

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Notes On
The Bhagavad-Gita

The First Seven Chapters

by

WILLIAM Q. JUDGE

The Remaining Chapters by a

Student Taught by Him.

THEOSOPHY COMPANY (INDIA)

BOMBAY

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

PREFACE

This book has been made possible by the generosity of a Student who is a member of The United Lodge of Theosophists. The matter in it appeared in the Magazine Theosophy, published by that Lodge, in various issues from November, 1913, to February, 1917. Notes upon chapters One to Seven, inclusive, were written by William Q. Judge, and were first printed in his magazine The Path, appearing in various numbers from 1887 to 1895. These Notes by Mr. Judge were signed "William Brehon, F. T. S.," or "William Brehon"—pen names used by Mr. Judge. The Notes for the remaining eleven Chapters were written by a Student of William Q. Judge, one who was personally taught by him and whose explanations and comments will be found in accord with the spirit and genius of his Teacher.

No attempt has been made to alter or revise Mr. Judge's Notes so that they may be in "book form." Quite often Mr. Judge devoted several articles, appearing in several different numbers of The Path, to a consideration of a single Gita Chapter, and the reader of this book will note that fact as he peruses its pages. The compilers have inserted rules to show where one such article leaves off and another begins. The reader will note the initials "W. B." or "B." signed to some of the footnotes: these stand for "William Brehon" or "Brehon," and were written, of course, by Mr. Judge.

The form and size of this book are designed to conform to that of Mr. Judge's rendering of the Bhagavad-Gita itself, which has been found so convenient by thousands of students.

The Publishers.

1

Chapter I

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

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

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

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

2

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

3

spiritual planes; and a great sage could easily adopt a human event in order to erect a noble philosophical system upon such an allegorical foundation.

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

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

The location of the plain on which this battle

4

was fought is important, as well as are also the very rivers and mountains by which it is bounded. And as equally needful to be understood, or at least guessed at, are the names of the respective princes. The very place in the *Mahabharata* in which this episode is inserted has deep significance, and we cannot afford to ignore anything whatever that is connected with the events. If we merely imagine that Vyasa or Krishna took the sacred plain of Kurukshetra and the great battle as simply accessories to his discourse, which we can easily discard, the whole force of the dialogue will be lost. Although the *Bhagavad-Gita* is a small work, there have been written upon it, among the Hindus, more commentaries than those upon the *Revelation* of St. John among the Christians.

I do not intend to go into those commentaries, because on the one hand I am not a Sanskrit scholar, and on the other it would not tend to great profit. Many of them are fanciful, some unwarrantable; and those that are of value can be consulted by anyone anxious to pursue that line of inquiry. What I propose here to myself and to all who may read these papers is to study the *Bhagavad-*

5

Gita by the light of that spiritual lamp -- be it small or great -- which the Supreme Soul will feed and increase within us if we attend to its behests and diligently inquire after it. Such at least is the promise by Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* — the "Song Celestial."

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

But there is the highest authority for reading this poem between the lines. The Vedas themselves say that what we see of them is only "the disclosed Veda," and that one should strive to get above this *disclosed* word. It is here clearly implied that the undisclosed Vedas must be hidden or contained in that which is apparent to the outer senses. Did we not have this privilege, then surely would we be reduced

6

to obtaining true knowledge solely from the facts of experience as suffered by the mortal frame, and fall into the gross error of the materialists who claim that mind is only an effect produced by the physical brain-molecules coming into motion. We would also have to follow the canonical rule, that conscience is a safe guide only when it is regulated by an external law such as the law of the church, or of the Brahmanical caste. But we very well know that within the material, apparent—or disclosed — man, exists the *real* one who is undisclosed.

This valuable privilege of looking for the inner sense, while not straining after impossible meanings in the text, is permitted to all sincere students of any holy scriptures, Christian or Pagan. And in the poem itself, Krishna declares that he will feed the lamp of spiritual wisdom so that the real meaning of his words may be known; so too the Upanishads uphold the existence of a faculty together with the right to use it, whereby one can plainly discern the real, or undisclosed, meaning of holy books. Indeed, there is a school of occultists who hold, as we think with reason, that this power may be so developed by devoted persons, that even upon hearing the words of a holy book read in a totally un-

7

familiar language, the true meaning and drift of the strange sentences become instantly known¹. The Christian commentators all allow that in studying their Bible the spirit must be attended to and not the letter. This *spirit* is that *undisclosed* Veda which must be looked for between the lines.

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

8

to listen, which is just the same direction as that given by Jesus of Nazareth when he said, "cast not your pearls before swine."

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

Western Sanskritists have translated many important words into the very lowest of their real meanings, being drawn away from the true by the incomplete Western psychological and spiritual knowledge, or have mixed them

9

up hopelessly. Such words as *karma* and *dharma* are not understood. *Dharma* means *law*, and is generally turned into *duty*, or said to refer merely to some rule depending upon human convention, whereas it means an inherent property of the faculties or of the whole man, or even of anything in the cosmos. Thus it is said that it is the duty, or dharma, of fire to burn. It always will burn and thus do its whole duty, having no consciousness, while man alone has the power to retard his "journey to the heart of the sun," by refusing to perform his properly appointed and plainly evident dharma. So again, when we read in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that those who depart this life "in the bright half of the moon, in the six months of the sun's northern course," will go to eternal salvation, while others, "who depart in the gloomy night of the moon's dark season while the sun is in the southern half of his path," ascend for a time to the moon's region, to be reborn on this earth, our Orientalists tell us this is sheer folly, and we are unable to contradict them. But if we know that the Aryans, with a comprehensive knowledge of the vast and never inharmonious correspondence reigning throughout the macrocosm, in speaking thus meant to admit that the human

10

being may be or not in a state of development in strict conformity to the bright or dark moon, the verse becomes clear. The materialistic critic will take the verse in the fourth chapter, which says that "he who eats of the ambrosia left from a sacrifice passes into the supreme spirit," and ask us how the eating of the remnants of a burnt offering can confer salvation. When, however, we know that Man is the altar and the sacrifice, and that this *ambrosia* is the *perfection of spiritual cultivation* which he eats or incorporates into his being, the Aryan is vindicated and we are saved from despair.

A strange similarity on one point may be noticed between our poem and the old Hebrew record. The Jews were prepared by certain experiences to enter into the promised land, but were unable to do so until they had engaged in mighty conflicts with Hivites, Jebusites, Perizzites, and Amalekites. Here we find that the very opening verse signalizes a war. The old, blind king Dhritarashtra asks his prime minister to tell him what these opposing forces of Pandus and Kurus have been doing assembled as they are resolved upon war. So too the Jews assembled upon the borders of the promised land, resolved on conflict, and sustained in their resolve by the declarations

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

11

of their God who had brought them out of the darkness of Egypt, carried on the fight. Egypt was the place where they had, in mystic language, obtained corporification, and stands for antenatal states, for unformed chaotic periods in the beginning of evolution, for the gestation in the womb. We are on the eve of a gigantic combat, we are to rush into the midst of "a conflict of savages." If this opening verse is understood as it was meant, we are given the key to a magnificent system, and shall not fall into the error of asserting that the unity of the poem is destroyed.

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

Someone has said— Goethe I think—that the old pagan religions taught man to look up, to aspire continually toward the greatness which was really his to achieve, and thus led him to regard himself as but little less, potentially, than a god; while the attitude of man under the Christian system is one of humility, of bowed head and lowered eyes, in the presence of his God. In approaching the "jealous God" of the Mosaic dispensation, it is not permissible to assume an erect position. This change of attitude becomes necessary as soon as we postulate a Deity who is outside and be-

12

yond us. And yet it is not due to the Christian scriptures in themselves, but solely to the wrong interpretation given them by priests and churches, and easily believed by a weak humanity that needs a support beyond itself on which to lean.

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

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

These philosophers were not behind our nineteenth century. Boscovich, the Italian, Faraday, Fiske and other moderns, have concluded that we cannot even see or know the *matter* of which these bodies and the different

13

substances about us are made up, and that the ultimate resolution is not into atoms finely divided, but into "points of dynamic force"; and therefore, we cannot know a piece of iron, we only know the *phenomena* it produces. This position is an ancient Aryan one, with another added — that the real perceiver of those phenomena is the *Self*.

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

or that some mediums are living who have disappeared while sitting in a chair, either as an actual dissipation of molecules or by being covered as with a veil.²

14

In those instances the thing happened without knowledge or effort on the part of the medium, who was a passive agent. But the Eastern ascetic, possessing the power of disappearing, is a person who has meditated upon the real basis of what we know as "form," with the doctrine ever in view, as stated by Boscovich and Faraday, that these phenomena are not realities *per se*, and adding that all must be referred to the Self. And so we find Patanjali in his compilation of yoga aphorisms stating the matter. In his twenty-first aphorism Book III, he says that the ascetic being aware that form, as such, is nothing, can cause himself to disappear.³ It is not difficult to explain this as a species of hypnotism or psychologizing performed by the ascetic. But such sort of explaining is only the modern method of getting out of a difficulty by stating it over again in new terms. Not until it is admitted that the Self eternally persists, and is always unmodified, will any real knowledge be acquired by us respecting these matters. In this Patanjali is very clear in his seventeenth aphor-

15

ism, Book IV, where he says: "The modifications of the mental state are always known, because the presiding spirit is not modified."

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

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

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

16

tire set of spiritual faculties, been doing on this sacred plain.

It follows then that the enumeration of generals and commanders gone into by the prime minister in reply to the king must be a catalogue of all the lower and higher faculties in man,

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

containing also, in the names adopted, clues to powers of our being only at present dimly guessed at in the West or included in such vague terms as brain and mind. We find these generals given their appropriate places upon either side, and see also that they have assigned to them various distinctive weapons, which in many cases are flourished or exhibited in the preliminary movements, so that our attention may be drawn to them.

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

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

17

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

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

The cause of this despondency is to be inquired into.

Arjuna, in the flush of determination, and before any analysis of either the consequences to himself or to others who might become involved, entered the conflict, after having chosen Krishna as his charioteer. The forces are drawn up in line of battle, and he rides out to survey them. At once he sees ranged against him relatives of every class, in their turn pre-

18

paring to destroy others, their relatives, friends and acquaintances as well as Arjuna's, who are enlisted on his side. Turning to Krishna, he says that he cannot engage in such a war, that he perceives only evil omens, and that even if the opposers, being ignorant, may be willing to fight with such dreadful consequences in view, he cannot do so, but must give up the battle ere it is begun. Thereupon:

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

Every student of occultism, theosophy or true religion — all being the one thing — will go through Arjuna's experiences. Attracted by the beauty or other seductive quality, for him, of this study, he enters upon the prosecution of it, and soon discovers that he arouses two sets of forces. One of them consists of all his friends and relations who do not view life as he does, who are wedded to the "established order," and think him a fool for devoting any attention to anything else; while the general mass of his acquaintances and those whom he meets in the world instinctively array themselves against one who is thus starting upon a crusade that begins with his own

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

19

follies and faults, but must end in a condemnation of theirs, if only by the force of example. The other opponents are far more difficult to meet, because they have their camp and base of action upon the Astral and other hidden planes; they are all his lower tendencies and faculties, that up to this time have been in the sole service of material life. By the mere force of moral gravity, they fly to the other side, where they assist his living friends and relatives in their struggle against him. They have more efficiency in producing despondency than anything else. In the poem, it is referred to in the words addressed by Arjuna to Krishna:

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

All of us are brought to this study by our own request made to our higher self, who is Krishna. Arjuna requested Krishna to be his charioteer, and to drive him forth between the two armies. It does not matter whether he now is consciously aware of having made the request, nor whether it was made as a specific act, in this life or in many another precedent one; *it was made and it is to be answered at*

20

the right time. Some of us have asked this many times before, in ancient births of ours in other bodies and other lands; others are making the request now; but it is more than likely in the case of those who are spurred on to intense effort and longing to know the truth, and to strive for unity with God, that they have put up the petition ages since. So now Krishna, the charioteer of this body with its horses — the mind — drives us forth so that we may stand with our higher self and all the tendencies connected with it on one side, and all the lower (but not all necessarily evil) principles on the other. The student may, perhaps, with ease face the crowd of friends and relatives, having probably gone through that experience in other lives and is now proof against it, but he is not proof against the first dark shadow of despair and ill result that falls upon him. Every elemental that he has vivified by evil thinking now casts upon him the thought, "After all, it is no use; I cannot win; if I did, the gain would be nothing; I can see no great or lasting result to be attained, for all, all, is impermanent."

This dreadful feeling is sure in each case to supervene, and we might as well be prepared

21

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

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

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

In this, Krishna uses the very argument advanced by Arjuna against the fight, as one in its favor. In the chapter we are considering, Arjuna repeats the old Brahmanical injunction against those who break up the "eternal institutions of caste and tribe," for, as he says, the penalty

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

annexed is a sojourn in hell, since, when the caste and tribe are destroyed, the ancestors, being deprived of the rites of

22

funeral-cakes and libations of water⁴, fall from heaven, and the whole tribe is thus lost. But Krishna shows, as above, that each man is naturally, by his bodily tendencies, compelled to do the acts of some particular calling, and that body with its tendencies is merely the manifestation of what the inner man is, as the result of all his former thoughts up to that incarnation. So he is forced by nature's law — which is his own — to be born just where he must have the experience that is needed. And Arjuna, being a warrior, is compelled to fight, whether he will or no. In another chapter, the institution of caste is more particularly referred to, and there we

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

Although greatly corrupted and debased, it is in this church alone that these old practices are preserved. *Sraddha* and *Pinda* are now neglected, because the inner constitution of man, and the constitution of the macrocosm, are not understood in such a way as to make the ceremony of the slightest use. —W.B.

23

will have occasion to go into that subject with more detail.

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

This leads us to the conviction that there must be a universal presiding spirit, the producer as well as the spectator, of all this collection of animate and inanimate things. The philosophy taught by Krishna holds that at first this spirit — so called, however, by me only for the purpose of the discussion — remained in

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

24

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

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

We have thus quickly, and perhaps in an

25

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

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

It would avail nothing at present to specify the Aryan nomenclature for all the sheaths — as they call them — that envelope the soul, because we as yet have not acquired the necessary ideas. Of what use is it to say that certain impressions reside in the *Anandamaya* sheath. But there is such an one, whether we call it by that name or by any other. We

26

can, however, believe that the soul, in order to at last reach the objective plane where its experience is gained, places upon itself, one after the other, various sheaths, each having its peculiar property and function. The mere physical brain is thus seen to be only the material organ first used by the real percipient in receiving or conveying ideas and perceptions; and so with all the other organs, they are only the special seats for centralizing the power of the real man in order to experience the modifications of nature at that particular spot.

Who is the sufferer from this despondency?

It is our false personality as distinguished from Krishna — the higher self — which is oppressed by the immediate resistance offered by all the lower part of our nature, and by those persons

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

with whom we are most closely connected, as soon as we begin to draw them away from all old habits, and to present a new style of thinking for their consideration.

For Arjuna, sinking down upon the seat of that chariot which is his body, fell back upon his own nature and found therein the elements of search and courage, as well as those previous ones of gloom which arise first, being nearer

27

the natural man. Reliance and pressure upon our own inner nature, in moments of darkness, are sure to be answered by the voice of Krishna, the inner guide.

The first consequences of the despondency

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

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

"THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA."

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

THE FIRST ABYSS

Salutation to the prowess of Krishna! May it be with us in the fight, strengthening our hearts that

28

they faint not in the gloomy night that follows in the path of the day.

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

29

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

It does not appear in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that Krishna had induced Arjuna, as was the case, to make the war for the purpose of regaining his kingdom. While stirring him up to it Krishna had wisely refrained from telling that which Arjuna finds out on the first day, that he had to oppose all these friends, kinsmen and preceptors. It was a wise reticence. If we completely apprehended the enormous power of our passions and various tendencies, most of us would throw up the fight in advance; for nothing would persuade us that any power within could withstand against

30

such overwhelming odds. For us then the incitement to fight is found, not so much in any conversation that we hold now with Krishna, but in the impulses which are carried across, again and again, from incarnation to incarnation.

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

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

31

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

Because the abyss is behind us.

There is in nature a law that operates in every department whether moral or physical, and which may now be called that of undulation and then that of inhibition; while at other times it reappears as vibration, and still again as attraction and repulsion, but all these changes are only apparent because at bottom it is the same. Among vegetables it causes the sap to flow up the tree in one way and will not permit it to return in the same direction. In our own blood

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

circulation we find the blood propelled from the heart, and that nature has provided little valves which will not permit it to return to the heart by the way it came,

32

but by the way provided. Medical and anatomical science are not quite sure what it is that causes the blood to pass these valves; whether it is pressure from behind communicated by the heart, or the pressure by atmosphere from without which gently squeezes, as it were, the blood upon its way. But the occultist does not find himself limited by these empirical deductions. He goes at once to the center and declares that the impulse *is* from the heart and that that organ receives its impulse from the great astral heart or the akasa, which has been said by all mystics to have a double motion, or alternate vibration — the systole and diastole of nature.

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

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

33

the general law and beginning the process of assimilation.

And in the astral world it is just the same. When one enters there for the first time, a great silence falls, during which the regulated soul is imbibing its surroundings and becoming accustomed to them. It says nothing but waits quietly until it has become in vibration precisely the same as the plane in which it is; when that is accomplished then it can speak properly, make itself understood, and likewise understand. But the unregulated soul flies to that plane of the astral world in a disturbed state, hurries to speak before it is able to do so intelligibly and as a consequence is not understood, while it increases its own confusion and makes it less likely that it will soon come to understand. People are attracted to the astral plane; they hear of its wonders and astonishments and like a child with a new toy in sight they hurry to grasp it. They refuse to learn its philosophy because that seems dry and difficult. So they plunge in, and as Murdhna Joti said in a former article in this magazine, they then "swim in it and cut capers like a boy in a pool of water."

34

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

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

meaning here, which is also a part of the great abyss the son of Pandu saw behind him, and which every one of us also sees.

We enter upon this great path of action in occultism mentally disposed towards final

35

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

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

It has been said in some theosophical writings of the present day, that a "spiritualized will" ought to be cultivated. As terms are of the highest importance we ought to be careful how we use them, for in the inner life they represent either genuine, regulated forces, or useless and abortive things that lead to nothing but confusion. This term "spiritualized will" leads to error, because in fact it has no

36

existence. The mistake has grown out of the constant dwelling on "will" and "forces" needed for the production of phenomena, as something the disciple should strive to obtain — whether so confessed or not — while the real motive power is lost sight of. It is very essential that we should clearly understand this, for if we make the blunder of attributing to *will* or to any other faculty an action which it does not have, or of placing it in a plane to which it does not belong, we at once remove ourselves far from the real knowledge, since all action on this plane is by mind alone.

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

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

But as there are countless wills of sentient beings constantly plying to and fro in our sphere, and must be at all times in some manner acting upon one another, the question arises: What is that sort of knowledge which shows how to use the will so that the effect of counteracting wills may not be felt? That knowledge is lost among the generality of men and is only instinctive here and there in

37

the world as a matter of karmic result, giving us examples of men whose will seems to lead them on to success, as Jay Gould and others.

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

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

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

He acquires extraordinary knowledge, enabling him to use powers for selfish purposes during immense periods of time, but at last the insidious effects of the opposition to the general

38

true will makes itself felt and he is destroyed forever.

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

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

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

39

Chapter II

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

A mighty spirit moves through the pages of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It has the seductive influence of beauty; yet, like strength, it fills one as with the sound of armies assembling or the roar of great waters. Appealing alike to the warrior and the philosopher, it shows to the one the righteousness of lawful action, and to the other the calmness which results to him who has reached inaction through action. Schlegel, after studying the poem, pays tribute to it in these words: “ By the Brahmins, reverence of masters is considered the most sacred of duties. Thee therefore, first, most holy prophet, interpreter of the Deity, by whatever name thou wast called among mortals, the author of this poem, by whose oracles the mind is rapt with ineffable delight to doctrines lofty, eternal, and divine — thee first, I say, I hail, and shall always worship at thy feet.”

The second chapter begins to teach philosophy, but in such a way that Arjuna is led

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

40

on gradually step by step to the end of the dialogue; and yet the very first instructions from Krishna are so couched that the end and purpose of the scheme are seen at the beginning.

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

The greatest of the ancients inculcated by both symbols and books the absolute necessity for the acquirement of philosophical knowledge, inasmuch as strength or special faculties

41

are useless without it. Those Greeks and others who recorded some of the wisdom of the elder Egyptians well illustrated this. They said, that in the symbols it was shown, as where Hermes is represented as an old and a young man, intending by this to signify that he who rightly inspects sacred matters ought to be both intelligent and strong, one of these without the other being imperfect. And for the same reason the symbol of the great Sphinx was established; the beast signifying strength, and the man wisdom. For strength when destitute of the ruling aid of wisdom, is overcome by stupid astonishment confusing all things together; and for the purpose of action the intellect is useless when it is deprived of strength. So, whether our strength is that of sympathy or of astral vision, we will be confounded if philosophical knowledge be absent.

But, so as not to be misunderstood, I must answer the question that will be asked, "Do you then condemn sympathy and love, and preach a cold philosophy only?" By no means. Sympathy and emotion are as much parts of the great whole as knowledge, but inquiring students wish to know all that lies in the path. The office of sympathy, charity, and all other

42

forms of goodness, so far as the effect on us is concerned, is to entitle us to help. By this exercise we inevitably attract to us those souls who have the knowledge and are ready to help us to acquire it also. But while we ignore philosophy and do not try to attain to right discrimination, we must pass through many lives, many weary treadmills of life, until at last little by little we have been forced, without our will, into the possession of the proper seeds of mental action from which the crop of right discrimination may be gathered.

Arjuna asks Krishna:

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Krishna, now the guru — or spiritual teacher — of Arjuna, makes a reply which is not excelled anywhere in the poem; pointing out the permanence and eternal nature of the soul, the progress it has to make through reincarnation to perfection, the error of imagining that we really do anything ourselves, and showing how

43

all duties must be performed by him who desires to reach salvation. The words used by the Blessed Lord in speaking of the soul cannot be added to by me. He says:

"The wise grieve not for dead or living. But never at any period did I, or thou, or these kings of men, not exist, nor shall any of us at any time henceforward cease to exist. As the soul in the body undergoes the changes of childhood, prime, and age, so it obtains a new body hereafter; a sensible man is not troubled about that. But the contact of the elements, O son of Kunti, which bring cold and heat, pleasure and pain, which come and go and are temporary, these do thou endure, O Bharata!⁶ For that man whom, being the same in pain and pleasure and ever constant, these elements do not afflict, is fitted for immortality. There is no existence for what does not exist, nor is there any non-existence for what exists. ... Know this, that that by which all this universe is created is indestructible. No one can cause the destruction of this inexhaustible thing*** He who believes that this spirit can kill, and he who thinks it can be killed, both of these are wrong in judgment. It is not born, nor dies at any time; it has no origin, nor will it ever have an end. Unborn, changeless, eternal both as to future and past time, it is not slain when the body is killed. How can that man, O son of Pritha, who knows that it is indestructible, constant, unborn, and inexhaustible, really cause the death of anybody or kill

44

anybody himself? As a man abandons worn-out clothes and takes other new ones, so does the soul quit worn-out bodies and enter other new ones. Weapons cannot cleave it. Fire cannot burn it, nor can water wet it, nor wind dry it. ... It is constant, capable of going everywhere, firm, immovable, and eternal. It is said to be invisible, incomprehensible, immutable. Therefore, knowing it to be such, thou art not right to grieve for it. "

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

"All this, whatsoever moves on earth, is to be surrendered to the Lord—the Self. When

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

45

thou hast surrendered all this; then thou mayest enjoy."

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

We must be ready to say at any moment under whatever circumstances, whether expected or unexpected: "It is just what I in fact desired." For only those ideals can be dissipated which rest upon a lower basis than the highest aim, or which are not in accord with nature's (God's) law. And as our aim ought to be to reach the supreme condition and to help all other sentient beings to do so also, we must cultivate complete resignation to the Law, the expression and operation of which

46

is seen in the circumstances of life and the ebb and flow of our inner being. All that can be gotten out of wealth, or beauty, or art, or pleasure, are merely pools of water found along our path as it wanders through the desert of life. If we are not seeking them their appearance gives us intense pleasure, and we are thus able to use them for our good and that of others just so long as the Law leaves them to us; but when that superior power removes them, we must say: "It is just what I in fact desired." Any other course is blindness. All the passing shows of life, whether fraught with disaster or full of fame and glory, are teachers; he who neglects them, neglects opportunities which seldom the gods repeat. And the only way to learn from them is through the heart's resignation; for when we become in heart completely poor, we at once are the treasurers and disbursers of enormous riches. Krishna then insists on the scrupulous performance of natural duty.⁷

47

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

In order to see more clearly the occasion for his insistence upon performance of duty, we must remember that at the opening of the battle Arjuna "threw down his bow and arrows." This, in India, meant that he then resolved to desert the circumstances in which karma had placed him and *to become an ascetic*, or, as has been frequently proposed by Western students, he wished to get away from a state of society which offered apparent obstruction to spiritual culture. But Krishna refers him to his birth in the Kshatriya — or warrior — caste, and to the natural duty of a Kshatriya, which is war. The natural caste of Arjuna might have been

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

represented as that of merchant, but wisely it was not, for this is the book of action, and only a warrior fitly typifies action⁸; so his natural duty will stand

48

for whatever be that of any man. We are not to shirk our karma; by abhorring it we only make new karma. Our only true course is to "let the motive for action be in the action itself, never in its reward; not to be incited to action by the hope of the result, nor yet indulge a propensity to inertness." This advice and the direction to see the one Spirit in all things and all things in It (ch. xiii) express the gist of the *Bhagavad-Gita's* teaching as to the proper attitude to be assumed by those striving after salvation.

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

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

Although not proclaimed in the newspapers nor advertised here and there through Secretaries, Delegates, and "Doors," this is the mother and the head of all systems of initiation. It is the progenitor of the mystic Rosicrucians, who have adopted the *lotus* and changed it into a *rose*⁹, and all the other hun-

49

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

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

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

In my last I said that a system of initiation is spoken of which is the mother of all others, and that all the rest are mere exoteric copies or perversions of the real. In order that the idea intended to be expressed may be made clear, it is to be stated that the system is not confined to India, but at the same time it is true that the Western world has up to this time been so deeply engaged in the pursuit of mere money and external enjoyment that no body

50

of Hierophants has taken up its actual residence in Europe or America as yet. There is very little force in the objection that, if those Adepts have such powers as have been ascribed to them, they could very easily have a residence here and overcome all the influences of the place. If it were in the least necessary that they should be here, no doubt can there be that they would come. But as all of the work required to be done, all that could possibly be accomplished, is to be achieved by the messengers sent out into each country who, so to say, prepare the ground, with the assistance of the Adepts, for others who follow them, there would be a waste of energy if the Hierophants appeared in person. Nor are those messengers dismayed by the critical attitude of those persons who, wanting a sign, continually deny that the help for the workers is afforded because the givers of it cannot be seen; and it can also be admitted that even the workers themselves are not continually in receipt of instruction or telegrams showing how and where to work. They are men and women who possess a faith that carries them through a long course of effort without a glimpse of those who have sent them. Yet at the same time some of them now and then see very plain

51

evidence of the fact that they are constantly assisted.

“That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and succession,

We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,

We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,

Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,

We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers: nor anything that is asserted,

We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,

They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade,

Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,

Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.”

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

51

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

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

53

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

54

place to be overcome, but they belong to the day when you have raised the arch of attainment all perfect but the keystone — that is found or lost in the appointed trial.

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

There is great encouragement in Krishna's words to Arjuna in the second chapter: In this system there is no destruction of or detriment to one's efforts; even a very small portion of this duty delivereth a man from great fear.

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

the knowledge which belonged to us in our former body, and from that time we struggle more diligently toward perfection. Patanjali also says the same thing, and all the Aryan

55

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

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

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

56

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

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

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

This is better understood when some of the

57

ideas held in India regarding sacrifices and ceremonies are known. In the Occident sacrifices have long gone out of use, as there appeared to be no reason for them. And yet it must seem strange to the reflective mind that Christian nations should claim redemption through the Jews whose prophet enjoined sacrifices, and when Jesus himself said that not one jot or tittle of the

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

law should pass away. In the place of the sacrifices of the East, the West has adopted a mere theory to be embraced, together with an uncertain moral code to be followed, with a result which is the same as that claimed by the Hindus — save only in one respect. That difference lies in the doctrine of reincarnation. The Christian looks for an eternal reward in heaven and knows nothing of reincarnation on earth, while the Hindu relies upon pleasure to be had in heaven — called *Svarga* — and a continuation of it upon earth by reason of a fortunate rebirth. They have special ceremonies, certain sorts of sacrifices, penances, prayers, and actions, the result of which is a rebirth on earth in a royal family, or with great riches, or in any other sort of pleasant circumstances; and also a sure admittance to heaven. Some ceremonies procure entrance into a delightful state after

58

death which will last for incalculable periods of time.

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

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

59

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

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

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

The first portion of this paper was designedly enlarged in order to precede the above. The last quoted verses contain the essence of what is called Karma-yoga, or, as it might be translated, *concentration and contemplation while engaged in action*. It is difficult, just as it is difficult to enter upon the Path, and if we desire to tread that aright we must know what we should do as true travelers. Krishna seems to me to here settle the dispute as to whether faith or works will save us. Mere faith will not do it, because in every act of faith there is some action. And it would appear to be impossible to acquire true faith without at once turning it into that sort of

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

60

action which our faith shows us must be done, as it were, in evidence; yet action, pure and simple, will not be a cause of liberation, inasmuch as action, or karma, will produce new karma. We must therefore seek for concentration in order that we may be able to do those actions which the All-Wise presents to us to be done, remaining the while unaffected. We have nothing to do with the results; they will come of themselves, and are beyond us; they are already done so far as we are concerned. But if we perform either an act of faith or an action of the body, hoping for any result — no matter what — we become to that extent attached to the consequences, and thus bound by them. It matters not whether those consequences be good or bad. Many will think that it is well to have attachment to good consequences, since that has been the received opinion. But this is unwise, because the only reason for it is found in the idea that thereby one is somewhat better than some other persons who are enamored of evil results and desire to see them come to pass. This idea produces separateness, and is opposed to that *identity* without the realization of which there can be no true knowledge. We should therefore be imitators of the Deity, who, while

61

acting as he does in the manifestation of universes, is at the same time free from all consequences. To the extent that we do so we become the Deity himself, for, as we follow the dictates of the Lord who dwells in us, we resign every act upon the altar, leaving the consequences to him.

The attitude to be assumed, then, is that of doing every act, small and great, trifling or important, because it is before us to do, and as a mere carrying out by us as instruments of the will of that Deity who is ourself. Nor should we stop to inquire whether the act is of any use to the Lord within¹², as some ask. For, they say, of what possible benefit to him can be the small hourly acts which, as soon as done, are forgotten? It is not for us to inquire. The act that pleases that Lord is the act which is done as presented with no attachment to its result, while the act that is displeasing to him is the one which we do, desiring some result therefrom.

This practice is the highest; that which some day we must and will learn to perform. Other sorts are inculcated in other writings, but they are only steps to lead us at last to this. There-

62

fore I said, Let us enter the Path as soon as we can.

We are still on the second chapter. If my object were merely to skim through the poem, showing where it agreed with, differed from, or reconciled the various systems of philosophy that were followed in India, we could have long ago reached the end of the book. But we are looking at it in one of its aspects—the one most important for all earnest students—the personal interior view that aids us to reach Moksha¹³. From this standpoint we can easily defer a consideration of the philosophical discussion to a later period.

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

¹³ Salvation.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

Krishna says that "the subject of the three Vedas is the assemblage of the three qualities." These three qualities are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, and are separately treated in a succeeding chapter. Now *sattva-guna*¹⁴ is a pure,

63

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

It is difficult for a great being such as Krishna to convey to the inquiring mind these high themes, and so, perforce, language must be used that forever has two meanings — it continually retreats before us, going from one

64

to the other. "*Sattwa*" — truth — had to be taken to express the highest quality of any being who possesses them, and yet, when we begin to speak of the highest conceivable state in which attributes are absent, we still use the same word, only adding to it *eternal*.

The essence of the instruction given by Krishna is *to become devoted*, as he says, "Therefore give thyself up to devotion." He prepared the way for that by showing, as adverted to in the last article, how erroneous it was to follow even the special ceremonies and texts laid down for the people in the Vedas. Those ceremonies procured either rewards in heaven, or upon the earth during subsequent lives as well as in those in which the ceremonies were performed. We can more easily understand what Krishna meant if we will suppose him to be referring to a doctrine that in those days was precisely similar in its scheme of rewards to the old-fashioned Christian belief that, by following the Scriptures, one secured happiness and prosperity on earth and great bliss forever in heaven with the saints. This is declared by him to be a deluding doctrine. He does not say that the rewards as laid down will not follow the practice, but implies that they will. But as

65

the wheel of rebirth will eternally revolve, drawing us inevitably back to a mortal body, we are continually deluded and never succeed in attaining to God — that being the goal for us all.

¹⁴ Quality of truth or purity.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

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

66

may roughly, for the present, call delayed karma and unspent affinities.

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

67

does return from heaven, his next body may furnish the needed apparatus to bring up to the front this mass of unexpended karma, and his next compensation might be a sojourn in hell.

In reassuming a body, the "mysterious power" spoken of reaches out to numberless affinities engendered in other lives, and takes hold of all that come in its reach. Other beings once known to the man arrive into incarnation at the same time, and bring into action affinities, attractions, and powers that can only act through them and him. Their influence cannot be calculated. It may be good or bad, and, just as he is swayed by them or as his sway the other being, so will work out the karma of each. Krishna therefore advises Arjuna to be free from the influence of the quality, so that he may obtain a *complete* release. And that freedom can only be attained, as he says, by means of devotion.

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

68

it is also a means whereby nature saves men often from damnation.

Suppose in some life long past I had a dear friend, or wife, or relative, with whom my intimacy was interior and deep. Death separates us, and in subsequent lives he devotes himself to

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

truth, to wisdom, to the highest in him, while I go on careless of all but pleasure in the present. After many lives we meet again as either friends or acquaintances. At once the old intimacy asserts itself, and my former friend — although maybe neither of us knows it—has a strange power to touch my inward life, and wakes me up to search for truth and my own soul. It is the unexpended affinity, and by its aid nature works my salvation.

Then we should both seek devotion. This devotion is what is inculcated by the Adepts to their chelas. It involves a mental abnegation not agreeable to our modern mind, but that must be acquired or real progress is impossible. We must by means of this mental devotion to the divine, which means abnegation of all the rest, dismiss all results of our actions. It is not ours to say what shall be the result of an action; the Law will bring about a result much better, perhaps, than we had imagined. If the results, if the

69

passing daily circumstances, are not those we expected, then by means of devotion we accept them as just what the Law intended. But if we fix our desire on accomplishing even a seeming good result, we are bound by that desire, no matter whether our wish is accomplished or not.

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

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

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

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

70

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

71

of all action. And in so far as we purify and elevate the motive and the aim, we become spiritually enlightened, reaching in time the power to see what should be done and what refrained from.

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

I do not mean it to be understood that there never was real Rosicrucianism, or that ceremonial magic yields no results, or that there is no science of talismans. There are realities of which these, as now known, are shadows. But we might as well expect to find the soul by attentively studying the body, as to know the truths behind the influence of talismans or

72

ceremonial magic by studying the books now extant upon those subjects. The mediæval so-called magicians have left a mass of writings that are now a delusion and a snare for students, theosophical and nontheosophical. In these are minute directions for various sorts of practices, but they are all the attempts of men to enable mortals, by methods altogether outward, to control the astral or natural world. Success did not come to these practitioners, nor will much else save failure be the portion of those of our own day who follow their directions. In most cases of the old European so-called sorcerers and writers on magic, their published lucubrations are only salves to disappointed vanity; in the rest, mere reduplications of formulae left by their predecessors. Paracelsus positively declares that true magic is within the man -- a part of his inner nature, potential at first, active after development, and that ceremonies or formulae are the veriest rubbish unless the person using them is himself a magician.

In the practice of ceremonial magic, where certain geometrical and other figures are to be used with the aid of prayers and invocations, there lies positive danger. This danger is increased if the student follows the practice

73

for the sake of gain or glory or power or mere wonder seeking —all of these being selfish. In this ceremonial the operator, or self-styled magus, surrounds himself with a circle or an arrangement of triangles, the use and purpose of which are to protect him from whatever sprites he may arouse. Mark that well! It is for *protection*. Protection of this sort would not be needed or thought of unless a fear lurked inside that the shades or demons had power to hurt. So at the outset, fear, the product of ignorance, is fully present. The next important thing to be noted is that a sword has to enter into the conjuration. This is advised because the demons are said to fear sharp steel. Now Jesus said that he who lived by the sword should perish by the sword. By this he meant just what we are talking about. Ceremonial magic involves at almost every step the use of a sword. After the invocator or magus has used the ceremonial, say with success, for some time, he at last creates within his aura, or what Swedenborg called his sphere, a duplicate of what he had previously used and pictured on the floor or walls. In this he is no longer master, for, it being placed in that part of his nature of which he is ignorant, the sword of metal be-

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

74

comes an astral sword with the handle held by the demons or influences he unwisely raised. They then attack him where no defense can be interposed — on the astral and mental planes, and, just as surely as the wise man's words were uttered, he at last perishes by the weapon he himself used. This danger, thus roughly outlined, is no mere figment of the brain. It is positive, actual, immanent in the practice. No book study will give a man the power to make the constitutional changes, as well as psychical alterations, needed before he is commander of immaterial forces. But these latter may be temporarily evoked and made acquainted with us by pursuing certain methods. That is the beginning. Their turn is sure to come, and, obeying a law of their nature, they take what has sometimes been called their "revenge." For all such practices call only upon the lower, unspiritual part of our nature, and that clothes such beings with corresponding attributes. Their "revenge" consists in bringing on inflammations in the moral character which will eventuate in a development of evil passions, atrophy of concentration, destruction of memory, ending at last in a miserable conclusion to life, and almost total failure to use the opportunities for progress

75

presented by that incarnation. Therefore I said, it is all either useless mental lumber or positively dangerous.

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

76

avad-Gita, how much wider would be the sweep of his intellection no one could calculate.

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

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

"Let a man, restraining all these, remain in devotion when at rest, and intent on me alone; for he whose senses are under his control possesses spiritual knowledge. Attachment to objects of

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

sense arises in a man who meditates upon them; from attachment arises desire; from desire passion springs up; from passion comes bewilderment; from bewilderment, confusion of the memory; from confusion of the memory, destruction of the intellect; from destruction of the intellect he perishes.

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

A very beautiful portion of the *Sanatsujatiya* may be read with profit here.¹⁵

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

"Both truths, O Kshatriya, have been current from the beginning. The wise maintain what is called delusion to be death. I verily call heedlessness death, and likewise I call freedom from heedlessness immortality. Through heedlessness, verily, were the demons vanquished; and through freedom from heedlessness the gods attained to the Brahman. Death, verily, does not devour living creatures like a tiger; for, indeed, his form is not to be perceived. Heedlessness develops in men

78

as desire, and afterwards as wrath, and in the shape of delusion. And then traveling in devious paths through egoism, one does not attain to union with the Self Those who are deluded by it, and who remain under its influence, depart from this world, and there again fall down [into generation]. Then the deities [i.e. the senses] gather around them. And then they undergo death after death. Being attached to the fruit of action, on action presenting itself, they follow after it, and do not cross beyond death. And the embodied self, in consequence of not understanding union with the real entity, proceeds on all hands with attachment to enjoyments. That, verily, is the great source of delusion to the senses: for by contact with unreal entities, his migrations are rendered inevitable; because, having his inner self contaminated by contact with unreal entities, he devotes himself to objects of sense on all sides, pondering on them only. That pondering, verily, first confuses him; and soon afterwards desire and wrath attack him. These lead children to death. But sensible men cross beyond death by their good sense. He who, pondering on the Self, destroys the fugitive objects of sense, not even thinking of them through contempt for them, and who, being possessed of knowl-

79

edge, destroys desires in this way, becomes, as it were, the death of Death itself, and swallows it up."

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

"That man who, casting off all desires, acts without attachment to results, free from egotism and selfishness, attains to tranquility. This is the condition of the Supreme Being, O son of

¹⁵ Sanatsujatiya Ch. 2.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Pritha! Having obtained this, one is not troubled; and remaining in it, even at the time of death, he passes on to extinction (or union with) the Supreme Spirit. "

Those are the last words of the second chapter.

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

Krishna's declaration brings up before us, not only the practices previously inculcated, but also the whole subject of death. For, in order to know how to "think of Him at the moment of death," or to have that tranquility which only perfection of devotion confers, we must find out what death is, and whether it is solely what we see going on at the decease

80

of a human being, or more than can be gauged with the eye. A little reflection shows that what is seen and noted by physicians and spectators is but the withdrawal of the soul and energy from the outer envelope called "body." While that is going on, the person may accept rites of the church or profess adherence to any sort of doctrine whatever, even with his last outward sigh speak of heaven with its bliss awaiting him. But that is only the first step. It leaves his visible features calm and happy, perhaps, in expression; his relatives close his eyes -- they call it death. He, however, has only begun to die. The soul has yet to pass through other envelopes beyond the ken of friends, beyond even the dying man's present control. All now depends upon the whole course and kind of thought in which he indulged during the life of the body. For the soul has to pass along the road by which it came, and that way is lined with the memories of a lifetime; as these memories rise up they affect the departing entity, causing it to be either disturbed from concentration on the Supreme Being, or assisting to a greater perfection. If, then, some few years only near the close of life were devoted to the sort of practice inculcated by Krishna, the memories

81

of the years previously spent in following after desires will throw a cloud over the soul and absolutely prevent it from attaining that state from which return to earth is impossible without our consent. It is more perfectly illustrated by considering life as a grand musical movement that is brought to a close by using at once all the tones sounded throughout the whole preceding portion. The result will be a combined sound, expressing neither the highest nor lowest notes, or the sweetest or less sweet, but the resultant of all. And this last sound is the fixed vibration that governs the entity, sounding all through him, and throwing him into the state to which it corresponds or of which it is the key. Thus it is easily seen that in each thought lie the possibilities of a harmony or a discord for life's conclusion.

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

82

Chapter III

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

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

The doubt arose because the Blessed Lord had declared that Arjuna must reach salvation by the right use of his understanding, and yet also must perform the dreaded act of opposing, perhaps slaying, his friends, tutors, and relatives. The request is the same as is repeated nearly every day by serious students and for which an answer is demanded¹⁶. It is

83

for *one* single method, *one* practice, *one* doctrine, by means of which the student may obtain that for which he seeks, whether he has formulated it as happiness or only as a thirst for wonderful knowledge and power.

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

84

some law or doctrine, practice, dogma, or philosophy, by which, being known, happiness can be secured.

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

¹⁶ See *Lucifer* of April and May, 1888, in articles "Practical Occultism" and "Occultism and the Occult Arts." —(Ed.) Both these articles were reprinted in the Magazine Theosophy in Jan. 1913, issue.—(Publishers.)

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

lamp of truth have to raise men gradually from stage to stage. It was in such an attitude Arjuna stood when he uttered the verses with which this chapter opens.¹⁷

85

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

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

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

86

while engaged in affairs of state, still performed actions.

These peculiar verses next occur:

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

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

¹⁷ It is to be noticed that Arjuna and Krishna constantly change the names by which they address each other. When Krishna is dwelling on one subject or upon something that has to do with a particular phase of Arjuna's nature, he gives him some name that has reference to the quality, subject, or other matter referred to, and Arjuna changes the name of Krishna whenever he has need. As in these first verses, the name used for the Blessed Lord is *Janardana*, which means "giver of all that men ask" —meaning thereby to refer to Krishna's potency in bringing to fulfillment all wishes. —B

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

87

zation should on these subjects be so dense and dark. Although Moses established sacrifices for the Jews, the Christian successors have abolished it both in spirit and letter, with a curious inconsistency which permits them to ignore the words of Jesus that "not one jot or tittle of the law should pass until all these things were fulfilled." With the culmination of the dark age¹⁸ it was, however, natural that the last vestige of sacrifice should disappear. On the ruins of the altar has arisen the temple of the lower self, the shrine of the personal idea. In Europe individualism is somewhat tempered by various monarchical forms of government which do not by any means cure the evil; and in America, being totally unrestrained and forming in fact the basis of independence here, it has culminated. Its bad effects — vaguely as yet shadowing the horizon — might have been avoided if the doctrines of the Wisdom-religion had been also believed in by the founders of the republic. And so, after the sweeping away of the fetters forged by priestly dogma and kingly rule, we find springing up a superstition far worse than that

88

which we have been used to call by the name. It is the superstition of materialism that bows down to a science which leads only to a negation.

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

The peculiar explanation of the Mosaic sacrifices advanced by the mystic, Count Saint-Martin¹⁹, needs only a passing allusion. Students can think upon it and work out for themselves what truth it contains. He holds that the efficacy of the sacrifices rested in magnetic laws, for the priest, according to him, collected the bad effects of the sins of the people into his own person and then, by laying his hands upon the scapegoat (as in one sacrifice), communicated those deleterious in-

89

fluences to the poor animal who in the wilderness exhaled them so far away as not to affect the people. It is suggested that Moses knew something of occult laws, since he was educated by the Egyptians and initiated by them. But Saint-Martin goes on to say that the Jews were directed to kill even the animals in the land because the death of animals infected with the impure influences of those nations preserved the Jews from the poison; whereas in sacrifices the death of clean animals attracted wholesome preservative influences, [and that] pure and regular influences attached to certain classes and individuals of animals, and that *by breaking the bases in which they are fixed* they may become useful to man, and we should thus read Lev. xvii, 11: "It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."

¹⁸ My readers may not agree with me that this is the dark age, inasmuch as that is the term applied to a period now past. That time, however, was a part of this; and this is even darker than that, as we think.

— B

¹⁹ See *Man: His Nature and Destiny* (1802). —B

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

He then says that the virtue of sacrifices comes through the rapport that man has with animals and nature; and, if the Jews had observed the sacrifices faithfully, they would never have been abandoned, but would have drawn upon themselves every good thing they were capable of receiving* *The extraordinary holocausts at the three great festivals were to bring down upon the people such active influences as corresponded to the epochs, for we see bulls,

90

rams, and lambs always added to the burnt sacrifices. Some substances, mineral, vegetable, and animal, retain a greater proportion of the living and powerful properties of their first estate.

In these views Saint-Martin had some of the truth. But Moses ordained some sacrifices as a religious duty from sanitary reasons of his own, since the unthinking tribes would perform devotional acts willingly which, if imposed only as hygienic measures, they might omit.²⁰ The burnt offerings were, however, founded upon different views, very like those at the bottom of Hindu sacrifices, and the law of which is stated in these words from our chapter:

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

It is not contended by either Brahmins or their followers that food will not be produced except from sacrifice performed according to Vedic ritual, but that *right food*, productive in the physical organism of the proper conditions enabling man to live up to his highest possibilities, alone is produced in that age

91

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

There is, however, another meaning to the "revolution of the wheel" spoken of by Krish-

92

na. He makes it very clear that he refers to the principle of reciprocity or brotherhood. And this he declares must be kept revolving; that is, each being must live according to that rule, or else he lives a life of sin to no purpose. And we can easily believe that in these days this principle,

²⁰ In India there are numerous religious observances having in view sanitary effects. For instance the cholera dance — a religious matter — in which, while disinfecting camphor is burned in heaps, a curious flower-umbrella-dance is engaged in with religious chants and music. —B

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

while admired as a fine theory, is not that which moves the people. They are, on the contrary, spurred by the personal selfish idea of each one becoming better, greater, richer than his neighbor. If continued unchecked it would make this nation one entirely of black magicians. And it was to counteract this that the Theosophical Society was founded, with the object of inducing men to once more revolve this wheel of brotherly love first set in motion by the "creator when of old he had created mortals."

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

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

Knowing that, under the great cyclic laws which govern us, periods arrive even in the

93

worst of ages when good examples of living imprinted on the astral light cause effects ever increasing in intensity, until at last the "gods" before referred to begin in distant spheres to feel the force of these good actions and to return again to help mankind on the recurrence of a better age, he implores Arjuna to be the very first to set the good example.

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

"It is better to do one's own duty, even though it be devoid of excellence, than to perform another's

94

duty well. Death is better in the performance of one's own duty. Another's duty is productive of danger."

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

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

To this Krishna replies:

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

"It is desire; it is passion springing from the quality of rajas, voracious, all-sinful. Know that it is hostile to man in this world. As fire is surrounded by smoke, and a mirror by rust²¹, as the foetus is involved in the womb, so is this universe surrounded by this quality. Knowledge is surrounded by this, and it is the constant enemy of the wise man — a fire which assumes any form it will, O son of Kunti! and is insatiable. Its empire is said

95

to be the senses, the heart, and the intellect. By means of these it surrounds knowledge and bewilders the soul. Therefore do thou, O best of Bharatas! in the first place, restraining thy senses, cast off this sinful impetus which devours spiritual knowledge and spiritual discernment.

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

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

Krishna has reference to the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The first is of the nature of truth, pure and bright; the second partakes of truth in a lesser degree, is of the

96

nature of action, and has also in it the quality of badness; the third, *tamas*, is wholly bad, and its essential peculiarity is *indifference*, corresponding to darkness, in which no action of a pure quality is possible.

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

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

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

²¹ The ancient form of mirror is here referred to. It was made of metal and highly burnished. Of course it was constantly liable to get rusty. And our own silvered mirror is liable also to cloud, owing to the oxidizing of the coating. —B

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

97

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

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

We must therefore begin, as advised by Krishna, with that which is nearest to us, that is, with our senses. We cannot slay the foe there at first, because it is resident also in the heart and mind. By proceeding from the near to the more remote, we go forward with regularity and with certainty of conquest at last. Therefore he said, "In the first place, restrain thy senses." If we neglect those and devote

98

ourselves wholly to the mind and heart, we really gain nothing, for the foe still remains undisturbed in the senses. By means of those, when we have devoted much time and care to the heart and mind, it may throw such obscurations and difficulties in the way that all the work done with the heart and mind is rendered useless.

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

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

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

"Our consciousness is *one* and not many, nor different from other consciousnesses. It is

99

not *waking consciousness* or *sleeping consciousness*, or any other but *consciousness itself*.

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

Sat, or Being;

Chit, or Consciousness, Mind; } These together are called *Sat-chit-ananda*

Ananda, or Bliss.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

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

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

"Thus in waking life, *Sat* experiences fully and knows. In dream state, *Sat* again knows and sees what goes on there, while there may not be in the brain a complete memory of the

100

waking state just quitted. In Sushupti — beyond dream and yet on indefinitely, *Sat* still knows all that is done or heard or seen.

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

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

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

While taking medicine one should think of Vishnu or the all-pervading; while eating, of Janârdana, the

101

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

102

Chapter IV

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

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

“This deathless Yoga, this deep union,
I taught Vivaswata, the Lord of Light;
Vivaswata to Manu gave it; he
To Ikshvaku; so passed it down the line
Of all my royal Rishis. Then, with years,
The truth grew dim and perished, noble Prince!

103

Now once again to thee it is declared—
This ancient lore, this mystery supreme—
Seeing I find thee votary and friend.”

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

104

teaches the Being, so that he may implant those ideas necessary for our salvation. After the race has grown sufficiently, the Being called the sun leaves the spiritual succession to Manu — whether we know him by that name or another — who carries on the work until men have arrived at the point where they furnish out of the great mass some one of their own number who is capable of founding a line of Kingly Priest Rulers; then Manu retires, leaving the succession in the hands of the Royal Sage, who transmits it to his successors. This succession lasts until the age no longer will permit, and then all things grow confused spiritually, material progress increases, and the dark age, fully come, ushers in the time before dissolution. Such is the present time.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Up to the period marked by the first earthly king called Ikshvaku, the ruler was a spiritual Being whom all men knew to be such, for his power, glory, benevolence, and wisdom were evident. He lived an immense number of years, and taught men not only yoga but also arts and sciences. The ideas implanted then, having been set in motion by one who knew all the laws, remain as *inherent ideas* to this day. Thus it is seen that there is no four-

105

dation for the pride of ideas felt by so many of us. They are not original. We never would have evolved them ourselves, unaided; and had it not been for the great wisdom of these planetary spirits in the beginning of things, we would be hopelessly drifting now.

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

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

106

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

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

These appearances among men for the purpose of restoring the equilibrium are not the same as the rule of Vivaswata and Manu first spoken of, but are the coming to earth of Avatars or Saviors. That there is a periodicity to them is stated in the words "from age to age." He is here speaking of the great cycles about which hitherto the Masters have been silent except to say that there are such great cycles. It is very generally admitted now that the cyclic law is of the highest importance in

107

the consideration of the great questions of evolution and man's destiny. But the coming of an Avatar must be strictly in accordance with natural law — and that law demands that at the time of such an event there also appears a being who represents the other pole — for, as Krishna says, the great law of the two opposites is eternally present in the world. So we find in the history of India that, when Krishna appeared so long ago, there was also a great tyrant, a black magician named Kansa, whose wickedness equaled the goodness of Krishna. And to such

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

a possibility the poem refers, where it says that Krishna comes when wickedness has reached a maximum development. The real meaning of this is that the bad karma of the world goes on increasing with the lapse of the ages, producing at last a creature who is, so to say, the very flower of all the wickedness of the past, counting from the last preceding Avatar. He is not only wicked, but also wise, with magic powers of awful scope, for magic is not alone the heritage of the good. The number of magicians developed among the nations at such a time is very great, but one towers above them all, making the rest pay tribute. It is not a fairy tale but a sober truth, and the present prevalence of self-

108

seeking and money-getting is exactly the sort of training of certain qualities that black magicians will exemplify in ages to come. Then Krishna — or howsoever named — appears "in visible shape, a man with men." His power is as great as the evil one, but he has on his side what the others have not — spirit, preservative, conservative forces. With these he is able to engage in conflict with the black magicians, and in it is assisted by all of us who are really devoted to brotherhood. The result is a victory for the good and destruction for the wicked. The latter lose all chance of salvation in that manvantara, and are precipitated to the lower planes, on which they emerge at the beginning of the next new creation. So not even they are lost, and of their final salvation Krishna speaks thus:

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

He also declares that the right and full comprehension of the mystery of his births and work on earth confers upon us nirvana, so that rebirth occurs no more. This is because it is not possible for a man to understand the

109

mystery unless he has completely liberated himself from the chains of passion and acquired entire concentration. He has learned to look beneath the shell of appearances that deceives the unthinking mind.

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

Krishna then adverts to various systems of religious practice, and shows Arjuna that they all lead at last, but after many births, to him, by reason of the tendency set up. The different schools are taken up in a few sentences. His dictum is that they "destroy sins," meaning that a certain purification of the nature is thus accomplished, which is followed upon death

110

by a longer stay in devachan, but it is only to one single practice he awards the distinction of being that which will bring about union with the Supreme Spirit. After enumerating all, not only the performance but also the omitting of sacrifice, he shows Arjuna that spiritual knowledge

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

includes all actions and burns to ashes the binding effects of all work, conferring upon us the power to take nirvana by reason of emancipation from the delusion that the lower self was the actor. The perfection of this spiritual knowledge is reached by strengthening faith and expelling doubt through devotion and restraint. Then occurs a verse, almost the same as one in the New Testament, "the man of doubtful mind enjoys neither this world nor the other, nor final beatitude."

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

These strong words end the chapter. They are addressed to those who can be strong, and

111

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

"It springs from ignorance, and all we have to do is to take the sword of knowledge and cut all doubts at once." Many will say that they have been always looking for this that they may have peace, and that so many systems are presented for their consideration they are unable to come to any conclusion whatever. This would seem very true on a view of the thousand and one philosophies placed before us with varying degrees of clearness by the exponents of them. But it has appeared to us that they can all be easily sifted and divided into classes where they will range themselves under two great heads — those which permit nothing to be believed until the miserable mass of mediocre minds have said that they at last accept this or that, and those which have each a little of what may possibly be true and a great deal that is undeniable nonsense. The doubter is a devotee of the first school, or he is an adherent partly of one and partly of the other; and in the latter case is torn almost asunder by the numberless conventional ideas which bear the stamp of author-

112

ity coercing him into an acceptance of that which revolts his judgment whenever he permits it to have free exercise. If you tell him that the much-lauded mind is not the final judge, and that there are higher faculties which may be exercised for the acquirement of knowledge, he disputes on the lines laid down by learned professors of one school or another, and denies the validity of proofs offered on the ground that they are instances of "double cerebration," and what not.

To such as these the chapter will not appeal, but there are many students who have sincere doubts, and with those the difficulty arises from ignorance. They are afraid to admit to themselves that the ancients could have found out the truth; and the reason would appear to be that this judgment is passed from a consideration of the merely material state of those people or of the present nations who in any degree follow such philosophies. Our civilization glorifies material possessions and progress, and those who have not these boons cannot be the possessors of either truth or the way to it. But the keepers of truth have never said that we

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

will be neither rich nor civilized if we follow their system. On the contrary, in the days when Krishna lived and taught his system there was more material

113

glory and power than now, and more knowledge of all the laws of nature than every one of our scientists put together have in their reach. Hence if anyone teaches that the reign of the doctrines of the Masters will be the knell of all material comfort and progress, he errs, and sows the seeds of trouble for himself and his friends. Why, then, is it not wise to at once admit that there may be truth in these doctrines, throw away all doubt, and enjoy the light coming from the East?

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

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

"Seek this knowledge by doing honor, by

114

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

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

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

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

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

115

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

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

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

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

116

Chapter V

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

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

117

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

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

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

The meaning of the teacher has been by some suggested to be that, inasmuch as the life of the ascetic is very hard, almost impossible for the majority of men, it is wiser to now perform good acts in the hope that they will lead one hereafter to a favorable birth in such sur-

118

roundings that complete renunciation of action — outwardly — will be an easy task, and that the two sorts of practice were not intended to be laid before the student for selection, nor is he put in a dilemma compelling him to choose. I think such is not the meaning, but that, on the contrary, the seemingly easy alternative of performing actions properly is in reality the most difficult of all tasks. And no matter how much we may wait for a favorable birth, for a much hoped-for environment which will not only permit the new sort of life but, in fact, urge it upon us, it will never arrive for us until we have learned what is the right performance of action. This learning can never be acquired by a renunciation of works now. Indeed, it may be taken for

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

granted that no person will be able to renounce the world unless he has passed through the other experience in some life. A few may be found who attempt to do so, but if they have not been through all action they cannot proceed. The character of the man himself inwardly is the real test. No matter how many times during countless births he has renounced the world, if his inner nature has not renounced, he will be the same man during the entire period, and whenever, in any one of his ascetic lives, the new, the appro-

119

priate temptation or circumstance arises, he will fall from his high outward asceticism.

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

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

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

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

Here again is a higher place assigned to performance of action. It seems clear that what Krishna meant was that renunciation

120

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

121

found in the sixth chapter, in the verses referring to the rebirth of such disciples

So hath he back again what heights of heart
He did achieve, and so he strives anew
To perfectness, with better hope, dear Prince!

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

*For by the old desire he is drawn on
Unwittingly.*²²

What we are to endeavor to understand, then, is how to renounce the fruit of our actions, which is what Krishna means when he tells us to perform actions as a renunciation. The polluting effect of an act is not in the nature of the mere thing done, nor is the purifying result due to what work we may do, but on either hand the sin or the merit is found in the inner feeling that accompanies the act. One may donate millions in alms, and yet not thereby benefit his real character in the least. It is very true that he will reap material rewards, perhaps in some other life, but those even will be of no benefit, since he will be still the same. And another may only give away kind words or small sums, because that is all he has to give, and be so much benefited by the feeling accompanying each act that his progress up the ascending arc toward union with spirit is rapid. We find in the Christian

122

Testament Jesus of Nazareth enforcing this view in the parable of the widow's mite, which he regarded as of more value than all that had been given by others. He could not have referred to the intrinsic value of the coin given, nor to the act as thus measured, for that quantity was easily ascertained; he only looked to the inner feeling of the poor woman when she gave all that she had.

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

And even in the high aim found in aspiration to discipleship under a master, or even to adeptship, we encounter the same difficulty. This aspiration is commendable above most that we can formulate, but when we coldly ask ourselves soon after that aspiration has been formed, "Why am I thus aspiring; why do I want to be near in sense to the Master?", we

123

are obliged to admit that the impelling motive for acquiring the aspiration was tinged with selfishness. We can easily prove this by inquiring in the forum of our own conscience if we had the aspiration for ourself or for the great mass of men, rich and poor, despicable and noble; would we be able to feel content were we suddenly told that our deep longing had given the boon to others and that we must wait ten lives more? It is safe to say that the answer would be that we were very sorry. In the twelfth verse we find the remedy for the difficulty, as well as the difficulty itself, clearly stated thus:

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

These instructions will be very difficult for all who are living for themselves and who have not in some small degree begun to believe that they are not here for their own sake. But when we feel that there is no separation between us and any other creature, and that our higher self is

²² The italics are my own. —B

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

leading us through all the experiences of life to the end that we shall recognize the unity of all, then, instead of continually acting contrary to that object of the Higher Self, we

124

try to acquire the right belief and aspiration. Nor need we be deterred, as some are, by the extreme difficulty of eliminating the selfish desire for progress. That will be the task during many lives, and we should begin it voluntarily as soon as it is known, instead of waiting for it to be forced in upon us through suffering and many defeats.

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

"Effacement in the Supreme Spirit is gained by the right-seeing sage whose sins are exhausted, who hath cut asunder all doubts, whose senses and organs are under control,

125

and *who is devoted to the well-being of all creatures.* "

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

126

Chapter VI

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

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

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

The forsaking of worldly action — called *sannyas* — is the same as what is known in Europe as the monastic life, especially in some

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

127

very ascetic orders. Adopted selfishly under a mistaken notion of duty it cannot be true devotion. It is merely an attempt to save oneself. The course adopted by some theosophical students very much resembles this erroneous method, although it is practiced in the freedom of the world and not behind monastery walls.

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

128

wrapped up in worldly pursuits, and yet be ourselves unattached and unaffected.

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

By pursuing this practice true meditation is begun and will soon become permanent. For one who watches his thoughts and acts, so as to perform those that ought to be done, will acquire a concentration in time which will increase the power of real meditation. It is not meditation to stare at a spot on the wall for a fixed period, or to remain for another space of

129

time in a perfectly vacuous mental state which soon runs into sleep. All those things are merely forms which in the end will do no lasting good. But many students have run after these follies, ignoring the true way. The truth is that the right method is not easy; it requires thought and mental effort, with persistency and faith. Staring at spots and such miscalled occult practices are very easy in comparison with the former.

However, we are human and weak. As such we require help, for the outer self cannot succeed in the battle. So Krishna points out that the lower self is to be raised up by the help of the higher; that the lower is, as it were, the enemy of the higher, and we must not allow the worse to prevail. It will all depend upon self-mastery. The self below will continually drag down the man who is not self-conquered. This is because that lower one is so near the thick darkness that hangs about the lower rungs of evolution's ladder it is partly devil. Like a heavy weight it will drag into the depths the one who does not try to conquer himself. But on its other side the self is near to divinity, and when conquered it becomes the friend and helper of the conqueror. The Sufis, the Mohammedan mystical sect, symbolize this in their

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

130

poetry relating to the beautiful woman who appears but for a moment at the window and then disappears. She refuses to open the door to her lover as long as he refers to their being separate; but when he recognizes their unity then she becomes his firm friend.

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

This high condition is therefore set before

131

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

But some are likely to make a mistake herein. Indeed they have done so. They set up the ideal, but in a too material and human manner. Then they thought to walk on the chosen path by outward observance, by pretending to regard gold and stones as the same to them, while in their hearts they preferred the gold. Their equal-mindedness they confined to other people's affairs, while they displeased and alarmed all relatives and friends by the manner of riding this hobby and by wrong neglect of obvious duty. Truly they sought for equal-mindedness, but failed to see that it can only be acquired through right performance of duty, and not by selecting the duties and environments that please us.

132

Chapter VII

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

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

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

He then gives an eightfold division of his inferior nature, or that part of the Universal

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

133

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

Included in the inferior nature are all the visible, tangible, invisible and intangible worlds; it is what we call nature. The invisible and intangible are nonetheless actual; we know that poisonous gas, though invisible and intangible, is fatally actual and potential.

134

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

Krishna points out to Arjuna a gulf between the inferior and the superior. This latter is the Knower and that which sustains the whole universe, and from it the inferior nature springs. So the materialistic and scientific investigator, the mere alchemist, the man who dives into the occult moved by the desire for gain to himself, will none of them be able to cross the gulf at all, because they do not admit the indwelling Spirit, the Knower.

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

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

A number of pre-eminently great and precious things and powers are here enumerated and declared to be the Self; while next the very delusions and imperfections of life and man are included. Nothing is left out. This is certainly better than an illogical religion which separates God from the delusions and cruelties of nature, and then invents a third thing, in the person of a devil, who is the source of human wickedness. All this further accentuates the difficulties in the way. Krishna says the illusion is difficult to surmount,

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

136

but that success can be attained by taking refuge in the Self — for he is the Self. The entire congregation of worshipers who are righteous find favor with the Self, but those who are spiritually wise are on the path that leads to the highest, which is the Self.

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

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

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

137

Although these words, like the rest of the colloquy, were spoken in India and to a Hindu, they are thoroughly applicable in the West. Every mode of thought and of living may be called a rite gone over by each one as his conscious or unconscious religion. A man adopts that which is conformable, or subordinate, to his own nature, and being full of desires he worships or follows other gods than the Supreme Self. In India the words would more particularly mean the worship, which is quite common, of idols among those who are not educated out of idolatry; but they would also mean what is said above. In the West these "other gods" are the various pleasures, objects, aims and modes of life and thought, be they religious or not, which the people adopt. They have not the many thousands of gods of the Hindu pantheon, each one for some particular purpose, but it comes to the same thing. The idol-worshiper bows to the god visible so that he may attain the object of his heart which that god is supposed to control. The Western man worships his object and strives after it with all his heart and mind and thus worships something else than the Supreme Imperishable One. The god of one is political advancement, of another — and

138

generally of most — the possession of great wealth. One great god is that of social advancement, the most foolish, hollow and unsatisfactory of all; and with it in America is yoked the god of money, for without wealth there is no social preeminence possible except in those cases where official position confers a temporary glory. The mother often spends sleepless nights inventing means for pushing her daughter into social success; the father lies wakefully calculating new problems for the production of money. The inheritors of riches bask in the radiance coming from their own gold, while they strive for new ways to make, if possible, another upward step on that road, founded on ashes and ending at the grave, which is called social greatness. And out of all this striving many and various desires spring up so that their multiplicity and diversity completely hide and obstruct all spiritual development and discernment.

But many who are not so carried away by these follies attend to some religion which they have adopted or been educated into. In very few cases, however, is the religion adopted: it is born with the child; it is found with the family and is regularly fastened on as a gar-

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

139

ment. If in this religion, or cult, there is faith, then the Supreme Self, impartial and charitable, makes the faith strong and constant so that thereby objects are attained. In whatever way the devotee chooses to worship with faith it is the Supreme which, though ignored, brings about the results of faith.

A curious speculation rises here; it may be true, it may be not. It can be noticed that millions of prayers are recited every month addressed to the One God, all through Christendom, asking various favors. Millions were offered for the conversion to a better life of the Prince of Wales—they failed. The rain ceases and prayers are made, but the dryness continues. Candles are lighted and prayers said to stop the earthquake which is destroying the city — the quakings go on until the impulse is ended and the city ruined. It is perfectly impossible to prove answers to prayer in enough cases to convince the thoughtful. Now the speculative thought is that perhaps the prayers offered to an unmanifested God have no effect, for to be effectual the Being appealed to must have a separate existence so as to be able to intervene in separated manifested things. Christians do not possess the statistics of results from prayer offered to

140

Gods in Oriental countries. The usual cases brought forward in the West are such as the orphan asylum, for which nothing is asked except in prayer. But in India they have institutions similarly — but not so lavishly — supported and no asking alone save to the particular patron god. It is a matter of strong, constant faith which carries the thoughts of the prayer into the receptive minds of other people, who are then moved by the subconscious injected thought to answer the request. Now if the prayer is offered to an unseen and unknown God the faith of the person is not firm, whereas perhaps in the case of the idol-worshiper or of the Roman Catholic addressing himself to the Mother of God with her image before him, the very presence of the representative is an aid to constancy in faith. All this applies of course to prayers for personal and selfish ends. But that prayer or aspiration which is for spiritual light and wisdom is the highest of all, no matter to whom or what addressed. All religions teach that sort of prayer; all others are selfish and spiritually useless.

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

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

Man, made of thought, occupant only of many bodies from time to time, is eternally thinking. His chains are through thought, his release due to nothing else. His mind is immediately tinted or altered by whatever object it is directed to. By this means the soul is enmeshed in the same thought or series of thoughts as is the mind. If the object be anything that is distinct from the Supreme Self then the mind is at once turned into that, becomes that, is tinted like that. This is one of the natural capacities of the mind. It is naturally clear and uncolored, as we would see if we were able to find one that had not gone through too many experiences. It is movable and quick, having a disposition to bound from one point to another. Several words would

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

142

describe it. Chameleon-like it changes color, sponge-like it absorbs that to which it is applied, sieve-like it at once loses its former color and shape the moment a different object is taken up. Thus, full of joy from an appropriate cause, it may suddenly become gloomy or morose upon the approach of that which is sorrowful or gloomy. We can therefore say it becomes that to which it is devoted.

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

Pushing into details a little further it is said that after death the person, compelled

143

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

But those who worship or believe in the Self as all-in-all, not separate from any, supreme, the container, the whole, go to It, and, becoming It, know all because of its knowledge, and cease to be subject to change because It is changeless. This also is law, and not sentiment.

The chapter concludes by showing how the ignorant who believe in a Supreme Being with a form, fall into error and darkness at the time of their birth because of the hold which former life-recollections have upon the mind. This includes the power of the skandhas or aggregates of sensations and desires accumulated in prior lives. At birth these, being a natural part of us, rush to us and we to them, so that a new union is made for another lifetime. In

144

the other life, not having viewed the Self as all and in all, and having worshiped many gods, the sensations of liking and disliking are so strong that the darkness of rebirth is irresistible. But the wise man died out of his former life with a full knowledge of the Self at the hour of death, and thus prevented the imprinting upon his nature of a set of sensations and desires that would otherwise, upon reincarnation, lead him into error.

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

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

145

CHAPTER VIII

THE Bhagavad-Gita has a subsidiary title, "The Book of Devotion." Each of its chapters—with the exception of the first one— treats of devotion by some particular means; so the preceding chapters may be regarded as leading up to the highest form of devotion through the various forms adopted by mankind.

The Eighth Chapter is entitled Devotion to the Omnipresent Spirit named as Om This title is a key to what follows in the chapter, as well as a summation of what is contained therein.

The Western mind may find a difficulty in grasping the idea of devotion to that which is everywhere, for the common acceptation of the term implies an object to which one may devote himself; here, however, devotion is shown to be a quality inherent in the one who perceives and not in any object seen and is therefore, applicable universally as well as in particular.

The deepest thinkers, ancient and modern, hold that That which reasons is higher than reason; and similarly, That which perceives

146

forms and acquires knowledge, is beyond all form, and is not limited to, or by, any degree of knowledge. These sages declare, and show, that all limitations are self-imposed and impermanent; hence they speak of the manifested universe as the "Great Illusion" produced by a general and temporary sense of separateness on the part of the beings involved. Their efforts at all times have been directed towards aiding the advancing intelligence of mankind to a truer realization of the essential nature of all beings, from which alone can come perfection in knowledge and hence the highest happiness.

"The Omnipresent Spirit named as Om," refers to the One Spirit which animates all worlds and beings. Another expression for the same idea is "The Self of all creatures", and in the present chapter Krishna begins his reply to Arjuna by saying "Braman the Supreme is the exhaustless". These terms, and many others used, are but different ways of conveying the same idea. An aid to comprehension may be had if it is realized that "the power, or ability to perceive is common to all creatures", and that it includes all that the abstract terms Spirit, Life and Consciousness imply. In fact, the Bhagavad-Gita cannot be

147

understood unless it is studied upon the basis that "That which lives and thinks in Man is the Eternal Pilgrim", and that "he is wise indeed who sees and knows that all spiritual beings are the same in kind, and differ only in degree."

As has been before stated, Krishna stands for the Higher Self of all beings; there fore all the discourses under his name are to be taken as addressed to all men and not merely as from one personage to another. It will then be understood that when He speaks of "my being manifesting as the Individual Self ", "Purusha, the Spiritual Person" or "myself in this body", He refers to the constituents of each human being.

"Karma is the emanation which causes the existence and reproduction of creatures". Perhaps this sentence may be made more clear if the student takes into consideration the ancient aphorism that "There is no Karma unless there is a being to make it or feel its effects"; Karma

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

means action, and as each being or creature acts according to his own degree of perception and feels the re-action or effect in the same relation, Karma as a whole, in so far as any world or system of worlds is concerned, is the interaction of all the beings

148

of every grade who constitute, or are connected with, any such world or system. Karma therefore is inherent in all beings and is not self-existent as such, or imposed by any imagined originator of worlds.

Krishna shows that the realization of immortality must be had during life in the body if the highest state is to be attained. This state reached, the necessity for reincarnation ceases. Those however whose beliefs are strongly fixed on some particular form of after death existence, have a realization of what they aspire to and then in the fulness of time are reborn upon earth.

The meditation spoken of as necessary to the highest attainment is sometimes called "a lifetime's meditation" it means that the immortality of man has first to be assumed, and then rigidly adhered to as the basis for every thought and action, for it is only in this way that a realization of immortality can be obtained by embodied beings. As it is from the Spirit in Man that all law and power proceeds, each human being creates his own limitations on every plane of being; he can transcend those limitations only by reverting to and maintaining his immortality, as the

149

observer and experiencer of all the passing changes, himself unchanged and unchanging.

Throughout the dialogue Krishna speaks of the various paths of devotion taken by men. Most of these paths are taken in order to obtain some coveted reward, such as freedom from rebirth, enjoyment of the individual's ideal of happiness after release from the body; individual salvation. He shows that all these rewards may be obtained by constant effort, but that all are temporary in duration, necessitating a return to earthly existence at some later period, however remote. "The Brahmacharya laboring for salvation", labors for himself alone; he "goeth to the supreme goal", but in that state is beyond the power of helping his fellow men. Although he may remain in that blissful state for an immense period of time, the duties to his fellow men which set aside in order to obtain salvation for himself, will inevitably place him where those duties have to be faced and fulfilled. The case of such an one is quite different from "those great-souled ones who have attained to supreme perfection" in knowledge and universal duty.

"All worlds up to that of Brahmâ are subject to rebirth again and again" In the

150

section beginning with these words Krishna is pointing out the Law of Periodicity which prevails in every department of Nature. This more fully explained in the Secret Doctrine by H. P. Blavatsky, Vol. I, in that part referring to the Three Fundamental Principles. Briefly stated, our present earthly existence is the result of previous ones; the present earth is the result of previous earths; the present solar system is the result of previous ones. All of these present progress of some sort, for the essence of progress is change. All beings have evolved to their present status, be that high or low, and all are still evolving; an infinite universe presents infinite possibilities. "But," says Krishna, "there is that which upon the dissolution of all things else is not destroyed; it is indivisible, indestructible, and of another nature from the visible". This is the Divine Spark of Spirit, Life, and Consciousness in every form and being. In Man it is

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

called the "Perceiver", That which sees, learns and knows, apart from all objects, circumstances or conditions through which It passes. "This Supreme, O son of Pritha, within whom all creatures are included, and by whom all this is pervaded, may be attained by a devotion which is intent on him alone". To "act for and as

151

the Self" in every state, under all conditions and in every circumstance is the highest path and leads to the highest goal; it is the path of [in its highest aspect.

"I will now declare to thee, O best of the Bharatas, at what time yogis dying obtain freedom from or subjection to rebirth". Yogis are those who strive for union with the Higher Self. All do not succeed in any one life, so some are subject to rebirth. Krishna indicates the conditions of planets and seasons in the several cases of departure. It would appear from the specific statement above quoted that the indications mentioned do not apply to those whose thoughts are based upon material existence, and that in such cases other indications apply. It may be of interest to consider in this relation the declaration of the ancient sages that all Souls do not depart from the body in the same way. They hold that there are seven great plexi governing other minor ones, these represent channels through which influences are received or given. Each of these channels has its own direct relation to one of the seven divisions of the system, thus showing Man to have the possibility of conscious relation with all the divisions. From this it would follow that the predominating

152

idea of any one life would necessitate departure through some particular channel leading to its own appropriate realm of freedom or bondage. Thus Man binds himself or frees himself by reason of his spiritual power — and his connection with every department and division of great Nature. Krishna concludes the chapter by saying, "The man of meditation who knoweth all this, reaches beyond what ever rewards are promised in the Vedas, or that result from sacrifices, or austerities, or from gifts of charity, and goeth to the supreme, the highest place". This highest place is sometimes called "All-knowingness," the perfection of knowledge, the possession of which confers power of action upon any or all departments of manifested Nature. To reach this "highest place" the highest motive must prevail in all thought and action, perhaps through many lives. The idea of this highest motive may be best conveyed by considering the following ancient pledge :—

"NEVER WILL I SEEK NOR RECEIVE PRIVATE
INDIVIDUAL SALVATION. NEVER WILL I ENTER
INTO FINAL PEACE ALONE; BUT FOREVER AND
EVERYWHERE WILL I LIVE AND STRIVE FOR THE
REDEMPTION OF EVERY CREATURE THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD"

153

CHAPTER IX

THE title of the Ninth Chapter is "Devotion by Means of the Kingly Knowledge and the Kingly Mystery". The word "Kingly" means of course "the Highest", so that if the title had been written in our time, it would have read "The Highest Knowledge and the Deepest Mystery."

That any book or system of thought should purport to afford the means by which such universal knowledge may be gained, is a fact which demands the attention of every intelligent mind. A claim so great may not be lightly brushed aside as unworthy of deep consideration.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Thinkers everywhere admit that what is needed in the world is a self evidently true basis for thought and action; they realize that our sciences, philosophies and religions are attempts, more or less sincere, to obtain such a basis, but are being continually confronted with the fact that none of these supply a sure foundation for the peace, happiness and true progress of mankind. It is realized, for instance, that our modern modes of thought are based upon and applied to ma

154

terial existence and external appearances, all of these being the effects of unseen causes, and that where attempt is made to fathom the unseen, material existence is taken as the cause, and the unseen as the effect, with no perceptible gain in the direction of an understanding of Life or its purpose.

It is interesting to note that the modern basis of thought and action is the reverse of that of the ancient sages, and that whereas our ways of thinking leave us in the dark, the ways of the ancients throw a clear light upon all our problems. Let us therefore study the wisdom of the past, that we may go forward with a clearer and more definite purpose than we now have.

In this chapter, Krishna addresses his disciple Arjuna in these terms: "Unto thee who findeth no fault, I will now make known this most mysterious knowledge, coupled with a realization of it, which having known thou shalt be delivered from evil." The words "Unto thee who findeth no fault" mean that Arjuna is recognized as one who understands that Law rules in everything and every circumstance, and that nothing can come to him of good or of evil, but that of which he him self was the cause; thus he accepted the good

155

without exultation and the evil without complaint; in other words, Arjuna was equal-minded in pain or pleasure, joy or sorrow, and stood ready to suffer or enjoy whatever the Higher Self had in store for him by way of experience or discipline. Thus at the outset Krishna propounds and Arjuna accepts the rule of Law, as a necessary step towards further enlightenment.

The term "knowledge" as used here has a greater meaning than we are accustomed to give it; for we would esteem as "knowledge" an all-round acquaintance with religions, philosophies, arts, sciences and histories as so far recorded, together with that which our senses give us in regard to the external material world. It is generally held, for instance, that one cannot know the constituents or properties of a piece of stone, without mechanical or chemical aids applied directly to the object, and that nothing can be known of the thoughts or feelings of another unless expressed in words or acts; whereas, the knowledge spoken of by Krishna implies a full identification of the mind—or thinking power—, with whatever subject or object it may be directed to, which concentration enables the perceiver to cognize all the inherent qualities of the subject or

156

object, as well as all incidental peculiarities, and know all about its nature.

The possibility of such "all-knowingness" is not admitted by the leaders of thought, and men of our day, whose process is based upon reasoning from particulars to universals, from effects to probable cause, and who are content to erect ever-changing hypotheses. Their process of reasoning is one, which although more refined and expanded, is the same as that used by our savage races. The sages of old, through experience gained from many civilizations, had learned to begin with universals—the plane of causation — and had finally come to see, understand and use the true process, after numberless testings and verifications. It is the

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

result of this acquired wisdom that Krishna imparts to Arjuna as rapidly as his advancing intelligence will permit. It is this wisdom and its results that are portrayed in the Secret Doctrine—or Theosophy. So, if the student is to understand the Bhagavad-Gita, he must begin with universals and with the universal ever in mind expand into all particulars.

Take the opening sentence of the second paragraph of this chapter. "All this universe is pervaded by me in my invisible form; all things exist in me, but I do not exist in them";

157

here Krishna speaks as the Omnipresent Spirit which is in all beings, but which is fully realized in such beings as Krishna, Christ, and others who have appeared in the world of men.

When Krishna uses the personal pronoun throughout the Gita, he is not referring to his own personality, but to the Self of All. So the above sentence may be read "All this universe is pervaded and sustained by the One Self—the Omnipresent Spirit; as it is the Self and Perceiver in all forms, it cannot be seen externally. Because of It, all forms exist; but It is not dependent upon form or forms; these are dependent upon It." In this sentence is contained an expression of the basic Universal Principle, the cause and sustainer of all that was, is, or ever shall be, and without which nothing exists. Being Universal or Omnipresent, and Infinite, no form of thought can define It; yet mankind has ever attempted to define the Infinite by their finite conceptions of Deity. Hence the many gods of different times and peoples; man-made idols every one of them, whether they be mental or physical. It is these man-made conceptions of Deity that have ever tended to erect and sustain divisions between peoples; tribal and national

158

gods deny and frustrate a realization of Universal Brotherhood.

The ancient teaching which Krishna once more enunciates is that all forms of every kind proceed from One Universal Source; the life of each is hidden in and sustained by that Source—the One Life. The power to perceive and expand its range of perception and expression is the same in all beings and forms; the degrees of perception and expression are shown in the innumerable classes of beings it is this power that is behind all evolution—the unfolding from within outwards.

Krishna goes on to present the Law under which all beings evolve, in the words, "O son of Kunti, at the end of a kalpa all things return unto my nature, and then again at the beginning of another kalpa, I cause them to evolve again". A kalpa means a great age or period, and the law referred to is what is spoken of in the Secret Doctrine as the Law of Periodicity, or the law of cycles. Everywhere in nature we find this law in operation, as in day and night, summer and winter, life and death, in-breathing and out-breathing, the systole and diastole of the heart, sowing and reaping. The general name for this universal Law is Karma, which means Action and Re-

159

action, Cause and Effect; it applies to all beings and all planes. An ancient aphorism says, "There is no Karma unless there is a being to make it or feel its effect." Hence all manifestation is the result of karmic action by beings of every grade in their inter-action and inter-relation.

The phrase "I cause them to evolve again" carries with it the meaning that each period of manifestation, great or small, is followed by another on the basis of the experience gained. That which causes "them to evolve again" is the Self of All, which is also the self of each, or as it has been poetically called, "the Great Breath" with its great periodical recurrent "out-

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

breathings and in-breathings"; ceaseless pulsation may be said to be Its one attribute. It is this essential nature which is meant in the phrase "I emanate again and again this whole assemblage of beings, without their will, by the power of the material essence". "Without their will", may be understood by considering that no human being is in a body because he—as such—desired to be; nor does he leave his body because he desires to; the impelling force proceeds from the inner self. the real man. "By the power of the material essence" may be understood by considering the state-

160

ment that Spirit and Matter are co-existent and co-eternal. By "matter" is meant primordial substance from which all differentiations in matter are produced by conscious actions of beings of different grades.

"I am as one who sitteth indifferent" means that the One Self is not involved in any or all forms of manifestation, but ever remains the spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also the highest soul. Just as each one may say, "I was in a child body and had experiences pertaining to that state; I passed through the changes of body and circumstance up to the present, and will pass through all changes to come, but I remain the same unchanging identity throughout all conditions."

"The deluded despise me in human form, being unacquainted with my real nature as Lord of all things". The One Self is the self of all beings. The Upanishads say that "the Self shines in all; but in all It does not shine forth." Krishna says that the deluded fail to recognize this Self, and judging from appearances and arbitrary classifications, maintain separateness. So acting, they set in motion causes that produce similar effects— in other words, bad karma.

161

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to presentations of the right understanding of Self and its results, as well as the results of a false or imperfect understanding.

` Krishna's teaching throughout, emphasizes the statement that there is but One Spirit and

not several, — the same Spirit animating all beings and sustaining all. The same power to perceive is possessed by all alike. The differences in beings consist in the range of perception which has been acquired through evolution, and this applies to all lives below Man, to Man himself, and to all beings higher than Man. In "The Voice of the Silence" it is said that "Mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects," and in other writings Mind is spoken of as "the mirror of the Soul". We cannot fail to see that we act in accordance with the ideas of life that we hold; that what we call "our mind" is a number of ideas held by us as a basis for thought and action; that we change ideas from time to time, as we find occasion for such change; but that at all times we act from the basis of ideas presently held. The reason for the differences between human beings is the false, imperfect or true ideas, form the basis of thought or action are or one to accept and hold only such

162

ideas as are in accord with our personal desires. Krishna presents an example of what, among us, would be called a good desire, that of "those enlightened in the Vedas", whose desire is for a personal enjoyment of heaven; these, he says, obtain and enjoy that heaven for a period of time proportionate to their merits, and then they sink back to mortal birth. He concludes by saying "thus, those who long for the accomplishment of desires, following the Vedas, obtain a happiness which comes and goes. But for those who, thinking of me as identical with all, constantly worship me, I bear the burden of the responsibility of their happiness". The words

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

"constantly worship me," have an explanation further on, in the chapter where he says, "Whatever thou doest, O Son of Kunti, whatever thou eatest, what-ever thou sacrificest, whatever thou givest, whatever mortification thou performest, commit each unto me". The real "worship", is devotion to an ideal. Here "the Self of All" is the ideal, and the action indicated is to think and act for, and as, the One Self in all things, without self-interest in the results. We are not attached to results by our acts, but by our thoughts; freedom comes from a renunciation of self-interest in the fruit of actions.

163

All of the above is included in Krishna's closing injunction; "Having obtained this finite, joyless world, worship me. Serve me, fix heart and mind on me, be my servant, my adorer, prostrate thyself before me, and thus, united unto me, at rest, thou shalt go unto me."

164

CHAPTER X

THE title given is "Devotion By Means of the Universal Divine Perfections". The words "Universal Divine Perfections" have a significance not usually perceived. Men speak of perfection from the standpoint of imperfection, and always in relation to forms, conditions and appearances that are constantly changing; so that with humanity in general the standard of perfection is an ever-receding and elusive, as well as delusive idea. Here again, as with our modern science, we reason from particulars to universals, instead of from universals to particulars, never perceiving that nothing less than the cause itself could ever know itself.

The discourses of Krishna but repeat that which was known before, to the perfected men of all ages, and that which all divine incarnations have since declared—that Man is identical with the Absolute unmanifested, and also with the Deity as we see It manifested in Nature. Our doctrines and education lead us to think that we are inherently imperfect; if we are so, we can never by any possibility become

165

perfect; but if we are inherently perfect, we can see, understand and correct imperfect knowledge and use of all forces, for it is forces we are dealing with, not forms; it is ideas, not persons. We will begin to understand that there is but one force or power— the Spiritual, and that all the various effects of that one power or force that we see and experience, are due to the direction given by conscious entities of many kinds in their different degrees. To understand the "divine perfections", they must be applied universally, from the standpoint of the One Self—the Self of each, the Self of All.

While the Gita is laid out in the form of a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, as between a divine teacher and his disciple and may be so understood, it can also be applied in another way; Krishna is the Higher Self in each, and Arjuna, the mind, the mirror of external impressions; so that the dialogue can be profitably taken as a means to the realization of the Self, and Its adjustment and control of the lower elements and forces. The key-note of the ancient teaching is that the creative and sustaining power of all things and beings is not to be sought for externally; it can only be found at the very root of the nature

166

of each and every being. As it is put in the Upanishads, "The Self-Being pierced the openings outward, hence one looks outward, not within himself." The wise, who seek the Eternal, look inward, for "that which lives and thinks in Man is the Eternal Pilgrim" (S. D.). It is necessary

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

then for the student to dwell upon the idea that he acts for and as the Self of All; that the power to see all, and to know all, is potentially present with him, is in fact his real Self. He will at least then understand when Krishna says "Neither the assemblage of the Gods nor the Adept Kings know my origin, because I am the origin of all the Gods and of the Adepts"; "I am the origin of all; all things proceed from me," that he is speaking of the Self of All and of each, and that the origin of that which is Eternal and unchanging is not to be discovered, for it is both Being and Non-Being. As Patanjali states it, "The Soul is the Perceiver; is vision itself, pure and simple, and it looks directly on ideas". This means that each human being has the power to see and know all things, however restricted that power may be at any given time; that the restriction lies in the more or less narrow range of the ideas that he adheres to, and which form the basis for

167

his actions. This self-limited range of perception, not only prevents the full exercise of his powers as Self, but acts as a bar to the right understanding of his observation and experience; so, even the man of today may say, "I am the origin of all things; all things proceed from me", for so far as he is concerned, his adopted ideas and acquired nature form the basis for all causes set in motion by him, and also constitute his field of observation and experience of effects. By the very power that resides in Self, Man creates good and evil, the delusion of separateness, and all imperfections. Divine perfections are universal; they can only be reached by acting for and as the Self in all things. This state can be obtained by a gradual elimination of all bases of action that make for separateness.

Arjuna begins by stating to himself (Krishna), the characteristics that to him designate the very highest place and power. "Thou art Parabrahm" (beyond Brahmâ) "thou art the Eternal Presence, the Divine Being; all-pervading; without beginning." "Thou alone knowest thyself by thy Self." "Thou alone can fully declare thy divine powers". "How shall I, constantly thinking

168

of thee, be able to know thee?" "In what particular forms shall I meditate on thee?"

The reply begins with: "I will make thee acquainted with the chief of my divine manifestations, for the extent of my nature is infinite. I am the Ego which is seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all existing things." He then goes on to recite that among the gods, the Self is the highest; among planetary bodies, the sun expresses It; among the spirits of the air, the chief of these is an expression of It; among the sacred writings, It is the essence of these — the all-compelling song or sound; and so on through a long list of forms, powers and qualities understood by Arjuna. He concludes by saying, "I am, O Arjuna, the seed of all existing things, and there is not anything, whether animate or inanimate, which is without me". "My divine manifestations are with-out end, the many which I have mentioned are by way of example. Whatever creature is permanent, of good fortune or mighty, also know it to be sprung from a portion of my energy. But what, O Arjuna, hast thou to do with so much knowledge as this? I established this whole universe with a portion of myself and remain separate."

169

Arjuna had asked Krishna under what particular form should the Self be worshipped. Krishna's reply was "under all forms", that there is nothing in the universe, animate or inanimate, which is without the Self. The seeker for Truth and knowledge must see the One Self in all things, and all things in the Self, and then act for and as the Self of All. All sacred writings are addressed to the individual, for it is from within the individual, and the individual alone, that reformation can begin and must be consummated. The study and application of the Gita tends

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

to break down all ideas based upon separateness, and impresses upon the student that the way of true knowledge of the divine perfections lies in universal service, without distinction of caste, creed, sex, color or race. "Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child"

170

CHAPTER XI

ENTITLED "Vision of the Divine Form as including All Forms," this chapter, like all the others, is to be applied to the individual, for while many classes of being, with their degrees of consciousness and power, are continually referred to, a clear indication is given that each Divine Ego is primarily the Self, and contains within his being every element that exists in the Universe.

Arjuna begins in this chapter by saying, "My delusion has been dispersed by the words which thou for my soul's peace hast spoken concerning the mystery of the Adhyatma — the Spirit." He had perceived that the One Self animates all forms of every kind; that the sustaining power, as well as the perceiving power is with in each and every form; but he desired' to see and understand the form or container of Self; in other words, the means by which the One Self became focused — so to speak — in the innumerable forms of existence.

Krishna in reply gives the key to the answer in one sentence. "Here in my body now be hold, O Gudakesha, the whole universe animate

171

and inanimate gathered here in one, and all things else thou hast a wish to see. But as with thy natural eyes thou art not able to see me, I will give thee the divine eye." Here, it is evident that the body Krishna spoke of was a spiritual one, since it required the divine eye to see it, and that Arjuna could not perceive this highest form unless he himself possessed similar sight. Body implies form and substance, and in this relation must mean the highest conceivable primordial matter or substance, which to us might be comprehended as "luminosity and energy," the source of all light and power.

The words "the Divine form as including all forms" imply that there are no forms but those which the Divine form includes, from which it may be understood that the substratum of every form is the same primordial substance spoken of in this chapter as "the divine form," and that every being possesses a divine form which contains within it potentially every power and element. In this ancient teaching is to be found the true basis of evolution, an unfolding from within outwards.

The descriptive portions of this chapter may be better understood if the student will bear in mind that the Gita, as we have it in our

172

language, is a rendition from the Sanscrit, — the latter being a scientific language whose every letter has a numerical value, with a corresponding sound and meaning; whereas our language is that of a fighting and a trading people, with a paucity of terms for anything beyond the physical. One will not then make the mistake of thinking that such descriptions are due to a childish and ignorant imagery, but in reality to a knowledge of powers, forces, beings and states of consciousness.

Sanjaya (the recorder of the dialogue) says, "Han (Krishna) the mighty Lord of mysterious power, showed to the son of Pritha (Arjuna) his supreme form, with many mouths and eyes

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

and many wonderful appearances, with many divine ornaments, many celestial weapons upraised; adorned with celestial garlands and robes, anointed with celestial ointments and perfumes, full of every marvelous thing, the eternal God whose face is turned in all directions."

"The eternal God" is the Perceiver within the divine form; the "face ... turned in all directions" is the "divine form," which like a spherical mirror reflects all things. All differentiations of substance occur within the divine form, and each differentiation neces-

173

sitates its own peculiar modes of expression and appearances, corresponding to "mouths," "eyes," and "wonderful forms."

It has been said of old that "the Deity geometrizes." All forms evolve from within outwards. From the "point" whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere, a radiation equal in all directions begins, and establishes a circumference; a sphere within which the activity of the "point" is particularly confined. The "point" spreading out horizontally becomes a diameter dividing the sphere into positive and negative hemispheres, forming a basis for action and reaction. A further extension of the point vertically to the circumference divides the sphere into four parts, represented on a plane surface as a cross within the circle. Remembering that these extensions of the "point," or center, are lines of force proceeding from the center and tending to return to it, we can conceive of the beginning of a revolution of the sphere whereby the ends of the vertical and horizontal lines extend towards each other, forming at first the ansated cross, and finally the square within the circle, in reality, a cube or six-sided figure within the sphere. The cube, if looked at from either side presents the appearance of four angles,

174

which, if we can conceive of them as being luminous points equidistant from the bright center, would be seen as a four-pointed star, the symbol and sign of the animal kingdom. If we can imagine Arjuna as seeing within the "divine form" all living lines of force and the forms produced by them, the four, the five, the six-pointed star, and the many-sided figures, all in motion and of wonderful brilliancy of light and of many colors, presenting the activities of all beings of every grade in the universe, we may obtain some conception of the descriptive parts of this chapter.

"I am Time matured, come hither for the destruction of all these creatures." "Time matured" means the completion of cycles; everything that begins in time, ends in time; every action has its own cycle or period of return, or re-action; it is action and actions that produce cycles, and these latter range from those of momentary duration to those of a "great age," as they are produced by separate entities, classes of beings, or the collectivity of actions by all beings of every grade concerned in any particular stream of evolution. The general reference here is to the impermanence of all forms or combinations of them. Change is necessitated by progress, for without change

175

there would be stagnation; hence the constant disintegration and re-integration of elements in ever changing relation and form, all brought about by the requirements of the Perceiver — the Real Man within, — who is the sole survivor through all changes.

"Thou art the one indivisible Being, and non-being, that which is supreme." This statement can only be understood by each one applying it to himself. We know that we are not our bodies, for they constantly change, while we remain the same identity through all the changes. We are

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

not our "minds," for we change them whenever we find occasion to do so; if we were our minds we could not change them, and further, it is apparent that "change" cannot see "change;" only that which is permanent can see change. That permanency is the Real, the immortal Man, or, as the "Voice of the Silence" states it, "the Man that was, that is, and will be, for whom the hour shall never strike." Each is the Self, the Perceiver; non-being, yet the cause and sustainer of being; as the Gita states it in this chapter, "thou art the Knower and that which is to be known;" "thou art the final supreme receptacle of this universe" — the garnerer of all experience when this universe is dissolved. At the end of the

176

Great Cycle, which includes all minor cycles, all beings return to the primordial state, plus the experience gained. The next great stream of evolution will proceed on the basis of the acquired knowledge of all beings concerned.

"Having been ignorant of thy majesty, I took thee for a friend, and have called thee 'O Krishna, O son of Yadu, O friend,' and blinded by my affection and presumption. I have at times treated thee without respect in sport, in recreation, in repose, in thy chair, and at thy meals, in private and in public; all this I beseech thee, O inconceivable being, to forgive."

Krishna is to be considered as not only representing the Self in all beings, but as a Divine Being embodied in a human form. Arjuna had asked to see the "divine form," and having seen it, was awed by its grandeur and glory, and realized that he had conducted himself towards Krishna as a human being like himself, although of vastly greater learning: he therefore besought forgiveness for his presumption and asked Krishna to resume the form to which he was accustomed.

Here in this ancient scripture is pictured the 'fatal error made again and again by mankind in the failure to recognize a divine teacher

177

when he appears among them in human guise. Buddha, Jesus, and many others before and after them, were treated by their contemporaries as ordinary human beings actuated by similar motives as the rest of mankind. They were opposed by the established interests, religious and otherwise, because the doctrines they taught were destructive of the hard and fast conclusions upon which those interests were founded; their speech and acts, although intended to instruct, enlighten, and benefit, were construed as violations of law and custom, and were frequently characterized as criminal in nature. Even among their immediate disciples, suspicion, doubt, jealousy, fear, resentment and self-interest were to be found, none of which could have had existence had the real nature of the teacher been understood. These conditions prevented the true relation between teacher and disciple which is so necessary to the latter if he would benefit fully from that relation. It is true that all the disciples learned something in spite of their defects, but it is also true that the lack of intuitive perception of the divine nature of their teachers was the most important factor in the failure of those disciples to truly transmit the teachings they had received; for that lack closed

178

the door in themselves through which the divine enlightenment could come. Even Arjuna, loyal and devoted disciple as he was, had failed to perceive the wondrous nature of his teacher. It was not until that teacher by his favor and power had caused "the divine eye" in Arjuna to open that the ability to see on that plane of substance was gained. It is natural to suppose that Arjuna had by his unshaken confidence and constant devotion arrived at a stage of development where such help was merited.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

It might be well for students of Theosophy to consider whether they may not have made a similar mistake in regard to Those who brought the message of Theosophy to the Western world, and so kept closed the only door through which direct help could come.

In the closing portion of the chapter Krishna says: "I am not to be seen, even as I have shown myself to thee, by study of the Vedas (scriptures), nor by mortifications, nor alms giving, nor sacrifices. I am to be approached and seen and known in truth by means of that devotion which has me alone as the object."

The following, written by one of the Teachers, may serve as an explanation of the foregoing paragraph. "Ishwara, the spirit in man,

179

is untouched by any troubles, works, fruit of works, or desires, and when a firm position is assumed, with the end in view of reaching union with spirit through concentration, He (that spirit) comes to the aid of the lower self and raises it gradually to higher planes." The "firm position" and concentration are one and the same; it means a lifetime's devotion, an acting for and as the Self in all things.

"He whose actions are for me alone, who esteemeth me the supreme goal, who is my servant only, without attachment to the results of action and free from enmity towards any creature, cometh to me, O son of Pandu."

180

CHAPTER XII

THE word "faith" as used in this chapter has a far deeper meaning than is usually given it. To have faith, is the holding of a conviction of the truth of that upon which one's faith is fixed. There are many "faiths" in the world, some adopted because of ignorance, credulity and superstition: others, because they appeal to the desires of their adherents; others again, because of the partial truths they hold. That which is lacking in all these is "knowledge," for a conviction held in ignorance only perpetuates ignorance and its results: a conviction held from desire only perpetuates desires and their results; a conviction held because of partial truths perceived indicates a little knowledge, but not enough to distinguish the error that is always mixed with partial truths. The "faith" spoken of by Krishna is that which is founded on self knowledge—or knowledge of the Self as being All, and in All. A reliance upon that Supreme Self, and an identification of one's Self with It, presents an unchanging and unchangeable

181

basis from which the Truth in regard to Man and all Nature may be perceived. "True faith" can only exist when founded upon right knowledge.

In the reply of Krishna which closes the eleventh chapter, these words are found: "I am to be approached and seen and known in truth by means of that devotion which has me alone as an object." Arjuna follows in the twelfth chapter with the question: "Among those of thy devotees who always thus worship thee, which take the better way, those who worship the indivisible and unmanifested, or those who serve thee as thou now art?"

Krishna's reply embodies the following:

"For those whose hearts are fixed on the unmanifested the labor is greater, because the path which is not manifest is with difficulty attained by corporeal beings." A foot-note explains that

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

"The difficulty here stated is that caused by the personality, which causes us to see the Supreme as different and separate from ourselves." The tendency of human beings is to think and act as persons in their relations with other human beings and with manifested nature in general, and although they may ardently desire to act "for and as the Self," they find themselves constantly falling under

182

the sway of the purely personal feeling of separateness.

The words "Or those who serve thee as thou now art," refer to the form in which Krishna was best known to Arjuna. That this was a human form is indicated in the previous chapter, where Arjuna says, "Having been ignorant of thy majesty, I took thee for a friend, and have called thee 'O Krishna, O son of Yadu, O friend,' and blinded by my affection and presumption, I have at times treated thee without respect, in sport, in recreation, in thy chair, and at thy meals, in private and in public; all this, I beseech thee, O inconceivable being, to forgive." In this sentence Arjuna recognizes Krishna as a divine incarnation, a being who had reached perfection and who had voluntarily incarnated in order to help those still struggling in "this ocean of incarnations and death." That such divine incarnations have not been infrequent, both before and since the time of Krishna, is shown by a study of the world's great religions; the rationale and meaning of such incarnations is clearly shown in the "Secret Doctrine."

The course of every Arjuna — and each one of us is just that — is first a recognition that

183

true knowledge must exist, and an ardent desire to obtain that knowledge. Then comes a search for the source of that knowledge; in that search lies the danger for the seeker. He finds many teachers, to knowledge. While as yet he has no means of determining the true from the false, he will accept ignorantly that teacher or teaching which his ideas and desires. This unfortunately is the course of most seekers. But there are to be found others who examine carefully the fundamental bases of the teachings offered, and who will accept only that one whose foundational propositions can be so universally applied that their truth becomes self-evident.

A resumé of the previous chapters will show that Krishna pointed out to Arjuna the various forms of belief and practice — or devotion — followed by men, and that these, though partial and erroneous, would finally lead to the one Truth if the seeker was sincere and devoted in his search for it. At the same time the One Reality or Truth was shown to be accessible to all men, and to be the highest, most direct and noblest path, leading to understanding wisdom and true happiness.

"But if thou shouldst be unable at once

184

steadfastly fix thy heart and mind on me, 'strive then O Dhananjaya, to find me by constant in devotion." Steadfastness is gained by a constant endeavor to become steadfast.

"If after constant practice, thou art still unable, follow me by actions performed for me; for by doing works for me thou shalt attain perfection." The works referred to are special ones, designed and performed for the sake of the Supreme, all tending towards an elimination of the "personal idea" of separateness.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

"But if thou art unequal even to this, then, being self-restrained, place all thy works, failures and successes alike, on me, abandoning in me the fruit of every action. For knowledge is better than constant practice, meditation is superior to knowledge, renunciation the fruit of action or meditation; final emancipation immediately results from such renunciation." It has been said that the Source of all beings is One; that the goal is One; but that the Path varies with each pilgrim. Hence each pilgrim is at a point of evolution or development where one or other of the steps presented is within reach. Each of these steps is shown to be leading in

185

the direction of the goal, but the aspirant must see them as only steps, the condition of his success being that he must ever keep the goal—union with the Higher Self—in view.

"Being self-restrained," means holding the personal self in abeyance. "Place all thy works, failures and successes alike, on me, abandoning in me the fruit of every action," hardly needs an explanation; for the same instruction has been given so often in previous chapters of the Gita, such as — "Freedom comes from a renunciation of self-interest in the fruit of one's actions." Self-interest is always a matter of thinking; we can have no attachment for anything that we do not think about, nor can we have any dislike for a thing we do not think about; so if we find confronting us things right to be done, we should do them, regardless of whether they promise success or failure to ourselves. Krishna says that final emancipation immediately results from such renunciation, thus placing complete renunciation as attainment of the goal. Renunciation is superior to meditation because it is by meditation upon the end in view that renunciation comes; meditation is superior to knowledge because right knowledge produces right meditation;

186

knowledge is better than constant practice, because practice begets knowledge.

The remainder of the chapter should be read in connection with these notes, for there Krishna speaks of the qualities possessed by those who follow the path he shows. The chapter ends with these words, "But those who seek this sacred ambrosia—the religion of immortality—even as I have explained it, full of faith, intent on me above all others and united to devotion, are my most beloved."

187

CHAPTER XIII

IN The Path magazine of October, 1890, Wm. Q. Judge published this Thirteenth Chapter entire, prefacing the publication with the following words:

"There are nowadays many professors of occultism, just as years ago there was a numerous brood of those who pretended to know about the philosopher's stone. Both, however, were and are learned chiefly in repeating what they have heard of as occultism, with no substance or reality underneath all the profession. Now, as then, the mere incidentals of the true occultist's practice are thought of, spoken about, and pursued. Phenomena or the power to produce them constitute the end and aim of these searchers' efforts. But seek as we may, we will not find among them real knowledge, real experience, true initiation. Being on the wrong path, deluded by false light, they cannot do aught but mystify, annoy, and deceive those who put their trust in them. During the days of Rosicrucian fame there was some excuse for the mass of seekers, but since the old Hindu works have become gradu-

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

188

ally known to everyone, that exculpation is at an end; for on every hand the note of warning is sounded, and everywhere are signs that show in what direction lies the true path. Particularly is this so in that wonderful book, the Bhagavad-Gita. In it however void of phenomena, however unattractive in respect to bait for psychic emotion, it points out the way, declares the mystic science, true devotion, right action."

It has been said of this chapter that it contains the whole of occultism, by which is meant, that all-inclusive occultism which begins with the highest point of perception and realization—the Self within, and which regards action and reaction on every plane of manifestation, as the process by which individual and universal power and wisdom are attained.

That which stands in the way of knowledge is ignorance, and from the point of view of true occultism, the root of all ignorance lies in misconceptions as to one's own essential nature.

In this chapter Krishna treats of devotion by means of the discrimination of the body from the soul, meaning thought and action based upon a knowledge of what is body and what is soul. He then speaks of "this perish-

189

able body" as including not only the physical form, but such elements as the following:

Ahankara-egotism, Buddhi-intellect or judgement, the unmanifest, invisible spirit; the ten centers of action, the mind and the five objects of sense; desire, aversion, pleasure and pain, persistency of life, and firmness, the power of cohesion. In this statement are included all that the ordinary mind conceives of as conscious existence, and purposely so, for if we are to arrive at an understanding of what is permanent, we must first see clearly what is impermanent and perishable.

In the divisions given by Krishna, Ahankara is placed first because in it is to be found the main cause of differences. Ahankara is the tendency to identify ourselves with forms and conditions; from that self-identifying attachment all the variations proceed; intellect or judgment is based upon that self-identification, as are all the likes and dislikes, modes, and channels of action.

If we can grasp the idea of the perishable nature of Ahankara-egotism, the perishable nature of the other elements can be understood. It is a fact that we do identify ourselves with the ever-changing perishable body, and with its conditions and relations, which

190

are also ever-changing. We say, "I am happy, or I am sad," "I am sick or I am well," "I am contented or I am dissatisfied," all of these expressions being due to some form or condition which is changeable. We should observe that the self-identifying attachment is chiefly concerned with the present form and conditions, although we are aware that other forms and conditions have existed in the past, to which we were attached by like or dislike, and that still others will exist in the future.

Through all the changes of the past we have gone; through all the changes of the future we must go. The past changes have perished; the present changes are perishing; the future changes will also perish; but "we" remain through them all, unchanged and unchanging. If we can grasp this idea and hold to it, we will have taken the first step towards right knowledge and freedom, for, as an ancient sage has put it, "The soul is the Perceiver; is assuredly vision itself pure and simple; unmodified; and looks directly upon ideas." In this chapter are the

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

following statements of a similar kind: "I am the knower in ever mortal body;" "As a single sun illuminateth the whole world, even so doth the One Spirit illumine every body;" "He who seeth the Sup-

191

reme Being existing alike imperishable in all perishable things, sees indeed ;" "Perceiving the same lord present in everything and every where, he does not by the lower self (Ahankara) destroy his own soul, but goeth to the supreme end."

It must be apparent to every one who thinks, that to be immortal necessitates being changeless, for that which changes has no stability. There could not be a continuity of consciousness even through one physical existence, un-less there is permanence of identity; the same "I" has noted the conditions, ideas, and feelings from childhood up to the present time, and will note them through all the years to come.

This Western mind of ours finds a difficulty in reconciling "changelessness" with "progression ;" this is because of Ahankara, the tendency to identify ourselves with forms and conditions. Forms and conditions do change, but not of themselves; there is That which causes change to succeed change, and That is the indwelling spirit, which continually impels the instruments It has evolved towards further perfection. So progress and evolution mean an unfolding from within outward, a constant impulsion towards a better and better instrument for the use of the Spirit—the Self within.

192

"The spirit in the body is called Maheswara, the Great Lord, the spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also Paramatma, the highest soul." This sentence really tells the whole story; the Spirit sees, rectifies, sustains and enjoys through Its instrument or vehicle; the ideal of progress is a perfected vehicle which will contact and reflect in the 'highest sense all worlds and all beings.

The term "body" has been used throughout this chapter, but it must not be supposed that only the physical body is meant. The physical body is included in the term, because itself is the product of involution and evolution from higher states of substance or matter. Krishna says "Know that Prakriti or nature, (sub stance), and Purusha the spirit, are without beginning. And know that the passions and the three qualities are sprung from Nature. Nature or prakriti is said to be that which operates in producing cause and effect in actions." There can be no action unless there is something to be acted upon; that something is the highest substance; it is that which fills all space, and from which all denser forms of sub stance or matter have been evolved, and within which they are contained. Thus, the body represents on this plane all the other states of sub-

193

stance from which it has been evolved; it is surrounded by, and connected with them. A study of the Seven Principles of Man will give an understanding of this statement, if it is remembered that Man, the Thinker, is not any of his principles; they are his vehicles or instruments.

"Individual spirit or Purusha is said to be the cause of experiencing pain and pleasure" (through the connection with nature found in the instrument); "for spirit, when invested with matter or prakriti experienceth the qualities that proceed from Prakriti; its connection with these qualities" (and self-identification with them) "is the cause of its rebirth in good and evil wombs."

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

‘ Krishna says that “the passions and the three qualities are sprung from nature” (prakriti). The three qualities represent attachment to bodily existence through love of that which is good and pleasant (sattva)

through a propensity for passion and desire (rajas); and through heedlessness, which destroys the power of judgment. They are all due to self-identification with one form or another of bodily existence.

That which informs and moves all manifestation is the One Spirit. That Spirit is

194

the Real and Permanent in all forms and beings; as Krishna says “it is wisdom itself, the object of wisdom, and that which is to be gained by wisdom ;” it is “the receptacle and the seed ,” it is the power to perceive, the consciousness, the life in all things. It is the cause of all manifestation and the holder of all knowledge gained thereby. Causing and perceiving change, It changes not. All power and all law proceed from It, are inherent in It. This is the meaning of “Spirit,” where Krishna says in conclusion: “Those who with the eye of wisdom thus perceive what is the difference between the body and Spirit, and the destruction of the illusion of objects, go to the Supreme.” By the “illusion of objects” is meant, the seeing of the objects as different from Spirit. Each object may be called an expression of Spirit through various evolved vehicles, whether these be called atoms, molecules, or forms composed of them.

In the “Voice of the Silence,” a statement of the same import may be remembered: “The eye of Spirit—the eye which never closes, the eye for which there is no veil in all her (Nature’s) kingdoms.”

All creatures, being essentially Spirit, strive (consciously or unconsciously) to realize their

195

spiritual being through contact psychical and physical with all manifested nature; some by meditation; some by service; some — mistakenly — by selfishness through separateness. While all paths lead to the Supreme, it is only when the Permanent as distinguished from the Perishable is realized, that erroneous paths are forsaken and the true Path followed.

196

CHAPTER XIV

THIS chapter, like all the chapters in the Gita, speaks of but one Supreme devotion, to which all other forms of human devotion must eventually give way, as the pilgrim strives for perfection.

“The great Brahmâ,” here refers to prakriti, matter or nature, for matter or nature is the cause of all action throughout the universe, as it is the basis by which action may take place. There can be no action unless there is something to be acted upon, hence, spirit and substance are held to be without beginning, that is, co-eternal and co-existent.

As there are great periods of non-manifestation as well as of manifestation, so for Spirit or Consciousness, and Substance or matter, there must be periods of latency and periods of activity which are synchronous with each other.

Prakriti or substance is “the womb” in which the Self or Spirit places “the seed” of thought or idea; from this, action and evolution begin. The following classification and discussion

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

197

of the three qualities illustrates the vital difference between the ancient, true psychology of the East, and what is termed Western psychology. Both abound in classifications; those of the East are much more numerous than those of the West and cover a far wider field; Western psychology in its classifications refers solely to mental states. The psychology of the Gita and the ancient sages classifies the moral states, treating the mental states as mere effects produced by moral conditions. Herein lies the secret of the hold the Gita has had all down the ages, and continues to have increasingly. It lays bare unsuspected bases of error; it discloses the most subtle forms of self-delusion; it marks out the true course so painstakingly that the dullest mind cannot fail to grasp a clear perception of the path to true knowledge.

" The three great qualities called sattva, rajas, and tamas — light, or truth; passion or desire; and indifference or darkness — are born from nature, and bind the imperishable soul to the body. The binding is by the attachment of the self or soul to the qualities perceived in nature. The sattva quality binds to rebirth through attachment to knowledge and that

198

which is pleasant; the fruit of righteous acts appertains to sattva.

Rajas is of the nature of desire, producing thirst and propensity; it binds the soul through action and its consequences. Being separative and compelling in quality, its fruit is gathered in pain.

Tamas is of the nature of indifference or darkness; as the chapter states, it is the deluder of all creatures; it imprisoneth the Ego in a body through heedless folly, sleep and idleness; ignorance, delusion and folly exist where tamas prevails.

Every human being is attached to physical existence through the qualities; it must not be supposed, however, that one of these qualities is present in one individual and absent in others, for all three qualities belong to nature and living being. The differences in human beings are found in the degrees of attraction which each one has for one or other of the qualities. As the chapter recites, "when tamas and rajas are overcome, then sattva prevaleth;" "when sattva and tamas are hidden, then rajas prevaleth;" "when sattva and rajas diminish, then tamas is chiefly acting."

Once the student understands the nature of

199

these three qualities or attractions found in physical existence, he is prepared to examine his own disposition in regard to them. Has he clearness of perception? Is he of a quiet and peaceful nature?

Is he attached to knowledge and that which is pleasant? If so, the quality of Sattva is there to some degree, even if only for the time being. To the individual, Sattva is that which seems good to him, even though his prevailing quality be Rajas or Tamas; so the bee seeks and appreciates the sweetness in the flower, but is ignorant of the flower's nature or purpose. While every form in the three kingdoms of nature has its own peculiar quality, whether consciously or unconsciously expressed, yet the perceptions of these qualities depend upon the nature of the perceiver, his understanding and knowledge. Good and evil are relative; Nature may not be classified as part good and part bad. The goodness, the passion and desire, the ignorance, indifference and folly are in ourselves. The path to Sattvic perception and perfection begins with the feeling of responsibility for thought, word and deed, and ends in unselfishness.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

"The characteristics of Rajas are love of gain, activity in action—meaning the holding of ex-

200

ternal action as the end in view; the initiating of works; restlessness and inordinate desire, producing thirst and propensity for possessions of any and every kind; loudness of speech; obtrusiveness in manner and action, and self-assertion in many ways.

Tamas shows itself in "indifference or darkness," as the chapter notes. Here it would seem that "indifference" and "darkness" are synonymous terms; for that which we call indifference arises from ignorance of the true nature of things, events, and beings; it might be called the selfishness of ignorance. There are, of course, many degrees of Tamas, as many in fact as there are minds, for Tamas is indicated wherever there is ignorance, folly, idleness, and delusion in any degree.

Thus one may express Sattvic-Rajasic or Sattvic-Tamasic qualities; Rajasic-Tamasic or Rajasic-Sattvic; Tamasic-Sattvic or Tamasic Rajasic, in variable and varying degrees at different times according as one is carried away by personal feeling.

Even Sattva may be of that kind which expresses a harmless selfishness; the love of knowledge, of goodness and pleasantness for one's own sake, (or the doing of righteous acts for the reward which follows them; while these

201

bring a fair and pleasant existence, the results obtained from them are temporary, and at the same time bind one to physical existence.

The highest path, and that which leads to emancipation, is "separation from the three qualities. Of course, there is in reality no separation possible in the ordinary sense of the — "separation" here means non-identification. It is Ahankara, self-identifying attachment with the ever-changing forms, conditions and relations of physical existence that makes the real "separation" and binds men to re-birth in a world, which they make one of infinitely more suffering than of joy. "He, O son of Pandu, who doth not hate these qualities — illumination, action and delusion — when they appear, nor longeth for them when they disappear; who, like one who is of no party, sitteth as one unconcerned about the three qualities and undisturbed by them, who being persuaded that the three qualities exist, is not moved by them; who is of equal mind in pain and pleasure, with those who like or dislike the same whether praised or blamed; equally minded in honor or disgrace; the same toward friendly or unfriendly side, engaging only in necessary actions, such an one hath surmounted the qualities."

202

CHAPTER XV

"MEN say that the Ashwattha, the eternal sacred tree, grows with its roots above and its branches below, and the leaves of which are the Vedas; he who knows this knows the Vedas."

In these words Krishna presents a symbol used by men to indicate the universe as an eternal evolutionary stream, proceeding from a changeless Source. This Source, though changeless Itself, produces change in ever-increasing differentiations throughout the great period of manifestation. When the limit of differentiation is reached, the same impulse gradually indraws all differentiations toward homogeneity. This evolutionary process is graphically symbolized in the Secret Doctrine as the Great Breath, with its periodical out breathing and inbreathing. Neither the "out breathing" nor the "inbreathing," nor both together, describe or constitute the

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Great Breath, for these are actions by That which has the power to so act. As Krishna states it in this chapter, "It is the Primeval Spirit from

203

which floweth the never-ending stream of conditioned existence."

"The leaves of which are the Vedas," refers specifically to the sacred scripture of the time; at the same time it should be understood as applicable to sacred scriptures of all times, for these are but formulations by men of portions of the eternal verities; formulations which present in concrete form such spiritual, philosophical and ethical ideals as exist among men at the time of formulation. These formulations are here properly symbolized by "leaves," for they shoot forth from the branches (the three qualities), have their period of manifestation and are replaced by other "leaves".

"Its form is not thus understood by men; it has no beginning, nor can its present constitution be understood, nor has it any end." This sentence may be comprehended better if read in connection with the second paragraph of the chapter: "It is even a portion of myself which, having assumed life in this world of conditioned existence, draweth together the five senses and the mind in order that it may obtain a body and may leave it again." This power to draw together and to disperse is that of the Supreme Spirit; it is the Self, the Real

204

Man, "a portion of myself" in every human form, as well as in all forms. It is not thus understood by men who are bound by Ahankara, the self-identifying tendency of the thirteenth chapter, but it may be realized by "those who are free from pride of self and whose discrimination is perfected, who have prevailed over the fault of attachment to action, who are constantly employed in devotion to meditation upon the Supreme Spirit, who have renounced desire and are free from the influence of the opposites known as pleasure and pain." Knowledge of the Supreme Spirit comes from identification with It; realization comes from dwelling upon the thing to be realized. The "power to perceive" is the very essence of our being, our perceptions are not that power, they are the exercise of it; our perceptions are the bases of our actions; it is because we identify ourselves with our perceptions that we are deluded and bound by the actions that flow from them.

"There are two kinds of beings in the world, the one divisible, the other indivisible; the divisible is all things and the creatures" — that is, all forms and objects of every kind, since every form and object is composed of minor forms or expressions of life or consciousness.

205

Our bodies, for instance, are composed of mineral, vegetable and animal lives and substance; these are borrowed from the three kingdoms below us and are returned to them; hence the term "divisible". "The indivisible is called Kutastha, or he who standeth on high unaffected". In every composite form — and all forms are that — there is a synthetic consciousness which has evolved and sustains that form; that synthetic power is unaffected by any changes in the form. In Man Kutastha would seem to indicate the Divine Ego, whose divinity and spiritual nature remain as such through all forms and changes.

"But there is another spirit designated as the Supreme Spirit — Paramatma — which permeates and sustains the three worlds. As I am above the divisible and superior to the indivisible, therefore both in the world and in the Vedas am I known as the Supreme Spirit. He who being not deluded knoweth me thus as the Supreme Spirit, knoweth all things and worships me under every form and condition."

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Devotion through Knowledge of the Supreme Spirit begins with a recognition that there is but one Spirit, the source and sustainer of everything that exists. As the Upanishads say "the Self shines in all, but in all it does

206

not shine forth". The Self is in all things, and all things are in the Self. Whatever there may be of "shining" through any form or under any condition, that "shining" is from and of the Self. If this is recognized and admitted, we must begin to regard all things and beings in that light and act towards them upon that basis; in this way we act for and as the Self, and as we hold to and follow that practice, all ideas, habits and desires that conflict become overcome little by little, until at last we have the supreme power for good that comes with selflessness.

207

CHAPTER XVI

IN this chapter Krishna begins with an enumeration of the "godlike" qualities. It will be noted that these qualities or virtues are not so numerous as they are comprehensive and complementary, and that taken as a whole, they fully express the title under which they are assembled — a godlike nature.

When we come to examine these qualities from the modern point of view and compare one with another, we may find it difficult to reconcile some with others: as for instance, "power" and "fearlessness" with "freedom from conceit". Our individualistic tendencies incline us to think that a sense of superiority is necessarily present with power and the absence of fear. And again, if we take the simplest, most definite and most easily understood of these qualities, "not speaking of the faults of others", we see only a pale and negative virtue. Yet fault-finding is the most universal and most insidious expression of conceit and self-assertion. Speaking of and pointing out the faults of others is a vice which masquerades under many forms of virtue but

208

in reality it is used to hide our own faults and present the appearance of a righteousness we do not possess—a vice which perpetuates self-delusion and negatives every apparent virtue. St. Paul, the Initiate, in I. Corinthians, Chap. XIII, says in this regard:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

Charity implies the possession of all the virtues, for they are all included in it; it implies the absence of fault-finding and condemnation. But charity is not negative; that which makes charity effective is knowledge, not sentiment; hence the need of discriminating between what are here called "godlike" and "demoniacal" natures.

We must therefore enquire into the meaning of Discrimination. It is a faculty, or power, whose range and value depend entirely upon the knowledge and understanding of the individual using it. All men use this faculty but in as many different degrees as exist between

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

209

the densest ignorance and the highest intelligence and wisdom. It may be called the ability to do the right thing, at the right time, and in the right place, on every plane of action. This necessitates a universal point of view, an understanding that covers the whole of nature, and a universal application of both.

The ancient wisdom of the Gita begins with universals and descends into particulars, this being the course of evolution. It posits One Spirit as animating all beings and all forms, and shows the universe to consist of an aggregation of evolved beings of innumerable grades, each with its own form and tendencies, and each acting according to its own acquired nature. Whatever accords with the acquired nature of each being, will appear to it as good; whatever obstructs or opposes it, will appear as evil; this being true, it is self-evident that good and evil are not things in themselves, but are appearances due to the of the perceiver towards things, forms, conditions and circumstances.

No such considerations as the above could be addressed to any being lower than Man, because he alone, of all those in physical forms, has reached that point of development of his acquired nature which enables him to grasp

210

that which is above, as well as that which is below, and permits him to extend his range of perceptions in all directions. He has reached that point at which he can know himself to be Immortal, and may, if he wills, bring his acquired nature in accord with his own spiritual nature. All of his perceptions are of the "pairs of opposites"; without these he could never find himself, nor understand the natures of those who are struggling to free themselves from the binding force of with forms and conditions.

It must be understood that Man the Eternal Pilgrim, is not his perceptions, for they are always relative. In all perceptions are to be found "the pairs of opposites", for no perception could exist without them. Without darkness, there could be no perception of light; without pain, there could be no perception of pleasure; without sorrow, there could be no exception of joy; without sin, there could be no perception of holiness. That these perceptions are all relative to the Perceiver is shown in the fact that what is light to some is darkness to others; pleasure to some is pain to others; joy to some is sorrow to others; holiness to some is sin to others.

It is the lack of understanding of these facts

211

in nature that produces every kind of "demoniacal nature," and there are many kinds. There are those who "know not the nature of action nor of cessation from action"; those who "deny that the universe has any truth in it, saying it is not governed by law, declaring that it hath no Spirit"; those who "seek by injustice and the accumulation of wealth for the gratification of their own lusts and appetites"; there are those who esteem "themselves very highly, self-willed, and full of pride, ever in pursuit of riches, they perform worship with hypocrisy and not even according to ritual (that which is known) but only for outward show; indulging in pride, selfishness, ostentation, power, lust and anger, they detest me (the One Spirit) who am in their bodies and in the bodies of others." What an arraignment this is of present day religions and systems of thought! All sects present formulas which must be accepted on faith, but which cannot be proved to be true. Many systems of thought affirm the unproven and unprovable and on facts of experience, thus ignoring law and justice in the universe; they deny the effects they perceive, on one side of nature, and affirm as self-existent the effects they perceive of an opposite kind, deluding themselves by offsetting one effect

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

212

against the other, and never perceiving the Cause of both effects. None of these religions and systems of thought as represented by their adherents have the faintest suspicion that they are but repetitions of the errors of past times and peoples; yet such is the fact known to every student of ancient literatures, religions and sciences, who has gained discrimination by means of "the pairs of opposites."

As before said, true discrimination proceeds from a universal point of view, an understanding of the whole of nature, and a universal application of both. The universal point of view is that all manifested nature, including all things below Man, Man himself, and all beings above Man, as well as all forms, degrees of substance, and elements have proceeded from one Source, the One Spirit. The understanding comes from a realization that, from atom to the highest being, each is an expression of that One Spirit and that from the faintest glimmering of perception in the lowest kingdom to the heights of Divine Knowledge, the path is the same for all under Law. Then comes the application of the knowledge gained.

The student must raise himself beyond "the influence of the pairs of opposites." He must

213

see that these are but the means and modes necessary to give him ever-widening perception, and he must realize that he is the perceiver and not any nor all of his perceptions. And as he raises himself above that influence, he will find others like himself, and still others beyond who are of a godlike nature—who love and understand; who possess what appear to others as virtues, but which to them are but actions with spiritual knowledge as director; who understand the vices of men to be due to ignorance and not to innate wickedness; and who hence have patience, power and fortitude, universal compassion, modesty and mildness. They know that that which makes for evil can be turned into that which makes for good; that which makes for destructiveness can be turned into that which makes for constructiveness; that which makes for separation and selfishness can be turned into that which makes for unity and selflessness. So knowing, all nature is theirs, every power and element in it are their instruments; not that the relativities of good and evil can or should be destroyed, but that the spiritual identity of all beings shall be realized at every stage, and only such thought and action prevail as will bring about a harmonious progress towards perfection.

214

True Discrimination distinguishes between good, evil, and mixed natures. It knows that all human beings are inherently perfectible, and that the imperfections exist only in the lower acquired nature; that while this acquired nature exhibits itself in actions, its root lies in tendencies fostered by limited and erroneous conceptions. The effort is therefore not expended in classifications of comparative good and evil, nor is there any condemnation of any being because of the state in which he is found to be ; the causes that have led up to each state are shown, the right basis for thought and action is given, the landmarks upon the "small old path" that leads far beyond comparative good and evil are pointed out, and the pilgrim patiently helped, on every step of the way.

215

CHAPTER XVII

THE twelfth chapter treats of Devotion through Faith founded on knowledge of the Supreme Spirit; the present chapter explains the nature of the faith of those who while they neglect the precepts of the Scriptures (recorded sacred knowledge), yet worship in faith.

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Krishna says that the faith of mortals is of three kinds and is born from their own disposition, and that this faith partakes of the qualities of Sattva, truth; Rajas, action; and Tamas, indifference. These three qualities are specifically treated in the fourteenth chapter and the necessity is there shown for the seeker after truth to raise himself above their influence. The twelfth, fourteenth and seventeenth chapters should be studied together, as they are intimately related.

"The faith of each one proceeds from the sattva quality ... the embodied soul being gifted with faith, each man is of the same nature as that ideal on which his faith is fixed." Here the word sattva should be given its highest definition, "the power to understand,"

216

which every embodied soul possesses, as contrasted with the limitations imposed upon that power by those who fix their faith upon some ideal of seeming good.

"Those who are of the disposition which ariseth from the prevalence of the sattva or good quality, worship the gods." "Gods" is a generic term covering many classes of invisible beings; here the reference is to that class of being which the worshipper believes to be endowed with supernatural powers and virtues, and from which is sought guidance and favors.

"Those of the quality of rajas, worship the celestial powers, the Yakshas and Rakshasas." That is, those in whom the desire for personal and selfish possessions and attainments prevail, seek the aid of, and attract, elemental beings who in an irresponsible way aid in such accomplishments; in other words, where the quality of rajas prevails, any external force that will aid in the fulfilment of desires is sought and welcomed, regardless of its nature or of the evil effect upon others. Such forces or beings belong to the separative and destructive side of nature.

"Other men in whom the dark quality of indifference or tamas predominates worship

217

elemental powers and the ghosts of dead men." Here, the elemental powers are those of the lowest class, and among them are the so-called "spirits" of the séance room, galvanized into a factitious presentation of life and intelligence by the medium and sitters. This lowest class of elementaries and elementals belongs to the grossest part of invisible nature, is nearest to the physical, and most easily aroused. The opening of the doors to this class arises from ignorance of man's true nature, and makes possible the delusion which fixes the faith on impermanent, irresponsible and vampirizing influences. Tamas also predominates in "those who practise severe self-mortification ... are full of hypocrisy and pride, longing for what is past and desiring more to come; they, full of delusion, torture the powers and faculties which are in the body, and me also, who am in the recesses of the innermost heart; know that they are of an infernal tendency.

It is a matter of common knowledge that many kinds of self-inflicted bodily punishments and tortures prevail among certain devotees in the East as a means of development, and that even among Western peoples a similar idea at one time prevailed extensively, and perhaps still exists in some quarters. There is

218

no doubt that these practices had their origin in a misunderstanding of a phrase frequently used in ancient scriptures "mortification of the body." In this chapter Krishna sets forth very clearly the true meaning of that phrase in these words: "Honoring the gods (beings higher than

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

Man), the brahmans (those who have divine knowledge), the teachers (of knowledge), and the wise; purity, rectitude, chastity and harmlessness are called mortification of the body." That this is the true definition is shown by the fact that the body of itself is incapable of action, and is merely an organized aggregation of physical matter used and controlled by the thinker and actor within; it is this thinker and actor who needs to change his modes of thought and action. In changing from one mode of thought and action to an other of an opposite kind, the man finds him self at war with habits which he himself established; these have to be dis-established by the institution of habits in accord with his changed basis. In a true sense this is mortification of the body, but from within outwards, not by any external means.

Similarly "austerities of speech" do not consist of a severity of tone and manner and a puritanical contempt for the average mortal

219

and his interests, a state due to an in-growing self-righteousness, but are practised and shown in "Gentle speech which causes no anxiety, which is truthful and friendly, and diligence in the reading of the Scriptures."

"Mortification of the Mind" is not effected by imposed prayers and penances, nor by offerings to any supposed deity, but by "Serenity of mind, mildness of temper, silence, self-restraint, and absolute straightforwardness of conduct."

The chapter continues by saying "This three fold mortification or austerity, practised with supreme faith, and by those who long not for a reward, is of the sattva quality."

"But that austerity which is practised with hypocrisy, for the sake of obtaining respect for oneself, or for fame or favor, and which is uncertain and belonging wholly to this world, is of the quality of rajas."

"Those austerities which are practised merely by wounding oneself, or from a false judgment, or for the hurting of another, are of the quality of tamas."

The idea prevails among Western peoples that the value of a gift lies in its intrinsic value; Krishna presents the contrary fact that the value of a gift lies entirely in the attitude

220

of mind which accompanies the gift; this applies to gifts and benefactions of every kind, whether seasonal or not; whether to friends, relatives, acquaintances or stranger poor; it would be well to remember this in the season of Christmas and holiday giving.

Krishna specifies and qualifies the different attitudes as follows: "Those gifts which are bestowed at the proper time to the proper person, and by men who are not desirous of a return, are of the sattva quality, good and of the nature of truth.

"But that gift which is given with the expectation of a return from the beneficiary, or with a view to spiritual benefit flowing there from, or with reluctance, is of the rajas quality, bad, and partaketh of untruth.

"Gifts given out of place and season and to unworthy persons, without proper attention and scornfully, are of the tamas quality, wholly bad and of the nature of darkness."

What a commentary this is upon our Western ideas of charity as ordinarily dispensed, and particularly upon our charitable organizations. How many gifts or charities are bestowed

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

without a view to spiritual benefit flowing therefrom? How many subscriptions are made to charities with reluctance, or from a

221

desire to appear generous in the eyes of men? How many are given "out of place and season and to unworthy persons, without proper attention and scornfully?" Each one must answer for himself. It takes a very wise man to do good works without danger of doing in calculable harm; one such might by his great intuitive powers know whom to relieve and whom to leave in the mire that is their best teacher. The poor and wretched themselves will tell anyone who is able to win their confidence what disastrous mistakes are made by those who come from a different class and endeavor to help them. Kindness and gentle treatment will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of a man or woman who has led a fairly presentable life when kept down by pain and despair. The Gita teaches that the causes of misery do not lie in conditions or circumstances, but in the mistaken ideas and actions of the man himself; he reaps what he has sown in ignorance. A better knowledge of the nature of man and the purpose of life is needed; as this is acquired, the causes of misery are gradually eliminated. No greater charity can be bestowed upon suffering humanity than right knowledge that leads to right action. The possessor of this knowledge will be filled

222

with divine sympathy for all sufferers; he will relieve only such distresses as should be relieved in each and every case, while at the same time he will impart as much of his greater knowledge as the sufferer can receive and apply. But he will not let his left hand know what his right hand does; he will have no thought of reward nor even of gratitude; he will simply do all that he can and the best he knows how to do to raise the sufferer to a higher plane of thought and action, while he affords sufficient physical relief to give a foot hold.

This chapter is the last but one of the Bhagavad-Gita, and perhaps as a chapter is the most comprehensive one, for it presents the One True Faith founded upon knowledge of the Supreme Spirit, the Self within, the Knower in every mortal body, and three kinds of false faiths fixed upon externalities.' It considers true practices as the natural outcome of true faith, in contrast with erroneous practices based upon false faiths. It shows clearly that spiritual reliance placed upon any external being, thing or practice prevents right knowledge and true progress, and cannot fail to bring about detrimental karmic results.

Knowledge of and action for the Self of

223

all—the Self within, is necessary in every thought, word and act, even in the providing of food for the body. Krishna does not enjoin any particular kind of food; he says that kind of food for each one is best "which increases the length of days, vigor and strength, which keeps one free from sickness, of tranquil mind and contented, and which is savory, nourishing, of permanent benefit and congenial to the body, is that which is attractive to those in whom the sattva quality prevaleth."

There are many who fix their faith on particular kinds of food and who endeavor to convert others to that particular kind of faith. They, like all others who fix their faith upon externalities, are "false pietists of bewildered soul." The question never is of kinds of food, but of fitness for each particular case; for when all is said and done, each body extracts from any kind of food only that which conforms to the nature of the possessor of the body, and that nature is subject to change from within. The main thing to be observed is to keep the body efficient as an

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

instrument for the soul who inhabits it, by whatever means and food may be found necessary for that purpose. Here, like and dislike are set aside and only the purpose of soul is considered.

224

"The food which is liked by those of the rajas quality is over bitter, too acid, excessively salt, hot, pungent, dry and burning, and causeth unpleasantness, pain and disease." The faith being fixed on desire for personal possessions and attainments, desire becomes cumulative; each object obtained only stimulates the desire for more; this produces corresponding and cumulative tendencies in the body.

"Whatever food is such as was dressed the day before, that is tasteless or rotting, that is impure, is that which is preferred by those in whom predominates the quality of tamas or indifference." Where tamas prevails there is a tendency for and affiliation with the lower elementals and elements of nature; the destructive and disintegrating side.

The last section of this chapter refers to the three-fold designation of the Supreme Spirit as Om, Tat, Sat, the triune Deity in its triple aspects corresponding to creation, preservation and destruction while re-creating, or in order to re-create. The word Om or Aum is at once an invocation of the highest within, a benediction, an affirmation, and a promise; its proper use is said to lead to a realization of the Self within. The Aum contains within itself all the aspects and implies the Universe controlled

225

by the Supreme Spirit. It represents the constant current of meditation which ought to be carried on by every man, even while engaged in the necessary duties of life. There is for every conditioned being a target at which the aim is constantly directed; in the Mundakya Upanishad there is the following, "Om is the bow, the Self is the arrow, Brahman is called its aim. It is to be hit by a man who is not thoughtless; and then as the arrow becomes one with the target, he will become one with Brahman. Know him alone as the Self, and leave off other words. He is the bridge of the Immortal. Meditate on the Self as Om."

226

CHAPTER XVIII

THE chapter begins with this question from Arjuna: "I wish to learn, O great-armed one, the nature of abstaining from action and of giving up of the results of action, and also the difference between these two."

The whole of the chapter is devoted to the answer. Not only are the nature of abstaining from action and the giving up of the results of action involved in the reply, but an understanding of the very nature of action itself and the causes and bases of action. Relating to the "agents of action," Krishna says:

"Learn, o great-armed one, that for the accomplishment of every work five agents are necessary as is declared. These are, the substratum, the agent, the various sorts of organs, the various and distinct movements, and with these, as fifth, the presiding deities. These five agents are included in the performance of every act which a man undertaketh, whether with his body, his speech, or his mind." Again, that "whoever, because of the imperfection of his mind, beholdeth the real self as the agent, thinketh wrongly and seeth not aright." It is

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

227

thus evident that it is not the "real self" that acts, a statement that has been reiterated throughout the previous chapters, and one that it is necessary to understand before the nature of action is comprehended.

Prakriti or nature, is the cause of all action throughout the universe, as it is the basis by which action may take place; this is true on every plane of being. In the thirteenth chapter are these words: "Know that prakriti or nature and purusha the spirit are without beginning. And know that the passions and the three qualities are sprung from nature. Nature or prakriti is said to be that which operates in producing cause and effect in actions; individual spirit or purusha is said to be the cause of experiencing pain and pleasure. For spirit when invested with matter or prakriti experienceth the qualities which proceed from prakriti." This passage throws some light on the meaning of "the substratum:" it is substance in its primordial state from which all differentiations proceed, and within which all differentiations are contained, and therefore forms the basic agent of all action; the word "agent" in the classification may be understood as the power which prompts to action; for instance, the personal self with its concrete and

228

limited ideas, impels the organs of the body and the necessary movements to carry out the prevailing idea. The fifth "agent" is called "the presiding deities"; this latter term may be explained in this way: our bodies are composed of small lives of many different kinds, each of those kinds acting only in response to particular impulses; each class acts according to its own nature, and as a class constitutes a hierarchy of being, devas or deities.

It is understood, of course, that That from which all power to perceive or to cause action emanates is the Self of All; that power becomes particularized, so to speak, in the Individual Self, who on higher planes is the impeller of actions on those planes; on the physical plane, the Personal self is but a temporary aspect of the Individual Self, this aspect being sometimes called the "false ego" because of its delusion; it is this personal self which consciously or unconsciously to itself impels the lives in his bodily organs to action.

' Now we may understand better this passage from the fifth chapter: "the devotee who knows the divine truth thinketh 'I am doing nothing' in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, sleeping, breathing; even when speaking, letting go or taking, opening or closing his

229

eyes, he sayeth, 'the senses and organs move by natural impulse to their appropriate objects.' " It has been said that the Self neither acts nor is acted upon; this must be true also of the Personal self, for, as the thirteenth chapter says: "the spirit in the body is called Mahaeswara, the Great Lord, the spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also the Paramatma, the highest soul." The self or spirit in the body is deluded by the three qualities perceived in nature, liked or disliked, and identifies itself with the actions it induces. "He who seeth that all his actions are performed by nature only, and that the self within is not the actor, sees indeed." There is also this passage, "The path of action is obscure. That man who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men."

If we reconstruct our ideas in regard to action as above indicated, it will throw a new light on karmic responsibility, connecting us more intimately with all selves, all lives small and great, and assist us to a better realization of acting for and as the Self. Having determined, to some extent at least, the nature of action, we have aroused to that extent what Krishna calls "the discerning power," which is also called Buddhi, direct cognition, the high-

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

230

est intellection, the power of judgment, according to its various degrees of activity. These degrees flow from attraction to one or other of the three qualities found in nature, and are described as follows: "The discerning power that knows how to begin and to renounce, what should and what should not be done, what is to be feared and what not, what holds fast and what sets the soul free, is of the sattva quality. That discernment, O son of Pritha, which does not fully know what ought to be done and what not, what should be feared and what not, is of the passion-born rajas quality. That discriminating power which is enveloped in obscurity, mistaking wrong for right and all things contrary to their true intent and meaning, is of the dark quality of tamas."

With the "discerning power" there must also be the "power of steadfastness," for unless we are constant in devotion to the higher life, and the ideal of a conscious life in spirit, not matter, we will be recreant to the best we know. Having reached the power of discernment and having been shown the path which to us is peculiarly ours, we should set aside all other considerations that tend to draw us from it; we should cultivate and practise "That power of steadfastness holding the man to-

231

gether, which by devotion controls every motion of the mind, the breath, the senses and the organs ;" this, as the chapter says, "partaketh of the sattva quality ;" that is, the whole instrument is used for the best and highest purpose only.

The "power of steadfastness" may exist without the highest power of discernment, as in the one who looking for the fruits of action, cherishes duty, pleasure and wealth from the point of view of desire or rajas; or in the man of low capacity who stays fast in drowsiness, fear, grief, vanity and rashness, bound by the tamasic quality.

If we have determined for ourselves the nature of action, the goal of true discernment, and steadfastness which is harmony of thought, will, and feeling, as well as an action on the lines of our determination, we can only have done so through something of that "wisdom which perceives in all nature one single principle, indivisible and incorruptible, not separate in the separate objects seen" and which is of the sattva quality. It is the changeless Self within, which, if we follow the lines of our determination, we will come to realize more and more.

There can be no realization of Self in that

232

kind of knowledge "which perceives different and manifold principles as present in the world of created beings," or in "that knowledge, wholly without value, which is mean, attached to one object alone as if it were the whole, which does not see the true cause of existence."

All our thoughts give rise to action among the lives which compose our astro-physical instrument, and, as we never cease thinking, action continually goes on, for, as often said, "thought is the real plane of action." Even though we may not contemplate any immediate bodily act, we may by our thoughts accumulate a tendency in the lives of our instrument which will eventually result in outward action when ever favoring conditions permit, and we will fail victims to our lack of discernment and steadfastness, as well as involve others in our fate.

"Now hear what are the three kinds of pleasure wherein happiness comes from habitude and pain is ended." We may get some understanding of this sentence if we consider that when some ardently desired aim or object is sought and found, there is at first happiness, and the

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

pain of non-attainment is ended. But the happiness does not remain the same; it resolves itself into contentment and habitude,

233

until the latter becomes wearisome, and another aim or object is sought.

"That which in the beginning is as poison and in the end as the water of life, and which arises from a purified understanding, is declared to be of the sattva quality." The pursuit of desires brings a beginning of sweetness and an ending of bitterness; the pleasure gained from idleness, carelessness and indifference stupifies the soul. To arouse oneself from desiring, or from carelessness and indifference is at first "as poison," but with a purified understanding becomes "the water of life."

The statement that "there is no creature on earth nor among the hosts of heaven who is free from these three qualities which arise from nature," points to the fact that the three qualities exist on every plane of being.

The hard and fast hereditary castes of India of the present day are not meant by the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras of this chapter. In earlier days, before the ancient teaching had become materialized, marriage was a sacred and religious contract; family life was so understood and conducted as to provide proper environment for egos of the same nature as the family on spiritual, psychical and other lines. Then there existed natural castes

234

where all lines of heredity conjoined; in these degenerate days the castes are mixed and there are those born in castes whose nature does not conform to the original caste whose name and privileges they take and abuse. Nevertheless, the castes exist everywhere; but no longer does social position or physical environment distinguish them. In all countries at the present time, there are those in high place and power who by nature are Sudras, and many who are Brahmans by nature are lower in our social scale, for this is Kali Yuga when the powers of darkness are in the ascendancy.

The ancient castes performed duties which were the outcome of their several natures, and were so recognized by all. There was no pride of caste nor jealousy and there existed an ideal community of mutual helpfulness; hence, the duties of the castes were "determined by the qualities which predominated in each."

"Men being contented and devoted to their own proper duties (that for which their nature fits them) attain perfection." "If (in all that he does) a man maketh offering to the Supreme Being who is the source of the works of all and by whom this universe was spread abroad, he thus obtaineth perfection." "The perform-

235

ance of the duties of a man's own particular calling, although devoid of excellence, is better than doing the duty of another, however well performed; and he who fulfills the duties obligated by nature does not incur sin. A man's own natural duty, even though stained with faults, ought not to be abandoned. ... The highest perfection of freedom from action is attained through renunciation by him who has an unfettered mind and subdued heart."

Dharma is the word which in our language is translated as "duty," but it has a much wider range and meaning than that which we accord to the word "duty." There are many who think that duty is something that others think we should do; others again consider "duty" to be

Notes on the Bhagavad-Gita

irksome, and as actions to be performed under duress, and therefore to be avoided; it is therefore necessary to grasp the meaning of the word "duty" as used in the Gita. Dharma means "the sacred Law," the fulfillment of our karmic destiny through many incarnations, the working out and elimination of defects which have brought us into earth life under the conditions in which we find ourselves, which conditions we should feel and know to be the very opportunities needed for our further progress. This is why one of the great Teachers wrote,

236

"Duty is the royal talisman; duty alone will lead us to the goal."

Krishna enumerates the attainments by which "a man is fitted to be the Supreme Being. And having thus attained to the Supreme, he is serene, sorrowing no more, and no more desiring, but alike towards all creatures he attains to supreme devotion to me. By this devotion to me he knoweth fundamentally who and what I am and having thus discovered me he enters into me without any intermediate condition. And even the man who is always engaged in action shall attain by my favor to the eternal and incorruptible abode, if he put his trust in me alone. ... And if, indulging self-confidence, thou sayest 'I will not fight,' such a determination will prove itself vain, for the principles of thy nature will impel thee to engage. Being bound by all past karma to thy natural duties, thou, O son of Kunti, wilt involuntarily do from necessity that which in thy folly thou wouldst not do."

"There dwelleth in the heart of every creature, O Arjuna, the Master — Ishwara — who by his magic power causeth all things and creatures to revolve mounted upon the universal wheel of time. Take sanctuary with him alone, O son of Bharata, with all thy soul; by

237

his grace thou shalt obtain supreme happiness, the eternal place."

"Wherever Krishna, the supreme Master of devotion, and wherever the son of Pritha, the mighty archer may be, there with certainty are fortune, victory, wealth, and wise action." Each one is Krishna and Arjuna; where these two are joined together, all nature makes obeisance.

In closing this series of comments on "The Bhagavad-Gita," we need, perhaps, give no reminder that only the surface of the teachings contained in the ancient book is touched upon. The view-point taken, out of the seven different applications possible, is that of the individual, in accordance with Mr. Judge's early comments, but even from that view point, the field has been by no means fully covered. It is hoped, however, that enough has been said to afford at least a little more light to those who aspire to learn the Science of Devotion...