



Krishna as Lord of the Universe,
by an anonymous Rajasthani artist,
19th century

THE IMMEDIACY OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE *BHAGAVAD GITA*

by
CHRISTOPHER CHAPPLE

The relationship between God and human beings has been expressed in various theologies of revelation. Some emphasize the otherness of God, while others seek knowledge through the indwelling spirit. In the Jewish tradition, a transcendent God reveals directives to a sequence of especially chosen patriarchs and prophets such as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Samuel. They then convey the word of God to others, and provide instruction on how life is to be lived. According to one strain of Jewish thought, God stopped communicating directly with humans after the time of the return from Babylon, approximately 500 B.C. However, the mystical strands of Judaism, particularly schools that emphasize the Kabbalah, consider God to be an abiding presence, intimate to one's truest being, who can be contacted through dance and devotion.

Revelation in Christianity finds its root in the person of Jesus. The four Gospels record his life and teachings. Later theologies further articulate his relationship with God, and speak of God's continued presence in the world. For some Christians, the phenomenon of revelation ended with the story of Jesus as told in the New Testament. For others, direct

access to God is provided through the Holy Spirit, said in the Book of Acts to descend upon those devoted and hopeful.

Later Christian thinkers came to regard God as tripartite: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The father of Jesus, the traditional God of the Jewish people, took human form in the person of Jesus, His son. After the death of Jesus, the spirit of God remains accessible through prayer and ecstasy that leads to revelations by the Holy Spirit regarding God's will.

Like Christianity, Islam also looks to a sacred book, the Koran, for the basis of its worship. However, in Islam, God never takes the form of a person. Mohammed, like the prophets of Judaism, is an especially chosen messenger of God, who bequeaths to humans what Islam considers to be the final revelation. Laws for human action are mandated in the Koran and interpreted by later scholars; for many Muslims, obedience to these laws constitutes the basis for religious life and indicates fidelity to God's revelation. Emphasizing interior spiritual life, Sufis — Muslim mystics — seek direct contact with God by way of asceticism and devotional dance, affirming

and celebrating the immediacy of revelation and God's presence.

The prophetic monotheisms — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — proceed from a common assumption: that the world was created by God, that there is only one God, and that He has sent messages through many prophets in a variety of ways. In cultures and civilizations that do not share this essential presupposition, revelation nonetheless is found. Among the shamanic peoples of the world, *mana* or spirit force, often referred to as *manitou* in the native tribes of North America, takes many forms. In some societies, all males entering adulthood undergo initiations designed to foster direct experience of this force through an extended period of fasting and solitude, culminating in a revelatory experience.

In East Asia, revelation is often associated with divination. The Yin and Yang, the creative forces of the universe, are consulted through the *I Ching*, in order to gain insight into how one should act in a specific situation. The medicinal and martial arts of the Far East also hinge on the subtle balancing of these forces, externally represented in heaven and earth and internally present within the flow of energy through one's own body. In Confucianism, the balance of these forces is sought in one's family life and social affairs. In Taoism, one seeks to balance Yin and Yang internally, in search of ongoing revelation, peace of mind, and longevity.

In South Asia, revelation has also taken many forms. The early amulets and etchings of the Indus Valley cities indicate a concern with interiority and purity. The *Rig Veda* reveals an intimate relationship between the Aryan peoples and a host of deities, from the sun (Surya), to the war god (Indra), to the power of the household flame (Agni). Inspiration, an attribute of Savitar, plays an important role in Vedic life; observant

orthodox Hindus invoke Savitar each morning in the recitation of the Gayatri mantra. Many rituals dating from the Vedic period that are used to invoke the various deities require elaborate preparations and the hiring of special priests for their execution. By the time of the Upanishads (c. 600 B.C.), this path to revelation comes under scrutiny, and reflective meditation gains importance. The world celebrated in the Vedic ritual process becomes interiorized: the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* asserts that the vision of totality sought through the sacrifice can be obtained by focusing on the process of one's own body; the human body itself is said to hold the key to understanding both society and the physical world. Revelation is to be found within: the totality of the universal consciousness (Brahman) is not different from one's true Self (Atman).

In the context of this specific revelatory insight, the great epic the *Mahabharata* provides a model that combines both visions of revelation — the transcendent and the immanent. In the *Bhagavad Gita* section, Krishna as an *avatar* of God reveals to Arjuna a major aspect of divine reality. Arjuna receives that insight and then incorporates it into his subsequent actions. The presence of God is revealed in a specifically human context.

In the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna reveals to Arjuna his divine, imperishable form. This vision comprises one of the grandest accounts of religious experience in world literature. Groping for a suitable metaphor, Robert Oppenheimer quoted this passage from the *Bhagavad Gita* when he witnessed the explosion of the first atom bomb: "If the light of a thousand suns were to blaze all at once in the sky, it would be like the splendor of that great being" (XI:12). Arjuna marvels at the many aspects of this revelatory experience, describing the many mouths and eyes of Krishna,

his celestial garlands and robes. He sees all the gods in the body of Krishna, and Krishna filling all the space between heaven and earth, absorbing hosts of gods, seers, and perfected ones (Siddhas).

Then the splendor and glory of this sublime, paradisiacal vision turns into a vision of the "terror-inspiring," destructive aspect of the Lord's might. Arjuna trembles with fear in the presence of Krishna's form, which issues forth blazing fires of destruction. He sees all the warriors of the Kurukshetra battlefield being sucked into the mouth of Krishna, mangled and crushed. Arjuna cries out, "As moths fly swiftly into a burning fire and perish there, so also do these men swiftly enter your mouths to their own destruction" (XI:29). Krishna proclaims that he is none other than time itself, engaged endlessly in the process of destroying the world. He points out to Arjuna that all persons meet ultimately with death: "Even without your action, all these warriors standing arrayed in opposing armies shall not survive. . . . They have already been slain by me" (XI:33-4). Krishna urges the reluctant Arjuna to perform his duty. After more words of awe and praise, Arjuna begs for Krishna to return to his human form, following which their human dialogue resumes.

This brief summary does little justice to the account of revelation given in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The beauty of this vision evokes awe and fascination on the part of the reader, and much could be explored regarding the particulars of what was seen: the importance of Krishna's weapons, the specific gods included, the symbolism of the thousand heads of Krishna, his great size spanning heaven and earth. In theological terms, Arjuna was granted a direct vision of "functional monism": seeing God in all things and seeing all things as God. The Upanishadic precept states, "Thou Art

That"; Arjuna saw both the *Thou* and the *That* as inseparable and interpenetrating, with no beginning, no middle, and no end. God comprises and absorbs all.

The aspect of the revelation, however, that critically alters Arjuna's decision-making process is to be found not in the grandeur and glory of the celestial adoration of Lord Krishna's divine radiance but rather in the terror of the Lord's destructive aspect — Krishna's graphic reminder of the eventual and undeniable end to life as we know it in all its particularity. Krishna grants Arjuna a vision of death, and this compelling disclosure puts all other things in perspective. No longer can Arjuna cling to any temporary aspect of his loved ones. The power of his enemies and of his friends disintegrates when swallowed by the inevitability of time.

This is the crux of the revelation: the impermanence of all things and all beings is undeniable and unavoidable. When life is seen through this perspective, one cannot do other than withdraw from attachment to that to which one had previously ascribed abiding presence. As an ongoing meditation, this can be applied in virtually any situation in which an opportunity for or a vestige of clinging is found. This thinking frees one from being stuck in the ignorant view that what we own is truly ours and that things are irrevocably what they appear to be. Revelatory insight comes with the perception that, to quote the *Samkhya Karika*, "I am not this, this is not mine." By shifting one's perspective from an "I"-dominated mode to this way of clarity and nonpossession, one attains a lightened state of mind that allows one to move freely, doing what needs to be done but without attachment and compulsion, in full knowledge of each situation's evanescence.

Reflection on death stands as a hallmark of religious thought. The Bible reminds us

that from ashes we come and to ashes we will return, an aspect of the Christian faith that Roman Catholics commemorate on Ash Wednesday. Perhaps no other contemplation of death matches that of the *Bhagavad Gita* in verve and drama. Krishna grants the vision of universal and inevitable death to Arjuna, who not only receives this revelation but then uses it to dispel his fears regarding the war soon to begin. A revelation requires this sort of receptivity; if no one hears God's word, if it has fallen on deaf ears, then it bears no fruit. Furthermore, an insight such as that gained by Arjuna serves as a model and reminder for others. Just as Arjuna overcame his hesitancy, so also can the message conveyed inspire others to act without concern for the fruits of action. Each person must perform actions within the world every waking moment. If one forgets, as it is so easy to do, that the world of appearance is subject to inevitable change, decline, and retreat, then it is easy to operate within a world view that is self-centered, materialistic, and petty. In such a state one sees other people only for what can be gained from them.

Death stands out as the great leveler, the persistent reminder that all things of this world will pass. By seeing his relatives and his teachers as if they already had been killed, devoured in the cosmic mouth of Krishna, Arjuna gains priceless wisdom. This message does not boom forth commandments or directives but invites us to reconsider priorities, to see the world in a new light. Revelation of this sort requires an inwardness and sensitivity. It demands

interpretative effort: in the remaining seven chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna struggles with how best to understand and then apply his newfound insight. Revelation in virtually all contexts requires cultivation and application. It is not enough that Arjuna knows the eventual outcome of the battle and, in fact, the outcome of all human existence. He must then go forth as a player in the drama, doing his duty to the best of his ability, giving body to the wisdom gleaned while in Krishna's exalted presence.

Such it is with all revelation and moments of great inspiration. The thrill of breaking through mental barriers is accompanied by the need to act upon the insight gained. It was not enough for Abraham to hear God's command to sacrifice his son; the ritual had to be prepared. It was not enough for Moses to merely receive the Ten Commandments; they had to be obeyed by his people. It was not enough for Jesus to preach a new path; others had to follow it. Likewise, Mohammed's messages from God demanded the construction of a new social order. As the *Bhagavad Gita* so unforgettably demonstrates, revelation is always a call for action to transform both ourselves and the world in which we live.

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Darshan
1992

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The End of an Era

Edward C. Dimock, Jr., the father of Bengali Vaishnava studies in the West and an inspiration to all who study Indic religion and culture, passed away on January 11, 2001. He was seventy-one years old. According to William H. Honan, who wrote an article about his passing in *The New York Times*, he “almost single-handedly introduced the study of Bengali to the American Academy.” And “his contribution was...recognized by the Indian government in 1992 when it awarded him its highest honorary title, the Desikotama, or honorary doctor of letters, for his work on Bengali literature.”

His published writings reflect his diverse character, as both a thorough scholar and a down-to-earth human being. This diversity is perhaps best seen in his two most recent publications: his life’s major work, the translation and commentary of *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Karṇiḍṭya* (Harvard University Press, 1999) and his personal memoirs of his sojourn in India, *Mr. Dimock Explores the Mysteries of the East* (Algonquin, 1999). He was a well-wisher of JVS from its inception in 1992, and never hesitated to encourage the project throughout its brief history. We pray that his spirit continues to inform the Journal and that his presence can be felt in its pages.

—Steven J. Rosen

CHAPTER ONE: ARJUNA’S CRISIS

Antonio T. de Nicolas

When reading the *Gītā*, we must be aware that the whole book is about Arjuna’s crisis and its resolution. The author of the *Gītā* takes, therefore, a concrete man—a prince, politician, leader, warrior—in a concrete historico-cultural setting—a battle—and identifies a crisis as the starting point of the book. Arjuna’s crisis arises because he identifies himself with his external world—his body and his actions. He believes himself to be the actor and is caught in the results of his actions. It will take eighteen chapters to resolve this impasse.

For the *Gītā* to have meaning for us, then, we must try to consider it from within its own context and structure—it should not be identified as something, a book or a doctrine, which is already known to us. We must start with the *Gītā*’s own initial situation: the human crisis of self-identity. This is Arjuna’s concrete situation in the *Gītā*—a situation which we human beings, in order to survive, must also consider at some time or another. We need to discover how our convictions function in our lives—a function so important that unless it is recovered, we cannot act. Our challenge is not only to understand Arjuna’s plight, but also to understand that this plight is in many ways our own.

The Body of Crisis

There is no more dramatic a document in Hindu tradition than the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the crisis and emancipation of Arjuna, the warrior, as narrated in it. A man, a culture, need to be saved so that we, through this symbolic action, can also come to know our own preconceived notions of reality, and can become our own ground. This document, moreover, is early

enough to provide us with insight into the multiple perspectives of a single culture. Arjuna's crisis, as described in chapter 1 of the *Gītā* is apparently a crisis about his decision to fight or not to fight. That would be fine if, indeed, Arjuna had a choice of either!

Arjuna is no ordinary person—a complete social system hangs on his decision. Generations of warriors before him, and his own thirteen years in exile, have made him ready for what is facing him now in the field of battle, the "field of dharna." Or have they? Apparently not. Sin and guilt wrap around him and threaten to submerge him in a sea of despair. In fact, Arjuna's body is so heavy with sin and guilt that it inevitably sinks into an almost cataclysmic inaction.

Regardless of the merits of war and peace, Arjuna's crisis is radically grounded in three basic presuppositions, all stemming from one misconception—his identification with the external world:

- 1) There is a body and only one body belonging to Arjuna to which the attributes of crisis (sin, guilt, despair, etc.) can be ascribed;
- 2) It is this belief or presupposition that decides Arjuna's course of action or inaction, and his crisis and despair; and
- 3) This is a kind of radical knowledge that grounds Arjuna's crisis—it is the basic orientation which makes the crisis possible.

These presuppositions, and the host of others they bring along—language, reality, the metaphysical hierarchy of absolute forms, philosophical truths, ideas in the mind—might not even make us blink. This is how we, too, are accustomed to "seeing" things and ourselves. However, it is just such an abstract theory that catapults us out of the experienced world by draining it of meaning, throwing us into the arms of existentialism, despair, and the psychiatric couch. These preconceived notions, all that we take for granted as "real," are what catapult the self—and Arjuna—into crisis.

Much of the *Gītā* is lost in interpretation by not paying attention to the first chapter and the clues it provides for both Arjuna's crisis and the path of its eventual resolution. We need to focus on the movement of the first chapter as the basis of its kinesthetic, or dynamic, orientation. Only then can we retrieve the context through which its action gains meaning. From Arjuna's viewpoint, his orientation is the metaphysical unity between him-

self and the action confronting him. His decision about the way things are makes him dependent on the result of his actions.

The first chapter clusters names upon names and adjectives upon adjectives. There are the names of warriors, kings, relatives, gurus, men and animals, weapons, musical instruments, bows, rewards and punishments. There is also a concomitant list of adjectives, properties, descriptions, decisions, indecisions, and so forth, attributable to those names. We might even believe that the Sanskrit language has no verbs, or that their function has been purposely stopped, at least for the time being.

Arjuna's crisis orients itself toward this cluster of names and properties and their permanence or destruction in the battlefield. These names and their properties weigh so heavily that Arjuna cannot see himself as anything but a name with properties—an agent, an actor, a body upon which the weight of all these names and properties lean—until he is crushed into inaction.

It is this abstraction that drains Arjuna's world of all meaning and leads him to crisis. It is such a context that structures Arjuna's body into a body of sadness, sorrow, weakness; a body that trembles, whose hair stands on end, whose mouth dries up, who can barely stand, mind reeling, skin burning.

In our search for meaning we also must not saddle the interpretation of the *Gītā* with the names we associate with it—such as "Hinduism," or the name of the text itself—or we will also be forced to mount the hidden horses—the abstract theory of names—that so much of our Western tradition carries with it. We take possession by names—we know things by our experience of them, by their quantifiable sense-data, the qualities or characteristics cluttered around them, the abstract concepts that the mind applies to things or names, subjects facing objects, things moving in space and linear time, thinking substances facing matter, fallen bodies facing heaven, what is and what ought to be.

The Body of Sound

Arjuna's search for meaning, together with our own, will have to move through seventeen chapters of exercises. First we get clues as to the direction of the search. Then we see a difference in perspective between Arjuna and Krishna. We see Krishna's perspective in chapter 11. And then there is the world of sound. Beyond Arjuna's crisis, and underlying Krishna's and

Arjuna's moves within the culture, there is a whole world of sound and movement that makes these moves possible. This sound-movement-world is what, in the words of St. John of the Cross, we may call "the sounding silence," in which the world of the *Gita* is submerged, and which we must recover if we are to give the *Gita* its own meaning.

Think of it: this whole interaction between Arjuna and Krishna is overheard in battle—over the roars of men, the tumultuous sounds of conch shells blowing, kettledrums, cymbals and horns, amid the clanging of armor, weapons, chariots, amid the nervous excitement of animals and people—through all this the author is able to hear a *whispered* dialogue! And, through him, *we* are able to hear it. The *Gita*'s body stretches as far as its voice is heard.

Arjuna's surrender of his life to meaninglessness is the result of his decision about a knowledge that he considers absolute and his decision about a body that is also considered absolute. The path that Krishna will lead Arjuna down in search of emancipation will be one that corrects this initial "absolute" and "objective" reality, this illusion.

Where Arjuna will rely for his identification on *ahankāra* (the I-maker), Krishna will propose *anahatvādin* (not the "I" speaking) as the linguistic modality of dwelling in the world. Where Arjuna relies on the *manas* ("mind") interpretation of sensation, Krishna will propose the *buddhi* ("intellect") interpretation, with its contextual dependence, rather than the absolutized form of sensation repeated by the *manas* interpretation. Where Arjuna's moves rely on his own thought, Krishna will show him the absolute emptiness of his moves by making him realize the circumstantial moves within which thought, knowledge, and body are already moving and expressing their moves within the situation facing them.

In the same way that Arjuna doesn't understand Krishna, we should also consider the presuppositions forced on us by our own English language. We need to be aware that our metaphors to describe memories are linear—covered with words like river, stream, chain, train. This linear thinking reinforces the belief in a theoretical consciousness that remains constant. It cannot account for the circumstances we face in every action without reducing them to a theory—but a theory that in no way changes our assumptions about memory, consciousness or the body. Linear thinking underlies all our methods of induction and deduction and distributive logic, along with all their distributive laws of and/or.

Cause and effect are similarly connected. In the same way, we trace the

path of a statistical graph, a historical development, a personal biography, the evolution from ape to mystic. Motivation and response follow the same linear path, and so does thought, action, life, reason, argument, conversation, and the path of salvation. Our language cannot function without the and/or connections, and our very language reinforces our reductionist tendencies both in relation to our experience and in relation to other people's cultures.

Yet how ironic that the contemporary quantum logic of modern physics is a nonlinear, nondistributive, intertwining lattice of sentences where the distributive laws—the and/or—have been dropped. Still, the linear logic of our language has not yet made room for the nonlinear character of human experience.

Unless we have this in mind, the moves of the *Gita* will be difficult to see. These moves are nonlinear in character in the sense that each of them is in a complete situation in itself: a body totally oriented toward a cultural origin, a perspectival and bodiless, which becomes perspective and flesh simultaneously with every human move. *Purusa* and *Prakṛti*, vision and interpretation, Krishna and Arjuna, function in the *Gita* as the embodiment of these generalizations.

The Body in Training

Simultaneous with Arjuna's form of knowledge, there is Krishna's—a knowledge that not only includes reflection, but is a form of reflection, fed by the multiplicity of social regional ontologies and their perspectives as they surround both Krishna and Arjuna. It is, moreover, a knowledge intentionally directed toward the recovery of its own original orientation, the absolute present. The *Gita* speaks of time in only two senses: one is the present, the now; the rest is memory. Chapter 11 makes it dramatically clear: "*Kālo smi*," or literally, "Time am I." This is the absolute present; the rest is memories, embodied memories of other presents built of the dark and terrifying present, the present that we so anxiously avoid.

Arjuna's and Krishna's consciousness—plus their radical original orientation—form the necessary conditions for the culture—the *Gita*—to be. All three have to be accounted for. Any one of them made absolute would be no culture at all; at least, not the culture of the *Gita*.

The integration of multiple perspectives is not possible if ultimately knowledge is not mediated through a radical sacrifice of perspectives. It is

through this sacrifice that human knowing as an embodied vision may be opened up, and the multiplicity of actual human spaces for interaction and communication may be made possible and experienced. In this way, the originatingaperspectival ground, which made possible the subsequent multiplicity, may be recovered.

When anyone is in the midst of a crisis, like Arjuna's, things must first get worse before they get better; the crisis must reach bottom before it is resolved. Arjuna's initial condition in the *Gītā* is a complete blank. He is *tamas*, dullness and inertia. It is not the case that Arjuna "feels" lows. Rather it is the case that Arjuna is the whole tamasic condition, not only in his mind but in his whole body-feelings-sensation. If Arjuna had been able, in his moment of crisis, to realize that his body was as large as his tamasic condition; if he had been able to realize the dependence of body-feelings on perspective and realize also this metaphysical unity, then the subsequent journey of the *Gītā* would have been superfluous. But Arjuna, like most of us, settles instead for a crisis, and the *Gītā*'s wheel goes on.

Arjuna's crisis and despair can be read from chapters 1 through 11 of the *Gītā*. Krishna's resolution of this crisis, his own relationship with Arjuna and their simultaneous moves can be seen through chapters 2 to 10 and 12 to 18. Chapter 11 will appear in the *Gītā* as the absolute present mediating and grounding the moves of the past and the future, Arjuna's and Krishna's.

The structure of the journey between chapters 2 and 10 is a structure to be "seen" in order to be understood. Through a mediation of memory—the lived memories of Arjuna's past, the imaginative variations of a life lived and forgotten—Arjuna is able to refuel his body as it felt and thought in different contexts. This is Sāṅkhya and Yoga: Karmayoga (the yoga of action); Jñānyoga (the yoga of knowledge); Karmasamyāyoga (the yoga of meditation); Jñānavijñānyoga (the yoga of wisdom and understanding); Akṣarabrahmayoga (the yoga of imperishable Brahman); Rājavidyārāḡyayoga (the yoga of sovereign knowledge and sovereign secret); and Vādhūtyoga (the yoga of manifestation). Within each of these contexts, world-body-feelings are different; the motivation of each context determines actions and the way these actions world-body-feel.

This long journey of lost memories is a journey of re-embodiment for a man who has been reduced to inaction and impotence. We must understand that it is a journey that is grounded in the realization that a reference for language, perception, or experience in general does not exist.

But the conclusion of such a journey of re-embodiment shows the futility of trying to grasp at anything permanent in this world. Chapter 11 shows the finality, dissolution, and despair of any world that is grounded in such permanence.

What we see in this journey is that Arjuna's memories are lived memories. He has experienced them and therefore knows how they world-body-feel. Arjuna is able to body-feel his own body while traveling the corridors of his memories. He is able to body-feel other body-feelings he himself was when those memories were not memories, but a living body. He knows of other world-unions that are possible through himself, or that he, himself, has been.

But for anyone on such a journey, these body-unions are problematic. We may decide to ascribe all these memories, all these imaginative variations, to the same constant body. That is, we may ascribe them to a body that remains constant through all these variations and to which memories—imaginative variations—are never recoverable as embodied, but are only possible as embodied attributes from a logical world to a logical subject. This union is a precarious one, a theoretic unity to which different sensations, different body-feelings may be ascribed, or may be denied. We can never find ourselves at home in such a body. And the only way out is either to declare ourselves in crisis—go crazy—or diligently dedicate ourselves to the task of finding our own emancipation.

Since the *Gītā* continues, we take it that Arjuna decides for emancipation rather than crisis, but by this decision alone, we find that he has already changed. Faith is no longer anything or any god, but rather a space beyond any god. Knowledge is no longer the "absolutized" universal knowledge that led him into crisis, but rather, "Know me, O Bharata, to be the knower of the field in every field—the knowledge of the field and the knower of the field; this I hold to be (real) knowledge." The body will appear as a radical embodied unity, a multiplicity of body-feelings-sensations, complete each time it acts, in every action, in every social situation. But the body also must refrain itself—"re-member"—every time it acts require not only time, but also the constant effort and habit of learning how to shift perspectives—a 180-degree turn in every action.

The metaphysical clues to this path of recovery are found in the knowledge (liberating action knowledge) that action (*karma*) belongs to *dharma*:

Dharma to the situation or *gunas*;
 The *Gunas* to *prakṛti* (body-interpretations);
Prakṛti to *puruṣa* (embodied vision);
Puruṣa manifests itself through *prakṛti*,
 which acts through the *gunas*,
 which act through dharma,
 which acts through *karma*.

All human actions and their knowledge are woven of the larger fabric of the *yugas*, the cosmic *gunas* from which we create our own personal world (nonattached action-knowledge) or our own personal crisis (attached action-knowledge). Our circumstance, to be saved, has to find its creative situation in the constantly moving world around it. We (and our world) are in constant change and movement. Attached thought-action either stops us or the world in its actual course.

The Body of Karma

The mode of action-knowledge taught by Krishna in the *Gītā* is the prototype of the unattached and dedicated path to find our creative liberation. Krishna's explained mode of acting in the world is the prototype of an activity that lets life pass through us without breaking its rhythm or its flow because of self-made or self-appropriated thought-body-actions.

Liberated people have a necessary and sufficient condition to save our circumstance—to know the field in every field. Of this knowledge new worlds are made. But Krishna could not save any world, any body, if *Arjuna—prakṛti*, the body—could not “re-member itself up” to the embodied vision that every enlightened action demands. *Arjuna* needs to do his part, as do we. In this sense, Krishna, *Arjuna*—and all of us—are meta-physical equals, and are inseparable. We all need to play our part.

Some people claim that the *Gītā* is repetitious and could have well ended with chapter 13. It is easy to understand why such a claim has been made. Faith and knowledge, as presented in chapters 12 and 13, are attributed to a god in whose love, knowledge and faith find their fulfillment. But to the degree that such an interpretation of the *Gītā* gives life to the text of the *Gītā*, it also disembodies the world by denying it in its flesh. Neither faith nor knowledge of the *Gītā* rest on such theoretic solutions to the human problem. What these theoretic interpretations miss is the so-

phisticated understanding and development of the human body that the *Gītā* represents.

No matter how we choose to interpret the *Gītā*, nothing will change it. *Arjuna* will still go into crisis. His knowledge will still be reduced to some form of theoretic synthesis; his liberation will still be reduced to a fruitless hope that somebody—someone else besides him—might be able to pull him out of the situation he himself is incapable of understanding.

This is the world of *saṁsāra*—birth and death, origin and dissolution—because the knowledge that holds it together is not only disembodied, but it is not even capable of “seeing itself.” Or to put it differently, what this knowledge sees is not its own movements, but rather the crystallized, static, stagnant repetitions of a structure that takes its own ground for granted. This is the reason why, regardless of how many lives we live, how many memories we have—even while we talk of maturity, change, growth, and of being different—we keep being reborn again and again into the same kind of body. This is the world of *saṁsāra*. The round of birth and death is only possible when we systematically lobotomize the living flesh for a theoretic substitute that remains constant in spite of the multiplicity of body-world-changes through which we play out our lives.

When we “see” as Krishna instructs us to, then neither the world nor the self nor ourselves are what *Arjuna* thinks them to be. All there is is movement—fleeting, changing, speeding up or slowing down. And unless we learn to see the movement, hear its sound, dance on its rhythmic waves, we have no alternative than to stop the world and triumphantly call the movement of thought the movement of the world. When we do this, human pain, human crisis, and human despair are born.

But the *Gītā* does not propose that we substitute one world for the other, nor proclaim one better than the other. The human condition is such that both worlds make up human life. Either we learn to live with both or we will remain forever incomplete. Both worlds are of equal value and both worlds depend on one another. Their interrelationship, however, is radical. What can truly be said in one cannot be truly said in the other. Understanding this type of complementary relationship is shared by modern physics and applies not only to two separate worlds, but to every action, if we take it in its circumstantial completeness—i.e., an action-body situation.

Krishna's moves—as we see from chapters 3 through 18—are intentional moves for a very definite purpose: the emancipation of *Arjuna*. This emancipation is not possible unless *Arjuna* is desensitized from the

one way of body-feeling-sensing he has reduced himself to by way of the *manas* interpretation of sensation. That desensitization depends on detachment. Our concern here, then, is to clarify how Krishna's moves lead to detachment and emancipation through successive desensitizations and resensitizations.

What Krishna actually performs for Arjuna is the multiplication, the dismemberment, of Arjuna's own body, or bodily conception, as it really embodied itself through other orientations, other memories, and sensed itself embodied as such distinct bodies. Chapters 2 through 10 contain the journey of such an embodied movement, a dance of prolonged frequency and low intensity, high and low pitched, but with one conclusion in mind. Arjuna is not the body he believes himself to be: he is also the multiplicity of bodies he has been through in his memories; all these bodies are alive and asking for release from Arjuna's prostrated and depressed body facing the battlefield.

In trying to understand the *Gītā*, we have to bear in mind all the previous action the *Gītā* has forced Arjuna to perform on his own view of the circumstance around him—and on himself. We have to bear in mind that Arjuna has touched his own emptiness (chapter 11), the absolute bereavement of what he took to be the solid ground of his body-feelings, and that new lenses have been put before his eyes, new auditory devices have been put on his ears, and that for Arjuna, the world cannot be seen or heard in the same old way again. The very structure of Arjuna's meaning has changed forever.

The strangeness of the new situation demands a critical change, not only in conceptual structures, but also in relearning of the new process of body-feeling, a re-education of the muscular and nervous systems, and, above all, a change in the conceptual structure that will account for the new situation. This is the change, during which a whole new style of embodied interpretation is assembled, but this is not achieved without an intellectual bereavement. This can only proceed to relearn its own process of formation step by step, action by action—how to walk, sit, fight, perform rituals, interact with others, talk, sing, dance, even eat leftovers. For those who know, who act on the radical orientation of chapter 11, every action is dangerous, for each one contains the creation and the dissolution of the world.

Every spot in Arjuna's world is now explosive, for in it the whole creation is present. "It is the upturned peepal tree, with its branches below, its roots above. The branches stretch below and above, nourished by the *gunas*, its

sprouts are the sense objects. When this tree reaches the world, it spreads out its roots that result in action." But we do not see how their actions are so umbilically joined to the whole world. "They do not comprehend its form, nor its end, nor its beginning, nor its foundation. Their only way out is to cut their firmly rooted tree with the weapon of nonattachment. Only those who have the eye of wisdom are able to see that it is only a fraction of the grounding self which appears as a living eternal self, and draws into its power the senses and the mind that comes from *prabhṛti*; but taking or leaving a body, they take all these along, like the wind carrying perfume from a home. They enjoy the objects of the senses, using the ear, eye, touch, smell and the mind." But we have to distinguish *puruṣa* from *prabhṛti*, perspective and body. "This is the vision the yogins see in their own self, but the mindless, whose self is not ready yet, even if they strive, they do not see."

Arjuna should not only be a warrior in name, but he should learn to live as a warrior. And among the plural conditions that make up a warrior, the most important one is waiting patiently for the right condition to act. Take a piece of land and there will be as many perspectives as people passing through it. But for a warrior, every piece of land is all the life there is. In fact, there is only every single action for him to count on as "his life" as a warrior, and it is in every action that he will throw himself with the full power of his decisions. A warrior's life is a life of a strategy about every action, and among those actions he has to discover also the strategy of waiting for the right action.

For a warrior, everything is morally dangerous. A trap hides behind every door, every bush, every branch; but in order to be trapped, a warrior must be willing. He must be willing not to be a warrior, and to abandon his will to be a warrior to his desire to be less than a warrior.

From chapter 16 to 18, Arjuna's journey to recover his will—to "do as you desire," as he says to Krishna—includes also the capacity to wait and stall for the right conditions. "For there are those who, without patience, throw themselves to the pursuit of pleasure on the excuse that there is no truth in the world. These are people lost in themselves, small in mind, cruel in deed, enemies of the world. They surrender to desire, arrogance, and hypocrisy, and they justify themselves with false philosophies. They only cling to what leads to death, they strive for wealth to gratify their desires; and they can only speak in the first person: 'I have won today; that desire I will obtain; this is mine; this wealth will become mine; I am lord and enjoyer; I am perfect, strong and happy; I am wealthy, well-born; I will sacrifice; I

will give; I will rejoice, who else is like me?" The destiny of these people is to be born again under the same conditions that perpetuate their delusions in every action. These people do not have enough faith to be able to wait. For we should be able to act in every situation as the situation acts on itself—without self-appropriations.

Arjuna's conclusion, at the end of his long journey, is to realize his own emancipation through the action facing him. Through that action, Krishna, Arjuna, *puruṣa*, *prakṛti*, and their orienting foundation coincide. For emancipation to be possible, however, Arjuna's will has to coincide with the original cultural will of which both Krishna and Arjuna are the body. But this realization could not have been mediated had Arjuna not been able to remember himself.

In the search for meaning, it would be a great oversight if we did not at least sketch the conditions of possibility for recovery of the cultural will of the tradition with which we are dealing. The conditions of possibility are not themselves the experience. It is really up to the readers to embody the circumstance by being able to "hear" what Arjuna constantly thinks he "sees."

Our Bodies

In India I discovered a new sense of movement through sacred chant, music, and language. It is this model of sound that allowed me to make sense of a body that was already moving according to a rhythm that only now I have begun to understand. Before I learned any Indian languages, or any cultural theories about Indian life, my body was already, in its silent way, drawing different bodily structures. I chanted before I learned to speak, and somehow, even without my knowing it, my body was silently shedding a multiplicity of perspectives of itself—made possible through the constant variation in perspectives induced through the musical activity.

I did not then understand, and I am only now beginning to glimpse, the relationship between the two experiences—the body and music. It is a great failure in our educational system that music is no longer a formal part of the curriculum, but it is, nonetheless, clear to me now why in many civilizations, including ours, music was considered the grounding of both training and education. It is also quite clear to me now the role of music in Plato's thought, and his need to "let the musicians in and

spoil the order of the banquet" after his careful discursive arguments of the *Symposium*. If we could only "see" all that they "hear."

It is obvious that the theory of music is not fully developed in the *Gītā*, though it is fully presupposed. It goes back to the *Rg Veda* and the *Bṛāhmaṇas*. It is the theory underlying Rta and Vṛta, Indra and Agni, the Puruṣa Sūkta and Prajāpati, embodiment and dismemberment.

Contrary to our Cartesian and linear way of understanding the mind-body relationship and problem, the *Gītā* forces us to face the same relationship and problem from a totally opposite perspective. In fact, 180 degrees different. While from a Western perspective we are used to conceiving the mind-body relationship as two opposing substances, where the mind has the upper hand, control, and direction of the body, the *Gītā* offers us instead a body—field or *prakṛti*—which, in order to act, finds in every action a perspective—*puruṣa*—or a radical interpretation of itself as it encounters it. Of this body-perspective-appropriation, the whole journey of the *Gītā* is undertaken.

The *Gītā* moves on music. Every action is to be understood as modulated on a soundpoint or tone. As a soundpoint, every action is both a limit and an origin of manifestation: the "male" principle symbolized by an integer "cutting" the undifferentiated pitch continuum, thus opening space itself—the "female" principle—to further differentiation.

Much of the mystery surrounding Hindu thought and practice could be erased, especially in the later tantric tradition, if these musical and mathematical ideas would be thoroughly examined. When projecting integer arithmetic into a tone-circle—linking the female matrix with the continuum of real numbers—it is obvious that the matrix cannot be divided and subdivided into equal parts. Thus we are continually confronted with imperfection and "uncleanliness." This is also the reason why there is no ground for any form of absolutism or dogmatism.

It is on this understanding of soundpoint that space and time may be understood as both the occasion and the challenge for a complete embodiment in every action. For it is on every soundpoint that the whole body-perspective plays out its whole human life—its manifestation and dissolution. The world is created and destroyed in every action.

The complete embodied vision which the *Gītā* proposes to us in every action is not possible unless the body and its appropriated perspective is systematically trained in an activity that would enable the body to shed

its appropriated perspective as it moves from sound-point to sound-point in the scale. The body-movement and embodied vision is implied in a "tuning-theory" that tries to reconcile a multitude of alternate perspectives of the tonefield and the related number field without reducing it to one system. We should be aware that numbers, in the sense of rational numbers—restricted as they are to integers—are inadequate to completely define the continuum of the octave. More specifically, any division of the octave cycle in equal parts (meaning parts in proportion, in the same ratio) is arithmetically impossible, and requires the later concept of real number. Any system of tuning requires that some ideal value be sacrificed at some point in the cycle. The fact that the Hindus do not mathematize their scales in the Greek way suggests that they have always known—even from Rg Vedic times—this lesson.

Music, unlike our English language, is nonlinear. And in this sense perhaps it is the key to understanding the nonlinear moves of the *Gītā*.

We have all referred to the cultural voice, or the cultural will, to orient our own search for meaning. In this sense, music provides a model and ground for meaning. The moves of the *Gītā* are not only descriptive, but normative—they agree with the tradition that has been proclaimed from the *Rg Veda* down as an exact form of acting (*satya, ita*). The Hindu musician takes his stand on any pitch: that is, Hindu theory of music is a theory of relative, not absolute pitch, and what is even more important, it achieves a wide range of modal tunings only because it is acutely sensitive to the precise values of pure octaves, fifths, and thirds. These form an inner metric space which make it possible to deviate from them by one or two "quarter-tones," the least perceptively different pitch intervals. Octaves, fifths and thirds, are true norms, part of all our psychoacoustical equipment. These are culturally reinforced in Hinduism, and, significantly, repressed (i.e., the pure third is repressed) in all countries of the West, where equal-temperament is imperialistically elevated to the status of "cultural norm."

It is obvious that the notion of cultural norm plays a profound role in the *Gītā*, permeated through norms of diversity. Arjuna is a man in search of full-embodiment, which implies that he must carry with him into battle (or any action) the social and cultural norms around him. It is only in this normative sense that Arjuna's action is equally essential to friends and enemies. It is for this reason that the Hindu world of the *Gītā* depends on Arjuna for its survival, on the condition that through

Arjuna, the cultural norms of the *Gītā* find a living body, an incarnation, to keep its wheel moving.

I would like to conclude these meditations through the *Bhagavad Gītā* with some general reflections. The beginning of our journey focused on the systematic effort of an individual, Arjuna, to surrender to non-movement in a moment of crisis. This impossible effort was mediated by a reflection on the frightening discovery that the soil upon which we stand is never secure. It has to be renewed again and again in every action. Even the appearance of nonmovement is a tension begotten by movement and destined to fall apart in order to give way to new movement, which then creates new tensions, new worlds. Movement speaks out of the body-perspective of all things. Crisis in the *Gītā* is the triggering mechanism of one individual's effort to discover the orienting context that dictates his body movement. The *Gītā* makes it amply clear that it is through the discovery of these body-movement-orientations that we may create our own emancipation, and our own world. We can avoid the self-strangulation and desensitization of repeating the same conceptual and absolute body-movement scheme to death.

The theme of journey has forced us to strew our paths with many conceptual corpses. Our systematic effort to make reason through other people's reasons has forced us to sacrifice ideas, models, presuppositions, perspectives, all along this path. The most radical sacrifice being that only one kind of reason may be rational. We were unaware that this dehumanizing demand on what reason should be has been determining our own way of body-feeling-sensing other people for centuries. And that while we were ready to tolerate their ideas, we could only tolerate them as long as our way of body-feeling-sensing would not have to change. In a radical sense, we condemned ourselves to perpetual wandering along a path of discursive thought which could only function discursively by in the end reducing our own human body to absolute insensibility and disorientation. Our educational system, psychology, the social sciences, philosophy, and even religion, are guilty of this sin of systematic disembodiment.

The *Gītā*, on the other hand, has made us aware that underlying all classifications, all definitions, all situations (*satva, rajās, tamās*), underlying

the analytic and synthetic side of our reason (the two sides of brain, *manas buddhi*), there is a body finding perspectives in every situation as it moves along.

Human life—Eastern or Western, Arjuna's or the present interpreter's—means having to deal with the world—a world. This cannot be done in the abstract, but only in the concrete situation of an individualy felt vital need that fills us with the anxiety of life in a moment of crisis. This perception of anxiety is unique to each of us. The concepts by which we think cannot be found ready-made, but must be extracted for the circumstantial architecture of our world. If the concepts by which we think are not capable of embodying the circumstantial architecture of the world, then we are condemned by the hand of our own limited and distorted vision to surrender to the fate of others, to be a slave of circumstances, to inaction—crisis.

The occasion for Arjuna's crisis is the fact that he is in a battle situation. The crisis is Arjuna's own identification of himself with his actions, unaware of the fact that this decision about this identification is not part of the battle: on the contrary, it is the willing reduction of Arjuna, the warrior, the leader, to a vision of himself short of his tradition and his training that reduces him to inaction. The battle is not the issue in Arjuna's crisis, but, rather, it is Arjuna's decision about himself in this battle situation that is at issue. His problem is none other than his identification with his action—taking unto himself literally the identity of the grammatical "I."

It would be a grave misreading of the *Gītā* to make an issue of the abstract values for or against war. To take such an abstract stand would be to misread from the beginning the whole intentionality of the *Gītā*. Nor would its message change because Arjuna fights with chariots and arrows, and we have thermonuclear weapons hanging over our heads. We are not dealing here with possible wars. We are dealing in human possibilities. What is at issue is how we, as readers, decide to see ourselves in our critical situations. What makes us falter, doubt, stop on the path? What leads us to despair, inaction, abandonment, when faced with a determined crisis? What kind of people are we to helplessly abandon ourselves to fate, or chance—even despair?

If we—as Arjuna in this case—are seriously concerned with this problem, we will find the activity (truth) that will quiet our anxiety. We will develop a disciplined commitment (personal morality) to carry out this

program of soothing radical needs. When a problem is as vitally felt as Arjuna's, neither truth nor ethics are in any way a conformity to already established norms of thought or behavior. For truth and ethics are the necessary acts and habits of those in search of freedom. They are the habits and acts of those in need to invent themselves anew, to remake themselves.

The difficulty of human life is that it is not given to anyone ready-made. Like it or not, human life is a series of instant decisions, one after the other, like the moves on a chessboard. At each moment it is necessary to make up our minds about what we are going to do next. In order to decide what to do next, we are compelled to have a plan of what we are supposed to do, or resort to some plan someone else has made for us. There is simply no possible life, sublime or mean, wise or stupid, that is not characterized by its proceeding according to some plan. Read chapters 16 through 18, for example; even if we abandon our lives to chance in a moment of crisis—like Arjuna proposes to do in chapter 1—we are really making a plan!

In the West, we think we choose our way in life. Actually we are interpreters, but our interpretations of ourselves and our world are not arbitrary—not even exclusively our own. Our interpretations belong to a cultural pool, or even a divine origin with which we must tune our individual wills for the continuity and the renewal of life, ours and that of the species. Arjuna's crisis is a model of what we can do or must do in a human crisis. Reading the *Gītā* should thus be an exercise in human liberation, and if we use it as such, the *Gītā* will be meeting its potential, and we, ours.

ARJUNA'S ARGUMENT: FAMILY SECRETS UNVEILED

Christopher Key Chapple

In the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, entitled *Arjuna-viśāda-yoga*, or “the Yoga of Arjuna’s Crisis,” Arjuna collapses, unwilling and unable to continue into battle. In this dramatic moment, Arjuna becomes every person who has been paralyzed by an ethical dilemma, unwilling and unable to take decisive action before sorting through one’s circumstance. In the words of Antonio deNicolas, “Arjuna’s problem would have no meaning for us unless we are able to get inside his bag of skin.”¹ In this essay, I will explore the arguments that Arjuna employs against the notion that he must fight, exploring their possible validity and the ultimate reasons for their rejection. I will also return to some reflections on deNicolas’ statement regarding the universality of Arjuna’s dilemma and the possible role of dramatic tragedy in the promotion of nonviolence and pacifism.

In twenty years of teaching the *Bhagavad Gītā*, students have from time to time argued in class that the weak Arjuna was right in protesting the battle, that he should not go to war, that the family structure should have been protected, that Krishna was full of bad advice. Mahesh Kumar Sharan has commented that “because people do not realize the circumstances under which the *Gītā* was spoken, and take it as a book of isolated teachings, that they commit the grievous mistake of saying that it inculcates manslaughter.”² Sharan indicates that one must approach the *Bhagavad Gītā* with a full understanding of the overall plot and structure of the *Mahābhārata*. In my teaching of the *Gītā*, I have been consistently quite careful to explain the context of the events leading up to the war and try also to convey the concept that in fact Arjuna has to kill or be killed; even if he refuses to fight, his death alone will not prevent the battle. However, some students remain quite obstinate in their insistence that Arjuna’s arguments are correct, that it would have been better for him to sacrifice his own life to save

others.³ However, the students do not seem to notice that this is not Arjuna's argument. Rather than appealing to a notion of self-sacrifice, Arjuna offers two reasons for his retreat: that relatives should not be killed and that women's purity must be upheld to preserve the family structure (*varṇa*). In the essay that follows, these positions will be examined and it will be suggested that each of Arjuna's cases ultimately rings hollow, even to himself.

To begin this exploration, we need first to look at the content of Arjuna's protest. He presents his argument against killing his kinfolk as follows, in verses I.30-37:

Gandiva (Arjuna's bow) fall from (my) hand,
 My skin burns,
 I am unable to remain as I am,
 And my mind seems to ramble.
 I perceive inauspicious omens,
 O Krishna,
 And I foresee misfortune
 In destroying my own people in battle.
 I do not desire victory, Krishna,
 Nor kingship nor pleasures.
 What is kingship to us, Krishna?
 What are enjoyments, even life?
 Those for whose sake we desire
 Kingship, enjoyments, and pleasures,
 They are arrayed here in battle,
 Abandoning their lives and riches.
 Teachers, fathers, sons
 And also grandfathers,
 Maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons,
 Brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen.
 I do not desire to kill
 Them who are bent on killing, Krishna,
 Even for the sovereignty of the three worlds.
 How much less then for the earth?
 What joy would it be for us
 To strike down the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, O Krishna?
 Evil thus would cling to us,
 Having killed these aggressors.
 Therefore we are not justified in killing
 The sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, our own kinsmen.
 How, having killed our own people,
 Could we be happy, Krishna?⁴

Arjuna balks at killing "teachers, fathers, sons, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen" and then goes on to proclaim "I do not desire to kill them who are bent on killing" (I.34-35). He specifically states that he does not want to kill the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The first part of this soliloquy articulates Arjuna's reluctance to put the lives of his own brothers and maternal relatives at risk. This would be noble of Arjuna and understandable in light of any battle in any war. However, when he balks at raising his weapons as the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he in fact has forgotten the numerous slights and insults suffered by himself and his brothers.

When teaching the *Bhagavad Gītā*, I am quite careful to introduce the text by providing the context of the battle. The sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra hated the sons of Pāṇḍu since childhood. The sons of Pāṇḍu were legitimate heirs to the throne; the name Dhṛtarāṣṭra means "he who holds the throne," indicating that he was serving as regent for his nephew Yudhiṣṭhira, a point agreed upon shortly following the death of Pāṇḍu.⁵ Yet Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eldest son Duryodhana wants to seize the throne. He attempts to burn his cousins alive in a house made of lacquer. The Pāṇḍavas then go into hiding, during which time they develop important alliances, most notably with King Drupada (whose daughter Draupadi becomes their joint wife) and their cousin Krishna. When they return from this self-imposed exile, the Pāṇḍavas agree to accept a piece of the kingdom, and they build the city Indraprastha. They declare independence from their home city of Hastinapura, which they have left in the hands of Duryodhana. However, jealousy and fear stalk Duryodhana. He challenges Yudhiṣṭhira to a dice match. Yudhiṣṭhira loses everything, including the beloved Draupadi. She, having been waged after Yudhiṣṭhira lost his own freedom, contests the result. Dhṛtarāṣṭra abrogates the game but Yudhiṣṭhira accepts one final challenge. He loses, and he and his brothers and wife are sentenced to twelve years of forest banishment and one year in hiding. One important point: Duryodhana had cheated, using his mother's brother Śakuni to rig the dice games. At the end of the thirteenth year, the five Pāṇḍava brothers willingly accept a compromise of moving to five small villages. Duryodhana refuses and prepares for the battle that Arjuna now faces.

In instance after instance, Duryodhana violated agreements and attempted to end the lives of his hated cousins. The Pāṇḍavas did not attempt to kill the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra; in three instances, they retreated, first to the kingdom of Drupada, then to the city of Indraprastha, and finally in the

thirteen year exile. Despite this history of rift between the cousins and the repeated threats to the lives of the Pāṇḍavas, Arjuna, in this moment of weakness, seems willing to lay down his weapons in order not to kill relatives that hate him. Arjuna does not at all seem to recall the reasons for the war and does not even once mention the hatred he has felt repeatedly from Duryodhana and his other cousins, nor does he mention the slight to Draupadi that so incurred her wrath. Hence, when he shows reluctance to fight, it seems to stem from a lack of resolve rather than any admission that he and his brothers deserve to die; they have done no wrong, other than to survive and succeed.

The second argument presented by Arjuna concerns the mixture of caste and the threat to the purity of women:

Even if those whose thoughts

Are overpowered by greed

Do not perceive the wrong caused

by the destruction of the family

(*kulaśyāntam doṣaṇi*)

And the crime of treachery to friends,

Why should we not know enough

To turn back from this evil,

Through discernment of the wrong caused

By the destruction of the family, O Krishna?

(*kulakṣayakṛtam doṣaṇi*).

In the destruction of the family,

The ancient family laws vanish;

When the laws have perished,

Lawlessness overpowers the entire family also.

Because of the ascendancy of lawlessness, Krishna,

The family women are corrupted;

When women are corrupted, O Krishna,

The intermixture of caste is born.

(*adharmābhīharaṭ kṛṣṇa*

pradusyanti kulastṛīya

stṛīsu duṣṭāsu vānsṛīya

jāyate varṇasambhavaḥ)

Intermixture bring to hell

The family destroyers and the family, too;

The ancestors of these indeed fall,

Deprived of offerings of rice and water.

By these wrongs of the family destroyers,

Producing intermixture of caste,

Caste duties are abolished,
And eternal family laws also.

(*doṣaṇi etarh kulaginīnāṇāṃ*

varṇasambhakarārahitaṇi

ustādyante jābīharmāḥ

kuladharmāś ca śāstravāṭi)

Men whose family have been obliterated,

O Krishna,

Dwell infinitely in hell,

Thus we have heard repeatedly.

Ah! Alas! We are resolved

To do a great evil,

Which is to be intent on killing our own people

Through greed for royal pleasures.

If the armed sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra

Should kill me in battle

While I was unresisting and unarmed,

This would be a greater happiness for me.

Thus having spoken on the battlefield,

Arjuna sat down upon the seat of the chariot,

Throwing down both arrow and bow,

With a hear overcome by sorrow

(*śokasantiṅgamanāśaḥ*).⁶

In this part of his discourse, Arjuna speaks of the potential threat to the women of his family if the war takes place. He asserts the need to prevent the mixture of castes by protecting the integrity of the women of the family. However, as with the prior argument, his memory seems quite clouded, particularly when he refers to "ancient family laws."

The women of the *Mahābhārata* in Arjuna's lineage demonstrate a fascinating combination of noble, lowly, and godly births and family backgrounds. The story begins with Arjuna's step great grandmother, Gangā, a river goddess "on loan" to Arjuna's great grandfather, Santanu. Arjuna's paternal great grandmother, Satyawati, was a product of a noble king, Yasu who, inspired by the sight of a beautiful woman, spurts forth seed that is consumed by a fish. Satyawati is raised in a family of fisher folk. Arjuna's great grandfather, Santanu, is a warrior and king; his great grandmother was a ferry operator, a businesswoman reared by the fisher family. His presumed paternal grandfather (through the line of Pāṇḍu) was a Brahman, the son of the fisher woman. His grandmother was a princess won by his

step grandfather, Bhiṣma. His presumed father was King Paṇḍu, who reigned because his elder brother was born blind. His actual mother, Kuntī, was of a royal lineage but, due to the antelope's curse placed upon Pāṇḍu, unable to bear him a child. Hence, she enacted a power taught to her by the sun god, enabling her to bear children by different gods of her choosing. Hence, Kuntī bore children by multiple gods: the Sun (Sūrya), Righteousness (Dharma), the War God (Indra, Arjuna's father), and the Wind God (Vāyu).

Arjuna's five brothers likewise share complicated births. His older hidden brother, Karṇa was born of the sun. Yudhiṣṭhira was born of Dharma and Bhīma was born of Vāyu. Arjuna's step-half brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, were born of the solar deity Aśvin twins when Kuntī taught her co-wife Mātṛi how to invoke the power taught to her by the Sun.

In terms of ancestry, Arjuna does not have the sort of clear and distinct history that makes him a credible advocate for "nonmixing of castes." His predecessors include a goddess, a fish, a fisherwoman, a Brahman, queen, and a god. Furthermore, his own marital history is also complicated. His first wife, Draupadī was won in a contest after the Paṇḍavas escaped the first two murder attempts by Duryodhana. But due to famous words uttered by his mother, unaware of Arjuna's feat, Draupadī was to be shared equally by all five brothers, an unusual marriage situation in any culture. His second wife, Subhadrā, was his cousin and sister of Krishna. Through their relationship, the lineage continues, but only when the gods rescue the embryo of Arjuna's unborn grandson.

Above all else, this tangled web of relations, human and superhuman, underscores the mystery of birth and the ever-present possibility that those who one assumes to be one's ancestors are not one's true progenitors. Did the fisherman really find Satyawatī in the belly of a fish? Did Santanu really have a relationship with the river Gāṅgā? Was the Brahman Vyāsa, also known as Kṛṣṇa-Draupāyana (who slept with Satyawatī's daughters-in-law) really her son? Did Kuntī really bear children by four different gods? If the answer is yes, then certainly there has been even more than a mixture of castes. If the answer is no, then a great deal of deception and story telling has transpired.

Why would these fantastic tales of godly births be woven into the epic? On the one hand, this literary device indicates a continuity between the human and heavenly realms. Gods and goddesses take human shape and help form the bodies and personal qualities of their issue. But they also

serve as a convenient fiction to further the plot of the story and add credibility to the claims to kingship put forth by the inheritors of the kingdom. It also perhaps helps to clean up questionable activities on the part of the main characters. A mysterious child can be legitimated by attributing its appearance to divine intervention.

In the final analysis, these intertwining stories that blur the distinction between gods and humans, brahmins and kṣatriyas, kings and fisherfolk, work against Arjuna's argument that he must spare the lives of his hated kinfolk in order to protect the sanctity of women. As he learns later in the battle, his own mother gave birth to a child before her marriage to Pāṇḍu. His own brother was, in a sense, his greatest enemy.

The appeal of the *Mahābhārata* lies partly in its portrayal of the human dilemma in all its ambiguity. It speaks to the human condition in the starkest of terms. The first chapter, in particular, places Arjuna "in the midst of his own authentic reality: despair, anxiety, inaction."⁷ People, even acknowledged divine presences such as Krishna, must cover and conceal themselves and advise others to violate dharma in order to protect dharma. Arjuna moves from an innocent and even naïve view of dharma to the realm of experience in the course of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. He sees the ultimate crushing of all his enemies in the mouth of Krishna. He sees that the higher governing principles are not easy to discern, that the decision making process in times of trouble must come not from rationality but a higher source of inspiration. Krishna personifies that inspiration but, in the words of Antonio T. deNicolas, Krishna serves as the occasion for Arjuna's own embrace of his own circumstances. And, ultimately, sadly, late in the *Mahābhārata*, even Arjuna forgets what he has learned, and suffers for a time in hell because he had fought treacherously against Karṇa. Even the heroic protagonists must suffer the consequences of their bad deeds.

This brings me to the larger issue of why my students protest the seemingly pro-war message of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Gandhi himself struggled with this and, like Abhinavagupta before him,⁸ decided that the *Gītā* provides an allegory for the inner struggle. He wrote that

to me the Mahabharata is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves.⁹

Gandhi also made clear that, to him, the war was not glorified but rep-

resented a great tragedy:

The author of the Mahabharata has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.¹⁰

Particularly in light of the approach taken by Peter Brook's rendering of the epic, one clearly sees that Arjuna and his immediate family pay dearly for their participation in the war. Ruth Cecily Katz summarizes the moral ambiguity succinctly when she writes that "the warfare itself is ambiguous in that, besides being forced to fight against people who are legally and morally entitled to respect, the Pāṇḍavas are able to win only by means of trickery and deceit."¹¹ Vyāsa does not avoid or deny the tragic aspects of his tale. Because of greed, obstinacy, and pride, the war rages forth, sowing a bed of unavoidable sorrows.¹² Rather than interpreting the *Gītā* as a moral treatise on the glories of war, I, like Gandhi, would prefer to see it as a literary testament to the sometimes inevitably tragic aspects of the human condition.

Arjuna, as a tragic heroic figure, represents the challenge of making difficult moral decisions. The human story often includes mysteries that do not lend themselves to easy resolution. In such circumstances, Hinduism offers a template in the person of Arjuna for finding "one's radical orientation beyond the dictations of controlled situations and through these controlled situations."¹³ A literary tale can bring our human horizon beyond the strictly rational modality into a higher level of understanding, appreciation, and insight. In this, and in Arjuna's fulfillment of his destiny as a literary character, we are led to greater human freedom.

Endnotes

1. Antonio T. deNicolas, *Avatāra: The Humanization of Philosophy through the Bhagavad Gītā* (New York, Nicolas Hays, 1976), p. 315.
2. Mahesh Kumar Sharan, *The Bhagavad-Gītā and Hindu Sociology*. Delhi: Bharat Bhawan Bhandar, 1977, p. 10.
3. Ruth Cecily Katz observes that "he acts out what Yudhishtira always threatens" and that "the shift that Arjuna undergoes in the Gītā episode is especially striking because he has been such an active hero up to this point; contrast, in particular, Yudhishtira." *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory* (University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 127, 129.

4. Winthrop Sargeant, translator, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, revised edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 68-75.
5. J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata: I. The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. xiv.
6. Sargeant, 1:38-47, pp. 76-85.
7. Antonio T. deNicolas, *Avatāra*, p. 178.
8. Arvind Sharma, in a conversation on January 18, 2001, noted that Abhinavagupta similarly interprets the *Gītā* as an allegory for the inner struggle.
9. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Message of the Gītā* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), p. 34.
10. Mohandas K. Gandhi, p. 3.
11. Ruth Cecily Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 128.
12. "Certainly in the 1920s Gandhi had insisted that the *Gītā* was to be interpreted throughout in a non-violent sense, under the canopy of *ahimsā* in which he so passionately believed; but he could arrive at this conclusion only through the free exercise of an allegorical method which side-stepped questions of history altogether. There remained throughout the uncomfortable fact that Krishna had exhorted Arjuna to fight, provided only that he did not do so for personal gain. Pacifism (or at least non-violence) could be read into the *Gītā*; it could scarcely be read out of it, except by a resolute ignoring of its Sitz im Leben." Eric J. Sharpe, *The Universal Gītā: Western Images of the Bhagavad Gītā, a Bicentenary Survey* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1985), p. 127.
13. Antonio T. deNicolas, *Avatāra*, p. 258.



42 This mixing of the castes leads into hell for the family as well as the destroyers of the family because the spirits of their ancestors fall when deprived of the ceremonial offerings.

43 By the sinful deeds of the destroyers of families, which cause the mixing of the castes, the eternal laws of caste and the family are destroyed.

44 Thus have we heard it said, O Janardana, that those whose family laws (*dharma*s) are lost must dwell in hell.

45 Alas, we are set to commit a great sin; we have resolved to kill our own kinsmen to satisfy our greed for the kingdom and its pleasures.

46 It would be far better for me if the sons of Dhritarashtra, weapons in hand, should kill me in battle, unarmed and unresisting.

47 Sanjaya said:
Having spoken thus on the battlefield, his heart overcome with grief, Arjuna sank down on his chariot seat and cast aside his bow and arrow.

Bhagavad Gita
Srinivas Murthy, for
Long Beach Public.

Chapter Two

THE PATH
OF
REALITY

1 Sanjaya said:
To him who was thus overwhelmed by compassion, whose troubled eyes were filled with tears, and who was depressed, Madhusudana spoke these words.

2 The Blessed Lord said:
Whence has come to you such faintheartedness in this hour of peril? It is unworthy of an Arjan, it is dishonorable, it does not lead to heaven, O Arjuna.

3 Fall not into cowardly impotence, O Partha, for it does not befit you. Shake off this petty faintheartedness and arise, O scorcher of the foe.

4 Arjuna said:
But how, O Madhusudana, can I fight with arrows in battle against Bhishma and Drona, who are worthy of veneration, O slayer of foes?

5 It is better to live on alms in this world rather than to slay these honorable masters. By slaying these venerable masters, I would enjoy wealth and pleasures smeared with their blood.

6 Nor do we know which is better for us, whether we should conquer them or they should conquer us. The sons of Dhritarashtra are facing us here; we should not even wish to live after slaying them.

7 My very being is overwhelmed with the weakness of pity and my mind is puzzled about my duty (*dharma*).² I appeal to You to tell me which is better. Teach me, your disciple, who have taken refuge in You.

8 I do not indeed see what will dispel the grief which is drying up my senses, even if I should obtain a rich and unrivaled kingdom on earth or even lordship over the gods in heaven.

9 Sanjaya said:

Having thus spoken to Hrishikesha, the mighty Gudakesha said to Govinda, "I will not fight," and he became silent.

10 To him who was depressed in the midst of the two armies, O Bharata (Dhritrashtra), Hrishikesha, smilingly as it were, spoke these words.

11 The Blessed Lord said:

You have been grieving for those who should not be grieved for, yet you speak words about wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead.

12 Never was there a time when I was not, nor you, nor these ruling princes. Never will there be a time hereafter when we all shall cease to be.

13 As the embodied Self³ passes through childhood, youth and old age in this body, so does It pass into another body. The wise man is not bewildered by this.

14 O Son of Kunti, material sensations give rise to heat and cold, pain and pleasure. They are transient; they come and go. Bear them patiently, O Bharata.

15 The man who is not disturbed by these sensations, O best of men, who remains calm in pain and pleasure, who is wise, is able to attain immortality.

16 The Unreal never is, the Real⁴ never ceases to be. This conclusion is perceived by the seers of truth.

17 Know that all by which this universe is pervaded is indestructible. No one can bring the annihilation of that which is immutable.

18 All these bodies of the eternal embodied soul, which is imperishable and incomprehensible, are said to have to come to an end. Therefore fight, O Bharata.

19 He who understands that this Self is a slayer, and he who understands that It is slain, neither of them have wisdom. The Self neither slays nor is slain.

20 It is never born, nor does It die at anytime; nor, having once been, will It again cease to be. It is unborn, eternal, permanent and primal. It is not slain when the body is slain.

- 21 He who knows the Self to be indestructible, eternal, unborn and immutable, how can that person, O Partha, slay anyone or cause another to slay?
- 22 Just as a person discards worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so too the embodied Self casts off old and worn-out bodies and enters into other new ones.
- 23 Weapons cannot cut It; fire does not burn It; waters do not drench It; nor does the wind wither It.
- 24 It cannot be pierced; fire cannot burn It; nor can It be wetted or dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, and immovable. It is the same forever.
- 25 It is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable and unchangeable. Therefore, knowing It as such, you should not grieve.
- 26 Moreover, even if you think that the Self is born and dies again and again, even then, O mighty-armed one, you should not grieve.
- 27 For one who is born, death is certain; and for one who is dead, birth is certain. So you should not grieve for what is inevitable.
- 28 Unmanifest are all beings in their beginning, O Bharata, manifest in their middle states, and unmanifest again in their ends. What is there to lament?
- 29 One looks upon the Self as a wonder, another speaks of It as a wonder, and another hears of It as a wonder; even after having heard, no one actually knows It.

- 30 The Self, which dwells in the body of everyone, O Bharata, is eternal and can never be slain.⁵ Therefore, you should not grieve for any creature.
- 31 Moreover, after considering your own duty,⁶ you should not waver. There is no greater good for a Kshatriya than a battle fought for a just cause.
- 32 Happy are the Kshatriyas, O Partha, for whom such a battle has come on its own accord as a gateway to heaven.
- 33 Now, if you refuse to fight this righteous battle, then, by failing in your own duty and honor, you will incur sin.
- 34 People will recount forever your lasting dishonor. And for one who has been honored, dishonor is much worse than death.
- 35 The great warriors will believe that you have retreated from the battle out of fear and those who have thought highly of you will lose esteem for you.⁸
- 36 Your enemies will speak of you with ill will, slandering your manhood. Could anything be more miserable than that?
- 37 If you are killed, you will go to heaven; if victorious, you will enjoy the earth. Therefore, arise resolved to fight, O son of Kunti.
- 38 Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, prepare yourself for battle. Thus you will incur no sin.

39 This is the wisdom (*buddhi*)⁹ of the Sankhya¹⁰ imparted to you, O Partha. Now listen to the wisdom of the Yoga. Disciplined by this thought, you will free yourself from the bondage of works.

40 No effort is lost and no harm prevails in this path (of Yoga). Even a little of this righteousness (*dharma*) saves a man from great fear.

41 In this, O joy of the Kurus, there is only one earnest and resolute understanding; but the thoughts of the irresolute are many-branched and unending.

42-43 The unwise who delight in the letter of the Vedas and say that there is nothing else, whose selves are filled with desire, who are intent on heaven, utter flowery words and lay down specific rites for the attainment of pleasure and power, resulting in rebirth as the reward for their actions.

44 The discriminating intelligence is not set in self-concentration for those who cling to pleasure and power and whose minds are carried away by these words of the Vedas.

45 The action of the three *gunas*¹¹ is the subject matter of the Vedas. Be free, O Arjuna, from the three *gunas*; be free from the dualities; be firmly fixed in goodness (*sattva*). Do not care for acquisition of property or its preservation and be established in the Self.

46 As much use as there is in a pond flooded with water on every side, so much use is there in all the Vedas for an enlightened seer who has knowledge.

47 To action alone you have a right and never to its fruits. Let not your motive be the fruits of action; nor let there be in you any attachment to inaction.

48 Fixed in yoga, O winner of wealth, do your work, renouncing attachment and remaining even-minded in both success and failure. This equanimity¹² of mind is called yoga.

49 Far inferior indeed is mere action, O winner of wealth, to action performed with the yoga of wisdom. Seek refuge in the yoga of wisdom. Pitiful are those who work for results.

50 He who has reached evenness of mind casts off both good and evil deeds in this life. Therefore strive for yoga, which is skill in action.

51 The wise who have attained evenness of mind renounce the fruits of action. The wise are freed from the fetters of birth and attain the state that is beyond sorrow.

52 When your mind has crossed the forest of delusion, you will become indifferent to what has been heard and what is yet to be heard.

53 When your mind, which is bewildered by the Vedic texts, stands firm and steady in the Self, then you shall attain yoga.

54 Arjuna said:
What is the description of the man of steadfast wisdom who is merged in concentration (*samadhi*), O Keshava? How does the man of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

55 The Blessed Lord said:

When a man completely abandons all the desires of the heart, O Partha, and is satisfied in the Self by the Self alone, then he is called a man of steady wisdom.

56 He whose mind is untroubled by grief, he who has no longing for pleasures; he who is free from attachment, fear and rage; he is called a sage of steady wisdom.

57 He who is not attached to anything, who neither rejoices nor sorrows when he encounters good or evil, has his mind firmly set in wisdom.

58 When he completely withdraws the senses from the sense-objects, just as a tortoise draws in its limbs, then his mind is firmly fixed.

59 The objects of the senses disappear from the one who abstains from food, but the taste for them remains. But even the taste disappears from the one who has seen the Supreme.

60 The churning and restless senses, O son of Kunti, violently carry away the mind of even a wise man striving toward perfection.

61 Having brought them all under control, he should sit disciplined in yoga, focused on Me. He whose senses are under control has a steady mind.

62 When a man broods over the sense objects, attachment to them arises. From attachment arises desire, and desire breeds anger.

63 From anger comes delusion of mind, and from delusion, the loss of memory; from loss of memory, the destruction of discrimination;¹³ and from the destruction of discrimination, the man perishes.

64 But a man of self-control, who moves in the world of the senses with his senses restrained, is free from attraction and aversion and thereby attains serenity of mind.

65 Through that serenity comes the cessation of all his sorrows. The intelligence of such a man of serene mind is soon grounded in peace.

66 There is no wisdom nor power of contemplation for the uncontrolled mind. Without contemplation, there is no peace; and without peace, how can there be happiness?

67 When the mind yields to the roving senses, it carries away one's discrimination just as a storm carries away a ship on the waters.

68 Therefore, O mighty-armed one, he whose senses are completely withdrawn from their objects has his wisdom firmly grounded.

69 In that which is night to all beings, the man of self-discipline is awake; that which is day to all other beings is night for the sage who sees.

70 No one who longs for desires attains peace but rather he into whom all desires merge like waters into the ocean, which ever being filled yet remains unmoved.

71 The man who abandons all desires and acts free from lust, indifferent to possessions and without egotism, attains peace.

72 This is the divine state, O Partha. Having attained it, one is no longer bewildered. Fixed in it, even at the hour of death, one attains liberation in Brahman.

Chapter Three

THE YOGA OF ACTION

1 Arjuna said:

If you hold, O Janardana, that knowledge is superior to action, why then do you urge me, O Keshava, to do this violent deed?¹

2 With these apparently perplexing words, You seem to confuse my understanding. Therefore, tell me definitely the one way by which I can reach the Supreme Good.

3 The Blessed Lord said:

O sinless one, since the beginning, a twofold way has been taught by Me in this world; the path of knowledge for the contemplative and that of works for men of action.²

4 Not by abstention from works does a man attain freedom from action; nor by mere renunciation (of works) alone does he rise to perfection.

The **Bhagavad Gita**: Key words and ideas

Part of the **Mahabharata**

Five Pandavas: Yudhishthira (Dharma), Bhima (Vayu), Arjuna (Indra), Sahadeva & Nakula (Twin-headed Asvin God)

100 Sons of Dhrtarastra, led by Duryodhana

Cousin of both sets of cousins: Krishna, who reveals himself to be an avatara

Karma Yoga: act without being attached to the fruits of action

Jnana Yoga: profound knowledge of distinction between change and the changeless

Bhakti Yoga: surrender of ego to a form of the divinity

Purusa or Atman (changeless) and Prakrti (change)

Three Gunas: Sattva (illuminative), Rajas (passionate), Tamas (lethargic)

Chapter Six: The Yoga of Meditation

The Blessed One said:

1. One who performs ritual action which ought to be done without seeking its fruits is a true renouncer and Yogi, not the one who fails to light the sacred fire and fails to perform the ritual acts.
2. Know that Yoga is called renunciation, O Pandava, for no one becomes a Yogi without renouncing desires.
3. For the sage who seeks to attain Yoga, work is said to be the means. When one has attained Yoga, peace is said to be the means.
4. When a person is attached to neither the sense objects nor to works, and when one has renounced all the desires of the heart, then one is said to have attained Yoga.
5. Let a person raise up oneself by the Self, not degrade oneself. The Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self.
6. The self is the friend of the Self for one who has conquered the self by the Self; but for one who is not self-conquered, the self is hostile like an enemy.
7. One who is self-conquered is peaceful, absorbed in the Supreme Self, ever steadfast in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honor and dishonor.
8. One who is content with wisdom and knowledge, firm and self-poised, has mastered the senses, to whom a lump of clay, a stone, or a piece of gold are alike, is called a steadfast Yogi of true discipline.
9. One excels among people who has equal regard for friends, companions, enemies, the impartial, the malicious, relatives, saints, and sinners.
10. Let the Yogi at all times strive to concentrate the mind on the Supreme Self, remaining alone in solitude, self-controlled, free from desires and possessions.
11. Establishing a firm seat in a clean place that is neither too high nor too low, covered with sacred grass, a deerskin, and a cloth, one over the other;
12. Sitting there, concentrating the mind on a single object, controlling thought and the activity of the senses, practice Yoga for self-purification.
13. Sitting still, holding the body, head, and neck erect, firmly and steadily gazing at the tip of the nose, without looking anywhere else,

14. Serene and fearless, faithful to the vow of celibacy, in control of the mind, let such a one sit harmonized with thoughts fixed on Me and devoted to Me.
15. Thus continually self-disciplined, with mind and emotions well-controlled, the Yogi attains to the supreme peace and joy abiding in Me, up to Nirvana.
16. Yoga is not possible for one who eats too much, O Arjuna, or one who refrains from eating altogether.
Nor is it for one who sleeps too much or too little.
17. For the person temperate in food and play, who is disciplined in the performance of actions, whose sleep and waking are regulated, Yoga dispels all sorrow (duhkha).
18. When the person of restrained mind is absorbed in the Self alone, free from the craving for desires, that person is said to be disciplined in Yoga.
19. Just as a lamp in a windless place does not flicker, similarly does the Yogi of controlled mind practice concentration on the Self.
20. Where thought enters into silence, stilled by the practice of concentration, one sees the Self through the self and is satisfied in the self.
21. When one experiences that supreme happiness, which is perceived by the intelligence (buddhi) and transcends the senses, when once established in that, one does not depart from the truth.
22. Having attained this, one regards no other gain as greater; one is not shaken even by profound sorrow.
23. Let Yoga be known as the dissolution from the union with sorrow. This Yoga should be practiced with firm determination and indomitable heart.
24. Giving up without exception all longings born of selfish will and completely taming the unruly senses with the mind,
25. let one gain tranquility little by little. With a firm grip on reason and the mind abiding in the Self, think of nothing else.
26. No matter what causes the wavering and unstable mind to wander, restrain it and bring it under the control of the Self alone.
27. Supreme bliss comes to the Yogi who mind is peaceful, whose passions are calmed, free from sin, who has become one with Brahman.
28. Freed from all sins, the Yogi who steadfastly practices self-discipline joyfully experiences the infinitely blissful touch of Brahman.
29. One whose self is disciplined by Yoga sees the Self present in all beings and all beings present in the Self; one sees the same self everywhere.
30. For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am not lost to that person, and that one is not lost to Me.
31. The Yogi who is established in oneness worships Me as abiding in all beings; that Yogi dwells in Me, of whatever lifestyle.
32. The one who sees oneness everywhere, both in joy and sorrow, who sees all as the image of one's own self, that one I deem to be the Supreme Yogi, O Arjuna.
33. Arjuna said: O Madhusudana, you have declared this Yoga to be characterized by equanimity of mind. But I see no stable foundation for it because of the restlessness of the mind,

34. for the mind indeed is restless, O Krishna. It is turbulent, strong, obstinate. Restraining it is as difficult, I think, as restraining the wind.
35. The Blessed One said:
The fickle mind is no doubt restless and difficult to control, O might Arjuna, but by constant practice and detachment from worldly objects, it can be restrained, O son of Kunti.
36. I agree that Yoga is hard to attain for one whose self is uncontrolled; however, it can be attained through proper means by the one who strives with self-control.
37. Arjuna said:
If one is endowed with complete faith but is unable to exert self-control, if the mind has wandered away from Yoga, O Krishna, what direction should one take, having failed to attain perfection in Yoga?
38. Does one not perish like a dispersing cloud, having fallen from both worlds (here and hereafter), unsteady and bewildered in the path of Brahman, O might Krishna?
39. Completely wipe out this doubt of mine, O Krishna, for no one but Yoga can solve such a doubt.
40. The Blessed One said:
O Partha, neither here on earth nor in heaven is there any destruction, for no one who does good, dear friend, ends up in grief.
41. Having reached the worlds of the righteous and having lived there for a number of years, the person who has fallen away from Yoga is born into the home of the holy and prosperous,
42. or indeed may be born into a family of wise Yogis, for such a birth is very difficult to attain in this world.
43. There one regains the knowledge acquired in one's previous life and strives even harder for perfection, O son of the Kurus.
44. Even against one's own will, one is carried on irresistibly by one's former effort. Even one who merely wishes to know of Yoga rises beyond those who perform Vedic rites.
45. But the Yogi who strenuously strives is completely cleansed of all sins, thereby becoming perfect through many births, reaching the ultimate goal.
46. The Yogi is deemed to be greater than the ascetic, greater than the person of knowledge, and greater than one who does ritual action. Therefore, O Arjuna, become a Yogi.
47. And of all Yogis, the one who worships Me with full faith, with inner self abiding in Me, that one I hold to be the most devoted to me in Yoga.

Adapted from the translation by B. Srinivasa Murthy, Long Beach Publications, 1985.

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Subscriber Information: The *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* is published two times a year: Fall and Spring. In the United States, a one-year subscription for individuals is US\$42.00; in Canada it is US\$52.00 and overseas it is US\$60.00. Back issues are US\$47.00 each. For institutions and libraries in the US and Canada, the annual rate is US\$65.00; outside, it is US\$75.00. All subscriptions are to be made payable to "JVS/A. Deepak Publishing" and sent to P. O. Box 2130, Poojason, VA, 23662 USA.

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JOURNAL OF VAISHNAVA STUDIES
Volume 14 No. 1 Fall 2005

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- this together without imposing *advaita* presuppositions on the text, we thus have a billy goat in ignorance who is enjoying *prāpti*, another billy goat who has enjoyed *prāpti* in the past but has now ceased to do so, and Hara, who supports all.
17. See, for example, the use of the female form *īśvarī*, throughout the *Devī Gītā*.
18. In I.38, Vācaspati speaks fondly of the satvic yogi's ability to dream of Shiva.

YOGA AND THE *GĪTĀ*: ĪŚVARA-PRANIDHĀNA AND BHAKTI

Christopher Key Chapple

The classical Yoga tradition of Patañjali, generally known for its non-theistic foundation in classical Sāṅkhya, includes a series of statements that discuss the nature of "the Lord" or Īśvara. Surendranath Dasgupta notes that "of all the points of difference between *Yōga* and Sāṅkhya the admission of Īśvara . . . [is] the most important . . ."¹ In the *Yōga Sūtra*, Patañjali outlines practices within his passages on Īśvara-pranidhāna that are also known within Bhakti Yoga, including the recitation of mantra. This study will analyze the *Yōga Sūtra* passages on Īśvara in light of the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s discussion of Bhakti Yoga, which begins in chapter seven, culminates in chapter eleven, and is further explained in chapter twelve. By juxtaposing the technical theory of Īśvara with the narrative explication of divinity or *avatāra* in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, comparisons and contrasts will arise between the Rāja Yoga of Patañjali and the Bhakti Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Īśvara finds mention in three places in the *Yōga Sūtra*. The first includes a full segment of the first book of the text, the *Samādhi Pāda*, which will be discussed more fully below. The second two mentions are much briefer, and occur in the second book, the *Sādhana Pāda*. These passages place Īśvara-pranidhāna in the list of three-fold Kṛyā Yoga (II:1) and in eight-fold Aślāṅga Yoga (II:32, 45). "Dedication to Īśvara," according to Patañjali, results in the perfection of *samādhi* (*samādhi-siddhi*). For hermeneutical purposes, I will propose later in this essay that *samādhi* be understood as an epiphany, a moment of being overwhelmed with deeply spiritual feelings. When Arjuna moves into his full encounter with Krishna's true identity, his state of awe and amazement could be seen as akin to Patañjali's description

of *saṁādhi*, seeing things (in this case Krishna) in light of their true nature (*sva-rūpa*).

Īśvara in the *Samādhi Pāda*

The *Yoga Sūtra* divides into a series of themed passages or pericopes. One of these pericopes, the discussion of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, extends over two books, including the final passages of the *Sūtrahana Pāda* and the first section of the *Vībhūti Pāda*. The *Samādhi Pāda* pericope on the nature of Īśvara spans twelve verses, marked by the inclusion of the conjunctive particle *vā* which serves to book-end each section. The discussion of Īśvara comprises one of the most extensive discourses within the text, and hence indicates the importance Patanjali gave to this particular topic. This segment of the text defines Īśvara, designates how to develop a practice of chanting, lists benefits that accrue from this practice, itemizes obstacles that can be removed, and advises one to conduct one's activities within the world in such a way that will imitate godly behavior. This last aspect often finds treatment separate from the discussion of Īśvara. However, because the separating word *vā* does not appear until the 34th *sūtra*, this concept will be explored in light of its relationship to Īśvara.

The pericope on Īśvara is translated as follows:

23. Or from dedication to Īśvara.
24. Īśvara is a distinct *puruṣa* untouched by afflictions, actions, fruitions, or their residue.
25. There the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed.
26. Due to its being unlimited by time, it is the teacher of the prior ones.
27. Its expression is *pranava* (Om).
28. Repetition of it and realization of its purpose [should be made].
29. Thus inward-consciousness is attained and obstacles do not arise.
30. These obstacles, distractions of the mind are: sickness, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, sense addiction, false view, non-attainment, and instability.
31. A dissatisfied, despairing body and unsteady inhalation and exhalation accompany the distractions.
32. For the purpose of counteracting them, there is the practice of one thing (*eka tattva*).
33. Clarification of the mind [results] from the cultivation of friendliness, compassion, happiness, and equanimity in conditions of pleasure, dissatisfaction, merit, and absence of merit, respectively.²

This passage evinces a series of themes and ideas that stake very specific claims regarding the definition of a personalized divine in Indian tradition. This section of text follows an extended discussion of the two means for achieving restraint (*nivāha*), practice (*abhyāsa*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*). The accomplishment of these two keys to the goal of Yoga manifests in three ways: those who earnestly and with vigor (*samvega*) pursue the path of Yoga, those who take a more moderate (*madya*) approach, and those who easily fall back into the ignorant patterns of behavior (*prathītya*). Dedication to the Lord is presented as the first alternative to this two-fold practice, followed by a list of several other options.

The term "dedication" (*pranīdhāna*), based on the Sanskrit root *dha*, which means "to place," evokes images of placing offerings in front of the object of one's affection or devotion. These could be any sort of offering, real or virtual, from the traditional flowers and fruit of *pūjā* sacrifices to offerings of prayer and chant, and also to offerings to abide by particular vows in honor of one's chosen deity. However, Īśvara in whatever chosen form (*īśādevatā*, II:44), is not capable of any reciprocal action. The definition of Īśvara specifies that this Lord does not perform any action or hold the results or residue of former action. As articulated by the anthropologist Alan Babb, this creates a paradox, or a somewhat interesting theological dilemma. If people make offerings to a deity who does not care about the donors and from whom the donors can expect no benefit, why would anyone bother to perform acts of dedication (*pranīdhāna*)?³

Īśvara as portrayed in the *Yoga Sūtra* functions in a manner similar to how a Tīrthakara functions in the Jain tradition: as an exemplar and model, but not a reciprocator. The worshipper cannot expect any reward or benefit from worshipping this ideal and must operate from a place of no expectations, a place of dispassion (*vairāgya*). Whitney Kelting has suggested that the function of such forms of worship is for the cultivation within oneself of the qualities manifested by the deity.⁴ In the case of Patanjali, the qualities are qualified as having no qualities, of not bearing "afflictions, actions, fruitions, or their residue" (I:24). By imitating the absence of all fettering karmas, one refashions oneself in the model of the perfected being or *siddha*. As we will see, the *Gītā* provides narrative descriptions of such an individual and, true to the this-worldly theology of the *Mahābhārata*, suggests that this can benefit life within the world. One remains detached while engaged in daily activities.

This brings us to Patanjali's discussion of omniscience (*sarvajña*), the function of time, and the role of the teacher as defined by Patanjali. Omniscience in this philosophy involves a total absence of karma. In the most elevated state, the Lord observes all activities past, present, and future because that person has never been attached to karma. The aspirant, in imitation of Īṣvara, has chosen to disassociate himself or herself from the various modes (*guṇa*) of activities. The impetus to commit further action has been diminished by acknowledging the existence of a being or beings who have never fallen under the spell of desire, attachment, birth, death, and rebirth. Because this ideal person has never fallen into a time-delineated stream of karmic action, this person never can be touched by time or assigned a designated place within an historical sequence. All persons who seek to escape the spell of karma turn to this paradigm of perfection, defined here as never having been trapped. Regardless of how one might conceptualize such an ideal, the timeless and quality-free nature of such a person will override all considerations. Hence, Patanjali regards Īṣvara, as a conceptual category, to be the paradigm for all spiritual attainment. Patanjali allows all persons seeking transcendence to share in a common platform that defies specific naming; defies taking on any specific qualities or designations. Whether one is a Jain or a Buddhist or a Vaiṣṇava or Shaiva or even a Christian, the process of re-fashioning oneself in light of the chosen deity would be similar. One aspires to be freed from all affects and effects of karma.

The transcendent structure in the "person" of Īṣvara provides a theological basis for doing Yoga. Patanjali then discusses specific two practices for enacting this theology and lists their benefits: recitation of mantra, which results in the removal of obstacles, and the adoption of an active interactive ethical observance, which results in the desired state of being nonplussed or dispassionate in one's dealings with other people.

Mantra practice for Patanjali, keeping true to his stance of ecumenism and/or a commitment not to advance any one particular theological agenda, describes a single syllable associated with Īṣvara. He does not name this syllable, but refers to it as the *praṇava*, which translates as a sound or exultation issued forth. The commentarial tradition agrees that this refers to the utterance of "om" but in fact it could refer to any syllable that for the practitioner evokes the non-qualities or transcendent nature of Īṣvara. Patanjali specifies that this syllable should be repeated and that one should actively cultivate an appreciation of how this syllable symbolizes transcendence and

inspires the aspirant to move toward the state of dispassion and omniscience. Chanting takes many forms, both private and public, in the lived tradition, from initiation into a private mantra to large public worship events, where people gather to chant and sing the names of particular deities, generally for extended periods of time. This results in a state of purification, generally accompanied with bliss, repose, and removal from the concerns of karmic existence. As a daily practice, mantra falls within the category of *abhyāsa*, to be "firmly situated" and "carefully attended to for a long time without interruption" (1:14). Through repeated return to the equipoise created by recitation of mantra, one creates a spiritual habit that helps counteract negative tendencies.

When one gains fluency in the practice of mantra, one's awareness turns inward and various debilities disappear. These obstacles, virtually all of which Arjuna exhibits in the first chapter of the *Gītā*, include physical illness, lack of resilience, "doubt, carelessness, laziness, sense addiction, false view, non-attainment of a stage, and instability" (1:30) as well as a pained body and uneven breath. The benefits of overcoming states of physical and mental ills can be seen in the wholesomeness of their opposites: well-being, brightness, certainty, vigilance, enthusiasm, self-assuredness, clear thinking, groundedness, stability, health, and evenness of breath. As we will see, by the end of the *Gītā*, Arjuna announces that he can move forward, having absorbed and embodied the teachings of Krishna. He has overcome his obstacles and attained a place of strength.

The last practice within the series of passages on the nature of Īṣvara advocates the adoption of ethical practices that one might adopt in order to replicate the way in which an omniscient being might behave in the hypothetical situation of being engaged within worldly activity. This speaks to the need for comportsment, the need to carry oneself in the world as if one were aloof from the weight of karmic attachment. Perhaps similar to the Greek and Roman philosophy of stoicism, this provides a blueprint for maximizing life without falling prey to addiction or petty judgmental thinking. This practice will help Arjuna to release his attachment to the named specificity of the family and friends he must face in battle.

This practice begins by loosely grouping all human beings into four categories: The first (*sukha*) refers to people who enjoy pleasure within the world and move through the world with ease. The second (*duḥkha*) includes people who experience repeated dissatisfaction and suffering. The third (*muṇya*) speaks of virtuous people who behave in accordance with

scriptural teachings and righteousness (*dharma*). The fourth category refers to the evil ones (*apūya*) who violate basic principles of human dignity and harm themselves and other people as a result in order to cultivate peace of mind within oneself. The *Yoga Sūtra* advises that one develop friendliness toward those people for whom life is easy, to develop compassion (not disdain) for those who suffer within the world, to regard the virtuous with gladness, and to apply equanimity or indifference in the face of evil, rather than crusading vehemently for its elimination. Psychologically, this last precept seems to bear similarity to Japan's Samurai ethic, wherein a warrior must act from a place of clarity and not hatred in battle.

The benefit of this fourfold practice can be found in the emergence of a clear mind (*citta prasāda*), which, as we will see, Arjuna in fact adopts before entering battle. By offering an assessment of four personality types and by suggesting strategies for auspicious interactions in each of the four arenas, Patañjali has suggested the ways in which one can model one's own behavior in the world according to what one might imagine would be done if *īśvara* were to enter into the worldly domain. This same strategy is called the *Brahma Vihāra* in early Buddhism, and Richard Combrich claims that this signals the way of the *arhats*, that is, describes the approach to life taken by those students of the Buddha who attained enlightenment.⁵

In summary, dedication to *īśvara* in the *Yoga Sūtra* provides a non-partisan theological definition of the spiritual ideal being who never becomes muddled by karma. This personification, regardless of whatever provisional name one might use, knows all things and serves as the exemplar for all spiritual behavior. Through recitation of the name that betokens this state of being, one conquers an array of obstacles, both mental and physical. Through adopting the ethical and psychological stance that would logically be manifested by a divine being, one can move through the world, mixing with all sorts of people, without being trapped into jealousy, hatred, envy, or judgemental thinking.

Krishna and Arjuna

The *Bhagavad Gītā* presents a model for spiritual discernment that can be viewed as a case example of the theory of *īśvara* as found in the *Yoga Sūtra*. Krishna functions as an *avatāra* or emissary of Viṣṇu. Although he appears as an ordinary relative of the Kuru clan, the *Mahābhārata* hints of his divine stature at various places, including when the Pandavas humiliate their

cousins in Indraprastha and when Draupadi successfully appeals to Krishna to prevent herself from being disrobed. However, it is not until the *Gītā* that Arjuna comes to a full realization of Krishna's status as an *avatāra*.

Krishna and Arjuna exist in spiritual symbiosis. Arjuna personifies the state of physical, mental, and spiritual suffering. In the first chapter of the *Gītā* he demonstrates nearly all the symptoms of a person riddled with obstacles of the sort mentioned in the *Yoga Sūtra*: sickness, doubt, false view, and overall instability and malaise. Krishna holds forth to Arjuna the spiritual ideal, both in his own person and in his descriptions of the accomplished Yogi or Siddha. Through his encounter with Krishna, Arjuna gains release from his hesitancy and readily enters the battle, which, as noted by Mahatma Gandhi, provides a metaphor for life and action in the world.⁶ The unfolding of this relationship in many ways mirrors the progression of the *īśvara* practice as found in the *Yoga Sūtra*.

To begin, Arjuna presents the worst possible state of the human condition. Those family members and friends to whom he should feel loyalty have betrayed him. Led by his cousin Duryodhana, they have tried to kill him, his brothers, and his wife. They successfully banished Arjuna, his four brothers, and their wife for thirteen years, and have scorned their pleas for peace and reconciliation. Even Krishna has failed in his attempts to negotiate a settlement. As a result, Arjuna collapses under the weight of this karmic burden. Arjuna proclaims "My limbs become weak, my mouth dries up, my body trembles" (BG 1:29).⁷ As in the list of obstacles in the *Yoga Sūtra*, he falls into sickness and dullness. He is filled with doubt about entering into battle, stating that "It would be better for me if Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons would slay me, weapons in hand, unarmed and unresisting" (1:46). He claims that his "mind is reeling" and, as I have explained elsewhere, enters on a long discourse about the ills of war that makes no sense.⁸ His "false view" ignores the slights and insults and assassination attempts that he and his brothers and wife have suffered at the hands of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He is clinging to the sentimental notion that his family members inherently merit protection, when in fact they have betrayed him repeatedly. As a result, he has no grounding, no stability, and falls into despair. He cries out to Krishna, "My inmost being is stricken by this flaw of pily . . . my mind is confused about dharma . . . I do not see what would take from me this grief which dries up my senses" (II:7-8).

Arjuna begs Krishna to relieve him of his distress, to help him find firm ground upon which to stand. During chapters two through six of the *Gītā*,

Krishna instructs Arjuna in a straightforward manner about two styles of Yoga: Jñāna and Karma. He reminds Krishna that the soul is imperishable, that the constructed phenomena of the world constantly shift, and that he needs to see the difference between the two in order to achieve peace of mind. He also tells him to act without attachment to the fruits of his action, to do his appointed dharma out of a sense of duty not from place of ego-driven agency. These teachings, distilled from the vast traditions of the Upaniṣads, Sāṅkhya, Vedānta, and Yoga, help remind Arjuna of his place within society and the importance of each individual in contributing to the smooth operation of the world. Beginning in chapter seven, Krishna introduces a twist into an otherwise predictable series of philosophical lessons: He pronounces divinity within himself and shows that divine nature to Arjuna.

Krishna as Īṣvara in the *Bhagavad Gītā*

The concepts of *avaiāra* and Īṣvara carry somewhat incommensurate meanings. An *avaiāra* manifests divinity within the world. Krishna states that "whenever there is a decrease in dharma and a rise in adharma, then I send forth myself. For the protection of the good and the destruction of evil, for the purpose of the establishment of dharma, I am born from age to age" (V:7-8). God takes birth in the form of an *avaiāra* for the purpose of re-establishing order within the world. This contradicts the definition of Īṣvara in the *Yoga Sūtra* who never becomes sullied with the messy business of karma. However, a structural relationship can be found between these two visions.

Krishna presents a description of the paradigmatic Yogi. When Arjuna asks him "What is the mark of the man of firm wisdom?" (II:54), Krishna describes a person who is freed from all karma:

He whose mind is not troubled in the midst of sorrows,
Is free from desire in the midst of pleasures,
From whom passion, fear, and anger have departed,
He is said to be a sage of steady-wisdom (II:56).

Like the sage practicing the Brahma Vihāra, the Yogi dwells within the midst of various forms of activity but without attachment. Krishna states that one needs to hold oneself in a state of equipoise, and that "the objects

of sense recede from the embodied one who abstains from feeding on them" (II:59). For such an individual, the intelligence (*buddhi*) becomes firmly established (*praviṣṭhitā*). The ideal behavior of the accomplished Yogi imitates Īṣvara in that both transcend entrenchment within the realm of sensory change.

Krishna begins in earnest to announce his divine status in chapter seven of the *Gītā*. His self-description, as we will see, clearly exceeds the lightly circumscribed and terse definition of Īṣvara in the *Yoga Sūtra* as omniscient, not limited by time or karma, and the primal teacher. However, some functional and structural similarities between the two may be discerned, as well as some profound differences.

Avaiāra theology differs rather remarkably from Vedantic panentheism and Sāṅkhya-Yoga dualism. In Vedānta, all beings and manifestations take part in the *saguna* form of absolute reality. Each particular being serves as potential reminder and key to a connection with the underlying silent, true, unmanifest (*nirguna*) nature of the universe. Though things appear in their multiplicity, unity in non-dual consciousness underlies all things. For Sāṅkhya and Yoga, the realm of change and manifestation (*pruṭhi*) carries on under the gaze of an aloof, uninvolved, inactive witness consciousness (*aiśvāhi* or *puruṣa*). Īṣvara fits within this latter system as the imagined, idealized inspiration to move oneself into the mode of witness consciousness.

Krishna, as *avaiāra*, espouses theologies of both aloofness and involvement. An *avaiāra* symbolizes the universal consciousness in that this person witnesses all occasions from outside a time-bound perspective. At the same time an *avaiāra* proclaims ownership of the realm of change, named by Krishna as his "lower *prakti*": earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, understanding, and the sense of I (VII:4). In the Sāṅkhya system, these aspects of reality would be considered inert and non-sentient; for Krishna, they comprise active aspects of his very being. For Krishna, the things of the universe are none other than himself, "like jewels on a string" (VII:7). He celebrates not only the elements, but the sensory connection between the body and the elements, announcing himself to be the "taste in the waters, the radiance in the sun and moon, the pleasant fragrance in earth, the glowing brightness in fire" (VII:8-9). He proclaims ownership of ritual and of the Vedic text, stating "I am the father of this world, the mother, the supporter, the grand sire" (IX:17). Referring to the Vedic and post-Vedic pantheon, Krishna proclaims identity with the Ādityas, the Maruṭs, Śiva, the protector gods, the gods of plenty, as well as with the sages, great trees, and men who

achieved perfection. He also claims to be the best of weapons, of snakes and serpents, of purifiers, of letters, of verses and meters, and of death (IX:21-37).

Krishna reveals his ultimate divine form as time itself to Arjuna in the eleventh chapter, where the narrative perspective changes. Instead of listening to Krishna describe himself, the text shifts to the voice of Arjuna, who narrates his witnessing of Krishna's power and divinity. Arjuna, who previously had been so adverse to the notion of killing his kith and kin, now sees them all being destroyed in the mouth of time, the mouths of Krishna: "Just as moths with great speed enter into the flaming fire and perish there, so also these creatures with great speed enter your mouths to meet destruction" (XI:29). He goes on to affirm Krishna's earlier self-declarations, stating "You are the first of gods . . . the knower and what is to be known" (XI:38). This vision inspires awe and fear within Arjuna, who begs Krishna to return to his "two-armed" form, after which the dialogue continues in a more earthly vein.

In the revelation of Krishna as a divine being, direct references are made to aspects of Krishna that relate to the *Yoga Sūtra* description of Īvara. Krishna suggests that one practice the recitation of mantra, a central facet of the later Krishna devotional movement. In the *Gītā*, instead of suggesting the traditional Hare Krishna mantra, Krishna states:

He who utters Om, which is Brahman,
Meditates on me as he goes forth and abandons his body,
He reaches the highest goal (VIII:13).

The connection between Krishna, Brahman, and Om differs from the more technical correlation between Īvara and non-association with all forms of karma in the *Yoga Sūtra*. The *Gītā* cosmicizes Om; the *Yoga Sūtra* exhibits a much more restrained metaphysical approach in explaining the nature and purpose of the recitation of Om. In the *Gītā*, one uses Om as a bridge to totality (Brahman) and the worship of a specific deity form (Krishna). In the *Yoga Sūtra*, Om cultivates inward consciousness and removes a host of karmic obstacles. The *Gītā* emphasizes an ornate theological connection; the *Yoga Sūtra* emphasizes practical benefits.

Another aspect of the *Gītā* in light of the Yoga system can be found in its articulation of witnessing, of employing the gaze, both in terms of how one enters into the witness consciousness and how Arjuna witnesses and gazes

upon Krishna as the manifestation of divinity. Krishna proclaims "I am the witness . . . the final shelter, abode, and friend" (IX:18). This passage seems to allude to the final goal and perhaps even the content of the final verse of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*: "The return to the origin of the modes (*guṇas*), emptied of their own purpose for consciousness (*puruṣa*), the steadfastness in own form, and the power of higher awareness (*aiśvārya*, the witness)" (YS IV:34). By gazing upon Krishna in his divine visage, Arjuna attains a milestone upon the spiritual path. Time is suspended during this moment of epiphany; Arjuna gains the distance from his situation sufficient to think differently about his predicament and eventually recover his resolve. Without the shock of witnessing this profound vision, Arjuna probably would not have been able to continue. Like a Yogi who "sees the self abiding in every being and sees every being in the self" (BG VI:29), Arjuna no longer sees isolated bits of players within time but recognizes a continuity between beings within the body of Krishna. He meets the description of one for whom "gold, a stone, a clod of earth are the same" (VI:8).

To relate the revelatory moment in chapter eleven of the *Gītā* to the *Yoga Sūtra*, I would like to suggest that we focus on the experience of Arjuna rather than on the descriptions of Krishna's divinity in Chapter Eleven. The function of this epiphany is not for the benefit of Krishna but for the change of heart that occurs within Arjuna. Patañjali defines *saṁvādi* as the collapse of distinctions between grasper, grasping, and grasped, wherein the person or witness becomes like a clear jewel (YS I:41). All separation between subject and object disappears. In the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* this moment happens when the dancer *prahṛtā* realizes she is being watched and runs away in embarrassment. For Arjuna, the epiphany of seeing the true nature of Krishna results in a similar form of embarrassment. He begs Krishna for forgiveness for "whatever was said in rashness or negligence or affection" (XI:41). After this encounter, Arjuna becomes newly receptive to listen to Krishna's teachings of Jñāna Yoga and Karma Yoga and eventually finds himself "standing firmly with doubt dispelled" (XVIII:73). The journey of the *Gītā* from despair to knowledge and vision leads to a rebuilt Arjuna, now capable of continuing with his duty.

Bhakti Yoga and Īvara-pravādhāna

In the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Krishna explains the nature of those who have devoted themselves to his worship. He begins with an

acknowledgment of the possibility of entering into states of worship that do not require a fixed object, or an object that has no qualities, like Īṣvara in the *Yoga Sūtra*.

Those who worship the imperishable and undefinable,
The unmanifested, the omnipresent, and unthinkable,
The immovable, the unchanging, the constant,
Who restrain all their senses, are even-minded,
Who delight in the welfare of every being,
They also obtain me (XII:3-4).

This description echoes and perhaps reflects the Īṣvara-pranidhāna pericope of the *Yoga Sūtra*, which states that the goal of inspiration is "untouched by afflictions, actions, fruits, or their residue" and "unlimited by time" (YS I:24, 26). The description of being free from karma and beyond time corresponds to the array of adjectives used by Krishna to describe the imperishable. Krishna refers to those who follow this form of worship as having restrained their senses and gained the state of being even-minded. Like the inward-consciousness mentioned in the *Yoga Sūtra*, these accomplishments result in the overturning of obstacles and, in the case of the *Gītā* also result in "delight in the welfare of every being," similar to the adoption of friendliness, compassion, happiness, and equanimity in the *Yoga Sūtra*.

Krishna goes on to praise the specific benefits of worshipping himself as a deity form, claiming that he delivers those who worship him "from the ocean of death and rebirth" (XII:7). For those who are not able to devote themselves to either the formless or his own form, he recommends Karma Yoga. He restates various qualities common to all doers of Yoga, including fearlessness, equanimity, and non-partiality. The chapter ends with a statement that Krishna considers his own devotees to be "exceedingly dear" (XII:20).

Conclusion

The option to choose devotion to any one of a variety of deities distinguishes the Hindu tradition from most other religions. The *Yoga Sūtra* presents an explanation of how this practice works. Metaphysically, the object of one's devotion must be seen as not becoming involved in the worldly or karmic realm. Practically, one should repeat mantras in honor of this deity.

Ethically, one should pattern one's interactions with other people in imitation of the way an aloof deity, untouched by karma, might behave if involved with the world. This fashioning of the Īṣvara ideal works well with systems that posit a clean division between the world of *samsāra* and release into *nirvāṇa*, such as Theravada Buddhism and Jainism. Even though their heroic figures, Shakyamuni Buddha and the Tirthankaras, once lived a worldly life, they now dwell in a state of eternal liberation, referred to as *parinirvāṇa* or *kevala*.

The concept of the *avatāra* within Hinduism and even the bodhisattva of Mahayana Buddhism challenge the ideal of Īṣvara. Both the *avatāra* and the bodhisattva make a conscious choice to enter into the world and engage the world for the sake of increasing auspiciousness and goodness. By the definition put forward by Patanjali, Īṣvara can never become enmeshed in the operations of karma, and hence could never enter an epic narrative or hold an historical biography. By this definition, Īṣvara cannot be equated with the *avatāra* Krishna nor with the historical personage of Buddha or Mahāvira. Īṣvara remains aloof, though devotees of Īṣvara change themselves due to acts of inspiration dedicated to Īṣvara. Through mantra practice they remove karmic obstacles. Through ethical comportment, they obtain purified minds. The system of dedicating oneself to Īṣvara emphasizes the transformations that take place in the devotee.

In some ways, the results of Īṣvara-pranidhāna and Bhakti Yoga appear to be the same. Both result in a diminishment of karma and a state of equipoise. In both traditions, the practitioner moves within the world in a state of nonattachment. However, whereas Īṣvara does not model or advocate such involvement, the *avatāra* in the form of Krishna urges Arjuna to carry forth his dharma, to engage the world. The this-worldly spirituality of the epic tradition, which celebrates the story and drama of life, stands in contrast to the world-negating asceticism of classical Yoga, though, as we have seen, the traditions are closely related and complementary. Though Īṣvara might not have a history or a story, both Lords, ascetic and epic, inspire the devotee on a path of self purification.

Endnotes

1. Surendranath Dasgupta, *Yoga as Philosophy and Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1978, first edition, London, 1924), p. 163.
2. Translation by Christopher Chapple and Yogi Anand Viraj (Eugene P. Kelly,

Jr.), *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: An Analysis of the Sanskrit with Accompanying English Translation* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1990), pp. 19, 42-48.

3. Lawrence Alan Babb, *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

4. Kelting quotes a female mendicant: "If you put a magnet against iron for a long time, slowly the iron becomes magnetic, the iron becomes a magnet. . . . If you go to the temple everyday and in front of the Jinas say the Nāvkar [prayer], then maybe some of their qualities will stick to you. The more times, the more will stick to you." M. Whitney Kelting, *Singing to the Jinas: Jain Laywomen, Mandal Singing, and the Negotiation of Jain Devotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 113.

5. Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditional Genesis of Early Teachings* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), p. 60.

6. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Message of the Gita* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), p. 34.

7. Antonio T. de Nicolas, *The Bhagavad Gita: The Ethics of Decision-Making* (Berwick, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 2004).

8. Christopher Key Chapple, "Arjuna's Argument: Family Secrets Unveiled" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2001, pp. 23-32.

VIJĀNABHĪKṢU'S YOGA: A NOTE ON DOCTRINE AND IDENTITY IN LATE MEDIEVAL INDIA

Andrew J. Nicholson

Introduction

The 16th-century northern Indian philosopher Vijānabhikṣu has been considered a marginal and problematic figure throughout the past two centuries of the historiography of Indian philosophy. He was the author of numerous works in the philosophical traditions of Yoga, Vedānta, and Sāṃkhya, and argued that when understood correctly, all of these schools constitute a unity free from internal contradiction. The historian Richard Garbe shares the opinion of many of his colleagues when he writes that "Vijānabhikṣu mixes up many . . . heterogeneous matters, and even quite effaces the individuality of the several philosophical systems."¹

In particular, it was Vijānabhikṣu's views on the existence and nature of God that led Garbe to question his true allegiances. While most modern commentators have understood the Sāṃkhya system to be atheistic, Vijānabhikṣu interpreted the *Sāṃkhyasūtra* in accord with the Purāṇic conception of God that was widespread in the late medieval period. This also led Vijānabhikṣu to understand the Yoga system in a new light. Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* teaches that God exists primarily as a meditative object, and has no role to play in the world's creation or destruction. But Vijānabhikṣu argues that the union of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga principles of *prakṛti* (nature) and *puruṣa* (soul) requires a third agent. And he reveals his Vaishnava commitments when he cites passages from the Purāṇas to show that it is Vishnu who joins these two, setting into motion the world's creation.

While taking issue with Vijānabhikṣu's theism, Garbe and many others have nonetheless considered his works too important to be written off