

The Value of Values

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This section deals with an important topic, the philosophy of the Gita as it pertains to values. We tend to dismiss the discussion on values thinking that we have heard it all since childhood. But our present way of life suggests that we have given undue importance to materialism and do not really comprehend the value of values. To understand the significance we need to look at it from several different points of view.

Education

All over the world we find that educational institutions give importance to reading and writing, to new learning techniques, to better buildings and equipment. Generally there is progress in all those areas, which makes us smart, but education of proper values and vision of life is lacking. These brilliant young people, who are so successful in academia when they get caught up in the emotional problems of life, lose all their efficiency and their objectivity becomes nil.

So what is it that educational institutions should pay attention to? The first point is to recognize that the purpose of education is to learn. Then comes the application of that learning, meaning that whatever we have learned we should know how to use it. Finally, and most importantly are the ethical considerations. We should know the purpose for which our knowledge is to be used. The dictionary describes ethics as a system of moral principles or values. For example, on completion of medical school a doctor takes an oath to serve humanity and not to use the knowledge for monetary benefit only. The primary goal is to serve others. But we find this attitude missing in the education as well as in the practice of that profession; today it has mainly become a business. All trades have business ethics; whether we choose to follow them is up to us. In business we may excuse our greed by saying that the purpose of commerce is to make a profit. But how much profit is enough? The primary objective of serving should not be forgotten in any given field. In the legal profession one may justify the compromise of values to protect the client. Practicing noble principles may not show immediate results, but once a lawyer establishes a reputation of being honest, fair, and able he will gain the respect of everyone, and good cases will no doubt come to him.

Therefore, the aim of education must be examined carefully. What is our final objective? The Sanskrit word upādhi means “that which brings about change.” That is why in India a university degree is called upādhi. After a child has gone through twelve or more years of schooling we expect to see a change in knowledge, behavior and conduct. However, these days when one graduates from college we find only outer or superficial change and there is no inner transformation. Thus education has not brought about any real change in many people. The increase in violence that we see expressed within the school systems today reflects a need to restore ethics to the classroom.

Even in our own communities we see that educated people fight for small things. Families are split for insignificant reasons. At the level of politics, low values are rampant, sometimes openly and sometimes more subtly. When it is open, it is called corruption, more subtly it is called a political contribution. Whatever it may be called it is basically a deterioration of the value system. We need to remember that at the level of the totality things will not change. It is only at the individual level that change is possible, and when the individual changes, it will affect everyone around him.

People question that with so many religious groups in the world, spirituality has not made the world a better place. But that is not necessarily true. For example, consider all the research that is being conducted in the field of medicine and the fine hospitals, doctors, and specialists that we have. But have they been able to find a cure for all diseases? It is true that many diseases have been obliterated, but they are always replaced with new ones. At the community level we have policemen, the courts, and lawyers that make up the legal system, but corruption still exists. Criminals have been brought to justice, but crime continues. Similarly, we have churches, temples, and

synagogues in abundance but immorality still exists. If there is any less insanity in the world it is only because of the contribution of values. Otherwise the world would have perished long ago as so many countries have fought and continue to fight with each other. It is only because of the guidance of values in society that some kind of sanity has prevailed. Nowadays in the field of business many seminars are conducted with titles such as “Value-Based Education” or “Value Based Management.” This is a shift from material values to spiritual values. Earlier the focus was on individual prosperity but now it is shifting to the welfare of the society in general. We have also started to care for world ecology. Therefore, values have gained importance not only in the way we conduct business but how we live our day-to-day lives. If values were to disappear completely there will be total chaos. The existing disorder is caused by the scarcity of values, the misunderstanding of values, and the lack of proactive implementation of values.

The Purpose of Values

We find that virtues and values alone add beauty to our lives. And we all enjoy beauty. We want our houses and our surroundings to be beautiful, and we also want to look beautiful. But please remember that there is not only an outer visual attractiveness but there is a factor called inner beauty as well. We may be fascinated by outer beauty and our initial attraction may be because of that, but we soon discover that appearances can be deceptive. Someone may appear beautiful on the outside, but when we come to live with that person, life becomes impossible. What is that inner beauty? What is it that draws us to certain people even when they are old or handicapped or not at all physically attractive? It is a fact that these people possess special inner qualities of good character and virtue. So in simple terms, values and virtues make our lives more beautiful.

We should recognize that whenever we want to achieve a particular goal in life we need both the outer means as well as the inner resources of values and virtues. The outer means that we need may vary with the particular goal. For example, as students we want to pass with good grades. As businessmen we want to be prosperous. As housewives we want our home to be clean and comfortable. But whatever our goal may be, the inner resources that we need remain the same. We need physical energy to work hard, and we need mental energy to support and sustain that activity.

Just as economics is the science for managing money and finances there is also a science of economizing the expenditure of our energy, avoiding unnecessary dissipation of one's inner vitality. This is known as the science of spirituality. It is with a wealth of inner virtues that we ensure success in reaching our goals. Generally we find that a lot of our energy is dissipated even before we start a project. We already feel tired before we begin. So one way of conserving energy is by being honest. Some people cannot tell the truth no matter what. They are manipulative and say different things to different people. That puts them under constant pressure to remember what they told to whom, so that their dishonesty will not show. When a person is truthful, however, he has nothing to worry about.

It is said that when Mahatma Gandhi was in England, he appeared to be quite relaxed before a big press conference. Many political leaders are under great stress at such times and spend days preparing for these events. The Mahatma's secretary asked him how he could remain so relaxed. Gandhiji promptly responded that he had nothing to hide; he just had to tell the truth and present the facts as they were. Honesty was the secret to his tranquil state. Life is simple when we do not try to manipulate. When we practice good values, the energy that it brings into our life is tremendous!

Another way to conserve energy is to manage our time well. We can achieve maximum work in maximum time if we are disciplined. Otherwise there is always work pending and we are under stress trying to catch up with our commitments. For example, if a student is given a project and he procrastinates, then just days before the project is due, he will get into a panic. When our activities are on time and under control, we feel free. There is no stress and no dissipation of mental energy.

A third value that saves energy is orderliness. “A place for everything and everything in its place!” Otherwise, as in some homes, every morning begins with a hunting expedition. First we try to find the keys. Then the search for

the portable phone begins. We become agitated and so does everyone else. The entire household begins looking for that one object. These are simple matters, but how much time and energy would be saved if things were kept in their respective places! There are so many creative activities that we can participate in if we learn to manage our time and energy.

What is the difference between an ordinary and an extraordinary person? And how does one become an extraordinary person? It is not that the extraordinary person suddenly drops down from the heavens. They become who they are by simply living what they have learnt. And that one simple fact lifts them to those great heights. Both ordinary as well as extraordinary people can have the same amount of knowledge. One acts on what he knows and matures from it, while the ordinary person, despite book knowledge remains at the same level, without any change. But when we see someone achieve great things, we see that this person adheres to certain principles and values, which make him a great person. For example, some people are good artists but they lack discipline and that is the only reason they do not become successful. This is of vital importance but we ignore it. We perform so many actions, but by ignoring the value system we are missing the joy that we should be experiencing in life. The divine virtues bring joy and happiness not only to ourselves, but also to others. And these divine virtues are now contrasted with their opposite, the āsurika qualities that bring only sorrow. The Blessed Lord said:

Fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness in the Yoga-of-Knowledge, charity, control of the senses, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, and straightforwardness...

Non-injury, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of fault-finding nature, compassion, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickle-mindedness...

Vigor, forgiveness, fortitude, purity and cleanliness, absence of hatred, absence of pride- these belong to the one born for the Divine Estate, O Arjuna.

Hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, pride, anger, and also harshness and ignorance, belong to one who is born for a Demonic Estate, O Arjuna.

The divine nature is deemed for liberation, the demonic for bondage; grieve not, O Arjuna, you are born with divine qualities. (XVI:1-5)

The divine qualities lead one to liberation (mokṣa) and the demonic (āsurika) qualities lead one to firm bondage. There are people who are endowed with divine virtues and there are those who act according to their vices. But no person has all the divine virtues or all the vices; everyone has a combination of both. There are some beautiful lines in the Rāmāyaṇa: After Vibhishana has advised his brother Ravana to return Sita and surrender to Lord Rama, he says that every heart has a mixture of noble and ignoble thoughts. No one can predict when an evil thought may come to us. And once we are faced with a temptation he says that there is no guarantee how one will react to it.

Therefore, when any thought comes to mind, we can decide whether to act on it or not. If an evil thought arises, we have a choice. We can either nip it in the bud or we can allow it to grow. Thus if a person allows noble thoughts to grow and express them there will be prosperity, mutual growth, and happiness. But if negative thoughts are allowed to persist, hardships and obstacles are bound to follow. With these two sets of qualities, one thing is clear: Noble virtues take one toward self-unfoldment, happiness, and liberation, and the vices definitely take us towards some kind of trouble. Thus we should clearly distinguish between the two. Many times we see good and bad as being separate, but there are times when a given situation can itself be good at one time and bad at another; to have the necessary discrimination is not easy. For instance if I overeat, I find that food is a problem. But if I take food in the right quantity, then it is healthy.

Therefore, food can be good or bad for us depending on how we use it. Food, like some medicines, can save or kill us. In a large quantity it can kill, but in a very small, minute quantity, it can cure. Thus we see there is a peculiar

mix of good and bad in the world. Therefore we need a clear understanding of these qualities and disciplines, especially on the path of spirituality. So many factors are at play. There are certain qualities that can be considered both detrimental as well as conducive to our spiritual health. But to understand them and to then practice them is not easy. One factor is the nature of an individual, which has been built over a number of years. Sometimes we feel helpless or compelled to act in a situation, driven by our past habitual traits. So in the face of all this, it is difficult to live up to the divine virtues, but at least we can try. We should become aware that there are virtues and there are vices. Virtues definitely take us to spiritual heights. And when we clearly understand that vices are detrimental to our health in every way, we will try to stay away from them. Even if we sometimes slip from our high ideal, a measure of our spiritual maturity is in how quickly we realize it, and how fast we recover.

Thus we see that several qualities are required for spiritual evolution. The first is knowledge. The second is awareness or alertness. Third is a readiness to get up every time we fall. And finally, we need extreme patience. There is a saying: "Adopt the ways of Nature, her secret is patience." But we are very impatient and we pray, "O Lord give me patience, but hurry!" Along with the factors of patience, knowledge, awareness, and readiness, we also have to admit to ourselves that we have made mistakes. This is the first step towards progress, for it is only when we admit our mistakes that we can do something about them. Sant Ramdas said "There are many vices in the world, but the worst vice is to consider your vices as virtues." If we do not recognize them for what they are we will never get rid of them.

Our attempt must be to cultivate not just a few virtues, but all of them; this is the best way to eradicate our vices. This may appear like a Herculean task, but as I pointed out before, everyone is already a mixture of good and bad; therefore no one is totally devoid of virtues. And since they are already present we can cultivate them further. Another point we should consider is that these qualities by themselves are not to be considered good or bad. The question is, for what purpose are they being used? It is said that desire is the cause of sorrow, but that is not always true. If we have a desire for learning, or to have satsaṅga, or for God, those are all good desires, and in this way we can "divinize" desires.

Generally we consider anger as being a negative emotion. We become angry when there are obstacles to the fulfillment of a desire. But we should consider the desire behind the anger. If the desire is righteous, then anger can be considered righteous. For instance, if we turn our anger towards God, that anger can be wonderful. We have all heard of great devotees who become angry with God. They exclaim, "O God, I have been calling for You again and again, yet You do not come!" Thus we see that even anger can be "divinized." However, most of the time our anger is a reaction to something, and as a reaction it is definitely a dangerous thing. If we prefix "D" to anger, it becomes "danger." It causes great disturbance in us and others.

Even greed can be righteous if it is for a spiritual goal. It would be good to become spiritually greedy and increase our daily spiritual practices. For instance, instead of repeating the Lord's name a hundred and eight times the desire to do it a thousand times would be healthy.

In contrast, contentment is usually viewed as a virtue, but it too can become negative. For example, if we are content to take the Lord's name infrequently then what do we hope to gain? We should have contentment for worldly things, but not for spiritual practices. Usually it is the other way around; for worldly things we are always dissatisfied, and with regard to spiritual practices we are content with very little. I once met a Swami who was eager to give this great knowledge to others, but became upset when people just did not seem to be interested. So I told him, "There is no need to become angry. Look at it this way: Highly spiritual people have minimum physical needs, and worldly people have a minimum of spiritual needs." Those who have worldly ambitions naturally have few spiritual needs, though now and then they may go on a pilgrimage or attend satsaṅga. The great saint, Kabirdas, asked God to give him that which would take care of his family so that they would not starve. And also that any guest that came to his house would not go hungry, that would be enough. This is the prayer of a saintly person. He has few physical needs.

Thus a value cannot be labeled as being good or bad in itself. The purpose to which it is applied must be considered. If a good quality is used for selfish purposes, it is considered to be āsurika and if the same divine quality is turned towards an evolutionary or spiritual goal, then it is considered to be a virtue. Therefore, it becomes difficult to classify values rigidly. But having said this much, we will now go directly to a detailed study of these two sets of values: the divine or the positive and the negative or the āsurika values.

All the divine qualities elaborated upon in the Gita are as follows:

1. Fearlessness (*abhayam*).
2. Purity of mind (*sattva-samsuddhih*).
3. Abidance in the yoga of knowledge (*jñāna yoga vyavasthitih*).
4. Charity, which comes from generosity or love (*dānam*).
5. Self-control, particularly over the senses or action (*damah*).
6. Sacrifice or worship (*yajña*).
7. Self-study, introspection, or study of scriptures (*svādhyāy*).
8. Austerity (*tapah*).
9. Straightforwardness (*ārjavam*).
10. Non-injury or non-violence (*ahimsā*).
11. Truthfulness (*satyam*).
12. Absence of anger (*akrodhah*).
13. Renunciation (*tyāgah*).
14. Peace (*śāntih*).
15. Not talking ill about a person behind his back (*apaiśunam*).
16. Compassion for all beings (*dayā bhūteṣu*).
17. Not craving for excessive sense pleasure (*aloluptvam*).
18. Gentleness (*mārdavam*).
19. Modesty (*hrh*).
20. Steadiness, absence of mental restlessness (*acapalam*).
21. Brilliance (*tejah*).
22. Forgiveness (*ksamā*).
23. Fortitude (*dhr̥tih*).
24. Purity and cleanliness (*śaucam*).
25. Non-betrayal (*adrohh*).
26. Absence of arrogance and excessive pride (*na atimānita*).

The above are auspicious qualities born of nobility and we should try to cultivate them. And listed below are the negativities of an ignoble character.

1. Hypocrisy (*dambha*).
2. Arrogance (*darpah*).
3. Self-conceit (*abhimānah*).
4. Anger (*krodhah*).
5. Harsh or sarcastic speech (*pārusyam*).
6. Ignorance (*ajñānam*).

The twenty-six virtues help to liberate us, but the āsurika vices strengthen our bondage. After He had enumerated these qualities, Lord Krishna noticed Arjuna's anxiety to know which category he belonged to, as it is very difficult to evaluate oneself objectively. The Lord immediately reassured Arjuna; He told him not to be anxious for he was born into an honorable family with noble traits and virtues. Arjuna had directly approached Lord Krishna for the supreme Knowledge and this in itself signified his nobility. We may also be worried about our status, but the fact that we have all come together to study the Gītā shows that we all have some divine qualities. And these are to be cultivated further. Therefore, let us discuss them one by one. The first of the twenty-six divine qualities listed is fearlessness.

1. Fearlessness

What is fear? It is only when we know what fear is that we will understand the concept of fearlessness. What are we afraid of? Whether we are afraid of losing our job, health, family or friends, name or fame, one thing is common, we are afraid of losing something. We are even afraid of losing a virtue that we may have acquired. When we are meditating we are afraid of going into samādhi for fear that we may not come back; or when having visions, we wonder if they will last. Thus the kind of object we are afraid of losing will all depend upon the grossness or subtlety of the mind.

Secondly, there may also be a fear of the unknown. We want to find out what is in store for us in the future. This is why people are often afraid of spiritual life, because it is a mystery. We have relative knowledge of the subjects studied in medical or engineering colleges, but the search for God or Self-realization is an unknown. When we think of the future, there may also be the fear of losing something. For example, if someone begins to attend spiritual discourses, his relatives are afraid that he will lose all interest in material things, become a monk and perhaps leave home. They recognize that it is a good pursuit, but again there is a fear of losing something. This fear of losing is because of attachment. The feeling that without a particular thing we are not complete, or that without it life is useless, is called attachment (raga). Once someone told me, "I have parked my car outside because I want someone to steal it, but no one is taking it." That person is not afraid because he has no attachment. When there is no attachment, there is no fear (bhaya). The only problem is that deep within ourselves we already know that we will eventually lose everything. That is the nature of things. Everything is time bound. Thus the great Rishi Bhartrihari put it beautifully "Dispassion (detachment) is fearlessness."

We may not have many material possessions and yet still be afraid, conversely we may have great wealth and be totally fearless like King Janaka. So it does not depend on how many things we own. The following is an incident that actually happened in India to a person who worked for a large corporation. One day he said to me, "Sometimes management asks me to do things that I do not like. What should I do?"

I told him, "I will tell you, but please act at your own risk. Keep a resignation letter handy and the next time that they ask you to do something that you do not like, tell them that you will not do it. At the most they can fire you, or perhaps they will ask if you are aware of the consequences and at that time give them the letter." He was afraid that he may lose his job, but he actually went ahead with it. Management's response was immediate; they invited him to discuss it first for they did not want to lose a trained and honest worker.

Another great source of fear is the constant worry about what others will think of us. In this world of material pursuits, if there is a person who wants to dedicate his life to a social or spiritual cause we fear what people will say. When I came to America, people asked, "How can you wear those orange robes in America?" My reply was simple, "In America some people have weird clothes and hair-dos, sometimes the head may be half shaven and green on one side, and with one or two earrings dangling in one ear. And if they disapprove of the way I am dressed, it is their problem. When people look at me I also look at them and that is all there is to it." We often worry about what others think of us, but ultimately we will realize that people do not even think about us, nor are they concerned about our behavior. In Narada Bhakti Sūtra it is said very beautifully that the one who uproots this kind of bondage to the world, which consists of thoughts such as, "What will people say? What will people think? What will happen?" is the one who crosses over māyā. Once we are convinced that we are acting rightly, why should we have any fear?

Let us now examine how we develop fear in reference to action. Scriptures contain many injunctions of do's and don'ts. If we do what we are supposed to do, and avoid what we are not supposed to do, then there is no fear. But when it is the other way around, when we perform a prohibited action, then naturally there is fear. The child who has not done his homework is afraid. Therefore not to do what we are supposed to do will cause fear.

To summarize, fearlessness is evident when: a) there is no attachment to worldly possessions, b) when there is no attachment to worldly name and fame, and c) when a person performs his duty and refrains from prohibited action. That fearlessness abhayam, is what we should be striving for.

But there is another aspect to all virtues. On the one hand we are told that fearlessness is a virtue to strive for, but, taking it one step further, we should also not instill fear in others. There are people who are fearless themselves, but others may be afraid of them. In the consecration ceremony of samnyāsa dīkshā, where one becomes a swami, there is a vow in which we proclaim to the world that, “I am not afraid (of you) and you need not be afraid of me.” It is a vow of renunciation and means, “If you want a certain object or being, please have it, I have no interest in it at all.” He is not in competition with anyone, therefore, no one is afraid of him. The vow says, “I do not want anything of this world, so the world need not be afraid of me, and again, when I do not want anything of this world, why should I be afraid of it?” That is called abhayam (fearlessness). This is to be practiced. We should be fearless ourselves, and we should also give the same feeling of fearlessness to others. Whether one is attempting to become a spiritual giant or follow in the footsteps of great scientists and explorers, without fearlessness we cannot progress.

2. Purity of Mind

Purity of mind is a natural state of the mind. It is an expression of sattva guṇa (the sātṭvika temperament). Our minds automatically glide into this natural state when we eradicate our mental impurities and gain true sātṭvika knowledge. As long as we have likes and dislikes, with their subsequent desires and attachments (rajasa and tamasa) the mind will be polluted and negative thoughts will always tempt us. When negativity disappears, our motives will be pure, and we will become fearless. In that pure mind one can invoke and experience the divine presence of the Lord. Such a person develops sanctity or holiness. That is called sattva-samśuddhih.

3. Abidance in the Yoga of Knowledge

How can one attain these divine qualities? They can be attained through firm abidance in the path of Self-Inquiry. Truth will lead one to fearlessness and purity of mind. Follow the connection. It is our erroneous thinking that has projected a false sense of security onto the objects of the world. Then we search for happiness and security in these objects where none can be found; and as a result we develop likes and dislikes. But as soon as we recognize the problem we begin to look for a solution. That solution is not found in chronological time and effort, but in right understanding.

It is the same when we want to get rid of some negative traits. We cannot “do” something to get rid of anger or jealousy. Problems at the mental level cannot be solved by actions at the physical level. If a room is dusty and dirty, we can put in some physical effort to clean it up; but if a room is dark, then all the sweeping and dusting in the world will not get rid of the darkness. Yet as soon as we bring in light, the darkness is gone immediately. It is not that darkness is eliminated gradually, a little at a time. No, the darkness disappears immediately. In the same way, once a person realizes that his thoughts were wrong, the transformation is immediate and complete. That is why in the fourth chapter Lord Krishna says that those purified by the penance of Knowledge come to Him.

We may wonder, “How long will it take me to get rid of negativity?” No time line can be given. Sometimes a whole lifetime is not enough to eliminate one’s wrong tendencies. Yet in history there are many cases of sudden and total transformation, of ordinary people suddenly becoming great saints. Thus it is not a question of chronological time. But it is very clear in cases of total transformation that these have been men of great determination. When they rightly resolved, the quality of their determination was such that there was an immediate and extraordinary change. A brilliant example is our Swami Chinmayananda, who went to the Himalayas originally as a secular journalist to expose the “bluff” of swamis. He was so impressed by the wisdom, selflessness, and service of both Swami Sivananda and Swami Tapovanam that he stayed there to study with extraordinary determination; later he himself was transformed into one of the greatest Mahatmas of our age.

4. Charity

Charity is to give with generosity and love. The Taittirīya Upanishad says, “Give with faith. Give only if you believe in something, but then give in full measure.” There are two schools of thought. One says give freely, without judging whether a person is a fit and worthy recipient because your nature is to give. This emulates nature: The sun, moon, rivers and trees all give of themselves with no concern for the recipient. A tiger or a deer all drink from the same

river. A flower does not say, "I will give my fragrance only to certain people."

There is a famous story of the Sikh King, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. One day he was sitting in the garden under a mango tree. Suddenly a stone hit him, but fortunately he was not hurt. His soldiers immediately apprehended the person who had thrown the stone and she was brought before the king. When asked why she had thrown the stone she said, "O Maharaja, I did not know that anyone was sitting under the tree. I was hungry and I threw the stone to strike down a mango and by chance it came to hit your majesty. Please forgive me. It was an unfortunate accident." And she threw herself down at his feet. The king dismissed her and told an official to give her some money so that she could buy some food. But people could not understand why the king was giving money to one who threw a stone at him. The King gave a beautiful answer: "Suppose her stone had hit the tree, it would have given her a fruit. I am a human being and I should be better than a tree." That King was a great soul! The trees bear fruit not for themselves, but for others. We too can learn from this.

The second school of thought says that you should not give indiscriminately; you should give with discretion. Even in the Gītā it says that one should choose the right time and place and also know that the recipient is deserving of it. Thus the two views conflict, so what is the solution? For the person who has realized his oneness with the totality of the universe, there is no distinction; that person sees no difference between himself and others.

There is a story about Swami Tapovanam. Once a robber stole his blanket and was running away with it. Swami Tapovanam ran after him and gave him a second blanket as well. The robber asked him, "Why are you doing this?" Swamiji replied, "If you want to take a blanket take this good one, the other one is old and has holes in it." Now tell me, in such a situation can someone actually be considered as having been robbed? It is said that the robber returned the blankets and also gave food to Tapovan Maharaj. This happens when the heart is so pure that a person makes no judgments, nor does he find any differences between himself and another. The thoughts of noble people are very different.

Once there was a guru who had many disciples. One disciple was rather problematic and created trouble for the others. So one of the students went to the guru and asked, "We all suffer and are punished because of this boy. We are all good, so why don't you just get rid of him?"

The Mahatma replied, "Oh, I see! Well then you can all go, for you are all virtuous and do not need this ashram, but that person certainly does."

Spiritual people view everything quite differently. But for all others, who have not yet realized their oneness with the Self, only differences are seen and consequently doubts arise. Therefore, if your mind begins to doubt whether or not certain persons or institutions deserve your financial help, please convince yourself first, and then give. Giving should bring joy to the giver as well as the receiver. The receiver should not feel pressured or obligated. This kind of giving demonstrates true generosity.

Charity need not be only monetary. It can be a giving of our time, talent, knowledge, love, or compassion. A story is there of Ramanujacharya, that when his guru gave him the mantra Om namo Nārāyaṇāya, the guru told him, "I do not give this mantra to everyone as they are not all qualified. If you chant it with sincerity and faith you will go to heaven." When Ramanujacharya asked him what would happen if he gave this mantra to others, the guru replied, "You will go to hell because you would have given it to non-qualified people." It is said that Ramanujacharya went straight to the village, called lots of people together and asked them to chant the mantra. When the guru heard of this, he called Ramanujacharya who replied, "I know that I will go to hell. But all those others who are chanting will go to heaven so what does it matter?" That is genuine giving, out of love and compassion.

There is a saying: "Giving food is great, but greater is the gift of knowledge." That is because food will satiate hunger for a while and then hunger reoccurs. But if we have taught someone how to earn, that knowledge will help him satisfy his hunger for the rest of his life. However, if someone who is hungry approaches us, we can not say that we

can only give food for thought.

Thus there are many kinds of charity: the giving of food, money, knowledge, but the greatest giving is that of fearlessness (abhaya dānam). If you make a person fearless, that is the greatest gift. Swami Chinmayananda used to say, “Be generous like God in giving and also in forgiving. God gives and forgives. Man gets and forgets.”

5. Self-Control

Damah is control over our senses. If we practice such control or self-restraint with understanding, we can conserve a lot of energy. Whenever we want to achieve something, not only do we need to mobilize our resources but we also need to preserve our strength. And for that we need self-discipline. If we dissipate our energy on frivolous things, we get tired easily and have nothing left to achieve greater things.

6-8. Worship, Study, and Austerity

Lord Krishna has expressed this comprehensive program very beautifully. We want to reach the state of fearlessness. Fearlessness is Brahman. How are we to reach that? Purity of mind and clarity of vision are required. To discover these, we conserve our energy and apply it to austerity (tapah). But what is tapah? Taittiriya Upanishad says tapah is the highest austerity. Any attempt to rise above our fallen status is tapah. Another meaning is that tapah is steadfastness in the performance of our duties in the various stations of life. Tapasa is also single-pointedness of the mind and senses. Damah was only at the level of senses, but tapah involves both the mind and the senses.

In this context it is interesting to note that in our Hindu scriptures various vows (vrata) and austerities have been enumerated. One vow is ekādaśī vrata, which enjoins a fast on the eleventh day of each month. Actually that vow starts on the tenth day itself. On the tenth day, we eat only one meal, then on the eleventh we do not eat at all, and on the twelfth day as we break that fast, we again eat only one meal. It is then that the ekādaśī vrata is considered to be complete. We may ask, “Why the eleventh day?” Eleven is significant, as there are five organs of perception, five organs of action, and one mind. The real ekādaśī vrata is such that we should not only control our eating on that day, but also control indulging in sense pleasures. Sometimes people fast, but watch video movies the entire day, so their eyes and ears are being fed continuously. They may not have eaten but they have indulged the senses nonetheless. Instead one should spend that day in contemplation of the lord. One should do tapasa by engaging one’s sense organs, organs of action, and the mind in thoughts of God only. However for most of us ekādaśī vrata means only a change of diet.

Tapah also means “concentration.” Just think of the sun’s rays being scattered everywhere. However when we take a lens and concentrate the rays at one spot, we see how much energy there is! They can even burn and object. So the practice of self-control and austerity result in conservation and concentration of energy. Thereafter, it must be focused or channeled, which is done through worship yajña. All of our energy should be used for performing the yajña. So we do not indulge in undesirable things, conserving our energy and directing it toward the Lord. When we perform action as worship of the Lord, it is called yajña. In that action the only motive is the welfare of all beings. In the process we should study the scriptures svādhyāyah and introspect. This introspection helps us take stock of our situation and see where we are headed. We can ask ourselves, “So many years have passed by, what have I done with my life?” “What did I gain?” “What did I lose?” “Where was I and where do I want to go?” Svādhyāyah is necessary as it helps us to examine our lives and figure out if we are on the right track. We know that we are progressing when we feel peaceful and happy. Are we at ease with everything around us? Do people seek our company or run away from us? There are so many indicators. In Kenopanishad it is said:

When a person meditates on Brahman and realizes Brahman all beings start loving him, even birds and wild animals. (IV:6)

That is how we measure success. When we pursue a goal with sincerity, the results will come. Then through charity dānam we must share that with others. In the Gītā it is said that one who takes and enjoys everything for himself and does not share with others is a sinner or a thief. We should give to others and then take what is left as prasāda (Lord’s gift) for ourselves.

9. Straightforwardness

Straightforwardness is simplicity of the heart. The more a person evolves spiritually, the simpler that person becomes, so much so that people may not even realize his greatness. Jesus had great simplicity. When he came, people did not recognize him as the Messiah, or the Messenger of God, for everyone expected a great king or warrior.

Straightforwardness also means unity of thought word, and deed. There are people who are wicked in thoughts, speech, and also in their actions. Now that can be considered as unity in wickedness. In the process they hurt themselves and everyone else. That is not *ārjavam*. The prayer of a true devotee is as follows: “May my speech abide in my mind and may my mind abide in my speech so that the Lord Himself manifests in front of me.”

When our thoughts and speech are the same, there will be unity and harmony in our thoughts, words, and deeds. To such a person the Lord reveals His true nature. Tulsidas said beautifully, “That person is simple and straightforward to everybody, who has no thought of deceit at all!”

Generally, there are two kinds of people in this world. There are some who think that everyone is deceitful, and undependable; they assume that everyone is bad until proven otherwise. Other people believe that everyone is to be trusted until shown to be dishonest. Most people tend to generalize and make sweeping statements based on a limited number of experiences. Once they are cheated they think everyone is corrupt. A straightforward person deals with each situation as it comes and does not generalize. His mind is relaxed.

10. Non-Injury

Non-injury is a mental attitude that prevails automatically whenever there is a sense of oneness, wherever there is love. When we love someone, we wish him well. We want to serve the beloved. Then there is joy and no desire to injure anyone. Yet, living in the world, at the physical level we cannot avoid causing injury at times. A surgeon during surgery is not violating *ahimsā*, for he is acting for the welfare of the patient. Thus it is said that violence (*himsā*) starts at the level of one's thoughts and only then does it go to the level of the body through words or actions.

12. Absence of Anger

This is another very important virtue. The entire world is burning in the fire of rage. People have been very angry even from childhood, and many of them want to know how to get rid of their anger. Therefore, let us examine the reasons for anger. It is a mental state, so we cannot ignore or escape it. There are obvious reasons why we become angry at times. First of all, if someone is physically unwell, his energy level goes down, and at that particular stage he becomes irritable. Some people try fasting to get rid of anger, but when they get hungry they become even angrier. Therefore, we should keep healthy and eat properly. Secondly, we should also avoid the kind of thoughts and situations that we know will make us angry. These are the grossest reasons for such behavior.

But anger exists mainly because of attachment. Attachment brings expectation and along with that comes the insistence on having our dreams fulfilled. The nature of the world is such that there is more of a chance of our becoming disappointed than of being satisfied. That is just the way it is. For instance, if we are very attached to our children we will not only have certain expectations of them, but we will insist that they achieve certain goals. If our children fail to meet them we feel that it reflects badly on us, and we become more frustrated. This is only one example. It can be extended to any situation. If an expectation is not fulfilled it is an excuse for anger. It becomes our excuse to the degree that we are attached to it. Remember that it is not possible to live without expectation. But at least we can try to be free from our dependence on other people for the fulfillment of our desires. Anger and longing are two sides of the same coin. If a desire is not fulfilled there will be anger.

The Sanskrit word *krodhah* means not only anger but also agitation. When we are angry, we become agitated, and lose all inner peace and tranquility. At the same time we also bring agitation to others and an increase in negativity all around us. Such mental turmoil will cause a person to display a lot of energy, but ultimately ends in complete

exhaustion. Thus in whatever way we look at it the result of anger is only loss- loss of time, energy, tranquility and peace, friendships and possibly even the loss of freedom. There is no gain at all that we can attribute to this negative emotion. Inmates can vouch how a sudden moment of anger can cause a tremendous loss of freedom. There is a saying “Act in haste. Repent at leisure.”

Another reason why we become angry is when our ego is hurt. For example, someone may ignore a request that we make and we feel slighted by their apparent lack of concern for us. We expect the whole world to dance to our tune, and if it does not, we become angry.

Thus we have seen some of the reasons for anger. Now how do we overcome anger? The first step is to be aware of it. Many people do not admit to any problem. In fact they may become addicted to the powerful feeling of anger and may actually enjoy the feeling of pleasure derived from exploding at someone. But the more we express our anger the more we suffer. Swami Chinmayananda summed it up well when he said, “Temper takes you to trouble. Pride keeps you there.”

So once we admit to having a problem with anger how do we get over it? First we should find out the causes for our anger. We may not be able to remove these causes immediately, but we should be intensely aware of how much we suffer and of the loss of time, energy and any profit associated with that anger. Then analyze as follows: “What do I want out of life? Do I gain anything from being angry?” Any way we look at it anger is a losing proposition, so what is the use of keeping it? When something becomes a liability we want to get rid of it.

There is also another way of looking at this question. If we have something precious, which is either of great sentimental or monetary value, would we part with it just because someone asks for it? We would not, because it is very precious to us. Now the most precious wealth that we all have is our peace of mind. It is everything. But in our everyday life we allow our peace of mind to be disturbed by a passing remark or a few words. We need to become determined enough not to part with it that easily.

Once we know what causes anger we also need to be aware of the harm caused by giving in to anger. If we realized the serious consequences of anger we would not give into it. Let me give an example. If someone gives us a glass of milk and tells us it is poisoned, would we drink it? Even if there were only a small doubt, we would still not think of drinking it. What if only one out of three glasses had poison in it? We would still not take a chance. Why? Because we are so intensely aware of the effects of poison on our physical body! If there is a chance of any bodily harm we will be on full alert immediately. Now suppose it was said that if a person gets angry he would die. Just think of it. Everyone would get rid of anger very fast. But we do not realize that the effects of anger are even worse than physical death. For the angry person dies continually to his higher Self. So we need a clear understanding of this in order to overcome anger.

To summarize: (1) We need to be aware of the consequences of anger, (2) the destruction that we cause to ourselves and others, (3) that anger is because of desire, the wrong kind of desire that has become a foolish obsession, and (4) an insistence on the fulfillment of our expectations. Thereafter our pride does not allow us to move on and we stay stuck in the anger. Thus extreme alertness is required.

As we are becoming angry, we should already become aware enough to say, “I should not get angry.” That is the first step. As we increase our awareness, a time will slowly come when anger will either drop to a minimum, or it will not rise at all, this is called akrodhah. Admittedly that is a far stage, but at least we can take the first steps. There is one very significant point to be remembered. Anger comes at a certain moment, and if we win that moment, we will be fine.

13. Renunciation

The dictionary describes renunciation as sacrifice or giving up. We need to understand what we are renouncing. We can only give up something that belongs to us. If nothing belongs to us, if nothing is ours, then where is the

question of giving up? That is a very interesting point. People often say, “I renounce the world.” But then where would we go, for we are all in the world. The same concept applies to giving also, we can only give what is ours. That is why in yajña it is said, “O Lord, this is yours and I offer it back to You only.”

We generally think that we are giving up material objects. Yes, we can give up some material objects, but even the body is made up of matter. SO how can we give it up? The idea of “giving up” must be well understood. It is not a very popular concept. Once an elderly person came to me and said “I want to study Vedānta, but don’t ask me to give up anything.” Certain teachers become very popular when they advise their students not to give up anything but just to add a little spiritual practice to their life. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, there was a famous saint in Maharastra by the name of Sant Eknath Maharaj who was a great scholar. His daughter was married to a learned pandit who somehow got into wrong company and started going out late at night. The daughter was worried and she spoke about it with her father. So Eknath Maharaj called his son-in-law and told him “You are a learned person but your wife is not, so before going out every day please teach her one or two verses of the Gītā. Just do that one task, and then go wherever you want.” The pandit agreed, and when he started teaching the Gītā he slowly began reflecting on his own life and he stopped going out. That is called tyāgah.

So tyāgah is renunciation of undesirable, unwanted, obstructive thoughts and actions which stand in the way of higher evolution. It is not renunciation of the objects in the world as long as we are in the body. Our needs may be minimal, but that is different. However, we can give up ignorance, wrong notions, wrong concepts, and the wrong relationships that we have with the objects and beings of the world. When we want something, we may have to sacrifice the smaller object for the greater, but sometimes we sacrifice the greater to keep the smaller.

Once a person came to visit a swami and prostrated before him. The swami immediately got up and prostrated before that person. So the man was really surprised. He said, “Swamiji what are you doing?”

Swamiji replied, “Why did you prostrate before me?”

The man said, “But you are a samnyāsī, a great person.”

Swamiji responded, “I prostrated before you because you are a greater swami, mahāsamnyāsī. I renounced the world for God but you have renounced God for the world.” That really awakened him.

Renouncing higher values for lower pleasures is merely a compromise to appease our lower nature. But when we relinquish smaller things for a higher goal, it is called evolution, which entails true sacrifice. Unless we abandon our old ways of living, we cannot evolve. I interview many people for the spiritual course in India. Many have Ph.D.’s and excellent jobs. So I ask them why they want to leave all that? Someone gave a very interesting answer, “Whatever I do now will only add numbers to what is already there. If I am making \$15,000 now, I may make a little more with my extra efforts but it will not bring any change or transformation to my life. First I wanted to be called “Mr.” and then I wanted to be called a doctor, so I went for a Ph.D. degree and fulfilled my desire for a doctorate. But what I really want now is that knowledge which will bring about a genuine change in me.” So when we talk of tyāgah here, it is not a question of giving up higher ideals for lower things but renunciation of the lower for a higher goal. Actually this tyāgah is a process of growing up. When we use the words “giving up” or “sacrifice” some fear is usually associated with it. It is like when a child is learning to walk, he holds on to the parent’s hands, but once he knows how to walk, he will refuse to hold on to anything. Why? He wants to be independent. It is a process of evolution, of maturing.

Tyāgah only becomes painful when it is forced upon someone. When we renounce out of our own conviction, there is no pain. If someone is addicted to tea or coffee or on-vegetarian food and he is told to give it up, then it will be painful and difficult. But if we give it up with understanding it brings us joy and happiness, and we wonder what took us so long. It is a growing out of the lower stages or from negative thinking to positive thinking. This has also been beautifully brought out in the eighteenth chapter. When we try to pluck an unripe fruit from a tree it is difficult, and there is pain to the tree as well. It is like trying to force open a bud before it flowers; we will destroy the beauty and fragrance of the flower. But when the fruit is ripe, it falls off very easily on its own. So tyāgah is a beautiful virtue. Whenever tyāgah is used in the Gītā, it is said karma phala tyāgah that is, renunciation of our

attachment to the fruits of action as well as the renunciation of the egoistic sense of doership behind all our actions. That is what has to be given up.

14. Peacefulness

The moment we give up attachment to the fruits of action our mind is calm. We have already discussed that when we conquer anger, it does not automatically mean that our minds will become peaceful. So why does agitation *aśāntih* still arise? It is only because of our desires, cravings, and sense of possessiveness: these are our real attachments.

From the spiritual standpoint our agitation is because we do not know our true Self. As long as we continue to identify with the state of our mind, we cannot have perfect peace. When Atman, which is beyond the mind's fluctuations, is known, then there is true peace. The Upanishads say, "Only those who have realized the Self have eternal abiding peace." So true *śāntih* is the "peace that passeth understanding." But we should have relative peace in this world first, only then can we reach for absolute peace. And we can have relative peace when we give up our attachments and wrong notions.

15. Non-Gossiping

Talking about a person behind his back is an activity that most people enjoy. It is said that if a club has fifty members and all members are present for a meeting, the function will be boring because no one is absent to talk about. If we have any information about someone we should be careful to check out the facts and not jump to hasty conclusions. It is said that a person who talks behind someone's back is worse than a snake. A snake kills only the person it bites, but a person who spreads gossip harms not only the person he talks about but he also poisons the minds of all listeners. *Apāiśunam* is the absence of such behavior.

We have to be very alert in our life, particularly those who are in managerial or senior positions, because the job demands listening to the complaints of co-workers and colleagues against others. Where there are differences of opinion take them to the person who is directly involved. Be up front. By talking behind someone's back we unnecessarily pollute the mind of the other person.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the maidservant Manthara went to Mother Kaikeyi and repeatedly poisoned her mind; the queen's mistake was to allow her to do so. Eventually she was influenced by it and therefore took wrong action. If we hear someone talking ill of another, we should put a stop to it right away. If gossip is repeated ten times, we begin to believe that it is true.

16-17. Compassion and Gentleness

Compassion has to be coupled with gentleness. What do we mean by compassion? It is the inability to stand by and see others suffer. It is not something passive but where one actively tries to alleviate the suffering of others. Many times we have abundant compassion for people of our own country or religion, but for others we have little or none. Sometimes we are large-hearted to people, but are cruel to animals. Some people slaughter animals for food, clothing, and for sport, and abuse them in medical and cosmetic experiments. How then are we to follow a spiritual path? Compassion is at the very heart of religion and righteousness. The slaughtering of animals is beneath human dignity. Our compassion should include plants also. When we destroy trees indiscriminately, we suffer the results of our actions expressed in a damaged ecology. Whenever we cause such harm we suffer the consequences automatically.

We can augment our compassion with the practice of *mārdavam* or gentleness. This is an attitude of mind that is not only limited to living things but extends to insentient material objects as well. If we handle all things with care, they will serve us beautifully. For instance, some people take proper care of their cars but others are so rough with them, there is no gentleness when they apply the brake, change gears, or shut the door. In the same way, we should remember that shoes are serving our feet, and we should place them down with respect. Once a man came running to a Zen Master, threw his shoes here and there, and fell at his feet saying, "Please teach me about God." The Master calmly replied, "First learn to respect your shoes." How we take care of inert objects reveals the state of our mind.

Thus mārḍavam is a disposition of the mind. When a person has this state of mind, all of his actions have a quality of gentleness.

18. Non-Craving

Loluptvam is a craving for all sense pleasures. Whenever such a person sees something desirable the immediate reaction is “I want this” or “I want that”. Absence of such unrestrained indulgence is called aloluptvam.

19. Modesty

This quality expresses our consideration for others. Hṛṣ can be translated as “a feeling of shame to do something prohibited.” Thus it is in keeping with modesty, to observe the norms of approved behavior or appearance in a particular situation. For example, if someone likes to smoke and there is an elderly person present, it would be proper to refrain from smoking in his presence. One also wears appropriate clothing out of consideration for others by adhering to approved guidelines.

20. Steadiness

Capalam is fickleness or a constant unsteadiness of mind; it implies wanting to do one thing at one moment and something else in the next. We cannot achieve anything that way. So acapalam can be described as “steadiness,” the absence of fickle-mindedness.

21. Brilliance

In the seventh chapter of the Gītā the Lord said, “I am the brilliance of the brilliant (tejas tejasvināmaham).” But what is brilliance? It can be looked at from different levels. So let us start at the physical level. If one is physically unwell, there is no strength in the body and no glow in the face. But when given medicine and nourishment, that person becomes well again and his glow and vigor are restored. People who are unemployed and have no money also have no teja. But the moment they get a job and have some money they gain self-respect. That is the teja of money. When someone becomes a cabinet master or president there is the teja of power. There is a glow on his face. There is also the teja of knowledge. So teja can be of different levels. At the physical level it is called vigor. At the mental level it is called “brilliance.”

One more point, there may be a person who has everything, but no moral character. He cannot even look into the eyes of a holy person. He is very uncomfortable because he lacks the teja of righteous living. Therefore, spiritual glow is the highest teja. If one looks at a picture of Swami Tapovanam Maharaj or Shri Ramana Maharishi, their faces radiate calmness. That is the saintly glow that we are talking about here. We also say there is an aura around a person when he rises higher and higher in his spiritual practice. This is the divine or adhyātma teja.

22. Forgiveness

A person may think that he cannot possibly forgive. But just think; the moment we forgive and forget our mind has such peace. If we do not forgive, our mind begins to plan revenge and carries a hit list of many others that need to be taught a lesson. Ksamā comes from large-heartedness. When we make a mistake don't we want the other person to forgive us? Then why not do the same? We want the Lord to forgive us all the time. Forgiveness can be from different levels: 1) At a base level, if someone has done something wrong to us we feel very offended, and at that time there is no question of forgiving, in fact, we retaliate. 2) At the second level, we forgive a person but say, “All right, just this once I will forgive you. But remember, this is the only time.” That is one kind of forgiveness. 3) At a slightly higher level, we feel bad but we forgive the person saying, “Who is perfect in the world? I also have my faults.” We don't forget and we are actually forgiving our own weaknesses. That is another kind of forgiveness. 4) Finally, rising higher we do feel hurt or offended but we do not look for any arguments. We feel bad, but we forgive and forget.

But the greatest forgiveness is when a person does not even feel that someone has done something wrong. So the question of forgiveness does not ever come up. Even if the offender says, “Please forgive me,” the response will be, “Forgive what?” He wonders why anyone is seeking forgiveness.

What is our attitude if our finger pokes the eye, or the teeth bite the tongue? Do we become angry? We will not even think that the finger or teeth have done anything wrong. They are all me. It just happened. Once when the great saint Eknath Maharaj had finished his bath, someone spat on him. Eknath Maharaj went back and took another bath. The person continued spitting at him and each time the saint patiently went back and took another bath. After doing this many times, the person finally felt ashamed, fell at the saint's feet and begged forgiveness. But Eknath Maharaj replied, "Why are you asking forgiveness? Because of you I acquired the merit of one hundred baths today." When Christ was crucified, he said, "Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do." So the highest *ksamā* is when the person does not even feel offended. He does not believe that anyone has done anything wrong. Therefore even the thought, "I forgive you" does not exist.

Ksamā is also one of the names of Mother Earth. It is said of Lord Rama that in forgiveness he was like Mother Earth. When we are forgiving, we have immediate peace. Otherwise night and day we burn with the fires of revenge, anger, and hatred. If we forgive and forget there is always peace of mind.

23. Fortitude

Fortitude is the ability to "hold on," to "persevere". What kinds of things are we to hold onto? Not to laziness, sleep, or procrastination, that is *tāmasika dhṛti*. If we hold onto our ambitions and passions, only thinking of self-gratification, that is *rājasika dhṛti*. But the kind that we are talking about here is *sāttvika dhṛti* by which we hold onto great, noble, and inspiring ideals and then move forward. We have discussed *sāttvika dhṛti* earlier in some verses from chapter eighteen.

24. Purity and Cleanliness

Śaucam refers to inner and outer cleanliness. We know about outer cleanliness. We do many things to keep our bodies and homes sparkling, but inner cleanliness is purity of motives, and that is the most important. When we perform an action, what is the motive behind it? At times outer actions may appear to be good and noble, but the underlying intent may be impure. For example, many houses have servants and if they initially serve honestly and well, they will gain the confidence of the master. Sometimes when a servant sees that the people of the house have relaxed, he steals everything and disappears. Although the servant seemed to be honest he really was not. This can be the case at any level, whether one is a servant, an employee, a manager, or the president of a big corporation. Someone may seem to be serving, but his motive may be different. Thus each of us should be alert to our own motives. When we look in a mirror, if we see any impurity such as dust or dirt anywhere in the mirror, we become concerned immediately. But our inner negativities are not so easily detected.

First, we need to become aware of our passionate and angry nature, our pride, arrogance, jealousy, greed or whatever else. Then we should determine what the consequences would be if they were allowed to continue. Once we see that, we can begin to make an effort to wash them away with the water of knowledge and devotion.

How do we know ourselves? There is an interesting analysis of the mind in this respect; that it has four sections or parts. One part of my mind is known to me and to other people also. A second part is known to me, but not to other people. A third part of my mind is not known by me, but is known to other people. And the fourth part of the mind is not known to anybody. It is lying unconscious or unmanifest. *Śaucam* will only be there if our entire mind is flooded with the light of knowledge. We can take the analogy of a large room that is pitch black. If we bring in a pencil-ray or light from a pocket torch, it will illuminate only a particular path. The rest will remain dark. But if we turn on the overhead lamp, the whole room will be flooded with light. Therefore we have to flood our minds with light slowly. We have to concentrate our attention first on that part of the mind that is known to us only. Then become fully conscious of that aspect of our mind that is known to us as well as that which is known to others. These two parts of our mind being known that much is illumined. We are not yet aware of the third part, but others are, and this is what is called criticism. When people criticize us, we may not like it, but the fact is that we are ignorant of our own faults; they reveal something to us that we cannot see for ourselves.

A great devotional poet says, "If there is a critic who always points out your faults, you should build a cottage for

him in your backyard. Invite him to stay and come to criticize you each day.” What is very close to us, we do not see. It is like a mountain of evil we do not see in ourselves, but the molehill of wrong in someone else I see clearly. So when someone says something about you, think it over. There may be some truth to it, therefore be honest. In the process of cleansing, the most important thing is honesty. If a person said something and it is true, I should not get angry, and if it is not true, I should also not get angry. Any criticism will throw light on an aspect of my mind that I was not aware of till then. If it is true, I should improve myself, and if it is false I should dismiss it calmly. Now what happens when three out of four parts are illumined? It is exactly like the floodlight analogy, when there is the light of knowledge in three out of four parts of the mind it will automatically illumine the fourth part also. And we come to recognize that which had been unknown to us all along

25. Non-Betrayal

This means the absence of betrayal. People who engage in anti-national activities are called *deśa drohī* and those who work against religious principals and engage in antisocial activities are called *dharma drohī*. Those persons who betray their spouses, teachers, or relatives cause profound hurt. Thus *adrohah* is to not betray someone who has faith in you.

26. Absence of Excessive Pride

Māna means overestimation of ourselves. It is to think that there is no one as great as I am. Such people love constant praise, and feel that they are the most praiseworthy and worshipful. That is *atimāna*. A person may be so arrogant that instead of going to a spiritual master to learn, he will demand that the master come to him. So *na atimāna* is humility or the absence of such excessive pride. It is a rare quality. Swami Chinmayananda used to say, “Humility is a strange thing. The moment you think you have got it, you have lost it.”

These are all qualities we need to cultivate. Here they are called the divine virtues. In the thirteenth chapter such qualities were called “knowledge” (*jñānam*) because they make the mind fit for receiving knowledge. All of these qualities purify and prepare our minds for Truth. The absence of knowledge, believing bad to be good, wrong to be right is called *ajñānam* (ignorance). All negativities are a sign of ignorance.

In the sixteenth chapter the first three verses list the divine virtues, and from the fourth verse on we receive a list of six negative qualities, as well as an elaborate description of *āsurika* people, describing how they think, feel, speak, and act. Demonic qualities help to strengthen the bond of ignorance. They are pointed out here so that we may become aware of all aspects of our mind.

Now the question arises, what happens to these people? In the nineteenth and twentieth verses, Lord Krishna says that He will throw them into this world of *samsāra* (delusion) again and again and they will fall lower and lower. When we read this, we wonder how the all-loving and compassionate Lord can repeatedly cast people into sorrow. We need to remember the teachings of Swami Chinmayananda, who said, “We are not punished for our sins, but we are punished by our sins.”

Even though in a court of law it appears that the judge passed a sentence on someone, if we think correctly, that person actually committed an act that invited such a result. That particular person is punished by his own action. If we protect the law, the law protects us, but if we break the law, the law will break us. Then ultimately who is responsible? We are. So when the Lord says that He will “throw people into *samsāra*,” who is this “I”? The Lord is the Law Giver. He creates the entire world, and the laws are His. If there is a law, we have to follow it. For example, fire is hot, and when used properly, no harm will come to us. In the same way the fruits of our actions (*karmaphala*) will be determined by the kind of actions we perform. Therefore, we should be careful. That is the Law of Karma. It is not without redemption; it is not an eternal hell or heaven. The Lord says that these are the laws, and they operate, whether we like them or not. If we are wise we will abandon the sinful actions and redeem ourselves. If we try to purify our minds and lift ourselves from the state of ignorance, we will break the cycle of *samsāra*.

Negative Tendencies

Thus the Lord elaborated on both the good qualities and the bad. Now He says that of all bad qualities, there are three chief negativities that can be called the gateways to hell. We have many ideas about hell. One idea of hell is that it is experience only after death; others conveniently believe that there is no such thing as hell.

Once a man came to Swami Chinmayananda and fell at his feet crying, "Please save me from going to hell." Swamiji said, "Do not worry, you will not go to hell."

The man replied, "How can you say that? All our scriptures say that if we commit sins, we will go to hell and I have committed many sins."

Swamiji said, "You will not go to hell because you are already in hell, but there is a way of getting out of it."

When we have committed many sins of commission and omission, and when we have failed to perform right actions our mind is continually troubled. The actions performed have created the present sorrow. This is living in hell. We live in perpetual regret and affliction. Svarga (heaven) is a place of joy where there is happiness, and Naraka (hell) is its opposite. Now let us look at the Gītā verse, which describes the three gateways to hell:

Lust, anger and greed, these three are the gateways of hell, destructive of the Self. Therefore one should abandon these three. (XVI:21)

What is that hell? Hell is nothing but the destroying of one's own Self; it is one's own ruin *nāśanam ātmanah*. This does not mean killing ourselves. These gates to destruction signify that through negative tendencies one shatters one's own dignity, happiness, peace, understanding, and the ability to reach a higher goal.

But what are these three doorways? The first is irresistible desire (*kāma*). This desire can be for anything, pleasure, or power, and it is very strong. It is considered irresistible because we want the experience immediately. Next is anger (*krodha*). And third is greed (*lobha*). All these three should be given up. Even though they appear to be three, they are really only one, and that is desire. If desire becomes obstructed it becomes anger. And if a desire is fulfilled, one wants more of it, and it becomes greed. Even a billionaire wants just a little more. All pleasure seeking is like that, just a little more.

So what is desire *kāma*? It is the belief that this object or being will give us joy. We think that without it life is not worth living. Once gained, the intensity of desire increases. And when we crave for more greed comes in. It is the same with money and power, we want more and more. Therefore one should give up all three.

Why does desire arise? It arises from ignorance, out of our superimposition of happiness onto outside objects. If we habitually entertain one thought, soon it becomes a desire. Desire, lust, or passions are insatiable. When we fulfill them, they will continue to grow. We should also see the distinction between these three. Some desires are immoral and may be fulfilled secretly. But anger is different in that it is displayed openly. We seem to experience a certain kind of power and joy from the fact that we are making an exhibition out of it. We also notice that at that moment the storms of desire or passion arise, that individual becomes the embodiment of passion only; but when the storm passes, he calms down. In the same way, anger erupts on the spur of a moment, and it subsides also. Greed, however, does not work that way it stays with us constantly and there is no public or private display of it.

In verse twenty-three of chapter five, Lord Krishna says "That person who can withstand the onslaught of the storms of desire and anger, that person is happy here in the world." What a beautiful definition of a happy person: one who is not swept away by desire or anger. Greed is not mentioned, for if *kāma* and *krodha* are under control then there is no *lobha*. If desire itself is not there, then where is greed? We should remember that jealousy and envy are also because of desire. If we want something and do not receive it, but someone else does, then we feel jealous of that person. If we do not want it and someone else gets it, jealousy never even enters the picture. So desire is at the root of our trouble. If we can take care of *kāma*, then life becomes beautiful.

But how can we get rid of desire? That is a very important question. First we have to see its source. The origin of desire is our fanciful imagination *samkalpa*, the recurring thought that a certain object, place, or experience is

wonderful, and will give us great joy and satisfaction. This is all due to superimposition or imagination. That is why in chapter six, verse twenty-four, the Lord advises, “Fix your mind in the Self, giving up desire which is born of this fanciful imagination (samkalpa).” And in Śrīmad Bhāgavat it is said, “Win over desire by non-entertainment of fanciful thoughts. And conquer anger by conquering your desire.” Thus we see that to the extent we give up desire, to that extent anger and greed will also disappear.

How do we conquer desire? By the non-entertainment of fanciful thoughts, asamkalpa. Try it, and see for yourself. If some pleasurable object comes in front of you and it is very tempting, refuse to imagine that it can bring you joy or that you want it. Before long you will see that you feel calm and there are no desires in your mind. Then try another experiment. Sit all by yourself and continue to think and imagine; just observe how many desires arise in the mind simply by imagining! It is not the object itself but our thoughts of the object that creates desire in the mind. Therefore we can conquer desire by asamkalpa.

The way to conquer anger is by peacefulness śānti, by conquering the moment of anger. If that moment is caught, the anger disappears by itself. Śānti is the only way. Only by not getting angry can we conquer anger.

Greed is overcome by practicing contentment santosa. Contentment does not mean that we cease all activities. Perform all your duties, work honestly, but then be content with whatever you receive as the result. When there is greed, one is never satisfied and we find many excuses to perform wrong actions. Now Arjuna wants to know what he will gain if he gives up these three. A man who is liberated from these three gateways to hell, O Arjuna, practices what is good for him and thus goes to the Supreme Goal. (XVI:22)

Hell is a life of agitation, restlessness, sorrow, suffering and compromise. The Sanskrit word for hell is narakdvāra. The person who has released himself from the clutches of lust, anger, and greed naturally starts working for his own supreme good. He knows that he has suffered enough and he begins to practice discrimination, dispassion, and self-control. He has intense longing for knowledge. He serves great spiritual teachers and learns from them, performing those actions that take him to the right path. So it is a question of right choice. Once we have chosen the right path and are working actively on it then our destination is not far off. We are on our way. We will reach our goal, which is the supreme destination of total contentment, satisfaction, and fulfillment. The next two verses explain how we can free ourselves from desire, anger and greed.

Having cast aside the ordinances of scripture, he who acts under the impulse of desire attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the Supreme Goal.

Therefore let the scriptures be your authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having known what is given as the commandments of scripture, here you should act. (XVI:23-24)

If we really want to free ourselves from the bondage of desire, anger, and greed, then we must follow the spiritual science (adhyātma śāstra) known as scripture. The word śāstra comes from the root śās, which means “to teach.” Śāstra is that which teaches or advises us. When śāstra is used in the material world it is referred to as science, and when dealing with life or subjective matters we call it scripture. The scriptures are very scientific, they embody systematic knowledge and analysis. Another meaning for śāstra is that which saves us from great danger through its teachings. Manana trayate iti mantra, “When we reflect upon the mantra, it is the discovery of Truth that protects us.” When we continue to chant, remembering the meaning of the mantra, we discover Truth. It is said in Taittirīya Upanishad, “This is a teaching and it must be practiced.” For a person who is suffering from a disease, there is a medical science called cikitsā śāstra and there are doctors who have studied that śāstra. They can recognize the disease and advise on its cure. They may prescribe certain medications and also suggest dietary restrictions or other disciplines to follow. The patient’s only duty is to implicitly follow the instructions of the doctor. But many times our own likes and dislikes come in the way. For example, the doctor might advise to stop smoking or drinking or eating sweets. But we protest and say, “What is the use of living, if I have to give up everything?” A person who does not follow the instructions for good health or refuses to listen to the advice of the doctor does not get well, his

disease only worsens.

Just as there is a science of bodily health, there is also a science of spiritual health. These instructions must be learned as well as practiced. Those who discard or throw away all the injunctions and advice of the śāstra (scriptures) and go with the whims and fancies of the mind cannot reach perfection. For them even in this world there is no joy, never mind supreme Happiness. They do not acquire purity of mind and there is no abidance in the Self. The more a person indulges in pleasures, the more diseases arise in him. Somehow we have a very wrong notion about śāstra and then we question why there are so many injunctions of do's and don'ts? Medical science prescribes rules for health and the doctor may also give advice, but it is our choice as to whether or not we follow them.

The last statement of this chapter is very powerful. "Let the śāstra be your authority on what ought to be done and what ought to be avoided." In other words, our life must be guided by the teachings of scripture. There are two thoughts here. Right now all our activities in life are prompted by our inner tendencies (vāsamā), desires, and likes and dislikes. We need to determine whether an act we want to perform is right or wrong. If it is permissible and endorsed by śāstra, only then should we do it. Our personal likes and dislikes must not even be considered and desire-prompted activities should be replaced by those sanctioned by the scriptures.

First of all, what the scriptures say about a particular matter should be understood. If we do not understand, we should ask learned or noble people for their guidance. Thus, once having understood the injunctions of scripture, the actions (karma) that are enjoined or advised should be performed. Therefore, first we should understand, and then that knowledge should be implemented.

In our lives we know what thoughtless action is. But there is something else, which is called action-less thought, only the thought is there, there is no action. If we are wondering why we are not able to achieve anything great in life, it is because we are living a life whereby a) We do not take action upon the thoughts or, b) We perform actions without giving them due thought. A life of thoughtless action takes us to trouble. Similarly, where actions are required, if we just sit and think, naturally we will not experience success. For example, we may decide that we will get up early so that we can have time for study and exercise or whatever. So action is required the next day, but when the time comes we think, is it really necessary to get up this early? Maybe tomorrow! What was required was action, not more thinking. But no action came, and what happens next is even more dangerous. If our actions are not according to our knowledge, then slowly our knowledge changes its form and it becomes consistent with the action. That is why it is said in buddhi karma anusāriṇi. Whatever we start doing, our thinking will also become like that. Let us take the same example. Say that we decided that we should get up early in the morning. So on the first day when we did not get up, we felt guilty and also thought, "What is this, I did not get up? Tomorrow I will definitely get up." But the next day the same thing happens and it continues for four or five days; we do not get up, and then our thinking slowly changes. We justify and rationalize by saying, "Why should I get up early? I only have to go to the office at eight o'clock." Thus, our thinking becomes conditioned by our actions.

The Lord tells us "You have to understand what the śāstra says and then that knowledge must be followed by actions." Then you can be free from karma, krodha, and lobha." In short, the Lord tells us these three are the gateways of hell and the one who releases himself or herself from these three negative qualities reaches the supreme goal. The question was how do we come out of the negative qualities? The answer is simple: follow the teaching of the scriptures and do not allow your likes and dislikes to interfere with that. At present our mind is such that if the guru tells us what we want to hear, then he is nice, and if he tells us something that we do not like, we say, "Lord has also given me some intelligence. Let me think for myself." Suddenly our mind changes because we do not like what he said.

We do the same thing with the scriptures. As long as it tells us what we like, everything is fine. But when we say scripture, we mean the entire scripture, not just parts of it. If we only do what is convenient, and just continue as we have been doing all along, then we are pursuing a philosophy of convenience. This concludes the topic of values in the Gītā.