing the sage's words, Aśvapati asked Sāvitrī to choose another man. She, however, said, "I have once desired him as my husband. Regardless of whether he is long-lived or short-lived, I cannot choose anybody other than him." Nārada told the king, "She cannot be swayed from her righteous decision. Satyavān has unmatched good qualities. My opinion is that you should give your daughter to him."

Aśvapati then approached Dyumatsena, obtained his approval and, then, gave Satyavān the hand of his daughter. After marriage, Sāvitrī removed her jewels and donned a simple ochre dress appropriate for her life in the forest. She proved to be an ideal wife to Satyavān and a perfect daughter-in-law to Dyumatsena and his wife. They were very happy with her.

Sage Nārada had specified to her the exact moment at which Satyavān was scheduled to breathe his last. She did not disclose this information to her husband but constantly worried about what was to come to pass. Four days before the specified day, she commenced a fast and stood motionless. On being questioned by Dyumatsena, she replied that she was observing a vow. She did not eat a morsel and remained where she was till the final day. That morning, she formally ended her religious observance but announced that she did not wish to eat till evening.

She expressed to Satyavān her desire to accompany him to the forest when he went to fetch sacrificial faggots, flowers and fruit. He asked her, "You have not ventured into the forest in the past. The path is tough to tread. You have become enfeebled on account of your fast. How will you be able to walk far?" "I am enthusiastic and am unexhausted by my fast. So, please do not forbid me from accompanying you," requested Sāvitrī. He acceded to her wish but wanted her to get the approval of his parents. She obtained their consent and left with Satyavān.

Deep inside the forest, both of them gathered flowers. Then, taking up his axe, Satyavān proceeded to chop wood. After some time, he felt fatigued. His head and limbs ached severely and he felt too weak to stand.

He explained his condition to Sāvitrī. She rushed to him and, as he lay down, rested his head on her lap. Satyavān closed his eyes.

At that time, Sāvitrī beheld an effulgent, dark person holding a noose. She stood up reverentially and asked him, “Your body is not like that of humans. I think that you are a Deva. Kindly tell me who you are.” The effulgent one said, “I am Yama. It is because of your chastity and Tapas that you are able to see and converse with me. The life-span of your husband has come to an end. I have arrived to take his life.” “O Lord, I have heard that your emissaries carry out the task of taking the souls of humans. Why is it that you yourself have come?” queried Sāvitrī. Yama replied, “The reason for my coming is that Satyavān is an ocean of good qualities and is established in righteousness.” Then, at the precise moment specified by Sage Nārada, Yama withdrew Satyavān’s soul; Satyavān’s breathing ceased.

By virtue of her devotion to her husband and her religious observances, Sāvitrī was able to follow Yama and did so. He told her to return. She, however, said, “Wherever my husband goes or is taken, I shall accompany him; that is in keeping with *dharma*. The learned persons who have realized the Truth have declared that when a person walks with another, they become connected by friendship. I seek to speak to you on the strength of the bond that has arisen between us by my accompanying you.” Then she spoke words that appealed to Yama.

Yama: I am pleased with you. Ask for any boon other than the life of Satyavān.

Sāvitrī: Let the eyesight and strength of my father-in-law be restored.

Yama: I grant you that. Now return. Do not strain yourself.

Sāvitrī: In being near my husband, I feel no strain. I shall accompany you wherever you take him. It is said that proximity with holy men on even one occasion is most desirable. Friendship with them is even more valuable. Thus, one should always keep the company of the holy.

On hearing her extol the company of the holy and express her desire to be in his and her husband’s presence, Yama felt happy.

Yama: Ask for another boon but not for your husband’s life.

Sāvitrī: Please let my father-in-law regain his kingdom and may he never deviate from the path of *dharma*.

Yama: So be it. Now you go back.

Sāvitṛī: Great ones such as you forgive even foes who seek refuge. Please show mercy on people like me.

Yama: Ask for any boon other than your husband's life.

Sāvitṛī: My father, king Aśvapati, has no son. Please bless him with male progeny.

Yama: It shall be as you wish. You have come a great distance. Go back now.

Sāvitṛī then glorified Yama and made him happy with her words.

Yama: I am highly gratified by you. Ask for any fourth boon other than the restoration of your husband's life.

Sāvitṛī: May my husband and I have strong, valorous sons who will propagate our line of progeny.

Yama promised her what she desired. Sāvitṛī then told him that, unlike the first three boons, the fourth could not find fulfilment without her husband being restored to life. She, being a chaste woman, could not have a son by any man other than Satyavān. Yama saw her point and released Satyavān's soul.

Then he told her, "You have given me full satisfaction by your righteous words. Satyavān shall be restored to health and shall be fit to be taken back by you. He shall live with you for long and shall, by his adherence to *dharma*, attain great fame. Both of you shall have sons who shall become kings." After bestowing this blessing, Yama left. Sāvitṛī returned to where her husband's body was and sat down, placing his head on her lap. Satyavān opened his eyes. He thought that he had slept for long and wondered why she had not awakened him earlier. He said that he had beheld a dark-coloured person and wanted to know where that person was. Sāvitṛī assured him that she would tell him later. Then, she led him back to their abode.

Some *ṛṣis* were with Dyumatsena when the couple returned. They asked Satyavān, "Why did both of you not come back much earlier instead of so late in the night? Your parents were worried." Satyavān responded that he had fallen asleep. A sage announced, "Your father's sight was suddenly restored. Perhaps Sāvitṛī can give the reason." She described all that had transpired. The next morning, the former subjects of Dyumatsena came to the forest and met him. They told him, "O King, your foe and also his family have been killed by his own ministers." They requested him to

again take over the reins of the Śālva kingdom. All that Yama had promised came to pass.

Dyumatsena was destined to be blind and live in a forest. By Sāvitrī's efforts, he regained his sight and his kingdom. Aśvapati was not destined to have sons. But obtained them. Satyavān was to die young, but he lived long; he sired sons and ruled the Śālva kingdom for many years. This story is a striking example of how what is destined to happen can be markedly changed by human effort.

Mārkaṇḍeya was fated to die at the age of 16 but lived on because of his devout worship of Lord Śiva. Śuka, the son of Vyāsa, was such a great Yogi that he attained disembodied liberation at the time of his choice. Numerous instances of the alteration of the course of fate by personal effort and by the grace of God can easily be cited.

Neither destiny nor personal effort singly determines the course of human life; there is great interaction between the two. Destiny or actions of the past that have begun to fructify, human effort and divine grace together govern what happens. Manu has compared destiny and personal effort to the two wheels of a chariot; a chariot cannot move on a single wheel.

After the *Mahābhārata* war, Kṛṣṇa took the Pāṇḍavas to Bhīṣma who lay on a bed of arrows but intensely meditated upon the Lord. The Lord relieved Bhīṣma of pain and imparted to him unimpeded and complete Knowledge. He then asked Bhīṣma to answer the questions posed to him. One of the questions asked by Yudhiṣṭhira was, "Is destiny more powerful or human effort?" In the course of his elaborate reply, Bhīṣma cited the answer given by Brahma to Vasiṣṭha when the latter had posed a similar question.

He said, "Destiny is comparable to a seed and individual exertion to the soil. Seedless soil does not yield a harvest nor does an unsown seed. Crops grow from the combination of seeds and the soil. It is by the combined influence of destiny and effort that people rise to heaven.

"The doer reaps the fruit of his deeds; happiness and unhappiness result from good and bad deeds respectively. A deed done always has a consequence. If one's action were to bear no fruit, then all actions would be puerile; relying on destiny alone, men would become idlers.

"Everything can be secured by effort but nothing can be got through destiny alone by a man who remains idle. By well-directed human efforts, a person attains heaven, objects of enjoyment and the fulfilment

of his wishes. The celestials attained their high status from that of a human being, through dint of effort. Just as a small fire becomes big when fanned by the wind, weak, favourable destiny increases greatly in potentiality when it is associated with individual exertion. A noble man who is diligent in his efforts can acquire the wealth that is hidden and guarded by unfavourable destiny.

“A sinner soon loses his precious gains; destiny does not help the man steeped in delusion and greed. A man may have obtained, through favourable destiny, vast wealth, women and objects of enjoyment but if he is inactive, he cannot enjoy them. When oil is used up, a lamp gets extinguished. Likewise, favourable destiny loses its influence in the absence of human perseverance. Favourable destiny cannot uplift a man who treads the path of evil; there is no inherent power in it.

“Just as a disciple follows his *Guru*, so does one’s action, guided by fate, follow one’s own individual effort. One’s own self is one’s friend and one’s enemy. Virtue is the refuge of the Devas and by it, everything is attained. Destiny cannot thwart one who is established in virtue.”

26. Influence of Food on the Mind

A Yogi lived in a small *āśrama*. Daily, he used to beg for food and partake it. He was thus leading a calm and peaceful life. The king of the land had a great regard for the sage. One day, he invited the ascetic to his palace for *bhikṣā*. The *saṁnyāsin* said, “I have been eating only food procured by begging. I do not know how my mind will be affected if I consume anything in your palace. So I should to decline your invitation.”

However, in response to the ruler’s repeated requests, he relented. When the ascetic was washing his hands after his meal, his eyes fell on a necklace of pearls. Noting that nobody was watching him, he picked it up and put it in his *kamaṇḍalu*. Then, he went to the main hall, blessed the king and returned to his hermitage. Only after some time, he began to ponder over what he had done.

Meanwhile, the queen complained to the king about the loss of the necklace she had left in the bathroom. The king analysed the situation and concluded that one of the servants must have pilfered it. In order to extract the truth from them, he applied third degree methods. They kept on pleading innocence. When one of them suggested that the hermit might be the thief, the monarch became infuriated.

At the *āśrama*, the ascetic was thoroughly ill at ease. “What a foul deed I have committed today! For whose sake did I steal the necklace? If I

wear this and go for *bhikṣā*, certainly no one will offer me food. If I leave it here itself, someone may steal it. Why did I become a kleptomaniac? I have beheld many necklaces but have never been affected by desire for them. The fact that a longing has arisen today implies that my mind has become impure. What could be the cause?" he pondered. It dawned on him that the food he had eaten that day must have been the cause. He induced vomiting and then went to the king. On seeing the commotion in the palace, he asked for the reason. The king replied that no one had admitted to stealing a missing necklace. The Yogi said, "How will these innocent ones plead guilty?" "Here, take the necklace," continued the remorseful ascetic. "I, the thief, have brought it for you."

The shocked king asked the *saṃnyāsin*, "You are a great sage. Is it proper for you to have taken the necklace? Further, what made you bring it back? I am thoroughly confused. Please elucidate." The sage replied, "In the beginning, I turned down your invitation to have *bhikṣā* in your palace. However, I finally gave in to your request. The result is that so many people have got unnecessary beatings and I have also earned a bad name. O King! You have stored so much rice in your granary. I wonder whether you have rightfully collected it." "I am sorry to say that unfair means have been employed to collect so much rice," the monarch replied truthfully. "I ate this rice for only one day and even that was enough to spoil my mind," sighed the Yogi. "Such being the case, I shudder to even think of its effect on all of you who take it daily. So please do not invite me for food hereafter. I will get my food by begging as I have been doing hitherto." "Cannot begged food also be impure?" queried the sovereign. "The food may be impure but it is so only till it is put into my begging bowl. Such is the verdict of the *śāstras*," clarified the sage.

This story illustrates that food does influence the mind. Eatables are classified as *sāttvika*, *rājasa* and *tāmasa*. *Sāttvika* food is pure and confers strength and good health; curd is an instance of a *sāttvika* product. *Rājasa* food stimulates desire and anger; an example is a pungent item. *Tāmasa* food leads to sloth, sleepiness, etc. Putrid food and ort are instances of *tāmasa* eatables. The mentality of the cook and the presence of defiling factors, such as a strand of hair, also have a bearing on the purity of food. Care should be taken by a *sādhaka* (a practitioner of spiritual disciplines) to consume only properly-prepared, *sāttvika* food.

27. How a Householder Should Conduct Himself

A district collector was distraught. A friend who dropped in at his office to pay him a casual visit, sensed his discomposure and asked, "What is

your problem?” The collector replied, “My wife and children are all laid up with fever. My son first fell ill and his infection spread to the others.”

Friend: Did you not call a doctor?

Collector: Of course, I did. He prescribed medicines and said that they would recover in a few days.

Friend: You are so upset at the illness of just four people living in a house situated in a quarter of an acre. How then do you deal with problems in your jurisdiction which covers thousands of acres and is populated by lakhs of people? What indeed would be your condition if there were to be an epidemic in your region?

Collector: I would inform the health department. Investigations would be carried out and the disease identified as cholera, plague or something else. Treatment and preventive measures including sanitation would be taken up on a war footing. I would handle such a situation efficiently, with a cool head.

Friend: If such a major, widespread problem can be dealt with by you without getting ruffled, why are you so distraught about a minor problem confined to four members of a single house?

Collector: Unlike the others, those who are ill now are my very own.

Such is the deleterious influence of strong attachment and of the feeling, “This person or thing is my own,” that the collector who worked hard and efficiently discharged his official duties without losing his composure became inefficient and beset with worry when it came to his wife and children.

A pilgrim, on the way back to his town, halted at a *dharmasālā*. He appeased his hunger there with the free meal offered to him. Then, desirous of doing good and acquiring *punya*, he joined the inmates in serving food to the pilgrims who had come there. Thereafter, he helped in cleaning up the place. Before retiring for the night, he engaged in conversation with the others, expressed his sympathy to those who voiced their personal problems and also gave them beneficial suggestions.

He behaved as if the choultry was his home and the persons there were his family members. Yet, his mind was fully at peace and he left the next morning without the least hesitation or regret. After he had returned to his home, a person asked him, “Where did you spend last night?” “At the

dharmasālā,” he replied. “What transpired there?” asked his relative. “Nothing of consequence. I ate there, slept and left. That is all.”

A married man has many duties and responsibilities and has to face many a problem affecting his family. The scriptures and Bhagavatpāda graciously advise him to lead his family life without attachment. He ought to be like the collector when engaged in the discharge of his official duties and like the pilgrim during his stay at the *dharmasālā*. He will then perform his duties and face family problems effectively and efficiently but without any mental agitation.

28. Karma-yoga

Three brothers went on a vacation to a hill station and stayed there in a cottage booked by them. One night, when they were fast asleep, a powerful earthquake wreaked havoc in the region. The roof of the cottage fell and would have crushed them to death had not a portion of the roof-beam come to rest on a piece of wooden furniture in the bedroom. From the creaking sounds the brothers heard, they realized that in moments the roof would descend on them. There was simply no question of their remaining where they were till help arrived.

They turned towards the two doors that led out of the room. Due to an electric short-circuit, a fire had started near one of them. The flames were spreading. The way to the other door was strewn with glass pieces from the shattered window panes. One of the brothers ran towards the door where the fire was. He managed to escape through it but suffered severe burns and had to be hospitalized for weeks. The second brother recognized the danger of passing through the flames and so moved as swiftly as he could to the second door. His soles were pierced at several spots by the glass pieces on the way. He had to be hospitalized for two days.

The third brother thought, “It is madness to remain here. Heading towards the spreading flames is foolish, for severe burns will be inevitable. So, I must escape through the other door. But, first, I must do something to protect my feet from the glass pieces.” He tore his bed-sheet and wrapped a piece of cloth on each foot. He worked fast and so the whole process took only seconds. Then he headed for the door chosen by him. He escaped unhurt.

A person cannot remain without performing some action or the other just as the brothers were not in a position to remain where they lay in the bedroom. All his acts do have consequences. If he engages in *adharma*,

he will experience much suffering in future, in hell or on earth. His behaviour would be on par with that of the brother who headed towards the door engulfed by fire. He who performs meritorious deeds experiences happiness for some time in heaven or acquires a good birth on the earth. In any case, he has to be reborn. Thus, even the acquirer of *punya* does suffer the bondage of transmigration. His conduct is comparable to that of the second brother. The path to the fiery door was easy to tread like the path of evil; the other door had to be reached with difficulty like the path of *dharma*, to go along which one has to restrain the mind and the senses.

The Lord has explained how a person may perform actions but avoid being bound by them. The person should dedicate all his actions and their fruits to God and discharge his duties without hankering for the results. This means of performing actions but escaping bondage is called *karma-yoga*. The performer of *karma-yoga* is like the third brother, who escaped through the very door through which the second brother had left but without suffering any injury. The most intelligent of the brothers protected his feet with bandages; the *karma-yogin* protects himself by dedicating his actions and their fruits to God.

A person had the practice of performing *pūjā* to God, and offering Him fruits and other eatables. After the worship, he used to partake of an offered fruit as God's *prasāda*. An agnostic friend of his mockingly told him, "Your practice of performing *naivedya* is silly. The fruit that you place before your God remains exactly at the same spot where it was kept. It undergoes no physical change either. Further, it is not the God you worship but you who consumes it."

The devotee responded with a smile, "I submit a fruit to God with the firm conviction that, in keeping with His statement in the *Bhagavadgītā*, He will accept it. Having received it, He is free to do with it whatever He pleases. Since He is omnipotent, He is perfectly capable of making it vanish or leaving it behind in its entirety after having consumed it. I believe that it is He who leaves behind the fruit for me after partaking of it in a humanly-inconceivable way. As far as I am concerned, what I consume after *naivedya* is the remnant of what God has eaten.

"Recently, when your political leader came to town, you and numerous others received him and offered him garlands. He certainly did not and could not wear all of them. He even gave you one of the garlands that he had received and you accepted it joyfully. As he walked through the large crowd of his supporters, he tossed some garlands to them and the crowd cheered. It is possible that a supporter got back the very garland that he

had given. Just because your leader does not retain garlands presented to him, you people do not abstain from the practice of garlanding him; you derive joy in honouring him and do not tell him what he should do with the garlands you give him. Why then are you uncomfortable with my sincerely offering God fruits and feeling happy? Further, when your leader can return a garland to you, why should God not be free to give me back the submitted fruits with His blessings? A *karma-yogin*, in fact, offers to God not just eatables but all his thoughts, words and deeds.”

A man had two servants. One of them was particular about eulogising his employer but not in executing his master’s instructions. The other sincerely carried out the tasks assigned to him; he also held his master in high esteem. The employer obviously preferred the second servant to the first. A devotee, who, like the second servant, sincerely performs the duties ordained for him by God and specified in the scriptures and, further, does so in a spirit of dedication, pleases God greatly and receives His grace in abundance. By the Lord’s grace, his mind becomes very pure. In due course, he realizes the Truth and gets liberated.

A woman doted on her young son and took great care of him. One day, she woke up with a splitting headache, fever and nausea. Nevertheless, she attended to her child’s morning requirements without any laxity. That day, she found the rice prepared by her to be slightly overcooked. Promptly, she started to cook some more. Her husband noticed this and told her, “You are sick and in pain. Why do you want to strain yourself? The rice that is ready is quite eatable.” “I want to give my son only the kind of rice he is used to and likes. As for the overcooked rice, I shall consume it,” replied the wife. Out of deep love for her child, the woman did her very best for him. Likewise, a *karma-yogin*, by virtue of his devotion to God, performs his duties to the very best of his ability and refrains from *adharma*.

Two students appeared for an examination. In spite of having prepared well, they fared badly because the questions were very tough and some of them fell outside the scope of the prescribed syllabus. One of them, who did not practise *karma-yoga*, became highly dejected because of his inept performance. When he went home and sat down to prepare for the next day’s subject, his mind kept reverting to that day’s question paper. His worry greatly hampered his preparation. The other boy, being a practitioner of *karma-yoga*, did not experience the least anxiety. This is because, in the examination hall itself, he had dedicated his performance and its fruit to God. After returning home, undistracted by worry, he focussed his attention on the next day’s subject.

On the following day, the first boy became flabbergasted on encountering a tough question. The *karma-yogin* read the question carefully and answered it to the best of his ability without getting perturbed in the least. It is hardly surprising that the first boy secured a lower rank than his friend. This example shows that the efficiency of a *karma-yogin* exceeds that of a person who acts with a longing for the fruits of his actions.

The Lord has declared in the *Bhagavadgītā*, “Perform your prescribed duties, for action is superior to inaction. Moreover, even the maintenance of your body will not be possible by inaction. Man becomes bound by all his actions except those done by him for the sake of God. O, son of Kuntī! Perform actions for the sake of God without being attached...By performing his duty without attachment, a person attains liberation (through the purification of his mind).”

29. Fitness for Knowledge of the Supreme

Desirous of heaven, Vājaśravasa performed the Viśvajit sacrifice in which one gives away everything. He had a son named Naciketas. Being full of faith, the boy was dismayed to find that the cows his father was gifting to the priests were decrepit and barren. He felt that as a son, he should do something to compensate this shortcoming in his father’s sacrifice. He decided to allow himself to be gifted. So, he asked his father, “To whom will you offer me?” Vājaśravasa ignored him. When Naciketas asked for the third time, Vājaśravasa angrily told him, “I hereby offer you to Yama.”

“My father has spoken these words in wrath without any consideration of purpose. Nevertheless, they must not be allowed to get falsified,” thought Naciketas. The boy left for Yama’s abode. As the latter had gone out, Naciketas patiently waited for him for three days. When Yama came back, he offered the boy three boons to expiate for his sin of not attending to a guest for three days.

As his third boon, Naciketas wanted to know whether or not there is an *Ātman*, distinct from the body, senses and the mind, that survives the death of the body. With a view to testing Naciketas and determining whether he was truly fit to be taught about the *Ātman*, Yama tried to dissuade him and to tempt him in various ways.

Yama said, “Ask for sons and grandsons who will be centenarians. Ask for many cows, horses, elephants and gold and a vast expanse of land. Live for as many years as you wish. If you desire some other equivalent boon, do ask for it. Ask for wealth and a long life. Become the king of a huge region. I shall make you fit to enjoy all pleasurable objects.

“Ask, according to your choice, for desirable things that are difficult to obtain. Here are celestial nymphs with chariots and musical instruments; they cannot be had by mortals. Get yourself served by them. But do not enquire whether anything exists after the fall of the body.”

Although Yama did his best to tempt the boy, Naciketas remained unperturbed like a still, vast lake. He said, “O Yama! All these enjoyable things enumerated by you are ephemeral. Moreover, they waste the vigour of man’s senses. All life, without exception, is short indeed. Hence, let all these remain yours.” He insisted that he only wanted the boon he had sought. Extremely pleased with Naciketas’ dispassion and firmness, Yama taught him about the *Ātman*. The boy became enlightened.

This story of the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* reveals that unwavering dispassion characterizes the person who is fit for the knowledge of the Supreme.

30. Contentment

Desirous of progeny, a man prayed to God to bless him with an offspring. Soon, he became the father of a male child. It refused to suckle. Hence, the devotee again sought the Lord and said, “You gave me a child but it does not consume milk. I fear that it will not survive. So, please do something.” “I see,” said the Lord, “From tomorrow, it will start taking milk. Do not worry.” That problem got solved but the child gradually became intolerably mischievous.

Once again, the devotee turned to the Lord. He prayed to Him to make the child behave better. “So be it,” blessed the Lord. From that moment, the child stopped its misconduct. It became so subdued that it remained silent. Unable to tolerate this, the devotee requested the Lord to come to his aid. Thereafter, the child conversed normally. After many such prayers, the devotee got his son married. A few years passed but his daughter-in-law did not conceive. So, the devotee beseeched the Lord, “I feel I would have been happier if You had not given me a child. My mind is fraught with sorrow at the thought of my son not having any progeny.”

Quite obviously, such prayers have no end at all. People are normally not contented with what they have. Our ancients have declared, “A man with a rupee longs for a hundred. He who has a hundred wants a thousand. He who has acquired a thousand desires to possess a lakh. The owner of a lakh seeks to become a king. A king yearns to become a Kubera, the god of riches. Kubera wishes to become Indra, the king of the gods. Indra hankers after the rank of Brahma. Brahma pines for the position of Viṣṇu.

Viṣṇu covets the state of Śiva. Who, indeed, has attained the limit of desires?”

There is a humorous verse to the effect, “A mountain is huge. The ocean is larger than a mountain. Space is more expansive than the ocean. God is bigger than Space. More extensive than even God is desire!” While discontentment makes a man miserable, contentment confers steady joy. A dispassionate man is contented; contentment favours dispassion.

31. The Feeling, “Mine,” Kills Peace

A man pondered for long about the kind of house that would be ideal for him and also sought the views of several knowledgeable persons. Finally, he framed a clear conception of it. He entrusted the construction to a competent and reputed engineer. But so concerned was he that there should be no shortcoming or deviation from what he had in mind that he spent almost all his time at the site. He proffered suggestions and comments to the extent of making a nuisance of himself. Finally, the house of his dreams was ready and he joyously moved into it with his family.

He swelled with pride whenever anyone expressed even the slightest appreciation of his home. One day, his son who wished to hang a picture started to hammer a nail into a wall. No sooner had the boy struck a single blow than his father came running into the room. His face crimson with anger, the man ordered his son to immediately stop the hammering. “How dare you do something that might mar the smoothness and beauty of the wall?” he asked. “If you want the picture, then keep it on your desk.” The boy was taken aback by the intensity of his reaction, for he was usually soft-spoken and indulgent.

Years passed. In the interest of his health, which had begun to deteriorate, he decided to shift to a hill-station with good medical facilities. He sold his house for a large sum and received much of the payment in the form of a bank draft. As his bank had closed for the day, he locked the draft in his cupboard with the intention of presenting it at the bank the next day. That night, as he tossed and turned unable to fall asleep, he heard a sound. Without making the least attempt to determine what might have caused it, he phoned the police. A few policemen soon arrived. On investigating, they found that the culprit was not a thief but a rat.

After they left, his wife asked him, “Why did you panic so easily?” “I was so apprehensive about the safety of the draft that I did not fall asleep. The moment I heard a sound, I felt that my fears had come true and that

a burglar had entered, who would steal the draft. Hence, I phoned for help. Now I realize that I overreacted,” he said sheepishly. He spent a sleepless night and arrived at his bank the next morning even before it opened. It was only after duly presenting the draft that he relaxed. Shortly after he left, a strange event transpired at the bank.

Some cheques and drafts, including the one given by him, were found to be missing. Tension gripped the manager and the concerned staff and they began to frantically search for the missing items. A sigh of relief escaped them when a peon announced the solution of the mystery. The manager’s five-year-old son who had come to the bank to see his father had picked up the cheques and drafts lying on a table and entered the toilet. After filling a bucket there with water, he had been about to make paper boats with them when the peon had seen and stopped him.

The man who had deposited the draft was unaware of all this. The next day, he finalised the purchase of a house of his choice located at the hill-station where he had made up his mind to live. Soon, he shifted lock, stock and barrel to his new residence. His old house was demolished and a shopping complex came up in its place. When he saw the shopping complex for the first time, he remarked to his friend, “It looks nice.”

The man of the story first had a strong idea, “This is my house,” and was deeply attached to the building concerned. Hence, a nail partly driven into a wall seemed to him to be a spear thrust into his heart. After selling the house and receiving a bank draft in return, he firmly felt, “This draft is mine,” and deemed it important. Consequently, he spent a sleepless night worrying about it. Once he presented it at his bank, he ceased to view it as his precious possession. So, he relaxed. On the other hand, the bank officials, who became its temporary custodians, lost their peace when they found it to be missing.

After the protagonist had shifted his residence to the hill-station, when he first saw a shopping complex in the place of his former house, he did not feel perturbed; he was even able to appreciate the new construction. It was because he no longer had the notion ‘mine’ with respect to his former house that its demolition did not affect him. Had his feeling towards it been as strong as before, he would have been rendered senseless by grief; after all, he had earlier been unable to bear even the hammering of a nail into its wall.

Janaka, the great king of Videha, was once informed that his capital Mithilā was on fire. He remained thoroughly unruffled and averred, “Though Mithilā is ablaze, nothing of mine is burning.” He was completely

free from the notion ‘mine’ with respect to his kingdom and so, though he sincerely shouldered the massive burden of suzerainty, he was always peaceful.

When a person has the notion ‘mine’ with respect to an object, he is affected by what happens or what, he thinks, might happen to that object. On his giving up that idea, the article ceases to be a trigger for his mental disquiet. Abandonment of the feeling “mine” with reference to persons, places and things makes a man calm and blissful, without compromising his efficiency.

32. The Source of Happiness

“Sweets give me great joy. Hence, I do not hesitate to accept them whenever they are offered. Further, I always make it a point to eat some everyday,” remarked a man to his friend. Some days passed. He fell ill and was laid up in bed. His doctor informed him that he was suffering from diabetes and infection. His friend, who was unaware of all this, dropped in one day and said, “I have brought you a bag of sweets.” Almost in despair, the bed-ridden patient replied, “Oh! Take it away from me. I do not desire it at all. Sweets are like poison to me.”

The story shows that what is considered pleasurable at one time is deemed to be a source of misery at another. Were sweets to be intrinsically a source of happiness, the man would never have despised them; his sickness definitely did not impair his basic desire for happiness and his dislike for misery. In fact, a little analysis would readily reveal that there is no sense object that is intrinsically a source of happiness. Such analysis engenders dispassion.

A father fondled his child. As he kissed it, his rough beard and moustache pricked its tender face, causing sharp pain. The child bawled. Keen on pacifying it, the father repeatedly kissed it. As a result, the baby began to wail all the more.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* teaches, “It is only for the sake of the *Ātman* that everything is dear.” A husband loves his wife not purely for her sake but because he regards her as his spouse and associates his happiness with hers. In the example considered, the father wished to calm down the child because he regarded it as his own baby and associated his happiness with its pacification and joy.

Bhagavatpāda has taught in His *Śataślokī*, “An object continues to be dear as long as one derives pleasure from it and it is detested for the

duration that it causes pain. The same object cannot be always liked or disliked. Sometimes, that which is not dear may become dear. Moreover, that which was loveable can turn unpleasant. The *Ātman*, towards which affection never wanes, is always the most beloved.”

The *Ātman* is ever the dearest because it is always the source of joy. In fact, the *Upaniṣads* are emphatic that it is of the nature of unalloyed bliss. Because one fails to realize one’s intrinsic nature of being pure bliss, one turns towards sense-objects, mistakenly imagining them to be sources of one’s happiness. The happiness that one seems to derive from sense-objects actually has for its basis the bliss of the *Ātman*. Thus, there is just one source of joy and that is the *Ātman*.

33. Entrapment in Eddies

A worm fell into a river. It was dragged along by the current and soon got trapped in an eddy. Round and round it went. Despairing for life, it struggled to escape but in vain. After some time, primarily because of the very dynamics of the flow, it found itself out of the eddy. Alas! Even before it could savour its respite, it was trapped in the watery grip of another eddy. Again, it was spun around in circles. Its freedom from this eddy too was short-lived, for it got caught yet again in churning waters.

Its life would surely have ended but for the fact that a kind-hearted man beheld its plight. He reached the spot where it was spinning in an eddy and gently rescued it. He carried it to the bank and finally left it on dry land. The worm realized that if the water level were to rise with the passage of time, it would be in trouble. So, it moved away from the river and soon reached a safe spot under a tree in the vicinity.

Man’s plight in the cycle of transmigratory existence is akin to that of the worm. People strive to obtain pleasure. The enjoyment they obtain motivates them to endeavour further to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. Thus, a vicious cycle comprising activity and enjoyment sets in from which there is virtually no respite. This cycle is like an eddy in the river of life. After death, a man moves on to another birth just as the worm passed on from one eddy to another. Like the kind man of the example, the *Sadguru* provides succour to the helpless man trapped in the cycle of work and enjoyment and the cycle of birth and death. Having received the grace and guidance of a *Guru*, it behoves a person to put in effort, like the worm placed on the shore, and become a *Jīvanmukta*, one liberated while alive.

34. Need for a Guru

A customer approached a jeweller. He had a diamond with him and wanted to ascertain its value. He was under the impression that the diamond was flawless and that it would fetch him a good price. The jeweller examined it and said, "This diamond is not very worthy as it has a defect in the form of a black dot." The customer examined the diamond thoroughly but could not locate the dot. So, he told the jeweller, "I see no dot." The jeweller asked him to inspect it carefully. Still, the customer failed to perceive the dot. The jeweller then gave several directions as to how the spot could be identified. After some time, the customer was able to apprehend the dot.

Even in a matter like examining a diamond, guidance is necessary. What then need be said about the importance of guidance in comprehending the Truth, which is most subtle? The Kaṭha Upanishad declares, "As the *Ātman* is subtler than the subtlest, It is beyond the scope of arguments."

A person may peruse the Upanishads, which expound the Truth, and reflect deeply on the import of the scriptures. But this much is inadequate for him to get direct realization of the Supreme and, hence, liberation. The grace and instructions of a *Guru* are essential for the dawn of enlightenment. It is said in the *Chandogya-upaniṣad*, "Knowledge acquired from the *Guru* is what definitely becomes most beneficial."

35. The Sadguru Graces All Immaculately

An enlightened sage lived in a forest spending most of his time oblivious of his body and surroundings, in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the acme of *yoga*. One day, two youths came to his divine presence and reverentially waited, standing motionless with joined palms, till his mind emerged from *samādhi*. When, on his opening his half-closed eyes, his glance fell on them, they prostrated for long. Thereafter, they humbly beseeched him to grace them by accepting them as his disciples. By virtue of his realization of the non-dual Truth, he had transcended all duties and wants. However, being an ocean of mercy, he acquiesced to their request.

To provide them an opportunity to perform *Guru-sevā*, which is invaluable for a disciple, he assigned them tasks to be performed on a daily basis, such as washing his ochre robes, cleaning the place where he performed penance and obtaining food by begging in the villages at the edge of the forest. He initiated both of them into a Mantra and taught them how to meditate.

One of the disciples soon became an adept at meditation who sat for hours with a rock-steady, concentrated mind, without awareness of even the body. The other wholeheartedly and regularly attempted to meditate but found his efforts consistently thwarted by distracting thoughts that kept on arising and disappearing like the waves of the ocean. The first disciple readily grasped, in its entirety, what the sage taught. The second lad sincerely attended the classes and read for long the portions taught. But as he was not bright, he comprehended far less than his companion. Both the disciples efficiently carried out the tasks assigned to them with thoroughness.

Five years passed. One day, the *Guru* told his disciples, “Your studies are now complete and it is time for you to return to your homes.” They loved their *Guru* dearly and the mere thought of being separated from him was very painful. However, they had the firm conviction that at no time should any command of the *Guru* be transgressed, even to the slightest extent, for any reason whatsoever. So, in deference to their *Guru*’s directive, they got ready to leave. The first disciple prostrated before his *Guru*. The sage blessed him with *abhaya-mudrā*, upraised palm. When the second disciple prostrated, the sage placed his divine hand on the disciple’s head and stated with certainty, “May you become fully enlightened, right now.” His grace was so potent that the disciple promptly became an enlightened *mahātman*.

The first disciple felt unhappy that, unlike his friend, he had not received the special blessing. Not one to hide his feelings or thoughts from his *Guru*, he asked with joined palms, “O Lord, a doubt has arisen in my mind. I seek your permission to express it to you. By your grace, my meditation has been far superior to his and I have grasped much more during your classes than him. Such being the case, O Master, why did you specially grace him rather than me? In case, my query is inappropriate, kindly forgive me.”

Guru: Prior to my answering your question, let me pose some queries to you. What do you think of me?

First disciple: You are my revered *Guru*. You are a great sage who has realized the Supreme and achieved all that is to be achieved.

Guru: Do I appear to be a man given to transacting business with his disciples?

First disciple: Certainly not.

Guru: My child, you referred to your superior meditation and your greater grasp of *Vedānta*. You aver that I am not a trader. Why, then, do you expect me to dispense grace proportional to a disciple's service, success in absorbing my teaching and progress in meditation practised according to my instructions? You further say that I have achieved all that is to be achieved. If so, I stand to gain nothing by your service or by producing a scholar adept at meditation, through whom my name shall spread.

First disciple: Are not meditation and enquiry means to getting knowledge of the Truth, which is what my companion has now got?

Guru: Of course, they are. If properly practised, meditation and enquiry eradicate the ego. You, my child, feel, "I meditate well. I am a scholar." You should not be egoistic like this. Your companion, on the other hand, feels, "I am nothing. Whatever state my *Guru* places me in, that is all that I want. Let my *Guru* do whatever he wishes to do with me."

First disciple: If there be the possibility of a disciple who has not progressed in the spiritual path straightaway getting enlightened by the grace of the *Guru*, then does not spiritual effort become something that is dispensable?

Guru: Not at all. A disciple should carry out his *Guru*'s instructions to the very best of his ability and then leave everything in the hands of his *Guru* or God; that ability of his may be great or insignificant. If, thinking, "I need not personally take steps in the direction shown by my *Guru*. May he himself deliver me to the goal," a disciple were to be indolent or careless, he will certainly not attain the highest. Undoubtedly, your companion did do his best. It is true that you, whose capacity is far greater than his, were also sincere.

My child, I love both of you equally. A mother attends more to a babe that is a few days old than to her ten-year-old child. This is not because she loves the latter less but because the former is in greater need of care. You are very intelligent, learned and meditate well. Combat your ego and realization of the Supreme shall be yours. For that, you have my complete blessings. Your companion is helpless like a new-born babe. He is neither intelligent, nor learned and his mind wanders like the wind. If I had not uplifted him myself, he would have been lost. So, I gave him special blessings. As for you, you too shall become enlightened. Have no doubt or apprehension regarding this. Numerous are the persons who shall be uplifted by you.

The *Guru* then called out to the second disciple, who was standing at some distance to allow his companion to converse in private.

Guru: If I had ignored you when you prostrated, what would you have thought?

Second disciple: Lord, you are everything to me. You know best. So, I would have remained quiet and fully satisfied if you had ignored or even cursed me.

Turning to the first disciple, the *Guru* said, “See how profound his devotion is. He spoke truthfully when he said that he would have been satiated even if I had cursed him. I blessed you and yet you felt dissatisfied. What a difference there is between his devotion and yours!” The first disciple hung his head in shame. Looking at him with compassion, the *Guru* unequivocally declared, “I questioned your companion for the sole purpose of creating a situation conducive to eradicate your ego, the obstacle in your path. Now that humility has pervaded your heart, you deserve the highest and shall have it.” Saying so, he specially graced the first disciple and the latter promptly attained the highest.

Regardless of the differences between disciples, the ideal *Sadguru* knows and does what is best for each of them. His mode of gracing is ever immaculate.

36. Where Censure is a Blessing

Devadatta was a bright, dexterous lad who studied his *Veda* and the *śāstras* at the hermitage of an very erudite sage. Five other *brahmacārins* were his classmates. The *Guru* was strict and ensured that his pupils, who venerated as also feared him, led disciplined lives conforming to the rules of their *brahmacarya-āśrama*.

One day, at the commencement of his *śāstra* lesson, the *Guru* asked a question to a disciple. As the question was simple and pertained to the portion covered the preceding day, the not-very-bright disciple gave a satisfactory answer. The *Guru* nodded. Turning to another *brahmacārin*, he asked a simple question, again relating to the previous day’s lesson. The *brahmacārin* hesitated for some time and then gave a completely wrong answer. The *Guru* spelt out the correct answer and asked the boy to repeat what he had said. On the lad doing so, the *Guru* told him, “Pay more attention. If you do not understand anything that I say, feel free to ask me.”

Then, turning to Devadatta, he posed a tough question pertaining to a portion that had been covered over a month ago. Nevertheless, Devadatta

thought over the matter and began his answer. He proceeded correctly for some time and then got struck. The *Guru* waited for a moment, and, with a frown on his face, shouted, “You fool! Your answer is inadequate. Have you come here to study or to while away your time? After this class, do not show me your face again, unless and until you are able to give me the correct answer.” Devadatta thought to himself, “My companion did not answer a simple question pertaining to yesterday’s lesson correctly, but my *Guru* was soft with him. I, however, answered a tough question partly. Yet, he has given me a strong rebuke. To avoid such censure, I shall study harder and thereby ensure that I do not ever get caught inadequately prepared.”

The *Guru* continued with the lesson. At the end of it, Devadatta did not go out like the other *brahmacārins* but continued to sit in the same room, pouring over his books. After a couple of hours, he approached his *Guru*. The *Guru* asked him, “I told you not to come to me unless you are ready with the correct reply. Can you give me the answer now?” Devadatta said, “Yes, master” and gave a flawless reply. The *Guru* did not express either approval or disapproval. He merely went on to ask a few more questions. Devadatta provided the correct answers. The *Guru* nodded and moved on. Time passed on with Devadatta never failing to answer correctly when questioned by his *Guru* during the classes.

One afternoon, he was fanning his *Guru* in his master’s hut when another *brahmacārin* came there and announced that a person who seemed to be a reputed scholar had come to the *āśrama*. The *Guru* asked that *brahmacārin* to receive the visitor with due honour and to usher him to his hut. The *brahmacārin* obeyed. The scholar who entered exchanged pleasantries with the *Guru* and then said that he had come for a discussion based on the *śāstras*. He expounded a point and then posed a query. The *Guru* unexpectedly turned to Devadatta and said, “Answer!” Devadatta was taken aback, for he thought that the question was addressed to the *Guru*. Nevertheless, in obedience to his *Guru*’s command, he began to give a reasoned reply. The visitor raised another point and a further question. Once more, Devadatta responded and soon a full-fledged discussion of great depth ensued. After about an hour of discussion, the visiting pundit posed a complex question. Devadatta rapidly called to mind all that he had read and heard from his *Guru* on the issue concerned. But he was unable to think of a satisfactory response. So he remained silent.

Noticing this, his *Guru* gave out a cogent answer that fully satisfied the visitor. Then, turning to Devadatta, his *Guru* shouted, “You are a disgrace.

Can you not think beyond what is given in the books? Do you have to be told everything? If you are going to reproduce what is in the books and whatever I tell you, then, what is the difference between you and a parrot? I might as well keep a parrot here as a student instead of you.” While the *Guru* was scolding Devadatta, the visitor was all smiles. Devadatta felt thoroughly humiliated.

He wondered, “Why is my *Guru* humiliating me like this in front of this reputed scholar? After all, I was not in the least expecting this discussion and yet managed reasonably well. I have been faring much better than my classmates. Yet, my *Guru* sharply censures me and also has a low opinion of me. Perhaps, he does not like me.” Never one to lose hope, he resolved, “No matter how much effort I have to put in and regardless of the scolding and humiliations I receive, I shall somehow master the *śāstras* to such an extent that he will be forced to be proud of me.” Thereafter, Devadatta not only studied what he had been taught but also pondered on the implications of the passages. He considered possible unstated objections and thought up powerful replies to them.

One day, during his *Guru*’s *śāstra* class, Devadatta abruptly began to feel dizzy and nauseated. He tried to control himself so that he could continue to attend the class. His *Guru*, however, discerned what was happening. In a kindly voice, he said, “My child, you are unwell. Do not strain yourself. Go to the hut, lie down and rest.” Devadatta was surprised at the extreme softness in his *Guru*’s voice. He tried to get up but as he did so, because of the dizziness, he nearly fell. His *Guru* quickly got up and held him. Then, lifting Devadatta in his arms, the *Guru* personally carried him to the hut and made him lie down on a straw bed. He prepared a medical potion and administered it to Devadatta. When the other *brahmacārin* came there, he told them that he was cancelling his class for that day.

Taking a disciple with him, he went out of the *āśrama* after instructing another *brahmacārin* to tend to Devadatta. He returned a couple of hours later. He had cuts on several portions of his body and was bleeding profusely. Worried, Devadatta asked him about what had happened. The *Guru* merely said, “Let us not talk about me,” and proceeded to prepare a special medicine, a little of which he administered to Devadatta. He then spent the whole night by Devadatta’s side, giving him a *kaṣāya* every one hour. Devadatta was deeply touched by his *Guru*’s affection. The next morning, he felt reasonably well.

As he was about to go for his bath, a co-student of his came to the hut. He said, “Last night, I heard you ask our *Guru* about the injuries on his

body. But you got no answer. I know what happened.” He continued, “Yesterday, our *Guru* took me and went out of the *āśrama*. He moved into the forest for some distance and gathered few herbs. He gave them to me and said, ‘Wait here for me in the safety of some tree. But do not tarry for more than an hour. If I do not return by then, return to the *āśrama*, prepare a medicine with these herbs and administer it to Devadatta.’ He explained in depth how I should prepare a potion using the herbs that he had given me.

“He then walked deeper into the forest, leaving me behind. I climbed a tree and from my perch could see him moving swiftly. He encountered a dense, thorny bush on the way. To cross it, he had to plunge through it. As he did so, his body was badly injured. But he did not seem to mind. He just picked himself up and continued to walk. I was shocked to see that he was proceeding towards a cave, at the mouth of which a tigress was seated along with her cubs. She was nursing her cubs. You will recall that our *Guru* had told us that tigers do not normally harm human beings and that if we encounter a tiger during our walks in the forest, we should remain perfectly still till the tiger passes. You will also remember that he warned us to take special care to avoid a tigress nursing her cubs because, apprehending danger, she might maul us.

“As our *Guru* headed towards the cave, I watched helplessly. I felt like screaming out to caution him but knew that he would not approve. So, I just sat where I was, petrified. The tigress sensed his arrival and growled. He ignored the warning and did not slacken his pace. Surprisingly, the tigress relaxed and continued to nurse her cubs. Our *Guru* soon reached the entrance of the cave and began to gather some herbs. I realized that he had gone there because the herbs concerned were found only at that spot. Having collected the herbs, he headed back. Again, he had no choice but to plunge through the bush on the way. He injured himself further. As he came up to the tree where I was perched, I descended.

“Seeing me stare at his wounds, he merely said, ‘Oh, these are nothing. Let us move on.’ We returned to the *āśrama* and it was with the herbs that he had gathered at the spot where I waited and at the entrance of the cave that he prepared the medicine that he administered you. He risked his life for you.” Devadatta was deeply moved and tears came to his eyes. He thought to himself, “What a blunder I have committed. I thought that he does not like me. Indeed, he loves me very dearly.”

One day, when Devadatta was cleaning his *Guru*’s hut, a *brahmacārin* came there and announced the arrival of two visitors to the *āśrama*. The *Guru* asked the *brahmacārin* to usher them in. Devadatta moved to leave

the room. But his *Guru* ordered him to continue with his work. One of the visitors was obviously a pundit, while the other appeared to be his quiet, submissive attendant. The *Guru* asked the visitors to sit down and they exchanged pleasantries. The scholar said that he had come to have a debate. He then initiated it. The *Guru* instructed Devadatta to respond and the latter did so.

Soon, the discussion reached great heights. Arguments sallied forth from one side to the other. About two hours passed in this way without the visiting scholar being able to gain the least upper hand. After some time, the scholar advanced what appeared to be an invincible argument in favour of his proposition. However, Devadatta beautifully demolished it. The scholar had no choice but to keep silent. Devadatta thought that the scholar would feel upset or annoyed. However, he was surprised to find the visitor in high spirits. The *Guru* then turned to Devadatta and said, "You can leave now." Devadatta obeyed. Thereafter, the visitors and the *Guru* engaged in conversation for a while after which, the visitors left the *āśrama*.

Two days later, the king of the land came to the *āśrama* and met the *Guru*. On being summoned, Devadatta went to the meeting place, prostrated and stood reverentially at some distance from his *Guru*. His *Guru* ordered him to sit down. He obeyed. The king turned to Devadatta and, rising from his seat, respectfully said, "I have built a big *āśrama* in the woods near the capital. Please accept it as a humble offering from me. I would be deeply honoured if you will agree to be my adviser in religious matters. I would be much obliged to you if you will also agree to gauge the scholarship of visiting pundits so that I can suitably honour and reward them. Please think over my requests and let me know whether you will grant them. I am eagerly hoping that you will give me an affirmative answer."

Devadatta was perplexed to hear the king address him thus. He asked, "Why is it that Your Highness is making such an offer to me? You do not know me at all." "I do," said the king. "Your *Guru* has told me much about you. He is extremely proud of you and has unequivocally asserted that you are a thoroughly disciplined scholar par excellence." "My *Guru* said that!" exclaimed Devadatta, his jaw dropping in amazement. The *Guru* said, "My child, I have always been proud of you. Because I rebuked you, you thought that I have a low opinion of you and do not like you. Is it not?" On hearing this precise description of his earlier state of mind, Devadatta felt ashamed of himself.

The *Guru* continued, “You will recall that I had posed a tough question to you during a class and when you had given a partially correct answer, I had shouted at you. I knew you to be a priceless diamond that would dazzle the eyes of beholders on being properly cut and polished. You were head and shoulders above all the other *brahmacārins* but I wanted you to rise higher and have all the lesson sat your finger-tips. To make you drive yourself harder, I rebuked you. I was glad to find that the aim of my harsh words was amply fulfilled.

“You will also recall the discussion in which, after responding brilliantly for some time, you were unable to proceed further. The scholar with whom you held that discussion was a classmate of mine. I was the one who had asked him to come here and that too at a time when only you would be with me in my hut. Further, the question that stumped you was asked by him in accordance with my earlier arrangement with him. As you know, after you were at a loss for an answer, I scolded you with extreme severity. My words broke my heart far more than they did yours. Nevertheless, I continued because my intention was to provoke you so much as to make you firmly resolve to prove yourself to me by becoming a scholar par excellence. I was overjoyed to find my efforts fully rewarded.

“My child, I did not praise you all these days not because I was not appreciative of you but to avoid any possibility of your becoming complacent. A *Guru* should keep in mind the risk of his eulogy serving as clarified butter to the fire of his disciple’s ego. Now that your studies are complete, I feel free to open my heart to you. You are the very best of the disciples I have ever had. Right from the time when you first came to me, you have been very close to my heart.” With joined palms, Devadatta said, “O Lord! How much I misunderstood you. I have been a thorough fool. Please forgive me.” The *Guru* said, “My child, there is nothing to forgive. Be at ease.”

The king who had been silently hearing the dialogue between the *Guru* and the disciple told Devadatta, “I should tell you at this stage that the scholar whom you debated a couple of days ago studied with your *Guru* at the hermitage of your master’s master. He has been my adviser in religious matters but has now decided to retire to the Himalayas. The quiet man who accompanied him that day was myself, in disguise. Your *Guru* invited us to witness a display of your superb erudition and debating skills. Needless to say, we were enthralled. Now you can see that I did not make my request to you without knowing about you.” After seeking his *Guru*’s directive, Devadatta acceded to the king’s wishes.

When a *mahātman* censures a person, it is not because of inadequate control over the tongue or out of malice or on account of a desire to humiliate or to derive sadistic pleasure. The purpose is to correct or uplift that person. That is why it is said, “Persons who are rebuked by the *Guru* with harsh words attain greatness.” Condemnation by a sage is truly a great blessing in disguise.

37. The Sadguru Rewards Unstinted Guru-Sevā

Upamanyu was a disciple of the great Sage Dhaumya. In accordance with his *Guru*’s instruction, he took the cows of the hermitage every day for grazing. In keeping with the rules to be observed by a *brahmacārin*, he obtained food by begging and submitted the same to his *Guru*. Desirous of testing Upamanyu, Dhaumya kept all the food that was brought by his disciple with himself and gave nothing to Upamanyu. However, the *Guru* found that even with the passage of days, his disciple remained quite strong and healthy. So, he asked Upamanyu about how he had been able to maintain his strength. Upamanyu said that he had been fetching *bhikṣā* a second time. The preceptor said that his practice was wrong and forbade him from indulging in it.

Surprisingly, the disciple continued to remain sturdy. On his *Guru* asking him the reason, Upamanyu said, “Nowadays, when I take the cows for grazing, I drink some of their milk.” The *Guru* told him, “Henceforth, you must not do so. If you consume the milk, which is my property, it only amounts to your stealing it.” The disciple stopped imbibing milk. However, he continued to be robust. This was because he began to subsist on the foam that remained on the mouths of the calves after they had suckled their mothers. On learning of this practice of the disciple, the *Guru* commanded that he should desist from consuming foam. The disciple obeyed. But overcome by hunger, he started eating the leaves of an *arka* plant. As a consequence, his system became poisoned and he lost his vision. Blinded, he staggered and fell into a disused well.

At dusk, the cows returned home without him. The *Guru* began to worry about the non-arrival of Upamanyu. “I wanted to test his devotion. But he is in some trouble. Why has he not returned?” he thought. Calling out the pupil’s name, he began to search for him. When he approached the vicinity of the well into which Upamanyu had fallen, a feeble voice responded to his call. Observing the sad state of affairs, Dhaumya asked him, “How did you fall into this well?” “Overcome by hunger, I tasted *arka* leaves. Consequently, I became blind and stumbled into this well,” replied Upamanyu.

Compassionately gazing at the disciple, Dhaumya said, “Recite this particular portion of the *Veda* which is a hymn eulogizing the *Aśvinī-kumāras*.” As commanded by his *Guru*, Upamanyu chanted the said *Ṛg-vedic* hymn. Pleased with him, the *Aśvinī Kumāras*, the physicians of the gods, appeared before him. They offered him a cake of flour and asked him to eat it. Though extremely hungry, Upamanyu told them that he could not do so without submitting the same to his *Guru*. The *Aśvinī-kumāras* tried their best to persuade him to consume it without offering it to his *Guru*, but Upamanyu did not budge from his stance. Extremely pleased with his devotion to his *Guru*, the *Aśvinī-kumāras* restored his eyesight.

Upamanyu climbed out of the well, approached his *Guru* and prostrated before Dhaumya. Then, he told his preceptor about what had transpired between him and the *Aśvinī-kumāras*. Fully satiated with Upamanyu’s *Guru-bhakti*, Dhaumya said to him, “You are intensely devoted to me. Hence I bless you that even without further studies and service, all the 14 *Vidyās* will spontaneously accrue to you.” His words came to pass. In the course of time, Upamanyu became a great and revered sage.

Āruṇi of Pāñcāla was another very devoted disciple of the Sage Dhaumya. He served his *Guru* with diligence. One day, Dhaumya sent him to the fields to attend to the dyke there. Āruṇi tried his level best to plug an opening through which water was leaking. However, he was unable to succeed. Finally, he blocked the flow with his own body. Time passed. At the hermitage, Dhaumya asked, “Where is Āruṇi?” His other disciples told him, “O Lord, you had sent him to attend to the dyke.”

Dhaumya immediately set out with his disciples in search of Āruṇi. He called out, “My child, where are you? Come to me.” On hearing the words of his *Guru*, Āruṇi stood up, quickly plugged the opening as best as he could and rushed to the presence of Dhaumya. Having prostrated before him, he explained what had happened. Then, he asked, “Master, what is your further instruction for me?” Dhaumya said, “In view of the task done by you, you shall become famous with the name *Uddālaka*. You have fulfilled my command. Let all the *Vedas* and the *dharma-śāstras* become known to you.” *Uddālaka-Āruṇi* promptly became thoroughly erudite.

38. Teaching Through Silence

The four mind-born sons of the creator Brahma known as the *kumāras* were thoroughly disinterested in getting married and begetting progeny. They were extremely dispassionate and wished to free themselves from

the cycle of transmigratory existence. Out of compassion, Lord Śiva manifested as a four-armed figure, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, and sat at the foot of a banyan tree in the Himalayas, silent and lost in the bliss of the Supreme. The sages approached Him with the intention of asking Him how to get rid of the cycle of transmigratory existence and of getting their doubts set at rest. The Lord, as Dakṣiṇāmūrti, did not speak. Yet, so potent was His silence and grace that the sages immediately became enlightened; their doubts vanished.

There is darkness on the night of the full moon as also on the night of the new moon; there is no night without darkness. In the darkness of the night of the full moon, people are able to move about on the roads and are also able to perform their routine activities. They, however, have to strain to read a book; that is all. In the darkness of the night of the new moon, if the sky happens to be overcast too, it is not possible for people to walk on the road or to engage in their activities; the question of reading a book does not arise at all. The ignorance of the sages such as Sanaka was like the darkness of the night of the full moon. On the other hand, the ignorance of almost all the others is like the darkness of the night of the new moon. The silence of an enlightened sage is adequate to dispel the mild ignorance of an extremely pure-minded disciple who is akin to the holy ones who approached Dakṣiṇāmūrti. However, disciples of a lower calibre, whose ignorance is denser, require to be taught the Truth by their *Guru*.

39. Brahma's Advice: "Da, Da, Da"

Brahma, once instructed the *devas*, humans and *asuras*. He rendered the same advice, "Da, da, da," to all of them. The Devas, as a rule, are given to enjoyment of sense objects. Hence, they thought that Brahma wanted them to be self-controlled. That is, they interpreted 'da' as connoting 'dāmyata (Control yourselves)'. Human beings are selfish by nature and hoard wealth for future use. They comprehended the word 'da' to mean 'datta (Perform charity)'. *Asuras* are cruel by nature. So, they understood the utterance 'da' to mean 'dayadhvam (Be compassionate)'.

Bhagavatpāda, in His commentary on the relevant portion of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, has clarified that the story does not necessarily refer to *devas*, humans and *asuras* considered separately. 'Deva' here means a person with a predominantly *sāttvika* nature, tainted by tendencies of enjoyment and conceit. 'Asuras' are stone-hearted persons with fierce instincts. All men should therefore cultivate sense-control,

charity and compassion. To this day, the Creator declares “Da, da, da” through the sound of thunder.

A *Guru* instructs his disciples bearing in mind their competence. It is perfectly possible for a common teaching to have different implications for different disciples; the instruction of Brahma is an example.

40. Essentiality of Humility

A lad approached a sage and requested, “Please instruct me about the Supreme.” The *Guru* said, “First live here as a *brahmacārin* for six months.” The disciple did so, duly observing the rules for a *brahmacārin* such as serving the *Guru*.

At the end of the stipulated period, the disciple decided to approach his *Guru* for initiation. He first had his bath in the river. As he was about to start, a man appeared on the scene and dumped a basket of filth on him. The disciple flew into a wild rage and gave the man a beating. Having bathed again, he went to his *Guru*. The *Guru* asked, “Tell me what you did today.” The disciple said, “Everything was fine till just prior to my coming here after a bath, when a rogue defiled me with filth. How dare he do that to me! So, I beat him. Having purified myself, I have come here to receive holy instruction from you about the Truth.” The *Guru* said, “The time for instruction is not yet ripe. Observe *brahmacarya* here for three more months.”

The disciple obeyed. Again, on the day he was scheduled to be initiated, he took a bath and emerged from the river. The man who had dumped filth on him on an earlier occasion came there and repeated his act. The disciple felt irritated but far less than on the previous occasion. He scolded the man, bathed again and went to his *Guru*. The *Guru* asked him about what had transpired that day. The disciple narrated what had happened. The *Guru* said, “The time is still not ripe. Observe *brahmacarya* here for three more months.”

The disciple obeyed. At the end of three months, on the scheduled day, he bathed prior to approaching his *Guru* for instruction. When he had finished his bath, the man who had troubled him on the earlier two occasions again came there and dirtied him. This time, the disciple felt no anger. He saluted the man and said, “I am indebted to you. Thank you for helping me remedy the defects of arrogance and wrath.” Then, he took a fresh bath and proceeded to his *Guru*’s abode. This time, the *Guru* told him, “Now you are fit to be instructed,” and duly initiated him into the Truth.

The *Guru* was actually the one who had arranged for the disciple to be defiled on all the occasions so as to make the disciple shed his sense of self-importance and become humble. A disciple who is proud and short-tempered fails to realize the Truth expounded by his *Guru*.

41. Some Errors of Disciples

A cow had fallen ill and its owner was worried about it. He took the animal to a veterinary doctor who prescribed a certain medicine with the instruction that it should be given after mixing with ghee. The owner of the cow reasoned, “The cow yields milk. From that we get curd, butter and finally ghee. So, the essence of ghee is already present in the cow. Such being the case, why should I mix ghee with the medicine?” Having analysed thus, he administered the medicine without adding ghee. The indiscretion of the milkman aggravated the disease instead of bringing it down.

A disciple should carry out the instructions of his *Guru* to the last letter, without deviating from them in the least. Were he to introduce innovations of his own, he would be on par with the milkman.

A teacher had two foolish disciples. One day, he summoned them and said, “I am feeling some discomfort in my legs. Give them a good massage.” The disciples grasped a leg each and commenced their massage. Soon, for relaxation, the teacher rested his right leg on the left.

The student who was massaging the left leg thought, “What is this? Something has fallen on my teacher’s sacred foot. How can I, a devoted disciple, allow such a thing to happen?” He roughly pushed the right leg aside without realizing that it also belonged to his master. Seeing this, the other disciple shouted, “What do you think you are doing? How dare you shove my teacher’s leg?” Then, he wrathfully pushed the left leg. The other disciple retaliated.

The disciples quarrelled thus at the cost of their teacher’s comforts. When this went on for some time, the master sat up and said, “What are you two up to? I asked you to massage my legs to relieve my pain but you have only worsened it. Get lost.”

Service of the *Guru* is essential but it should be done with due care, after obtaining permission. Improper service will only be a hindrance to the *Guru*.

Four students learnt the *mantra-śāstra* from a *Guru*. After the completion of their studies, they started for their homes. As they were passing

through a forest, they came across a dead tiger. Three of them opined, “We are conversant with the *sañjīvinī-mantra* which can restore the dead to life. Should we not test its efficacy? Let us revive this feline with it.” The fourth student saw the foolishness of their proposed course of action. He did his best to dissuade them but failed. So, he climbed a tree nearby and sat on a branch. His companions utilized the *sañjīvinī-mantra* to give the tiger a fresh lease of life. The carnivore rose. Feeling the pangs of hunger, it struck its saviours dead.

Notwithstanding scholarliness in the *mantra-śāstra*, lack of common sense caused the trio to perish. A person’s mind is like a blunt knife that is unfit for cutting unless it is sharpened by the knowledge acquired from a teacher. Erudition without common sense is like a sharp knife in the hands of a monkey. Thus, learning and common sense are both essential; bereft of these, one would be mentally blind though physically sighted.

42. Teachers to Avoid

A patient suffering from a bronchial ailment approached a doctor and narrated his tale of woe. “Do not worry,” said the doctor. “I have the right medicine for you. I am also suffering from this very disease for a long time and have been taking this medicine. It does not seem to have much effect on me. Now that you have come, I have an opportunity to test its potency. I feel that it will cure your disease,” he explained.

How can a patient have faith in such a doctor? Similarly, a teacher who himself is not sure of what he teaches will neither inspire confidence in his pupils nor expound well.

A boy’s orthodox father took him to Kāśī and enrolled him there in a *Vedānta-pāṭhaśālā* with the hope that he would become an erudite, renowned scholar. He attended the classes because he was required to but as he was neither hard-working nor intelligent, the understanding of the Vedānta texts that he acquired was meagre. After a few years, he dropped out of the *pāṭhaśālā* and returned to his home in South India. He claimed that he had completed his course successfully. As he was the son of a wealthy, respected man and he was supposedly a pundit, several *vaidikas* in his town had no hesitation in offering their daughters to him in marriage. He soon got married and set himself up as a teacher of *Vedānta*. He was more than ready to accept anyone who came to him as a pupil, regardless of whether that person was a *brahmacārin* or a *grhastha*.

Being lazy and ignorant, he did not bother to prepare for any class. His mode of teaching was to read or to ask a student to read a few lines,

restate the contents in different words without elaboration, and pass on to the next few lines. Now and then, he cracked some jokes and gave worldly examples that were more irrelevant than pertinent. He handled questions to which he did not know the answers in three ways.

Sometimes, he said, “This issue is not of significance. There is no need for us to waste time on it. Read on.” When what was asked was obviously important, he looked at the watch. If the class was scheduled to end in a few minutes, he said, “There is no time for this today. We shall see sometime later.” Were there much time left, he nonchalantly stated, “This very point has been discussed and clarified in our text itself in a portion that we will be covering in future. So, there is no need to consider it at this juncture.”

He was fortunate that his six students had great faith in him and felt that they had no one but him to make them *Vedānta-panḍitas*. Further, they felt fully satisfied with the semblance of knowledge they were receiving. The teacher was happy and so were the students but the latter did not know that they were great losers.

One day, a bearded young man clad in a silken ochre Dhوتي and shirt turned up at a town. When some people met him, he said that he had descended from the Himālayas after spending seven years there absorbed in meditation. He claimed that his *Guru* was an omniscient celestial who had suddenly materialized before him years ago. His *Guru* had vouchsafed to him a hitherto-unknown, simple and quick method for people to get peace, fulfilment of desires and finally, freedom from rebirth.

His *Guru* had then transformed him, by touching select spots on his body, into a knower of Truth and endowed him with special powers. “Remain here in meditation for seven years. Then, travel to various places and teach the potent method that I have made known to you, to others,” the *Guru* had said before disappearing. The people were impressed with his account. A person asked him about his life prior to his encountering his *Guru*. He responded, “That is a closed chapter. Having taken a new spiritual birth, I should not and shall not say anything about it.”

He was given some rooms for his use in the mansion of an affluent man who had begun to think much of him. That evening, he gave a talk to a modest audience. Being a good orator, he comfortably held the attention of his listeners. In the course of his discourse, he said, “There is no need to renounce the world or even desires to attain peace and liberation. I am

ready to teach those who approach me with full faith. The new method that I have received from my *Guru* is most efficacious and simple but not time-consuming.”

His disciples were basically required to generate a sound like the braying of an ass synchronized with the outgoing breath. After doing so for five minutes, they were to breathe in and breathe out as fast as possible, while mentally chanting a monosyllabic *mantra* received from him. He assured them that on chanting the *mantra* for some time, they would feel light-headed. They were to then stop the *mantra*, breathe normally and enjoy the unusual feeling till it vanished. The process was to be carried out in a dark room.

Prior to initiating a disciple into a *mantra*, he said, “Make a complete confession to me. By my power, I will free you from the consequences of your weaknesses and faults. Once I do so, it will be immaterial whether you change your ways or not.” After hearing out the disciple, he placed his right hand on his disciple’s chest and intoned, “I free you from sins,” thrice. Then, he began a complex process of initiation in a dark room, in the course of which the disciple was required to sit motionless, with eyes closed.

After initiation, he presented every disciple with a framed photograph of himself. Then, by waving his hand in the air, he produced some *kun̄kuma* which he gave his disciple. He was very particular that no disciple of his should divulge the Mantra or the meditation procedure to another. Any violation of secrecy would, he severely warned, render the process infructuous for the disciple. Further, the erring disciple would fall seriously ill within six months.

Every disciple experienced tingling sensations in the body during initiation; some had a variety of experiences that filled them with wonder and joy. During the meditation procedure, the disciples did get an uncommon feeling after chanting the *mantra* for a short time; some had visions and felt ecstatic. Each disciple noticed a white powder forming automatically for a day on the photograph he received from his *Guru*.

The *Guru* frequently went on long tours and soon acquired a large following and much fame. Many gave him large donations or costly articles, out of a sense of gratitude. What his disciples did not realize was that they were losing, not gaining, by coming into contact with him.

It was by sleight of hand that he brought *kun̄kuma* to the palm of his right hand. The gradual formation of ash on his photograph was simply the

consequence of his having applied suitable chemicals on the glass part of the frame. Hyperventilation caused by the rapid breathing was responsible for the disciples experiencing an unusual feeling during meditation. During initiation, he used a device to administer very mild electric shocks and also gently manipulated a disciple's body hairs to produce tingling sensations that seemed to spread. The disciple who sat full of faith with his eyes closed and that too in a dark, quiet room did not suspect or identify foul play.

The *Guru* knew the power of belief, expectations, auto-suggestions and hypnotic suggestions and exploited them to the hilt. Thus, the special experiences had by some disciples during initiation were the consequences of their *Guru* having successfully hypnotized them; they were highly susceptible to hypnosis and the *Guru* put them into a trance by appropriate, repeated suggestions given in a flat tone. The unusual experiences had by some during meditation was a consequence of factors such as their belief in what he had told them might happen and their high expectations.

The *Guru* had no scruples about taking advantage of the confessions made to him by his disciples and about sexually exploiting females during initiation if he found them to be gullible. He knew that they would heed his warning never to divulge the details of the initiation and of his imparting 'special *śakti*' to them by physical contact with them.

People stand to lose greatly by being the disciples of fraudulent *Gurus* such as this man and by studying under teachers like the ignorant *Vedānta* teacher. Unfortunately, persons who expound *Vedānta* without a deep knowledge of it and unenlightened or downright bogus *Gurus* are commonplace now-a-days. It is said, "Many are the preceptors who take possession of the wealth of their disciples but rare is he who takes away the sorrow of his disciples." The *śāstras* say, "One should give up even a *Guru* who is tainted, who does not take cognizance of right and wrong and treads the wrong path."

Bhagavatpāda has described a true *Sadguru* as, "He who has realized the Truth and is ever intent on the welfare of his disciple." It is to such a *Guru* that one should resort. To avoid the risk of being misled by a charlatan, it is advisable to go only to a *Guru* who belongs to a line of great preceptors, is conversant with the scriptures, teaches in accordance with the scriptures, does not propagate a self-discovered path, is a master of his mind and senses, is dispassionate, whose conduct is spotless, who

is clearly interested in the welfare of the disciple and who does not expect anything in return from the disciple.

43. The Hypocrisy of Pseudo-Advaitins

A *saṁnyāsin* was not observing any regulations with regard to food and spiritual practices. A householder approached him and asked, “You do not seem to be observing any regulations whatsoever. You eat as you wish, spend your time loitering and do acts that are unbecoming of a *saṁnyāsin*. Is it proper for you to be like this?” The *saṁnyāsin* replied, “Everything is *Brahman*. The body and mind perform actions whereas I am the pure, conscious *Ātman* which is unstained. As such, it matters little to me what the body and mind do. Indeed, everything is *Brahman*.”

The householder queried, “Will you come to my house for *bhikṣā*?” “Yes,” replied the *saṁnyāsin*. “I have no objections. To me, who revels in the *Ātman*, nothing matters. I shall come.” That afternoon, the *saṁnyāsin* went to the householder’s place and sat down to have a meal. However, his host did not offer him even a drop of water. As minutes passed, he became restless. His host deliberately ignored his uneasiness. Finally, unable to withstand the delay any longer, he shouted, “What do you mean by keeping me waiting? I am quite hungry. Serve me fast.”

The householder came up to him and said, “I fail to realize how hunger and thirst could arise in you who are totally immersed in the bliss of the *Ātman*. You are all-pervasive, for such is the nature of the *Ātman*. I am unable to offer you water, for, being omnipresent, you already pervade it from within and without.” The *saṁnyāsin* got up saying, “Do not speak like that. I am unable to bear my hunger.” He then left in search of food.

This *saṁnyāsin* lacked self-control and dispassion. Hence, he did not adhere to the rules meant for unenlightened mendicants. He misused *Advaita* philosophy merely to explain away his misconduct. His unrestrained behaviour fetched him much sin; his *Advaitic* declarations offered him no protection from demerits.

During an eclipse, a *paṇḍita* went to the sea for a bath. He had a copper vessel with him. He thought, “If I leave this vessel on the shore while I bathe, someone may steal it. On the other hand, if I take it with me, it may slip from my hand and get lost in the waters. What should I do?” He dug a hole in the beach, put the vessel in it and topped the vessel with sand. To be able to locate the spot, he made a sand *Lingam* there. Heaving a sigh of relief, he proceeded for his bath.

Some persons saw the Lingam on the shore and the pundit bathing in the sea. They assumed that everyone should make a Lingam before taking a sea-bath. Sometime later, the pundit went to the place where he had hidden his vessel. What did he see there? Not one or two but numerous Lingams made of sand. “My God!” wailed the pundit, “What happened? How did all these Lingams crop up? How am I to find out the Lingam that I had made?” He searched for his vessel under some Lingams but failed to find it. Finally, he returned home without it.

The above story gives a glimpse of the fact that many have the tendency to follow others without a second thought. Blindly following others is inadvisable. Further, the tendency of people to follow those whom they revere makes it imperative for teachers and religious personalities to set good standards.

A person was expounding *Advaita* philosophy to a group of students and, in the course of his discourse, pointed out that the world is unreal. Suddenly, a wild elephant chanced to come running that way. The disciples ran helter-skelter; the teacher was no exception. Unfortunately, the teacher slipped and fell into a pit. After the elephant went away, the students discovered their teacher in the pit, shouting for help. They approached him and asked, “Sir, you were just telling us that the world is unreal. Why then did you run, gripped by fear, when the elephant charged? Further, why are you now shouting for help?” The helpless teacher thought for a moment, and said, “Please help me to come out and I shall explain.” Accordingly, he was pulled out.

He resumed his seat at the place where he was teaching and, without batting an eyelid, declared, “I stand by what I had said. The world is unreal. The elephant that charged was unreal. You noticed that I had fallen into a pit and was screaming for help. All that was unreal. Finally, your helping me out too was unreal.” The explanation shows that the so-called teacher was shrewd but it does not alter the fact that he was being hypocritical.

One should be true to one’s conscience. One may deceive others by high-sounding talk on *Advaita* but it will not be of any use if one does not mend one’s ways. It is said, “He who is attached to worldly comforts but still says that everything is *Brahman* is actually one who has fallen from Karma and also from *Brahman*. Such a person must be discarded like a lowly one.” Because such a man fails to realize the Truth and procure liberation, it is said that he has fallen from *Brahman*. Because of his putting up a show that he is realized, such a man does not perform the

ordained duties sincerely. Hence, there is the declaration of his having fallen from *karma*.

44. Search Without Dismantlement

A person had a harmonium. When he played it, melodious music flowed out of it. Hearing the enchanting tunes, another man thought, “How does such sweet music come out of this? Probably, these sounds are present inside this instrument.” Getting very curious, he dismantled the harmonium and searched for the sounds in every nook and corner. However much he toyed with the internal parts, he could not get the original music out of them. “Ah, what a wonder! This instrument produces music out of nowhere,” he concluded.

While there are certain occasions when one should dismantle and analyse, there are numerous other situations where this technique will not be of any help. Analysis of the *Ātman* falls under the latter category. The *Ātman* has to be discerned without actually taking apart the body which It enlivens.

45. Superficial Knowledge

A certain philanthropist offered a sum of rupees fifty thousand to anyone who knew well all the four *Vedas*. After a couple of days, a young man approached him and asked for the award. “Are you familiar with the four *Vedas*?” queried the philanthropist. The seeker of the prize answered, “I am aware of the fact that there are four *Vedas*.” The donor was stunned by the reply and asked, “Is that all?” The young man said, “Sir, I know that the *Vedas* are four in number. Is that not sufficient?” Well, what was the philanthropist to do? He just sent away the young man.

Just as the man’s superficial knowledge was inadequate to fetch him the prize, superficial or indirect knowledge of the Truth cannot bring about emancipation. Direct realization of the non-dual Supreme is what destroys ignorance and results in liberation from transmigratory existence.

46. Overlooking What is Immediate

Once, ten fools forded a river. After reaching the opposite bank, they wished to ascertain whether all of them had crossed. One of them started to count. He listed all except himself and so concluded that one of them had drowned. This caused him much grief. Another fool made the same error and confirmed that one person was missing. Consequently, all of them began to weep.

A well-wisher happened to pass that way and sought to know what their problem was. One of the fools said, “Ten of us set out to cross the river but now we are only nine.” The well-wisher was amused. He told the leader, “Please count and let me know how many of you are here.” As the others had done before him, he arrived at the answer, “Nine”. The well-wisher announced, “No. The tenth man is not dead.” The fools experienced some relief. Quickly pointing at the man who had counted, he continued, “You are the tenth man.” The significance of the well-wisher’s words dawned on the fools. Exultation replaced their grief.

Each fool forgot to count himself; we have forgotten our true nature of being the non-dual Supreme. Playing a role like that of the well-wisher of the story, the *Sadguru* tells his disciple, “You are not the limited, miserable person you imagine yourself to be. You are the Supreme that is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss.” A very pure-minded disciple promptly becomes enlightened. A disciple of a lower calibre has to serve his *Guru* for long and sincerely practise spiritual disciplines to free himself from defects, such as uncertainty and misapprehension. Thereafter, he obtains direct realization of the Truth.

47. Upaniṣads are a Flawless Means of Knowledge

A man named Bharcchu was the favourite of a king. This was resented by the other courtiers who were highly jealous of him. So, they drew up a plan and arranged for him to be kidnapped. With his hands tied and eyes covered, Bharcchu was taken far away from the kingdom and abandoned deep inside a forest. He began to shout for help.

Fortunately for him, a forester heard his cry. Coming up to him, he removed the bandage from his eyes and untied his hands. Then, he pointed out the direction in which Bharcchu ought to proceed to reach his kingdom. Bharcchu moved on for some time in the prescribed direction and encountered another woodman. He took further instructions from him. Thus, seeking directions from different people in the course of his journey, he reached the boundary of his kingdom. However, because of the precautions they had taken, the courtiers who had arranged to have him kidnapped got wind of his arrival. They threatened him and precluded his entry into the kingdom. Much earlier, they had informed the king that Bharcchu had died and gradually convinced him to the extent that the king had no doubt whatsoever in this regard.

One day, the king went out from the capital towards the forest. By chance, he happened to see Bharcchu. The king ought to have been overjoyed to meet Bharcchu. However, what he experienced was not happiness but

fright. The reason was that he was quite convinced that the entity before him was Bharcchu's ghost, for Bharcchu, the man, was dead. He swiftly turned and quickly rode away, leaving Bharcchu quite perplexed and sad.

The king's organ of sight was faultless and presented him a clear image of Bharcchu. However, because of the defect of miscomprehension, he did not arrive at the right conclusion. The Upanishads, too, are flawless like the eyes of the king in the story. They produce correct knowledge. However, in spite of this, many people who study the Upanishads do not immediately get enlightened. The reason is the defect that lies in their minds. They are beset with faults such as extreme attachment to sense objects, doubts about what has been taught, as also miscomprehension. Due to flaws such as these, an individual fails to get correct knowledge though the means of knowledge, the *Upaniṣads*, are flawless.

48. Unreal Can Point to the Real

A person went to sleep. He soon had a dream in which he beheld himself being chased by a ferocious tiger. Since the tiger was by far swifter than him, the distance between them shrank rapidly. He was overcome with fear. So terrified was he that he abruptly woke up, his forehead wet with perspiration. The tiger seen by him in the dream was undoubtedly unreal. However, it was instrumental in bringing about a real effect, awakening.

Some object, "According to the *Advaitins*, the world is illusory and *Brahman* alone is real. If so, the teachings of the *Vedas*, which are included in the cosmos, should be unreal. Hence, they cannot produce true knowledge. Consequently, *Advaita* philosophy, which is based on the *Vedas*, should be worthless." This objection is invalid.

Advaitins speak of the unreality of the world only from the standpoint of the Absolute. From an empirical standpoint, the world and the *Vedas* do exist. Another reply of the *Advaitins* is that an unreal object can, as in the example considered earlier, lead to the real. Hence, though being illusory, the *Vedas* can effect enlightenment and, thereby, establishment in the Supreme.

49. Recognition of Identity

A prince was kidnapped when he was a child. He was taken to a forest and left there to die. Fortunately for him, some foresters took care of him. Brought up by them, he began to live, work and behave as a woodman. Years passed. In the capital, the king passed away. So, the search for the prince was intensified. Certain persons who had known him as a child chanced to see him in the forest and even managed to recognize him.

They informed him of his royal birth. Then they told him that as his father was dead, it behoved him to accept the throne. At first, he did not believe them. Gradually, he became convinced that they had spoken the truth to him. He returned to the capital and soon began to conduct himself in a manner befitting a king.

We are, in reality, the Supreme that is bereft of all bondage. On account of ignorance, we presume that we are subject to birth and death and that we are given to suffering. When, through the words of the *Guru*, we realize our true nature, we snap our imaginary shackles and remain as the blissful Supreme. No actual transformation takes place. False beliefs are discarded, as in the case of the prince.

50. Mind, the Cause of Bondage and Liberation

A three-year-old boy asked for an apple. As there was no apple at home, his mother offered him other fruits instead. He refused them and insisted that he be given only an apple. His mother told him that she would procure one for him in the evening. He, however, began to cry and continued wailing till his indulgent mother took him to a shop and allowed him to pick an apple of his choice. It was when his desire was gratified that he smiled joyfully.

His seven-year-old sister, who had witnessed all this, desired to have some fun at his expense. She informed him with assumed gravity, "Without realizing it, you ate a seed. I saw you do so. Do you know what will happen? An apple tree will start growing in your stomach. It will cause you great pain and, emerging from your nose and mouth, make you look funny." He swallowed her tale hook, line and sinker and turned pale with fright. Seeing him petrified, his mother ascertained the cause and did her best to pacify him. She emphasized more than once that his sister had been pulling his leg. But her explanation fell on deaf ears. He continued to remain terror-stricken and did not take even a drop of water for hours. His mother started to worry about him. So, the moment her husband returned from work, she informed him about what had happened.

He held his son in his arms and said in a gentle reassuring voice, "Normally, no tree grows inside the stomach when an apple seed is swallowed. Even when it does, it is small. In fact, it is so tiny that it does not cause any pain and cannot be seen by others. So, even if a tree develops within you, you will neither suffer nor become the butt of ridicule. You like apples. Once there is a tree within you, you will have a constant supply of apples. You can put your fingers inside your mouth and pluck out a small fruit which you can then chew and swallow. It

would be wonderful to be able to get delicious apples any time you desire them. Is it not?"

The boy nodded, with the traces of a smile forming on his face. "Do you want the tree to grow or not?" queried the father. "Definitely I do," responded the boy. "The seed may not sprout. But if it does, then, to help it develop into a tree, you will have to eat food and drink water. If you starve yourself, the tree will die," declared the father. Promptly, the boy ran to his mother and asked for his meal and a glass of water. His terror was completely replaced by joy and enthusiasm.

The boy was initially unhappy because of his unfulfilled desire for an apple. Thereafter, he was overcome with trepidation owing to his foolishly-imagined future danger to the body he was intensely fond of. His mind was thus the cause of his unhappiness before and after he obtained an apple.

Bharata, the eldest son of R̥ṣabha was anointed king by his father who then renounced every possession. Bharata and his wife Pancajanī had five sons. Erudite and steadfast in the observance of *dharma*, he ruled justly and looked upon his subjects with affection. They, for their part, adhered to their duties and held him in high esteem. Bharata performed numerous sacrifices, such as the *Darśapūrnamāsa*, and worshipped Viṣṇu with deep devotion. Having ruled well for long, he handed over his kingdom and possessions to his sons and retired to holy Śaligrāma on the bank of the river Gaṇḍakī. There, he lived as a recluse. He bathed thrice a day, unfailingly performed his *sandhyā-vandana* and spent much time in *pūjā* and meditation on the Lord.

One day, after he had bathed in the river and completed his *sandhyā-vandana*, he beheld a pregnant doe approach the river to quench its thirst. As it was drinking avidly, it heard the roar of a lion. Stricken with fright, it leapt across the stream. As it did so, the foetus in its womb emerged and fell into the water. Owing to exhaustion and because of having prematurely delivered a young one, the mother died. Moved by pity, Bharata rescued the orphaned and helpless fawn. He assumed the responsibility of rearing it.

He took great care of it and grew increasingly fond of it. Consequently, he was smitten with anxiety whenever it went to roam in the forest and took time to return; he feared it might have been attacked by a carnivore. Even when it was in the hermitage, he interrupted his religious observances to confirm that it was safe and sound. Time passed. Finally, he lay dying. The thought about what would happen to the deer pervaded

his mind. Focussed on the deer rather than on God, whom he had nearly attained prior to rescuing the animal, he breathed his last.

As a consequence of his intense attachment, he was reborn as a deer. Fortunately for him, the memory of his past birth did not desert him. He wended his way back to Śaligrāma and lived there, patiently waiting for his life as a deer to terminate. After death, he was reborn as the sole son of the second spouse of a pious Brahmin. Retaining as he did the recollection of his past lives, Bharata was terribly afraid of getting attached to the world. Eschewing attachment in its entirety, he focussed his attention on the Lord and realized the Truth. He conducted himself like a dull-witted person. His father invested him with the sacred thread and taught him. However, Bharata's mind was disinclined towards even scriptural activity. Consequently, his father's efforts to educate him were unsuccessful. With the passage of time, Bharata's parents died.

Holding him to be a dunce, his step-brothers gave up all ideas of instructing him. They were unaware that he was a *jīvanmukta*, constantly reposing in the Supreme. Bharata wore no more than a rag around his loins and slept on the bare ground. His brothers employed him in their fields. He raised no objections but worked disinterestedly. Whatever his brothers gave him to eat, he consumed regardless of whether it was well-cooked or ill-cooked.

One day, a bandit chieftain desirous of a son made arrangements to offer a human sacrifice to Goddess Kālī. His servants had searched in vain for long for a victim when they espied Bharata, who was stout and flawless in every limb. They bound him with a rope, unopposed by him, and took him to the place of sacrifice. There, they bathed and decorated him. When he was about to be killed, the Goddess intervened to save the life of the saint and brought about the death of those wanting to shed his blood.

One day, the ruler of Sindhu-Sauvīra territory set out on a palanquin to meet Sage Kapila. The captain of his palanquin-bearers, who was on the lookout for recruits, spotted Bharata. He drafted the sage to bear the king's palanquin.

Bharata did not utter a murmur of protest. But he walked with his eyes riveted to the ground and his pace did not match that of the others. So, the palanquin jolted. The king instructed his palanquin-bearers to walk at a uniform pace. The palanquin continued to jerk. Finding that his instructions were not having the desired effect, the ruler identified Bharata

as the one responsible and reprimanded him. Sarcastically, he told Bharata, “Oh, you have carried the palanquin a long way all by yourself; you are not well-built and age has made you feeble.”

Taking pity on the king, Bharata taught him the Truth. He said, “Stoutness pertains to the body, not to me. Your body is a modification of *prthvī* (earth). It is borne by the palanquin which again is a modification of *prthvī*. The body of the bearer too is made of *prthvī*. The palanquin rests on the shoulder which is held up by the trunk; the trunk transfers weight to the feet; the feet rest on the ground. Where then is the question of my supporting any load? Notions such as distance to be traversed or a destination to be reached are not based on reality. Consciousness alone is real. All else is a mere appearance.” The king realized the greatness of Bharata and profited greatly from the sage’s didactical, poignant discourse. Bharata lived his life without giving least room to attachment and, on death, attained disembodied liberation.

Bharata’s mind was the cause of his rebirths and also of his getting the knowledge of Truth and, hence, liberation. The *Maitrāyaṇī-upaniṣad* declares, “The mind is of two kinds, pure and impure. It is impure when with desire; it is pure when devoid of desire... The mind indeed is responsible for the bondage and liberation of humans. When attached to objects, it brings about bondage. When devoid of the thoughts of objects, it leads to liberation... Just as fire subsides into its basis on the exhaustion of fuel, the mind subsides in its source, the *Ātman*, on the cessation of thoughts... The mind must be restrained in the heart, on the *Ātman*, till it is destroyed... The bliss that accrues for the mind that has been cleansed of dirt by *samādhi* and which is fixed on the *Ātman* cannot be described in words.”

51. Renunciation of Everything

In the *Dvāpara-yuga*, there lived a king named Śikhidhvaja who ruled over Mālava. He was learned and endowed with good qualities such as generosity, kindness and bravery. His queen was Cūḍālā, the daughter of the king of Saurāṣṭra. She was thoroughly chaste and an ideal mate for her husband. They loved each other dearly and their mutual affection waxed with the passage of time. They lived together in great joy.

Years rolled on. Their youth passed and they became old. In due course, they realized that all worldly objects and joys are transient and that there is no worldly object on acquiring which the mind gets permanent relief from sorrow. Cogitating deeply, they concluded that knowledge of the *Ātman* alone can confer complete freedom from the virulent disease of

transmigratory existence. So, with all their being, they strived to acquire such knowledge.

Cūḍālā listened to the import of the scriptures from wise people and then reflected on what she had heard. She thought, “Who am I? The body is inert. I, who am conscious, cannot be the body. The senses that are associated with the body are inert like it, impelled as they are by the mind, just as a stone is moved by a stick that strikes it. So I am not the senses. Nor am I the mind, which too is basically devoid of consciousness; it is, after all, moved by the intellect just as any inert object is. The intellect, activated by egoism, is certainly inert and I cannot be the intellect.”

Thinking deeply in this fashion, she came to the conclusion that she was non-dual consciousness, the Supreme Brahman. Focussing on the Truth, her intrinsic nature, she acquired enlightenment. She became dispassionate and untroubled by the pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain and heat and cold.

Śikhidhvaja noted that Cūḍālā looked glorious. He asked her, “How is it that you look as if you have regained your youth?” She replied, “I have abandoned the cosmos that is neither real nor totally non-existent. I am contented without worldly enjoyments and neither rejoice nor feel irritated. I revel in my Self that is absolute and infinite. Hence, I am radiant.”

The king, however, did not comprehend the significance of her words. Hence, he derisively told her, “You prattle like a child. You are in the midst of royal pleasures. Where is the question of your having abandoned anything? You are confused. O beautiful one, you are sporting with words. Enjoy yourself.” He laughed and left for his afternoon bath.

Cūḍālā felt sorry for Śikhidhvaja but recognized that he would not heed advice from her about self-realization. Though she had transcended desires and was constantly contented, one day, she casually decided to acquire supernatural powers. Observing the requisite restrictions, she practised *prāṇāyāma* and meditation. She awakened her *kuṇḍalinī*. Finally, she acquired all the eight renowned *yoga-siddhis*, such as the power to become minute or large. Spiritual practitioners should not be enamoured with *siddhis* and should view them as distractions and obstacles in their *yogic* path. However, as Cūḍālā was already enlightened, she had nothing to gain or lose by them and their acquisition did not in the least cause her to deviate from her establishment in the Supreme.

Though she tried hard to awaken her husband from his slumber of ignorance, he did not concern himself with her words, taking her to be

just his very loving but unenlightened wife. He performed much charity, undertook pilgrimages and also practised austerity marked by severe dietary restrictions and fasting. Nevertheless, he continued to remain ignorant of the Truth and troubled by afflictions. He began to strongly feel that his enjoyments, power and duties were impediments in his quest. Hence, he decided to renounce them.

He told Cūḍālā in private, “I have ruled this kingdom for long and experienced various enjoyments. Now, prompted by dispassion, I propose to proceed to the forest. Joys, sorrows, prosperity and adversity do not torment a man who has renounced and lives in a forest. Dwelling there, I shall be happy and free from all concerns. You should not thwart my noble course of action and, instead, ought to attend to the kingdom.” Cūḍālā conveyed to him that giving up the kingdom at that time was inadvisable. But he remained firm in his resolve. At night, when Cūḍālā was asleep, he moved out of her presence. He told his attendants that he was going alone on a patrol.

He proceeded to a distant forest and built a hut of leaves. He dwelt there performing *japa* and worship. Cūḍālā located him with her Yogic powers but, deciding that the time was not ripe for her to help him, left him alone and attended to the kingdom. Time passed. Desirous of uplifting him and knowing that he would not take her advice seriously, she transformed herself at the appropriate time into a young Brahmin boy, radiant with Tapas and approached him in this form. Śikhidhvaja rose and duly venerated her. She told him that her name was Kumbha and that she was the son of the celestial Sage Nārada. He felt greatly impressed with her.

She told him that to attain realization, he should renounce everything. Śikhidhvaja responded that he had renounced his kingdom, his palace, wealth and even his dear wife. He then asked, “Does this not constitute total renunciation?” Cūḍālā as Kumbha, responded, “Though you have renounced your kingdom and the like, that does not constitute total renunciation. You still have attachment.” At this, the king said, “I, at present, am fond just of this forest. Hence, I shall now give up attachment to it.” He succeeded in what he proposed to do. Then he remarked, “I have completely renounced.” Cūḍālā continued to object and said, “Even by abandoning your fondness for trees, streams and mountains, you have not accomplished renunciation of everything.” The king then gave up his utensils and the hut in which he was dwelling. Even then, Cūḍālā was dissatisfied. So Śikhidhvaja discarded his deer-skin, rudrākṣa beads, bowls, etc., and stood naked.

Once more, Cūḍālā objected that he had not renounced everything. The king thought that as he had only his body left, to achieve complete renunciation, he ought to discard it. He readied himself to commit suicide but was stopped by his wife. She told him, “Even if you give up this body, you would not have achieved complete renunciation. On the other hand, if you give up that which is the activator of this body and which is the seed of all births and activities, only then you would have renounced everything.” The king asked for clarification. Cūḍālā explained that it was the renunciation of the mind that was most important. It was the mind that manifested as everything. The mind comprised *vāsanās* or tendencies and the seed of the tree of the mind was egoism. “Investigation into the nature of one’s own *Ātman* is indeed what annihilates the seed of the mind,” emphasized Cūḍālā.

Guided by her, the king succeeded in implementing her advice and became enlightened. She left him and came back to him after a while. She tested him severely but he remained firmly rooted in the non-dual reality. Having accomplished her purpose as Kumbha, she revealed her identity to him and successfully persuaded him to return to the kingdom. He then began to rule but without any attachment and without being affected in the least by adversity and prosperity. He and his wife remained totally rooted in the Supreme.

52. Illusoriness of the World

Vidyānidhi was a *brahmacharin* who studied Vedānta under an aged *mahātman*. His *Guru* and he were the only occupants of the *Guru*’s small cottage situated at a secluded, scenic spot on a hill, close to a stream. One night, Vidyānidhi lay down as usual just outside the entrance of his *Guru*’s room. His *Guru* had retired for the night a little earlier. In a few minutes, Vidyānidhi fell asleep. Shortly thereafter, he was awakened by the sound of his *Guru* moaning softly. He opened the door and entered to see if his *Guru* was in need of anything. He found his preceptor clutching his abdomen and obviously in great pain.

Vidyānidhi: O Lord, may I fetch the Vaidya from the village?

Guru: No. Why trouble him by making him travel five kilometres at night? In any case, pain is only for the body-mind complex. I am the unchanging and unaffected witness.

Vidyānidhi: I know that you are unmoved by pleasure and pain, but I am unable to bear your suffering. I beseech you to at least let me fetch some medicines for you.

The *Guru* saw that Vidyānidhi was highly worried and on the verge of tears. So he specified an *Ayurvedic* preparation and permitted Vidyānidhi to meet the Vaidya and fetch it. Immediately, Vidyānidhi set out. The moon was clearly visible and the village could be reached by just walking along the side of the stream. Hence, Vidyānidhi did not take any source of light with him. He walked briskly.

After he had journeyed for half an hour, he felt a sharp pain in his right foot. He found that a cluster of thorns had penetrated his sole. He sat down and carefully pulled them out. The pain started to decrease. However, owing to the continuing discomfort, he remained seated for a few minutes. Then, he got up thinking, “My master is unwell. It is wrong on my part to delay procuring the medicine for him. In any case, the moon will set in three hours and I must be back before that to avoid having to travel in the dark. How I wish I could fly like a bird. I would then be able to reach the village and return in minutes.”

He arrived at the physician’s house in the village in half an hour. In response to his knock, the physician’s teenaged son opened the door. Vidyānidhi told him that he had come to fetch a particular medicine for his *Guru*. The boy and his father were devotees of the *Guru*. So, the boy immediately woke up his father. Vidyānidhi described his *Guru*’s condition and named the medicine he had come to fetch. The Vaidya said, “I do not have any of it left. But I shall prepare it now. Wait for about half an hour.” The physician then started his work. Vidyānidhi sat down. As he felt sleepy, he closed his eyes.

He found himself back on the path. As he walked, he felt himself rising from the ground. In moments, he was coursing through the air. As he effortlessly descended to reach the ground near the cottage, he realized how different the hermitage looked when viewed from above. He went to his *Guru*. At that moment, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Abruptly, he found himself seated at the Vaidya’s house. The Vaidya’s son told him, “You had fallen asleep. Father told me not to wake you up until he had finished preparing the medicine. It is ready now.”

Vidyānidhi collected the medicine, thanked the Vaidya and his son and left. From the position of the moon, he inferred that he must have spent an hour at the village. He increased his pace. As he moved on, he mused, “My dream at the Vaidya’s place was clearly based on my waking-state experience of the recent past. I had wistfully thought of being able to fly back to my *Guru* with the *Ayurvedic* preparation and fly is what I did in my dream.” He returned to the hermitage a little before the moonset. When he approached his *Guru*, he found that his master was still in great pain.

He administered the medicine. In a few minutes, his *Guru* told him, “The pain is almost gone. You have put up with much inconvenience for my sake. Now go and lie down.” Vidyānidhi returned to his mat and quickly fell asleep.

He woke up well before dawn as was his wont. He peeped into his *Guru*’s room and found his master peacefully asleep. In a short while, the *Guru* came out. Vidyānidhi respectfully asked him, “O Lord, please may I know how your health is today?” “It is good,” replied the *Guru* with a smile and moved on.

That afternoon, the Vaidya came to pay his respects to the *Guru*. On seeing him, Vidyānidhi said, “The medicine acted quickly on our *Guru*.” “What medicine are you talking about?” asked the Vaidya, looking perplexed. “I am referring to the medicine you prepared and gave me last night when I came to your place,” explained Vidyānidhi, wondering how the Vaidya could have forgotten. “It is impossible for you to have met me last night. I have not been in my village for the past one week. I returned only a couple of hours ago,” stated the Vaidya. “Are you unwell?” he continued. Vidyānidhi remained silent, feeling thoroughly confused.

At the earliest opportunity, he asked his *Guru*, “O Master, as you know, with your permission, I went last night to fetch a medicine from the Vaidya to relieve you of your abdominal pain. The Vaidya, however, now says that he was not at his house last night.” “My child, I had no stomach pain and did not ask you to meet the Vaidya,” said the *Guru*. “Tell me in detail what you think happened.” Vidyānidhi obeyed and described everything. The *Guru* burst out laughing.

Then, he explained, “My child, yesterday I was teaching you the *Vedāntic* position suitable to advanced spiritual aspirants that the world of the waking state is on par with the world of dreams. You had several doubts and I told you that I would provide you clarifications today. By God’s grace, you have had a dream that makes my task easy.

“You went to sleep. Now, you think that you woke up on hearing me moan in pain. But that was just the starting point of your dream. Your dream ended with your returning to your bed. Such were the unusual commencement and termination of your dream that, even after waking up, you have been unable to differentiate your dream from your waking state. As you can see, you have had a first-hand experience that the world of the waking state is akin to the world of a dream.

“In your dream, you did not feel pain before coming into contact with the thorns but felt it when the thorns penetrated the sole of your right

foot. You grasped and pulled out the thorns. Thereafter, the pain gradually subsided. Similar is the experience you have when awake. Why then should you not regard the thorns of the waking state to be false like those of the dream state?

“In your dream, a moon in the sky provided you the light for your journey. Further, in the course of your forward and return trips, you saw that moon in different positions. You even estimated the passage of time on the basis of the moon’s movement. You found yourself advancing along the stream when you walked but not when you sat down. You can encounter all this in an identical fashion in the waking state. Why then should you not regard the moon, passage of time, space and the effect of movement in the waking state to be on par with those in a dream?”

“You believe that dreams are based on real experiences of the waking state and that when you wake up from a dream, you revert from a false world to a real one. Now, in the course of your dream last night, you had a second dream that apparently had for its basis your experiences of the main dream. Further, when you woke up from the second dream, you regressed to the main dream. Is not the relationship between your waking state and your main dream on par with the relationship between your main dream and the second dream? Why then should you not regard your waking state to be false like the main dream?”

“In the course of your dream last night, the Vaidya and his son apparently saw you sleeping in their house when you had your second dream. They could have certified that you had not flown back to your cottage as experienced by you in your second dream. Why then, should you not regard the people of the waking state who can observe you when you sleep and dream to be on par with the Vaidya and his son of the main dream?”

Finally, the *Guru* asked Vidyānidhi, “Have the doubts that you expressed yesterday evening at the end of the Vedānta class now got resolved?” “My doubts have vanished. I am now in a position to accept that the world of the waking state is as unreal as the world seen in dream,” responded Vidyānidhi.

The *Guru* said, “My child, it is only when you realize the non-dual Truth that you will have the unshakeable experience that the states of waking, dream and deep sleep are illusory and that their substratum, pure consciousness, alone is real. Your present understanding is only a step in this direction. Unless a person is free from desires, he cannot cognize the

waking state to be on par with the dream state. Strive on in the spiritual path. By God's grace, success shall be yours."

In His *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya*, Bhagavatpāda has explained, "The *Veda* deems the experience of the waking state to be but a dream," and, "In dreams, worlds that do not exist are falsely superimposed as being a part of the *Ātman*. One must understand the worlds in the waking state too to be like that... Since, in the waking as also the dream state, the gross and subtle worlds, comprising actions, its factors and its results, are merely objects apprehended by the perceiver, therefore, that perceiver, the *Ātman* characterized by consciousness, is distinct from its objects, the worlds seen in those states, and is spotless."

53. Vision of Unity

Sage Ribhu was a mind-born son of Brahma, the Creator. By his very nature, he was firmly rooted in the non-dual Supreme and was a repository of scriptural knowledge. He had a disciple named Nidāgha. Taught by Ribhu, Nidāgha mastered the *śāstras*. He, however, did not attain steady repose in the non-dual Truth. At the end of his studies, he took leave of his *Guru* and settled down at Vīranagara, on the banks of the river Devika, as a householder. He led a pious, charitable life, firmly observing *grhastha-dharma*. Years passed.

Ribhu was sure that Nidāgha, whom he had not met for long, continued to be unenlightened. The sage felt great compassion for his learned, dear disciple and made up his mind to personally go to Vīranagara to uplift Nidāgha. Nidāgha had completed his rituals and was standing at the door of his house, eagerly hoping that some guest would arrive whom he could honour and feed, when he espied Ribhu. As the sage had disguised his identity, Nidāgha did not recognize him. However, he respectfully invited Ribhu to his house and washed his guest's feet.

Having duly honoured Ribhu, Nidāgha requested him to have food. Ribhu agreed but asked, "Tell me first, what items of food you will serve me?" Nidāgha gave him an impressive list. However, Ribhu responded that he did not find the items appropriate for his consumption. He then specified what he wished to be given; his list primarily comprised sweet items such as *pāyasa* and *halwa*. Nidāgha instructed his wife to prepare the dishes concerned with the best of ingredients available. Soon, Ribhu was served a meal consisting of all that he had asked for.

After Ribhu had finished eating, Nidāgha asked him with great humility, "O holy one, has the meal sated you? Are you feeling at ease?" He also

respectfully expressed his desire to know where his guest dwelled, where he was coming from and where he was headed.

Ribhu said, “He who experiences hunger attains satisfaction after a meal. Never have I been hungry. So, how can there be satiation for me? When the fire of digestion consumes the food ingested, hunger crops up. Likewise, when the water available in the body gets depleted, thirst arises. Hunger and thirst are thus bodily attributes. They do not pertain to me, who is not the body. Peacefulness and satisfaction belong to the mind and not to me, who is not the mind. Thus, your questions about satiety and tranquillity are inapplicable to me.

“I am the *Ātman* that is omnipresent, being all-pervasive like space. So, there is no question of my dwelling at a specific place, coming from somewhere, or proceeding towards some destination. By virtue of differences in bodies, you, I and others appear disparate, but are really not so. You and I are not the limited, distinct beings we seem to be; we are only the non-dual *Ātman*.

“What is considered delicious becomes inedible with the passage of time and causes displeasure. What is tasteless can change into something tasty. Thus, no object is intrinsically delicious or unpalatable. There is no eatable that continues to be delicious in the past, present and the future. Further, the various items of food such as rice, wheat, jaggery, milk and fruits are all only modifications of *Pr̥thvī*.

“Thinking in the manner mentioned by me, you should make your mind same-sighted. Being ever same-sighted is the means to get the knowledge of the non-dual Truth and become liberated from the cycle of transmigratory existence.”

Hearing Ribhu’s words of wisdom, Nidāgha said, ‘O Lord, be propitious to me. You have come for doing good to me. Kindly tell me who you are.’ Ribhu said, “I am Ribhu, your *Guru*. I came here to teach you the Truth. Know that all that is there in the universe is intrinsically the Supreme. In reality, there is no diversity whatsoever; there is just the non-dual *Ātman*.” Nidāgha prostrated before Ribhu and worshipped his *Guru*. Having blessed his disciple, the sage departed.

Years later, motivated by his overflowing mercy, Ribhu came once again to Vīranagara to grace his disciple; he knew that Nidāgha had still not attained steady abidance in the Supreme. Ribhu observed that the king of the region was entering the town with great pomp. Nidāgha was standing aloof, holding *darbha* grass and sacrificial faggots obtained from the forest in his hands. The sage approached Nidāgha in the guise of an

ignorant person and prostrated. Then, Ribhu asked, “O holy one, why are you standing here alone?”

Nidāgha: The king is coming. As the streets are crowded, I am waiting here.

Ribhu: You appear to be well-informed about the happenings here. Kindly tell me who among the people seen here is the king and who are the rest?

Nidāgha: The one riding the huge elephant is the monarch. The rest are his attendants and followers.

Ribhu: You simultaneously indicated the king and the elephant. Please explain which among the two is the elephant and which one is the king.

Nidāgha: The elephant is below and the king is the one above. Who indeed is not familiar with the relation of the rider and the mount?

Ribhu: You spoke of below and above. Kindly clarify what is meant by the words below and above.

Nidāgha felt exasperated. He quickly mounted Ribhu’s shoulders and sat with his legs astride them. Then, he said, “Now, like the king, I am above, while you, like the elephant, are below.” Without the least irritation or hesitation, Ribhu asked, “O great Brahmin, you stated that you are like the king and that I am like the elephant. If so, who, intrinsically, are you and who, intrinsically, am I?”

Ribhu thus turned Nidāgha’s mind to the instruction that he had given years earlier that, intrinsically, everything is the Supreme and that there is actually no diversity whatsoever. Nidāgha jumped down, fell at Ribhu’s feet and held them in his hands. He said, “O Lord, you are undoubtedly my revered *Guru*, Sage Ribhu.”

Ribhu compassionately said to him, “As a student, you served me with great sincerity. Out of love for you, I have come here to instruct you about the Truth. In everything, realize the non-dual *Ātman*.” Nidāgha became enlightened and Ribhu left.

54. Lessons from Śuka’s Life

Maharṣi Veda-Vyāsa once performed intense austerities and worshipped Lord Śiva with all his heart. He prayed to the Lord to grace him with a son endowed with the firmness of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and Space. Pleased with him, Śiva manifested before him and said, “You shall have a son of the kind you desire. Possessed by greatness, he will be as spotless as Space and the other elements. He will be firmly rooted in the Supreme and will attain great fame.”

After obtaining the boon of his choice, Vyāsa took up a pair of sticks of the Shami tree and rubbed them against each other to produce fire. As he was doing so, he beheld the *apsarā* Gṛtācī who quickly assumed the form of a parrot and came near him. A spark of life from the sage came into contact with the sticks in his hand and from them emerged Śuka, ablaze with spiritual splendour. Goddess Gaṅgā personally bathed him with her waters. From the sky, there fell a staff and a deer-skin for the divine boy's use. Subsequently, Lord Śiva came there with Goddess Uma and performed Śuka's *upanayana*.

By the grace of the Lord, right from his birth, Śuka was endowed with wisdom and was conversant with the *Vedas*. However, the *Vedas* must necessarily be learnt from a preceptor. Hence, after his *upanayana*, Śuka approached Bṛhaspati as a student. Having quickly learnt the *Vedas* and the *sāstras* at the feet of the *Guru* of the *Devas*, he returned to his father.

Śuka's *brahmacarya* and control of the mind and senses were impeccable and he was dispassionate to the core. He had direct knowledge of the non-dual Truth but mistakenly imagined that there was still much to be learnt and done by him to attain the highest. He requested his father to teach him about how he could attain liberation.

Vyāsa instructed his son in depth. Nonetheless, he found that his enlightened son, who had become an adept at Yoga, continued to feel that he was ignorant. Hence, Vyāsa told him, "Go to king Janaka. He shall make known everything about Mokṣa to you." As Śuka readied himself to leave for Mithilā, Vyāsa said, "Do not use your powers of *yoga* and transport yourself there by air. Walk and approach Janaka with humility.

Accordingly, Śuka trekked the long distance on foot. He was not distracted in the least by the numerous beautiful sights he encountered on the way. Finally, he reached Janaka's palace in Mithilā. The guards at the gate, however, rudely denied him permission to enter. Without a murmur of protest, Śuka stood silently near the entrance. Seeing that the boy was free from anger and indifferent to the hot sun, one of the guards appreciated his greatness and escorted him reverentially to a chamber within the palace.

Janaka's minister received Śuka there with joined palms and led him, through another chamber, to a delightful garden with ponds, many plants prettified by flowers and numerous fruit-bearing trees. Several beautiful damsels were there. The minister ordered them to attend to Śuka and left. The belles washed his feet, duly honoured him and offered him tasty articles of food. After Śuka had eaten, they showed him everything of

interest in the garden. They were skilled in music, dance and dalliance and did all they could to entertain him.

However, Śuka's mind-control and dispassion were so great that just as the disrespect he was shown at the palace gate did not irritate him, the garden and the efforts of the belles did not elate him. Even-minded, he sat on a seat offered to him and began his evening *sandhyā-vandana*. Then, he went into deep meditation. By the time he emerged from it, a third of the night had passed. He slept for the second third of the night. Thereafter, he got up and again absorbed himself in Yoga till dawn. A little later, Janaka approached Śuka accompanied by his priest, minister and the members of his family. The king offered the holy boy a jewelled seat and thereafter worshipped him. Śuka experienced neither joy nor discomfiture. He paid his respects to the king and explained the purpose of his visit. Among the questions he posed were, "How is emancipation from transmigratory existence obtained? Is knowledge or penance the means? If a *brahmacharin* obtains knowledge and freedom from the pairs of opposites such as likes and dislikes, is it necessary for him to get married?"

Janaka, in the course of his sagacious reply, said, "It is only by means of knowledge and direct realization of the Truth that one becomes liberated. Such understanding and realization cannot be acquired without the guidance of a *Guru*. Knowledge is the boat that carries one across the ocean of Samsara and the *Guru* is the boatman. He, whose mind has become immaculate by virtue of the cleansing of his senses and recourse to righteousness in many births, procures liberation in his *brahmacharya-āsrāma* itself. Becoming enlightened and liberated in the *brahmacharya-āsrāma*, he has no use at all for married life.

"Beholding one's *Ātman* in all beings and all beings in the *Ātman*, one should live without being attached to anything. He who views all beings, praise and censure, pleasure and pain, gold and iron and life and death with equanimity reaches the Supreme."

Janaka added, "I see that all this knowledge that I am communicating to you is already there in you. You are fully conversant with all that needs to be known about liberation. Your knowledge, attainment and power are far superior to what you imagine them to be. In spite of directly realizing the Truth, a person does not attain the highest if he doubts his experience or entertains a fear that he will not become emancipated. When such misconceptions are dispelled, he promptly attains the Supreme. You have already apprehended the Truth. Your mind is steady and tranquil.

You are free from desires and are truly same-sighted. I and others like me behold you to be established in indestructible freedom.” On hearing Janaka’s words, Śuka’s doubts and vacillations ceased; he became a *jīvanmukta*.

He took leave of the king and flew to where his father was in the Himalayas. Out of compassion for people, Vyāsa codified the unified *Veda* into four. He entrusted the spreading of the *R̥g*, *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Atharva Vedas* to Sumantu, Vaiśampāyana, Jaimini and Paila. The four great disciples of Vyāsa left for the plains and became householders; Śuka, who had been taught by Vyāsa along with them, remained a celibate and stayed on with his father, reciting the *Vedas*. To Śuka is attributed the narration of the *Bhāgavata* to Parīkṣit.

One day, the celestial Sage Nārada met Śuka when the latter was alone and spoke to him at length about *mokṣa*. In the course of his advice, Nārada said, “Abandon *dharma* characterized by the performance of scripturally-ordained actions, such as sacrifices, and give up *adharmā*, typified by the performance of scripturally-prohibited actions, such as killing. Discard truth and falsehood. Having dispensed with these, renounce the mind by means of which you relinquish all these. Give up *dharma* by ceasing to make any *saṅkalpa*, resolve. Abstain from *adharmā* by dispassion. Restraining speech by the mind, desist from uttering either verity or untruth. Renounce the mind by ceasing to identify with it and by realizing that you are pure, non-dual consciousness.”

Śuka reflected on what Nārada had told him. He decided that he would display his *yogic* powers to the world and then cast off his body through *yoga* and attain disembodied liberation. Nārada expressed his approval. Śuka proceeded to where his father was. On learning his son’s intention, Vyāsa said, “My dear son, stay with me today so that I may gratify my eyes by beholding you for some more time.” However, Śuka was so dispassionate and keen on disembodied liberation that he did not tarry.

He ascended the summit of a mountain and sat there for some time in *samādhi*, revelling in the supreme bliss of *Brahman*. After emerging from that state, he walked round Nārada and took leave of the celestial sage. He then rose into the sky. As he flew, *ṛṣis* and the celestials gazed at him in wonder. He requested the presiding deities of nature, “If my father were to follow me and repeatedly call after me by name, please respond on my behalf.” The deities who presided over the seas, mountains, rivers, etc., loved him so much that they promptly agreed to do what he desired.

As he coursed through the sky, he beheld a pair of contiguous mountains in his path. Without slowing down, he smashed his way through them.

Many bewitching *apsarās* were sporting unclad in the Gaṅgā when he flew over them. However, his dispassion and absorption in the *Ātman* were so obvious to them that they felt no shame and did not make any move to cover their nudity. Śuka rose higher in the direction of the sun and, terminating his astounding *yogic* show, cast off his body and attained absolute disembodied union with the non-dual Supreme.

Meanwhile, driven by his love for Śuka, Vyāsa supernaturally transported himself to the spot from where his son had taken off. The *mahaṛṣi* retraced Śuka's aerial path and soon reached the mountains split by Śuka. On encountering him, the *ṛṣis* described to him the wonderful feats of Śuka. Vyāsa missed his son so badly that he began to lament and loudly called out to Śuka. From everywhere, there came the response, “*Bho!*”

Having witnessed the evidence of the glory of his son who had now truly become the soul of all, Vyāsa sat down. When the naked *apsarās* sporting in the Gaṅgā espied him, they became agitated. Filled with shame, some plunged deep into the waters. Some ran into the groves while some quickly covered themselves with their clothes. Recalling that the belles had not minded remaining undressed in Śuka's presence, Vyāsa felt proud of his son but ashamed of himself.

Lord Śiva manifested before Vyāsa who was burning with grief at the loss of his son. Consoling the sage, He said, “You had prayed to me for a son who would be like the elements. You obtained, by your penance, the son you wanted. By My grace, he was mentally spotless and spiritually glorious. He has attained the highest state. Why then do you grieve? His fame will remain undiminished till this world lasts. By my grace, you will henceforth be constantly accompanied by a Śuka-like shadow that will be visible to you.” The Lord then vanished. Vyāsa beheld a shadow of his son and this filled him with joy.

Śuka was born with the knowledge of the Truth. Such a birth is possible but is extremely rare. A person who passes away while on the verge of getting enlightened may effortlessly become a *Jīvanmukta* in his next birth. The *Upaniṣads* speak of Sage Vāmadeva obtaining, by virtue of his past, direct experience of the Truth even while he lay in his mother's womb.

Śuka knew the *Vedas* without being taught. Nevertheless, he went to Bṛhaspatī as a disciple to learn them. This is because it is imperative that the *Vedas* be learnt from a preceptor. Children who are regularly exposed to *Vedic* chanting may be in a position to recite *Veda-mantras* without being formally taught. They do not, however, become exempt from the rule regarding *Vedic* chanting.

When approaching a *mahātman* for guidance, one must do so with humility and respect. Though Śuka had the power to quickly transport himself to Janaka's presence by air, he undertook, in accordance with Vyāsa's advice, a strenuous journey by foot to Mithilā and waited there patiently for an opportunity to meet with Janaka.

Doubts and misconceptions can prevent a person from benefitting from his first-hand experience. The following two examples emphasize this.

When a person was reorganizing and cleaning his house, he accidentally came across a pouch. His father was the one who had concealed it years ago. Though his father had wanted to inform his son about it, he had fallen seriously ill before actually doing so and died without recovering from the ailment. The son opened the bag and found 50 glittering diamonds in it. They would have fetched him a good price and, with the amount, he could have lived in reasonable comfort.

However, he thought, "My father did not speak to me about them. So, they are unlikely to be diamonds. Presumably, they are pieces of glass. If I take them to a diamond merchant, he is likely to make fun of me for being unable to differentiate between precious diamonds and worthless pieces of glass." Because of his doubts and misapprehension, he put the pouch back where he had found it and continued to struggle to make ends meet.

A boy wanted to turn on a light in his room and so moved his hand to the pertinent switch. The moment he touched it, he got an electric shock. As he jerked back his hand reflexively, he banged his elbow against an article on his desk. He, who had never received an electric shock before, thought, "My friends have told me that they have experienced a tingling sensation on being struck on the funny bone of the elbow and that the cause is pressure on a nerve passing over it. Almost certainly, the sharp sensation in my arm was caused by the blow I received on my elbow." Failing to identify what he had directly experienced, he touched the switch again. This time, the consequence was disastrous.

Not only in worldly but also in religious and spiritual matters, doubts and misconceptions can cause great harm. Lord Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, "Neither this world nor the next nor happiness is there for one who has a doubting mind." A man who is beset with doubt about the existence of life after death is unenthusiastic about acting according to the scriptural injunctions and securing an exalted realm. Because he is not certain that there is no life after death, he is unable to unhesitatingly revel in a materialistic life. Thus, he suffers a double loss.

Śuka's life reveals how doubts and misconceptions about the *Ātman* can

block spiritual success. Though Śuka had realized the non-dual Truth, he failed to have a conviction regarding it and so did not become a *jīvanmukta*. It was only when Janaka put an end to his uncertainties and misunderstanding at rest that he attained the highest.

Dispassion, equanimity and mind-control are vital for a spiritual aspirant. Marriage is not only not obligatory but also useless for a *brahmacārin* who is pure-minded, dispassionate and keen on liberation from rebirth. These points can be gleaned from the life of Śuka.

A person must conduct himself reverentially towards his *Guru* even after becoming a *jīvanmukta*. Nārada gave detailed spiritual advice to Śuka and thereby played the role of a *Guru*. Hence, Śuka, a *Jīvanmukta* par excellence, worshipped Nārada and took leave of the celestial sage before casting off his body and attaining disembodied liberation.

Attachment unsettles the mind of even the great. Vyāsa was undoubtedly a very great sage and a knower of the Truth. Yet, because of his intense attachment to Śuka, he was plunged into grief when Śuka left him for good. As for Śuka, he was an epitome of dispassion and did not have the least hesitation to leave everything, including his body. True detachment does not make a person callous. It is only out of consideration for his father's feelings that the dispassionate Śuka requested the presiding deities of nature to respond on his behalf to his father's call.

PART 3

SCRIPTURAL EXPOSITIONS

This part is based on His Holiness's exposition of the Bhagavad-gītā, Upaniṣads and the Brahma-sūtras as per Bhagavatpāda's commentaries thereon, on some of His public discourses and on some of His private expositions of spiritually relevant matters. The elucidations included have been grouped under 15 heads.

1. Eight Great Qualities

Mahaṛṣi Gautama has, in his *Dharma-sūtras*, spoken of eight ‘*Ātma-guṇas*’ or personal qualities that every individual should cultivate.¹ They help a person to enjoy mental peace and happiness. They also give rise to virtue and so their benefits are not confined to the present life. Further, if people strive to cultivate these, the world will become a happier place.

The first such quality is “Compassion towards all beings.” God has nothing whatsoever to achieve for Himself. Yet, on account of His compassion and desire to uplift mankind, He has taken on many incarnations. When we have been given the capacity to help others, it is but proper that we should do so. After all, God Himself has shown us the way. The desire to relieve the sufferings of another is what is termed compassion. Compassion occurs naturally in some persons, while in some others, it arises by virtue of the company of great ones, who are certainly very compassionate. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, while listing the traits in devotees which render them dear to God, Lord Kṛṣṇa first mentions absence of hatred towards any being, friendliness and compassion.

In the *Yoga-sūtras* also, compassion towards one who is suffering is enjoined to get peace of mind.² Aversion, pride and the like agitate the mind. Suppose one cultivates the feeling, “I never want to be unhappy. The same is the case with others. Their suffering is on the same footing as mine. So let none have misery.” Then, one’s aversion and pride will get checked and the mind will become calmer than it would have been otherwise. The development of compassion acts as a remedy for anger too and it is well known that anger severely perturbs the mind.

The second quality is “Forbearance.” Normally, when one hears that which is unpleasant or encounters an unfavourable situation created by another, one feels angry and seeks vengeance. If one is strong enough, one directly retaliates. If not, one seeks to avenge oneself on the sly. Acting thus does not constitute the behaviour of a noble one.

Even though one may be in a position to take action, one could forgive the wrongdoer. One must not harbour malice. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we read, “*Rāma does not, by virtue of His self-control, recall even a century of wrong acts committed against Him by another. On the other hand, He is satiated even with a single favour done to Him.*”³

What is the point in being intolerant and angry? A person only loses his own mental peace by doing so. Suppose a person is slighted or censured by another. He may get angry. Who is the loser? Anger is like an ungrateful entity. It burns the very person who gives room to it. Instead of getting

angry, the slighted or censured person could very well have analysed whether any actual shortcoming of his had been pointed out. If so, he could remedy that personal fault and be grateful to the person who brought it to his notice. On the other hand, the censure may have been unfounded. If so, he could think, “It is said that making others happy is a form of worship of God.⁴ So if this person is deriving some joy in condemning me, I am lucky. After all, without taking any effort, I am able to worship God by giving him some happiness. He has done me a great favour.

The third quality is, “Not cavilling.” Often, people who are not dexterous or successful, find faults with others who are competent, prosperous or famous. The censure is basically to hide one’s shortcomings; the comments are not constructive. This is a bad practice, for we should appreciate good qualities in others and not assume or search for faults. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa declares His willingness to expound the Truth to Arjuna who “does not cavil.”⁵ Bhagavatpāda has said in his *Prabodha-sudhākara* that a person who listens to the condemnation another incurs sin.⁶ What need be said about the sin incurred by a man who himself engages in nit-picking?

Suppose a man were to cultivate an attitude of friendliness towards happy people. Then, he would only derive happiness in their success. For instance, does not a father feel joy on the success of his son? Likewise, why will not a man feel happy if he regards another in a friendly light? It is said, “*The petty-minded think, ‘This one is my own. This one is not.’ For the broad-minded, the whole world is one family.*”⁷ How can the prosperity of another agitate the mind of a person who looks upon everyone as a member of his family? In fact, such an attitude conduces to peace of mind by eliminating jealousy and the like that are disruptive of mental peace.

The fourth quality is, “Purity.” If we were to encounter a person who wears filthy clothes and who has not bathed for many days, his obnoxious smell makes us want to move away. On the other hand, the stinking one is hardly aware of anything abnormal. Likewise, some are in the habit of spitting in public places. Such practices are repulsive and unhygienic. So one must bathe daily and observe hygiene. Cleanliness is an ingredient of purity.

The fifth of the eight qualities listed is, “Freedom from laziness.” Many people do not diligently and promptly engage in the tasks that they should carry out but conceive of and advance some reason or the other to explain why they were not in a position to execute the tasks at the scheduled times. No employer would be pleased with an indolent worker. As regards a student who keeps putting off reading, he fares badly in his studies. When a person consistently occupies himself with the conscientious and timely execution of his various obligations, he fares well and his mind gets

far less opportunity to engage itself in idle or harmful thoughts. Thus, it is in everyone's interest to eschew laziness and cultivate zeal.

The sixth noble quality is, "Auspiciousness." When we meet some, we note that their words as also facial expressions are not pleasing. This is undesirable. We should speak and conduct ourselves in a manner which is pleasant. For instance, on seeing an elderly or a great person rather than saying, "Sit down", rudely, one should politely offer a seat and invite the person to sit. Proper speech is not just pleasing to hear but is also factual. Manu has said, "*Speak the truth. Utter that which is pleasant. Do not verbalize a distressing truth. Do not say anything that is gratifying but false. This is the eternal dharma.*"⁸ The Lord taught Arjuna, "*Speech that causes no pain and is true, agreeable and beneficial, and the practice of studying the scriptures constitute austerity of speech.*"⁹ Such austerity of speech purifies a person.

The seventh ordained quality is, "Absence of niggardliness." The tendency to hoard and not part with anything in charity is the result of greed. Lord Kṛṣṇa has referred to desire, anger and greed as the triple gates of hell. Hoarding will never benefit us and when we die, we cannot take our wealth with us.

Nīlakanṭha Dīkṣita has humorously advised, "*If you are keen that even after death you should not be parted with your wealth and that you should carry it with you in a bundle on your head, then give it to the deserving.*"¹⁰ Currency notes cannot be taken to the next world. On the other hand, if a miser converts them into virtue by offering charity, he need not fear that he will lose them after death. After all, virtue will accompany him to the next world.

The scriptures prescribe giving of gifts to the deserving as an antidote for greed. Hence, charity, apart from bringing about happiness in others, greatly conduces to the spiritual well-being of the donor. A person who loses some money feels unhappy. But he feels happy, not sad, when he voluntarily gives the same amount to a poor student who is not in a position to pay examination fees. Charity can thus make not only the receiver but also the giver happy.

A person was advised by a holy man to gift a vegetable a day and told that he would attain great merit by doing so. The poor person strictly followed the advice. After death, he was reborn in a royal family and grew up to become a king. He was able to recall what he had done in his past birth. So he continued to gift a vegetable a day. Surprisingly, after death, he was reborn as a beggar. He was unable to comprehend the reason

and so sought the advice of the holy man who had earlier blessed him. From the sage, he learnt that prior to becoming a king he had been very poor and so a gift of a vegetable a day was sufficient to give him a lot of virtue. On the other hand, as a king he was endowed with affluence. So, thereafter, the gift of just a vegetable a day was quite insufficient to earn him merit of any consequence. He realized that the extent of charity needed to earn a certain degree of merit depends upon one's financial status.

The last of the eight qualities is, "Absence of attachment." Most of our problems are due to our desires. It is said in the *Pancadaśī*, "*He who is attached gets tied down in the world. The unattached one experiences joy. Therefore, attachment should always be given up by one who desires to be happy.*"¹¹ It is perfectly possible to work efficiently and to fulfil all one's duties without attachment. In fact, attachment impairs efficient functioning. Commonly, surgeons do not perform surgeries on their close relatives. If there were to be no risk of attachment clouding or impairing performance, such would not have been the case.

2. Stages of Devotion

Madhusūdana Saraswatī, the famous author of *Advaita-siddhi*, was a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa. His being an *Advaitin* par excellence did not in any way stand in his way of composing soul-stirring verses on Kṛṣṇa.

He has spoken of three stages of devotion. The first stage is the one where the devotee feels "I am Yours" with regard to God. In other words, the devotee dedicates himself to God. A special characteristic of a true servant of God is that he longs for nothing from God in return for his devotion and service.

Here the following instance comes to mind. To prove Prahlāda's view that God is present everywhere and also in a pillar pointed at by Hiraṇyakaśipu, the Lord emerged from the pillar in the form of Narasimha. Lord Narasimha slew Hiraṇyakaśipu but continued to be very fierce. The *devas* were afraid of approaching Him and so was Goddess Lakṣmī. Hence, Prahlāda, who was but a young boy, was asked to pacify the Lord. Prahlāda consented and fearlessly walking upto the Lord, who was seething with fury, prostrated before Him. Immediately, the Lord calmed down and moved by compassion, He rose from the throne He was occupying and placed His hand on the boy's head. Being pleased with His devotee, the Lord asked Prahlāda to seek a boon. Promptly, Prahlāda replied that he desired nothing from the Lord. There is a scintillating verse in the *Bhāgavata* wherein we have Prahlāda telling the Lord, "*He who desires anything from God is a trader and not a servant of God.*"¹²

The story brings out two aspects. One is that a true servant of God knows no refuge other than God. This is why Prahlāda felt no fear in approaching Lord Narasimha. The second aspect is that the true servant of God desires nothing from God. In fact, he does not even pray for *mokṣa*.

In a verse in the *Śivānanda-laharī*, Bhagavatpāda tells the Lord: “Tell me why You are not redeeming me from this wretched worldly state. If the answer be that it pleases You that I should wallow thus, then I have achieved all that has to be achieved.”¹³ When God is pleased what else is there to long for?

The second stage of devotion spoken of is the feeling “He is mine” with regard to God. Here the devotee is positively concerned about ensuring God’s welfare. It is not as though God is in need of the devotee’s care. In spite of this, He allows Himself to be even controlled by the devotee on account of the devotee’s love.

The *Bhāgavata* contains the explicit declaration of Lord Kṛṣṇa, “I am subservient to My devotee like one under the control of another.”¹⁴ Yaśodā’s love for Kṛṣṇa is an illustration of devotion of the form, “He is mine.” To her, Kṛṣṇa was her darling child and not the Lord. The Lord seems to have relished her motherly love so much that He deliberately withdrew from her the awareness that He was none other than the Supreme. Though omnipotent, He even allowed Himself to be tied to a mortar by Yaśodā.

The third stage of devotion is the feeling “I am He” with regard to God. In other words, *Advaitic* realisation is the highest stage of devotion. A reason is that while others are willing to brook at least some minute separation from God, a devotee of this class cannot bear even that. When can separation be totally obliterated? Obviously when one realizes that one is not different from the Supreme. In the *Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself indicates that the knower of the Truth is not different from Him.¹⁵

3. Prostrate, Surrender and Become Blessed

A devotee prayed to the compassionate Lord to forgive two terrible sins of his.¹⁶ What were they?

The devotee spelt out that in none of his previous births he had done *namaskāra* to God. This was a very grievous sin. How did he know that he had never saluted God at any time? The answer is simple. *Namaskāra* to God, according to the devotee, automatically ensures freedom from rebirth. Had he saluted God in any previous birth, he would not have been born. The fact that he had been born showed that such a holy act as prostrating before God had not been performed earlier. In the present

birth, he was now offering his *praṇāms*, and that precisely was the cause of his second fault. On account of his paying obeisance to God, he would certainly not be born again. Thus, there would be no occasion for him to salute God in future. His inevitable failure to do *namaskāra* to God in any future birth was his second sin! These two sins should be pardoned; this was the prayer.

The prayer illustrates how important one should consider offering salutations to God. Normally, most of us prostrate before God daily but are most casual about the act. This is not correct. We must regard the opportunity given to us to offer *namaskāra* to be most valuable and to be due solely to God's grace.

God has taken care of us even from the time when we lay helplessly in the wombs of our mothers. The least we can do by way of gratitude is to salute God with all our being.

Will God accept us, for we cannot truly claim to be leading a life much different from that of any animal? We spend much of our energy and time earning our bread and a large chunk of the remaining time in sleep. How then can we claim to be far different from animals unless we are strongly devoted to God and lead a spiritual life?

In His *Śiva-bhujāṅga-stotra*¹⁷, Bhagavatpāda poses this query to Śiva and then tells the Lord to accept him even if he be on par with an animal. Why? Is not Nandi the vehicle of Śiva? Surely, if Śiva can accept Nandi, a bull, there should be no problem in His accepting an animal-like devotee. How indeed could Śiva complain about the devotee being animal-like, when He had made an animal itself His own.

It is one thing to be on par with an animal and another to be sinful. What if the devotee be full of faults? Would the Lord then accept him? In the verse under consideration, Bhagavatpāda tells Śiva that even in such a case, Śiva should extend His love. Why? Had not Śiva placed Candra on His head even though the latter had violated the promise given by him to view all his wives alike and had even committed the sin of eloping with his preceptor's wife? Decidedly, if Śiva could place on His head one who had such faults, He should have no reason to reject a devotee merely because of the devotee's blemishes.

Let the devotee be on par with an animal and be sinful too and yet be qualified to be accepted by God. But then should not the devotee's supplication be free from all traces of hypocrisy? Should not the devotee at least be free from double standards? Here again, Bhagavatpāda demurs, for he tells Śiva, "If you are opposed to 'two-tongued ones', then how is

it that You keep a fork-tongued snake as a neck ornament? If You can adopt a snake, then why not me?"

In conclusion, Bhagavatpāda reminds Śiva that no matter what a person's condition might have been, he inevitably becomes blessed on being received by the Lord. The implication of the prayer is that God's kindness is limitless and so He will accept us in spite of all our faults and limitations if we offer ourselves to Him. Thus, we will do well to salute God and surrender ourselves to Him. The rest will be taken care of by God.

4. The Nectar of Devotion

People have a natural capacity to love. Affection requires an object and when that object is God, it gets the appellation *bhakti* or devotion. Nārada defines *bhakti* as extreme love of God.¹⁸ He who attains such devotion no longer longs for anything and is ever fully satiated and happy. While attachment to wife, wealth, etc., causes bondage, attachment to God liberates. A sense object sometimes gives joy and sometimes sorrow. It is not always available and has several faults. On the other hand, God is ever captivating, constantly available and totally free from blemishes. Further, what or who can be as loveable as God who is the repository of all good qualities? So bewitching are His glories that even sages who have realized the Truth and have nothing to achieve go into raptures on thinking of Him.

Though intrinsically formless, the kind Lord does appear in various forms to grace His devotees and to enable people to easily contemplate on Him. The scriptures describe several marvellous forms of the Supreme. We read in the *Devī-māhātmyam* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*, "You are gorgeous, lovelier than all that is beautiful and absolutely stunning. Greatest of the great, You are verily the Supreme Goddess."¹⁹

A devotee wanted to pray, "O Bhavāni, please bestow on me, Your serf, a compassionate glance." So he began with the words "*Bhavāni tvam.*" So eager was the Goddess to fulfil Her devotee's wish that She did not realize that the devotee's pause before "*tvam*", meaning "You", was only the interval between successive words. Taking the request as complete, She immediately granted him "*Bhavāni-tvam*" or the state of being Bhavānī; that is, She made him one with Herself. Bhagavatpāda has stated this in his *Saundarya-laharī*.²⁰

The Lord's mercy extends to all. Did not Rāma tell Sugrīva when the latter voiced concern about accepting Vibhīṣaṇa, "To anyone who seeks refuge in Me but once, saying, 'I am Yours', I grant fearlessness"²¹ A sincere devotee has no cause for any worry, for he has surrendered his

body and mind to God and left everything in God's hands. Overpowered by love for devotees who have surrendered, Kṛṣṇa declared to Uddhava, "*With a view to purifying Myself by the dust of the feet of the sage who longs for nothing, bears enmity to none and is same-sighted, I always follow him.*"²² What a remarkable proclamation by the perfect Lord of the cosmos!

While it is said that a true devotee is in God's loving care, it would be wrong to infer that a devotee ought not to have any hardship. The Lord is, after all, not only most compassionate but also perfectly just. If a person had committed major transgressions in earlier births, allowing him to go scot-free, without any punishment in the form of suffering, would be a travesty of justice. A judge who refuses to penalise murderers on the ground of kindness would be doing a great disservice to society. He can, of course, take mitigating circumstances and repentance into consideration to reduce the punishment awarded to a person found guilty of a crime. Likewise, God, being just, does award punishment even to devotees, but, being kind, reduces the penalty to the extent possible. Just because a mother scolds her child, does it mean that she does not dearly love her offspring?

God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and an ocean of mercy. Hence, there is just nothing that the devotee has to make known to God which is not already known to Him. Further, if the devotee says, "I want this; I want that," how can he be said to have full faith in the gracious dispensation of the Divine One? This apart, even when faith is inadequate, it would be appropriate to avoid praying for anything. It goes without saying that the will of God is infallible. It is also well known that people feel happy when they obtain what they desire and unhappy when they do not. So he who attunes his will to that of God can never have any reason for dissatisfaction. How can suffering make a devotee grieve and lament if he cultivates the attitude that the pain too is in his best interests as it has been ordained by his dear God? At any rate, grief and lamentation do not reduce suffering; they only make it worse.

The path of devotion is special in that one begins to experience peace and joy even prior to one's having made much headway. Further, sharpness of the intellect, scholarliness, prowess, age, physique, social status, occupation, wealth, etc., are not of consequence. God, being most loveable, there is no reason why anyone cannot cultivate devotion. By associating with and thinking in positive terms about a person, another develops a liking for him. Likewise, devotion to God can be developed by repeatedly thinking of God and His glories. To think of Him is not

difficult, for one can mentally keep chanting His name and dedicate all actions and thoughts to Him. The company of holy devotees is highly helpful in developing devotion, for, in them, we see surrender and peace. On the contrary, bad company produces the opposite effect and turns one's mind away from God and towards sense objects.

At first, when a person tries to fix his mind on God, he may not find his mind cooperative and he may not derive much joy in doing so. There is no reason, however, for despair. The budding devotee can change the situation to his advantage by giving God a detailed report of the antics of his mind. What difficulty is there in mentally telling God, "My mind refuses to think of You. See the way it rebels"? Such a conversation with God is itself a way of thinking of Him.

Even when a person is able to briefly fix his mind on God, he experiences peace. This is because, at least for that short duration, he is free from concerns and is like a baby in the arms of its mother. The sense of peace and joy comes rather easily in the presence of great devotees. The nice feeling itself provides an impetus to the budding devotee to think further about God. It is, nonetheless, necessary for him to recognize that in the initial stages there is the danger of the mind forgetting about God for long. Hence, without giving room to inadvertence, he must diligently strive to think of God often.

In a verse in his *Śivānanda-laharī*, Bhagavatpāda has portrayed the stages in the growth of devotion.²³ In the first stage, the devotee somehow approaches God, just as the seed of the *aṅkola* tree manages to get to the tree and attach itself to the trunk. Thereafter, the effect of grace, which was there even earlier, begins to be clearly felt. God holds on to the devotee, just as a magnet attracts and holds a needle. The devotee feels the pull of God. In the third stage, the devotee and God are close to each other like a man and his chaste wife. The love is strongly mutual. Next, just as a creeper adds to the beauty of a tree, the devotee adds, as it were, to God's glory. Indeed, devotees like Prahlāda were ornaments of God. In the final stage, the devotee merges with God just as a river flows into and becomes one with the ocean.

Lord Kṛṣṇa has compassionately taught how devotees of different capabilities should practise devotion.²⁴ There is nothing in the world that is distinct from God. So a mature aspirant is advised to fix his mind and intellect on God as the Cosmic Person; everything is viewed as a part of God's body, which is the universe. To the aspirant who is unable to view everything as related to God, Kṛṣṇa teaches repeated fixation of the mind on some chosen form of God. Suppose a person is unable to meditate

thus, he is instructed to be intent on works for the Lord. The devotee should engage himself in hearing about God, glorifying Him, worshipping His idol, etc. Finally, even if the aspirant is unable to be absorbed in such tasks, there is an easier option that is available to him. The Lord says that the aspirant should, with regulated mind, dedicate all his actions to Him and give up desire for the results of all the acts. Normally, a person acts motivated by longing for the results. Such functioning is productive of bondage. The spiritual aspirant, motivated by his love of God, acts for the sake of God, without attachment to the results. Just as a fruit can be offered to God during worship, the devotee offers the fruits of actions to God. He acts with the feeling, “I do this for God”; he does not go a step down and hold, “I do this so that God may be favourably disposed.” He views success and failure with equanimity; here success includes the attainment of mental purity.

Acting as he does for the sake of God, the devotee abstains from misdeeds. He acts with firmness and enthusiasm. After all, his devotion makes him put forth his best. Treating the scriptures as the directives of God, he faithfully carries out the scripturally-prescribed duties that are pertinent to him. How can one who disobeys the commands of God, and neglects his religious duties be a true devotee? Thus, detachment from the fruits of actions does not imply inefficiency or negligence. On the contrary, the devotee’s performance is superior to that of a worldly man; unlike the latter, the former is not bogged down by anxiety, frustration, etc.

The Lord proclaims, “*Fix your mind on Me. Be My devotee. Worship Me. Prostrate before Me. (Conducting yourself in this fashion, offering all ends, means and needs to Me), you shall come to Me alone. Truly do I promise thus to you, for you are dear to Me.*”²⁵ Who indeed would not want to surrender himself to God who is so very loving and loveable!

5. Fundamental Tenets of the Bhagavadgītā

What is the philosophy expounded by Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna? Does the Lord declare that liberation can be attained only by the realization of one’s true nature or does He opine that actions are also directly responsible for liberation? Is it the view of the Lord that there are many *Ātmans* and a real world or does the Lord hold that the *Ātman* is really none other than the Supreme and that the world is not absolutely real? To answer these queries, it is obviously imperative that we turn to the *Gītā* itself.

The Lord points out to Arjuna the immortality of the *Ātman* and its total distinction from the body and bodily attributes. “*The Ātman is not born nor does it die nor does it cease to be. It is unborn, eternal, unchangeable*

and ancient. It is not killed when the body is killed.”²⁶ Such unequivocal declarations that the *Ātman* is distinct from the body are commonly found in the *Gītā*.

The Lord has equally clearly asserted that the *Ātman* is untainted by any bodily activity and that it is devoid of action. For instance, He has said, “*Having no origin and bereft of qualities, this imperishable Ātman, though dwelling in the body, neither acts nor is tainted.*”²⁷

What is it then that acts? The Lord has clarified in various places by utterances such as, “*The guṇas of nature perform all activity. The one whose understanding has been clouded by egoism feels, ‘I am the doer’.*”²⁸ From such pronouncements, it is patent that the *Ātman* is without any activity and is totally untainted. How indeed is it possible for such an *Ātman* to really suffer bondage? The Lord’s declarations would be readily meaningful if bondage is not real and is caused by ignorance.

The Lord says, “*He sees truly who sees that all actions are done by nature alone and that the Ātman is a non-agent.*”²⁹ The view that true knowledge destroys ignorance and results in liberation is explained by Kṛṣṇa by words such as, “*He who has faith and is intent upon knowledge and has restrained the senses obtains true knowledge. Having attained knowledge, he immediately attains peace.*”³⁰

Does not the grace of God confer liberation? Does not Kṛṣṇa aver, “*They who seek refuge in Me alone cross this Māyā*”³¹ Yes, indeed the Lord has said that He confers liberation to devoted ones. But it must be seen how He does so. He Himself has clarified, “*Out of mere compassion for them I, dwelling in their mind, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by means of the luminous lamp of wisdom.*”³² Thus, the Lord has shown that knowledge is the means to liberation. Such knowledge destroys the fruits of all actions. The Lord has said, “*Just as fire reduces fuel to ashes, so too does the fire of knowledge burn up all actions.*”³³

It certainly cannot be said that the very Lord, who declares the opposition of action and knowledge, forgets His teachings and proceeds to say that liberation results from a combination of these. He has consistently taught that actions are meant for one who has not attained realization and that for the realized one there is just ‘abidance’ in *Ātman*. He clarifies, “*For the holy man who tries to attain yoga, action is said to be the means. For the same man when he has attained yoga, quietude is said to be the means.*”³⁴

By taking it as axiomatic that, “*The end of that which is born is certain,*”³⁵ the Lord has pointed out that all that has a beginning must have an end. If a real liberation were to be brought about by action then by virtue of

having a beginning, such a liberation must also have an end. Hence, liberation cannot be brought about by action. Action's contribution is the purification of mind. Kṛṣṇa makes this clear when He says, "*Sacrifice, gift and austerity are the purifiers of the wise.*"³⁶

As regards multiplicity of *Ātmans* and their relationship with the Supreme, the following words of the Lord illustrate His position. He says, "*He who has been made steadfast by yoga sees the same everywhere and sees the Ātman as abiding in all beings and all beings as abiding in the Ātman.*"³⁷ The use of the singular for the *Ātman* suggests that in reality there is no multiplicity of *Ātmans*. As regards the relationship of the *Ātman* with the Supreme, the Lord Himself has said, "*O Gudākeśa, I am the Ātman seated in the hearts of all beings*"³⁸ and "*Understand Me to be the Kṣetrajña (individual Self).*"³⁹

6. True Advaitins and Pseudo-Advaitins are Poles Apart

It is well known that *Advaita* philosophy recognizes *Brahman* alone as the ultimate reality and holds that the world is illusory, with no existence apart from *Brahman*. *Avidyā* or ignorance is responsible for the mistaken notion that one is the body or mind and that duality is a fact.

The individual soul is actually not different from the Supreme. Strictly speaking, a true *Advaitin* is one who has directly realized that one is the Supreme *Brahman*. Others who hold the *Advaita* philosophy as right are also called *Advaitins* but the usage is somewhat figurative.

Those who have directly realized the Truth are called *jñānins*; they are liberated even while alive. Such persons are most uncommon. Kṛṣṇa points out in the *Gītā*, "*He who knows that Vāsudeva is all is very rare to find.*"⁴⁰ Egoless, such sages do not flaunt their wisdom.

On the other hand, there are many who have not acquired such realization but who talk and behave as if they have attained liberation. We even find that they are not very regulated in their conduct. When questioned, they say, "*After all I am not the body or the mind. I neither act nor am I affected by action. Further, the world is only unreal. So, why should I bother about what the body and mind are engaged in doing?*"

There is a story in this regard. A person was teaching *Advaita* philosophy to a group of students and in the course of his discourse pointed out that the world is unreal. Suddenly, a wild elephant chanced to come rushing that way. The disciples fled as fast as their legs could carry them; the teacher was no exception. Unfortunately, the teacher slipped and fell into

a pit. After the elephant went away, the students discovered their teacher in the pit, shouting for help. They approached him and asked, “O *Guru*, you were just telling us that the world is unreal. Why then did you run, gripped by fear, when the elephant charged? Further, why are you now shouting for help?” The helpless teacher thought for a moment, and said, “Help me to come out and I shall explain.”

They lifted him out. He resumed his seat at the place where he was teaching and, without batting an eyelid, declared, “I stand by what I said. The world is unreal. The elephant that charged was unreal. You saw me flee in terror but my flight was unreal. You noticed that I had fallen into a pit and was screaming for help. All that was unreal. Finally, your helping me out too was unreal.”

Maybe the explanation shows that the so-called teacher was shrewd but it does not alter the fact that he was being hypocritical. One should be true to one’s conscience. One may deceive others by high-sounding talk on *Advaita*, but it will not be of any use if one does not mend one’s ways. It is said, “*He who is attached to worldly comforts but still says that everything is Brahman is actually one who has fallen from karma and also from Brahman. Such a person must be discarded like a lowly one.*”⁴¹ Because he fails to realize the Truth and procure liberation, it is said that he has fallen from *Brahman*. Because of his putting up a show that he is realized, he does not perform the ordained duties sincerely. Hence, there is the declaration of his having fallen from *karma*.

Why then does one act as if one is aware that the world is unreal even though one does not possess such realization? One reason is self-delusion. Another is that one wants to get a good name. Nīlakṣṭha Dīkṣita has humorously written, “*Always keeping the rosary in the hand, occasionally opening one’s eyes and declaring that everything is Brahman are sure ways of creating a good impression!*”⁴²

Such pseudo-*Advaitins* are not a rarity these days. They will do well to bear in mind the declaration of the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*, “*One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated and whose mind is not free from hankering for the result of concentration cannot attain the Ātman through knowledge.*”⁴³ It is clear that true knowledge can dawn only after the mind has been rendered very pure by the practice of spiritual discipline.

7. Essential Prerequisites For Knowing the Supreme

The first of the *Brahma-sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa is, “*Hence, deliberation on Brahman should be undertaken thereafter.*”⁴⁴ The word “thereafter”

reveals that enquiry into the real nature of the Supreme must be done only after some requirement is met. The prerequisite is not knowledge of the rites detailed in the *Karma-kāṇḍa*, portion dealing with rites, of the *Vedas*. On the other hand, it comprises the “*sādhana-catustaya*” or the four-fold spiritual means. Even if a person were to study *Vedāntic* texts for long, master them and become an exponent who delights scholars and common people, if he lacks the *sādhana-catustaya*, he will not get direct experience of the Truth. He will, for all his scholarliness in *Vedānta*, remain trapped in the cycle of transmigratory existence. On the other hand, he who equips himself with *sādhana-catustaya* and endeavours under the guidance of a sage, can get realization of the Supreme and, so, liberation.

The first member of *sādhana-catustaya* is “*viveka*” or discrimination. The aspirant should differentiate between the eternal, which is *Brahman*, and the transient, which is all else. Only he who knows “this is eternal; this is transient” will tend to withdraw his mind from the transient world. The world is to be viewed not merely as subject to destruction but as quite illusory. Indeed, who would desire an object which he firmly regards as being illusory? It is inadequate to see sense objects as transient because people are commonly found to seek worldly pleasures though knowing that these enjoyments are not ever-lasting.

The second element of *sādhana-catustaya* is “*vairāgya*” or dispassion and this, as seen earlier, stems from discrimination. When some close relative or friend dies, a person may experience disinterest in the world. However, such indifference soon fades away. It is only the steady dispassion born of discrimination that conduces to the realization of the Supreme. The aspirant should carefully cultivate dispassion till he finds all worldly and heavenly objects of enjoyment, inclusive of his body, to be as unappealing as the droppings of a crow.

The third constituent of *sādhana-catustaya* is a set of six qualities. The first member of this set is “*śama*” or mind-control. This is characterized by the mind remaining fixed on its objective. In the absence of strong dispassion, the attention of the mind would keep getting diverted to sense objects. On the other hand, he who repeatedly perceives the shortcomings of sense objects, such as that they are transient, require expenditure and effort to acquire and that they even turn insipid, ceases to be attracted to them. His mind quits being diverted by them. Thus, dispassion is the basis for steady mind-control.

Mind-control facilitates “*dama*” or withdrawal of senses from their respective objects. In the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*, the sense-objects have been likened to roads, the senses to horses and the mind to the reins.⁴⁵ So the

senses can be kept under check by a mind that is preoccupied with its objective; mind-control leads to restraint of sensory activity. It should not, however, be supposed that an aspirant should first pay attention only to controlling the mind, while ignoring the activities of the senses. As the Lord points out in the *Gītā*, the senses are powerful and can unsettle the mind.⁴⁶ While avoiding sense-objects provides a situation conducive to gaining control over the mind, firm restraint of the senses even in the presence of beautiful sights, tasty objects, etc., can be effected only by a regulated mind.

Sense-control is the precursor of “*uparati*” or self-withdrawal. The withdrawal is from sense enjoyments and from bondage-fostering activity. If one is immersed in worldly activities and in the performance of religious rites, how can one uninterruptedly and intensely strive to know *Brahman*, which is devoid of all attributes and is the subtlest of the subtle? The limit of withdrawal occurs when one is totally oblivious of the world, inclusive of the body, and is immersed in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the acme of *yoga*.

The fourth element of the set under consideration is “*titikṣā*” or forbearance. True forbearance is marked by the tolerance of all afflictions without the institution of remedial steps and without worry and lamentation. When self-withdrawal is at its peak, the mind does not cognize heat, cold, etc. However, when apprehension of heat, cold and the like does occur, they are endured. Normally, when people are unable to remedy some unpleasant experience, they worry and lament. The spiritual aspirant who is endowed with true forbearance is different. A mind that is tainted by anxiety, lamentation, etc., is unfit to successfully enquire about the Truth.

“*Śraddhā*” or faith is the firm acceptance of the words of the *Guru* and the scripture as true. Even in a worldly matter, a person does not think in accordance with the words of another when he lacks faith in the latter. Such being the case, what need be said about the importance of faith in matters that cannot be ascertained by means of sense-perception? Intense faith in the *Guru* and the scripture is vital to know the Truth. Further, it is only he whose mind is focused, whose senses are restrained, who has withdrawn himself and who is forbearing who can obtain a firm conviction of the form, “It is indeed so”, when taught, “*Brahman* alone is the reality; all else is illusory. You are actually the Supreme.”

Extreme faith in the *Guru* and the scripture leads to freedom from doubts and distractions. Hence, the aspirant is able to unswervingly establish his intellect on *Brahman*, which is devoid of all qualities. This kind of steady establishment of the intellect characterizes “*samādhāna*”, the sixth member of the set. In the stage of “*sama*” too, the mind is fixed on its objective,

Brahman, but such focus is accomplished with effort; further, doubts are not fully resolved. Thus “*samādhāna*” is not identical with “*śama*” but is the latter’s culmination or fruit.

We finally come to the fourth and last constituent of the *sādhana-catuṣṭaya*. This is “*mumukṣutva*” or yearning for liberation. When a person whose mind is tainted by worldly tendencies hears an exposition of *Vedānta*, he may feel a desire for freedom. However, such a desire is fleeting and hardly persists beyond the time of listening. It does not lead to liberation and is classed as *mumukṣutva* of the inferior type.

When the hearing of scriptural texts leads to discrimination and thence dispassion, a person gives up worldly matters and approaches an enlightened *Guru* for earnest enquiry. *Mumukṣutva* of the middling kind then develops in him as he listens to his *Guru*. This too is insufficient.

When he achieves uncompromising dispassion, his mind becomes focussed. Flooded by the *Guru*’s grace, he longs for nothing but liberation. He cannot brook any delay in becoming free and is on par with a person who rushes towards water to put out a fire on his head. His *mumukṣutva* is of the well-developed kind. Being pre-eminently qualified, he quickly attains direct experience of the Truth and becomes liberated, even while alive.

8. The Source of All Evil

Arjuna asks Lord Kṛṣṇa, “*O Vārṣṇeya! Impelled by what does a man, even though reluctant, commit sin as if he were forced?*”⁴⁷ Arjuna is baffled because he finds that not only those who wish to do evil but also those who wish to abstain from unrighteousness appear to commit sin. It is as if one is being forced to err akin to a servant ordered by a king to perform some task.

The Lord wishes to point out to Arjuna the source of all evil. He says, “*It is desire and it is anger, born of the guṇa ‘rajas’, all devouring and sinful. Know that to be the foe here.*”⁴⁸ The enemy of the whole world is desire from which evil comes to all beings. When desire happens to be obstructed by some cause, then it gets transformed into anger. Hence, anger is a mutation of desire.

Everything in the world is comprised of the three *guṇas* of nature, namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* is responsible for a peaceful, happy disposition, *rajas* for an overactive, attached nature and *tamas* for sloth, etc. Desire, according to the Lord, is born of *rajas*. An alternative interpretation of the Lord’s words is that desire itself is responsible for the rise of *rajas*. When desire manifests, it arouses *rajas* which impels a

person to act. Desire is declared by the Lord to be very sinful because it is only when one is impelled by desire that one commits sin. For that reason, it is one's enemy in this world.

The Lord is competent indeed to declare things in their true perspective. Thus, Bhagavatpāda, when commenting on this portion, explains the meaning of the word *Bhagavān*. He says that the Lord is called *Bhagavān* because He is the one in whom 'bhaga' abides. According to the *Viṣṇu-purāna*, *bhaga* means the six attributes of perfect mastery, might, glory, splendour, dispassion and salvation.⁴⁹ The *Viṣṇu-purāna* also says, "*He is called Bhagavān who knows the origin and the end, the coming and the going of beings and what is wisdom and what is ignorance.*"⁵⁰

The Lord illustrates how desire is our foe. He gives three examples which convey the gradations in the covering of knowledge by desire. He says, "*Just as fire is enveloped by smoke, a mirror is covered by dirt, and just as the foetus is enclosed by womb, so too is knowledge covered by desire. Covered, O son of Kuntī, is knowledge by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is greedy and insatiable.*"⁵¹ Fire covered by smoke is able to burn. A dirty mirror is unable to produce a clear reflection until it is cleaned. As for the foetus, it remains completely unseen and confined.

The wise person knows, even before suffering the consequences, that he has been led by desire to evil ways. So he feels miserable. Hence, desire is the enemy of the wise. On the other hand, the ignorant regard desire, at the time of their thirsting for objects, as a friend. It is only when suffering results, but not before, that an unwise person realizes that he has been rendered miserable by desire. Desire is ever insatiable and greedy. It is said, "*Never is desire satiated by enjoyment just as fire is not put out by pouring ghee into it.*"⁵²

Next, the Lord points out where this enemy resides, for this would render killing the foe easy. He says, "*The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seats. Veiling knowledge through these, it deludes the embodied soul.*"⁵³ How is one to conquer desire? The Lord says, "*Therefore, O great one amongst the Bharatas, restrain the senses first and cast off this sinful thing which is destructive of direct and indirect knowledge.*"⁵⁴

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*'s second chapter itself, the Lord had indicated that the senses are dangerous, for they forcibly carry away the mind of even a striving wise man.⁵⁵ So to conquer desire, it is essential that the senses be restrained. That much alone is not sufficient. The mind and intellect too are, after all, the seats of desire. Therefore, according to the Lord,

one must comprehend the *Ātman*, which is superior to the intellect, attain spiritual absorption by means of the purified mind and thus slay desire.⁵⁶ When one knows that one is not the body-mind complex but is the *Ātman*, which is changeless and of the nature of pure consciousness, one ceases to desire anything phenomenal.

In the *Brhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* it is said, “*A man who desires is reborn. But the person who does not desire is never reborn. He who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desires have been attained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Ātman - such a person's organs do not depart (on his death and proceed to another body). Being but Brahman, he gets merged in Brahman.*”⁵⁷

Here, we have an account of how state of being without desires is attained. When a person realizes that the *Ātman* alone exists and that there is nothing apart from It, then he attains all objects of desire. After all, for him, there is no object of desire distinct from the *Ātman* that is himself. As all objects of desire have been obtained by him, desires leave him. Normally, gratification of a desire produces only temporary silencing of that desire; longing rises again, with force. In the case of the knower of the *Ātman* the fulfilment of desire is constant. Thus, it is appropriate to say that desires leave him. As desires have quit, he is without desire.

It is only by realizing the *Ātman* that the problem of desire can be completely solved. Else, desire can be checked but its seed remains. That is why the Lord specifies establishment in the *Ātman* as the way to slay desire. Restraint of the senses is an important step towards this end.

9. Three Impure Tendencies

It is important for one who is seriously striving to attain realization of *Brahman* to eliminate not only desire, anger and greed but also, three types of impure *vāsanās* or mental tendencies. This triad of *vāsanās* comprises *loka-vāsanā* or mental impression relating to the world, *śāstra-vāsanā* or mental tendency pertaining to the scripture and *deha-vāsanā* or latent mental imprint concerning the body. These *vāsanās* prevent the dawn of direct experience of the Truth. Thus, it is declared in the *Muktikā-upaniṣad*, “*True knowledge never dawns in a person with loka-vāsanā, śāstra-vāsanā and deha-vāsanā.*”⁵⁸

Vāsanās are the mental seeds owing to which feelings, such as of desire, crop up quickly without being preceded by any deliberation. A boy who has had the misfortune of being chased by a bull abruptly feels fear on encountering another bull at some other time. The *vāsanā* engendered by the initial experience is activated by the sight of the second bull and it

agitates the boy's mind with fright. Countless *vāsanās* abide in the mind, implanted and nurtured by the thoughts and experiences of the present and previous lives. Good *vāsanās* aid spiritual progress while the bad ones are antithetical to it. A bad *vāsanā* can be rendered impotent by assiduously cultivating a *vāsanā* of the opposite kind. So a spiritual aspirant should neutralize the impure *vāsanās* that plague him by developing appropriate pure *vāsanās*.

Loka-vāsanā pertains to a fixation of the form, "I shall always conduct myself in such a way that people do not censure me and, instead, they praise me." This *vāsanā* is an obstruction to a spiritual aspirant because it demands what cannot be achieved. There will always be at least some persons who disapprove of us or of what we have done.

Sītā was the exemplar of chastity. She even underwent an ordeal by fire to confirm Her purity. Yet, the people of Ayodhyā cast aspersions on Her and censured Lord Rāma Himself as being swayed by desire in accepting Her at Lanka. If such be the fate of spotless Divinities like Rāma and Sītā, what need be said about the fate of others? Hence, it has been stated, "There is no available means by which one can satisfy all people. So a man should ever do what is right for him."⁵⁹ The texts on liberation advise the spiritual aspirant to treat praise and censure alike; he should rid himself of *loka-vāsanā* by realizing the futility of attempting what it entails.

Some points need to be noted with reference to the eradication of *loka-vāsanā*. It does not imply that the aspirant nonchalantly dismisses the views of others. He may certainly utilize the observations of others for self-improvement; what he gives up is elation and displeasure when appreciated and depreciated respectively. Conquest of *loka-vāsanā* should be attempted in the context of other spiritual disciplines. For instance, it would not be beneficial for a boy who avoids bad company primarily because he wants to earn a good name at home to blindly check this aspect of *loka-vāsanā* without taking other steps. Further, one who tries to maintain an image of being a rebel, who does not care about what others say, is also under the grip of *loka-vāsanā*; conservation of that image is essential to him.

Śāstra-vāsanā is of three types; obsession with study, preoccupation with many subjects and marked squeamishness with regard to observances specified in the scripture. The *Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* contains a narrative that can serve to illustrate the first kind of *śāstra-vāsanā*.⁶⁰ Bharadvāja, the *Veda* says, seriously applied himself to the study of the *Vedas* for three successive births. In his fourth life too, he wished to strive incessantly. Taking pity on him, Indra explained the impossibility of learning all the

Vedas and then taught Bharadvāja about *Brahman* with attributes. While Bharadvāja’s study of the *Vedas* was not wrong, it was his obsession with mastering all the *Vedas* that was the problem. To get rid of this type of *śāstra-vāsanā*, the aspirant should impress upon himself that it is impossible to know a subject in its totality.

Addiction to the study of many subjects is also bad. The story of Durvāsas encountered in the *Kāvāṣeya-gītā* is pertinent. Durvāsas, it is said, once came to the assembly of Lord Śiva to pay his respects. He arrived with a cart-load of books. Nārada made fun of him by comparing him to an ass burdened with a great load on its back. Irritated and cured of his obsession, Durvāsas dumped his books into the sea. Thereafter, Śiva initiated him into the knowledge of the *Ātman*. One should realize that *Brahman* cannot be known by being preoccupied with books on a variety of topics. Thus, the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* declares, “*This Ātman is not attained through much study, through the power of grasping the meaning of the texts or through much mere hearing.*”⁶¹ Likewise, in the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*, we read that in spite of mastering a wide variety of subjects, Nārada was not free from grief as he had not realized the *Ātman*. To attain that sorrow-eradicating knowledge, he approached Sanatkumāra as a disciple.⁶² It has been said, “*What is the point in vainly chewing the filthy rag of talk about sacred treatises? Wise men should, by all means, seek the light of consciousness within.*”⁶³

Sincere practice of scripturally ordained rituals is essential for a person who has not progressed to the stage wherein he can dispense with rituals. However, undue fastidiousness with respect to religious observances, which characterizes the third type of *śāstra-vāsanā*, is an impediment. In the *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, we encounter the story of Dāsura which is relevant here. Dāsura, on account of his intense fastidiousness, was unable to locate a single spot in the whole world adequately pure for him to perform his religious rites.⁶⁴

Śrī Vidyāraṇya, who has elaborately dealt with the destruction of *vāsanās* in his *Jīvanmukti-viveka*, points out that *śāstra-vāsanā* leads to pride of learning and that humiliation somewhere at some time is inevitable. This is a reason, in addition to the impossibility of consummating the needs of *śāstra-vāsanā*, for the *śāstra-vāsanā* being labelled as impure.

Finally, we come to *deha-vāsanā*. This is of three kinds, the worst being marked by the identification of the *Ātman* with the body. Such identification is wrong because this view is opposed by the scripture and because it is the cause of misery. Unfortunately, it is almost universally

prevalent. Being difficult to uproot, it must be assiduously tackled by cultivating the right notion that the *Ātman* is distinct from the body.

The second type of *deha-vāsanā*, is characterized by concern with the acquisition of bodily grace. Motivated by the *vāsanā* of this kind, people strive, for example, to beautify themselves by the use of cosmetics and to purify themselves by bathing in rivers like the Ganga.

Cleanliness is laudable and is listed among the eight noble qualities that all should acquire. In the *Yoga-sāstra*, this is described as a facilitator of meditation.⁶⁵ What is problematic is the false belief that the body can really and consistently be made gracious or pure; this leads to effort to accomplish what is impossible.

Charm and sweet smell, for example, belong to the cosmetic and not to the body, which is an assemblage of fat, flesh, bones, etc. A pretty attire does not make the body different. Consumption of pepper to make the voice melodious is not necessarily effective nor is the effect unceasing. A bath makes the body externally clean but only for a short while. As for scriptural means, such as a bath in the Ganga, to attain purity, it must be noted that there are powerful scriptural passages to the effect that the body is ever impure.

The third form of *deha-vāsanā* is related to the second kind; it is characterized by the persistent effort to rid the body of flaws. Striving to eradicate disease comes under this head. The problem is that diseases cannot be always kept at bay nor can all ailments be cured.

As regards the body, the scripture is emphatic that it is, by its very nature, the repository of what is unclean. Thus, in the *Maitrī-upaniṣad*, we have, “O Lord, this body is malodorous, insubstantial and a compact mass of skin, bones, sinews, marrow, flesh, blood, semen, mucus, tears, rheum, urine, excreta, bile and phlegm. What sense is there in gratifying one’s desires in that?”⁶⁶

At this juncture, it is necessary to emphasize that the spiritual aspirant should be clean and ought not to be negligent of health. A sick, dirty body does not favour the practice of spiritual discipline. The aspirant should, however, get rid of his longing to appear attractive and give up preoccupation with health and freedom from bodily defects.

It is noteworthy that in the *Yoga-sūtras* it is specified that one who is established in purity develops dispassion towards the body.⁶⁷ Normally, it is one who bathes regularly who notices the foul odour of dry sweat

and the like, while a person who is habitually filthy is unlikely to do so. Thus, it is the clean person who is better equipped to recognize the innate impurity of the body.

10. God, the Universe's Cause

We encounter two types of causes: the material cause and the efficient cause. The first is responsible for the substance of which the effect is made, while the other is only instrumental in producing the effect. For instance, the material cause of a pot is mud, while its efficient cause is a potter. We see the world and with regard to it, there arises the question as to what constitutes its material cause. Is God that material cause or not? This issue has been dealt with by Bādarāyaṇa in the *Brahma-sūtras*. The *Vedāntic* position is that *Brahman* is not only the efficient but also the material cause of the universe.

Some objections have been raised against this stand. In the *Upaniṣads*, statements are found to the effect that God reflected prior to manifesting the cosmos. A potter thinks of a pot and then proceeds to make it. God too deliberated and then produced the universe. Thus, being similar to the potter, God should be regarded as only the efficient cause of the universe. In the world, we do not find any instance of a material cause reflecting and then generating an effect.

Another reason adduced is that the scriptures declare God to be the Lord of all. In the case of lordly beings like kings, only efficient causality is perceived and not material causality. Indeed, no king served as the material with which a palace or a road was constructed.

Yet another reason is that the world has many shortcomings. If an effect is tainted, then impurity must be there even in its material cause. So if God were the material cause of the universe, He would not be free from defilements. Not only is the proposition that God is flawed unappealing, it is refuted by the scripture. For instance, the *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* explicitly states that the Supreme is unchanging and taintless.⁶⁸ Hence, God cannot be affirmed to be the material cause of the cosmos.

On the basis of arguments of the form listed, it has been contended that God is the efficient but not the material cause of the world. Declaring the true view of the *Upaniṣads*, Bādarāyaṇa aphorises, “*Brahman must be the material cause as well so as not to contradict the proposition and the illustration.*”⁶⁹ We shall now consider this *Brahma-sūtra* further.

In the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*, we read of the sage Uddālaka Āruni querying his son Śvetaketu, “*Did you ask about that teaching through which the*

unheard of becomes heard, the unthought of becomes thought of and the unknown becomes known?"⁷⁰ On comprehending the efficient cause of an object, the object does not become known. On the other hand, as the effect has no existence apart from its material cause, knowledge of the material cause does make the effect known. So the proposition of Uddālaka relates to the material cause of the universe. As the *Upaniṣad* explains in depth that by knowing *Brahman*, everything becomes known, the Supreme must be the material cause. Else, the proposition would get contradicted.

In the other *Upaniṣads* too, we find a similar basic premise. Thus, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, there is the proposition of Yājñavalkya, "My dear, all this becomes known when the *Ātman* is seen, heard of, reflected on and meditated upon."⁷¹ In the *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad*, the student Śaunaka asks his *Guru* Angirasa, "What is that on knowing which all this becomes known?"⁷² In all these cases, the basic premise would get falsified if God were only the efficient cause.

Reverting to the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*, we find Uddālaka giving several illustrations that clearly reference a material cause. For instance, he says, "By knowing a clod of mud, all objects made of mud become known. All modification has speech as its support and is merely a name. It is true only as mud."⁷³ When mud is known, all products of mud, such as pots, can be regarded as known, for a pot has no existence apart from mud and is basically a name given to a particular shape of mud. Another example of Uddālaka is, "By knowing a piece of gold, all things made of gold become known."⁷⁴ All such illustrations would become inappropriate if the Supreme were just the efficient cause.

Thus, the *Brahma-sūtra* in question points out that the proposition and the illustrations of the scripture will be contradicted unless the Supreme is the material cause of the universe. The *sūtra* specifies by the words "material cause as well" that *Brahman* is the efficient cause too. Indeed, if the universe were to have a maker other than God, it would be impossible to have knowledge of everything just from the knowledge of the Supreme and as such the proposition and illustration would not be apt. Further, the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* explicitly declares that prior to the manifestation of the universe, there was just the Supreme, one alone, without a second; the Supreme's deliberation followed by creation is also spoken of.⁷⁵ Thus, the Supreme is the efficient cause too.

An objection considered earlier was that nowhere in the world do we find a material cause that deliberates and generates an effect. This is inapt in the case of the universe's cause, which can be known from the *Vedas* alone. From the *Upaniṣads* it can even be comprehended that *Brahman*

does not undergo any actual change to become the universe. On the other hand, remaining perfect, It appears as the world due to *Māyā*, just as a rope, not apprehended correctly in dim light, appears to be a snake or a crack in the ground.

11. God is Neither Partial Nor Cruel

There is tremendous inequality in the cosmos. The *devas* are said to enjoy great felicity in heaven and are endowed with powers of the kind that men are not. Humans constitute a middling class while animals lie lower than man in creation.

Apart from the fact of inequality, there is great suffering too. All animals and humans are subject to death and the inhabitants of heaven have to return to the world of mortals on the exhaustion of the stock of virtue that enabled them to enter heaven in the first place. Even young, innocent babies are, sometimes, seen to be in great suffering. Disease, infirmity and such else are widely encountered and result in unhappiness.

The *Vedāntic* conclusion is that *Brahman* is the material and efficient cause of the universe. Thus, God ought to be the one who creates this cosmos with its great inequality and its sufferings. Would not such a God be partial by virtue of His ordaining inequality? Further, would not God be cruel by being the originator of great misery? Surely, a partial and cruel God is no true God at all. This conclusion follows from the proposition that God is the efficient cause of the universe. As it is thoroughly unacceptable, God could not have been the creator of the universe. This is one of the objections considered and rebutted in the *Brahma-sūtras* by Bādarāyaṇa.

Bādarāyaṇa aphorises, “*Partiality and cruelty are not there in God owing to His consideration of other factors, for the Vedas so show.*”⁷⁶ If God had created this world arbitrarily, without taking any factor into consideration, He would have been open to the charges of partiality and cruelty. However, God is blameless since this unequal creation is brought about by Him in conformity with the virtues and vices of various beings. God is like rain. Rainfall is the common cause for the growth of a variety of crops such as paddy and barley. However, the differences between crops stem from the disparity in the seeds. It is not rain that makes a barley seed sprout into a crop different from paddy. Like rain, God is the common cause for the birth of the *devas*, humans, etc. But it is the great merit acquired by the *deva* in an earlier birth that results in his being born a *deva*; a man is so born because of his having earlier earned merit as well as demerit.

How is it known that God creates in accordance with the virtues and vices of beings? The aphorist points out, “*for the Vedas so show.*”⁷⁷ For instance, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* teaches, “*It becomes virtuous through good deeds and vile through evil acts.*”⁷⁸ In the *Bhagavad-gītā* the Lord tells Arjuna, “*In whatever way people worship Me, in the same way do I consummate their desires.*”⁷⁹

The aphorist next presents another objection and answers it. “*If it be contended that this is impossible for want of any distinction in work prior to creation, we reply ‘No’, because the transmigratory state has no beginning.*”⁸⁰ Prior to the first creation of the cosmos, there could have been no *karma*, virtuous or vile in accordance with which God could have created a world of inequality and suffering. The *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* says, “*In the beginning, O good looking one, all this was but the Truth, one alone without a second*”⁸¹ and thereby rules out differences. Therefore, if God were the creator of the universe, He must be the one responsible for the inequalities at the start of creation. At best, He can rely thereafter on the good and bad acts of persons to reward or punish them in their subsequent lives. Thus, God must be guilty of partiality and cruelty by virtue of His having introduced inequality and suffering at the very start of creation.

The *Vedāntin* answers this objection by saying that the problem mentioned does not arise, for the transmigratory state has no beginning. There is nothing like the absolute starting point. Every cycle of creation is preceded by another cycle which provides the requisite disparity in the merit and demerit of creatures.

How is it known that the transmigratory state has no beginning? Bādarāyaṇa answers, “*This is logical and it is met with in the scriptures.*”⁸² Suppose the cosmos with its unequal inhabitants had an absolute starting point. Its emergence must then have been capricious. God could not have been responsible for the inequality. This is because He operates, as seen earlier, on the basis of the past *karma* of creatures and there could have been no *karma* prior to the origin of the universe with beings. *Avidyā* too could not have been the cause of inequality as, without the involvement of past *karma*, it is, per se, homogeneous. Hence, a universe with an absolute starting point could have come into being only by chance.

If events can occur capriciously, then it should be quite possible for beings to have happiness or misery for no rhyme or reason. A man’s good and bad deeds could go unrewarded and unpunished respectively. Further, if chance occurrences are possible, there is nothing to preclude the accidental rebirth of liberated souls. All this is unacceptable and

absurd. On the other hand, everything falls into place if the transmigratory state has no origin. The relationship between the condition prior to and after the start of each cycle of creation could then be on par with a seed and a sprout.

The scriptures too declare transmigratory existence to be devoid of a starting point. For instance, the *Ṛg-veda* teaches, “*The Lord devised the sun and the moon as before.*”⁸³ The *Bhagavadgītā* states, “*Its form is not perceived here as such neither its end, nor its origin, nor its continuance.*”⁸⁴ The teaching of the *Purāṇas* also is that the past and future cycles of creation are without number.

To conclude, God is not guilty of partiality or cruelty because He creates in accordance with the past merit and demerit of each creature. There is no first creation prior to which there was no merit or demerit for God to consider. There is thus no flaw in the *Vedāntic* conclusion that *Brahman* is the material and efficient cause of everything.

12. No Total Change of Brahman into the World

In his *Brahma-sūtras*, Bādarāyaṇa has presented and refuted several objections to the *Vedāntic* conclusion that *Brahman* is the material and efficient cause of the universe. One such objection is tersely stated by Bādarāyaṇa as follows: “*There shall arise the eventuality of wholesome transformation or of the violation of Upaniṣadic statements about (Brahman) being without parts.*”⁸⁵ If *Brahman* is to be the material cause of the cosmos, then either the whole of *Brahman* must become the world or a part of the Supreme must undergo modification. Both these options are unacceptable.

The first alternative is inappropriate because the *Upaniṣadic* instruction about the realization of *Brahman* would become purposeless. After all, if *Brahman* wholly becomes the world, then no Supreme transcendent of the cosmos would remain to be known. As for *Brahman* in the form of the world, it is already being perceived and so scriptural advice in this regard is not required. The *Upaniṣadic* declaration that in deep sleep, the individual soul becomes absorbed in the Supreme would get falsified, for there would be no *Brahman* other than the cosmos into which such absorption could take place. This apart, the teaching that *Brahman* is unborn would have to be discarded. The second alternative too is inappropriate. Only if *Brahman* has parts can a portion of the Supreme become the world and the rest remain transcendent. Requiring *Brahman* to have parts would imply negation of the numerous *Upaniṣadic* passages to the effect that the Supreme is without parts and admits no

distinctions. Moreover, no entity that has parts can be eternal. So if *Brahman* has parts, it cannot be eternal as taught by the scripture.

Bādarāyaṇa commences the *Vedāntin*'s reply with the aphorism, “(But there is no complete transformation) on the authority of the *Upaniṣads* and on account of *Brahman* being known from the *Upaniṣads* alone.”⁸⁶ The fundamental contention of the *Vedāntin* is that his position is not defective as it is based on the *Upaniṣads*. *Brahman* can be known from the *Upaniṣads* alone and not by mere logic. It is said, “Do not argue about those things that are beyond thought. The characteristic of a thing beyond thought is in its being other than what lies within the realm of *prakṛti* or nature.”⁸⁷ A supersensible entity such as *Brahman* can be truly comprehended only through the scripture. As for the *Upaniṣads*, they unambiguously state that *Brahman* is without parts and devoid of modifications as also that the Supreme is the material and efficient cause of the universe.

That the manifestation of the cosmos does not obliterate *Brahman*'s transcendence is, for example, clear from the following statement of the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*: “His glory extends that far. The all-pervading Being is higher than that. All things are covered by one foot of His. The imperishable three-footed One is established in His own Self.”⁸⁸ Had *Brahman* been fully transformed into the world, the same *Upaniṣad* would not have said with regard to deep sleep that the individual soul then becomes absorbed in the Supreme.⁸⁹

Here, the opponent may object that even the *Veda* cannot teach what is patently self-contradictory by saying that the *Brahman*, which is without parts, changes partially into the world. The *Vedāntin* readily responds that there is nothing incongruous about the scriptural teaching. This is because the *Upaniṣads* intend to show that while *Brahman*, in Its real aspect, is changeless and transcendent, variety is imagined on It through *avidyā*. For instance, the moon is one but appears to be multiple to a man afflicted by diplopia or polyopia. Since the differences of name and form are conjured by *avidyā*, the *Brahman*'s being without parts is not affected. At the same time, *Brahman* seems to be partially transformed into the world.

The *Veda* does not aim at establishing any real transformation of *Brahman* into the world. Indeed, no fruit would accrue to a person by knowing about such a transformation. The *Upaniṣad* would not teach that which confers no benefit. The texts about transformation actually have another aim and that is to show that there is nothing whatsoever apart from *Brahman*, which is transcendent of all phenomenal processes. Such a

correct knowledge of *Brahman* has the invaluable fruit of freeing one from transmigratory existence.

Bādarāyaṇa continues the *Vedāntin*'s response with the aphorism, "*Since in the individual soul also, as in the case of devas, etc., diverse creation occurs. Similarly, in the case of Brahman.*"⁹⁰ In the dream state, without any change of nature in the individual soul, there appears the multifaceted world of dreams. The *Brhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* says, "*There are no chariots nor animals to be yoked to them nor paths there. But he creates chariots, animals and roads.*"⁹¹ The *devas* are said to be able to display diversity without undergoing personal modifications. In the world too, a magician may, by means of hypnotism, cause another to see several objects without himself being personally affected in any way. Similarly, even in the case of *Brahman*, there can be diverse creation without *Brahman* actually undergoing transformation or having parts.

To conclude, the *Vedāntin*'s position that *Brahman* is the material cause of the universe and yet without parts and immaculate is not defective. It is based on the scripture, which is the authority in such matters. *Avidyā* is what makes the non-dual Supreme appear as diverse. Supportive illustrations too are available.

13. The Greatest Secret

Lord Kṛṣṇa, in the course of His advice to Arjuna, extols the sacred doctrine and then reveals it. He says, "*To you who do not cavil, I shall now declare the greatest secret which is knowledge coupled with direct experience, having known which you will be liberated from transmigratory existence. This is the sovereign knowledge, the sovereign secret and the sovereign purifier. It is directly realizable, unopposed to dharma, very easy to perform and imperishable.*"⁹² This eulogy is intended to make the hearer interested and focused.

The Lord then proceeds to directly expound the sacred doctrine. He says, "*In My unmanifest form I pervade the entire world. All beings dwell in Me but I do not dwell in them. Nor do beings dwell in Me. Behold My divine Yoga! Sustaining all beings, but not dwelling in them - such is My Self, the cause of all beings.*"⁹³

At the first sight, the teaching of the Lord appears to be full of contradictions. How? The Lord declares that everything is pervaded by Him and that all beings dwell in Him and immediately follows this up by saying that neither does He dwell in beings nor beings in Him. Surely, the Lord would not speak thus in riddles unless the nature of the teaching demands such an exposition.

If we take the world to be real then the contradiction cannot be properly resolved. On the other hand, consider a rope mistaken, in semi-darkness, to be a snake. Can the apparent snake be visualised in the absence of the rope? No. Can there be any portion of the snake where the rope is not there? Here again the answer is, “No.” Since the snake has no existence apart from the rope and since whatever portion of the snake is seen, the rope is also there, it would not be wrong to say that the snake is entirely pervaded by the rope. Further, as the rope is the substratum of the illusory snake it can be said that the snake dwells in or has as its substratum, the rope. No doubt such statements can be made but are they true when examined with greater insight? No, for neither does the rope really pervade the snake nor does the snake really rest on the rope. This is because there is no real snake at all. Only if the snake were to be real could a real pervasion take place. Similar is the case with the *Ātman*. The *Ātman* being the substratum of everything without which nothing can exist, it can be said that everything rests in the *Ātman*. On the other hand, if one were to view the scene with greater insight it would be impossible to assert that the *Ātman* really dwells in all beings or that all beings really dwell in the *Ātman*. The Lord took recourse to such a mode of exposition to drive home the point that the *Ātman* alone really exists and that the world is illusory.

Adducing His seemingly inexplicable, contradictory statements, the Lord clarifies, “*Behold My divine Yoga (My divine function).*”⁹⁴ Earlier, the Lord had spoken of His *Māyā* by saying, “*Indeed this Māyā of Mine, composed of guṇas, is hard to surmount.*”⁹⁵ Hence, it is clear that the Lord makes known that the world appears in Him only on account of *Māyā* but not in reality and that He is totally unaffected by its appearance. The Lord has taken recourse in other places too to the mode of exposition followed here. For example, in Chapter 13, He has said about the *Ātman*, “*Shining by the functions of all the senses and yet without senses, unattached and yet supporting all, devoid of qualities.*”⁹⁶

In the verses taken up for consideration, we found the Lord saying, “My Self is the cause of beings.” Does this mean that the Lord has an *Ātman* distinct from Him? No, He Himself has declared later, “*I am the Ātman.*”⁹⁷ Hence, here the Lord has merely resorted to common parlance in making such an utterance. Certainly, no one can say that the Lord is ignorant. Even a knower of the Self may use the word “I” in conformity with an ordinary person. In the *Pancadaśī*, it is explained that when the knower of the Truth says, “I go” etc., he refers to the body but when he says, “I am the conscious Self”, he refers to the changeless *Ātman*.⁹⁸ The Lord’s saying, “My self is the cause” rather than, “I am the cause” is like this.

14. Atman is Self-effulgent Consciousness

In the *Jyotir-brāhmaṇa* of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, the *Ātman* is taught to be of the nature of unchanging, self-effulgent consciousness. To indicate the mode of imparting and receiving the teaching and to eulogise knowledge, the *Upaniṣad* resorts to a story involving a disciple, emperor Janaka, and his *Guru*, Sage Yājñavalkya. Janaka initiates the dialogue by asking his *Guru*, “What serves as the light for a person?”⁹⁹

Bhagavatpāda has compassionately conveyed the teaching of the *Jyotir-brāhmaṇa* in a simple, single verse; this is his composition, “*Eka-ślokī*.” The *Eka-ślokī* describes the conversation between a *Guru* and his disciple. Unusually, it is the teacher and not the student who poses the queries. By a series of questions, each following a reasoned reply from the disciple, the *Guru* leads the disciple to the realization that the *Ātman* is the ultimate light. Since the disciple is induced to think deeply, he is not troubled by inattention, doubts and lack of conviction at any stage of the instruction process.

Imitating Janaka, the *Guru* asks, “What is your light?” The import of the question is, “What light enables you to perceive objects and to engage in activity?” The disciple responds, “During the day, the sun serves as my light.” Once the sun has set, human activity does not automatically cease. At night, people resort to lamps. Not only man-made sources of light but also natural sources facilitate perception and activity. For instance, on a full-moon night people can find their way home. Therefore, the disciple continues, “At night, lamps, etc., serve as my light.”

It is not the intention of the *Guru* to stop with getting the disciple to give this familiar answer. Hence, he probes further by saying, “That may be so. What is the light that enables you to perceive the sun and lamps?” The sun, moon, stars and lamps are luminous but are objects that are perceived. Sounds may be present but one who is deaf will not be able to hear them. Thus, sounds are not self-revealing. Likewise, the sources of light spoken of by the disciple are themselves in need of being revealed by another “light.”

The disciple thinks about the question and concludes that it is by means of his organ of sight that he apprehends any external source of light. His senses are present unimpaired even in the absence of external factors. For instance, when one enters a dark room just because one does not perceive objects, it does not mean that one has lost one’s power of sight. After all, one apprehends darkness. On the other hand, when the organ of sight does not function, none of the external sources of light such as

the sun can enable one to see; they themselves remain unseen. Thus, the disciple answers, “The eye.”

The *Guru* leads the disciple further by asking, “At times when the eye is closed, etc., what is your light?” One can sense whether the eyes are open or closed. Also, one can comprehend that one is able to see clearly or that one’s vision is significantly impaired. Thus, the eye itself is an object of apprehension. When one is quite inattentive, though the eyes are open and there is adequate light, one does not cognise objects, the sun and the state of the eyes. On the other hand, one is able to think when the eyes are closed. Analysing thus, the disciple answers, “The intellect.”

The teacher decides to clinch the issue by taking the disciple one step further. He queries, “What is the light by which the intellect is perceived?” People are aware of the presence and absence of their thoughts. Thus, the mind itself is an object of cognition. Just as the sun cannot reveal itself and the eye cannot perceive itself, the intellect too does not, on its own, apprehend itself. After all, a thing cannot be the subject and object simultaneously. It cannot even be assumed that each thought is revealed by another thought. This is because if a thought were required to generate awareness of another thought, then yet another thought would be required to grasp the thought that has for its object the first thought. Thus, there would be the fallacy of infinite regress.

An alternative interpretation of the teacher’s words is also possible. The teacher’s query can even be taken as, “When the intellect is not seen, what is your light?” When one is in deep sleep or in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, the acme of *yoga*, thoughts are not present. Still there is awareness. Thus, on waking up from sleep one recognises, “I slept happily. I did not know anything.” This recognition could not have arisen if awareness were totally absent during sleep. In the interval between thoughts too, awareness is there.

Thinking deeply over his *Guru*’s query, the disciple answers, “I am there.” After all, it is he who perceives the rise and fall of thoughts as also a state of thoughtlessness. The disciple realizes that he must be of the nature of awareness. Appreciating the disciple’s understanding, the *Guru* presents the conclusion, “Therefore, you are the ultimate light.” Suppose the one who illumines the intellect were not self-effulgent. Then another perceiver would be required to reveal that illuminator of the intellect. To reveal the second perceiver, a third perceiver could be needed. There would be infinite regress. Thus, what apprehends the functioning of the mind is self-effulgent consciousness. The disciple cannot but be that self-effulgent consciousness. Not merely on account of intellectual

understanding but also from direct experience, the disciple asserts, “Yes I am, O Lord!”

Be it the waking state, the dream state or the state of deep sleep, the *Ātman* is the unchanging self-effulgent witness; only what is apprehended changes. Thus, in connection with deep sleep wherein consciousness supposedly ceases to be, Yājñavalkya teaches Janaka, “*The knower’s function of knowing can never be lost as It is imperishable. However, there is no second thing separate from It which It can know.*”¹⁰⁰ A rough example is that of a man with normal eyesight entering a dark room. In *nirvikalpa-samādhi* too, duality is not apprehended; the *Ātman*, however, shines clearly on Its own without the thick veil of *avidyā* that marks dreamless sleep. To conclude, the *Ātman* is unchanging, self-effulgent consciousness.

15. Liberation of Sages with Divine Missions

Can one who has realized the Truth be reborn? In view of the explicit assertion of the *Upaniṣads* that knowledge of the Supreme is the cause of liberation, this query would appear to be dispensable. It would perhaps be on par with wondering whether or not the hunger of a man who has begun eating a full meal will be appeased. The question, however, is pertinent because in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* we come across stories of knowers of the Truth being reborn.

For instance, it is written in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that the great sage and mind-born son of Brahmā, Vaśiṣṭha, lost his body due to a curse of King Nimi. Vaśiṣṭha sought Brahmā’s help and, in accordance with Brahmā’s advice, acquired a new body by being born of Mitra-Varuṇa.¹⁰¹ There is no room for doubt that Vaśiṣṭha was completely enlightened.

The *Mahābhārata* informs us that Apāntaratamas, an ancient seer and teacher of the *Vedas*, was directed by Viṣṇu to take birth at the junction of the *Dvāpara* and *Kali yugas* as Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana, commonly known as Vyāsa.¹⁰² It is narrated that sage Bhṛgu and others were reborn at the sacrifice of Varuṇa¹⁰³ and that the exalted Sanatkumāra acceded to the wish of Rudra and was reborn as Skanda.¹⁰⁴ Apāntaratamas, Bhṛgu and Sanatkumāra and were decidedly knowers of *Brahman* that is devoid of all attributes. More than one birth of the celestial sage Nārada has been spoken of. Supportive evidence is available in the *mantra* and corroborative portions of the *Vedas*.

From the various accounts, it can be seen that some sages acquired new bodies after the fall of their original ones; some others retained their bodies but, by their powers of *yoga*, simultaneously entered multiple

bodies. These sages are described by the *Smṛtis* as possessed of the realization of the full import of the *Vedas*.

In the light of all this, the *prima facie* position is that knowledge of *Brahman* devoid of all attributes sometimes results in liberation from transmigratory existence and sometimes it does not. Rebutting the *prima facie* view, Bādarāyaṇa aphorises, in his *Brahma-sūtras*, “*For those with a mission, there is corporeal existence till the completion of the mission.*”¹⁰⁵ We shall consider this *sūtra* in the light of Bhagavatpāda’s commentary on it. Realization of the Truth never fails to confer liberation. A Vedic rite such as *Jyotiṣtoma* results in the performer of the sacrifice attaining heaven after his death, which may occur long after the completion of the rite. So there is at least some occasion for a man of inadequate faith to fear whether the result of a rite will accrue or not. On the other hand, there is no such scope for uncertainty in the case of knowledge of the Supreme as it produces an immediately-experienced, direct result. Thus, on realizing the Truth, one becomes liberated even while alive. Persons like Vaśiṣṭha were not exceptions.

Knowledge burns away the seeds of *karma* or action. The *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* declares, “*When the Supreme that is both high and low is seen, the knot of the heart gets torn, all doubts cease and all one’s actions become dissipated.*”¹⁰⁶ In the *Bhagavad-gītā* too, we find the Lord stating, “*O Arjuna, just as fire reduces fuel to ashes, the fire of knowledge burns away all actions.*”¹⁰⁷ After the dawn of realization, no bodily or mental activity of the sage leads to the acquisition of merit or demerit that must be exhausted by taking a future birth. This is true even of knowers like Vaśiṣṭha.

Knowledge ensures that the store of actions of the past birth that would normally have begun to bear fruit only in future births becomes thoroughly infructuous. All that remains is *prārabdha-karma*, the actions of the past that have already started yielding results. The *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* thus teaches, “*His delay is only as long as his body does not fall. Then he merges into Brahman.*”¹⁰⁸ On the *prārabdha-karma* getting exhausted, the body of the one liberated while alive ceases to function and the sage attains disembodied liberation. The norm is that *prarabdha-karma* ends with the very life in which one attains mature knowledge.

There is definitely no difference between knowers of the Truth, such as Vaśiṣṭha, who are entrusted by God with special missions and other knowers of the Truth in their being untainted by physical and mental activity and being liberated even while alive. However, a special feature in the case of the former class is that corporeal existence lasts not till the

fall of the body in which realization of the Supreme dawns but till the mission ends. It is as though a person like Vaśiṣṭha is a knower of the Truth with an extraordinary *prarabdha-karma* that gets fully exhausted only when the divine mission undertaken ends. At the end of the God-entrusted task, disembodied abidance as *Brahman* occurs just as it does in the case of a normal knower on the fall of his body.

Great ones such as Apāntaratamas are allocated by God the holy task of bringing about the well-being of the world by propagation of the *Vedas*, etc. Hence, their corporeal state is regulated by their mission itself. These sages are divine and for the task undertaken they move from one body to another with perfect liberty just as a man moves from one house to another. Whatever residual *karmas* or actions have begun to fructify they shed once and for all in the various lives. All through, they retain complete memories of their true identity. Being masters of the materials needed to produce bodies, they create new bodies for themselves and possess the bodies one or more at a time.

It is stated in the *Mahābhārata* that an exponent of *Brahman* named Sulabhā wished to have a discussion with the emperor Janaka. So she set aside her body and entered that of Janaka. Having finished her discussion with him, she again took possession of her body.¹⁰⁹ This story furnishes an example of how a great one may freely move from one body to another.

Sages such as Vaśiṣṭha cannot be placed on par with *jāti-smaras*, who are persons with the special capacity to recollect their past lives. This is because the sages have complete enlightenment, are fully independent in their movements and remember their identities under all circumstances. Accordingly, even after taking birth through Mitra-Varuṇa, Vaśiṣṭha continued to be portrayed by the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* as being Vaśiṣṭha, the mind-born son of Brahma.

To conclude, there is no exception to the rule that realization of the Truth gives rise to liberation. In the case of normal knowers of the Supreme, there is total disembodiment after death. On the other hand, persons entrusted with holy missions by God continue to have corporeal existence till the completion of their special tasks. Then, they attain disembodied abidance as *Brahman*.

1 *Gautama-dharma-sūtras* I.8.23, 24

2 *Yoga-sūtra* I.33

3 *Rāmāyaṇa* II.1.11

4 *Subhāṣita*

5 *Bhagavadgītā* IX.1

6 *Prabodha-sudhākara* IV.59

7 *Śārṅgadhara-paddhati* 273

8 *Manu-smṛti* IV.138

9 *Bhagavadgītā* XVII.15

10 *Sabhārañjana-śataka* 38

- 11 *Pañcadaśī* VI.274
 12 *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* VII.10.4
 13 *Śivānanda-laharī* 19
 14 *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* IX.4.63
 15 *Bhagavadgītā* VII.18
 16 *Subhāṣita-ratnakośa* 4.7
 17 *Śiva-bhujāṅga-stotra* 12
 18 *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra* I.2
 19 *Devī-māhātmya* I.81
 20 *Saundarya-laharī* 22
 21 *Rāmāyaṇa* 6.18.33, 34
 22 *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* XI.14.16
 23 *Śivānanda-laharī* 61
 24 *Bhagavadgītā* XII.8-11
 25 *Bhagavadgītā* XVIII.65
 26 *Bhagavadgītā* II.20
 27 *Bhagavadgītā* XIII.31
 28 *Bhagavadgītā* III.27
 29 *Bhagavadgītā* XIII.29
 30 *Bhagavadgītā* IV.39
 31 *Bhagavadgītā* VII.14
 32 *Bhagavadgītā* X.11
 33 *Bhagavadgītā* IV.37
 34 *Bhagavadgītā* VI.3
 35 *Bhagavadgītā* II.27
 36 *Bhagavadgītā* XVIII.5
 37 *Bhagavadgītā* VI.29
 38 *Bhagavadgītā* X.20
 39 *Bhagavadgītā* XIII.2
 40 *Bhagavadgītā* VII.19
 41 *Garuḍa-purāṇa* II.49.64
 (Venkateswara Steam Press Ed.)
 42 *Kalividambana* 90
 43 *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* I.2.24
 44 *Brahma-sūtra* I.1.1
 45 *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* I.3.3, 4
 46 *Bhagavadgītā* II.60
 47 *Bhagavadgītā* III.36
 48 *Bhagavadgītā* III.37
 49 *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* VI.5.74
 50 *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* VI.5.78
 51 *Bhagavadgītā* III.38
 52 *Manu-smṛti* II.94
 53 *Bhagavadgītā* III.40
 54 *Bhagavadgītā* III.41
 55 *Bhagavadgītā* II.60
 56 *Bhagavadgītā* III.43
 57 *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* IV.4.6
 58 *Muktika-upaniṣad* II.2
 59 (?) cited in *Jīvanmuktī-viveka*
 60 *Taiittīrīya-brāhmaṇa* III.10.11.3
 61 *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* I.2.23
 62 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VII.1.1-3
 63 *Muktika-upaniṣad* II.63
 64 (*Laghu-*)*Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* IV.2
 65 *Yoga-sūtra* II.41
 66 *Maitrī-upaniṣad* I.1.2
 67 *Yoga-sūtra* II.40
 68 *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* VI.19
 69 *Brahma-sūtra* I.4.23
 70 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.1.2
 71 *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* II.4.5
 72 *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* I.1.2
 73 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.1.4
 74 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.1.5
 75 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.2.2, 3
 76 *Brahma-sūtra* II.134
 77 *Brahma-sūtra* II.134
 78 *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* III.2.13
 79 *Bhagavadgītā* IV.11
 80 *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.35
 81 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.2.1
 82 *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.36
 83 *Ṛg-veda-samhitā* X.190.3
 84 *Bhagavadgītā* XV.3
 85 *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.26
 86 *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.27
 87 *Mahābhārata* 6.6.11
 88 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* III.12.6
 89 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.8.1
 90 *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.28
 91 *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* IV.3.10
 92 *Bhagavadgītā* IX.2, 3
 93 *Bhagavadgītā* IX.4, 5
 94 *Bhagavadgītā* IX.5
 95 *Bhagavadgītā* VII.14
 96 *Bhagavadgītā* XIII.14
 97 *Bhagavadgītā* X.20
 98 *Pañcadaśī* VII.12, 13
 99 *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* IV.3.2
 100 *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* IV.3.23
 101 *Rāmāyaṇa* VII.55.3-VII.57.8
 102 *Mahābhārata* 12.337.37-57
 103 *Vāyu-purāṇa* II.4.21-22
 104 *Tripurā-rahasya* I.37.120-135
 105 *Brahma-sūtra* III.3.32
 106 *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* II.2.8
 107 *Bhagavadgītā* IV.37
 108 *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VI.14.2
 109 *Mahābhārata* 12.308.3-191

PART 4

INCISIVE ESSAYS

The English translations of three of the essays penned by His Holiness in Kannada in the 1950s have been included here. The translations of the numerous citations in Sanskrit in the original have been included in the body of the text and the references given in the foot notes. The depth, accuracy and comprehensiveness with which His Holiness has covered the three topics in the light of the scripture are matched by His presenting them in an effortlessly comprehensible manner.

1. WORSHIP OF ĪŚVARA

People desire to escape death. But experience shows that this desire is not fulfilled. The Lord has said: “*For anyone who is born, death is definite and for the one who dies, rebirth is certain. Hence, with regard to what is unavoidable, you ought not to grieve.*”¹

We have been born now. The Lord speaks of rebirth. If there is to be a rebirth in future, death must occur first. The exit of the *prāṇas* (life-breaths) from the body is said to be death. While we do not want our *prāṇas* to leave the body, in whose case will there actually be no departure of the *prāṇas* from the present body and entry into another body? The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* says: “*The enlightened one’s prāṇas do not depart from the body,*”² and, “*They dissolve into him alone.*”³

In the case of a *jñānin*, the one who has realized the Supreme, the subtle body comprising the mind, organs and the *prāṇas* does not depart from the gross body and proceed to another body. Instead, the earth, water, fire, air and *ākāśa* that constitute the body dissolve into their respective universal forms. The *Veda* asserts that there is no death for a *jñānin*: “*It is only on knowing Him that one transcends death.*”⁴ He who is without death cannot have any rebirth. Statements such as, “*Birth, death and dwelling in the mother’s womb occur again and again,*”⁵ are not applicable to a *jñānin*. So if people are to fulfil their desire for freedom from death, it is imperative that they acquire *jñāna*, the realization of the Truth. For this, it is necessary that they secure the means for the dawn of realization.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* teaches: “*The Ātman, my dear, should be realized, heard of, reflected on and firmly meditated upon.*”⁶ Thus, the proximate means to realize the *Ātman*, which is none other than *Brahman*, are *śravaṇa*, the hearing of the Truth from the *Guru* and the scripture, *manana*, reasoning in accordance with what has been taught to resolve all doubts, and *nididhyāsana*, steadfast, one-pointed concentration of the mind on the *Ātman*. A tetrad of qualifications is needed for one to engage in *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. These are *viveka*, discrimination, *vairāgya*, dispassion, *śamādi-ṣaṭka-sampatti*, possession in abundance of the set of six qualities beginning with mind control, and *mumukṣutva*, the desire for freedom from transmigratory existence. The set of six referred

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* II.27

² *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* IV.4.26

³ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* III.2.11

⁴ *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* III.8

⁵ *Mohamudgara* 21

⁶ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* II.4.5

to comprises *śama*, the control of the mind, *dama*, the control of the senses, *uparati*, withdrawal from activities, *titikṣā*, forbearance, *śraddhā*, faith, and *samādhāna*, focus. If the four qualifications are not present in a person, his attempt at *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* will not bear fruit in the form of the dawn of the realization of the Supreme. Just as *upanayana* (investiture with the sacred thread) is a prerequisite for a person to perform a *Vedic yāga*, these four qualifications are needed here. However, they are uncommon.

What is one who is not yet qualified to engage in *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* to do? It is said: “*Since our mind has not withdrawn from the world in its entirety, we cannot practise śravaṇa and manana. However, the anguish caused by sense-objects is unbearable. To end it, we practise the worship of God’s feet.*” *Bhakti* is what should be resorted to.

The nature of devotion

By nature, we are emotionally involved with something or the other. It is said: “*A child is engrossed with play. A lad dotes on a maiden. An aged one is given to worrying. But none is attached to the Supreme Brahman.*”¹ It is patent that we are not free from attachments at any time and that it would be well-nigh impossible for us to give up fondness altogether. However, what we can do is to turn our fondness towards the Lord; if we do so, we will benefit greatly. Fondness is a *vr̥tti* of the mind; it needs an object and cannot subsist without one. The emotional pull towards children is called ‘*vātsalya*’, that towards the wife is named ‘*rati*’ and that towards the revered is termed ‘*bhakti*’. Nārada has defined *bhakti* thus in his *Bhakti-sūtras*: “*Bhakti is of the nature of supreme love for God.*”² A devotee with this ‘*parama-prema*, supreme love’ just cannot exist without God; he who can manage for even a moment without love for God does not have this *parama-prema*. Such is the characteristic of consummate *bhakti*. A devotee with this *bhakti* attains God and transcends dotage and death.

According to the *Taittirīya-upaniṣad*, the intrinsic nature of God is as follows: “*Brahman is absolute existence, pure consciousness and infinite (unlimited by space, time and objects).*”³ The Supreme is, thus, *nirguṇa*, bereft of qualities. The good qualities of an entity engender fondness for that entity. As God is without qualities, how is one to love Him? The Supreme, though intrinsically devoid of qualities, appears with wonderful qualities that thoroughly facilitate devotion. The Lord has said: “*Though*

¹ *Mohamudgara* 7

² *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra* I.2

³ *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* II.1.1

*I am without birth, have, by nature, a power of knowledge that never wanes and am the Lord of beings, by subjugating My Prakṛti, I take birth by My own Māyā.*¹ The *Veda* teaches, “*He that is unborn manifests in many ways.*”² Thus, it must be accepted that God incarnates. His incarnations are His captivating sports. Why does the Lord incarnate? He does so for the sake of benefitting beings. It is said: “*Having compared the weights of helpfulness to others and abidance in absoluteness and concluded that helping others is the weightier of the two, the Lord incarnated ten times.*”³ It is also said, “*Fie upon the life of one who helps none. May animals live; even their skins are useful.*”⁴ The life of the person who helps none is a sheer waste; an animal is much better than him, for it is useful even after its death. As for the Lord, He is the embodiment of kindness.

Here is an example from the *Mahābhārata* of His kindness. Kṛṣṇa was in His palace at Dvārakā. At that time, in Hastināpura, in keeping with Duryodhana’s instruction, Duśśāsana dragged Draupadī from her private quarters to the hall and started disrobing her to shame her. Being greatly devoted to Kṛṣṇa, she cried out to Him for succour: “*Alas! O Kṛṣṇa! O Resident of Dvārakā! O Delighter of the Yādavas! Where are You? Why are You ignoring me, who have attained this state, with nobody to protect me?*”⁵ The Lord’s heart melted. He did not give thought to any possible inconvenience. He did not wait to inform anybody. He immediately went to Draupadī and saved her honour in an extraordinary manner. Yet, such was His compassion that He was not satisfied with what He did for her and later stated, “*Sobbing, ‘O Govinda’, Draupadī invoked Me, who was afar. So My debt to her is great and does not leave My heart.*”⁶

Referring to the captivating qualities of the Lord, the *Bhāgavata-purāna* points out, “*Even sages who revel only in the Ātman and are free from all bonds (or, have given up even the study of texts) are devoted to God without any expectation whatsoever. Such are the excellent qualities of God.*”⁷

A prayer of Bhagavatpāda is, “*What am I to make known to You, who are skilled in giving devotees with what they lack and preserving what they have, who are intent on bestowing all good on devotees, who impart*

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* IV.6

² *Taittirīya-āranyaka* III.13.1

³ *Subhāṣita (Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgāra, prakaraṇa 2, paropakāraprasāmsā 2)*

⁴ *Śārṅgadharma-paddhati (nīti 59)* 1478

⁵ *Mahābhārata (dākṣiṇātya-pāṭha)* II.61.47

⁶ *Mahābhārata* V.58.21

⁷ *Bhāgavata-purāna* I.7.10

knowledge about the means to desired seen and unseen ends, who pervade everything from within and without, who are omniscient and are merciful? O Śāmbhu! I constantly bear in mind that You are my inmost self."¹ The Lord's lovely nature is indeed of the kind depicted in the verses.

Intense, steady love for God is the *bhakti* specified earlier. A name for it is 'sādhyā bhakti, accomplished devotion'. There are nine devotional practices that lead to it. We call even these as *bhakti*; this term is used in the scripture to refer to accomplished devotion and, secondarily, to the means to it.

Prahlada said, notes the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, "*Hearing about the greatness of the Lord, praising Him, thinking of Him, waiting upon Him, worshipping Him, paying obeisance to Him, being His servant, looking upon oneself as His friend and dedicating oneself to Him – if devotion to God, which has these nine forms, is practised by a person without any expectation right from the moment he is taught about it, that I deem to be the best learning.*"²

Faithfully listening to the exposition of works, such as the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, that highlight the greatness of God is called 'śravaṇa' (the first of the nine means). Such hearing engenders affection towards God. We, however, squander our precious time now on worthless matters. By doing so, we are not going to attain any good in this world or the next. On the contrary, if we turn to works about God such as the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, we would not only develop devotion to the Lord but also learn about how to lead our lives meaningfully and about the actual insipidity of worldly pleasures.

Various spiritual practices have been specified in the scriptures for us to attain what is truly good. While it is difficult in the *kali-yuga*, the present age, for people to duly resort to these, one of them, 'kīrtana' (the second of the nine means), is indeed easy and effective. Chanting the names of the Lord is included in this. The *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* points out, "*What a person attains in the kṛta-yuga by meditation, in the tretā-yuga by the performance of sacrifices and in the dvāpara-yuga by worship, he attains in the kali-yuga by chanting the names of the Lord.*"³ As the *yugas* passed, human ability kept decreasing and, hence, people resorted to simpler and simpler means. However, what has to be finally achieved has not changed and we must never lose sight of it.

¹ *Śivānanda-laharī* 35

² *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* VII.5.23, 24

³ *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* VI.2.17

'*Kīrtana*' refers not only to the singing of *bhajans* but also to the performance of the *japa* of a *mantra* into which one has been initiated. According to the *Manu-smṛti*, "*A brāhmaṇa attains perfection through japa itself. There is no doubt regarding this. He may or may not engage in rites and such else. He who is the friend of beings (as japa does not involve causing injury to anyone) is said to be connected with the Supreme.*"¹ It is said in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, "*There is, O king, a great merit in the kali-yuga, a storehouse of defects. One gets freed from attachment and reaches the Supreme just by praising God.*"² From this it is apparent that if we keep engaging in *kīrtana*, we will become freed from worldly bonds. Though engaging in *kīrtana*, we should never neglect our scripturally-ordained duties. If we do not do our duties, our chanting of the Lord's names and *mantra-japa* will not duly fructify.

Dereliction of duties is regarded as a '*nāmāparādha*', an offence relating to the chanting of the Lord's names. It is said: "*Finding fault with noble persons (i); preaching the greatness of God's name to the wicked (ii); regarding Śiva and Viṣṇu as distinct from one another (iii); lack of faith in the words of the Vedas, śāstras and the Guru (iv, v, vi); having the delusion that what has been taught about the greatness of God is not factual (vii); indulging in what is forbidden and giving up what is prescribed as obligatory by the scriptures under the belief that as the divine name is there, these acts of commission and omission do not matter (viii, ix); and equating the chanting of the names of Śiva and Viṣṇu with other dharmas (x) – These are the ten nāmāparādhas, offences relating to the chanting of the Lord's names.*"³ It is said, "*The Lord should be constantly praised (by the chanting of His names) by one who is humbler than a blade of grass, is more patient than a tree, gives respect to others and is free from egoism.*"⁴

The third means spoken of is '*smaraṇa*, keeping God in mind'. A teaching of the *Yogasūtras* is, "*Repetition of Om (the name of God) and meditation on what it signifies (result in the practitioner's mind becoming one-pointed).*"⁵ Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "*To those persons who are ever attached to Me and who, becoming non-different from Me and meditative, worship Me everywhere, I provide what they lack and preserve what they have.*"⁶

¹ *Manu-smṛti* II.87

² *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* XII.3.51

³ *Bhagavannāma-bhūṣaṇa* quoted in *Bhagavannāmāmṛta-rasodaya*, ullāsa 6

⁴ *Śikṣāṣṭaka* 3

⁵ *Yoga-sūtra* I.28

⁶ *Bhagavadgītā* IX.22

It is said in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*: “*With peacock feathers as a diadem and karnikāra flowers behind his ears, wearing a yellow vestment and donning the Vaijayantī garland, Kṛṣṇa, who had the form of an expert dancer, whose praises were sung by the gopis and who was filling the stops of His flute with the nectar of His lips, entered Vṛndāvana, rendering it lovely with His footprints.*”¹ One could contemplate thus on Īśvara; the term, ‘*smaraṇa*’ encompasses contemplation on God.

The next form of *bhakti* that is spoken of is ‘*pāda-sevana*, serving the lotus feet of the Lord’. Waiting upon the Lord’s manifestations and bathing in holy rivers such as the Gaṅgā, which is said to have come from the feet of God, and the Yamunā, in which Kṛṣṇa sported, are included in this form of devotion.

‘*Arcana*, worship’ is the next form of *bhakti*. Īśvara’s idols should be worshipped as specified in the scriptures. *Pūjā* ought not to be performed to those idols in which ‘*prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*, the invocation of the presence of God’ has not been done. It is said, “*Idols in which prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā has not been performed remain without sanctity. There is no godhood in just gold and the like.*” A person readily associates himself with his picture. God is particularly present in an idol of His in which *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* has been performed.

A question may arise: Why should *pūjā* be done to an idol even though God is omnipresent? A veterinarian may prescribe that something be mixed with ghee and given to an ailing cow. It will not do if it is given to the cow unmixed with ghee on the ground that ghee is only a product of milk and plentiful milk is already present within the cow. Likewise, though God is present everywhere, He confers special blessings when He is worshipped in a duly consecrated idol. What is to be done if there is no idol with us or we lack the capacity to do idol-worship ourselves? My *Guru* (Jagadguru Śrī Candraśekhara Bhāratī Mahāsvāmin) has said that one could well go to a temple and worship God there.

Worshipping the Lord is actually very easy. The Lord has said, “*Whoever offers a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water to Me with devotion – that devout offering made by the pure-minded person, I accept.*”² The *Mṛtyuñjaya-mānasa-pūjā-stotra* (Hymn on the Mental Worship of Śiva), *Devī-mānasa-pūjā-stotra* (Hymn on the Mental Worship of Devī), etc., have been composed to bless us with guidance on worshipping God mentally, even without any physical item of worship.

¹ *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* X.21.5

² *Bhagavadgītā* IX.26

‘*Vandana*, prostration’ is spoken of next. It does form a part of *pūjā*. Nonetheless, noting that Īśvara is present everywhere, prostrations can be submitted to Him at any time, physically, verbally or mentally. This is admitted as ‘*vandana*’ in devotional literature. Seeing the cosmic form of the Lord, Arjuna offered his prostrations to God, saying, “*Prostration to You in the eastern direction and in the western direction. O All! Prostrations to You on all sides.*”¹

The next form of *bhakti* is ‘*dāśya*, viewing oneself as God’s servant’. The Lord has declared, “*The Veda and the smṛti are My commands.*”² Hence, we should treat the *śruti* and the *smṛti* as His commands and carry out with faith what is prescribed for us. Further, we should dedicate everything to God in keeping with His instruction, “*O son of Kuntī! Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give and whatever tapas you perform – do all that as an offering to Me.*”³

A prayer for *dāśya* is, “*O Parama-śiva! You may roam about in the crematorium or in a place beyond the world or in Kailāsa or on the peak of the Meru Mountain. But please keep Me near You and make me a servant of Your servitors.*”⁴

The next form of *bhakti* that has been spoken of is ‘*sakhya*, viewing oneself as God’s friend’. When we persevere with such devotion, our attachment to Īśvara becomes stronger and stronger. We do not fear a close friend; for his part, he wants and helps us to be happy. This is seen even in the relationship of friendship between a devotee and God.

Lastly, we have ‘*ātma-nivedana*, the complete offering up of oneself to God’; it culminates in the knowledge that we are not separate entities but are none other than the Supreme. After a river merges with the ocean, it has no distinct identity of its own; that which was the river becomes the ocean and the ocean alone remains. One who attains absolute merger with the Supreme thereafter remains as just the Supreme.

The Lord has averred in the *Bhagavadgītā*, “*O scion of the Bharata dynasty! Seek refuge in Him with all your being. By His grace you will attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.*”⁵ Moreover, the view of sages is: “*Always thinking about It (the Supreme), talking about It, teaching each*

¹ *Bhagavadgītā* XI.40

² *Viṣṇudharma* 74.30

³ *Bhagavadgītā* IX.27

⁴ *Ātmārpaṇa-stuti* 45

⁵ *Bhagavadgītā* XVIII.62

other about It, and being completely intent upon It - the wise regard this as the practice of the knowledge of the Supreme.”¹

We should dedicate everything to God and be without any worry. If we do so, the Lord Himself will fully take care of us; He will provide us what we lack and preserve what we have. He will give the realization of the Supreme too. The deathlessness that we desire would then be ours. Attaining God is alone the ultimate attainment and the highest good.

2. DEMONSTRATION OF THE NEED FOR THE ŚĀSTRA

In Īśvara’s creation, man has attained absoluteness. In what? It is not in size; an elephant is much bigger than him. Nor is it in strength, for many a beast is mightier than him. Could it be in unhappiness? No; it is not as though people can endure the acme of torment. Any claim that man’s joy is what is unsurpassed would be summarily dismissed as incredible. As a poet aptly put it, “*O deer! You neither beguilingly panegyryze the opulent nor feast your eyes repeatedly on their visages. You do not lend your ear to their supercilious pronouncements or rush to them with any expectation. Instead, you sate yourself with tender grass when hungry and yield to sleep when drowsy. Do divulge to me what austerities you practised and where to become so contented.*”²

Is man’s perfection in the possession of wealth? No. It is pertinent to consider what exactly constitutes wealth. Nīlakaṇṭha-dīkṣita has clarified, “*Wealth is certainly not the same thing for all. What is wished for by a person is that man’s wealth. While different objects constitute the wealth of the common folk, destitution is the wealth of the wise.*”³ What is dear to anyone is one’s wealth. Hence, what dearth of wealth is there for a deer that grazes freely in a lea that is green with luscious grass?

What then is the basis of man’s fullness? Knowledge. Like humans, animals experience happiness, pain, desire and anger. However, unlike humans, they are ineligible to access completely the storehouse of knowledge. It may be objected that they are quite knowledgeable, possessed as they are of understanding that encompasses food, wandering, sleep and the like. That animals possess such awareness is true but were the treasure-house of knowledge to contain merely what they discern then a human, such as the objector, would be on the same footing as them. However, there exist superior grades of knowledge that are acquirable by man but not by them.

¹ *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha* III.22.24

² *Śubhāṣita-sudhānidhi* II.136.22; *Kuvalayānanda*, example for *vyājastuti-alāṅkāra*

³ (Nīlakaṇṭha-dīkṣita’s) *Vairāgya-śataka* 43

The *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* points out, “*There are two kinds of knowledge to be acquired, the higher and the lower.*”¹ Among the two, ‘*aparā-vidyā*’ or lower knowledge throws light on what leads to happiness and sorrow in this world and in the next. Just as engineering and medicine promote common good, the means taught by the *Veda* in the course of its description of ‘*aparā-vidyā*’ yield desired worldly and heavenly fruits. For instance, a scriptural instruction is “*Let one who wants rain perform the Karīrī sacrifice.*”² Another injunction is, “*Let one who desires heaven perform the Jyotiṣtoma sacrifice.*”³ Just because animals lack such knowledge, man cannot be regarded as being superior to them. After all, ‘*aparā-vidyā*’ conduces to the attainment of only impermanent joy. Were man’s understanding of afterlife and more worldly matters than animals adequate, by virtue of its being expansive and multiplex, to demonstrate his pre-eminence, a heap of husk should, in view of its being large and constituted by many elements, be worthier than a piece of diamond! Familiarity with science does not make man the greatest. On the other hand, he attains fullness on account of that knowledge which provides the answers to queries such as, “Am I the body or distinct from it? If distinct, am I eternal or impermanent? Am I of the nature of bliss or sorrow? What is the relationship between this world that is perceived and myself?”

The *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* proceeds to teach, “*Then there is the higher knowledge by which the Immutable is realized.*”⁴ This knowledge does not arise in animals. Further, unlike the other forms of knowledge which give room to future follies, it terminates delusion once and for all. The *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* avers, “*On knowing It, one becomes freed from the grasp of death that comprises ignorance, desire and action.*”⁵ This knowledge should be attained through recourse to *vicāra* or enquiry.

It is unfeasible to carry out the *vicāra* in question without a bedrock. In materialistic matters too, there is the practice of conducting an investigation on some basis. We have to depend on mathematics to compute the distance of the sun from the earth; it is futile for us to hope to make the measurement with a foot-rule. In like manner, we should understand the *Ātman* by means of the *Upaniṣads* and then personally realize It. Hence, Bhagavatpāda has given us the instruction: “*Enquire into the import of the scriptural utterance about the identity of the individual soul with*

¹ *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* I.1.4

² *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* XIX.25.16 (Source is an unidentified *śruti*)

³ *Āpastamba-śrautasūtra* X.2.1 (Source is an unidentified *śruti*)

⁴ *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* I.1.5

⁵ *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* I.3.15

Brahman. Take recourse to logic that is in consonance with the view of the scripture."¹

The *Ātman* cannot be determined purely through logic. This is because ratiocination lacks finality. A *Brahma-sūtra* begins as follows, "Since reasoning is inconclusive..."² There is scope for what is shown to be right by us today through logic to be proven wrong tomorrow by another. A verse (of the *Vākyapadīya* approvingly) cited (in the *Bhāmatī*) by Vācaspati is, "Even what has been painstakingly demonstrated by adroit logicians is proved to be otherwise by defter dialecticians."³ Our experience is in agreement with this verse. The following assertion of Raghunātha Śīromaṇi (the author of the *Nyāya* work, *Dīdhiti*) adds to the case against the finality of mere ratiocination: "Even while I, Raghunātha, the master of ideas, proceed with my exposition, hosts of scholars must reverse their positions about whatever they had unanimously proclaimed to be right or flawed."⁴

Hence, having the *Upaniṣads* as the basis, one should understand the *Ātman* with the aid of reasoning. By the direct realization of the *Ātman*, man attains the Supreme *Brahman*, which is not different from the *Ātman* and is spoken of in the scripture as, "That Supreme *Brahman* is infinite; *Brahman* conditioned by this universe is also infinite."⁵ Abidance as *Brahman* characterizes true absoluteness.

Objection that the *Upaniṣads* are unnecessary

Must we seek this absoluteness characterized by identity with the Supreme *Brahman*? Even if we do, why should we ascertain the import of the *Upaniṣads* by hearing them from a *Guru* and then reflect on it in order to achieve the goal? Such questions can arise.

Everyone endeavours to attain what one likes and to avoid what one dislikes and terms unwanted. Though we have an aversion towards many objects and beings, such as poison and tigers, our distaste for them is not intrinsic. It is only because we fear the unhappiness they can cause us that we view them with disfavour. What we loathe by nature is just sorrow. We ever despise it and much of our efforts are directed towards getting rid of it. If unhappiness were non-existent, the scripture that makes known the *Ātman* would be superfluous. In spite of the existence of sorrow, if man

¹ *Upadeśa-pāñcaka* 3

² *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.11

³ *Vākyapadīya* I.34 cited in *Bhāmatī* on *Brahma-sūtra* II.1.11

⁴ *Dīdhiti*

⁵ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* V.1.1

did not abhor it or did not wish to transcend it, then also the scripture would be unnecessary. Moreover, if man were to want to be rid of sorrow but the annihilation of sorrow were impossible, then too the scripture would be irrelevant. Such impossibility can be of two kinds. *Akāśa* (space) is, according to the *Tārīkikas*, eternal by its nature; as it is indestructible, there is no means by which it can be destroyed. If sorrow were eternal like *ākāśa*, obviously there would be no possibility of ending it. The second kind of impossibility would prevail if sorrow were destructible but we were to have no knowledge of the means to eradicate it. Finally, even if sorrow were to be removable, the *Upaniṣads* would be pointless if what is revealed by them does not constitute the means to destroy sorrow or, even if does, there are some other easier ways to do so.

Reply to the objection

None can say that sorrow is non-existent. Everyone is experiencing it and is also striving to be rid of it. The *śāstras* have categorised sorrows under three heads: *ādhyātmika*, *ādhibhautika* and *ādhidaiivika*. *Ādhyātmika* sorrow, in its turn, is of two types: *śārira* or bodily and *mānasa* or mental. By bodily sorrow is meant the suffering due to diseases such as fever which result from the imbalance of wind, bile and phlegm. The grief caused by desire, anger greed, delusion, fear, jealousy and the like constitutes mental sorrow. Woes of these two kinds are termed *ādhyātmika* because they are rooted in the faulty functioning of the body and the mind. Pain that is caused by objects and beings such as poison, foes and snakes constitutes *ādhibhautika* sorrow. *Ādhidaivika* sorrow is that resulting from malevolent spirits and the like and from natural calamitous phenomena such as earthquakes.

We have been striving to get rid of all the three kinds of sorrows but till now our efforts have not been successful. Thus, there is a triad of miseries and man desires to eradicate it. Unhappiness can be eliminated in its entirety and the means described by the *śāstras* are potent to do so.

(Counter-objection:) Notwithstanding all this, recourse to the *śāstras* is unwarranted. The *śāstras* say that a person should free himself from sorrow by realizing the *Ātman*. They prescribe that to achieve such realization he should endow himself with discrimination, with dispassion, with the set of six qualities, which are mind control, restraint of the senses, withdrawal, forbearance, faith and concentration, and with longing for liberation and that, so endowed, he should hear about the *Ātman*, reflect on it and firmly meditate upon It. The path shown by the scripture is tough. Why? The *Kātha-upaniṣad* states, “The *self-existent Lord impaired the out-going*

senses. Hence, one sees external things and not the inner *Ātman*.”¹ Arjuna told the Lord, “I consider the control of the mind to be as greatly difficult as that of the wind.”² Hence, one should look for a simple route to freedom from unhappiness. There do exist well-known worldly cures for the three kinds of sorrows. They are easy to implement and do not require firm restraint of the senses and the mind. It is said, “If honey can be got at an arka tree, what need is there for a person to go to a mountain in search of it? When the object desired has been attained, which wise man would strive to acquire it?”³

Numerous are the treatments prescribed by eminent doctors to combat corporeal afflictions. Mental woes crop up because of the frustration of longings. If the mind is supplied all that it desires then *ādhyātmika* sorrows of the mental kind would be absent. If, taking a cue from demoniacal view, “This adversary has been slain by me and I shall exterminate other antagonists as well,” a powerful person were to subjugate those who stand in the way of his consummating his wishes, he would cease to be subject to grief born of anger.

Having studied treatises about worldly wisdom and salutary deportment, a person can safeguard himself from potentially harmful objects and creatures and, thus, avoid *ādhibhautika* sorrow. With regard to *ādhidāivika* sorrow, the distressing influences of evil spirits and the like can be put an end to by means such as the personal or commissioned chanting of suitable *mantras*. Thus, there are simple ways by which all kinds of sorrows can be nullified. One can totally get rid of unhappiness without strain by resorting to them. Hence, it appears that the scriptural texts that expound the Supreme are superfluous.

(Rebuttal of the counter-objection:) Patients are not always restored to health even when the administration of drugs and other aspects of the treatment are precisely what they ought to be. It is not possible to procure and enjoy all that is desired and thereby get rid of unhappiness. Further, mental disquiet that is quelled by gratification stages a comeback. The rule is, “Never does desire subside through the enjoyment of desired objects. Instead, it only grows more and more as does fire because of clarified butter.”⁴ By adopting the methods suggested, *ādhibhautika* and *ādhidāivika* sorrows may be warded off for a while but cannot be stamped out forever.

¹ *Kaṭha-upaniṣad* II.1.1

² *Bhagavadgītā* VI.34

³ Maxim cited in the *Śābara-bhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.2.4

⁴ *Manu-smṛti* II.94

Therefore, though worldly means to tackle sorrow are relatively simple, they are impotent to consummate our wish that we never be unhappy. Such being the case, a desire for emancipation from transmigratory existence springs up in the discriminating. Nīlakāṇṭha-dīkṣita has (with a touch of humour) said, “*The discrimination between that which is unceasing and that which is perishable is present in everybody with respect to ‘pot-ness (the element that is common to every pot)’ and a pot. True discrimination is, however, that which gives peace; all else is but indiscrimination.*”¹

Another objection against the need for the *Upaniṣads* is, “It could be that the means prescribed by the scripture are unfit to permanently annul all sorrows.” The root cause of all sorrows needs to be ascertained before investigating the potency of the scriptural way to uproot them. *Ajñāna* or ignorance of one’s true nature is the fountain-head of sorrows and only the realization of the one’s non-difference from the Supreme can eradicate it; the details are not essential at this juncture. The right knowledge of one’s true nature is produced by the *Upaniṣads* and with its emergence, ignorance is annulled and unhappiness is transcended in accordance with Nārada’s statement, “*The knower of the Ātman goes beyond sorrow.*”²

Union with the infinite *Brahman* by the acquisition of knowledge is indeed what marks completeness and the absolute cessation of all sorrows. The way to get this knowledge has been clearly stated in the texts that reveal the Supreme. For instance, it is said, “*The Ātman, my dear, should be realized, heard of, reflected on and firmly meditated upon.*”³

At the time of Bhagavatpāda’s advent, this *Vedic* creed had well-nigh withered away. In just 32 years, He weeded out erroneous schools of thought from the whole of India and made the scriptural position shine in all its glory. May Bhagavatpāda grace everyone to tread the spiritual path and attain absoluteness.

3. DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE ĀTMAN

We have some abilities that are almost absent in the members of the subhuman species. One such is the power of *vicāra* or enquiry. Though feebly inherent in animals, it cannot wax to sublime heights in them. To it, we owe our distinction.

Every potential has consequences and we are in a position to fittingly utilize our capabilities. Our intrinsic power of *vicāra* generally manifests

¹ (Nīlakaṇṭha-dīkṣita’s) *Vairāgya-śataka* 20

² *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* VII.1.3

³ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad* II.4.5

in some way or the other at all times other than when we slumber. *Vicāra* is synonymous with deliberation. Reflection comes naturally to humans. We ought to ascertain what is truly worthwhile for us to ponder on.

We normally cogitate on purposeful as well as irrelevant mundane matters. Bhagavatpāda has cautioned, “*Man employs his ears to hearken to the disparagement of another done to the heart’s content by calumniators. The censured person does not perish as a consequence of that but he who lends his ears to slander pointlessly incurs much sin.*”¹ Apart from taking into account the alleged or actual failings of others, we give thought to the domestic affairs and possessions of people. Nevertheless, nothing objective to which we bestow attention is dear to us at all times.

Each of us has unwavering affection only for himself or herself. The self that is ever dear is termed *Ātman* in the *śāstras*. Anything objective that is desirable now can become undesirable in the future and, likewise, what is currently distasteful can turn agreeable; the *Ātman*, however, is dear now and will continue to ever remain so. A sweetmeat that is routinely liked by a person is regarded as unwanted by him when he falls ill and loses his appetite. We might have cherished something in the past but dislike it now; on the other hand, we loved ourselves in the past and continue to do so to this day. In the normal course, we encounter three states; waking, dream and deep sleep. In all of them, one is dear to oneself. Bhagavatpāda has said, “*An object continues to be dear to one as long as it gives one happiness and it is disfavoured for the duration that it causes unhappiness. An object is not always agreeable or disagreeable. Sometimes, that which is unwanted may become dear. Also, what is greatly liked can become undesirable. Hence, the Ātman towards which affection never wanes is always the most beloved.*”²

It is the height of foolishness for us, who are reflective by nature, not to attend to and enquire about ourselves. There is no point in pondering over what is thoroughly known, such as that consumption of food appeases hunger. It is impossible to enquire about what is totally unknown. We know that we exist but have not understood what our fundamental nature is. Therefore, let us enquire into it.

To carry out such *vicāra*, a suitable means is vital. In fact, without a means, no activity is possible. For instance, to walk, we need feet and to travel by air, we require an aircraft. He who has the capacity to make a plane may do so, board that aircraft and, through it, gratify his wish to

¹*Prabodha-sudhākara* 59

²*Śataślokī* 10

course through the sky. Aircraft may be of various types and the cost of operating them may differ but for them to qualify as means of aerial travel, it is essential that they be capable of flying. He who is not in a position to make an aircraft can, nevertheless, consummate his desire to fly by means of one provided by another. Thus, a means is essential but it may be either our own or that provided by another; through it, we can achieve what we seek. The works of Bhagavatpāda constitute the means for us to perform *vicāra*; He has spelt out the nature of the *Ātman* therein.

Regarding the methods adopted by the great to expound the Truth, Sureśvarācārya has written, “*Through whatever mode of exposition a person gets the knowledge of the inner Ātman, that is appropriate here; the mode is not rigidly settled.*”¹

The nature of the *Ātman*

Bhagavatpāda has taught, “*Know this, your Ātman, to be that which shines in the heart as self-effulgent, eternal bliss and which, witnessing egoism etc., that have various forms and modifications and uniformly shining within at all times as the innermost entity and as not objectified, manifests itself very clearly in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep.*”²

This teaching greatly surprises us for our experience is at variance with it. We are subject to pleasure, pain, death and rebirth. Numerous sorrows, which are of the *ādhyātmika*, *ādhibhoutika* and *ādhideivika* kinds, retain us in their grip. Hence, it seems that, like teasing a beggar by calling him an emperor, this verse twits us. Nonetheless, there is simply no question of *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, the text that contains it, having been penned to poke fun at us. Its author, Bhagavatpāda, was of the following kind: “*There dwell tranquil, great ones who move about effecting, like the spring season, what is beneficial to people. Having themselves crossed the dreadful ocean of transmigratory existence, they, without any motive, cause other persons too to cross over.*”³

Unlike the example of a beggar being derisively called a monarch, there is another that is pertinent here. Owing to circumstances, a prince was growing up amidst foresters. One day, a palmist examined his palm and said, “You are a prince and shall become a sovereign.” These words appeared to be naughty at that time but subsequently their veracity became clear. The words of the verse about our true nature are also like that; so

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-bhāṣya-vartika* I.4.402

² *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* 219

³ *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* 39

long as we are ignorant of who we really are, the words that readily appeal to us are only those that conform to our erroneous notions.

The reason for becoming different

Though being absolute existence, pure consciousness and supreme bliss, why do we experience the world? It is pointed out in the *Viveka-cūdāmaṇi*, “*Being thoroughly shrouded by tamas, even a man who is invariably sagacious, has scriptural knowledge, is skilled in analysis and is a perceiver of what is most subtle does not clearly comprehend the Ātman even upon being taught about It in various ways. He considers what is superimposed on account of delusion to be true and attaches himself to its qualities. Alas, formidable is the power of concealment of calamitous tamas.*”¹

Ignorance of one’s own nature is *avidyā*. *Avidyā* has two powers; the power of *āvaraṇa* or concealment and the power of *vikṣepa* or projection. *Āvaraṇa* precludes correct knowledge of the *Ātman*. Because of *vikṣepa*, manifold forms can be seen in the *Ātman* that is veiled. The condition of being a *jīva*, a doer and an enjoyer, as also egoism, the feeling, ‘mine’ and so on appear in the *Ātman* owing to *vikṣepa*. These cause unhappiness and constitute transmigratory existence. Is there anything that can bring about the cessation of transmigratory existence? Is transmigratory existence terminable at all? Let us inquire into the matter.

Illusoriness of bondage; knowledge its terminator

There are just two kinds of entities in the world; the real and the false. Our comprehension too is of two kinds; *pramā* or valid knowledge and *bhrama* or false knowledge. It is the position of the Vedānta school that illusory silver originates and is seen when a mother-of-pearl is mistaken, in partial darkness, to be a piece of silver. A justification for this view is that the annihilator of that silver is just the right knowledge of the nacre and not any bodily action or meditation.

It is said in the *Svārājyasiddhi*, “*This bondage of transmigratory existence is caused by avidyā. It is eradicated only by knowledge and not by actions, which are like snares. Does at all a snake that one’s misapprehension conjures up in a garland go away due to prostrations, incantations, drugs, and other such means?*”²

If the *Ātman*’s present bondage is real or natural, it cannot be terminated by knowledge. However, scriptural passages such as the following reveal that liberation from bondage is effected exclusively by knowledge. “*On*

¹ *Viveka-cūdāmaṇi* 116

² *Svārājya-siddhi* 1.7

knowing the effulgent One, all bonds are destroyed."¹ "On knowing Him thus, one becomes immortal here."²

That which is real must exist always. However, the condition of being a doer and an enjoyer as also the states of waking, dream and deep sleep do not co-exist with the *Ātman* at all times. In the waking state, the dream state is absent; in the dream state, the waking state is not there; in deep sleep, both these are missing. The *Ātman* alone is ever present. Śrī Gauḍapādācārya has pointed out, "That which is non-existent in the beginning and in the end is equally so in the middle."³

The states of waking, dream and deep sleep are each seen one moment and cease the next and hence, are unreal. The *Ātman* is eternal and, thus, real. Nothing else is needed to illuminate It; certainly nobody needs to find out whether he exists by asking another. During deep sleep, there is objectless happiness. It is to experience this bliss that we fall fast asleep regardless of how many worldly activities we may have. Is it not apparent that we have a unique experience during deep sleep? At that time, there is no sign of any object or sense-organ. Bliss is had then though there is no contact with anything objective. How indeed is this possible but for the *Ātman* itself being of the nature of bliss? In that case, is not deep sleep sufficient for one to attain the *Ātman*? No, because even though *vikṣepa* is absent in that state, *āvaraṇa*, which veils the *Ātman*, is definitely present. To remove not just *vikṣepa* but also *āvaraṇa*, realization of the *Ātman* is vital.

The means for the realization of the *Ātman*

It is specified in the *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*: "In the matter of freeing oneself from the connection with the bonds wrought by *avidyā* and thereby attain the *Ātman*, which is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss, the means of valid knowledge are the *śāstra*, *yukti* or reasoning, the words of the *Guru* and one's own experience characterized by inner certitude."⁴

Here, by *śāstra* is meant the *Upaniṣads*, which contain statements such as the following. "He that is here in the human person and He that is there in the sun are one."⁵ "The knower of *Brahman* attains the Supreme."⁶

¹ *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* I.11

² *Taittirīya-āranyaka* III.13.7

³ *Gauḍapāda-kārika* II.6

⁴ *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* 475

⁵ *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* II.8.5

⁶ *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* II.1.1

*“When the aspirant sees the slightest difference in It, he is smitten with fear.”*¹

As for the *yukti* that is mentioned next, an instance of the reasoning that confirms that the *Ātman* is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss was given earlier.

Then there is the teaching of the *Guru*. Books together with practical training are essential to acquire some forms of knowledge. Though geniuses might become knowledgeable in modern science and engineering by themselves perusing books and logically pondering over matters, others need to be taught. Just as observing adept cooks when they make cakes of flour and receiving guidance from them enable others to prepare such cakes, the life and teachings of living saints who have realized the *Ātman* enable people to acquire knowledge.

Apart from the *śāstra*, reasoning and the words of the *Guru*, personal realization of the *Ātman* is necessary. A person’s own experience is what reveals to him whether he has realized the *Ātman* or not. Indirect knowledge based on the words of the *śāstra* and the *Guru* is insufficient to bring about liberation from transmigratory existence. It is said, *“He who is attached to worldly pleasures but asserts that he knows Brahman is one who has strayed from both Brahman and karma and should be discarded like a lowly one.”*² It is stated in the *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, *“The scholarliness of the learned marked by graceful and fluent speech and proficiency in explaining the śāstras leads to personal enjoyment, not liberation.”*³

Only those who have personally realized the *Ātman* are truly fortunate; they are the ones whose dedication to *vicāra* is total. It is only in them that the power of *vicāra*, which is natural to humans, finds fulfilment. What is their life like? It is said in the *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, *“Ever engaging in nirvikalpa-samādhi, the mendicant, who has controlled his mind, restrained his senses, fully withdrawn from external activities and patiently bears the pairs of opposites, experiences his oneness with everything. Having fully burnt through nirvikalpa-samādhi the various ideas born of the darkness of avidyā, he blissfully remains as Brahman, without actions and apprehension of distinctions.”*⁴

Thinking of ‘*sat-puruṣas*’ is regarded as most beneficial. Who are ‘*sat-puruṣas*’? There is actually only one entity that is *sat* or absolutely real

¹ *Taittirīya-upaniṣad* II.7.1

² *Garuḍa-purāṇa* (Venkateswara Steam Press Edition) II.49.64

³ *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* 60

⁴ *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* 356

and that is *Brahman*. Hence, *sat-puruṣas* are those who abide as *Brahman*. The scripture teaches, “*The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman Itself.*”¹ The import of this *Vedic* utterance is obvious to them as they have realized their oneness with *Brahman*. The word ‘*sat*’ is used figuratively when others, who are noble, are referred to as *sat-puruṣas*. We should strive to become true *sat-puruṣas*. Eulogising a liberated one whose body has fallen off, the *Veda* says, “*His possessions go to his sons, his good deeds to his well-wishers and his misdeeds to his despisers.*”²

My *Guru* had all the characteristics of a knower of the *Ātman* that were touched upon. Thinking of Him with devotion, I conclude here.

¹ *Mundaka-upaniṣad* III.2.9

² Cited as a *śruti* of the Śātyāyanins in the *bhāṣya* on *Brahma-sūtra* III.3.26.

His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin, the 35th Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Sringeri Sri Sharada Peetham was born on 13th November 1917. With the direct guidance of God and His *Guru*, He intensely engaged in spiritual practices right from the day of His *samnyāsa* on 22nd May 1931 and these culminated in His enlightenment and establishment in the Supreme Brahman on 12th December 1935.

His flawless character, noble virtues, intense dispassion, deep devotion to God and His *Guru*, thorough grasp of *Vedānta*, profound meditation, direct realization of the Supreme and *jīvanmukti* (liberation even while living) made Him stand out as a living testimony to the scriptural statements about enlightened sages. Exceptionally kind and egoless, He was an accessible *Guru* par excellence who touched the hearts of the hundreds of thousands who came into contact with Him and He graced them in myriad ways.

This publication, '*From Sorrows to Bliss*', comprises the invaluable teachings of His Holiness presented in four parts namely, *Definitive Answers*, *Motivating Narratives*, *Scriptural Expositions* and *Incisive Essays*. His Holiness's explanations were characterised by lucidity and cogency, and they consistently bore the stamp of His direct experience of the Truth, His complete mastery of *Yoga* and His unparalleled erudition in the scriptures. Indeed, His teachings enable one to eradicate the sorrows of *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, and attain eternal bliss in the form of *mokṣa*, liberation.



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