

Bhagavadgeeta

Chapter 15

Aśvattha – The Tree of Creation

Krishna concludes the fourteenth chapter with a brief description of the great, wholesome and causal Self, denoted by the term 'I'. Even the infinite Brahman rests upon this Self, says Krishna (*Brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham*). Immortality, inexhaustibility (*amṛtasya avyayasya*), eternal dharma (*śāśvatasya ca dharmasya*) as well as endless happiness (*sukhasya ekāntikasya ca*) inhere in the same inmost Self (14.27).

The focus is now the Self, *ātmā*. The 15th chapter, in which Krishna introduces the theme of the causal and comprehensive *ātmā* is thus aptly named "*Puruṣottama Yoga*".

The *Puruṣottama-Paramātmā* exposition, which is the main theme here, has a special appeal for sādhakas, especially ascetics. This chapter is usually recited in Ashrams and spiritual abodes while taking food, probably because it refers to *Vaiśvānara* – an expression or manifestation of the supreme Puruṣa – digesting and assimilating four kinds of food.

The word puruṣa generally refers to a being, more particularly the human being. In place of the word 'God', Krishna uses 'Puruṣa'. This is characteristic of our Scriptures. Our Scriptures always equate the supra-human God of religion with the jīva, the puruṣa of the earth. By this **they cut all distance to God and identify Him as the Self in oneself**. Krishna embellishes the word 'puruṣa' further as '*Puruṣottama*,' meaning the magnificent or the paramount inmost Self.

Of the entire existence and manifestation, this *Puruṣottama* is the supreme, he concludes. He is greater than all else, nay the greatest and final itself. And He is the *ātmā*, the *Paramātmā*, denoted by the common term 'I' employed by one and all. Needless to say, the *ātmā* is within every one's body, closest to each.

All gross existence, the entire objectude, has its *pratiṣṭhā*, inherence, in the subtle counterpart. And the subtle is always inward to the gross. Compared to the gross, the inner subtle is greater. It is the causal, from which alone has emerged the gross. In actual experience also, are not all forms of growth from inside to outside? How can the external Universe rest upon something still external to it? All externals together form the universe. Can an additional external source be there at all for the universe to rest upon?

The only answer, compulsion, is that the objective universe can inhere only on something subtle and abiding within itself. All ideas about the absolute nature of gross objective existence are thus invalidated by Krishna's statement that *aham*, the Self, is the *pratiṣṭhā* of even Brahman.

Thus the whole Universe does inhere inwardly in its own subtle source. It is like our own body resting upon its own inmost core. Are not all sensory activities as well as mental and intellectual ones caused and centred right within us? Can there be any doubt or confusion at all in this?

Illustration through the Peepul tree

Giving the analogy of *Aśvattha* tree, Krishna describes the characteristics of the whole creation and its purpose. His words are quite profound and suggestive:

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।
छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥

ūrdhvamūlam-adha:śākhamaśvattham prāhur-avyayam ।

chandāṃsi yasya parṇāni yastam veda sa vedavit ॥

(15.1)

The undying Peepul Tree, whose leaves are the Vedas, has its roots upward and branches downward. Whosoever knows this, knows verily the import of the Vedas.

Why does Krishna resort to such an illustration? The dialogue started with Krishna addressing Arjuna's grief. Incidence of grief being ever relevant to the human mind, the discussion became classical, extensive and comprehensive, encompassing the entire gamut of human personality.

Spiritual or philosophical discussion may commence from anywhere. Whatever be the initial setting or background for enquiry, very soon the discussion becomes lofty and deep to reflect the ultimate quest, leading the mind to get enlightened about (i) the fundamentals and finale of human life (ii) the truth about Creation and Creator and (iii) the mysterious authenticity of existence itself. This is a distinction of our land's philosophical thoughts and reasoning.

Thus, the distressed Arjuna quickly became a sustained seeker ready to enquire, know and reinforce his understanding variously. This added to the tone and trend of the entire dialogue. We have already seen how Krishna's words, arresting and provocative first, became exhorting and revealing next. They led to the beautiful exposition of philosophy, spirituality, yoga, the art and dexterity of life, activity and achievement.

Keeping his thoughts and ideologies in tune with the prevalent time, Krishna brings in the concept of *Aśvattha* tree. Trees are a common sight for all. Unlike plants and creepers, they grow very tall and also have a longer life span. In fact, human life inevitably depends upon vegetation, not alone for food and nutrition but also for respiration.

The *Aśvattha* (Peepul tree) lives for centuries, unlike humans. When one gets born, he finds that the world around him existed much before his birth, and will also exist after his death. The Peepul tree is alluded to strike the contrast. Unlike the short span of human life, the longevity of *Aśvattha*, says Krishna, symbolizes *avyayatva*, eternity.

Krishna has more to say about this *Aśvattha*. Its trunk, branches and leaves grow downward, not only upward as is the case with the usual trees we see around. How true! The planet earth on which we all live has itself come downward from the sun above. Are not the roots of the earth thus above somewhere?

In fact, this is the truth of everything we see in the world, Universe. The source of everything in space clearly reigns far above. Wherever one looks at, the vision will take him upward to infinite distances. The space surrounding the planets or heavenly bodies is endless. This endless space alone is the source of all these heavenly bodies.

After having said that the *Aśvattha* has its roots above and growth below, Krishna says that the leaves constitute the Vedas. The character and shape of leaves help us to identify the tree with its properties. The idea is that using the Vedas we have to understand this tree of existence. In other words, to discern the human life, the world around and to decide about the interactions between the two, we have to be guided by the Vedas. Vedas alone serve to enlighten us about our position in this huge complex world and how our goal and objective can be achieved.

This illustration implies far more than what appears on casual observance. About the very status and purpose of Vedas, contradictory views have been in vogue. Are the Vedas revelatory or mandatory? In other words, are they a source of true, great knowledge or are they merely a collection of injunctions and prohibitions (*vidhis* and *niṣedhas*)?

Many scholars, including the famous Jaimini, view Vedas as 'mandatory'. According to them, Vedic life consists of rituals and allied performances. The rituals, they say, are prescribed means to achieve a certain end either here or hereafter. Votaries of Vedas have simply to perform these in all faith, without question.

In accepting such a line of thinking, a fundamental disharmony would result. Sheer faith alone cannot be the ground for any sustainable system of thought or philosophy. Sooner or later the thinking man will be prompted to investigate into the merits of his belief and the rewards it alludes to. Can the ritualistic rewards have veracity? Thus a

compulsion for unraveling the Truth behind the Vedic injunctions is inevitable. It is then that one is led to the Upanishads, the last portion of the Vedas, and their startling revelations and discussions.

On the other hand, if we regard the Vedas as enlightening, revelatory, they remain sovereign and useful. By not heeding the Vedas, their strength and purpose of revelation are not invalidated the least. Those who do not heed them will be denied the enrichment and enlightenment they would otherwise derive.

Man is intelligent by nature. Knowledge is the best persuasion and compulsion for him. Like any other branch of knowledge, Vedic knowledge has its eternal relevance and utility.

Vedas discuss and reveal the true nature of the world and what the discerning attitude and evaluation about the world should be. The pronouncement is very clear and strong, as the Upanishad puts it:

इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति
न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टिः ।

*iha ced-avedīd-atha satyam-asti
na ced-ihāvedīn-mahatī vinaṣṭi: ।*

Kenopanishad (śloka 2.5)

If one verily happens to know this here and now, then his life becomes meaningful and true. If he ignores and misses, then colossal is his loss.

In this declaration, the intention is quite clear. If the message is not heeded, then the wrong is not with the revealing source, but with those who are inattentive to the revelation! For every rational human being, such a pronouncement has the best of validity and relevance.

Understanding bondage - the purpose of *Aśvattha* illustration

The purport is this: The entire world is like the *Aśvattha* tree, with its roots far above and only branches and leaves down below. No individual has any power or scope to do anything about it. But, a discerning individual should try to understand the world, its magnitude and complexity, by reading the Vedas and going into the meaning of what they say about the whole subject.

Krishna continues his exposition of the *Aśvattha* tree:

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः ।
अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि
कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके ॥

adhaścordhvaṃ prasṛtās-tasya śākhā
guṇa-pravṛddhā viṣaya-pravālā: ।
adhaśca mūlāny-anusantatāni
karmānubandhīni manuṣya-loke ॥

(15.2)

Branches of that tree with *guṇas* for their nourishment and sensory enjoyments as tender leaves, issue forth downwards and upwards. Its roots are spread forth below in the human world in all directions, giving rise to bondage in the form of activities (through *rāga* and *dveṣa* for the results thereof.)

In addition to the initial branches the *Aśvattha* tree has spread below, says Krishna, there are branches growing upwards also. This specifically implies the pursuit of Vedic rituals, aimed at bestowing results like heavenly life, which become relevant only after one's body falls.

Prakṛti with its three *guṇas*, instils desires and motivates manifold activities. Humans are the only beings capable of thinking, designing and acting diversely for various achievements, resulting in drastic changes not only in their life-style but also in nature and environments. This applies to both constructive and destructive activities alike.

The potential is two-fold: Enquiry into the present life along with the world around; and yearning to know about life after death.

By the human spirit of discovery and adventure alone men of the earth were safely landed on the moon and also brought back. This bespeaks how much their spirit of exploration can be effective. There is no limit to the scope humans have before them. The world is endless and the human access to knowledge is also limitless!

Again, it is the same spirit of yearning that has led the religious thinkers to explore into the prospects of life after death and conceive of heavenly prospects and luxuries, referred to in the Vedic and allied scriptures. Arjuna himself refers in the beginning to the life in the heavens and hells, as reward or punishment for the acts done here. Thus the branches with leaves of the *Aśvattha* tree also extend upward.

The entire visible creation is before us as a huge tree, whose roots are, far above, beyond our reach. Nonetheless, its branches with leaves are available to us. **Are we to be allured by them, or a clear note of further discrimination is called for?** As earlier,

Krishna has his own special note of caution and wisdom to emphasize here. He speaks about not allowing this tree to overpower us, instead to check it by means of our own willful insight.



Asaṅga – The Mightiest Weapon

Imagine the tree with roots spread far above and branches extending below, and again with roots cast below and branches stretched above. Isn't it amazing, baffling and elusive in every way? But this is what the world around us is, says Krishna, through this striking illustration. Being surrounded by such a tree of stupendous entanglements, what should anyone with discretion do to be peaceful and free? What is the appropriate safeguard to ensure safety and peacefulness for us? See how deftly Krishna proceeds with his exposition! He gives a two-fold formula:

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते
नान्तो न चादिर्न च संप्रतिष्ठा ।
अश्वत्थमेनं सुविरूढमूल-
मसङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्त्वा ॥
ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं
यस्मिन्गता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।
तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये
यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥

na rūpam-asyeha tathopalabhyate
nānto na cādir-na ca sampratiṣṭhā ।
aśvattham-enaṃ suvirūḍhamūlam-
asaṅga-śastreṇa dṛḍhena chittvā ॥
tata: padaṃ tat-parimārgitavyaṃ
yasmin-gatā na nivartanti bhūya: ।
tam-eva cādyam puruṣaṃ prapadye
yata: pravṛtti: prasṛtā purāṇī ॥

(15.3,4)

Neither its constitution nor beginning nor end nor details of prevalence are within our reach. This well-rooted *aśvattha* tree should be felled using the strong, sharp weapon of dis-attachment.

Thereupon enquire into that abode, on reaching which the earthly denizens take no rebirth. The way of enquiry being: "I seek that supreme Primordial Puruṣa, from whom has emanated this most ancient process of creation."

Krishna makes it clear that the full dimensions of this *Aśvattha* Tree are not accessible to anyone on this earth. In other words, the world is endless, infinite, in every way. The planet on which we live is but a speck in the myriad bodies hovering in the expanse of endless unbounded sky. Look in any direction. There is no scope to reach the boundary or limit anytime. What could be the basis for such a display?

Felling the Tree of Worldliness

The world already existed when we were born and has been there for incalculable time. This makes it beginningless (*na ādīḥ*). Where comes the question then of accessing its origin from here and now? Equally so, the end of phenomenal existence is beyond our comprehension (*na antaḥ*). Inasmuch as the beginning and end are inconceivable, its prevalence too will remain incomprehensible (*na ca sampratiṣṭhā*).

Our knowledge about this Tree of Creation (*saṃsāra*) being grossly inadequate, there is no possibility for anyone to uproot or destroy it at all. At the same time, we do want to make sure that it does not disproportionately grow and spread its branches stifling and disabling us from fulfillment.

Krishna has a beautiful formula for the purpose. With discretion one should go on felling the branches that grow towards him. He should not allow the Tree to entrap him. In doing so, the seeker has to be firm and consistent.

For felling the Tree of worldliness, says Krishna, **the weapon to be employed is dis-attachment, *asaṅga*, a quality of the mind.** One has to be firmly rooted in *asaṅga*. It is inevitable that the Tree of worldliness, with its branches spread all over, will always surround and entrap the seeker. The seeker must shield himself inwardly. If he gets attached to the flowers and fruits of the Tree, there will be torment and bondage. The sure remedy is to *wisely* develop dis-attachment.

This safeguard is very inner, personal and subjective. **In effecting it no external restrictions are there. None can claim any excuse.**

Path to the Imperishable Abode

Dis-attachment only marks the beginning of the effort of felling the Tree of worldliness. It should be followed by a deep, subtle sense of search, enquiry or investigation. Only then the effort will succeed and result in enlightenment, fulfillment and freedom.

Enquiry of what or whom? Krishna says, the introspection should be focussed on the Primordial Puruṣa, from whom has emanated the whole activity, bringing evolution and expression. With *asaṅga*, the seeker should insulate himself from worldliness and by the deeper search aimed at discovering and realizing the very source of phenomenal existence, he must fortify himself.

Dis-attachment, *asaṅga*, the mind's emotional response will be fruitful only when it is clubbed strongly with the sustained quest of the intelligence. The whole spiritual *sādhana* consists in achieving a **functional integration between intelligence and mind**. Religion evolves into spirituality at this point and the seeker is then poised to grow.

निर्मानमोहा जितसङ्गदोषा

अध्यात्मनित्या विनिवृत्तकामाः ।

द्वन्द्वैर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञै-

र्गच्छन्त्यमूढाः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥

nirmāna-mohā jita-saṅga-doṣā

adhyātmanityā vinivṛtta-kāmāः ।

dvandvair-vimuktāः sukha-duḥkha-sañjñair-

gacchanty-amūḍhāः padam-avyayaṃ tat ॥

(15.5)

Those, who are free of pride and enchantment, having won over the evil of attachment, given to constant reflection on the supreme Reality, turning away from desires, get delivered from the pairs of opposites in the form of sukha and duḥkha. They attain that supreme Imperishable Abode.

This is the most significant verse in the whole chapter. It reveals in unmistakable terms what the core of spiritual *sādhana* is. If the message is heartily heeded, the seeker is sure to reach his destination.

One should be free from undue pride (*abhimāna*) and delusion (*nirmāna-mohaḥ*). **All forms of *abhimāna* generally are based upon or centred around the body, and hence violate the ultimate truth that one is not the body**, but the Soul, which is beyond all needs and safeguards. Any *abhimāna* is therefore, unfounded and misleading. It will only result in humiliation, hurt and self-victimization.

Saṅga, which grips one since birth, is another evil to be overcome (*jita-saṅga-doṣāḥ*). Needless to say, attachment, identification, of any kind, especially when left uncontrolled, is extremely afflicting and binding.

All kinds of attachment (*saṅga*) are hollow, when properly studied. For, neither the body nor any object around it has any independent status. Everything is made relevant by the mind alone. It is the mind that wields the body and instruments different activities and interactions. The outcome of all these is also on the mind.

Should the seeker then care constantly for the inner mind, to preserve its purity and character or focus on the external? Whenever attachment (*saṅga*) creeps in, instantly it begins to taint the mind, making it **dense and distorted**. Freed of *saṅga*, the mind becomes **light, joyful and expansive**. Such a mind truly becomes the Self – transparent, unaffected and blissful.

In fact, Krishna referred to *saṅga* and the need to eschew it right in the second chapter, when he exhorted Arjuna: “*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi, saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanañjaya*” (Being established in Yoga, perform actions renouncing all attachments – 2.48). Again in the third chapter he emphasized that wholesome *sādhana* consists in acting without *saṅga*. Action rid of *saṅga* alone is sufficient to lead the seeker to the Supreme. *Tasmād-asaktaḥ satataṃ kāryaṃ karma samācara, asakto hy-ācaran karma param-āpnoti pūruṣaḥ* (Therefore, without attachment perform actions well. With dis-attachment alone one attains the Supreme – 3.19).

Here now in summarizing the *sādhana*, Krishna again stresses the importance of overcoming the evil of *saṅga*. He also specifies the means to accomplish this.

Adhyātma-nityāḥ. This means the seeker has to be constantly given to spiritual and philosophical reflection, rumination, with the help of Scriptures and the company of the Guru, listening to his words and serving him. He has to develop fondness for both. Such fond involvement will bring about extinction of *saṅga* and all kinds of desires.

Vinivṛtta-kāmāḥ is a very significant phrase. The mind, by itself, feels clearly how futile it is to foster and pursue desires. What truly happens when each desire is fulfilled is that the desire verily becomes extinct. **It is therefore clear that one tries hard to fulfil a desire only to get rid of it.**

Thus, if in the mind level the effort to fulfil desires is only to make them extinct why not take up directly the pursuit of ‘not generating any desire’ at all? What a great benefit will it be if the desires as a whole become extinct!

Krishna next speaks about *vimukti*, liberation, deliverance. He also specifies from what or where should the deliverance be. *Sukha-duḥkha-dvandvas* are the ones from which one has to be freed. To be freed from these will mean deliverance from all the *dvandvas* surrounding us.

Success and defeat, gain and loss, heaven and hell, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, sin and virtue, all these only result in sukha and duḥkha. The entire objects and their qualities can, ultimately result only in one of these i.e. sukha or duḥkha.

This is a great fact. **To train oneself to dissolve the *sukha-duḥkha dvandvas* is verily to be delivered of all external and internal *dvandvas*.** How lofty and wholesome a proposition!

Heaven becomes alluring only when contrasted with the afflictions of hell. The mind that is able to evenise and transcend *dvandvas* will neither be seduced by any allurements nor repelled by any abhorrence.

This kind of harmony and transcendence as related to sukha-duḥkhas is to be gained by coursing through them and making the process a full-fold *sādhana*. Then the same *sukha-duḥkha-dvandvas* that tend to delude and dislodge the mind, will transform as the sublime cause for bestowing liberation, freedom. Is this not what Krishna stated in the 2nd chapter too? *Mātrā-sparśās-tu kaunteya śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ tān titikṣasva* (Through sensory contacts heat and cold, pleasure and pain are felt. They come and go. Forbear them. 2.14). He also declared that the one not tormented by pairs of opposites is fit for liberation.

Supreme abode is neither distant nor external

Krishna now clarifies and confirms that to be freed of sukha-duḥkha delusion is to win the supreme spiritual glory, life's fulfillment. Such a one attains that eternal abode (*tad avyayaṃ padam*). Is it something like the Vedic *Brahmaloka*, Creator's world? The next verse clarifies it significantly:

न तद्भासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः ।
यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्धाम परमं मम ॥

na tad-bhāsayate sūryo na śaśāṅko na pāvaka: ।

yad-gatvā na nivartante tad-dhāma paramaṃ mama ॥

(15.6)

That, which neither sun nor moon nor fire illumines, is the abode of the Supreme, on reaching where no return or rebirth will ever be.

It is that magnificent abode, which the sun cannot illumine; nor can the moon. Likewise, fire too lights it not. It is that lofty, safest abode, on reaching which, one does not ever return. It is verily immortality, absolute and wholesome!

This is where Krishna excels, the Kurukṣetra dialogue becomes illustrious. **The supreme Abode, says Krishna, is not external**, objective or sensory. Anything external

and objective can be lit up by the sun and similar luminaries. But the senses and external luminaries become powerless to reveal the inner abode. Whatever is outer alone becomes perceptible to the senses. Whatever is within the body, will remain invisible.

What is the summary finding, then? The seeker has to focus his search within himself and unearth the supreme Abode. The means for it is **freeing the mind and intelligence from misplaced notions and evaluations** like *māna*, *moha* and *saṅga*. Therefore, Krishna extols, be given to spiritual knowledge and introspection, and their pursuit, thereby rid desires and their latent causes. Sukha-duḥkhas instead of alluring and repelling, should be made to lead the seeker transcend them resulting in sublimation and enrichment.

The whole pursuit thus becomes personal, inner and based on mind and intelligence. It is equally interactional. None can say that any external factor can intercept it at all. Sharpness and subtlety in understanding it precisely is what really matters.

■

Life – an Expression of the Supreme Reality

Contemplation on Power of animation

With a few striking words Krishna emphasizes that the brilliance called 'life' is no other than the eternal supreme Reality itself, the one Great Divinity enfolding and sustaining the whole creation. His effort is to awaken the sādḥaka to the importance of understanding **the majesty and magnificence of the supreme Power that resides within the body** – a point that eludes most people, even seekers.

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।
मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥
शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः ।
गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥

mamaivāṁśo jīva-loke jīva-bhūta: sanātana: ।

mana:ṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛtisthāni karṣati ॥

śarīraṁ yad-avāpnoti yaccāpy-utkrāmatīśvara: ।

gṛhītvaitāni saṁyāti vāyur-gandhānivāśayāt ॥

(15.7,8)

The soul (*jīva*) manifesting the power called 'life' abiding in the body is eternal and a part of the supreme Reality itself. It draws the five senses and the mind from the elemental nature.

And like wind carrying fragrances from their seats, it takes away these six powers while exiting from the body.

The supreme Reality from which the visible creation has emanated, which interpenetrates the whole manifold existence, is itself imperceptible to the senses and even inconceivable to begin with. As such the whole grandeur is inaccessible to human comprehension.

But the supreme Reality manifests as the power or spirit called life. It is as though a part of the Supreme has itself become life or the enlivening power that animates and activates one's body. It is something to be contemplated upon, conceived in its full potential and glory. In fact, **this is the only goal of spiritual sādhanā**.

While the body is mortal, this animating power is immortal (*sanātanaḥ*). Where there is life, there alone we find the glory of the Supreme manifest. So Krishna says that the supreme Reality has become the manifest *jīva* (life) and *jīvabhūtaḥ* (living power). In

earth, where survive various kinds of life forms, the Supreme has manifested as life and animation.

To have a glimpse of the profundity, potency and grandeur of this inner power as a distinct expression of the Supreme, Krishna draws attention to the fact that the whole group of senses, as well as their powers, is evolved by this Power of Animation. He speaks of the senses as six (*ṣaṣṭhāni-indriyāṇi*). Of these eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin constitute the five. And mind itself is the sixth. Mind is called a sense because, like the other senses, its function also is to perceive. The bodily senses perceive outer objects, whereas the internal mind perceives internal processes like thoughts, feelings, emotions, memory, etc. In both cases it is perception or comprehension that takes place.

This inner Power of Animation is what holds the power of the senses. The senses left to themselves are inert. To illustrate this fact, Krishna says that when the life-forces depart, the senses, which were till then functional become functionless. A person's eyes and ears may be quite healthy, intact. Suddenly, if his life forces become inoperative making him dead, neither the senses nor the mind will be active in him thereafter. At the same time, if a healthy part, like the cornea, is taken out and grafted to a blind person, then the latter begins to see.

That which could not bring about vision in the dead body, suddenly enables vision in a living body. What does this mean? The actual perception is not just due to the sense organs, but the perceiving Spirit within. Hearing, seeing, holding, tasting, smelling and touching are actually the powers and potentials of the animating agent, the life itself, and not of the senses. This is a point people mostly fail to grasp.

Can we imagine such a magnificent source that holds all these powers? It can only be something great, stupendous, incomprehensible and transcendental! Every sense is unique and exclusive in its place and function. Take the eye for instance. It can only see, not hear or smell or feel or taste. Very small though, the eye is capable of observing infinite distances and variety. That is how we are able to see the sun, moon, stars and the rest in great distances. We also have a clear vision of the endless sky.

Notions like infinitude, endlessness, manifoldness, multiple dimensions etc. are brought about by the eyes alone. But the eyes are just external perishable instruments in the process of external comprehension. What verily employs the eyes and other senses, connects them with the objects around and causes comprehension, is the Power of animation in the body, which is invisible, internal and supra-material.

To have a glimpse of it, Krishna first of all takes the seeker to the instance of death, when suddenly all the sensory functions cease. Though physically sense organs are healthy and can fulfil their roles, life spirit being absent, they become useless. This implies that it is the Power of animation that empowers senses as well as renders them powerless.

The same Power also generates the entire physical aggregate called the body. For example, how does a foetus grow in the womb? Right from the moment of fertilization of female ovum by male sperm, there is no external interference at all in empowering growth of the fertilized ovum. **Power and potential that brings about growth of each part, organ and its function in the foetus is not at all external.**

Blood cells from the mother at best carry food and nourishment for the foetus to grow. All the cells are just physical in nature. In fact, blood itself is generated from food and nourishment that the mother takes in response to her hunger, thirst and taste. All the food substances are inert. But when digested and assimilated in the alimentary canal, they become hot living blood in a few hours. Who administers this livingness to the food substances taken by us?

Evidently it is the potential and Power of animation itself. The same potential is what formulates the various organs and parts of the body. Eyes are its handicraft. Ears and other senses too. The same is the truth about hands, feet and other physical organs and their functions. Together they enable an adult individual to interact with this endless world, comprehend its infinite magnitude, think, know, probe into virtually any sphere of this endlessness.

To whom or which factor can this be attributed? Initially to the body and its parts. But when one thinks about death, which makes the body useless, then he is obliged to think of the inlying Power of animation, which alone holds the key to this multiple potential. And this Power, the *jīva*, is but a part of the supreme Reality itself. In a way it is the Lord of Nature, whose manifestation this huge endless world is.

Krishna said, when death befalls the body, *jīva* transits taking the power of the senses away with it. He had explained it in the second chapter too. Just as one removes used clothes and puts on fresh ones, so does the Soul leave the body and take to another. There also Krishna has used the word *saṁyāti*, as in this verse. This is more to make the seeker think of the *jīva* as different from the body and the senses.

Right introspection leads to enlightenment

Once this body-different nature of the Soul is grasped, the seeker has to develop his understanding properly. The body-different Soul will never be affected by any of the changes the body undergoes. Thus it is birth-free and death-free. In the same manner, while associated with the body too, it is unaffected in all the conditions like growth and decay.

As fire, blazing through many media, does not get the least affected by the character or plights of the media, the *jīva* too because of its pristine nature is not at all affected by the various plights of the body. The same idea he makes clearer in the next verse:

श्रोत्रं चक्षुः स्पर्शनं च रसनं घ्राणमेव च ।

अधिष्ठाय मनश्चायं विषयानुपसेवते ॥

śrotraṃ cakṣuḥ sparśanaṃ ca rasanam ghrāṇam-eva ca ।

adhiṣṭhāya manaścāyaṃ viṣayān-upasevate ॥

(15.9)

By presiding over the ear, eye, skin, tongue and nose and also the mind, it enjoys the multiple qualities of world objects.

Dwelling in the elemental body, which it has shaped itself, *jīva* experiences the world objects through the five senses and the mind. Here, the senses and the body fulfil the role of instruments or media. No experience belongs to any of these instruments, which are but means to contact the objects. In interacting with the objects around as well as getting the imprints of these, the senses and the body are merely employed by the *jīva*.

Think of a driver who runs a vehicle. The vehicle alone moves forward, backward, to the right or left. The driver makes it move variously, himself not undergoing any of those motions.

उत्क्रामन्तं स्थितं वापि भुञ्जानं वा गुणान्वितम् ।

विमूढा नानुपश्यन्ति पश्यन्ति ज्ञानचक्षुषः ॥

utkrāmantam sthitam vāpi bhujñānam vā guṇānvitam ।

vimūḍhā nānupaśyanti paśyanti jñāna-cakṣuṣaḥ ॥

(15.10)

Those under the spell of ignorance fail to perceive the Soul either while departing from or residing in the body or while experiencing the sensory objects, associated with the three *guṇas*. But those with the eye of wisdom do perceive it.

Krishna adds that only due to sheer delusion, people in general, miss the presence of the *jīva*. There are three instances, occurring repeatedly, through one of which at least the seeker can gain access to the Soul. The first is when death befalls the body, making it insensitive and useless. Following death, although the body remains warm for a while, does not all sensation and activity cease abruptly?

Secondly, **living itself is a clear evidence of the Soul**. For, every one refers to himself as 'I'. The 'I' is obviously not the body. It is also not the senses, the mind or even the intelligence. We refer to all these as 'mine', indicating clearly that 'I', the wielder of all these, is inmost and something different. What is that 'nominative case' existence, to

which mind, intelligence, body and senses, together with all that they do, are related? **This question should normally occur to any rational person!** But seldom one thinks deeply about it.

Thirdly, think of sleep, during which everyone totally forgets his body, mind and intelligence. He wakes up to say that he did not know anything at all. Obviously, the knower of the sleep state is different from the body, for during sleep the body remains un-sensed.

Though all these states are equally available for all, the sense of enquiry is not there. Thus they remain deluded.

The only way to remove such delusion is to **take up the enquiry and be dedicated to it until the intelligence gets properly enlightened.** When the seeker is able to have the eye of Knowledge, the Soul-presence within the body will be revealed to him without any doubt or lack of clarity.

■

Self-realization is Realization of the Supreme

Ātmā, the Self, was the focus of Krishna's exposition right from the beginning. He began with the pregnant words that the enlightened people (*paṇḍitāḥ*) would not grieve either about the dead or the living. Life force is present in any living body only for a period. The tenure of life is limited. Embodiment is but ephemeral. So, those with the eye of wisdom are not deluded.

The enlightened are imbued with *sama-darśana*, equal vision, grounded on the Immortal Spirit that animates the body.

Pursuit through purity & discrimination

In any living body, what one should obviously sense is the Soul. Our body is the only expression of the Soul, which enables us to infer and feel the Soul's presence in it. "There was no time when I was not. This is true of you and also of all those around (*na tveva-ahaṃ jātu nāsaṃ na tvam neme janādhipāḥ - 2.12*)", adding, "equally so, there will not be any time when we shall cease to be (*na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ*)".

The key and clue to the Supreme is one's own living body. But alas, despite all the power of observation and understanding, every one invariably fails to grasp the immortal presence in it and its glory shining everywhere.

Krishna calls this common inability as sheer delusion. Those deluded alone (*vimūḍhāḥ*) miss this great perception (*na-anupaśyanti*). And those who have acquired the eye of discrimination and wisdom (*jñāna-cakṣuṣaḥ*), certainly succeed in discovering and realizing the Supreme.

Krishna pinpoints again that the only place where this great spiritual perception can be gained, the locus of this great Realization, is within oneself:

यतन्तो योगिनश्चैनं पश्यन्त्यात्मन्यवस्थितम् ।

यतन्तोऽप्यकृतात्मानो नैनं पश्यन्त्यचेतसः ॥

yatanto yoginaścainam paśyanty-ātmany-avasthitam ।

yatanto'py-akṛtātmāno nainam paśyanty-acetasa: ॥

(15.11)

Striving seekers do perceive the supreme Reality in themselves. Those lacking purity and discrimination fail to realize it.

Yatantaḥ yoginaḥ, meaning 'striving seekers', spiritual sādhanas, see the Infinitude of the Soul right in their own being. The emphasis he makes is on **striving**, meaning the sādhanā, consistent spiritual effort, of the seeker. Such effort is first of all to get exposed to the Self as the supreme Presence in the body. Self is not something to be perceived by the senses.

Senses can only perceive external objects, ranging from earth to space. The Self, neither an object nor reigning outside, does not come within their range. Its locus is within the body, hence inaccessible to the senses.

The striving, Krishna speaks about, is thus beyond sensory level. The seeker has to delve into his mind, intelligence and ego, to unearth the Self and gain Its perception.

Perception normally commences from the senses and ends with their objects. Whenever you want to perceive a colourful object with the eye, the thought and persuasion first arise in the mind, which then employs the eyes and gains an imprint of the object.

Though eyes effect the seeing, the process is willed and instituted by the inner instruments of consciousness. It becomes complete when the inner consciousness takes in it an impression of the object sensed. Self-perception is not anything akin. Yet it is perception, no doubt.

When the genesis of perception itself is gone into, explored and discovered in fullness, the Self-perception or Self-realization will also, in truth, take place.

Spiritual striving is fully an inner process. In the whole of spiritual pursuit, *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* (hearing, reflection and meditation) alone matter. Whatever helps this process, is welcome as an aid. *Śravaṇa*, hearing, exposes the seeker to the existence, nature, greatness and magnitude of the Self. To facilitate *śravaṇa* (hearing), we have the scriptural compositions. They are to be handled by exponents who have the requisite authority of realization of the scriptural Truths.

When heard from the right Teacher, hearing becomes fully effective. The words conveying wisdom inspire and involve the mind of the seeker. They institute the process of *manana* (reflective thinking). When *manana* deepens, it leads to *nididhyāsana*, the last phase of meditation and realization.

Krishna by explaining the points consistently to Arjuna, provided powerful exposure, *śravaṇa*. Arjuna grasped what was exposed and introspected. This resulted in clearing his delusion and providing the clarity, strength and persuasion he was thirsting for.

So the words *yatanto yoginaḥ* are very significant in the context of spiritual sādhanā, its rightful fruition. Viewed from any angle, Krishna's words have but one focus – the

inner Self. Here too he emphasizes that the striving yogins perceive the supreme Presence in themselves, within their body.

Though many enquirers or seekers pursue some sādhanā or other, they do not succeed in their effort. Krishna is concerned with this general plight and he explains its cause quite precisely. He also pinpoints the negative traits the seeker should avoid or do away with. Herein lies the effectiveness of Krishna's gospel.

Yatanto-api-akṛtātmāno nainaṃ paśyanti acetasaḥ. Failure in comprehending the Truth is solely due to two reasons: i) Lack of necessary cultural purity and sublimity (*akṛtātmānaḥ*) in the seeker, and ii) lack of the requisite viveka, discrimination (*acetasaḥ*).

It is viveka that empowers our buddhi (intelligence) to distinguish the Soul from the body, discern the supreme Presence in and through the manifold existence around. Viveka is a kind of sharpness, astuteness, subtlety and rarity, which equips the intelligence to probe into one's own within, as it would into any external existence. Purity is the sublimity adorning one's inner being (*antaḥkaraṇa*), whereby it becomes free of worldly blemishes and taints like untruthfulness, infidelity, greed and possessiveness.

The sole purpose of all religious and spiritual efforts is to make the mind and intelligence pure. Such purity will instantly reflect, nay radiate the glory of the Immortal Spirit within. Otherwise, like muddy water, the mind and intelligence will only remain opaque and spread gloom.

Power that creates external visibles

After emphasizing that spiritual search and seeking is truly inner and the resulting discovery is also inner, Krishna speaks about the inner presence, its vast and manifold magnitude and splendour. This elaboration is very important. It is not that the seeker comprehends the spiritual splendour only within himself. He can and should visualize it all around:

यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद्भासयतेऽखिलम् ।
यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥

yad-ādityagataṃ tejo jagad-bhāsayate'khilam ।

yac-candramasi yaccāgnau tat-tejo viddhi māmakam ॥

(15.12)

Know the brilliance of the sun that illumines the world, that (brilliance) which is in the moon and the fire, to be of the same Supreme.

The brilliance of the sun, providing heat and light to the whole earth is due to the supreme splendour of the inner Soul. The same is the truth about the moon, fire and similar luminaries also. In other words, one should not think that the Soul is only an inner spiritual magnificence, having no bearing upon the world of matter and energy. **Every speck of material existence as well as the flow of energy, no matter where it occurs or is evident, is an emanation from the Self, the Soul, and none else.**

Krishna also explains how the life-promoting functions of Nature are equally the Soul's own:

गामाविश्य च भूतानि धारयाम्यहमोजसा ।
पुष्णामि चौषधीः सर्वाः सोमो भूत्वा रसात्मकः ॥

gāmāviśya ca bhūtāni dhārayāmy-aham-ojasā ।

puṣṇāmi cauṣadhīḥ sarvāḥ somo bhūtvā rasātmakaḥ ॥

(15.13)

Permeating earth, the Supreme alone sustains beings with its splendour.
Becoming the lunar lustre, It preserves the sapidity of all herbs and vegetables.

Of the countless planets and heavenly bodies, the earth hosts our life, movement and varied activities. How many forms of life are there on earth! To enable all these to sustain their life, what an enormous variety of food and nourishment is available! How many seeds, minerals and salts, water, countless physical, chemical and biological processes and transmutations are there! Myriad are the contents and characteristics the earth possesses to bring about, promote and sustain life. Krishna says that all these emerge from the same spiritual Soul. Though there is surprising plurality in manifestation, in causality it is the singular Soul.

Sun is hot, whereas the moon is cool. In the growth, flowering and fruition of plants and vegetables, moon has a distinct role to play. Krishna describes the moon as *rasātmakaḥ*. Moon holds the power to instil sapidity into the seeds, sprouts, plants and creepers thereby making them healthy and vibrant. There are flowers that blossom with the touch of the cool beams of the moon.

Earlier, he has linked yajña with rainfall that results in production of food grains, which alone provides sustenance for living beings. Here he goes a step further to say that like the hot sun the cool moon also has a close link with the health and resourcefulness of the plant kingdom. It is a traditional practice among farmers to expose seeds to moonlight for a few days. By this, the seeds are expected to imbibe some special vigour to germinate healthily. Does this not give a clue for further scientific investigation?

Discovering the Supreme as the Inner Presence

The idea is that the magnitude and splendour of the Soul is not just subtle, hidden within the body. It is infinite, extensive and manifest in the smallest as well as biggest forms of existence and expression. Going up to the sun, transiting to the moon, then descending to the earth and coursing through plants and vegetables, Krishna leads the seeker to be lodged in himself and feel closer:

अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।
प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्विधम् ॥

ahaṃ vaiśvānaro bhūtvā prāṇināṃ deham-āśrita: ।

prāṇāpānasamāyukta: pacāmy-annaṃ catur-vidham ॥

(15.14)

Manifesting as life-fire in the bodies of creatures and uniting *prāṇa* and *apāna*, the supreme Reality digests the four-fold food.

Krishna says that in the matter of eating and providing nourishment to the body, to empower its ceaseless activity like breathing, circulating blood, stimulating signals to different parts, etc., the potential and powers of the supreme Reality alone are manifest. In particular, he says that the supreme Reality resides in the bodies of beings as Vaiśvānara, the enlivening fire. Linked with *prāṇa* and *apāna* (the upward and downward breath), Vaiśvānara digests the four kinds of food.

Bhakṣya, *bhojya*, *coṣya* and *lehya* are the four different types of food the humans take. *Bhakṣya* refers to those items to be chewed or masticated before gulping in. *Bhojya* consists of semisolid items, which can be taken in without chewing. *Pāyasam* (a kind of sweet) and such other items fall in this group. All that can be sipped in are called *coṣya*. They need not touch the teeth at all. *Lehya* is to be licked in.

Human system is meant to assimilate all these four kinds uniformly. Vaiśvānara helps this process. How intimate is then the presence and function of the Supreme in our life!

In the 10th chapter Krishna has referred to the *vibhūti*s of the Supreme. He has explained how the Supreme, otherwise imperceptible and omnipresent, remains incomprehensible, though manifest in the whole creation. In order to facilitate a full comprehension of the Supreme, Krishna lists a variety of objects and qualities. The references include letters, words, mountains, war-weapons, fame, patience, will, memory, spirituality and the rest. Finally he declares that all put together, the entire visible glory around us is *merely one small fraction* of the Supreme (10.42).

Compared to that, how closely Krishna brings one's day to day life to the manifest glory of the Supreme! He now goes on to describe it as present within the body, even in the sphere of the mind and intelligence:

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो
मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च ।
वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो
वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ॥

sarvasya cāhaṃ hṛdi sanniviṣṭo

matta: smṛtir-jñānam-apohanaṃ ca ।

vedaiś-ca sarvair-aham-eva vedyo

vedānta-kṛd-veda-vid-eva cāham ॥

(15.15)

Supreme is embedded in all hearts, giving rise to memory, wisdom and forgetfulness. Four Vedas speak of the Supreme alone. The author as well as the Knower of Vedanta is again the Supreme.

The Supreme is closest to everyone, whether we admit it or not. It is present in everyone's heart. To trace it functionally, Krishna lists memory (*smṛti*), knowledge (*jñānam*), and forgetfulness (*apohanam*), stating that all these emerge only from this indwelling Presence. These are conscious functions, reigning above the range of matter and energy.

He does not specify the memory as good, benign or virtuous. Memory is always the recollection of things transpired. Actions and events take place in the march of time. As they occur, so they pass off and what they leave is their memory. This survives only because of the Supreme presence in one.

Knowledge of any kind is also due to the Supreme. Forgetfulness too. Forgetfulness or its possibility is the ground on which memory rests. It is like friction to movement.

All the Vedas speak about and reveal one supreme Reality. Vedic hymns may be numerous, but the import of them all is but one, contained in their *mahāvākyas* – *Prajñānaṃ Brahma* of Ṛgveda, *Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi* of Yajurveda, *Tat-tvam-asi* of Sāmaveda and *Ayamātmā Brahma* of Atharvaveda. All these describe Brahman alone. The first denoting its nature as 'knowledge', the second describing its locus as the 'I' in all, the third specifying the instruction to the seeker as "you are That", and the fourth confirming that the inner Self alone is the supreme Reality.

All the Vedas, in the form of Knowledge, are but creations of this Supreme itself. The Knower of Vedas also is the Supreme. In other words, every individual identity is a reference to the Supreme. The entire knowledge is but its own display.

The Knower of Truth is the distinct expression of the Supreme. He alone, like Krishna, will be able to think, speak and act on Its behalf. The same idea Krishna has set forth earlier also: *jñānī tu ātmaiva me matam* (7.18). The supreme Reality is a spiritual concept. It is illustrated and explained by man alone. Other than the Knower, the supreme Reality has no representation at all.



The Ultimate Confluence – Īśvara, the Supreme Reality and the Self

There is a supreme Reality. It is all-permeating. Its locus is truly in every creation, mobile and immobile. That is the sole subject of discussion in the Vedas and allied Scriptures. All forms and procedures in religion, spirituality or yoga have, in reality, one focus – this supreme Reality.

As the mind is generally unable to think in depth and grasp the true dimension of the Supreme, people prefer to remain parochial in their concepts and approaches. But in reality the seeker's intention must be to elevate his introspection and broaden his horizon to arrive at the right spiritual insight.

This transpires when the seeker processes his mind and intelligence through the finer spiritual concepts. Such personal inner interaction on the subtler notes of wisdom, as Arjuna is doing before Krishna, constitutes the true pilgrimage leading to the comprehension of the Self. There is no other way of **purifying the mind, sharpening the intelligence** and gaining spiritual worth and glory.

Transcending perishable & imperishable puruṣas

Krishna pointed out that right in the yonder sun (*yad ādityagataṃ tejo*), then in the nearer moon (*somo bhūtvā rasātmakaḥ*), down in the earth (*gāṃ āviśya ca bhūtāni dhārayāmi*) and finally in one's own heart (*sarvasya cāhaṃ hṛdi sanniviṣṭaḥ*), the Supreme alone dwells, instilling thoughts, feelings, memories and knowledge. Now, he brings in the discussion of *uttama Puruṣa*. By this he wants to emphasize that the supreme Reality in the form of *Paramātmā*, the greater, loftier and the ultimate Reality, Existence, transcends the two *puruṣas*:

द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च ।
क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥
उत्तमः पुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः ।
यो लोकत्रयमाविश्य बिभर्त्यव्यय ईश्वरः ॥

*dvāv-imau puruṣau loke kṣaraś-cākṣara eva ca ।
kṣara: sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭastho'kṣara ucyate ॥
uttama: puruṣastv-anya: paramātmety-udāhṛta: ।
yo loka-trayam-āviśya bibharty-avyaya īśvara: ॥*

(15.16,17)

There are in this world two kinds of puruṣas, the perishable and imperishable. All the beings come under the perishable puruṣa and the imperishable is said to be unshakeable and unaffected. It is the *jīva* in the body.

The Supreme, namely the transcendent Puruṣa, is still different. That is said to be the *Paramātmā*. It is the one permeating all the three worlds and sustaining them, thereby becoming the all-controller.

Generally prakṛti and puruṣa go together, making an inseparable couple, complementing each other. Their complementary qualities empower their mutuality. Prakṛti represents the changeful existence and Puruṣa the constant, unchanging support for it.

At this point Krishna brings in a different concept, namely, that of two Puruṣas. One akin to the transforming prakṛti and the other acting as the base and support for it. In fact, the words alone differ; the concept and connotation are the same. Of the many elements making the gospel unique, this also is one. All spiritual concepts and postulates mainly serve the purpose of enunciating a theory or proposition and thereby giving a proper message. In all this, what is conveyed is more important than the theories. Krishna's twin-puruṣa exposition can be evaluated in this context.

Calling both of them 'puruṣas', Krishna says all beings and expressions of existence constitute the perishable puruṣa. Within, beneath and together with this perishable puruṣa is the other, immovable and imperishable.

Such an imperishable entity is there in every individual. Despite the changeful character of the body, senses, mind, intelligence and even ego, does not every one always carry a constant note of unchanging-ness in him? This he refers to as 'I', to which he relates all outer and inner changes. This is the imperishable puruṣa. Both the puruṣas go together, each enabling and fulfilling the other. The changeful part will not be there but for the changeless presence. Thus a question becomes inevitable: If the two are interdependent, then what is that independent superior factor that gives rise to both? Is not such a sovereign third factor inescapable?

Yes, says Krishna. And he calls it the supreme Reality, the *Paramātmā*. Is this merely a statement, or is there some tangible ground to posit such a Supreme? In spirituality, everything is *sva-saṃvedyam* (self-experiential).

The whole spirituo-philosophical thoughts and presentations are experiential. It is well-established that for presenting any proposition, there must first be experiential facts supporting it. And the proposition should be supported by well thought out reason too.

Krishna says that this third factor is the one that permeates 'the three worlds', remaining sovereign, all-controlling (*Īśvara*). What can these three worlds be?

By the 'three worlds', Krishna refers to the **three states of awareness** we have within us. Māṇḍūkya Upanishad (Mantra 5,6 & 7) discusses this *avasthā-traya* (the three mental states) in a unique manner. Gauḍapāda has written a detailed *kārikā* on it, which Śaṅkara has commented upon.

The sense-perceived external objective world is in fact no other than the wakeful state manifestation. As a full contrast to this is the deep sleep state (*suṣupti*), wherein this whole wakeful objectivity becomes totally extinct, making the sleeper alone survive to fetch the wakeful manifestation again. In between the wakeful and deep sleep states prevails the dream state, which brings forth the dream creation and its effects.

These three states of our mind and the respective outcomes are the only ground for our experience, perception and evaluation. In fact, all our Scriptures and philosophical dissertations are based on these three mental states of ours. They alone give the clue to all the worlds, above and below. Krishna had mentioned the same earlier as well:

अव्यक्तादव्यक्तयः सर्वाः प्रभवन्त्यहरागमे ।
रात्र्यागमे प्रलीयन्ते तत्रैवाव्यक्तसंज्ञके ॥

avyaktād-vyaktaya: sarvā: prabhavanty-ahar-āgame ।

rātry-āgame praliyante tatraivāvyakta-sañjñake ॥

(8.18)

As the day dawns, all beings emerge from the unmanifest. And at night they glide back into the same unmanifest.

Waking state reveals the wakeful world of objects. The dream state brings in the subtle dream world, quite similar to wakeful world, but reigning within the sleeping individual, with no external relationship or identity. Sleep is yet a different one, from which we get the clue to the existence of a Subject distinct from all objects like the world, body, mind, intelligence and ego.

Something different from these three is there, due to which alone the three states occur one after another, each invalidating the other two. And that One, is sovereign, causing each state to be. Hence it is the *Īśvara*, the Controller of all the three. The three states together with their gross and subtle, external and internal outcomes totally depend upon this, **making it the distinct fourth**, the *turiya*. This *turiya* alone causes and preserves the inter-dependence of the three.

Understanding Puruṣottama as the Self

This is the *Paramātmā*, the Supreme, says Krishna. He describes it in his own manner:

यस्मात्क्षरमतीतोऽहमक्षरादपि चोत्तमः ।
अतोऽस्मि लोके वेदे च प्रथितः पुरुषोत्तमः ॥

yasmāt-kṣaram-atīto'ham-akṣarād-api cottama: ।

ato'smi loke vede ca prathita: puruṣottama: ॥

(15.18)

As the Supreme, namely the 'I', transcends the perishable existence as well as the imperishable *jīva*, in both Vedas and the world of thinkers, it has become famous as the supreme Puruṣa, the Puruṣottama.

As it is beyond the perishable forms of existence and also transcends the imperishable *jīvā* acting as the support for the perishable, It has become famous in both the Vedas and the realm of thinkers as Puruṣottama. **The reference he makes is to the Self**, which he began describing and explaining right from the second chapter as:

ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo । (2.20)

nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate । (2.19)

acchedyo'yaṁ adāhyo'yaṁ akledyo aśoṣya eva ca । (2.24)

By calling it as Puruṣottama and Īśvara, Krishna gives a clear indication as well as assurance to the seeking mind that **the objective of all sādhanā is to get at the Self and be established there.**

The world is, no doubt, infinite, endless, stupendous and awe-inspiring. Everything in it makes one think deeply about something great, wholesome and magnificent. Think of the earth itself, on which survive countless varieties of creatures – animal and vegetable kingdoms that live in water as well as on land. How could the single earth, being mute and insentient, be the genesis of all these?

The power that water or air holds is boundless – even terrifying. What to say about lightning, rainfall or radiation? How many planets far more huge and complex than earth surround us! When one thinks of all these endless creations and tries to trace their source, where would it lead and to what splendour and might?

Krishna says all these come within the *kṣara* and *akṣara puruṣas* he speaks of. The one source, the progenitor of both, he then adds, is not so much above, far away or beyond our reach. It is within us, beneath the mind and heart. It is the creator of the three mental states. Call it the Puruṣottama and **understand that It is within yourself.**

Once this understanding becomes firm, unshakeable and wholesome, that would mark the **end of all search**, doubt and agitation. He, who has gained this kind of fruition and fulfillment, becomes the all-knower. **For him nothing else is there to be known.**

Such a Knower has sensed and realized the ultimate essence of all creation, the one substratum of all existence. This wholesome knowledge of the Supreme makes him a wholesome worshipper too.

His worship, if at all, is no more partial or piecemeal. No more does he distinguish between worship and non-worship. For him there is nothing secular either. **Everything becomes religious, divine, spiritual and yogic.** Within him is the Supreme and surrounding him is Its magnificence and splendour. There is no fall or rise for such a one – religiously, spiritually, philosophically or in yoga.

Of course, Krishna has spoken about such a stable, wholesome, inner spiritual state in the second chapter while describing the *sthita-prajña* and *sthita-dhiḥ*.

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।
स्थित्वाऽस्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥

eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha naināṃ prāpya vimuhyati ।
sthitvā'syām-antakāle'pi brahma-nirvāṇam-ṛcchati ॥

(2.72)

This is the Brāhmic state, gaining which one is no more deluded. Ever established in it, one attains Brahma-nirvāṇa.

The key to everything is in one's own within. **The world is not as much an external creation, as it is an outcome of one's own wakeful state.**

Mind is above matter. It is an expression of Consciousness. Consciousness, *cit* is *sat* and *ānanda*. *Sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* go together, to make the *Saccidānanda*, the Reality.

Wisdom – the hidden essence of all scriptures

Krishna concludes:

इति गुह्यतमं शास्त्रमिदमुक्तं मयाऽनघ ।
एतद्बुद्ध्वा बुद्धिमान्स्यात्कृतकृत्यश्च भारत ॥

iti guhya-tamaṃ śāstram-idam-uktaṃ mayā'nagha ।
etad-buddhvā buddhimān-syāt-kṛtakṛtyaś-ca bhārata ॥

(15.20)

Thus is revealed to you by Me, the greatest secret of all śāstras, O sinless soul. Knowing this well does the seeker become wise and fulfilled.

Thus, says Krishna, he has divulged the best of the scriptural secrets and enunciation. The *purāṇas* and allied scriptures have a great deal to say about fourteen worlds, the heavens and the hells. But the net result is confusion. In front of all these possibilities and potentials, what is the plight of the seeker?

Those who are addicted to the *purāṇa* lore are faced with despair, confusion and fear. Are we in the middle of an ageless past and endless future, making neither return nor further journey possible? Such a situation is most saddening.

But they too are held as śāstras. Krishna, in contrast, says what he tells Arjuna is **the most hidden essence** of all śāstras. His words are fully scriptural, and as such, one does not have to look for any other scriptural source or relief. *Guhyatama* means the best and the deepest of all secrets. One has to understand that it is so, giving it the right place and allowing it to enrich and fulfil him.

Right knowledge of what Krishna says will make one wise and the wisdom also brings fulfillment. When such an outcome is had, nothing more will be there to be gained.

As the dialogue extends, Krishna has to hold the attention of Arjuna. So he gives a personal touch to his words often. It is to convey a note that will make the listener attentive. Describing his words as most valuable, highest, greatest of all secrets, etc. Krishna is drawing Arjuna's attention.

Such words are used elsewhere also. He had begun the fourteenth chapter with the words:

परं भूयः प्रवक्ष्यामि ज्ञानानां ज्ञानमुत्तमम् ।

यज्ज्ञात्वा मुनयः सर्वे परां सिद्धिमितो गताः ॥

paraṃ bhūya: pravakṣyāmi jñānānāṃ jñānam-uttamam ।

yaj-jñātvā munaya: sarve parāṃ siddhim-ito gatā: ॥

(14.1)

Again, I am telling you that wisdom, which is the best of all. By knowing this have all Sages attained the Supreme perfection.

As he proceeds, Krishna will again speak in comparative and superlative degrees, while describing the place and importance of his gospel. True to his role as a narrator, Vyāsadeva records not alone Krishna's words and phrases, but also how he entuses Arjuna emotionally. The personal note is no doubt preserved and strengthened.

Is not spiritual wisdom, in truth, hidden and inaccessible to ordinary people? Or else, it would have been known to all and followed by many!

