

Chapter XVI: Daivasura Sampad Vibhaga Yoga

The Unitive Way of Discriminating Between Higher and Lower Values

Chapter XVI begins with a list of so-called divine qualities, followed by demonic qualities. Krishna explains quite clearly that there is no mythological significance to these terms, only that the former conduce to emancipation (freedom) and the latter to further entanglement in chains of cause and effect, described as bondage to necessity. Any confusion around whether the Gita advocates war can be dispelled by a glance at this section. Most certainly not! Bellicose attitudes are at the core of demonic thinking.

Although Krishna never suffers fools gladly, a ferocious tone that is more intense than anywhere else in the Gita builds throughout this chapter. This may be partly a response to Arjuna's differentiation of perfected ones and demons back in XI, 36, and in that light sounds a note of caution. As concretely manifested states are progressively built up on abstract concepts, any minor anomaly in consciousness becomes powerfully magnified. Because of this, the slightest speck of dirt in the potion while it is being brewed can ruin the whole batch. In other words, we will come to see what we expect, more or less, even if the expectations are initially very subtle. The selfish, "diabolic" attitudes that Krishna lambastes are actually very reasonable to most people, and are often mistaken for common sense. We are given a powerful warning here to never succumb to the lure of self-interest in opposition to universal beneficence, not even in our supposedly private thoughts.

There is nothing old-fashioned or obsolete about Krishna's rant. At present the political and economic realms are deeply polluted by the very attitudes Krishna excoriates, and longstanding edifices of civilization are collapsing in consequence. Widespread disinformation occludes the causes, but the effects at least are visible to everyone. A clearly stated and cogent scheme of understanding can go a long way toward resolving the conflicts

and mitigating the suffering that is a direct result of unenlightened self-interest.

As always, the most valuable aspect of the teaching is what we can personally put into practice in our own lives. We should not read this or any teaching as if it only applied to other people and not to us. Our own psyche is the neglected garden in which spiritual values are to be cultivated. Nitya Chaitanya Yati, in his *Therapy and Realization in the Bhagavad Gita*, keeps the focus solely on the individual, and has this to say under the heading The Ambivalence Between the Bright and the Dark:

The sixteenth chapter, “The Unitive Way of Discriminating Between Higher and Lower Values,” gives a new way for self analysis. Even the best of men, who is calm, serene, peaceful and loving, has moments when he is dull, and also when he can become harsh and negative. That is the ambivalence in our life, which swings from the darkest extreme to the brightest extreme and goes on swinging. The rhythm of the swinging can be different for different people, but it is certainly present in all. In some people there is the tendency to go to the bright side and remain there for a long time, along with the tendency to go just a little to the dark side and then immediately leave it. Your personality type can be discerned when you see how long you can remain on the bright side and to what intensity of brightness it can attain. Similarly, knowing how you sink into the dark, and how you are caught in the trap of that darkness, and how intense that darkness is helps you to discern your personality type. This dark nature is called *asuri sampatti*, and the bright nature is called the *daivi sampatti*. If the *daivi sampatti* is stronger in you, you come more and more into the open brightness of life and you keep yourself more or less in that area. If the dark side is operating too much in you, then you like to hide away from anything which helps you to open up, and you become very withdrawn, or it can be expressed as a very negative indulgence in violence. The *asuri sampatti* and

daivi sampatti are the two alternate faces we have, and each person has to find out how much of them is in him or her. And our spirituality has to be so modeled that we can regulate these two principles.

By now a student of the Gita should have overcome the normal human tendency to try to pass themselves off as all good, and accepted the inevitable presence of their shadow aspect. Only after this is recognized does balancing the psyche become possible.

1) Krishna said:

Fearlessness, transparency to truth, proper affiliation to unitive wisdom, attitude of generous sharing, self-restraint, sacrifice, private perusal of sacred books, discipline, rectitude,

The first three verses present the Gita's inimitable version of righteousness or right activity. No one can act with pure unitive freedom all the time, and when artistic inspiration wavers it's good to have enlightened concepts to fall back on.

In contradistinction to fatalistic science with its genetic imperatives, currently directing a lot of energy into proving there is no such thing as free will, all the items on the Gita's list require effort to actualize. None of them are "natural" states of mind; they are highly evolved products of dedication and intention. Conversely, the unrighteous states listed in the fourth verse are also the result of diligent effort, and these are the ones most fostered by a competitive, heartless social milieu. The vision of the wise seers of all ages and all places is of a united humanity in which the positive virtues are cultivated and nurtured and the negative ones weeded out or at the least minimized. Swimming against the entropic tide to produce a garden of delights gives meaning to life.

There is substantial overlap between the Gita's long list of "divine" qualities and the ten yamas and niyamas (restraints and observances) that form two of the eight limbs of Patanjali's Yoga

system. Each item is worthy of separate study, and a number of them will be taken up in more detail in the Gita's final two chapters. A contemplative worthy of the name is expected to put these principles into actual practice, instead of merely reading about them.

When you open yourself up to the wave, or the Divine, or your intuition, however you prefer to conceive of the greater reality, it has to be an absolute, total and neutral gesture. If not, you are vulnerable to many subverting forces: the winds of public opinion, current fads and obsessions, mob psychology, religious fervor, and all types of conventionalism. The contemplative must always be on guard to go beyond such limiting parameters, to offer allegiance as regularly as possible to an all-inclusive principle.

Partial approaches generate what is popularly called karma, i.e. repercussions and entanglements, many of them quite serious. All decent scriptures are remarkably similar in their moral framing, emerging as they do from a reciprocal understanding akin to the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Even physical science has a version of it: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." It means that what happens to us is significantly shaped by what we do—we are not simply victims of outrageous fortune.

There are plenty of people who sincerely believe they are doing the will of God, yet who are causing pain and suffering and even death in their vicinity. We don't have to look any farther than the partisans of the Biblical "Thou shalt not kill," and "Love your enemies," who are slaughtering or despising their purported foes in bounteous measure, to observe the human potential for rationalizing everything. To guard against sliding down slippery slopes into such tempting traps, scriptures offer clear guidelines for proper moral behavior. If your inner God is telling you to kill or to perpetrate some other violation, it is in fact the deranged voice in your head speaking and not any actual deity, so turn it off and wake up!

Simply reading through a list of qualities such as we find here is nearly meaningless; it requires reflection to illuminate the importance of each item. Infusing meaning into everything encountered is a primary benefit of contemplation. The Gita almost always presents its lists in a graded sequence, usually most important first to least important last, so if you look closely at the first item it often implies the others in some way. Now let's look at each of the "divine" qualities individually:

Abhayam, fearlessness, is critically important in spiritual life. Fear deflects us from the straightforward attitude that strives to always see things as they are, causing us to superimpose all manner of projections and expectations onto our surroundings.

The Upanishads teach that fear comes from the perception of an other. Where there is no other, there is no fear. Fearlessness does not depend on having an opponent, and so is not grounded in a defensive posture the way courage or ferocity are. It is a balanced state that is a natural outgrowth of knowing the unity of the Absolute. When that is realized, all fears are dispersed. In a sense, then, fearlessness is the supreme achievement, the first benefit of knowing the state of oneness directly. Like any good disciple, Arjuna was aware of and troubled by his fears in the beginning. Krishna immediately addressed them early in Chapter II. The transformation he advocates throughout the Gita is intended to bring everything seemingly 'other' into a unified definition of Self.

Guru Nitya reminds us of the importance of our attitude in this matter:

This world can indeed be threatening. It can be dark, frightful and depressing. If your mind is already tainted with the dark colors of fear, since it is through that very mind you look at the world, this world will also look very frightening. But if your mind is free of such taint, then you see it as a fresh garland of newly picked flowers, very beautifully strung together. Thus in its structure, function and value this becomes a world of great

endearment, full of truth that can be adored as vast wisdom.
(That Alone, 151)

There are many reasons we become fearful, and what a powerful motivator it is! We have already touched on the usual suspects, such as the early childhood shocks engendered by popular beliefs that beating and terrorizing children is “for their own good,” to keep them “safe,” so they will be “normal,” that we are born little sinners who need to be smacked into shape or else we’ll go to hell, etc. Such ideas thinly mask aggression towards innocence. And there are plenty of accidental traumas and tragedies to compound the damage. Eventually we become hard wired to reject pain. Fear directs us to avoid perceived painful situations in advance, and since the world is full of pain, fear is constantly directing our footsteps and shriveling their ambit. The Gita wants us to be free, and if we are all the time avoiding pain (along with its flip side, seeking superficial pleasure) we are not really free. It may well be that right behind (or inside) that pain is where our next lesson lies, but we’ll never confront it if our only parameter is to be as far away from discomfort as possible.

Abhayam is thus of preeminent importance and contains elements of several of the other qualities in it. Fearlessness paves the way for the next value in the list, transparency to truth, because a lot of why we block the benign radiance of the universe comes from our fear that it will prove harmful to us. After we become assured that the beneficence of the Absolute includes everyone and everything, we can be confident enough to allow it to be a part of us (or vice versa). To quote Nitya yet again, “When the transparency of the mind is not affected by any kind of emotional crisis, intellectual conflict, or psychotic or other pathological affectation, it gives a spontaneous expression of its own truthful nature.” (Gita, 353)

It seems there is a very deep level in us that is prone to being terrified. In general terms, we are afraid of cessation of existence, death, voidness. If we live in terror of ceasing to exist, then

everything we do is literally done as a barricade against our termination. We frantically stay as busy as possible, or distract ourselves with whatever can hold our attention, simply to suppress the uncomfortable awareness of the void. This makes even contemplation itself appear inimical to our interests, instead of our best attitude and finest achievement.

When we say that fear is the great motivator, it means that nothingness produces fear to motivate us to try to exist, as if without it we wouldn't. We have a hard time accepting that we already exist, because our existence is so intangible. This fear-based existence contrasts with the benign image of the Absolute that the Gita speaks of. Yet when Arjuna ACTUALLY encounters the absolute ground of all, in Chapter XI, it does scare the living daylights out of him, and he begs for the restoration of familiar imagery to absolve him of the terror.

Pity the poor Absolute, which puts everything it has—which is Nothing with a capital N—into convincing us that we are eternal and this game is for our enjoyment and edification. Yet its very nature terrifies us, because to embrace it is to appear to disappear as a separate being. That's about the ultimate paradox.

All who seek freedom should be courageous enough to examine their fears. A key one is the cessation of the flow of money, which is a symbol of sustenance. This must be almost the most primal fear—after ceasing to exist—first appearing with our banishment from the Eden of the womb and the severing of the umbilicus at birth. While civilization has ameliorated this fear to some extent with its supportive structures, it remains at least theoretically uncertain where our sustenance comes from and whether we'll continue to receive it in the future. The Gita's recommendation is to realize our unity with the Absolute, in which all things are sustained. Not only sustained, but created, sustained, destroyed, and eventually recycled.

Narayana Guru reminds us, in verse 66 of his *One Hundred Verses of Self-Instruction*, that everyone is receiving sustenance all the time. By reminding us how every creature finds its needs met

every day, we are led to sense the invisible beneficence that is a mark of the Absolute. Traditional sannyasa or renunciation is the process by which a truth seeker throws himself into the arms of the Unknown, trusting totally in its care. Most of us are afraid to even imagine such a path; it requires true fearlessness. But the alternative is to be eternally in a state of trepidation, which is the background anxiety of losing our sustenance. Oddly, no amount of material wealth can quell this fear, since at heart the problem is spiritual, not material. Death cannot yet be staved off by opulence, though some scientists are currently working on making it possible for the super wealthy.

Many people also fear being considered different, i.e. weird or “not normal.” How much energy we expend in proving to others that we're not really the person we know ourselves to be, with all our faults: we're really that mythical beast called a normal human being! Truly astonishing, especially considering it's easy to demonstrate that it's a wholly imaginary thing we're afraid of. There is no such thing as normal: no two people would describe normal the same way, and no one could be found who actually matches the description. Our “ordinariness” is almost embarrassingly extraordinary. But we have a genetic inheritance that equates invisibility with safety, so we suppress anything about us that is likely to stand out. Plus, we are convinced early in life that we must warp ourselves to match an implicit standard residing somewhere else that is only partially spelled out. Sometimes self-appointed guardians of normalcy administer a threat or a beating to reinforce the trap even more strenuously. Who cares that we have no idea why we are being threatened or abused; we'll either go along or suffer the consequences. Sooner or later we construct a tepid “cardboard cutout” version of ourselves and prop it up in plain sight, to keep our persecutors diverted away from our tender innards.

As adults one of our primary tasks is to grow up out of this childhood nightmare. The sad fact is that camouflaging ourselves usually becomes so deeply ingrained that we forget we are striving

to live up to capricious and arbitrary norms. Not only ill-considered, but harshly destructive norms often enough. These are some of the poisoned arrows that Arjuna is warding off in the midst of the battle. When we find them we should pull them out as quickly as we can, before the poison seeps into our system. It may well be that the so-called normal person is one who has learned to love the arrows protruding from their tender skin, who has become acculturated to cherish the poison. In that case, you should become abnormal as fast as you can!

The two preceding examples include a very real fear (sustenance) and a very unreal fear (abnormality). It would be hard to say which was the stronger motivator. It doesn't seem to matter how much of a fear is real: it's a chemical reaction that can be set off by all sorts of triggers. Still, fear really matters, even though much of it isn't real. A mere whiff of actual content can produce titanic fear. There are whole countries that have been driven to madness over false warnings of invasion or terrorist attacks. Are we being deluded by our own ignorance, then? The rishis of ancient days certainly thought so.

For all our fears the prescription is to minimize the imaginary part and focus on the real content. This makes them less painful, and makes it much easier to choose a preferable response. Yet in the final analysis, it is unhelpful to fear even real threats, as this undercuts our ability to respond to the challenge.

It should also be admitted that fear can have a positive as well as a negative motivational impact. Take the common fear of growing senile and losing our memory and sense of self and becoming helplessly dependent on faceless caretakers. Such a feeling may motivate us to avoid aluminum cans and cookware and otherwise take care of what enters our bodies, and it is quite possible that such behavior would be beneficial for us. We might reach out to family members and learn to trust them more, against the day when we might need their help. Or we might help fund research or even perform some ourselves on the causes of mental

degeneration. There are many positive responses to fear, but they are still responses to fear, just better ones.

Perhaps I'm splitting hairs, but I'd call this last type a worry rather than a fear. A worry is primarily conscious while a fear is mostly unconscious, and therein lies a big difference. A fear drives us as a leaf before the wild hurricane, while a worry should motivate us to ponder and make intelligent changes in our actions. (The niggling misery of obsessing about future possibilities is often called worrying, but it is evidence of a deeper, unaddressed fear.) Burning in hell is a primal fear, and it also is based on imaginary future possibilities even more remote than senility. It's an interesting amalgam of something deep in our psyche that is activated by tall tales. By my tentative definition, then, it's both a worry and a fear. It may be that when a repeated worry goes deep enough over time to become an unconscious motivator, it turns into a fear. Or when fears spill over into conscious awareness they instigate worrying.

Walking through a dangerous area, for instance a snake infested jungle, the conscious worry is indistinguishable from fear. It's abstract and real at once. Undoubtedly we are more prepared to meet contingencies if our fear heightens our awareness of the environment. At any rate, fear is a tough nut to crack. We can imagine that Krishna and Arjuna spent a long time pondering it, but Vyasa was a busy fellow and so he just summed it all up in one word, fearlessness. We should follow their example and dive deeply into the meaning of each of the words in this long list of beneficial qualities.

Confronting fears has ever been a fundamental spiritual and psychotherapeutic technique. When you experience a fear it's an indication of where to work on yourself. In this sense all fears (or worries) are beneficial as long as they're being addressed. It's when we suppress them and ignore them that they wreak havoc. Part of their bag of tricks, however, is that they make us want to avoid them. So you have to already be somewhat fearless to even take on your fears.

On the other hand, psychopaths are utterly fearless, because they are constitutionally unable to register the emotions that we read as fear. They demonstrate beyond any doubt that fear has a positive contribution to make to our wholeness. It is an important way our highly intelligent unconscious gets the attention of our often-preoccupied conscious mind.

Fearlessness, then, does not require eradicating all fears, but merely having a confident attitude toward them so we can distinguish between real and unreal fears. Some fears play a valuable role, but we need to bring them into conscious awareness, so we only respond to the valid ones. By breaking the hold unconscious fears have on us, we come to a state of heightened clarity, which is about to be called transparency to truth.

It's relatively easy to subtract our imaginary fears from the picture once we start looking. Fear of the actual crocodile slithering toward us is a different matter. One should be dismissed and the other acted upon. This is a matter for our discrimination. There are relatively few crocodiles and lots of old shoes. Few terrorists and lots of bomb threats. So life will be much more enjoyable if we stick to the real fears and shrug off the rest.

What can't be denied is that some measure of fearlessness is a desirable state. Not the crazed fearlessness of a warrior pumped up on adrenaline, but the fearlessness caused by the vital energy of the Absolute flowing through your veins, producing the confidence of participation in the eternal, if only for a moment.

With all this churning about the nature of fear, now we have to wonder what in the world fearlessness can be. Where could it possibly come from? It's a mystery all right. But selected folk who've stood out through the ages have somehow discovered an inner connection to overcome their fear of death. We may not know what or where it is, but Krishna must be right that fearlessness is the most important of all beneficial qualities, one that frees us profoundly from being driven to act wrongly, and if properly refined would finally permit us to act without compulsion.

Sattva samshuddih, transparency to truth, is another critical virtue that is difficult to achieve. Usually translated as purity of mind or temperament, Nataraja Guru's version really captures the sense of it. Truth is not something that is created out of nothing. It is discovered. Truth is all around us in the very existence of everything, but our preoccupations make us opaque, unable to tune in to it. We have to strip away our everyday opacity to reacquaint ourselves with the sea of truth we swim in.

We are blinded by more than our fears: we also have habits and misunderstandings that hamper our ability to discern reality. These will play a central role in the demonic attitudes soon to be discussed, because the more we cling to them the more our actions are forced into negative channels. To be open to unfettered behavior we have to find a way to let our conditioned urges surge through us without finding anything to latch on to. If we can let them pass, better options will become available to us.

The cure for this malaise is to question and examine the comments that catch our attention, while letting those that don't pass through us like neutrinos, particles that almost never interact with matter. It is estimated that some 65 billion neutrinos shoot through every square centimeter of Earth every second, and yet no one can detect them, because they are electrically neutral. Like that, transparency to truth means we are not impacted by the torrents of glamorous junk circulating all around us; they pass right through. There is no point in holding on to them. Hate, greed and anger are like powerful electrical charges with tremendous magnetic attraction. The yogi neutralizes their electricity using intelligence, so like neutrinos they can transit the system without causing any damage.

We might be feeling perfectly fine, but then we hear a terrible accusation made by someone on the radio. The thought really makes us angry: those awful people, how dare they! They should all be shot. Then if we meet someone who resembles that type of person we may lash out at them. If we don't, at least we go through the day fuming and resentful. What a terrible condition!

Even yogis have moments when they viscerally respond to provocations—after all, that’s what the brain is designed to do very well—but where ordinary people treat such stimuli as a call to arms, the yogi treats them more like a pesky mosquito to be shooed away. The provocation only lasts a few seconds, but our response to it determines whether or not it moves in as a permanent resident. If it does it’s like capturing the whining mosquito and keeping it in a jar so we can show our friends how annoying it is, over and over again. Jill Bolte Taylor describes the neurological basis for this:

Although there are certain limbic system (emotional) programs that can be triggered automatically, it takes less than 90 seconds for one of these programs to be triggered, surge through our body, and then be completely flushed out of our blood stream. My anger response, for example, is a programmed response that can be set off automatically. Once triggered, the chemical released by my brain surges through my body and I have a physiological experience. Within 90 seconds of the initial trigger, the chemical component of my anger has completely dissipated from my blood and my automatic response is over. If, however, I remain angry after those 90 seconds have passed, then it is because I have *chosen* to let that circuit continue to run. Moment by moment, I make the choice to either hook into my neurocircuitry or move back into the present moment, allowing that reaction to melt away as fleeting physiology. (Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight*. New York: Viking, 2006, pp. 146-147)

While much more easily described than practiced, Taylor hits the principle of transparency to truth right on the head.

Jnana yogavyavasthitih, proper affiliation to unitive wisdom, is a positive counterpart to the negative process of attaining transparency to truth. When we cannot fully neutralize a toxic emanation within us, we have to offset it with an equal and

opposite electrical charge. This usually comes from a source of inspiration, such as a great teacher like Krishna, or a persuasive written presentation, as advocated at the end of the chapter.

Affiliation to unitive wisdom is proactive; transparency to truth is pro-inactive.

There is an implied sequence here too. Transparency to truth is in some respects like cutting back the overgrown tree of our life that has many distorted and diseased branches, and then affiliation to unitive wisdom allows new sprouts to grow back free of corruption.

As I said before, some provocations can be safely ignored, if they are only minor distractions, but others need to be attended to and diffused. These latter carry us away with them, and to combat them we need to repeatedly bring ourselves back to a previously determined harmonious attitude. Determined, that is, not by our cravings or wildly hopeful fantasies but by a recognizably intelligent aspiration. The longer and more intensely we affiliate with a high ideal, the easier it becomes to regain it when our baser instincts yank us off course.

Reprogramming our neural wiring merely with good intentions is a laborious, gradual process, and the speed is proportional to the amount of deprogramming we undertake at the outset. Much as we might wish it did, neurological transformation does not happen in an instant. We have to be dedicated to the task, or we will be tempted to give up in frustration. This is one of the main reasons the Gita counsels us to not be motivated by expectations: so we don't become impatient. We have to have a vision grounded in wisdom even as we acknowledge our faults, and then we can be satisfied at every moment, good or bad, and we won't obsess over our shortcomings.

Danam, attitude of generous sharing—when things of value, often nowadays in the form of money, are circulated everyone benefits, while when they are hoarded people become impoverished. This is true within the individual as well as in the

greater society. A person who is thoughtfully generous expands and one who is selfishly retentive shrinks.

We can see the effect of this principle in the transactional realm as well. For instance, I live in the State of Oregon, which has many absentee landlords and corporations. Its government taxes property instead of sales so that the profits of out of state owners are to some extent retained by the State to its benefit. Failing repeatedly to institute a sales tax, which has no effect whatsoever on absentee owners, large corporations have demanded and gotten direct tax exemptions. The result has been that money generated in the state has been siphoned off, never to return, exacerbating a serious recession here.

This is not unlike what happened to India's longstanding ban on foreign corporations doing business in the country, in order to recirculate profits to benefit its own citizens. At long last the ban was overturned, paradoxically with the pressure and blessings of the Hindu Fundamentalist party, and the vacuuming of profits out of that huge market has begun in earnest. The relatively small group of people who benefit financially is vastly outweighed by the number for whom poverty has been the outcome.

Because gifting is often incorrectly taken in a literal sense, Vedantic scholar Paul Deussen translates *danam* as liberality, which is exactly the point. I'm merely touching on the topic here, because it will be extensively explored in the next two chapters, especially XVII, 20-22.

Damah, self-restraint, is a word related to "domestic" and "domicile." The idea is you are Lord of all you survey, which in the larger sense is your home. You don't foul your own nest, or smash your house, you care for it and everyone in it. You are at home in the world. This is actually harder to achieve than it seems. Much of humanity feels like a trespasser on someone else's turf, because we are often treated that way. That's why we carry a vague (or acute) sense of not belonging: we've been treated like imposters since we were born. We have become lost souls busily

impersonating ourselves. Only a solid grounding in our true nature allows us to feel “at home” wherever we may be, and this is actually a very significant achievement.

Self-restraint does not mean repression of our self, but a caring and nurturing, winnowing the wheat from the chaff. Our immediate reaction to provocation is often exaggerated or otherwise off course. If we take a moment to investigate and reflect, our responses are much more likely to be appropriate. Again, this can hardly take place if we are on the defensive or feeling guilty, like an intruder at someone else’s party.

In Genesis in the Bible, God appoints man to care for all the “creatures of the earth,” which symbolize aspects of the psyche. We are asked to have “dominion” (also related to *damah*) over manifold aspects of our psyches, so we can bring out their best abilities. Dr. Mees interprets it this way in *The Key to Genesis*:

The 26th verse [of Genesis I.1] tells us that the Spiritual Man should rule the lower functions of his psyche. He should have dominion over the fish of the sea, symbolizing the lower emotional or erotic life, and over the fowl of the air, symbolizing the lower aspects of the spiritual life.... Further he should have dominion over the cattle, symbolizing the higher, creative, emotional life. Cattle yield milk. Milk is in many traditions symbolic of “the stream of consciousness” and of the nourishing properties of the Motherly Moon-Sphere. It yields cream, universally a symbol of the Quintessence or Ether. The “chrism” of Christianity is a form of this “cream.” The words are even etymologically related....

Man must have dominion “over all the earth.” [In other words] Man must rule the urges in his lower mind.

Finally man must have dominion over “every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” This has reference to the libido manifesting physically or with regard to the material plane.

(68-69)

Self-restraint is often equated with simply “being good” in the way we were admonished as children. Behaving ourselves properly. Damah is clearly much more profound an issue than that. It must radiate from the inside out, and not be an imposition from the superego on the rest of the psyche.

Yajnah or yajante, sacrifice, another broad subject, is addressed in depth in the next chapter, XVII, 11-13. It is also extensively covered in chapters III and IV.

Suffice it to say that yajnah has nothing to do with propitiating deities, killing animals, or offering fruits and flowers on an altar. It references unitive activity, karma yoga, which means “freely chosen activity.” The Gita simplifies the subject by recommending relinquishing expectations of reward. Action that is not impelled by necessity or done with expectations must be freely chosen. Necessary action must be done, by definition, and expectations inevitably play a part in much of what we do, both necessary and unnecessary. Anything else is sacrificial activity. This is the category—wholly absent in many people’s lives—that the yogi seeks to amplify.

False sacrifice performed to exalt the ego is denounced in verses 15 and 17 below.

Svadhya, self-study, is another of Patanjali’s observances. Nataraja Guru has it as private perusal of sacred books. But it means much more than that.

Nitya Chaitanya Yati describes the further implications in his comments on Patanjali’s Sutra II: 32. This is how svadhya is usually understood, and it’s very valuable:

Svadhya is generally recognized as the study of words passed on by seekers who have gone before. The records of the experiences of wise people are available to us as compendiums of great works. It is worthwhile to study those books every day. Further, it is very wholesome to spend at least some time

each day with an enlightened person, listening to their word directly. It is not possible to gather wisdom all in one day, but each day you can learn a little. Wise persons teach with their words, their modes of action, their thought processes, and, above all, with their silence. Attuning to all these aspects will bring conviction.

When what you experience, what you hear from great people, and what is recorded in the scriptures from time immemorial all come in one line, then you can be sure that your svadhyaya has been profitable. Such is the royal path in which you are confirmed that whatever you have been doing as sadhana (practice) is ultimately successful. (*Living the Science of Harmonious Union*, 259)

Most importantly, all that input from our wise forebears is to be directly applied to our own personal dilemmas, otherwise the perusal is merely an academic pursuit. For the study to have an impact, it has to be put into practice. Ultimately yoga isn't about posturing on any level, physical, mental or spiritual. It is about learning to *be*, unencumbered by any stereotyped poses. Only then do we gain our full freedom.

When we read or listen to “sacred” words, we imagine ourselves as either sacred or profane, depending on whether we identify with them or not. This has to be treated with care, because neither is true. The temptation to reject words because of their limiting aspect must be overcome, since their liberating power is too important to miss out on. Ideally, the words will inspire us without contributing to any binding self-image.

The typical seeker posits a deity absolutely other than who they are, and develops a relationship with that hypothesis. Those with a more philosophic bent seek truth by systematically refuting everything of a relativistic order, with the most basic form of relativity being between them and God. If done with wholehearted dedication and clarity of mind, both approaches “ultimately arrive at the Adorable in which both the worshipper and the

contemplative vanish,” as Nitya puts it. (*Living the Science of Harmonious Union*, 290).

The ego defends itself by pretending to knowledge it in fact does not possess, and only if it becomes healthy and courageous can it dare to surrender such a pose in favor of straightforward honesty. We have to go beyond the all too human tendency to presume that we know everything there is to know, and instead cultivate an open attitude of welcoming new insights.

Svadhyaaya, self study, aims to bring about this optimal state of mind, converting us in the process from posers to practitioners.

Only after the ego relinquishes its fixation on itself, either positively or negatively, can it at last turn to the Absolute or God or Nature and experience the joy of adoration. Adoration is the perfect word, by the way. Its root is oration, and it is usually taken in the sense of praising, words in honor of something. But it can go the other way, meaning appreciating the words of wisdom which enlighten. In that sense it is similar to Upanishad, which means sitting near a teacher to listen to their words of wisdom.

Tapah, discipline or austerity, is a vast category, encompassing pretty much all striving for improvement. Although it is often used to denote extreme asceticism, that only applies to a very small percentage of seekers. It can be taken in a much broader sense. Tapas, another of Patanjali’s observances, has its own section at XVII, 14-19, and is of central importance early in Chapter XVIII also.

Tapas references the heating up that occurs when you are passionately engaged in something you love. This often includes the heat generated when your ego is thwarted by your teacher or therapist, which ideally can lead either to a breakthrough, or less fortunately precipitates a disadoption, a cooling of the ardor and a rejection of the training. But for the casual student who is not particularly interested in risking their creature comforts for that kind of intensity, it can be taken simply as attaining a proper balance, the ever-elusive equipoise.

The point of doing tapas is to bring about physical and mental well-being. If we are healthy, our mind will be available for advanced thinking and contemplation, and if we're sick or addled it won't. We inhabit very delicate biological systems that can be thrown into chaos by all sorts of subtle and unsubtle pollutants, including toxic ideas and the words used to express them.

Tapas is thus something that practically everyone is obsessed with in some way or other. The right foods, the proper exercise, the value of sun exposure, the cleanliness of the air we breathe, how much radiation we tolerate, is all vitally important to us. The only problem is that tapas can become an end in itself. We can be so caught up in optimizing our health we sometimes forget to use the resulting good feelings to align ourselves with the Absolute, or, in modern parlance, to express our innate talents. We tend to take our health for granted until it begins to collapse. Gurus are well aware that our bodies will give out no matter how nicely they are treated. We are searching for that which persists in the midst of all the deterioration, and it would be foolish to hitch our star to the part that is doomed.

Discipline brings about asana, a properly balanced psychological position that is arrived at intentionally through tapas. Much of yoga practice is aimed at achieving mental balance, and as far as goal orientation goes that is the most legitimate aspiration. Tapas is best performed sacrificially, without expectations, but at the same time we need to have a goal of sorts or we won't do anything. This is a fine line, a razor's edge to walk along. On one side lies inactivity and on the other excessive zeal in which the means is mistaken for the end.

Arjavam is here translated as rectitude. Deussen calls it right dealing, others say uprightness and straightforwardness. Sincerity. It is the opposite of scheming, which is a central element of the demonic attitudes listed later in the chapter. The implications of the term are discussed in detail in XIII, 7 and XVII, 14.

The word arjavam bears kinship with Arjuna, who is always forthright, never devious. Arjuna as the exemplary archer is an image of straight shooting. Yogis should always stick to the point, and if they do, it becomes easier for them to see how humans in general are experts at displacement activity. We subtly redirect threatening conversations onto deceptively similar but more favorable terrain, where we can defeat our opponents. This is a skill specifically taught in rhetoric classes, useful for politicians and others who intend to manipulate opinions, and it provides a wonderful ego defense at the same time. A yogi should be on guard to resist the temptation and to catch others in the act, so that the discussion stays on the subject. Only in this way can our knowledge be clarified and aligned with its object.

Being straightforward doesn't necessarily require strict adherence to truth: sometimes a "white lie" or diversion serves a situation better than barefaced honesty. The difference with political manipulation is the former has a compassionate basis, while the latter is self-serving, done at the expense of others. The manipulative version often masquerades as compassion, which misleads a lot of trusting souls.

Arjavam, staying focused and clear, is actually a rare quality, though plenty of people know how to stage a reasonably convincing masquerade. Distinguishing between the genuine article and an imitation put forth by a great pretender is another serious challenge the yogi faces.

2) non-hurting, truth, non-anger, relinquishment, calmness, self-integrity, compassion to beings, non-interest in sense values, gentleness, modesty, non-fickleness,

The list of positive qualities continues:

Ahimsa, non-hurting, is one of Patanjali's restraints. His Yoga Sutra II:35 reads, "In the presence of one firmly established in nonviolence (ahimsa), hostility ceases." In ahimsa an internal

peacefulness is established and radiates outward to pacify the environment. It isn't that we stop hurting others and then become peaceful in consequence, though that's a decent second best, but that we become peaceful through the realization of unity, and then harm is naturally minimized. It is impossible to be totally free of negative impacts on our environment, but we can at the minimum subtract all the intentional ones.

Our egos either identify with our social milieu or with our intellect, while only the latter is potentially in tune with the inner light of the Self. To cope with society we usually rely on conscious manipulations. After all, the Self or inner being tends to be socially inept, and that's a *good* thing, because society is relativistic and often short-sighted and narrow. Manipulation works only in areas where we can make improvements, that is, external conditions. If we imagine we are in charge of the process, though, we have to try to affect the world through our words and actions, and this actually adds to the chaos, causing plenty of unintended consequences. On the other hand, if we are able to relinquish the sense of agency, it allows us to receive and be guided by the bountiful light from within. The more time we spend in that state, the more we grow into the unshakable unity that knits everything together and is the basis of ahimsa.

Tending to the demands of our life while incorporating useful inner guidance from our unconscious, a.k.a. the Absolute, is a high art form. To further develop our sense of unity we can nurture our identity with other people and other forms of life. Arjuna's burgeoning awareness of his inseparable connectedness with his enemies in the first chapter is in fact the very thing that precipitated his turning to a guru to commence his spiritual dedication. The seeds of ahimsa were already sprouting in his heart.

When we have achieved a real sympathetic resonance with the whole, the peace it engenders not only affects our life but can spread to receptive beings around us as well. This is beautifully expressed by Guru Nitya:

There is no question of wanting to show any violence to anyone because there is no one apart from yourself. A person who has cultivated a positive attitude of union with others—not only humans but all sentient beings—affects others just like a magnet affects a piece of iron by magnetizing it. The peaceful silence of a yogi will affect the entire atmosphere around him or her with a unifying and pacifying magnetism. In the yogi's silence everyone is disarmed. If you walk into a room and find a person sitting there in a state of meditation, you will immediately experience an aura of serenity. It can have such a telling effect on you that you feel spellbound and wouldn't dare to cause that person any disturbance. Just as anger and madness are contagious, peace and silence are also. (*Living the Science of Harmonious Union*, 269-70)

Satyam, truth, is another of Patanjali's observances. We can note that Krishna's list contains both "truth" and "transparency to truth," which actually are subtly different. In the first instance we are exhorted to actively mine for truth hidden beneath life's surfaces, which is the domain of physical science, and in the second we are directed to open ourselves to its existence by discarding impediments, which is the purview of psychology or mental science.

Both science and psychology, then, are to be brought to bear, since science seeks truth and psychology optimizes our functioning. Because of their relative placement in Krishna's list, where the most important comes first, the psychological aspect is accorded a higher spiritual value than the scientific. That's correct, because we see and know only what we are capable of.

It is fortunate for us that science depends on psychology and not the other way around, since we seemingly will never attain to absolute truth in scientific terms; it is a unending unfolding process. If our well-being depended on understanding exactly how everything works, we could never be happy until we were all-

knowing. But we can learn to access happiness within a partial understanding. By fully opening ourselves to the present, we can attain an ecstatically productive state of mind no matter how much we are privy to know factually. Then too, the incremental unveiling process is blissful and satisfying in itself.

Science is just beginning to realize its dependence on mental orientation, but in the distant past this was better known, because the ancient rishis were keen observers of the human condition. The relatively modern belief in isolated rationalism as an incontrovertible good has been hard to slough off, though it is beginning to be restored to its rightful place as one key element in a spectrum of mental abilities that must all work together.

Accessing truth is the preeminent problem confronting all sentient beings once we become aware of our limitations. In recent centuries, reason and rationality have been the primary techniques employed to discern truth, and they have brought us far, but more recently these tools have revealed unsettling weaknesses. Jonah Lehrer, summing up one theme of his excellent book on neuroscience, *How We Decide*, assures us that “The reality of the brain is that, sometimes, rationality can lead us astray.” (134)

To take just one example, present day logic insists on the principle of the excluded middle, that a proposition is either true or false, period. The only problem with that particular proposition is that it is manifestly false, or it is only true in a rigidly defined area. It insists on the separateness of things, heightening polarity with its bald-faced assertion of a limited purview. So, are Muslims true or false? Christians? Atheists? People in general? Horses? Countries? Clouds? None of these things are, strictly speaking, propositions, but we apply the rules of logic to them anyway, taking broad categories as monolithic entities when they are nothing of the sort. Once we decide a group is false, we select facts to support our proposition and discredit all evidence against it. Then we are free to commit atrocities. The demonic qualities described later in the chapter all stem from the surety that truth is black and white, and never the twain shall meet.

Seers of all ages and places claim there is middle ground everywhere, and recovering it is the route to universal amity and peace. A spiritual seeker by definition is one who aims at unity and downplays the superficial differences in the world of appearances.

Science itself discredits the excluded middle, with its inviolable certitudes, and has unearthed numerous exceptions, but logic, with long habit, is slow to catch up. Reason is simple and convincing, but the seeker of truth has to treat it with due caution, as it is a prime way we can be fooled by our unacknowledged assumptions.

Our mental state is not either true or false either, it is an ever-changing amalgam of elements with varying degrees of veracity, and we inhibit ourselves by reducing it to simple polarities. The spiritual demand of truth is that we need to be constantly striving to increase the percentage of validity in our thinking, when very often a convenient fiction suits us much better, at least from a selfish perspective. The hope of wise seers is to never leave out anything of importance. In India especially, seers are said to be oceanic in their awareness, with unlimited knowledge, By contrast, small-minded people cling to narrow and exclusive views that refuse to admit any number of valid factors. Maybe you have met some of them yourself.

Discerning truth is by no means an abstract exercise, since the way we look at the world has a tremendous impact on it. Despite its many flaws, the United States once flourished under a mindset—theoretical, at least—of national unity. Its motto is *e pluribus unum*, “out of many, one.” Recently, the rational certitude of separateness and selfishness has displaced the hypothesis of unity, and the country is falling into ruin, with factions sniping at each other while gloating insiders sneak away with the wealth.

Present day Rwanda demonstrates the opposite swing of the pendulum. A century or so ago, the Belgians, who were in power, divided the Rwandan people into two groups and fostered animosity between them. One was good, the other evil. It didn't take long for genocide to result, with a horrific period of slaughter

everywhere. Amazingly, though, Rwandans realized what was happening and were able to put a stop to it. They now consider every resident to be a Rwandan, plain and simple, and no one even dares mention the former division. In consequence, in an astonishingly short time the country has returned to prosperity. Everyone left alive is grateful to have survived the train wreck and eager to insure it won't happen again.

Religions try to build up a belief system by creating a plausible world view. Beliefs are necessarily partial and limited, and to the extent they are, they are false. They may be wonderful teaching tools, but they omit much. By contrast, yoga, aligned as it is with psychotherapy and scientific methodology, works to strip away falsehood by throwing off the affliction of ill-considered beliefs. The idea is that when everything false is removed, what remains is truth. Truth is the undeniable core right in the heart of maya, which is Sanskrit for falsehood or ignorance. If we build our castles on heaps of sand, reality will eventually wash them away and we will lose everything we have invested our faith in. A yogi more often prefers a humble hut to a castle in the first place, because there is so much more sand than bedrock in our world, but also diligently seeks out a solid foundation. After all, the goal is not opulence but renewable utility.

Because death will inevitably strip away all our false accretions, be they huts or castles, as our being is returned to its essence, yoga is sometimes thought of as a preparation for death. The idea is that if we have pared our psyche down to its essence of truth, when we die we won't have to contend with the painful bursting of all our mental bubbles, and we can concentrate solely on what is taking place right then. Whatever decisions we need to make can be our best efforts, instead of being clouded with regret and desperate clinging to empty concepts. Even if death is the grand finale of our conscious life, as some speculate, we can still drink in its beauty to the dregs. Sadly, many people are so swathed in the cotton batting of superstitious beliefs that they will even miss the ineffable drama of their own final act.

Another reason to search for truth is that basing a life on wishful thinking cheapens it, while honing one's attitude on the grinding wheel of critical self-examination not only strengthens it but beautifies it, because it reveals what is actually there, or at least tends in that direction. When the glories of existence are subsumed in a fog of mythmaking—however clever and attractive—they are in effect being brushed aside in favor of a less adequate mental picture. This may be seen as one of the tragic flaws of the human race at this admittedly early stage of its development. Conscious evolution should entail the gradual replacement of formerly plausible hypotheses with verifiable truths.

It is fair to ask, is there anything at all we can be certain of? On examination we have to acknowledge there isn't much. All we know for certain is that we exist. Awareness of our existence is undeniable, so it has to be the starting point of a search for absolute truth. Certitude of our existence and the existence of a universe surrounding us is possible; all else is uncertain. We can and should speculate about truths that are uncertain, relative truths, but these have to be open to revision. The relative is a continuum of unfoldment and change, and it is there that certitude is an absurdity.

The oft-repeated instruction to ask yourself "Who am I?" acknowledges this. It advises us to begin our investigation with what we know for sure: that we exist.

There are important differences between absolute and relative truth. Absolute truth is what allows everything to exist, as well as for existence to be everything, while relative truth pertains to the accuracy with which we perceive and conceive what exists—or doesn't, for that matter.

The criminal justice system affords a handy example. Take two people who are suspects in a crime. Only they have absolute knowledge: one of them knows they committed the crime and the other knows they didn't. But the justice system is constrained to determine the truth of the matter through a process of relative sifting of secondhand evidence and speculation. It begins every

investigation in ignorance. By putting together bits and pieces, it is hoped that justice will eventually prevail. Sometimes it does; often it does not.

One of the pillars of spiritual life is that the more we associate ourselves with absolute truth, the more accurately we will be able to appraise relative truth. But there is never a moment (religious beliefs notwithstanding) when our unitive attitude allows us to imagine we are all-knowing about relative matters. Even the most enlightened person has a limited perspective, only much less limited than someone who clings to their cherished interpretations. It is critical to distinguish between absolute and relative truth: we bristle for war and other mayhem precisely when relative truth is imagined to be absolute.

A million psychological experiments have been performed to demonstrate how limited our perception is in the best of circumstances. Relative truth is never perfect even when all involved are trying their best. In real life, people's self-interest muddies the waters considerably. Only yogis and those like them place truth above personal gain. All of us project degrees of deception wherever we go, sometimes consciously, most often unconsciously. Because of the impossibility of determining relative truth with absolute certainty, the wise often recommend retiring to a calm, quiet place where untruth can be digested one serving at a time. Only when we begin to know truth a little bit can we then take it with us into the marketplace.

The way our brains manipulate time can teach us about how they manipulate all sorts of data, ostensibly, but not always, for our benefit. We are witnesses to a performance staged by our minds that is an interpretation of our environment, not the environment itself. Yoga and science are ways to fine-tune our minds so that they delude us less and less, but because we are at the mercy of interpretive equipment there is always a gap between truth and our grasp of it. Doggedly believing our unquestioned sense data, as we are tempted to do, keeps us in the dark.

David Eagleman is doing some fascinating research on time. In the article about him called *The Possibilian* (The New Yorker, April 25, 2011), Francis Crick (the man who visualized the structure of DNA on LSD and shared the Nobel prize for its discovery) told him “The dangerous man is the one who has only one idea, because then he’ll fight and die for it. The way real science goes is that you come up with lots of ideas, and most of them will be wrong.”

Eagleman suggests a simple experiment you can try at home. Stand in front of a mirror and look alternately at one eye and then the other. You can feel your eyes moving, but the image you will see is of your eyes staring straight ahead. Our brain has edited out the motions and given us the “approved version.” While this may be very handy in terms of survival or simply convenience, in terms of liberation it can be a disaster.

An article on time in Discover Magazine’s special issue on The Brain (Spring 2011) includes:

Neurobiologists are slowly coming to realize that “real time” is just a convention foisted upon us by our brains. In any given millisecond, all manner of information—sight, sound, touch—pours into our brains at different speeds and is reprocessed as hearing, speech, and action. Our perception of time can be manipulated in ways that researchers have already begun to exploit.

To understand how your brain bends time, try this trick: Tap your finger on the table once. Because light outraces sound, the audio tap should register a few milliseconds after the sight of it; yet your brain synchronizes the two to make them seem simultaneous. A similar process occurs when you see someone speak to you from several feet away—thankfully so, or our days would unravel like a badly dubbed movie. Your mind is messing with the time, editing out the parts that distract you. Woody Allen [among others] once said, Time is nature’s way of keeping everything from happening at once.” He was right.

“The brain lives just a little bit in the past,” says David Eagleman, a neurobiologist at Baylor College of Medicine. “The brain collects a lot of information, waits, and then stitches a story together. ‘Now’ actually happened a little while ago.”

Or rather, our brains live in the now, and we live in the future, without even knowing it. What we call causal reality is like one of those live television shows with a built-in delay for the censors. (10)

This verifies the keen observations of the ancient rishis. Science is finally catching on! All the world is indeed a stage, and what we perceive is a supremely convincing display totally within our own minds.

Because of this, truth is a very slippery commodity. At least knowing that it is reduces our urge to fight. Mainly, we have to get over our insistence that there is a single monumental truth within the relative universe that we need in order to stabilize our mental states. Instead, like athletes of the mind, we can keep our balance even while in motion. Voltaire has pointed out that, “Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd.” Nataraja Guru famously said, “Science seeks certitude.” But it’s the seeking that matters. The minute you rest on certitude for more than a brief respite, you lose the game.

Summing up, it behooves us to investigate our false beliefs and discard them. Truth will lead us, not to escape death, but to be better prepared for what *is* happening instead of what we *hope* will happen. Our fully alert presence is surpassingly valuable to both ourselves and our environment.

Akrodhah, non-anger, is mainly dealt with as anger in the Gita, most definitively in II, 62 and 63, also III, 37, and later in the present chapter. Anger is so obviously spiritually negative it would seem that Krishna does not need to underscore the point, and yet anger is widespread. Veiled or obvious, it is found in nearly

everyone. Righteous anger is often encouraged by religious preceptors. The Semitic religions are famous for breeding assassins and crusaders supposedly doing the bidding of their god. In contradistinction to them, the Gita maintains that anger is a demonic trait while its absence is divine, though I have even met pious Gita devotees declaiming angrily about some silly issue or other.

Anger does have its uses in focusing the mind and bringing a lot of energy to bear, but it is always outwardly directed, so its benefits are limited to the transactional world. It is true that we should not allow others to take advantage of us or anyone else, for that matter, and anger can occasionally be useful in repelling hostile forces. Even anger at our self, which can help pull us out of the stupor of *tamas*, is an exteriorized focus, preventing us from sinking into our depths. Anger's spiritual failing is that it pulls us away from exploration of the mind's inner landscape. I don't know of anyone who recommends an angry meditation! For penetrating the core of wisdom, anger must be left behind.

The standard way to avoid anger is to suppress it when it boils up, but the spiritual version, which could even be said to be a culmination of all of Krishna's teaching, is to annul it at the source. When everything and everyone is seen to be the Absolute in essence, it is impossible to be angry with them. Only when we treat something as inferior or outside our circle of legitimacy can we indulge in hatred of it. Moreover, anger is a reflection of our own unresolved issues. We have been directed to resolve them, and one proof of their resolution is the absence of hatred.

Chapter XVI is a very stern injunction by Krishna to take this business seriously. The self-indulgent attitudes by which we delude ourselves into thinking we are right and the other is wrong, or we are deserving and the other is not, are said to bring about the degradation of the world.

Tyagah, relinquishment, has the lion's share of early Chapter XVIII, where Krishna advocates it as the ideal spiritual attitude. It

differs from *sannyasa*, wholesale renunciation, in being the renunciation of goal orientation while maintaining a refined interaction with life. Renouncing beneficial actions is considered foolish, tamasic even, in the Gita, which ever aims at optimizing our time spent breathing. Being alive is not a mistake!

Shantih, calmness or peacefulness, is another state whose desirability we take for granted. Yet few of us are content to be calm for long. When confronted with something exciting or challenging we eagerly rise to the bait. Maintaining inner peace in the face of confrontation is a high achievement.

Calmness does not mean ignoring our surroundings or turning ourselves off. It is dynamic, the product of intelligent effort. Evolution has bequeathed us a finely tuned apparatus for offensive and defensive parrying. We only transcend our normal reactivity if we work hard to get over it; otherwise we remain hapless victims of every provocative event that impinges on us. The subject has been discussed in more detail elsewhere, notably in IV, 39 and XII, 12 and 15.

Apaisunam, self-integrity, is closely akin to a peaceful state of mind. It means leaving others alone and concentrating on our own issues, because that's where the work needs to be done. It is the opposite of evangelism, which presupposes at the very least an egotistical pose of superiority. Those who get a little bit excited at the beginning of their religious studies want to hype the values of their "home team" long before they have achieved the mellowness of experiential insight. Foisting their beliefs on others becomes a handy substitute for serious grappling with their own shortcomings. Evangelists have devastated ancient cultures in every corner of the globe, undermining stable and environmentally integrated societies with crime, poverty, disease and competitiveness, while making them ripe for economic exploitation. Bishop Desmond Tutu stated this most poignantly: "When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we

had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.”

Individual egotistical intentions typically backfire as well, but usually the effects are far less egregious than those of organized economic or religious institutions.

Truly worthy systems of thought will spread readily by example, since many people are interested in bettering themselves. Exploitive systems must be founded either by force or some kind of con job, such as claiming inside information regarding God's plans.

Accepting our own psyche as the proper domain of spiritual cultivation takes humility. It is very hard to accept that we are flawed, after a lifetime of pretending we aren't. But the route to self-integrity passes directly through our faults; there's no getting around them.

Daya Bhuteshu, compassion to beings. I don't need to say much about compassion, which is universally extolled, except that it isn't something to “do,” it is a natural outgrowth of our appreciation of unity. If we are still seeing everyone as separate, then compassion is a forced attitude, and as such false to an extent. Nonetheless, if you are going to mount an arbitrary attitude, it might as well be compassionate!

Thanks to Nataraja Guru, in *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, Chapter X, we enjoy this clarification:

Saraha was also a Mahayana Buddhist who lived in India about CE 850. By way of contrast we quote a short part from his *Treasury of songs*:

He who clings to the Void
And neglects Compassion,
Does not reach the highest stage,
But he who practices only Compassion

Does not gain release from toils of existence.
He, however, who is strong in practice of both,
Remains neither in samsara nor in nirvana.

(E. Conze (tr.), *Buddhist Scriptures*, Penguin, London, 1960,
p. 180.)

Aloluptvam, non-interest in sense values, could easily have been translated as detachment. It means freedom from all desires. Believing the taste of food is superior to friendship, for example, is delusion by sense values. Love for your mother or friends is not a sense value. Love is the highest value there is. So don't stifle it in the name of detachment. The actual word *love* isn't found in the Upanishads, however. There it's called bliss, but we moderns mostly know it as love. Detachment has been addressed in XIII, 8, and numerous other places.

Most of us habitually fail to properly distinguish "freedom from attachment" from "detachment." Detachment is often taken as a thoroughgoing severance of connection with sensory experience, and as such is a dramatic hardcore practice where normal reactions are rigorously suppressed. Freedom from attachment, on the other hand, is a much gentler endeavor in which we still register and respond to sense inputs but are not overly manipulated by them.

Breaking free of attachments is an intense and enjoyable form of yoga that can easily be a fulltime practice. In the course of our day (or night) we register a gestalt, and then observe how we reflexively respond to it. Bringing in an intelligent assessment allows us to catch a glimpse of our attachments, which are the discrepancy between what we might assess as a neutral reaction and what we can observe as our actual manifestation of self-interest. We can "feel" this as well as think it. By intuitively making adjustments in our psyche to correct the discrepancy, we learn how to regain our mental balance at all times.

It is easy to conceive of two types of detachment, one ferocious and absolute in rejecting all input, the other gentle and tolerant of input as inevitable and even potentially delightful.

Mardavam, gentleness. Interesting, isn't it, that the scripture that supposedly foments war actually advocates gentleness, compassion, non-hurting, forgiveness, absence of malice, and similar dispositions? Warlike attitudes will be listed in verse 4 as demonic. But it is always hard to surrender our conceits, our convenient fictions. Once a label is affixed, it is difficult to remove it. In the popular imagination the Gita remains the scripture that validates war.

Gentleness, like some of the other virtues, is unitive when it is the natural result of a loving state of mind, when we can intuit how another being would feel based on how we know we feel. This is different from the suppressed hostilities that are cloaked in gentleness as the only safe tactic in a punitive environment. That means it isn't good enough to simply be gentle, it should lead us from mere holding back to compassionate connectedness.

The universal adage to "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is the high road to gentleness, and is readily comprehensible even to small children. I well remember my mother pointedly asking me "how do you think that feels?" whenever as a small boy I accidentally or intentionally hurt someone, and considering the question inevitably made me feel remorseful and vow to change my behavior. But again, is the principle being followed as an externally applied "rule," or does it spring unadulterated from the heart? Transactionally there is little difference, but psychologically there is no comparison. We have to discipline ourselves until the idea of gentleness suffuses our being and becomes our natural response to provocation.

Hrih, modesty, is again something of a paradox. If we *try* to be modest, it comes off as immodest egotism. It should emerge in an unaffected way from our mental equanimity.

If we focus too much on the details of our life, we can hardly help becoming full of ourself. There has to be an outward-directed appreciation to counterbalance the intense self-examination a yogi must perform. If, for instance, we take a look at the many and varied geniuses of the human race, or the spectacularly complex way that life functions, or great art, it is a humbling experience. We may well have a special talent, but in that we are not alone. Extraordinary talent, both positive and negative, abounds on all sides, and nearly all of us fall somewhere in between the extremes.

Achalam, non-fickleness. Aurobindo translates it as “freedom from restlessness,” which is excellent, but *achalam* is more than that. Fickleness means being excessively changeable. We need to persevere in our chosen endeavors, especially with regard to spiritual striving. Spiritual growth is sometimes a painful process, and if we quit a program as soon as it doesn’t feel “groovy,” we will never get past the first hurdle. I’m sure that therapists and gurus must get frustrated when, just as they are beginning to make good headway with some patient or disciple, they drop out to pursue a new allurements.

It is well known that the traumas that warp our lives wrap themselves in protective psychological cocoons. Some of them we can perhaps learn to live with, but others need to be treated and cured if we are to enjoy peace of mind. In this, we cannot rely on our immediate feelings. We have to decide on a course and hold to it even when we crave with every fiber of our being to abandon the quest. Just knowing that an intense struggle is bound to be part of the cure can help us to persevere.

Many, many of the students I have encountered expect that just doing a little watered down “yoga” should make them eternally happy and problem-free. As soon as the initial rush wears off, they start looking for a new thrill. If they are challenged by a guru, they turn and run to somebody who won’t confront their weaknesses, but instead stroke their ego. It’s hard to imagine that such a course of action will be of much benefit. There has to be

determination. It may not be as extreme as Shankara's desperate deer in a burning forest analogy, but it has to be a lot more than a passing fancy.

3) alertness, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, absence of malice, absence of excessive respectability—these make up the divine (higher) values of anyone, O Bharata, born for them.

Surveying the divine qualities in the third verse, we can see we are moving toward more specific virtues:

Tejah, alertness, is translated in many different ways: vigor (Radhakrishnan), energy (Aurobindo), Thompson has it as radiance, which is literally correct, but hard to think of as a value to be cultivated. Radiance is more of a side effect of absorption into the Absolute. The dictionary reveals the broad scope of the term: *tejas* refers to the sharp edge of a knife, flame or light ray, whence the idea of splendor, brilliance; also fiery energy, ardor, vitality or spirit; which can lead to impatience, fierceness or energetic opposition (presumably in a righteous cause); spiritual or moral power or influence, majesty, dignity, glory, authority. Alertness then, has the intensity of a laser beam, and includes all these nuances. It aims to cut through to the heart of the situation.

Our brains are naturally brought to a state of heightened alertness by interaction with people, especially loved ones. That's why a guru in the form of a human being is an ideal agent for precipitating change. Other forms of communication pass right through us almost like neutrinos, rarely if ever engaging our synapses. A recent article on childhood learning in *National Geographic Magazine* (January 2015) reports on studies that demonstrate the immense value of human interaction. The studies first discovered that more input was better—a greater volume of verbal communication was directly related to higher IQ and later to better school performance. Surprisingly, though, how it was delivered turned out to be critically important:

Exposing children to more words would seem simple enough. But language delivered by television, audio book, Internet, or smartphone—no matter how educational—doesn't appear to do the job. That's what researchers led by Patricia Kuhl, a neuroscientist at the University of Washington in Seattle learned from a study of nine-month-old children....

In their study the researchers exposed nine-month-olds from English-speaking families to Mandarin. Some of the children interacted with native Chinese speaking tutors, who played with them and read to them. "The babies were entranced by these tutors," Kuhl says. "In the waiting room they would watch the door for their tutors to come in." Another group of children saw and heard the same Mandarin-speaking tutors through video presentation. And a third group heard only the audio track. After all the children had gone through 12 sessions, they were tested on their ability to discriminate between similar phonetic sounds in Mandarin.

The researchers expected the children who'd watched the videos to show the same kind of learning as the kids tutored face-to-face. Instead they found a huge difference. The children exposed to the language through human interaction were able to discriminate between similar Mandarin sounds as well as native listeners. But the other infants—regardless of whether they had watched the video or listened to the audio—showed no learning whatsoever.

"We were blown away," Kuhl says. "It changed our fundamental thinking about the brain." The result of this and other studies led Kuhl to propose what she calls the social gating hypothesis: the idea that social experience is a portal to linguistic, cognitive, and emotional development. (71)

Many repetitive spiritual techniques actually dull the mind, in hopes that doing so will release the latent powers of the psyche. The Gita's perspective is more in tune with these neuroscientific

experiments, suggesting that our enthusiasm and alertness are the keys to developmental learning. The love of a teacher is an ideal way to stimulate the process.

It has apparently been known since the dawn of history that if you nod off in class you won't pass the course. The conscious mind has to be present to learn. Aldous Huxley, in *Brave New World*, lampoons the then-fashionable unconscious learning theories, where a tape recording is played while you sleep. There it made for rote memorization without comprehension.

It is now known that while we are sleeping we process what we've consciously learned during the day, so listening to tapes while sleeping would simply disrupt the consolidation of information. Still, a great deal is accomplished when we are not alert, at least consciously.

The narrow focus of our conscious mind routinely screens out important information, and for the most part this serves a useful purpose. So tejah doesn't have to be full time, just at the right time. This would include when interacting with a friend or listening to a teacher. We need to be alert so we can hear what they are actually telling us, instead of half-alert and going on automatic pilot, hearing what we expect or want to hear.

Lawrence Gonzales, in his excellent book *Everyday Survival*, goes into the neuroscience behind this principle. He says, "One of the most frequently ignored factors in our behavior is the way we form models and scripts and use them rather than information from the world itself in most of what we do." (24) He adds, "This kind of coupling of mental models and scripts leads to intelligent mistakes in all walks of life." (26).

Many spiritual preceptors recommend an "ignore it and it will go away" attitude toward conflicts: just think of God or something beautiful and your troubles will be over. As we have often noted, that's a great way to let our traumas (or manipulative people) have their way with us. If the conflicts are wholly imaginary, ignoring them might be provisionally effective, but if they are real—and most do have a real basis—some kind of actual

grappling with them is necessary. If a guru or therapist tells you to just think of something else, they are simply not able to help you.

When all is said and done, *tejas* is quite a complex notion. After all, being mindful isn't so hard: it's *remembering* to be mindful that's difficult. There are times when we learn despite our conscious attention, and sometimes a distraction serves to open a blocked door. But we make ourselves available to transformative influences mainly by being alert, in the broadest sense of the word.

Kshama, forgiveness, is a simple concept that is not so easy to put into practice, because our ego resists it with all its might and main. Tolerance grows out of the admission that we are in some respects limited and imperfect, works in progress so to speak. If we can accept that in ourselves, we can grant forgiveness to others for their failings. But the ego stakes its reputation on being perceived as perfect, unassailable, and lovable, and so would rather wheedle out of admitting it sometimes isn't. A significant amount of psychological bravery is involved in accepting our flaws.

Anyone who has been punished for making mistakes as a child is likely to have adopted a plan to never let anyone see their weaknesses. In the back of their mind is the fear that any blemish, if found out, will bring punishment. Authority figures often deliberately reinforce that fear, and in consequence we become guarded beings who hide our real self from outside scrutiny. Because we can't tolerate our own divergences from what passes for normal, we instinctively want to smash it in others too. A mind-narrowing paranoia comes to replace the trusting openness we are ordinarily born with.

When we struggle to hide the fact that we are less than angelic, wracked with guilt, and fearing punishment or embarrassment, we often cover our insecurity with hostile bluster toward others, trying to force attention away from ourselves. So the first step toward forgiveness is to cultivate tolerance of our own faults. Not indulgence, only tolerance. Once that giant step is taken, the rest is relatively easy.

Dhritih means fortitude. This is another term with a wide range of implications. Thompson and Miller call it resolve; Aurobindo, patience. The dictionary adds supporting; firmness or constancy; will; to fix the mind on. *Dhritih* is similar to the non-fickleness of the previous verse, expressed positively rather than negatively. In both cases we are called to stick to our program, so long as it's a beneficial one. Only if we intelligently reassess what we're doing and find it lacking should we change direction. Intelligence means an integrated confection of rational and intuitive inspirations, not the strictly rational version that is still worshipped in some circles. Certain parts of the mind can be very convincing in presenting their selfish wants in persuasive guises, so "going with the flow" can lead us off course if the flow isn't quite what we imagine it to be. We first have to analyze and consider, but once we have made up our mind we should put our whole heart into our chosen endeavors.

The candy-coated version of spirituality our egos would prefer has to be seen as childish wishful thinking. Otherwise, the first insult to our fortress persona will send us out the door. If we can accept that we need to change, then we can align the tremendous energies of the psyche on our behalf. As Nataraja Guru used to say, "A drastic disease needs a drastic cure."

Saucham, cleanliness or purity, is another of Patanjali's observances. Purity or purification is usually seen as a question of morality, of weeding out inappropriate behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth! Well, I exaggerate, but morality is for the most part beside the point in spirituality. Making our behavior "good" does not bring us any closer to the sighting of the One Beyond. In fact, focusing on being moral or artificially pure is a distraction—albeit a very popular one—from the productive work we should be doing.

It should be noted that there are a lot of seriously deranged people who are obsessed with moral cleanliness, and they harp on

purity all the time. It can easily become a route for mental illness to manifest. One of the greatest spoofs of the syndrome is General Jack D. Ripper in the classic movie *Dr. Strangelove*, whose obsession leads to the destruction of the whole planet through nuclear holocaust. Earth abounds with purity fanatics who are willing to kill for their beliefs, or at least make life miserable for anyone having a different attitude than theirs. This type of false saucha falls within the demonic qualities later in the chapter.

The legitimate purification meant by saucha is to learn to perceive the persona we have “made ourselves up” with, and then refuse to let it distort our life. Unless we are a Ramana Maharshi or a Narayana Guru we will continue to maintain our persona to some extent, but at least where we once lost our identity in it, we can gradually recover our authentic self-awareness. A mask or veil does serve a useful purpose in casual interactions, since that’s what most other people are going to care about. The important thing is that if we feel unfulfilled in life because we don’t fully match our persona, we will spend vast amounts of energy trying to force ourselves to conform to it. It is much healthier to peel away the junk aspects of the persona—which, after all, is the elaboration of a strategy devised by an infant—and rediscover our authentic beingness. Who we are is the brightest light of sentience we know of in the cosmos, but our light has become covered over with the dirt of ignorance and self-doubt. Saucha is where we shrug off of the grime of illusion to allow the light to shine through ever more brightly. Again, this cleansing is a psychological rather than a moral issue.

Admittedly, this much of purification is old hat, and yet we still over-manage ourselves all the time, and consequently our progress is often very slow. Purity is not a finalized position we sit in, it is a process of continually disentangling ourselves from the well-tended brambles we routinely stumble over. We must not do either too little or too much by way of purification, and neither indulge our faults or get overly impatient at how many we still possess after all these years.

We don't often realize how so much of our “normal” behavior is a defense of our position, legitimate or otherwise. Any fixed position is indefensible in the ultimate analysis. One very important type of purification is to wean ourselves away from the need to defend who we think we are.

When we are accused by someone, especially someone we love, it elicits a negative response in direct proportion to the degree of our impurity, of our attachment to a rigid position. If we are saintly, the accusations don't cause any disturbance in us, because we are so thoroughly identified with the Absolute we have nothing to defend. In other words, there is no guilt, nothing for the accusations to activate. We are pure, in that sense. But to the extent we have a hidden agenda of selfish motivations—as likely as not hidden from our conscious mind as well—we feel compelled to bark back and keep the accuser at bay.

In this way, life itself is acting like a wise guru and throwing light into our darkly protected areas. Our egos are content to leave a lot of garbage lying just behind our defensive barricades, out of sight and therefore out of mind. So life blesses us with a child, or a coworker, or even a stranger, who points their finger at us. They probably are pointing at something else entirely, but deep down we know what we are hiding, and we feel the sting in our heart, the pangs of guilt. If, instead of getting angry, we use that flash of recognition to bring what it reveals up into our consciousness, it is a true act of purification.

One of the happy results of facing these inner impurities is that the poison that has been leaking out of them into our system can be neutralized. Much of the time, converting lurking resentments into conscious images defangs them. This is the practical process by which we sacrifice our presumed individuality, which is primarily a composite of the quirks we have developed from our history of painful and pleasurable experiences, in favor of our universal selfhood. “I” am the person who has all these beliefs and needs (demands, desires) and as “I” give them up I make room instead for the “laughter of the immortals,” a phrase

apparently coined by Herman Hesse in *Steppenwolf*. As I become less of an I, I become more my Self, and levity soars in my gladdened heart. I may well burst out in laughter.

The cheerfulness we see in enlightened people, or the enlightenment we see in cheerful people, comes from purifying ourselves from the hidden agendas we secretly cling to, imagining we need them to survive. When we give them up and find they are not at all necessary, it is like rolling a great stone away from the door to our tomb. Coming out is such an uplifting sensation it is like rising up to heaven, lighter than a feather.

The most surprising thing of all is that the inner light, brilliant as it is, can be ignored or veiled in the first place, permitting us to lose our way and thrash about in outer darkness. It's one of the greatest miracles of existence, perhaps the greatest. Marooned in shadow, we treat the light as the miracle, but it is our true nature, our ground. The real magic is that light has managed to create darkness out of itself, which permits the whole panoply of transformation to take place. If there were only light, we would have nothing to learn and nowhere to grow.

Purification in relation to the vision of the Self—often called seeing the light—involves discerning the oneness within our experience. The world is not impure in any moral sense, but its vicissitudes do capture our attention and distract it from the underlying unity. The final benefit of purity, fitness for the vision, comes from no longer being sucked in by the dark side of life that is always grabbing at our lapels and shaking us.

Once again, all this does not mean that there are pure people and impure people. We all have a vast store of impurities, and they make us who we are. They are perfectly normal, but inhibiting and problematic nonetheless. We work on them to free ourselves, but we must never trick ourselves with the lie that we are now pure, pity the fools who aren't. *Saucha*, purity, is a yoga *practice*, something to do all the time, something really *fun* to do all the time, and not a finalized position where I egotistically believe I am holier than thou.

Adrohah, absence of malice, makes a matched pair with the final divine quality listed, the absence of excessive respectability. The yogi does not radiate antipathy or crave admiration. Both are outwardly directed attitudes, social rather than spiritual, bound to turn us into something we are not.

Becoming something other than who we think we are is a subtle transformation we may not even be aware of. This is true on every level. In the wake of World War II the US was a paragon of civic virtue, champion of democracy, with liberty and justice for all. But beneath that benign surface was a body politic seething with animosity for the USSR as a symbol of repression of everything we cherished. Many claimed—though seldom in public—that evil had to be met with evil, and so the hostility grew like a mushroom cloud to spawn a subterranean network of illegal and immoral specialists in “dirty tricks.” Within a short time, the beacon of liberty had been converted into a den of iniquity, now by far the most lethal force ever assembled by the human race. Where the original rationale was to defend freedom and peace, the US now ruthlessly undercuts those values all over the globe. Such is the transforming power of malice. At least yogis are requested to avoid that tragedy in their own lives, and hopefully serve as examples for a more intelligent “foreign policy” across the globe. Yogis follow the spirit of my friend Johnny Stalling’s brief poem:

My foreign policy: there are no foreigners.

This may well be the same virtue that brought Arjuna up short on the battlefield, when he realized all his supposed enemies were actually his dear friends and family.

Na atimanita means absence of excessive respectability. Much of this chapter confronts the egotism that erupts from an obsessive concern with respectability. As soon as we are separated from our true sense of self and begin to create a persona in

compensation—a process that begins long before we are capable of doing it properly, such as after taking an advanced course in life science similar to Krishna’s training of Arjuna—we start to weigh our appearance in terms of its effect on others around us. Often it becomes a mania, but one we are hardly aware of. We scheme every move, bargaining and measuring instead of acting unitively. Everything is contractual: I need to get this amount for what I do for you. It’s a degraded way to live, but if we are successful we take on a sense of respectability far in excess of what we deserve.

Krishna’s advice does not mean we should go to the opposite extreme of being disreputable, which is merely the flip side of the counterfeit coin named “social perception.” We live in a paradigm where the coveting of approval by others that prevailed for a very long time has been replaced with cynicism about other people’s motives and a rejection of their approval. It’s now cool to be disreputable. To the yogi, both approval and the rejection of approval are static, binding outlooks, Procrustean in cutting the world around us down to fit the mold we have prepared for it. Nowadays we regard other people’s views as judgmental and without value, and that is likely to be true. Perhaps we should include our own opinions in that assessment. Where we go wrong is in generating a hostile attitude in order to keep outside opinion at bay. A realized yogi employs no artificial defenses, either positive or negative.

A person should strive to be who they are, no more and no less. Being in essence the Absolute, what we are is boundless, excellent, and blissful. Foregoing that state for a manufactured social standing is pathetic, a symptom of a psyche that has lost its mooring.

God has appointed us Her emissary to manifestation, since She's too unbusy to attend to every detail. And as long as we keep in mind that everyone else is also an emissary of the Source, we’ll never suffer a false sense of superiority or messianic complex.

Abhijatasya, of anyone born for them - Several mentions are made in the next two verses and the middle of Chapter XVIII to people being born for certain grades of values. This should be understood as referring to one's native predilections, and not in any way to imply rigid determinism by birth, as in caste. As we will see, both the "divine" and "demonic" values—what we simply call good and bad these days—are found to varying degrees in every person. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Which ones come to dominate is a complex matter of nature influenced by nurture, or in other words the impact of circumstances on the raw material of the incipient human being. The important thing is what we do with the hand we have been dealt.

Because of the hidebound caste prejudices that are often projected onto the Gita, it is important to realize that they are a case of seeing what you want to see, and are by no means intended by the Guru Krishna. It would certainly be "demonic" to presume to be able to determine someone else's stature based solely on their parentage. Life is primarily what you make of it, and there is no guaranteed easy or right path to wisdom. That heredity is not a significant factor in determining value orientation is proved by the fact that a single family almost always contains a wide range of types within it.

It would be the height of absurdity to presume we are born to be either good or evil, which would mean we couldn't change our allotted fate. If you believe that, you should throw away your scriptures, because they are pointless. Forget striving for excellence, just attend to your needs as they arise, and the devil take the hindmost. Not too surprisingly, that misreading of the Gita lands us squarely in the next category, that of demonic values:

4) Pretentiousness, arrogance, a sense of self-importance, anger, harshness, and also ignorance—these, O Partha, make up the demonic (lower) values of anyone born with them.

It is unnecessary to dissect these demonic values here, as the bulk of this chapter will address them in depth. They cover a surprisingly narrow range, which tells us that they can be overcome with relative ease, just as soon as we are courageous enough to face them. The trick is that they are the *real* golden disk hiding the sun of truth: they make us absolutely certain that our problems are someone else's fault, so we never turn around and face them. They are like an addictive drug that provides a sense of total reassurance even as it corrodes the entire system.

A neutral attitude would make us aware of how little we know in comparison with all there is to be known. Naturally we would be humble and not pretentious—willing and eager to learn from others and to share our little piece of the picture. Something in the human strain, however, makes us feel embarrassed if we don't pretend to the world that we know everything. We feel vulnerable to attack if we don't live in a well-fortified bastion of ideas. We swagger around inside our fort, taking potshots at passersby, hardly daring to venture outside the walls. Buoyed by our sense of safety, we often become aggressive and extremely prejudiced, since the humanity of the 'other' is not permitted to cross the barricades.

As Robert Frost has advised, in his poem *Mending Wall*:
“Before I built a wall I'd ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out / And to whom I was likely to give offence.”
Unnecessary and offensive walls are at the heart of the failings of humanity, and the saints and sages of all eras clamor for us to refuse to build or maintain them. If we can dare to admit our limitations—perfectly natural, and common to the most brilliant and most ignorant among us—we will not be afraid to come out of hiding in our self-imposed prison, and we can stop erecting offences.

5) The divine values are deemed to be for emancipation, and the demonic for bondage to necessity; do not regret, O Arjuna, you are born for the divine values.

The difference between attitudes that emancipate and those that bind is as great as night and day. Philosophers and writers throughout history have marveled at how large segments of the human race can so easily adopt attitudes of lethal negativity, often in the name of some divine principle no less.

Our “birth” to divine or demonic values takes place over a long stretch of time, mostly after our natal birth, though womb time is also a factor. Somewhere in our timeline we change over from compliant children to masters of our fate, and here is where our compilation of influences for better or worse will be a force for us to contend with. It would be wonderful if children were encouraged and directed toward higher values in a supportive way, but such is not often the case. At least Arjuna has been so fortunate, as Krishna acknowledges here. You should be very grateful if you too have enjoyed such support.

A simple example of how profoundly a mindset can affect people is the widespread attitude that if a married woman loses her husband, for whatever reason and at whatever age, there is no further point to her being alive. No avenue of legitimate expression is open to her. Many cultures prescribe a kind of living death for widows: they are treated as insentient property that has been abandoned by its owner. They are wrapped in obscuring veils, incapable of going out in public, holding a job, or dating. It makes jumping onto the husband’s funeral pyre seem a viable option. With an extremely minor attitude adjustment, such women could be welcomed into many aspects of social life without the least detriment to anyone, and benefits to many.

Self-righteous religious types may curse anyone trying to alleviate that kind of unnecessary suffering, calling them wicked and ungodly. The Gita wants us to be clear on this business, so it takes a chapter to reveal the psychology of those who derive pleasure from the oppression of others, who are equally or more ubiquitous in the modern world as they were in the ancient one. They are driven to cause unhappiness in the name of God. This

part of the Gita calls to mind the song by the Beatles called Think for Yourself:

I've got a word or two
To say about the things that you do
You're telling all those lies
About the good things that we can have
If we close our eyes

Chorus: Do what you want to do
And go where you're going to
Think for yourself
'Cause I won't be there with you

I left you far behind
The ruins of the life that you have in mind
And though you still can't see
I know your mind's made up
You're gonna cause more misery
(Chorus)

Although your mind's opaque
Try thinking more if just for your own sake
The future still looks good
And you've got time to rectify
All the things that you should
(Chorus)

Why don't we all make up our minds to *stop* causing misery? What a difference it would make! Every person, without exception, is born for the expression of "divine values," but somewhere along the line the possibility has been stripped away.

6) There are two orders of created beings in this world: the divine and the demonic; the divine have been described at length; hear from me now of the demonic.

By focusing on the everyday aspects of life and tuning out the transcendental we can very easily become enmeshed in misery and destructive behavior. The Gita has been predominantly positive throughout. It is only fitting that the negative possibilities be covered also, if only to turn us more toward their antidotes. Just because both sides of a coin exist doesn't mean we have to admire them equally.

It's quite unhelpful to imagine that there are fully good and wholly evil people in the world, with no gradations of overlap between them. It goes against yoga dialectics, which never excludes the middle ground between poles. All these aspects may be found to a degree in everyone, at least in potential form, and each reader should take the admonishments as applying to them especially, though not exclusively.

In contrast to the Pollyannaish tales of sugary instruction by doting gurus, there is another method with a much longer tradition: the path of intensity and adversity. Most humans grow primarily in response to challenges, and tend to stagnate when their environment is overly comfortable. A guru or therapist who merely mouths slogans and offers condolences is not doing anything particularly helpful. If they are truly engaged in the transformation of someone in their care, they will confront their unexamined conceits and psychological blind spots, and find a way to bring them to acknowledge them. Each disciple is to some degree a unique puzzle to unlock, so every dialogue will differ. While often uncomfortable, the heat generated by the friction of conflict between the truth of the guru and the limitations of the disciple—known as tapas—supplies the impetus to lift the psyche out of its pool of tamasic stagnation and set it on a sattvic path of growth and unfoldment.

We should study the upcoming diatribe in this light. Don't think Oh, this is about other, bad people. Think instead, how do I take this to heart? How do these exhortations apply to me and my hidden selfishness and unconscious scheming? Otherwise reading it will be a waste of time.

7) The demonic men do not know the way of positive action, nor the way of negative withdrawal; in them is found neither cleanliness, nor propriety in conduct, nor veracity.

The two paths mentioned here are known as *asti asti* and *neti neti*. Both paths may be tried at different times, or some seekers use one exclusively, depending on their temperament. The former, the way of positive action, is called *asti asti*, "and this, and this." Everything is accepted as part of the Absolute. This is the essence of the active path, and it undercuts the ordinary attitude that considers some things as desirable and some as avoidable by envisioning everything as a form of the Absolute. Krishna has referred to it earlier, for instance IV 35: "Having known this, Arjuna, you will not give way to delusion thus any more; by this all beings without exception will be seen by you in the Self and thus in Me."

Neti neti, "not this, not this," is the path of withdrawal. It negates the delusion of focusing on the surface play of life and forgetting the Absolute ground or core. Nothing is purely the Absolute by itself, so denying everything can lead the mind to contemplate the emptiness that is universally present. Krishna has previously referred to the basis of this path also, for instance in VII, 13-15: "Deluded by these three manifestations of value, this whole world is unable to know Me, who am beyond them and unexpended. Verily this divine illusion of Mine, made up of the manifestations of value (*gunas*), is hard to surmount. Those who seek Me alone pass over this illusion. Foolish evildoers, lowest among men, do not attain Me, their wisdom being distracted by

illusion, affiliated as they are to the demonic (or non-intelligent) aspect of nature.”

Negative withdrawal and “getting some distance” are not the same, though they look similar. It is usually necessary to stand apart to calmly assess any situation, but minus the negative emotions this is not withdrawing, it is an intensification of engagement in an intelligent manner.

Whenever we forget our identity with the unifying principle of the Absolute we become “demonic” or at least confused or stupid. Lack of cleanliness here refers to the absence of a healthy and kind attitude, not physical dirtiness, obviously. Like cleanliness, proper conduct arises from a heightened awareness of the total integrated picture, as does truthfulness or veracity.

8) They say that the world is without true existence, without a basis, without a presiding principle, not resulting from reciprocal factors (lying beyond immediate vision), as if asking, “What else is there other than that caused by lust?”

This verse is leading us to the following premise: to those who take the world out of context, it appears to be nothing more than a complicated pile of sand in an accidentally assembled sandbox. While it is then logical to presume the pile can be manipulated with impunity, actions based on that false perspective are likely to become highly destructive. By contrast, Krishna’s spiritual science urges us to look closely into the intrinsic harmony of the pile and realize that our actions have far-reaching implications, including boomeranging back on us. If we make the effort to thoroughly examine the world, our attitude will change dramatically. In the symbolic terms of the chapter, we shift from demonic to divine, careless to caring.

Ervin Laszlo, in *Science and the Akashic Field*, (Inner Traditions, 2004), quotes a titan of the materialist viewpoint as essentially paraphrasing this verse, and also adds the antidote:

The depressive futility inherent in the negative face of Western civilization has been spelled out by the renowned philosopher Bertrand Russell: “That man is the product of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving,” he wrote, “his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.”

But the face of progress need not be so cold, nor the face of fall so tragic. All the things that Russell mentions are not only not “beyond dispute,” and not only are they not “nearly certain”; they may be the chimeras of an obsolete view of the world. At its cutting edge, the new cosmology discovers a world where the universe does not end in ruin, and the new physics, the new biology, and the new consciousness research recognize that in this world life and mind are integral elements and not accidental by-products. All these elements come together in the informed universe—a comprehensive and intensely meaningful universe, cornerstone of the unified conceptual scheme that can tie together all the diverse phenomena of the world: the integral theory of everything. (pp. 14-15)

In light of the profound ancient wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads, I would only change this to read that the new cosmology is *rediscovering*—rather than newly discovering—something that was once known. A detailed discussion of this can

be found in my article *The Trajectory of Science*, accessible here: <http://scotteitsworth.tripod.com/id18.html>.

While it is fading out to some extent, the modern world is still beset by the belief system outlined in this verse, because it appeals to a noncontemplative outlook that relies solely on appearances. That's why Nataraja Guru added the clarification that the reciprocal factors are beyond immediate vision. There is more at stake in life than material success, but what it amounts to is by no means obvious. The well-being of everyone and everything is directly impacted by intangible karmic effects, which are so complicated that they cannot be directly traced. Since their repercussions are out of sight and largely in the future, they appear to be ignorable. But they are not. As contemplatives quickly realize, they can come back with a vengeance.

The inner connections of everything being invisible, it is easy to be deluded by our sensory view of the world into believing that we are independent creatures and our actions have only immediate and obvious consequences. Disruptions of the inner balance can be ignored, at least until you look around and notice that all biologic systems are crashing and the peaceful refuges of the world are fast disappearing.

Greed or the lust for immediate satisfaction of needs is at the heart of what we might call the corporate mentality, where short term profits are the only consideration, and morality is at best a hindrance, a cost delivering no benefit. In the next verse, Krishna will assert that this outlook brings about the world's decline, and observing the devastation of the globe from the craving for short-term profits this can no longer be considered speculative.

The problem is that there is not only no instant karma from deception: it often produces temporary success, and it's highly addictive. The swagger of a politician is the body language of a successful deceiver, giddy from getting away with murder. Remember the rush when you were a young child, stealing a cookie and not getting caught. It was intense! But the easy, dishonest road to success actually leads into a locked room with no

escape. War, for example, always seems so tantalizingly simple, a quick sortie and it will be over, with lots of lucre and only other people suffering, but it quickly engulfs everyone.

Market capitalism fills the bill as the most widespread modern religion, and it springs from the quasi-scientific hypothesis that the world is made up of compilations of tiny, lifeless particles that somehow achieved a degree of complexity that allows for the illusion of existence. The view of the ancient rishis, that the universe consists primarily of consciousness, and therefore is an interdependent matrix, is only very recently beginning to loom large again in scientific awareness. Until it infuses the human species with all the “divine” values of the first three verses, we must wrestle with the karmic consequences of materialism. If the world is built up from insensate particles, nothing is connected to anything else. Everything is independent, so it’s everyone for themselves, and nothing matters except immediate gratification. The impact of this philosophy can be easily seen in the worldwide destruction it is causing. Paradoxically, some of the older religions subscribe to and cheerlead the devastation, in hopes that God will set things straight after we wreck the planet, or under the theory that ignoring a problem makes it go away. This is ignorance squared: a stupid application of a ridiculous proposition, and all the inhabitants of our planet will suffer the consequences.

So-called free-market capitalism in its present form is based on the presumption that all beings are best motivated by their lusts, and this produces the optimal outcome. In actuality we have crony capitalism, where the most fortunate come to dominate the less fortunate, independent of any innate ability on anyone’s part. At its extreme, partisans of this system, worshipping lust in the form of greed as the highest value, take delight in torture, murder and grand larceny. Part of the fun is to sneer at anyone attempting to uphold liberal, unifying values, such as those listed in verses 1-3.

The immediate impact of these beliefs is to unmoor behavior from truth. The value of an idea is its serviceability in manipulating others, not its innate worth. Unfortunately, without a

bedrock of truth, honesty is, well, dishonest. But because of the elusive nature of truth, a whole genre of ersatz honesty has taken center stage, in which we are unconcerned with our ignorance. After all, lashing our ignorance to our goals is much less taxing than educating it away. This trend has now progressed to the next logical step of undermining truth completely by making it a pragmatic tool of commercial exploitation, both personal and corporate. Put simply, if what we wish to have happen is the only truth of any value, and if deception is the means to that end, then any amount of prevarication is acceptable. Needless to say, an honest person cannot accept such a travesty. As we have so often maintained, the primary task of a yogi is to discard whatever is false and deceptive to arrive at the underlying truth that is always present. Realized yogis are living proof of the validity of an engaged and caring lifestyle.

In his biography *Word of the Guru*, Nataraja Guru (then a mere youthful orator) recounts a passionate diatribe by Narayana Guru against the destructiveness of humanity. Here's the last part:

Man is terribly inconsistent. The state, which calls itself interested in humanity, would, for example, vehemently forbid even a man suffering from the worst form of skin disease to quit his miserable body. On the other hand, it will madly engage itself in wholesale manslaughter, after due deliberation and in the holy name of altruism or religion. Man does not know what he does, although he prides himself on being more intelligent than the animals. It is all a mad deluded rush." "Oh, this man!" he said, lapsing into wistfulness... "He must lay waste; his greed can be satisfied only by the taking away of life." As the Guru repeated the word *Man*, the youthful orator watched his composed features and could not but discover a distant tinge of sadness in his voice and in his venerable features. "Man knows not what he does," the Guru repeated, and became silent for a moment. "It would not have mattered so much," he continued, "if the effect of man's misdeeds struck

its blow only at mankind. But the innocent monkeys and birds in the forest have to forfeit their peaceful life because of man. The rest of Nature would be thankful if, in the process of self-destruction, man would have the good sense to destroy himself if he must, alone, leaving the rest of creation at least to the peace which is its birthright.” (13)

As always, though, we want to apply these principles primarily to ourselves. If we pin our hopes solely on reforming politicians or their corporate employers, we’ll have to think in terms of many lifetimes. Instead—or I should say in addition, because reforming the exterior world is an admirable calling—we want to focus on what we can accomplish now, which means waking ourselves up to truth. We may hope that this will catch on in the larger world, but we aren’t holding our breath.

We know in our hearts that we, too, are not totally honest. The practice of yoga is aimed at sweeping away the garbage we have amassed to bolster our self-image, in order to reacquaint ourselves with our true nature, which is identical with the Absolute. In the process, the selfish ‘I’ that is a projection of our wants and worries melts away. Whatever fear we feel is going to hold us back from making a sincere effort, due to our false identification with the persona at the expense of our real self. We need to change our primary alliance from our ego to the Absolute.

The lust (kama) of this verse has almost nothing to do with sexual passions; it is about desire in general. Sex is not considered relevant to the Gita’s spirituality one way or the other, unless it happens to be a disruptive craving, but it remains a subset of the principle Krishna is expounding. Later pundits advocated sexual abstinence and it became a big deal in some religions, but not here. Lust means you are no longer content to receive your due from the beneficence of the Absolute, you have to charge out and get it, usually by force. You crave things, in the expectation that they will compensate for the emptiness of your psyche. Lustfulness is a way of looking at the world based on the innate impoverishment of

materialist beliefs. The market religion extols this kind of lust as the prime motivator of human beings, and it does have a point there. The problem is it is a conscienceless motivator, and one with terrible and far-reaching consequences. Unleashing the paranoiac lusts of the populace is not a healthy economic policy. It would serve us all much better to redirect our energies to healthier options, as the Gita recommends. Again, this is something that can mainly be accomplished on the individual level.

The idea of “reciprocal factors” should be clear enough by now. They are extolled in the Golden Rule and Newton’s law of inertia, among many other places. The Indian notion is that the universe arises from consciousness in the following manner. As awareness of existence comes into being, unitive consciousness splits into a subjective and an objective component, which are reflections of each other. All polarities are therefore inextricably connected within the neutral ground of consciousness, which for convenience we call the Absolute. Since they *are* connected, operations on one side equally affect the other. Ignorance of this basic principle of reciprocity impels people to go off on harmful and deluded tangents, smugly imagining they are hurting only others while benefiting themselves. When one treats the transactional world as an unconnected phenomenon, it is possible to conceive any number of workable but deadly poisonous methods of manipulation. A healthy philosophy must be related to the Absolute as a ground and moral balancing factor, otherwise our actions may go cruelly and explosively wrong.

Once again, we are not to be diverted from self-improvement by imagining these words of Krishna apply only to others—a widely popular misunderstanding. We have to recognize these tendencies in ourselves. Indulging in a materialistic attitude we may be tempted to feel that since there is no god looking on and judging us, we can “get away” with anything. The Gita reminds us there is an inherent reciprocal principle upon which the whole world is based. Exploitation may not be witnessed by any god, but it bears the seeds of its own destruction within its very essence.

Whatever we believe or say, this remains the overriding truth of the matter. Reciprocity is as much a law as gravity, and we violate it at our own risk.

Of course, spiritual aspirants will find reciprocity to be a rewarding and delightful condition as soon as they incorporate it into their life. Sensing the inner interconnectedness of things, sharing and compassion are the best reward anyone could wish for, and the negative consequences of selfishness simultaneously come into plain sight, aiding us to turn away from it. We just have to remember that karma is complex, and there are not so many one-to-one relations between what we do and how the environment reacts. If we look to the world to reciprocate our intentions in a predictable way, we are likely to be disappointed.

Astonishingly enough, this verse is among other things a highly accurate description of the present day neoconservative movement, founded by Leo Strauss of the University of Chicago, and bearing a close kinship with the so-called Objectivist philosophy of Ayn Rand. Its philosophy is like an incurable virus. Preying on the impossibility of determining absolute truth in relation to the horizontal plane, acolytes are trained to assert lies that support their will to power, wealth and security. Deception is the fundamental principle. Its implementation is well thought out and self-ratifying. It's a very successful strategy, at least in the short term. At the present writing its members have taken control of the most powerful nation on earth and have significant claims in several others, at least.

The technique is straightforward: set aside morality, subjective as it is, then act with determination and a plausible but deceptive cover story, and keep on rolling in pursuing your own interests at the expense of everyone you view as not sharing your goals. While good hearted but less bold souls busy themselves trying to sort out the truth from fiction, neoconservatives bulldoze ahead in a political blitzkrieg. Pleas for morality are derided as weakness, and religion is cynically exploited for its value in

manipulating the gullible. One can but ruefully admire the movement's successes, while lamenting the ruined lives and piles of corpses left in its wake. It uncannily resembles a grownup version of a two-year-old's temper tantrum, presuming said infant was armed with the most powerful weapons ever devised.

As contemplatives, these tendencies must be familiar to us. We have mostly repressed them in the name of ethics, but they are in us too, a legacy of millions of years of "eat or be eaten." The widespread myth that we are the good people and others are the expendable evil ones is one of the greatest stumbling blocks to yogic awareness and realization.

In his autobiography *Love and Blessings*, Nitya Chaitanya Yati relates a discussion he had with Gandhi, who describes truth as many-faceted, like a diamond. Gandhi meant that truth includes the sum total of perspectives involved in any situation. There is the truth of individual conviction (one facet per person), the truth of the totality of individual convictions (all facets together, constituting the surface), and a transcendent truth that is the Source of all (the core structure) which paradoxically penetrates all the way to the surface.

The image demonstrates how each person has their own sense of certitude, their own version of truth, but only when you knit them all together can you begin to get a sense of the whole picture. Moreover, all the facets are held together by the solid reality of the diamond itself, without which they would only exist in isolation, and there would be no meaning in the world. We should keep in mind that relational truth refers to only specific facets of the symbolic diamond, and not the whole jewel. Taken in isolation they can mean just about anything.

The value of relational truth between one facet and another should not be minimized. It is the truth of what we experience in the transactional world, and is related to Narayana Guru's admonition "Ours is not to argue and win, but to know and let know." We are here to share, not to conquer. One facet is not more important or valuable than any other; all contribute to the beauty

and symmetry of the diamond. The basis of democracy, among other things, is a mutual respect between facets who are all aware they are only “a piece of the continent, a part of the main,” in John Donne’s immortal words.

While modern hubris-saturated politicians loudly proclaim “The truth is what we say it is,” while rushing full speed ahead into a rock wall, a contemplative first becomes familiar with their own truth and then looks to incorporate all the other needs and angles of vision into it. The All is embraced. There is no compulsion to exclude any part of the picture in order to gain advantage over others, since the maximum good of all is the goal.

Parts of the picture are always only relational truths. The Absolute is truth itself. At least in the Indian view, the Absolute is exactly what is true, whereas the relative views express—with varying degrees of accuracy—fragments of the whole. Therefore a contemplative seeks the Absolute within every event, and is not content with the relative truths of the part that fluctuates.

9) Willfully holding to this view, these men of lost souls, of little understanding, of harsh deeds, emerge as non-beneficial, effecting the world’s decline.

The Gita doesn’t particularly aim at reforming society, so this is one of the few sections somewhat concerned with human impact on the world. In its perspective, the world is a flux of roiling positives and negatives in constant conflict and interaction, and it will always be that way. The task of the individual is to break free of this maelstrom to allow rapid development of their best qualities. This requires such intense dedication that there is no time for tilting at windmills or aiming to cure eternal dilemmas.

Yet here we are asked to consider that selfish values are a tragedy that affects the whole world. When pursued without restraint they transform our earthly paradise into a hellish desert. This alone should motivate us to change our mindset. Shouldn’t we treasure the glory of the existence we have been granted, that we

had nothing to do with bringing about, and care for it to the best of our ability? Shouldn't degrading any bit of the planet we live on be one of the things we are most careful to avoid, and to mitigate when it happens? It is nothing but selfishness that closes our eyes to the tragedies strewn in our wake.

The intractability of selfishness is legendary. If you have ever tried to lift a friend out of a negative state of mind, you know how frustrating it can be: their ego parries every well-intentioned thrust like an expert swordfighter, and if you make an irrefutable point they simply tune you out. Our egos decide in advance to cling to what we want, and they are masters at holding onto it. Yogis are those who are willing to sacrifice their cherished views for a better one, and so are open to critical input. As they gain confidence in themselves, they realize there is no need to resist differing opinions. Those who are insecure and unsure of themselves are paradoxically the ones who cling hardest to their shaky beliefs.

Despite all this resistance, there is always plenty of room for helping out where help is needed, in a natural way. Since all the "demonic" values enunciated here are basically selfish, it stands to reason that the opposite "angelic" traits are largely unselfish. Even while gaining freedom in solitude, the thoughtful seeker will have plenty of interactions with people of all stripes, and the quality of the exchanges can be made valuable to both sides.

We should always remember that when Arjuna wanted to run away from the battlefield, Krishna asked him to hold his ground. The current political situation in the United States is a perfect example of what happens when all the unselfish people either retreat or are driven off the field: it becomes a wasteland of cruelty and destructiveness. Difficult though it may be, standing firm in the midst of chaos is part of the dharma of each principled person. Before this can become an accomplished reality, though, it is essential to sit at the feet of a wise preceptor and come to know who you are and what the meaning of life is, as well as how the two fit together. Then the ill winds of public greed and hatred cannot move you from your stable ground, solidly based on your

own inner understanding of truth. History is filled with the tales of well-intentioned people who acted without adequate knowledge or wisdom and quickly became part of the problem rather than part of the solution. So the Gita asks us to build a relationship with the transcendently neutral Absolute first, and it teaches us how. Once this is in place, our actions spring from the harmonious depths and are resistant to superficial motivations, which tend to have disastrous consequences.

The Christian mystic Thomas Merton sums up the results of buying into the power-mad, “dominative” view of reality, in his masterful book *Faith and Violence* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1968). When it becomes a widespread mindset, the collective compulsion “becomes a vast aggregate of organized hatred, a huge and organized death-wish, threatening its own existence and that of the entire human race.” (220-21)

10) Holding to insatiable desires, accompanied by pretentiousness, arrogance, and madness, fondly grasping false values deludedly, they act with unclean resolve.

Although this sounds like a perfect description of power mad politicians—and it is!—we have to relate it to ourselves as well. What this means is the ideas we console ourselves with about how to live and what to think are our substitutes for what we often call spirituality: true living and thinking as they pour into the present moment. Beguiling ersatz ideas are the essence of idol worship.

Thomas Merton’s aforementioned book *Faith and Violence* is a brilliant exposé of idolatry, of how we “fondly grasp false values deludedly.” He writes at length about *simulacra*, simulations, the term the Latin Vulgate (Bible) uses for idols. He claims we consider ourselves free of idolatry because we think of idols as little statues or Pagan altars, but an idol is basically an image, a *simulacrum*. He sees television (and would certainly generalize it to “screens” nowadays) as one of our most beloved idols, and we worship its simulations hour after hour, day after day. Worse, we

have established a comfortable image of ourselves as not being idolaters, so we don't worry about this most crucial aspect of spirituality. Echoing Krishna's excoriation, Merton warns us that our arrogant self-satisfaction leads us to destruction: "Our idols are by no means dumb and powerless. The sardonic diatribes of the prophets against images of wood and stone do not apply to our images that live, and speak, and smile, and dance, and allure us and lead us off to kill." (p. 153)

Merton emphasizes this with a conclusion that is a vivid description of modern political reality, and anyone seeking to grasp the relevance of the teaching has only to look at the sea of corruption we are currently drowning in:

Because we have an image (*simulacrum*) of ourselves as fair, objective, practical and humane, we actually make it more difficult for ourselves to be what we think we are. Since our "objectivity" for instance is in fact an image of ourselves as "objective" we soon take our objectivity for granted, and instead of checking the facts, we simply manipulate the facts to fit our pious conviction. In other words, instead of taking care to examine the realities of our political or social problems, we simply bring out the idols in solemn procession. "We are the ones who are right, *they* are the ones who are wrong. We are the good guys, *they* are the bad guys. We are honest, *they* are crooks." In this confrontation of images, "objectivity" ceases to be a consistent attention to fact and becomes a devout and blind fidelity to myth. If the adversary is by definition wicked, then objectivity consists simply in refusing to believe that he can possibly be honest in any circumstances whatever. If facts seem to conflict with images, then we feel that we are being tempted by the devil, and we determine that we will be all the more blindly loyal to our images. To debate with the devil would be to yield! Thus in support of realism and objectivity we simply determine beforehand that we will be swayed by no fact whatever that

does not accord perfectly with our own preconceived judgement. Objectivity becomes simple dogmatism. (pp. 154-5)

Thomas Merton is the poster child for the incisive wisdom that blossoms in the awakened mind of the contemplative. This is essentially a perfect explication of the human weaknesses that the Gita also brings to light as a caution against spiritual blindness.

11) Engrossed with infinite cares lasting till doomsday, for whom desire and enjoyment is the supreme end, cocksure that such is the way,

It's hard to believe that the people of the ancient world exhibited these identical modern characteristics. We like to think of them as easygoing, devil may care types, but apparently we haven't changed much as a species in the last few thousand years. Nor have all the "labor saving devices" and advancements in science and philosophy over the millennia set us free. Apparently, liberation must come from another direction entirely.

The Isavasya Upanishad rhetorically asks, "Whose is wealth? Relax and enjoy!" The idea is that wealth comes from our mental state, not from the endless pursuit of perishable items represented by money. External buffers don't satisfy us for long, so we have to direct our efforts to getting more in a never-ending procession of demands. The wisdom of the rishis directs us to come to happiness and contentment first, after which all our endeavors will be fulfilling instead of merely enlarging our lust for more.

The dopamine model of brain functioning is relevant here. Brain imaging studies have revealed that avoiding pain and seeking enjoyment is precisely how the brain functions on a regular basis. When our expectations based on previous experience are met, it is accompanied by a little jolt of dopamine that makes us feel good, and when they aren't met we suffer the misery of dopamine's absence. We go through life trying to adjust what went

wrong, indicated by suffering, to make it right, indicated by pleasure. This takes place on many levels, including the rational, but more importantly on what could be called the instinctual. Some pain can be avoided by intelligent analysis, but that's only the tip of the iceberg. The brain is addressing our needs in amazingly complex ways, which are fortunately veiled from our conscious awareness. Otherwise we would be overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of processing that is going on. We touch these instinctual levels when we dive deep in meditation, but if we simply ignore them, they drive us for the most part without our realizing it.

The intent of yoga is to transcend the whole business of pain-pleasure conditioning. Ordinarily we are obsessed with avoiding pain and receiving pleasure, both consciously and unconsciously. With Krishna's guidance we are trying to get to a clear space beyond the "infinite cares," the surging ocean of ups and downs that defines our mentality more thoroughly than we realize.

All too often, we mistake a sophisticated search for pleasure for the enlightenment held out in Vedanta and elsewhere as the highest ideal. In *How We Decide*, (Boston: Mariner, 2009), Jonah Lehrer describes how science has come to the same conclusion, that pleasure isn't the be-all and end-all of existence. Lehrer reports that in one experiment, electrodes were placed in rats' brains at the spot where pleasurable feelings are generated (the nucleus accumbens). Then a small electric current was run into the electrodes, producing a continuous state of bliss. The rats immediately lost interest in eating, drinking, sex, movement, everything. They became totally detached from their surroundings. In only a few days, though, they all died of thirst, because they were no longer responding to the needs of their bodies. Only a scientist would prolong the experiment to that extreme; a philosopher would see what was going on, shut off the stimulation, and give them a drink. But that's another issue. The point is that obtaining eternal pleasure isn't the answer. It's not even a good idea.

The contemplative way to avoid pain and alleviate suffering is not by replacing it with a permanent stream of expensive, exciting, dopamine-producing experiences—which is the materialist, consumerist mentality, universally held up as the ideal in popular culture—but of a dynamic, interactive absorption in the Absolute: the neutrally balanced state lying beyond the give and take of dopamine-driven actions. This is the wisdom at the heart of yoga philosophy.

12) bound by a hundred cords consisting of expectations, given to lust and anger, they strive unfairly to hoard wealth for sensual enjoyment.

If you live a life based on titillating your nervous system, then you have to make arrangements for it to continue. Costly, time-consuming arrangements, generally speaking. The temptation is never far off to gather more than your fair share of nature's bounty and cling to it, and it can very easily become a full time obsession. Each strand of income production is a binding cord woven out of demands on your time and energy.

Typically, we mistake the form for the content. This type of snare is always waiting to gobble us up, whether it's the church, the workplace, the identity group, or simply even the family. We can participate in all these things, but a yogi does it as a free spirit and not as a dutiful team member interested in upholding a collective fiction. Any fixed posture we become enamored with exerts a powerful tamasic pull to keep us mired in place.

Narayana Guru, in *Atmopadesa Satakam*, pictured a contemplative sitting calmly under a great tree. He is peaceful but exceedingly careful to avoid the clinging vines that grow up the trunk, that reach out their tendrils and try to bind him fast. Like him, we are called to “come out” of our false identities through contemplation, and not merely substitute a new form of bondage for the old, but break free and remain free. In this eternal quest we

have the good company of wise seers from near and far. Because we so easily forget ourselves, they help us remember who we are.

According to Krishna, we should live our lives without expectations about the outcome of our actions. In the Gita's poetic but antique language this is expressed as relinquishing the fruits of our actions. The point is that expectations undergird most of what we do, and disrupt the naturalness of the flow of our lives. In the dopamine model just described, the brain is an elegant and complicated expectation-meeting machine. Obviously we cannot safely abandon the functioning of our brain. The secret is that our conscious expectations block out the intelligent expectations generated in the unconscious. When we hold back from what we superficially imagine to be in our best interests, what really *is* in our best interest is allowed to bubble up to the surface.

As must be obvious by now, Eastern philosophies like Taoism, Buddhism and Vedanta understand that extreme poverty is the flip side or shadow of extreme wealth. Polar opposites arise from each other, and the solution to gross disparities is to aim for the middle rather than the extremes. Thus egalitarian socialism and democracy are in tune with these philosophies, while capitalism and fascism are not. The former unite, while the latter divide. It isn't that in actual life everything has to be identical, but the direction should be toward equality of opportunity. Equality is not the same as uniformity, by the way. The Gita presents a three dimensional, integral philosophy, in contradistinction to the linear Western models that imagine that by rushing ahead you drag everybody else along with you. Or, as with fascism, that you drive them ahead of you like cattle.

Philip Hyde, in his book *The Gift*, makes an eloquent case for the circulation of wealth as the guarantor of community well being. This was taken to ludicrous levels of excessive gifting by some of our ancestors. Hoarding is like putting wealth in a deep freeze. It is often done for reasons of psychological insecurity, but in this verse it is described as being used for sensual pleasures. Huge houses filled with fancy furniture are a typical symptom in our modern

day. Nice... but cold and dead, when you come right down to it. Most of the rooms are vacant most of the time, symbolizing Krishna's point exactly. There's nobody home.

13) "This today has been gained by me; this particular end I will get; this wealth is mine, and that wealth also will be mine;

In the words of Yama, Death, in the Katha Upanishad 2.6, Shankara's translation: "The other world never rises before the careless child deluded by the delusion of wealth. This is the world, he thinks, there is no other; thus he falls again and again under my sway."

It's so hard to read these verses without thinking of our current political and business leaders. The Gita sounds as if it was written this month. The art is to take these "demonic" attitudes and perform a self-examination to see where they might be lurking in you, too. Like Hercules battling the hydra, you really have to keep after selfish attitudes as they continually spring up from the depths of the vasana seedbed. It does more harm than good to imagine that only other people embody demonic values and you don't. It's a perfect smokescreen for them to hide behind and stay alive. So always turn the teachings toward yourself.

Once more we turn to Thomas Merton, who exemplifies the contemplative conscience at its best:

Indeed, the Western contemplative can say that he feels himself much closer to the Zen monks of ancient Japan than to the busy and impatient men of the West... who think in terms of money, power, publicity, machines, business, political advantage, military strategy—who seek, in a word, the triumphant affirmation of their own will, their own power, considered as the end for which they exist. Is this not perhaps the most foolish of all dreams, the most tenacious and damaging of illusions?

...The contemplative way requires first of all and above all renunciation of this obsession with the triumph of the individual or collective will to power. For this aggressive and self-assertive drive to possess and to exert power implies a totally different view of reality than that which is seen when one travels the contemplative way. The aggressive and dominative view of reality places at the center the individual self with its bodily form, its feelings and emotions, its appetites and needs, its loves and hates, its actions and reactions. All these are seen as forming together a basic and indubitable reality to which everything else must be referred, so that all other things are also estimated in their individuality, their actions and reactions, and all the ways in which they impinge upon the interests of the individual self.

The world is then seen as a multiplicity of conflicting and limited beings, all enclosed in the prisons of their own individuality, all therefore complete in a permanent and vulnerable incompleteness, all seeking to find a certain completeness by asserting themselves at the expense of others, dominating and using others. (*Faith and Violence*, 219-20)

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have written a book called *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009). Examining health and economic data from across the globe, they found that the greater the disparity between rich and poor in a country, the more pronounced are a wide range of problems, including crime, diminished longevity, teen pregnancy, mental illness, obesity, violence, and so on. The interesting part is that these affect the entire spectrum, the well-to-do along with the poor. The perplexing thing is why, after centuries of evidence and instruction to the contrary, some people continue to be so strongly motivated by selfishness.

A significant amount of spiritual endeavor is motivated by a belief in the accumulation of merit. If we think of the wealth of this

verse as meaning our personal spiritual accomplishment rather than political or financial gain, we can “out” our ego in its secret scorekeeping. Most of us have been raised under a school system obsessed with rating every participant in minute detail, so it should come as no surprise that this would carry over into our spiritual striving. Getting that hatha yoga pose just right, following instructions to the letter, counting beads exactly, and all the rest, can produce the little bursts of pride we have been trained, like performing seals at the zoo, to work for. So at the same time as we read these verses as referring to social arrogance, we can also use them to redirect ourselves toward honest humility. For instance, whether you struggle or are expert at stretching your muscles, you are working at the same game. It’s just as wonderful to be a beginner as to be an adept, so why not be content at every stage? There is not some mystical moment when you sit in a full lotus that you become enlightened—it’s just a way to sit. The spiritual ego is gentler than the political ego, but is nonetheless a serious impediment to the creative intuition that is freed up by the yoga of the Gita.

When we have a similar mindset to the crazed powermongers we profess to despise, we are subtly reinforcing the attitude we deplore. We have to learn how to live without the false lures, and perhaps others will learn too, from our example. It is in our capacity as yogis to add just one more humble and unselfish person to the total: our self.

14) that enemy has been killed by me; and others I will also kill; I am the Lord; I am the enjoyer; I have satisfied my ambitions; I am powerful and happy;

By now it should be clear that these verses are the secret voice of the ego brought out in the open. At its most raw, the ego is barbaric and primitive, a hungry predator, capable of murder. It is even capable of killing itself in order to maintain its inviolability, in the act known as suicide.

The degradation of the world that egotism brings about is to instigate a “survival of the most ruthless” mentality. Such an attitude breeds insecurity and paranoia even in the supposed winners, and drives them to link up with similar types to form a gang or mafia, and the more defined by harsh rules the better. Curiously, violence is gender-specific to a large degree. As Norman Rush puts it in his book *Mating* (1991): “A deep calm drenches the male soul when it feels the persona it inhabits being firmly screwed into a socket in some iron hierarchy or other, best of all a hierarchy legitimately about killing.” (224)

All’s fair in love and war means that to the aggressor there are no holds barred, no binding laws outside those of loyalty to your own team. Truth and justice don’t matter. The aggressive approach fails precisely due to dissociation from what is true or fair. The venting of egoistic emotions is a secondary failing.

On a personal scale, we “kill” our enemies in a number of psychological ways: we ignore them, we sweep their claims aside, we ridicule them, all so we can feel secure on our perch in a fool’s paradise. We identify our happiness with the satisfaction of our ambitions, which is exactly the goal-oriented lifestyle Krishna aims to correct with his advice to not focus on the fruits of action. Unitive action does not need goading. In fact, it requires the opposite: the quieting down of external prompts in order to balance the mind and open the door to the internal flow of creativity.

15&16) I am rich and well-born; who else is like me? I will sacrifice; I will give; I will rejoice”—thus deluded by ignorance maddened by many thoughts, caught within the snare of confusing values, addicted to lustful gratifications, they fall into an unclean hell.

If possible, Krishna’s excoriation of selfish delusions is becoming even more intense as we move toward the climax of the chapter. In fact he is making a very subtle point, where the subtle arrogance lurking in self-satisfaction is shown to be a form of

spiritual derangement, even when it is cloaked in the guise of generosity.

Every time we pin down a fixed description of ourself, we substitute an abstraction for the flow of life, and invariably this is done in service of our self-image, as padding for our persona. The result is a break with inner harmony leading to a split in the psyche. This is among the most prevalent and least criticized types of spiritual egoism, partly because it doesn't seem it should have such a profound effect on our wellbeing. Yet it does.

The religious attitude that material wealth is a sign of God's favor, along with its widespread evolutes in which social status is placed above psychological stature, is roundly and unequivocally blasted in this verse. The cruelty and degradedness of aristocracies has been one of the major obstacles to progress of the human race, and the corruption of the wealthy in history is legendary. Yet the appeal of profits never seems to wear off. Monetary goals are concrete; spiritual probes are mysterious and abstract. Therefore they are much more soothing to the anxious soul.

The meaning of wealth here covers the whole range from material to spiritual, with the latter of particular interest to truth seekers. How many gurus have gone down in flames after their operations became big business and they were surrounded by crowds of admirers? Not all, but many. Being attuned to the freedom of the Absolute, it is tempting to believe that anything we do is permissible. It is so easy to disrupt the harmony of any situation, we should always allow for the possibility. Letting go is an inward gesture, not an excuse to go crazy, even in the name of wisdom.

The Bible agrees with Krishna here. Job, 32:9 reads: "Great men are not always wise." You can say that again! We also know that "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely," even when its mantle is donned in the name of the common good. And this is true on a humble, individual level as well as in the recognized halls of the rich and powerful: to our own egos, we are the greatest. On top of that, the smug satisfaction we are likely to

feel when we believe we've gotten everything just right is bound to put a damper on our freedom of spirit, even if we don't outwardly profess our superiority.

While we pay lip service to happiness being independent of worldly circumstances, until we truly tap into the bliss of the Absolute running in our veins, the principle remains hypothetical. It is possible to spend a whole lifetime seeking financial security, and never, ever feel secure. That's because true solidity in life is a psychological condition, not a material one. Yet few are the voices that speak up for such a commonsense attitude.

Not coincidentally, the ordinary egotistical attitude toward selfless service is unrelentingly denounced by Krishna here. Our very posture of selflessness is self-motivated: we are selfless for selfish reasons, like those who do good works with the expectation of securing a reserved seat in heaven, or even simply "changing the world." We are consciously directing our kindness, and adopting some sort of martyr complex around it, instead of living it unitively. Such a dualistic attitude is the reason most revolutions, whether of consciousness or politics, transform from idealism into repressive pragmatism.

It takes a first class guru to root out these sly types of hypocrisy, which fool most of the people most of the time. True unselfishness is not defined by any actions; it stems from knowing all beings as ultimately rooted in the Absolute. If we believe we are helping those less fortunate, then we don't understand fortune.

All of the delusions mentioned in this rant by Krishna have their origin in not being attuned to the Absolute as a unitive principle within all creation. The Absolute is seated in the heart of all (X, 20), and only if we open our heart to it will we grow out of the miasma of miserable attitudes listed in this chapter. Traumatized humans insist on toughness as essential to their self defense, but being open-hearted does not mean being either soft-headed or overly tender-hearted. It should never preclude expertise in action, and it is aware in the broadest sense of the word. By contrast, tough minded hard-heartedness is a kind of willful

ignorance, intentionally blocking awareness of the condition of the Other. We arbitrarily decree that the world is mindless and unfeeling so that we can abuse it without a twinge of conscience.

Assembly line production of meat animals for food is a perfect example of hard-heartedness in practice. The creatures are kept in conditions that can only be described as torture. Confined in cages little bigger than their bodies for their entire lives, they cannot move, much less perform normal activities. They are clearly aware of their predicament, and it drives them insane. Their environment is toxic with waste and barely controlled diseases, and the air is perfused with the tension from their tormented souls. To be in contact with them you have to shut out any compassionate thoughts, lest their suffering overwhelm your mind's defenses. The consumer, who is only aware of the neatly packaged end product, is free to eat it in "blissful" ignorance. If they had to endure similar conditions for even one day—an eternity of hell for sure—they could never again close the door of their minds to the horror of it. The corrupt system depends on maintaining a general ignorance and propagating a veneer of respectability. As a good friend of mine always says to me, "If I had to kill my own meat, I'd become a vegetarian."

This is but one way we hate the Absolute in other's bodies. All creatures are sentient. They all love and cherish their freedom, however limited by their evolutionary development it may be. If we must eat them, at least they should be allowed to enjoy life on their own terms for a period, followed by a quick dispatch. The so-called rationalization that cruelty to animals is dictated by economic necessity is pure self-serving propaganda. Sure, it's cheaper, but that kind of rationalization should never ever be on the list of options. Part of the price we have to pay for everything we do is to keep it sane, in tune with sustainability and universal kindness.

Sadly, our politics is not much different than the factory-farming of animals. If the populace was aware of the disgusting crimes regularly committed behind the veneer of patriotism, it

would be so nauseated it would never stomach it. We are served prepackaged and sanitized sound bites just the way we buy our hot dogs and hamburgers, and we consume them likewise in complacent and intentional ignorance. Anyone who does so is fully deserving of Krishna's scorn. Spirituality means waking up. Sleepwalking is for the living dead, the zombies.

17) Self-righteous, perversely immobile, filled with pride and intoxication of wealth, they perform sacrifices ostentatiously, which are only nominal sacrifices, not conforming to scriptural rules.

Spiritual and political leaders who titillate their followers' sadistic tendencies in order to make their church or private coffers grow are among the few true "sinners" of this world, according to Krishna. It's amazing and dismaying how successful they are year after year, century after century. So special thanks to those spiritual leaders who are brave enough to stand up to the hypocrites within their own faith, and provide an option for those who want to learn to love rather than hate.

Televangelists are an easy mark for condemnation, with their ostentatious prostrations at the feet of a jealous and myopic god, but have you heard American talk radio in the twenty-first century? It is tailor made for this chapter of the Gita. Self-righteousness trumps all sensibility. There is a vicious bullying mentality that is completely closed to all discourse. "Monsters from the id" are unleashed at all creatures that fail to subscribe to a chosen narrow view, empowered by the belief that might makes right. It must have some appeal to a vengeful strain carried over from thwarted childhood egos. The arguments generally break down into thinly veiled name-calling. The power of those held in its thrall is undeniable, resembling a psychic hurricane, or better yet a tornado, swirling in tight circles like a frenzied dog chasing its tail. Such storms cannot be stopped in an instant, they have to gradually lose their vigor through lack of the input of additional energy. They are

stoked by money energy from smirking behind-scenes string pullers, which encourages the continuation of the ranting and raving, as much as by reinforcement of fellow cave dwellers. Such shows, which appear to have a popular following, are a projection into the public realm of the secret vicious lusts harbored by frustrated and beaten down human beings. Thus the value of ostentatious sacrifice: it brings a flood tide of sycophants swarming to your cause.

Poet W. B. Yeats summed up this state of affairs most ably in 1920, in his famous poem *The Second Coming*, which includes:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats' anarchy is psychological, clothed in righteous garb, and not necessarily a political ideology.

An almost uncanny prescience is revealed by the following excerpt from *Meetings With Remarkable Men*, by G. I. Gurdjieff (Arkana, 1985). Relating to print journalism in the age before television and talk radio took it even lower, Gurdjieff quotes an "intelligent, elderly Persian":

Owing to this unprincipled daily literature, the thinking function of people has come to be even further separated from their individuality; and thereby conscience, which was occasionally awakened in them, has now ceased to participate in this thinking of theirs. They are thus deprived of those factors which formerly gave people a more or less tolerable life, if only in respect of their mutual relations.

To our common misfortune, this journalistic literature, which is becoming more widespread in the life of people year by year, weakens the already weakened mind of man still more by laying it open without resistance to all kinds of deceit and delusion, and leads it astray from relatively well-founded thinking, thus stimulating in people, instead of sane judgement, various unworthy properties, such as incredulity, indignation, fear, false shame, hypocrisy, pride and so on and so forth. (18-19)

Why aren't people acutely embarrassed by buying into these ridiculous pretenses, instead of being so easily drawn in? A wise yogi takes care to dispassionately assess every claim thrown at them, keeping in mind the myth of the lemmings, who are supposed to plunge in a maddened peer group off a cliff to their death, or stampeding cattle that, even as they realize their danger at the last moment, are unable to stop because the force of the herd behind pushes them over the brink.

Again, there is a very subtle principle at the heart of this electrical storm. A major implication of the teaching is to not allow ourselves to be swept up in fads or a mob mentality, which humans have a powerful tendency to do. It is not a sin to feel compelled by our surroundings, but indulging in its dictates is bound to get us into trouble.

18) Resorting to egoism, force, insolence, lust, and anger, these envious ones hate Me [the Absolute] in their own and other's bodies.

Krishna now sums up the core principle in everything he's said: since we are all the Absolute in essence, if we hate anything we are hating the Absolute, which has assumed that form for the moment. This doesn't mean we have to countenance misdeeds, obviously. No one can be more than a partial representation of perfection, so we all have room for improvement. But hating

something doesn't lead it to light; it makes its excesses more extreme. By comprehending the whole context we can discern how to be helpful, instead of polarizing against a supposed enemy and giving it energy. The Gita's advice is to catch ourselves in the act of indulging in powerful emotions like these and mitigate them with an infusion of wisdom.

All of us struggle with the emotions on this list at times. In actual situations our spiritual self can make excellent decisions that perfectly accord with a problem, but we block that ability by having preconceived ideas about "what to do" when certain of our buttons are pushed. In preparing to meet dangerous situations we must not commit ourselves to fixed plans and programs, but instead learn to listen to the "still small voice" within. What we decided in the past about how to act is not guaranteed to match the present, but we apply it anyway, often with disastrous results. The solution is to throw away the Golden Disc of imagery, the preprogrammed plan, and trust that we will meet contingencies with our best effort as they occur. This is equivalent to the Biblical injunction, "Take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." (Luke 12. 11-12) In old-fashioned language, Jesus is recommending that we don't plan our words and actions in advance, but stay fluid and respond according to the Holy Spirit of the moment.

The epitome of this line of thought is the motto: "Don't premeditate—meditate."

It is always shocking how powerful hate is, a portal through which all our thwarted hopes and desires, turned to acid, are flung upon the outside world. It is strengthened by toxic religious beliefs that boil down to the insistence that we must reject the world—and even ourselves—to know God. Krishna assures us here and elsewhere that God is in everything, and rejection is not only unnecessary, it is a failed policy, impossible, and a shameful affront to the wonder of creation.

Somewhere along the line we have been trained to believe that black is white, or, with Orwell, war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength.

I may have already told the story how as a child I was beaten up several times by a bully in my school. His technique was to say as he was punching me, “I’m not doin’ anything. (whap) I’m not hittin’ ya. (thunk) I ain’t hittin’ ya. (crack) I’m a nice guy (smash).” It added a psychological attack to the physical and was very effective, because as the victim gaped in disbelief at the obvious lies, we’d let our guard down for the next haymaker. It’s politely called a snow job. Observing the American political scene reminds me of this technique, except the media provides the snow for the corporate scalawags. While economically raping and pillaging, stealing everything not nailed down or otherwise, these morally blind institutions wrap themselves in the flag, insisting that they and only those who agree with them are patriotic. Naysayers are shouted down, bullied. (Public pundit Ann Coulter has openly suggested that liberals should be tortured, for instance.) It works as well for them as my schoolyard bully’s disinformation campaign worked for him. While honest folk are sifting through the lies and trying to reestablish equilibrium, the criminals are busy cleaning out the house. As they eviscerate their own country, along with the rest of the world, they are even cheered on by many of their victims who consider themselves patriots too. They’re convinced their very self-definition is connected with the greed mongers: “If I’m a patriot, and my president tells me what he’s doing is patriotic, I guess I have to support him. If I didn’t I wouldn’t be a patriot.”

Lately, more than the average number of naked invasions of sovereign countries by more powerful neighbors have occurred, though it’s certainly nothing new. It’s mandatory that the attacks are accompanied by claims of “self-defense” and protestations of innocence, necessity, and so on. The claims throw a fog over the obvious, that they are invading and terrorizing due to their own

unrestrained greed, and any pretence will do. Hired “pundits” spend their days justifying these heinous acts.

Certain religions take this to another level, metaphysically speaking. Followers are diverted from the valuable advice and sensibility at the root of their religion to simple cheerleading for their own “team.” All their authentic energies—monetary and political as well as spiritual—are channeled through the religion’s infrastructure. The original teachings are recrafted for every generation to maintain the bondage to false prophets and real profits, until the lies are piled so deep it is nearly impossible to sort them out. If anyone dares to entertain any doubts they are obviously not a true believer, and should be energetically corrected or expelled from the group.

Whether political or religious, partisanship requires a dualistic attitude, an enemy “other” who you can exploit or attack. Since this other is just as much the Absolute as the home team, this amounts to hating God in other’s bodies. From an elevated perspective, you are hating and exploiting yourself. Rest assured you will not be hearing that from the pulpit!

Oftentimes hating the body is taken literally. Puritanical believers consider the body and its miraculously ingenious functions to be a desecration of the purity of God. They actively strive to suppress not only their own awareness and activities, but those of everyone else as well. The psychological process by which natural urges and curiosities are first repressed and eventually transformed into lustful anti-lust, is well known. People then lash out at precisely what they secretly crave. The hidden message is “I’ve been denied my pleasure, so you can’t have any either!” Such seriously unbalanced attitudes are thoroughly opposed to the yogic state. Repression is not even transactionally functional, as those who indulge in it are famous for sinning in secret. We can read the veiled lusts of the puritans in exactly what they complain about. Shakespeare put this wisdom whimsically in Hamlet: “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.”

The list of hypocritical actions of the self-righteous is too extensive to even begin to enumerate. Once a person sets out to examine life with an unrepressed eye, hypocrisy stands out all over the place. But there is little to be gained by being shocked by it. The lesson we should draw is to be honest with ourselves, and tolerant of other people's actions to the degree they do minimal damage. Our attitudes can be simple and direct: cause no harm. Be kind. Don't be sucked in by lies.

Above all, we should resist exhortations to physically punish and brainwash children. Once the natural, innate joy of children is beaten out of them, they grow up to be the next generation of abusers. They cannot tolerate seeing in others the happiness they have been denied, so they lash out at it wherever it appears. Again, the cure is to examine those urges if we have them, trace them to our thwarted natural instincts, and bathe them in kindness and care. Call them out into the open and express them. We're talking about joy here. It's not evil, no matter how much rationalization is brought to bear to convince us it is. Common sense should carry the day.

19) These cruel haters in the world, worst of men, I hurl unceasingly even into the degraded wombs of demons;

On the surface this sounds like the ancient belief that people are reincarnated according to their virtues, and that's all right as far as it goes. The idea that virtuous and yogically inclined people attain better future lives was examined earlier (VI, 40-45). Here we have the opposite view: those who do harm are born as lowlife humans, or animals, or insects, or demons even, depending on how bad they are. It's very hard to work your way back up once you cycle down and become increasingly entangled in necessity.

This should be an admirable scheme to insure that everyone is good all the time, but in practice it doesn't work any better than the other arbitrary moral codes scattered about, abstract threats of jail or hell or whatever. That's because in most people the roots of

hatred lie much deeper than their conscious attitudes. The brain models its concepts of future pain based on the punishment it has received during its development. I suppose that's why many caring parents are eager to provide suitably terrifying examples for their children to contemplate. Many children will rebel against such treatment sooner or later, while others employ the strategy of becoming complacent and well behaved.

The causes and cures of antisocial behavior are endlessly debated by psychologists and physicians, and it's a worthwhile subject to look into. Yoga practice is an efficient technique for exposing our psychic roots to the light of consciousness, where they can be somewhat tamed. Then we don't have to either accept or reject those punitive pressures.

I take rebirth as symbolizing the repetition of thoughts or behaviors and the way they shape future potentials in the present life, rather than simple bodily reincarnation after death. Krishna has already given the Gita's revaluation of reincarnation as the Absolute incarnating repeatedly. Karma thus passes from one person to another in a very complex fashion. In the modern world we now interpret reincarnation in terms of genetic transference.

It is very freeing to imagine that our consciousness is eternal, and that the universe would not have bothered to evolve such an amazing capacity just to discard it. In that sense the idea of reincarnation should inspire us to care about life in every sense. On the flip side, if the idea of reincarnation is used to postpone our evolutionary efforts until later—which is a far more common attitude, I'm afraid—then the concept is toxic. We can see that the former belief is unitive while the latter is dualistic. Dualism divorces us from life, so in place of life after death we get death before death. Whatever their beliefs may be, yogis examine them closely to preserve the beneficial ones and discard the encumbrances. Dying prematurely is something we definitely want to avoid.

Symbolically speaking, what we have as the “wombs of demons” are nightmare hell states of the mind. By causing harm to

those around us we push ourselves deeper and deeper into misery, which causes us to lash out furiously, which produces more inner blindness, and so on, in an endless cycle. Hell, like heaven, is available to us right now. They are psychological states, not geographical locations.

Need it be reiterated that no angry God is actually throwing sinners into any inferno? This is a metaphor, but a powerfully worded cautionary statement nonetheless. Because of the reciprocal nature of the universe, selfish actions based on lust, hate or greed end up debasing the perpetrator. Once the descent into untruth or separation from reality has begun in earnest, it tends to compound and reinforce itself, making escape ever more difficult. In effect we are hurling ourselves into the inferno, but saying it that way wouldn't have quite the poetic potency of Krishna's warning as it stands.

Observing the collapse of immensely powerful governments from corruption is an apt object lesson. Secrecy and deception rule the day, and so whoever wants to play the game becomes caught up in a web of total mistrust and suspicion. The facts must be suppressed at all costs! You are only as secure as the good faith of the other criminals conspiring with you warrants. When the few remaining honest participants are killed or driven away, what remains is a wasteland to be looted in which the players who stop to repent become the carrion for the next wave. Accompanying the parasitism, innocent bystanders are swept into a punitive judicial black hole from which there is no escape, no matter how hard they try. It's hard to imagine a more torturous hell world than that!

A story that often comes to mind is of a friend's grandmother, an old hard-bitten Texas fundamentalist who lived her whole life in absolute certainty about JEEsus and where she was headed after death. You know the type: bitter, suspicious, anger and hatred boiling out all the time, her only pleasure picturing you burning in hell. Her "cruel hatred of the world" was an obvious defensive shield to everyone outside that particular behavioral sink. But a couple of weeks before her death, as her

demise loomed up, all her false beliefs evaporated and she was left totally unprepared and terrified. She finished her life miserably bemoaning her fate, with no truth anywhere to hold on to. If she had had a viable relationship with a proper guru during her life, they would not have permitted her to “lay up her treasures where moth and rust doth corrupt,” to paraphrase the guru she paid lip service to. Instead, together they would have explored the origins of her hatred, lanced the boils, and taught her how to bring heavenly love onto the earth. Then she might have passed away in peace.

20) attaining a demonic womb, deluded by birth after birth, not reaching Me, O Son of Kunti, they go to the lowest state.

This completes the sentence of the previous verse. Once we are caught in a miserable state of mind due to dualistic thinking, delusory ideas arise one after another. Because the deluded one is out of tune with the Absolute (“not reaching Me”), projections of illusory thoughts appear before the mind’s eye, reinforcing the darkness. Such negative cycles lead to a rock bottom of outright insanity if there is no mitigating concept of unity. Examples are even more bountiful today than they were in ancient times, so the reader can picture them without assistance. They are ubiquitous.

The Law of Karma is not hoodwinked by clever dissimulation. As the Guru of Avon once put it, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Our ideas have to be brought in line with reality, lest we lose touch with it and sink to a perpetually dismal state. Author Philip K. Dick provided an excellent definition of reality, by the way: “Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.”

“The lowest state” sounds like the Semitic hell, but it does not reference any imaginary realm. Thoughts lead us either in ascending or descending dialectics, either freeing or binding us depending on how we put disparate elements together. For example, always blaming others for perceived ills exacerbates

problems and diverts attention away from their solution, whereas accepting a measure of responsibility and exploring realistic causes leads to their amelioration. This is quite possibly the most important spiritual idea of all; one which the ego resists with both great passion and wily sneakiness. Our very first step should be to turn the arrow of interest away from the warped reflections of the outside world and back into our own psyche.

We can start with this chapter itself, which appears to be referring to all those other bad people out there. Let them study the Gita in their own time! This is for us. We too are deluded by our beliefs, and they continually resurface to trap us in a loveless, sterile mentality. We are cut off from the Republic of Heaven within only because we are looking the other way. We need to reshape the “demonic womb” of our ideas so we can give birth to beauty rather than ugliness. A simple change (okay, not so simple, but doable) converts a demonic womb into a divine one.

21) Triple is the infernal gate, destructive of the Self: lust, hate and greed; therefore these three should be avoided.

Once the One Beyond has been sighted, negative emotions fall away of their own accord. In the meantime, we can intelligently grasp how binding they are and intentionally strive to avoid their grip. If this is done without conscious intent, we run the risk of repressing them and driving them underground, so a more thoroughgoing solution is to be sought. Rightly understood, it is possible to use our negative emotions to energize the search for the harmony of the Absolute.

Lust and greed, often but not necessarily impelled by hatred and anger, are at the heart of the profit motive, the cornerstone of free market capitalism as well as selfish individualism. Profit is unarguably a legitimate motivating force, as are hunger and thirst, but they are all oriented to basic necessities. Satisfying basic needs can exacerbate competition at the expense of community. The results of basing our philosophy on this lowest common

denominator are plain to see on every hand. As wealth moves from the community into private hands and disappears from view, the social world begins to crumble, and the less fortunate are forced to fight over the crumbs. Spirituality by any meaningful definition raises its sights above necessity to draw its motivations from more subtle sources. Healing the sick, self-realization, community involvement and artistic expression are but a few of the more noble aspirations that have attracted spiritual folk from the beginning.

On top of this, throughout civilized history the brightest intellects that have led humankind forward have been given various forms of financial aid to allow them as much freedom from necessity as possible. Whether in monasteries, think tanks, universities, or simply patronized by royalty or charitable foundations, they have been bequeathed support to concentrate on matters of unusual importance. Because the best ideas are not necessarily money makers, being forced to compete for profits in the marketplace would have squandered their talents. Happily, humans have not always been so short sighted and materially-oriented as they are in the present, though that tendency is by no means new. Society would be much better served by fostering the natural interests of people rather than removing all supports just because some small number are freeloaders. To spite the laziest (or gentlest) among us we are cutting off the best and brightest.

Society could just as easily employ an army of creative problem solvers as the one it maintains of killers and destroyers, and at enlightened moments in history it has.

There is a dialectic mean between a person being supported by the community to probe deeply into matters of the mind and spirit, and a representative of religion who is merely faking it to extract money from the faithful. The great value in electing someone to probe into the Unknown is similar to sending a political representative to the distant seat of government, but in both cases they have to be worthy of our faith. In a global world teeming with people it is very hard to know who to trust, but that doesn't mean we should abandon being trusting, only that we

should be extra careful where we place it. At the very least we can steer clear of lust, hate and greed, which are justly famous for luring us away from common sense.

22) A man who has abandoned these three gates of darkness observes what conduces to his progress, and thereafter attains to the Supreme Path.

Here we see the simple truth that all we have to do to begin to regain awareness of our unity with the Absolute is to stop deluding ourselves. The Absolute is our very nature, but we have forgotten who we are in our scheming, and adopted a very poor substitute. As soon as we stop feeding our false persona, we can sense a steady rain of beneficial influences pouring into us, which will gently direct us to progress back toward contact with our inner Source. The Supreme Path is simply the one we take through our life while directly connected with the Absolute. We are either wandering lost in a darkened wood, or joyously stepping out with a bright inner light to inform our steps.

Each of us has an inner guru that can guide us to learn and grow in the way that suits us best. Others should be welcome to offer suggestions based on their own experience—which is the ever hopeful purpose of religion at its best—but we need to discover our own truths to make them fully real. In principle the outer guru and the inner guide are one and the same. Outer and inner are yet another duality that effortlessly dissipates as the unitive vision begins to hold sway.

From another angle, when we act selfishly we block the “radio waves from the center of the universe” (or the core of our being) that can illuminate our path and conduce to our progress. It’s a simple matter of screening: attention to one reduces awareness of the other. Which way to turn should be apparent to us once we know about this. We have to listen to the promptings of our emotions, and then sort out the wheat from the chaff, the legitimate from the egotistical.

Jonah Lehrer puts this same idea in more scientific terms:

Dopamine neurons automatically detect the subtle patterns that we would otherwise fail to notice; they assimilate all the data that we can't consciously comprehend. And then, once they come up with a set of refined predictions about how the world works, they translate these predictions into emotions.... These wise yet inexplicable feelings are an essential part of the decision-making process. Even when we think we know nothing, our brains know something. That's what our feelings are trying to tell us. (48)

Science is also coming to see how we routinely subvert our inner intelligence. Citing a study of punditry done by Philip Tetlock of UC Berkeley, Lehrer quotes his conclusion:

Tetlock writes, "The dominant danger [for pundits] remains hubris, the vice of closed-mindedness, of dismissing dissonant possibilities too quickly." Even though practically all the professionals in Tetlock's study claimed that they were dispassionately analyzing the evidence—everybody wanted to be rational—many of them were actually indulging in some conveniently cultivated ignorance. Instead of encouraging the arguments inside their heads [which presented contrary evidence], these pundits settled on answers, and then came up with reasons to justify those answers. They were, as Tetlock put it, "prisoners of their preconceptions." (209-10)

Being a mindful observer needs to be understood correctly, as mindfulness can as easily interrupt emotional input as draw our attention to it. One trick is to be non-judgmental. The world is becoming full of video cameras and computer programs watching our every move, and we are becoming very self-conscious about our actions in public. Even without that we have the insidious teachings of religion that lead us to believe we are being

continuously monitored by “gods.” The self-consciousness this engenders causes us to deliberate our actions rather than act freely, which takes the spontaneity out of living. We want to be free to act, as long as our actions are non-harmful and intelligently considered. If we become an overly critical observer of ourself, we will be caught in a joy- and spirit-killing state of mind.

The idea of becoming a detached observer is to break the grip of chaotically impulsive action grounded in unnecessary desires that we are prone to as neophytes. Once that has happened, we should move into unitive action, where you immerse yourself in what you are doing, totally, without reservations or second thoughts. Then the observer and the observed merge into a harmonious state of pure action, of living a pure event, where there is no more need for inhibitingly critical self-observation.

23) He who, having abandoned the guiding principles of scripture, acts under the promptings of desire—he cannot attain perfection, nor happiness, nor the Supreme Path.

After all the training to become free and expert in expressing our inner potentials, this pair of verses extolling scripture comes as a bit of a shock, seemingly out of step with the rest of the Gita. Several factors mitigate this initial impression.

First of all, keep in mind that the Gita has high standards for a work to be considered scriptural. Most of the tawdry and confusing texts of obligatory rituals that we call scripture fall far outside its definition. Only the finest distillation of wisdom rates this nomenclature. It goes without saying that many writings—or ravings—widely regarded as scriptural are in fact ghastly, hate-filled garbage. A wise person will never unquestioningly accept the opinions of others about such matters, but will doubt even the most hallowed social conventions.

Those basted in their childhood with religious injunctions often think of scriptures as a kind of strict penal code before which everyone must bow down in terror lest they be subjected to eternal

torment. This is definitely part of the problem rather than part of the solution! Moreover, the overt or implied threat of hell prompts the believer to act on the basis of desire: the desire to avoid eternal punishment. This is contrary to the neutrality necessary for true stability and happiness.

The Gita was composed in a time when there were very few books, and they were not so much conglomerations of rules as compilations of inspired poetic insight for how to deport oneself through life. Such genuine scriptures help their votaries to be free, and rely on intelligence rather than fear to accomplish their goals. Freedom from fear, as we have seen, brings happiness in the present, obviating the need to long for incarnation in future heaven worlds.

24) Therefore the scripture is your authority in deciding what should and should not be done. Understanding what is indicated for guidance in scripture, you should do work here.

After much thought, Nataraja Guru began his magnum opus, *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, with the simple sentence “Science seeks certitude.” Certitude is as mysterious as truth, and like it, is susceptible to misplaced enthusiasm. We can feel quite certain about things that are not at all true; in fact, history contains an unending litany of people being motivated by certainty about matters that had tragic consequences and which seem ludicrous in retrospect. The contemplative must be cautious about the soaring sense of inner certainty and make sure it has a reasonable basis. Although certitude is exactly what is sought, it must be doubted and questioned, and held up to comparison with the accepted standards of wise predecessors. Only if it matches those guidelines can it be considered legitimate. As Mark Twain said, “It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.”

The Gita is returning to solid ground after exploring the most sublime reaches of human potential, preparing the student to

reenter the actual world. Pure spiritual intuition does not avail in all circumstances except in the rarest of cases; for the majority of us—those who plan to maintain a measure of connection with society—there should be external guidance available. While an enlightened guru is an ideal guide, readily available scriptures fill that role for most people most of the time.

The dilemma of whether to surrender to outside advice or one's inner promptings is perennial, that is to say eternal. There is no hard and fast answer for it. We have to enlist all our resources all the time in order to be on the safe side.

Very often even the wisest person will be puzzled as to the right course of action. Rather than being led astray by the persuasive arguments of someone with a vested interest, not excepting one's own ego, the neutral wisdom of a scripture may offer superior advice. At least advice worth considering. The ego can be very convincing in rationalizing an unwise course of action. By comparing our inner promptings with a widely admired hypothesis, we can be assured that the desire is legitimate and beneficial rather than merely selfishness masquerading as virtue.

Taking the most important teachings of the Gita as a whole, scripture would have to be considered a valuable adjunct to an intuitive connection with one's true inner nature, one's dharma.

One can't help but think that the Gita may be offering itself as an eminently wise scripture to be attended to. While we are aware of Godel's second incompleteness theorem, which asserts that systems asserting their own consistency are inconsistent, we can bring our own judgment to bear as well. The Gita most definitely provides ample encouragement for a penetrating and open-ended excursion into the nature of reality. It doesn't have to blow its own horn. Sipping its sublime nectar is convincing enough.