

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1-3: Krishna rebukes Arjuna

2.1: Sañjaya said (*sañjaya uvāca*): Kṛṣṇa saw that Arjuna was crying because he did not want to hurt his family (*taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭam aśru-pūrṇākulekṣaṇam*). Thus, seeing His friend so distraught, Kṛṣṇa, who is celebrated as Madhusūdana, the killer of the demon Madhu, spoke to dispel the demon of ignorance which had bewildered Arjuna (*viṣīdantam idaṁ vākyam uvāca madhusūdanaḥ*). This does not befit an Aryan who aspires for spiritual realisation and knows that the means to achieve it is by performing one's duties as prescribed by scripture (*anārya-juṣṭam asvargyam*).

#### **Explanatory note:**

In his purport to text 1 of the Bhagavad Gita, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada explains the significance of referring to Kṛṣṇa as Madhusūdana:

“The word ‘Madhusūdana’ is significant in this verse. Lord Kṛṣṇa killed the demon Madhu, and now Arjuna wanted Kṛṣṇa to kill the demon of misunderstanding that had overtaken him in the discharge of his duty.”

Misunderstanding is a form of ignorance, and ignorance is the root cause of all our misfortune.

“...we commit sins out of ignorance. Our sinful nature is due to ignorance. Just like a person who does not know the laws of the state, he commits something which he does not know, but he is captured, he is arrested under the law. So similarly, all kind of sins we perform, it is due to ignorance.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 7.28-8.6, October 21<sup>st</sup> 1966 in New York](#))

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2.2: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): What has come over your judgement at this decisive moment on the battlefield (*kutas tvā kaśmalam idaṁ viṣame samupasthitam*)? You are not acting like one who understands the higher purpose of life and how to attain it (*anārya-juṣṭam*). If you renounce your kṣatriya duty and leave the battlefield, not only will you not be liberated, but you will not even be elevated to the heavenly planets in your next life, nor will you be happy in this life, for your good reputation will be destroyed (*asvargyam akīrti-karam*).

#### **Explanatory note:**

In unpacking this verse, I looked carefully at how Śrīla Prabhupāda, Viśvanātha Cakravartī

Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explained the following terms: *kutaḥ*, *kaśmalam*, *viṣame*, *anārya-juṣṭam*, and *asvargyam akīrti-karam*.

*Kutaḥ*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this word as ‘wherefrom’. Baladeva and Viśvanātha, on the other hand, translate it as ‘for what reason’ or ‘why’.

Why the apparent difference? The term *kutaḥ* literally means ‘wherefrom’. However, in Sanskrit, ‘wherefrom’ can imply ‘for what cause’, or in other words, ‘why’.

*Kaśmalam*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as ‘dirtiness’ and ‘impurities’. This echoes Baladeva’s use of the word ‘contamination’. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, however, translates it as ‘bewilderment’. How to explain the apparent difference?

The word *kaśmalam* conveys a condition that clouds or pollutes one’s inner clarity. Thus, the ‘dirtiness’ or ‘contamination’ refers to a disturbance in one’s faculty of discernment, which manifests as bewilderment. Kṛṣṇa will describe proper and polluted discernment in chapter 18.30–32.

*Viṣame*: Although Śrīla Prabhupāda does not show this word in his fluent translation, in his word-for-word he translates it as ‘in this hour of crisis’, which suggests the timing is critical. Baladeva translates it as ‘at the time of battle’, which suggests the place is inappropriate. Viśvanātha translates it as ‘at this critical juncture of the war’, which suggests both the timing and setting are inappropriate.

*Anārya-juṣṭam*: Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: “The word *āryan* is applicable to persons who know the value of life and have a civilization based on spiritual realization.” Bg 2.2 purport Baladeva explains this refers to people who follow their prescribed duties because they want to purify their hearts of material desires and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Viśvanātha describes this as referring to those who follow the prescriptions of scripture. Taken together, this term indicates behaviour that is unworthy of one who understands the highest aim of human life and is committed to achieving it by following the guidance of scripture.

*Asvargyam akīrti-karam*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: ‘They lead not to higher planets but to infamy.’ Baladeva says ‘The Lord explains that this renunciation of fighting does not lead to liberation, Svarga or fame. It is also contrary to religious practices for obtaining Svarga (*asvargyam*), and it destroys fame (*akīrti-karam*). Viśvanātha writes ‘which is against both happiness in next life (*asvargyam*) and this life (*akīrti-karam*)’. Taken together, this indicates that such behaviour brings neither elevation in the next life nor honour in this one.

**Evidence:**

Below are the relevant excerpts from Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura’s commentaries respectively:

“The word ‘contamination’ (*kaśmalam*) is used with a derogatory sense, since Kṛṣṇa is taking the position of the teacher and criticizing His student. For what reason (*kutaḥ*) has this contamination of turning away from your duties come upon you, the jewel among warriors, at the time of battle (*viṣame*)? The Lord explains that this renunciation of fighting does not lead to liberation, Svarga or fame. It is not practiced (*juṣṭam*) by those aspiring for liberation (*ārya*), because those who are ārya practice their designated duties for purification of the heart.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.2)

“Why (*kutaḥ*) has this bewilderment (*kaśmalam*) at this critical juncture of the war (*viṣame*) come upon you (*samupasthitam*), which is not experienced by persons firmly established in dharmic principles (*anārya-juṣṭam*), which is against both happiness in next life (*asvargyam*) and in this life (*akīrti-karam*)?” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.2 commentary)

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2.3: Arjuna, you are my cousin, the son of my aunt Pṛthā. Don’t succumb to unmanly cowardice (*klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha*). I don’t expect such behaviour from you—this is out of character (*naitat tvayy upapadyate*). Give up this foolish sentimentality. These are trivial concerns—a momentary lapse in your resolve to do your duty (*kṣudraṁ hṛdaya-daurbalyam*). Stand up, Parantapa—destroyer of enemies (*tyaktvottiṣṭha paran-tapa*).

**Explanatory note:**

The following words were of particular interest to me: Pārtha, klaibyam, kṣudram and hṛdaya-daubalyam.

*Pārtha*: Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna as Pārtha to emphasise their family relationship. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to this verse:

“Arjuna was addressed as the son of Pṛthā, who happened to be the sister of Kṛṣṇa’s father Vasudeva. Therefore Arjuna had a blood relationship with Kṛṣṇa.”

Their blood line is a noble one, and the fact that Arjuna is Kṛṣṇa’s cousin makes it even more special. Kṛṣṇa is implying that such behaviour is not worthy of someone with such a fortunate birth.

Baladeva writes: “By the mercy of Indra, you have been born as the son of Pṛtha (*pārtha*).” Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.3 commentary.

Viśvanātha writes: “O Partha, you are the son of Prtha, but in spite of that you have acted like this. Do not yield to this.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.3 commentary)

*Klaibyam*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the word *klaibyam* as impotence: “do not yield to this degrading impotence”.

Viśvanātha and Baladeva both translate it as cowardice.

“Do not become cowardly (*klaibyam*), impotent.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.3 commentary)

“Do not succumb to cowardice (*klaibyam*).” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.3 commentary).

The term derives from the root *klība*, which carries the sense of being ‘unmanly’, ‘impotent’, or lacking strength and resolve. Thus, *klaibyam* indicates an inability to act with courage, firmness, and determination. *Klaibyam*, thus, refers to an inability to act with strength, courage, and firmness. I have expressed it as ‘unmanly cowardice’.

*Kṣudram*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *kṣudram* as petty. Baladeva translates it as transitory: ‘a transitory (*kṣudram*) weakness of heart.’ Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.3 commentary. I have tried to incorporate both perspectives.

*Hṛdaya-daurbalyam*: Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva both translate this as ‘weakness of heart’ and Viśvanātha translates it as ‘weakness of mind’. I have analysed this express in my Gita Support in the back portion of this book. A strong heart is resolved to do what Kṛṣṇa wants, but a weak heart lacks resolve.

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## 2.4-9: Arjuna surrenders

2.4: Arjuna said: How can I raise my weapons against Bhīṣma and Droṇa? They deserve to be worshipped by me, not attacked with arrows (*iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjārhāv*). You are known as Madhusūdana, the killer of the demon Madhu (*madhusūdana*). You strike down enemies, not those who deserve honour—so why should I do otherwise (*ari-sūdana*)?

### Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva and Viśvanātha suggest there is an unspoken subtext in this verse.

“If Bhisma and others attack, why should you not attack them? Is this not proper for the ksatriyas?’.... ‘Bhisma....and Drona are teachers who give knowledge. How will I attack them with arrows? It is not proper to attack even with joking words those who should be

worshipped with flowers and other articles of respect. So how can I attack them with arrows?...’O Krsna, You also kill enemies in battle (*ari-sūdana*), but not men worthy of worship such as Ugrasena and Sandipani, (so why should I do that?)” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.4 commentary.)

“But those two elders are fighting. Are you not able to fight against them?’ ‘No, I cannot do so, for they are worthy of worship (*pūjārhou*): I should offer flowers to their feet in devotion rather than sharp arrows in anger. O friend Krsna! Even you injure only enemies in battle, and not your own guru Sandipani Muni or your friends the Yadus, O Madhusudana, killer of Madhu!” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.4 commentary)

Srila Prabhupada shares a similar light on Madhusudana in this lecture: “Kṛṣṇa is addressed "Madhusūdana." Madhusūdana means... Madhu was Kṛṣṇa's enemy, a demon. So He killed. So "You are Madhusūdana, You are killer of Your enemies. Can You give me any evidence that You have killed Your guru? So why You are asking me?" This is the purport. Iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjārḥāv ari-sūdana. Again ari-sūdana. Ari means enemy. Madhusūdana, particularly "the killer of the Madhu demon." And next is Arisudana. Ari means enemy.” (Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 2.4-5, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1973, in London)

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2.5: I would rather live as a beggar than kill such saintly men who have taught me everything I know (*gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān śreyo bhoktuṃ bhaikṣyam apīha loke*). Even if they are materially motivated, they are still my elders, and thus anything I enjoy from killing them would also be sinful (*hatvārtha-kāmāms tu gurūn ihaiva bhujīya bhogān rudhira-pradigdhān*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa provide a more elaborate subtext to this verse which I have not included because it was not necessary to explain my understanding of the verse. However, I recommend H.H. Bhānu Swāmī’s translations of their commentaries to the eager student of the Bhagavad Gita.

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2.6: I don’t know what would be worse, winning this war or losing (*na caitad vidmaḥ kataram no garīyo yad vā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ*). Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons are my cousins. I could not live with myself if I killed them—but that’s the only way I can win, as they have all come out to fight (*yān eva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas te ’vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to this verse, “still, if the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra died in battle, it would be very difficult to live in their absence.”

I understand this to mean that they do not want to kill their uncle’s sons—because they are their cousins. This is how the verse speaks to me.

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2.7: I am forgetting my spiritual nature and thus succumbing to the fault of identifying with my material body and thinking that whatever is in relation to this body is mine. This weakness is overpowering my heroic kṣatriya nature (*kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ*). I am confused about what is the right thing to do (*prcchāmi tvām dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ*). Please help me decide with certainty what I should do to secure my ultimate benefit (*yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me*). I accept You as my spiritual instructor, and I want to learn from You. Therefore, please instruct me (*śiṣyas te 'haṁ sādhi mām tvām prapannam*).

**Explanatory note:**

Let us analyse the first line: *kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ*

**Kārpaṇya:**

This word confused me. Śrīla Prabhupāda translates it as ‘miserly’. This alerted me to the fact that the words *kārpaṇya* and *kṛpaṇa* are etymologically connected. *Kṛpaṇa* refers to a miser, and *kārpaṇya* refers to the condition of being miserly—miserliness.

A miser is defined as one who does not properly utilise his God-given assets:

““Actually my behavior should be exactly like a kṣatriya, to fight for the just cause, but in this case I am denying. Therefore I am kṛpaṇa.” Kṛpaṇa means one who does not properly use his position. One man is very rich, but he does not use his money, simply sees the money, he is called kṛpaṇa. Similarly, Arjuna is powerful, he can fight, he is a kṣatriya, but he is denying his ability. Therefore he is thinking that “I have become kṛpaṇa, miser. Although I have got strength, I am denying to fight.” “Although I have got money, I do not spend.” These are called kṛpaṇa.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 2.1-11, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1975 in Johannesburg](#))

I became confused when I noted that Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura both translate *kārpaṇya* differently—Baladeva as one who does not know Brahman, and Viśvanātha as the weakness of giving up the God-given qualities which define our nature and work in society.

Since I am in the habit of listening to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s lectures, I came across comments which helped me understand that these definitions are not contradictory. Each ācārya’s perspective is supported by Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Śrīla Prabhupāda agrees with Viśvanātha that *kārpaṇya* means giving up one's natural duties:

"Giving up my natural courage as ksatriya is my weakness (karpanyam)." (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.7 commentary)

"Yes," *kārpaṇya-doṣa*, *kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ* [Bg. 2.7], "my natural duty I am forgetting." ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gīta 2.7, on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1973, in London](#) )

He also agrees with Baladeva that *kārpaṇya* refers to one who is not spiritually realised: "The word karpanya indicates a person with no knowledge of Brahman, as seen from the sruti statement y ova etad aksaram gargy aviditva asmal lokat praiti sa karpana: 'O Gargi, he who leaves this world without knowing Brahman is called karpana' (Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad 3.8.1)." *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.7 commentary.

"Anyway, we should always be conscious that everything that we have in our possession, even our body, even our mind, even our energy, everything, is God-gifted. One who has got this conception of life, he is brāhmaṇa. He is the one who knows Brahman. One who does not know this and simply lives for sense gratification, he is called the miser. So we shall not be miser. We shall be the brāhmaṇa." (Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.48–49, April 1st, 1966 in New York)

*It seems that kārpaṇya is the antonym of brāhmaṇa. The first denotes a conditioned soul in ignorance, and the second denotes one who has achieved Brahman-realisation:*

"Don't be miser. Don't be miser." Miser... We have already explained in our last meeting what is the miser and what is a brāhmaṇa. The opposite word is brāhmaṇa. Miser means this valuable body, one who does not properly utilize it; simply they utilize this body for sense gratification and nothing more. They are kṛpaṇa. Kṛpaṇa means miser. Miser, who does not utilize the asset given to him, he's a miser. Miser. He's not liberal. One should be liberal." ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gīta 2.48-49, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966 in New York](#))

*The different definitions of kārpaṇya provide three complementary perspectives on miserliness: its literal meaning—not properly using God-given assets; how this misuse appears in action—abandoning one's natural duties; and the underlying cause of such misuse—spiritual ignorance.*

#### **Dosa:**

This is another word which is translated differently. Srila Prabhupada, in his word-for word section translates it as 'by the weakness'. Baladeva Vidyabhusana, however, translates it as 'fault':

"Because of the lack of knowledge of Brahman (karpanya) I have developed the fault (dosa) of possessiveness of family members, as mentioned in the previous verse." (*Gita Bhusana* 2.7 commentary)

*Baladeva's translation is the literal meaning of doṣa. The inner fault is that Arjuna is identifying with the body and therefore thinking in terms of 'I and mine'—I am this body, and these are my cousins, my grandfather, my teacher. This sense of possessiveness, arising from spiritual ignorance, is the fault, and it manifests as weakness, or the inability to do his duty.*

“Practical application means that this "I" and "mine," it is all misconception. Everything belongs to Kṛṣṇa. I am His servant.” ([Lecture on Srimad Bhagavatam 2.9.2-3, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1972, in Tokyo](#))

### **Upahata svabhava:**

Srila Prabhupada translates 'upahata' as 'being afflicted'; and svabhava as 'characteristics'. The word 'upahata' also appears in these verses: Bg 1.37-38, SB 8.24.46, SB 10.15.49-50, and SB 10.84.26 and in these verses Srila Prabhupada translates it variously as: overpowered, lost, and destroyed.

Svabhava also comes up in other contexts. It can refer to one's eternal spiritual characteristic, or one's material characteristics in the modes of nature: “*svabhāvaḥ* — nature (under the influence of different modes of material nature).” Srimad Bhagavatam 7.9.20.

Baladeva Vidyabhusana makes it clear that in this verse, svabhavaḥ is being used to refer to one's material characteristics under the modes of nature:

“This in turn has caused me to develop weakness of nature (upahata svabhavaḥ)—making me give up my desire to fight as a ksatriya.” Gita Bhusana 2.7 commentary.

*Together the two words upahata svabhavaḥ mean that Arjuna's natural heroic nature is being overpowered. By what? By the fault of thinking of his family members as belonging to him which is the result of spiritual ignorance and which is thus robbing him of his ability to do his duty.*

### **My Insight:** (an insight is implied but not directly stated)

The first line of this verse explains, in a nutshell, the reason for our suffering in the material world. All of us act to increase our happiness and reduce our suffering, and yet, despite our best efforts, we ultimately increase our anxiety and suffering. Why? Because of spiritual ignorance, we identify with the body and mistakenly think that whatever is in relation to our material bodies is ours. When we act on this mistaken belief, we implicate ourselves in greater and greater suffering. We cannot resolve this by artificially renouncing our material duties. The Bhagavad Gita systematically teaches us how to act responsibly in this world while simultaneously elevating our consciousness to Brahman-realisation. Without trying to understand the Bhagavad-gita to the best of our ability, as Arjuna did, we cannot solve the problems of our lives.

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**Kṛṣṇa's unspoken comment:** You know what the scriptures say are the duties of a ksatriya. If you want your own benefit, than think over those instructions and act accordingly. You do not need to become My disciple. I am your friend.

Explanatory note:

“You are knowledgeable of the scriptures. Carry out action after considering your own benefit in light of the scriptures. Why should you be a disciple of Me, a friend?” Gita Bhusana 2.8 commentary.

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2.8: Arjuna said: I cannot discern what course of action will relieve my grief, which is draining my physical and mental vitality (*na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād yac chokam ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām*). Even if I were to regain the kingdom and enjoy undisputed sovereignty over the earth with prosperity like that of the celestials, it would not remove this grief (*avāpya bhūmāv asapatnam ṛddham rājyaṁ surāṇām api cādhipatyam*).

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**Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eyes lit up with hope. If Arjuna refused to fight, his sons' victory was assured.**

**Explanatory note:**

Evidence for this is found in Śrīla Prabhupāda's short purport to Bg 2.9.

It is also supported by Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa:

“In this way Sañjaya extinguished the hope which arose in Dhṛtarāṣṭra's heart of gaining the kingdom for his own sons.” *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.9 commentary.

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2.9: Noting Dhṛtarāṣṭra's reaction, Sañjaya said (*sañjaya uvāca*): Arjuna, who is capable of destroying his enemies, then addressed Kṛṣṇa, who is Hṛṣīkeśa, the controller of the senses (*evam uktvā hṛṣīkeśam guḍākeśaḥ paran-tapaḥ*): “Kṛṣṇa, I turn to You because You are famous as Govinda—the knower of the Vedas and giver of pleasure to the senses. Until I am certain, on the authority of the Vedas, what truly satisfies the senses, I will not fight” (*na yotsya iti govindam*). Then he became silent (*uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha*).

**Explanatory note:**

Hṛṣīkeśa: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that the reason Sañjaya refers to Kṛṣṇa as Hṛṣīkeśa—the controller of the senses—is to suggest to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that Kṛṣṇa will soon change Arjuna's mind about not fighting.

Govinda: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says this name means “knower of the Vedas,” and in a lecture on this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda gives an additional meaning: “one who gives pleasure to the senses.” I have incorporated both meanings in this version.

My evidence:

“Sañjaya, by mentioning the name Hṛṣīkeśa, controller of the senses, indicates that the Lord will make Arjuna manifest intelligence to engage in the battle. By using the word Govinda, the knower of all the Vedas, Sañjaya suggests that the Lord will make Arjuna accept his dharma to fight.” *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.9 commentary.

“Govinda. Go means also senses. Go means cow, go means land and go means sense. And inda. Inda means pleasure. One who gives pleasure to the cow, one who gives pleasure to the land, one who gives pleasure to the senses—so His name is Govinda.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.7–11 on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1966](#))

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### **2.10-15: Tolerance is essential in self-realisation.**

2.10: Sañjaya, addressing Dhṛtarāṣṭra as a descendant of the great King Bharata (bhārata), explained that before replying, Kṛṣṇa seemed to smile (*tam uvāca hṛṣīkeśaḥ prahasann iva bhārata*) at the despondent Arjuna while they stood in the middle of the two armies (*senayor ubhayor madhye viṣṭāntam idaṁ vacaḥ*).

#### **Explanatory note:**

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain Kṛṣṇa’s smile as follows:

Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasises that it was because his friend, Arjuna, had decided to become his disciple:

“Kṛṣṇa was smiling because a friend had chosen to become a disciple.” Bg 2.10 purport.

Baladeva and Viśvanātha give a more elaborate explanation. They suggest that, as a friend, Kṛṣṇa would have laughed at Arjuna to embarrass him for his foolishness. However, because Arjuna had now become His disciple, and it is inappropriate to laugh at one’s disciple, He only smiled.

“He smiled at Arjuna as a friend, suggesting, ‘How has such thinking come upon such a person as you? I will make you sink in the ocean of embarrassment for having said such unsuitable words.’ He made a very slight smile appear on His lower lip, because it would be improper to laugh at Arjuna, who had now become His disciple. That is indicated by the phrase *prahasann iva*.” *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.10 commentary.

“ ‘You have shown such lack of judgment!’ Laughing at him as a friend, Kṛṣṇa could put Arjuna in an ocean of embarrassment for his unworthy actions. However, because now Arjuna took the position of student, laughing would be improper. Thus Kṛṣṇa suppressed

that laugh by closing his lips. Instead he slightly smiled (*prahasann iva*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.10 commentary)

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2.11: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): You mimic the language of those who have realised the ātmā. For example, you talk about detachment, ethics, and concern for karmic consequences (*prajñā-vādāmś ca bhāṣase*). However, your lamentation is misplaced—you are grieving for that which does not deserve grief (*aśocyān anvaśocas tvam*). No spiritually enlightened person grieves for the body, neither when it is alive nor when it is dead (*gatāsūn agatāsūmś ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

A pandita refers to one who is spiritually enlightened:

“*Paṇḍita means one who has attained the spiritual platform.*” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 4.13, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1974, in Bombay](#))

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2.12: There was never a time when I, you, and each of these warriors did not exist (*na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ na tvam neme janādhipāḥ*). Nor will any of us cease to exist in the future (*na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayam ataḥ param*).

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**Arjuna’s unspoken comment:** True, the soul is eternal, but it is natural to lament for the body the soul inhabits, because we have relationships with the body.

**Explanatory note:**

“In spite of the eternal nature of the soul, distinct from the bodies of Bhīṣma and others, it is appropriate to lament for the bodies, which are the places of enjoyment.” *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.13 commentary.

“One’s body becomes the object of affection as it is related to the soul. By relation with that body, one’s relatives become objects of affection, and by relationship with them, even their sons also become objects of affection. So when their bodies perish, there will certainly be lamentation.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.13 commentary)

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2.13: Kṛṣṇa said: The soul passes through different stages of life within this body (*dehino ’smin yathā dehe*). When the soul gives up its boyhood body and enters a youthful body and then gives up that body to enter an elderly body, no one laments (*kaumāraṁ yauvanam jarā*). In the same way, a self-realised person does not lament when the soul enters a new body (*tathā dehāntara-prāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati*).

**Explanatory note:**

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura suggests that Kṛṣṇa is reasoning with Arjuna why a self-realised person does not lament the change of bodies.

A dhīra is someone who is not disturbed in the face of material changes, and the word refers to a self-realised person.

**My evidence:**

“In answer to this, he speaks this verse. ‘In the body belonging to the jīva (*dehinaḥ*), one attains stages such as boyhood. After boyhood is destroyed, one attains youth. When youth is destroyed, one attains old age. In the same manner, one attains another body. Just as (*yathā*) one does not lament for the destruction of the objects of affection in the form of boyhood and youth of the body, which are related to the soul, so (*tathā*) one should also not lament for the destruction of the object of affection, the body, which is also related to the soul.’” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.13 commentary)

“A *dhīra* is one who is not disturbed by material illusion. No one can be undisturbed unless he is perfectly spiritually realized, at which time one neither hankers nor laments for anything. A *dhīra* realizes that the material body and mind he has acquired by chance through material association are but foreign elements; therefore he simply makes the best use of a bad bargain.” [Isopanisad, verse 10 purport](#)

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**Arjuna’s unspoken comment:** But I cannot remain so equipoised, because I am unable to tolerate the grief of separation from great personalities such as Grandfather Bhīṣma and my teacher, Droṇācārya.

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa suggests there was such an unspoken objection: “But I lament because of the grief caused by separation from him. Thus my senses and mind are burning up.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.14 commentary)

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura also suggests that Arjuna acknowledged he was not a dhīra and was thus suffering:

“Yes, this is indeed true. I have shown such indiscretion. My mind, producing nonsense, uselessly covered with lamentation and bewilderment, causes me suffering.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.14 commentary)

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2.14: Kṛṣṇa said: Such material happiness and distress are temporary (*āgamāpāyino ’nityās*). Just as the seasons change from winter to summer, so material experience fluctuates between happiness and distress (*śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ*). Our emotions shift with changes in sensory experience (*mātrā-sparśās*). But, O son of Kuntī, you enjoy a great heritage from your mother’s side, and from your father’s side you descend from the great

King Bharata (*kaunteya bhārata*). Therefore, it behoves you to tolerate these disturbances and remain fixed in doing your duty (*tāms titikṣasva*).

**Explanatory note:**

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura all suggest that Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna how to rise to the platform of being a dhīra. He must first learn to tolerate temporary sensory inconveniences and perform his duty regardless. By such faithful execution of his duty, he will rise to the platform of knowledge, from which he will attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa also suggest that, by referring to Arjuna as *Kaunteya* and *Bhārata*, Kṛṣṇa is appealing to Arjuna’s heritage and the expectations that come with such a birth.

**My evidence:**

“Cold water, which in the summer gives pleasure, gives pain in the winter. Tolerate these temporary experiences (*anityān*), since they appear and disappear (*āgamāpāyinaḥ*)... This means that just as one takes a cold bath in the month of Māgha, though it is difficult, because it is an injunction, with a sense of duty, so Arjuna should fight with Bhīṣma and others, though it is difficult, because of the rules of scripture. At present, he should tolerate the incidental experience of suffering for the accomplishment of proper dharma. From dharma comes the appearance of jñāna, and from jñāna arises liberation, after which there is no obligation to follow those rules. Giving up dharma without first becoming firmly established in jñāna gives rise to obstacles. ‘O son of Kuntī, O descendant of Bharata, it is improper for you to abandon the performance of dharma, since you have the purity of these two great families.’” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.14 commentary)

“Following dharma gradually rids one of all low qualities... Not performing prescribed duty eventually brings about great problems.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.14 commentary)

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2.15: One must use his intelligence to properly understand his God-given duty, and by cultivating correct discernment, he will be able to remain undisturbed (*yam hi na vyathayanti ete puruṣaṁ*). You are known as the best among men (*puruṣarṣabha*) because of your intimate friendship with Me. Thus, such loss of equilibrium does not suit you. One who can remain fixed in doing his duty, regardless of happiness or distress (*sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ*), attains the preliminary qualification to progress toward liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*so ’mṛtatvāya kalpate*).

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that to be a dhīra, one must engage one’s intelligence in understanding dharma—one’s duty. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura also specifies that merely

tolerating difficulties in a mood of blind following is not effective. Toleration is effective when coupled with the proper use of one's own discerning faculty.

Srila Prabhupada explains in a lecture that Kṛṣṇa refers to Arjuna as 'the best among men' specifically because Arjuna is Kṛṣṇa's friend. Thus it does not behove him to become disturbed by material circumstances.

**My evidence:**

"The word *dhīra* indicates a person who makes (*īrayati*) his intelligence (*dhī*) active in these matters of dharma." (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.15 commentary)

"Practicing tolerance with this discernment, the experience of sense objects will, with the passage of time, no longer give distress." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.15 commentary)

"So Kṛṣṇa is addressing Arjuna *puruṣarṣabha*, the best of the men. "O the best of the men." Certainly, Kṛṣṇa [Arjuna] is the best of the mankind. Because he is directly friend of Kṛṣṇa, who can be better man than him? The best of the men. So the best of the men, why he's distressed in executing his duty? Therefore this very word is used, that "You are the best of the men." Actually, the best of the men should not be disturbed by any material condition. He should discharge his duties." ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gīta 2.15, August 21<sup>st</sup> 1973, in London](#))

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## 2.16-25: The Distinction Between the Body and the Soul

2.16: One achieves the ability to remain equipoised in all circumstances when one can properly discern the difference between the material body and the soul (*ubhayaḥ api dṛṣṭo 'ntas tv anayos tattva-darśibhiḥ*). At such a time, one sees that emotions like confusion and lamentation arise from the gross and subtle material bodies, both of which are ephemeral and thus insubstantial (*nāsato vidyate bhāvo*), and are distinct from the eternal ātmā, whose existence is substantial because it is eternal (*nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that this verse describes the discrimination of a *dhīra*, which enables him to remain equipoised in all bodily circumstances.

**My evidence:**

"This verse describes the result for those who have attained the level of discrimination. As the śruti says, the soul is not attached to matter: *asaṅgo hy ayam puruṣaḥ* (Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.3.15). Thus, the jīva has no relationship with the subtle or gross bodies and their products, such as lamentation and bewilderment. This relationship is caused by ignorance. This is explained in this verse. There is no real existence (*bhāvaḥ*) of the body (*asataḥ*), the shelter of lamentation and bewilderment, because of its opposite nature to the soul, in which these do not exist. And there is no destruction of the jīva in its real form (*sataḥ*)." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.16 commentary)

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2.17: You should know that the soul pervades the entire body through consciousness (*avināśi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam idam tatam*). No one can bring about the destruction of the soul, for it is immutable and eternal (*vināśam avyayasyāsyā na kaścit kartum arhati*).

**Explanatory note:**

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa all concur that this verse refers to consciousness as the manifestation of the soul pervading the entire body.

**My evidence:**

“This verse more clearly explains the real nature of the soul, which is spread all over the body. Anyone can understand what is spread all over the body: it is consciousness. Everyone is conscious of the pains and pleasures of the body in part or as a whole. This spreading of consciousness is limited within one’s own body.” (Bg. 2.17 purport)

“This verse clarifies the meaning of the previous verse. Know this jīva (*tat*) as indestructible, which is spread throughout the body (*sarvam idam tatam*).... ‘But, being spread throughout the body by its consciousness....’” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.17 commentary)

“The Lord further explains the nature of the body and the jīvātma just discussed in two more verses. Understand that the substance known as jīvātma is eternal (*avināśī*). This whole body (*idam sarvam*) is pervaded by this soul: the body is pervaded by the ātmā’s consciousness, its capacity to know objects beyond itself (*dharma-bhūta-jñāna*), including the body.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.17 commentary)

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2.18: The material body is destined for destruction (*antavanta ime dehā*). The Vedas state that the soul which inhabits the body is eternal (*nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ*). It cannot be destroyed, nor can it be measured or perceived by any material means (*anāśino ’prameyasya*). Therefore, since the body is destined for destruction and the soul is indestructible, you should fight, O descendant of Bharata (*tasmād yudhyasva bhārata*).

**Explanatory note:**

Let us analyse *aprameyasya* and *ukta*.

*Aprameyasya*: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa translates this word as “cannot be known by material methods,” whereas both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura translate it as difficult to measure because it is very small.

*Ukta* — “is said”: I understand that Kṛṣṇa is appealing to the authority of the Vedas.

**My evidence:**

“The bodies of the jīva are said to have a destructible nature (*antavantaḥ*), whereas the possessor of the body, the jīva (*śarīriṇaḥ*), is eternal. Because it is the knower and

consciousness itself, the jīva cannot be known by material methods (*aprameyasya*).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.18 commentary)

“This verse also clarifies verse 16. The possessor of the body (*śarīriṇaḥ*), the jīva, is beyond measurement, or difficult to understand, because it is very, very small (*aprameyasya*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.18 commentary)

*Aprameyasya* is a combination of the prefix *a* (“not”) and the root word *prameya* (“that which can be measured, perceived, or analysed by material means”). Thus, *aprameyasya* means “that which cannot be measured, perceived, or analysed by any material means.”

“So for spiritual advancement especially we have to accept the Veda-pramāṇa, or evidences given in Vedic literature.” ([Town Hall lecture, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1972, Auckland](#))

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2.19: It is ignorance to either think (*ubhau tau na vijānīto*) you can kill anyone, or that anyone can kill you (*ya enam vetti hantāraṁ yaś cainam manyate hatam*). How is that possible, since the soul cannot kill another soul nor be killed (*nāyam hanti na hanyate*).

#### **Explanatory note:**

This verse can be misunderstood to suggest that the soul has no agency or responsibility. However, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that Kṛṣṇa is simply reinforcing the indestructible nature of the soul. I have tried to emphasise this in my unpacking.

#### **My evidence:**

“In this verse, Kṛṣṇa confirms the indestructible nature of the soul. That person who thinks that the jīva, with such an indestructible nature, is a killer, and thinks that such a jīva is harmed, does not know.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.19 commentary)

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2.20: The soul is not born when the body is born, nor does it die when the body dies (*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin*). It did not come into being in the past and will not come into being in the future, nor will it ever cease to be (*nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ*). The soul never took birth; it exists eternally and continuously, without transformation (*ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo*). Nor is it killed when the body it inhabits is killed (*na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*).

#### **Explanatory notes:**

**Purāṇa:** Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this word as “the oldest” and “primeval.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa acknowledges this but provides an additional nuance. The word *purāṇa*, meaning “ancient,” also implies something which existed in the past and has continued without deterioration or transformation.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura clarifies how the first two lines of the Sanskrit are functioning. The first line refers to the present; the second line refers to the past and future.

**My evidence:**

“The word purana indicates that the soul is without change or transformation (vipariṇamate). Though the atma is pura, ancient, it is nava, new.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.20 commentary)

“The first line negates the possibility of birth and death for the jiva at the present time. The second line negates birth and death in the past and the future.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.20 commentary)

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2.21: I have already explained that the soul cannot be destroyed, that it is eternal, it was never born but always exists and does not undergo any change. Now that you know the soul in this way (*vedāvināśinam nityam ya enam ajam avyayam*), how, O Pārtha, can you think that I, the Supreme Lord, am instructing you to kill anyone, and why do you think that by killing the body, you are killing the self (*katharṁ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha karṁ ghātayati hanti kam*).

**Explanatory note:**

This verse is often taken to refer to agency and responsibility in general. However, both Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentary indicate that it refers specifically to one who acts with knowledge of the Supreme Lord’s will and on His order. Such a person incurs no karmic reaction.

Puruṣaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this word as “person.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, however, is more specific, explaining that *puruṣaḥ* refers to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord. This understanding is, in my view, supported by Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport.

**My evidence:**

“This verse explains that one who, having this knowledge of the truth, engages in war or causes others to engage in such a war while fixed in dharma, has no fault at all.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.21 commentary)

“Whom do I (*sa puruṣa*), the Lord, cause to be killed (by advising you to fight)? And how do I cause anyone to be killed? And whom do you kill? And how do you kill?” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.21 commentary)

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2.22: *When one’s clothes are worn out, one accepts new clothing (vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni grhṇāti naro ’parāṇi). Similarly, when warriors die in a righteous battle, on leaving their old bodies, they immediately attain a new celestial body without undergoing the discomfort of gestation in a womb (tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny anyāni samyāti navāni dehī).*

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that killing Bhīṣma and Droṇa in a righteous battle will actually benefit them, as they will immediately attain celestial bodies, without the inconvenience of gestation in a womb. Therefore, Arjuna should not hesitate to fight and kill them. Śrīla Prabhupāda makes the same point in his purport.

**My evidence:**

“Just as giving up old, worn clothing and putting on new clothing gives happiness, giving up an old human body and accepting a new devatā body certainly gives great happiness to the soul. The war will enable both the giving up and accepting to happen more quickly. Therefore, because the war assists this, do not abandon fighting. The word *saṁyāti*, meaning ‘directly attain’, indicates that one will very quickly attain that body without undergoing the pains of remaining in the womb and other inconveniences. The prescriptions for atonement apply to killing persons outside the conditions of war or sacrifice.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.22 commentary)

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**Arjuna’s unspoken doubt:** When a house is destroyed, the person within it is also harmed. Similarly, might my powerful weapons inflict some harm on their souls?

**Explanatory note:**

“But just as the dweller in a house is destroyed when the house is burned, when the body is destroyed by the blow of weapons, the soul should also be destroyed.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.23 commentary)

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2.23: Arjuna, you cannot cut the soul with your weapons (*nainam chindanti śāstrāṇi*). Your fire weapons cannot burn it (*nainam dahati pāvakaḥ*), your water weapons cannot moisten it (*na cainam kledayanty āpo*), nor can your wind weapons dry it (*na śoṣayati mārutaḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura all explain that this verse assures Arjuna that none of his weapons can harm the soul.

**My evidence:**

“Also, it is not possible to injure the soul at all by the weapons used by you in the battle.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.23 commentary)

“Swords (*śāstrāṇi*) cannot cut it. The fire weapon (*pāvakaḥ*) cannot burn it. The rain weapon (*āpaḥ*) cannot moisten it. The wind weapon (*mārutaḥ*) cannot dry it. Accordingly, the *ātma* is not disturbed at all by being exposed to all these types of weapons (either those used for striking or those that are thrown).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.23 commentary)

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2.24: Thus the soul is referred to as unbreakable, inflammable, insoluble, and undryable (*acchedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam akledyo 'śoṣya eva ca*). It is also described as all-pervading, in that it accepts all types of bodies. The soul possesses the quality of being eternal, it cannot be artificially displaced from its position, and it does not change its qualities, and let Me once more emphasise its eternality (*nityaḥ sarva-gataḥ sthāṇur acalo 'yam sanātanaḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that in the previous verse Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna what his weapons cannot do to the soul, and in this verse He explains that, for this reason, the soul is referred to by names such as “cannot be cut,” “cannot be burned,” and so on.

*Sarva-gataḥ*: Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa both explain that this means the soul enters into all types of bodies according to its karmic destiny.

*Sthāṇuḥ and acalaḥ*: Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says these two words are synonymous. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, however, gives a more nuanced distinction: *sthāṇuḥ* refers to the soul having a fixed form, and *acalaḥ* means the soul never changes its qualities. During a morning walk conversation, Śrīla Prabhupāda clarifies that the soul’s form is fixed in the sense that it cannot be artificially displaced from its position. In my unpacking, I have tried to reflect Śrīla Prabhupāda’s emphasis.

*Nityaḥ and sanātanaḥ*: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura agree that both words mean “eternal,” and Viśvanātha further explains that eternality is mentioned twice for emphasis.

**My evidence:**

“Not being affected by any of these weapons, the ātma is thus called by the appropriate names (cannot be cut, burned, dissolved or dried out).....The ātma is called all-pervading (*sarva-gataḥ*) because it accepts all types of bodies.... The ātma also possesses a fixed form (*sthāṇuḥ*) and fixed qualities (*acalaḥ*).... *Sanātanaḥ* in the Gītā verse means ‘eternal’.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.24 commentary*)

“Therefore the ātma is described in this way (taking the descriptions of the previous verse): it cannot be cut, burned, dried or moistened. The repetition of the word signifying the eternal nature of the soul in this section (such as the use of the words *nityaḥ* and *sanātanaḥ* in this verse, and statements of previous verses) is for the purpose of precisely defining the soul for those of confused intellect, just as one will repeat several times in order to make certain that everyone understands..... *Sarva-gataḥ* (‘gone everywhere’) means that the soul goes into all sorts of bodies..... *Sthāṇuḥ* and *acalaḥ* have the same meaning, ‘having stability’, and the repetition is to make the meaning clear.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.24–25 commentary*)

“Immovable in this sense = when he is fixed up in a certain body, then he is immovable from that body. *Acalo 'yam sthanuḥ. Sthanuḥ.* Just like we're speaking of transplanting the heart. That does not mean you move the soul. That is immovable.” ([Morning Walk, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1975, in Philadelphia](#))

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2.25: The soul is imperceptible by any of the material senses (*avyakta 'yam*). It is inconceivable, as it defies logic that an infinitesimal soul can pervade the entire body with consciousness (*acintyo 'yam*). It can only be known through the authority of the scriptures. Though the body it inhabits undergoes six changes such as birth, growth, maintenance, reproduction, dwindling and death, the soul itself undergoes no change (*avikāryo 'yam ucyate*). The Vedas say that when one realises these truths about the soul, one will no longer lament (*tasmād evaṁ viditvainaṁ nānuśocitum arhasi*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Avyakta*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “invisible,” and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa broadens its meaning to “imperceptible by any of the material senses.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Śrīla Prabhupāda both attribute this to the soul’s infinitesimal size.

*Acintya*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “inconceivable,” and Baladeva defines it as beyond the scope of logic and knowable only on the authority of scripture. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that the reason for the soul’s inconceivability is that it pervades the body with consciousness.

*Avikārya*: All three ācāryas explain that this means the soul does not undergo any change. In other words, though the body is born, grows, is maintained, reproduces, dwindles, and then perishes, the soul does not.

*Ucyate*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “it is said.” On the basis of his purport, I have inferred that this means “the Vedas say.”

**My evidence:**

“Because it is very fine, it is called *avyakta*. Because it pervades the body with consciousness, it is called *acintya*, beyond conception. Being devoid of the six changes such as birth, it is called *avikārya*.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.24–25 commentary)

“The ātma is not perceptible by the material senses (*avyaktaḥ*). It is beyond logic (*acintyaḥ*), being understood only through scripture. By the scriptures, the ātma is understood to be *jñāna-svarūpa*, knowledge itself, and a knower of things. It is not subject to the six changes (*avikāryaḥ*.)” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.25 commentary)

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2.26-28: Soul or No Soul—No Reason to Lament

2.26: But even if, like the Lokāyatās and Vaibhāṣikas, you think that what we call the self is born with the body and dies when the body dies (*atha cainam nitya-jātam nityam vā manyase mṛtam*), there is still no reason to lament for its loss (*nainam śocitum arhasi*). But, O mighty-armed Arjuna, as you are a powerful warrior trained in the Vedic conclusions, I do not expect you to hold such false views (*tathāpi tvam mahā-bāho*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that Kṛṣṇa is referring to traditions of the time such as the Lokāyatikas and Vaibhāṣikas, akin to modern-day nihilistic Buddhism. They also explain that Kṛṣṇa uses the term *mahā-bāho* sarcastically to show His disapproval of such philosophies.

**My evidence:**

“This body is real and is subject to appearance and disappearance because of its nature of constant change, and this is known by direct perception. This is what the Lokāyatās maintain. The Buddhists such as the Vaibhāṣikas maintain that the ātma is *vijñāna-svarūpa*, different from the body, but is still subject to destruction at every moment..... The Lord then addressed Arjuna with a mocking tone: ‘O mighty-armed one! You, being the best of the warriors following Vedic traditions, should not hold such wrong views.’” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.26 commentary)

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2.27: If one accepts the eternality of the soul, there is no need to lament, because one who takes birth is certain to die, and one who dies is certain to take rebirth according to one’s karmic reactions (*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvam janma mṛtasya ca*). Therefore, since it is not possible to avoid birth and death, and since society cannot function properly without its citizens performing their duties, you should give up your lamentation (*tasmād aparihārye ’rthe na tvam śocitum arhasi*).

**Explanatory note:**

This verse speaks about those who accept the eternality of the soul, and not about those who do not. As Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa points out, without acceptance of the eternal soul, there is no coherent basis for rebirth, nor for karmic reactions—the cause of rebirth.

Aparihārye: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “of that which is unavoidable.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura links this to the inevitability of birth and death. Śrīla Prabhupāda, in his purport, extends this inevitability beyond birth and death to the performance of one’s duty for the upkeep of society—in Arjuna’s case, his duty is to fight.

**My evidence:**

“If the soul were not eternal (lasting only one lifetime), it could not be accepted as the substratum of dharma and adharma, because then it could have no acquisition of results to actions previously performed, and simultaneously it would acquire effects not caused by

actions previously performed. This is the view of the logicians (followers of Gautama’s Nyāya philosophy).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.27 commentary)

“Since (*hi*) death is certain (*dhruvaḥ*) with the depletion of karmas meant for this life, and birth is also certain because of the actions done by that body which just died, since both death and birth are unavoidable, do not lament.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.27 commentary)

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2.28: The atoms that constitute a living body first exist in an unmanifest state as dispersed atoms (*avyaktādīni bhūtāni*). When those atoms come together, Arjuna, they manifest a form (*vyakta-madhyāni bhārata*). After a while the atoms disperse and again become invisible (*avyakta-nidhanāny eva*). Those who do not accept the existence of the soul, but think a living being is the material body, still have no reason to grieve (*tatra kā paridevanā*). When the body is destroyed and no longer manifest, the material atoms of which it was constituted are not destroyed, but simply dispersed again.

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### 2.29-30: No Need to Lament the Inconceivable Soul

**Arjuna’s unspoken comment:** Kṛṣṇa has taught me many astonishing truths about the soul. The soul is both knowledge and the knower; it is infinitesimal but still pervades the body with consciousness; it enters many different types of bodies but remains unchanged by them. These contradictory truths are difficult to reconcile.

#### Explanatory note:

“Though I have been taught many things by You, who are omniscient, I do not understand the nature of the atma..... Though the jiva is knowledge itself, it also takes the role of the knower. Though the jiva is very small, it is spread throughout a large body. Though having had a relation with many bodies, it is untouched by those transformations. Being filled with many such contradictory qualities, the jiva ....is astonishing.” (*Gita Bhusana* 2.29 commentary)

“What an astonishing thing you are describing!” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.29 commentary)

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**2.29:** Kṛṣṇa said: Yes, the soul is truly amazing. Even yogīs who directly perceive the soul are astonished (*āścarya-vat paśyati kaścīd enam*). What to speak of those who lecture on it or attend such talks to hear about it (*āścarya-vad vadati tathaiva cānyaḥ āścarya-vac cainam anyāḥ śṛṇoti*). Some people are unable to grasp the truths about the soul, even after hearing about it (*śrutvāpy enaṁ veda na caiva kaścīd*).

#### Explanatory note:

“Yes, the ātma is truly astonishing.” The Lord then speaks this verse. (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.29 commentary)

The author understands that Kṛṣṇa is referring to the yogīs who directly perceive the soul and Supersoul, the jñāna-yogīs who speak about the soul, and the karma-yogīs who hear about it.

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2.30: Thus, O descendant of Bharata, the self within every material body is indestructible (*dehī nityam avadhyo 'yaṁ dehe sarvasya bhārata*). Therefore, there is no need to grieve for anyone (*tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam śocitum arhasi*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explicitly state that Kṛṣṇa now concludes His teaching on the nature of the soul: since the soul never dies, there is no need for lamentation.

**My evidence:**

“Having succinctly taught the nature of the ātma, which is difficult to understand, the Lord concludes the topic by saying that Arjuna should not grieve for the ātma.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.20 commentary)

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**2.31-38: Duty bestows material benefits and detachment**

2.31: Furthermore, since you are a kṣatriya, you should not hesitate to do your duty and fight (*sva-dharmam api cāvekṣya na vikampitum arhasi*). Do not think that by fighting you will be degraded to hell; rather, you will be elevated to heaven. Even if your goal is spiritual enlightenment, doing your duty and fighting for this righteous cause is the best course for you (*dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyo 'nyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate*).

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that in this verse Kṛṣṇa begins His explanation of the gradual path of spiritual enlightenment, starting from sa-kāma karma-yoga (working for Kṛṣṇa while also desiring material happiness), progressing to niṣkāma-karma-yoga (working only for Kṛṣṇa without personal motivation), and culminating in ātma-jñāna (being fixed in transcendental knowledge of the soul). He refers to those who follow this gradual path as *saniṣṭhas*.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura connects this verse to the previous one, where Kṛṣṇa concluded that Arjuna should not hesitate to fight because the self is indestructible. In this verse He adds that Arjuna should not hesitate to fight because, both materially and spiritually, it is the best course for him as a kṣatriya.

**My evidence:**

“...the Lord will now speak to the *saniṣṭhas* (followers of the gradual path to enlightenment) about actions undertaken without personal desires (*niṣkāma-karma*), which will establish *ātma-jñāna*, after purifying the heart. In order to produce conviction of being fixed in this *ātma-jñāna* (though *niṣkāma-karma*), the Lord first speaks in two verses about the material results produced from actions performed with personal desires (*sa-kāma-karma*). Thus, considering your own *dharma*, you should not deviate from that *dharma* (*vikampitum*). You have said that you see no benefit in this killing, as it will lead to living in hell continuously after death, because you will commit sin by the battle. But this is not so. That applies only to fighting out of ignorance. To fight according to the principles of *dharma* (*dharmyāt*) is beneficial.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.31 commentary)

“Because the soul cannot be destroyed, you should not fear killing. And considering from the point of view of your particular duties (since there is nothing better than fighting for *dharma*), you should not fear. That is the relation of the two verses.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.31 commentary)

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2.32: Indeed, O Pārtha, being a *kṣatriya*, you should be happy (*sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha*). After all, it is very fortunate for a *kṣatriya* to have the opportunity for such a battle (*yadṛcchayā copapannam / labhante yuddham īdṛśam*). Whoever is killed in the battle—whether you or your opponents like *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*—will immediately attain heaven (*svarga-dvāram apāvṛtam*).

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda both explain that Kṛṣṇa is hinting that if Arjuna dies, he will go to heaven. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, on the other hand, suggests that Kṛṣṇa is hinting that Arjuna will do *Bhīṣma* and others a favour by killing them in the battle, since they will go to heaven. I have tried to incorporate both perspectives.

**My evidence:**

“Fortunate (*sukhinaḥ*) *kṣatriyas* obtain such battles with great warriors such as *Bhīṣma*, which come to them without effort—because if they die, they very quickly attain *Svarga*.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.32 commentary)

“Moreover, more than even the victors, those who die in a just battle attain happiness. By killing *Bhīṣma* and others, you make them happier. Even without doing *karma-yoga*, one can attain *svarga* through the battle, without any obstructions (*apāvṛtam*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.32 commentary)

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2.33: On the other hand, if you do not do your prescribed duty as a *kṣatriya* and fight in the battle (*atha cet tvam imam dharmyam saṅgrāmam na kariṣyasi*), then by abandoning your

duty, you will lose your good reputation and incur sin (*tataḥ sva-dharmam kīrtim ca hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi*).

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2.34: People will continuously speak badly of you, calling you a coward (*akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni kathaiṣyanti te 'vyayām*). Since you have enjoyed the high reputation of a powerful warrior and the privileged position of being My intimate friend, it would be better for you to die than to dishonour yourself like this (*sambhāvitasya cākīrtir maraṇād atiricyate*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that Kṛṣṇa would prefer Arjuna to be killed rather than leave the battlefield. In a lecture on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that Arjuna's reputation and social standing were not only due to his prowess as a warrior, but also to his intimate friendship with Kṛṣṇa. The word *sambhāvitasya* refers both to good reputation and high social standing.

My evidence:

“Not only do you destroy your duty but you also completely destroy your fame. All the people will talk of your eternal infamy of fleeing at the commencement of the battle.’ ‘But from fear of death, I could tolerate the infamy.’ ‘No, death is preferable (*atiricyate*) to infamy for one who has attained such a high position (*sambhāvitasya*).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.34 commentary)

“Everyone will say, ‘Oh, Kṛṣṇa is his intimate friend, so He has agreed to drive his chariot.’ This is your reputation all over the world.’ So *sambhāvitasya cākīrtiḥ*. ‘And if you do not fight now, what will people say? Better you die.’ Kṛṣṇa is advising that instead of becoming a so-called nonviolent man, he should lay down his life.” (*Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā* 2.33–35, September 3, 1973, London)

“*Avyayam* means ‘continually.’ *Sambhāvitasya* means ‘of great position.’” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.34 commentary)

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**Arjuna's unspoken comment:**

Why would anyone speak badly of me for leaving the battle out of compassion and to avoid the sin of destroying my entire family?

**Explanatory note:**

“But how can I gain infamy from neglecting to fight out of compassion and avoiding the sin of destruction of the family?” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.35 commentary)

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2.35: All the great generals on both sides, including your enemies, currently respect you for your prowess and courage (*maṁsyante tvāṁ mahā-rathāḥ yeṣāṁ ca tvāṁ bahu-mato*). However, if you leave, all of them—even your friends—will hold you in contempt, thinking you are a coward (*bhayād raṇād uparataṁ / bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam*).

**Explanatory note:**

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explicitly states what Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda imply: that not only his friends, but even his enemies currently hold him in high regard as a kṣatriya. However, if he leaves the battlefield, all of them—both friends and enemies—will attribute it to cowardice.

**My evidence:**

“For those who have high regard for you as a warrior, even as an enemy, will no longer give you respect if you give up the battle. The mahārathas like Duryodhana will think that you have fled in fear from the battlefield. They will not think of any other reason for the kṣatriya to leave the field than fear. Strong bonds of friendship will not be considered.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.35 commentary)

“You will reap intolerable contempt from them.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.35 commentary)

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2.36: Your enemies, especially, will hurl many insults at you (*avācya-vādāṁś ca bahūn vadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ*), disparaging your valour and prowess as a kṣatriya (*nindantas tava sāmartyaṁ*). What could be more painful than that for you (*tato duḥkha-taraṁ nu kim*)?

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2.37: Whatever the outcome of this battle, fighting in it will be auspicious for you. If you are killed, you will immediately attain the heavenly realms (*hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṁ*), and if you win, you will enjoy sovereignty over the earth (*jītvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm*). Therefore, get up, Arjuna, son of My aunt Kuntī, and fight with firm determination (*tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛta-niścayaḥ*).

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2.38: Better still, fight simply because it is your prescribed duty to do so (*tato yuddhāya yujyasva*). By fighting without regard for personal gain or desired outcomes (*sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau*), you will not incur any sinful reactions (*naivāṁ pāpam avāpsyasi*).

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### 2.39-41: Kṛṣṇa Recommends Buddhi-Yoga

2.39: Up to now, I have explained that you should do your duty and fight in terms of the knowledge of *sāṅkhya-yoga*, which analyses the difference between the body and the soul

(*eṣā te 'bhihitā sāṅkhye*). If due to impurities in the heart, you are not yet able to act on this knowledge, listen as I explain the process of *buddhi-yoga*—regulative devotional service (*buddhir yoge tv imām śṛṇu*). By acting according to the regulative principles of devotional service, you will purify yourself of the fruitive mentality that makes your work binding (*buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karma-bandham prahāsyasi*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Buddhi-yoga* is another name for *bhakti-yoga*.

The question may naturally arise: if *buddhi-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* are the same, why use two different terms?

My light: the external practices are the same, but the terms distinguish the consciousness of the practitioner. At the stage of *buddhi-yoga* one is still conditioned by the modes of material nature and is thus inclined towards material enjoyment. However, guided by good intelligence (*buddhi*), one makes a deliberate choice to adhere to the regulative principles Kṛṣṇa recommends. Thus the *ācāryas* have coined the term ‘regulative devotional service’—*vaidhi-bhakti*—to describe *buddhi-yoga*.

When one transcends the influence of the modes of material nature one enters into *bhakti-yoga* proper. Kṛṣṇa refers to this in *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.54: *mad-bhaktiṁ labhate parām*.

The *ācāryas* have coined the terms ‘spontaneous devotional service’—*rāgānugā-bhakti*—to refer to this stage of *bhakti-yoga*. The reader may note that Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes refers to spontaneous devotional service as ‘transcendental devotional service’.

The practices do not differ—only the consciousness of the practitioner.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that in the previous verse, Kṛṣṇa has exhorted Arjuna to execute his prescribed duty of fighting without personal motivation, and that by doing so he will not incur sinful reactions. But what if one is unable to give up personal motivations? Kṛṣṇa therefore explains *buddhi-yoga*, a process that purifies the heart of material motivations and enables one to act solely for the Lord’s pleasure.

**My evidence:**

“So Kṛṣṇa is describing now *buddhi-yoga*. *Buddhi-yoga* means *bhakti-yoga*.”

““There are two processes of practical devotional service. One is regulative devotional service, and the other is spontaneous devotional service.” CC Madhya 22.108

“So that is called *buddhi-yoga*. When you act according to the direction of the Supreme, Kṛṣṇa, or His representative, that is called *buddhi-yoga*. That is real... *Buddhi* means intelligence, and *yoga* means linking, connecting.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 2.39, September 12, 1973, in London](#))

“Please describe the science of Godhead with determination and in a manner by which it will be quite possible for the human being to develop transcendental devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead Hari, the Supersoul of every living being and the summum bonum source of all energies.” (Srimad Bhavatam 2.7.52)

“The understanding or knowledge (*eṣā buddhiḥ*) necessary for performance of *sāṅkhya* (*sāṅkhya*) alone has been spoken to you.... If that knowledge does not arise because of impurities in your heart, then hear about the knowledge necessary to execute *karma-yoga* (*yoge*), which will now be spoken, and which includes within it *ātma-jñāna*.... This *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* is then praised in the last line by stating the results of practising it.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.39 commentary)

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2.40: Unlike other yoga processes, the benefit gained from executing regulative devotional service is never lost (*neha abhikrama-nāśo 'sti*). Nor are there any adverse reactions or reductions in benefit if one makes procedural mistakes, such as incorrect pronunciation of mantras (*pratyavāyo na vidyate*). And even just a short period of practice or limited progress in executing these devotional principles (*sv-ālpam apy asya dharmasya*) will protect one from descending into lower species of life—a fearful and hellish existence (*trāyate mahato bhayāt*).

#### **Explanatory notes:**

The acaryas explain that even if we do not complete our purification by the practice of buddhi yoga, or if we make mistakes in the execution of devotional service, or we only practice for a short period of time, still we are not the loser. This is not the case with other yoga practices.

Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes explains that the greatest fear is descent into hell, and at other times as descent into a lower species of life. I have combined these two perspectives.

#### **My Evidence:**

“This means that there is not lack of results even if the process is started but not completed. In this process, there are also no negative results (*pratyavayah*) for imperfection in chanting mantras or other components..... And because the process has the goal of atma and includes utterance of the name of the Lord, no sin is incurred.” (*Gita Bhusana* 2.40 commentary)

“In bhakti yoga there is no destruction (*nasah*), and there is also no sin incurred (*pratyavaya*), if the practice has just began (*abhikrama*) and then stopped. If karma yoga, however, is began and then stopped, there is both destruction of the fruits of karma yoga and sinful reactions as well.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.40 commentary)

“As confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.40), *svālpam apy asya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*: “Even a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous

type of fear.’ .... The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is anxious to serve human society by teaching people to perform devotional service, which can save a human being from being degraded again to animal life.” (Srimad Bhagavatam 7.6.1 purport)

“Ajāmila, for example, was saved by the Supreme Personality of Godhead from the greatest danger, that of going to hell.” (Srimad Bhagavatam 8.5.48 purport)

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2.41: O beloved of the Kurus, one whose intelligence is fixed in a single purpose—serving Kṛṣṇa—remains steady in his devotional practices (*vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana*). On the other hand, those who have many desires cannot remain steady in their practice (*bahu-sākhā hy anantās ca buddhayo ’vyavasāyinām*).

**Explanatory note:**

One attains steadiness in regulative devotional practices when one discerns with one’s intelligence that one thing—and one thing only—will protect him in life and bring him success and happiness. That one thing is to hear about, glorify, think about, and worship Kṛṣṇa with the desire to please Him.

Others cannot remain steady in their devotional practices because they think they need other things as well for their protection and happiness.

**My evidence:**

“My *sādhana* is to serve the lotus feet of the Lord, to remember and glorify Him as instructed by my guru. That is also my goal (*sādhya*). It is my life-sustaining medicine, for I cannot give up the *sādhana* and the *sādhya*.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.41 commentary)

“The intellects of those who undertake *kāmya-karmas* (*avyavasāyinām*), however, have infinite objects (*anantāḥ*), since those persons have desires for unlimited objects such as sons, food, animals, or *Svarga*.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.41 commentary)

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**Arjuna’s unspoken comment:** Surely those who have many material desires will also develop steady resolve by following the relevant sections of the Vedas.

**Explanatory note:**

“But these persons should also develop fixed intelligence, because the *śrutis* deal with both subjects equally.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.42 commentary)

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**2.42-46: Arjuna should transcend the modes of nature**

2.42: Those who are unable to properly discern the intent of the Vedas become attached to their poetic mantras and elaborate rituals for the fulfilment of material desires and elevation to the heavenly planets, O Arjuna (*pravadanty avipaścitaḥ veda-vāda-ratāḥ pārtha*). They

think these are the highest teachings of the Vedas and that there is no greater attainment than the fulfilment of such desires (*yām imām puṣpitām vācam / nānyad astīti vādinaḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

The *ācāryas* concur that less intelligent people misunderstand the *karma-kāṇḍa* section of the Vedas to be the summit of its teachings.

**My evidence:**

“No, this fixed intelligence will not arise, because they have faults in the heart.’ .... Those with little knowledge (*avipaścītaḥ*) speak words (*imām vācam*) such as *jyotiṣṭomena svargakāmo yajeta*: a person desiring *Svarga* should perform the *jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice..... they think that these are the best words in the Vedas. Intelligence fixed on *ātma* does not arise in the minds of those people whose consciousness is stolen by these words.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.42)

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2.43: They are attracted to the heavenly planets because they yearn for material enjoyment and opulence (*kāmātmānaḥ svarga-parā*). They continually discuss what they should do to obtain a more elevated birth in the next life, as well as desirable outcomes in this life—such as pleasure, status, wealth, etc. (*janma-karma-phala-pradām*). They are particularly interested in elaborate Vedic rituals aimed at securing enjoyment and opulence (*kriyā-viśeṣa-bahulām bhogaiśvarya-gatim prati*).

**Explanatory note:**

“This verse speaks of faulty consciousness. Their hearts are possessed by desires for material happiness (*kāmātmānaḥ*). If that is the case, they have no desire for liberation at all.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.43 commentary)

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2.44: Those who are attracted to material sense gratification and opulence—such as wealth, fame, beauty, strength, material learning, or even inappropriate renunciation (*bhogaiśvarya-prasaktānām*)—and who thus lose their power of discrimination (*tayā apahrta-cetasām*) are unable to practise devotional service with determination and mental focus (*vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate*).

**Explanatory note:**

The Lord has six opulences which the living entity tries to imitate. These are: unlimited wealth, strength, knowledge, beauty, fame, and renunciation. In my unpacking, I have interpreted *aiśvarya*—opulence—to refer to these.

**My evidence:**

“The word *bhagavān* is explained thus by Parāśara Muni: one who is full in six opulences,

who has full strength, full fame, wealth, knowledge, beauty and renunciation, is *Bhagavān*, or the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 10.1 purport)

“The material world is a field of activities for the corrupt conditioned souls who desire to enjoy in imitation of the Supreme.” ([Letter to Dr. Ghosh, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1974](#))

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2.45: That is why the Vedas mainly deal with activities within the three modes of material nature (*traī-guṇya-viṣayā vedāḥ*). Arjuna, you should transcend all material desires (*nīstrai-guṇyo bhava arjuna*). Then only will you always be free from confusion and anxiety regarding your future and be able to realise your spiritual nature (*nīrdvandvo nitya-sattva-sthaḥ niryoga-kṣema ātmavān*).

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2.46: Consider this, Arjuna. A villager may use different small wells for different purposes—some for drinking and others for washing. However, one who has access to a large lake can use the same water for all purposes (*yāvān artha uda-pāne sarvataḥ sampluta-udake*). Similarly, desires for material enjoyment on earth, elevation to heaven, or liberation can all be fulfilled by properly understanding those sections of the Vedas that deal with self-realisation, for the purpose of all the other sections—such as *karma-kāṇḍa* and *jñāna-kāṇḍa*—is to elevate one to self-realisation (*tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ* in his word-for-word translations as “one who is in complete knowledge of the Supreme Brahman”, and in his fluid translation as “one who knows the purpose of the Vedas”. In his purport to this verse, he synthesises these two definitions. He explains that the purpose of the Vedas is to awaken us to self-realisation, which he defines as knowing Kṛṣṇa and one’s eternal relationship with Him. Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura have a similar understanding.

Viśvanātha further explains that this verse speaks to the *sa-kāma-karma-bhaktas*. Though they have many different desires, all those desires can be fulfilled by worshipping Kṛṣṇa alone.

*Karma-kāṇḍa* refers to those sections of the Vedas dealing with material enjoyment and elevation to the heavenly planets, and *jñāna-kāṇḍa* refers to those sections dealing with impersonal liberation.

**My evidence:**

“However, even *bhakti* with material desire (*sakāma-bhakti*) is known by the term *vyavasāyātmikā-buddhi* (since there is worship of only one person). This is shown through

an example..... All the purposes of all the different wells are served by a large body of water like a lake.... Thus, whatever purposes are served by worship of all the *devatās* mentioned in all the Vedas are achieved by worship of the one Supreme Lord, by the person in knowledge, one who knows the Vedas (*brāhmaṇasya*). He who knows the Vedas knows the import of the Vedas, *bhakti*." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.46 commentary)

"Here in this material world, *karma-kāṇḍa* or *jñāna-kāṇḍa* is going on. The *karmīs* are thinking ... They will enjoy life in this world; again they will be elevated to the heavenly planet. .... And the *jñānīs*, they are thinking that "We have worked as *karmīs*, but we have never derived any benefit out of it; therefore this is all false." The grapes are sour. Give it up, jackal. "Now let us become *sannyāsī* and become Brahman, become one with God." They have left this, I mean to say, paltry enjoyment." ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gīta 10.1-3, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1973, in Calcutta](#))

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### 2.47–53: Buddhi-yoga — Aligning with the Lord's will

2.47: My advice is that you do your prescribed duty of fighting. You are not currently eligible to practise the path of *jñāna-yoga* or the path of pure *bhakti*, but you are eligible for *karma-yoga* (*karmaṇy eva adhikāras te*). However, never act with a desire to enjoy the result of your work (*mā phaleṣu kadācana*). By performing your prescribed duties without a desire to enjoy the results—*niṣkāma-karma-yoga*—you are not considered the doer of that action (*mā karma-phala-hetur bhūḥ*). Be careful never to insist on not doing your duty (*mā te saṅgo 'stu akarmaṇi*).

#### Explanatory note:

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda says that Kṛṣṇa is now advising Arjuna what he should do, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura concurs with this in his commentary. Kṛṣṇa's advice is based on Arjuna's qualification (*adhikāra*).

*Adhikāras te*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "you have a right to", whereas Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura translate it as "you have the qualification for".

#### My evidence:

"The Lord wanted to speak about the processes of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma-yoga* to Arjuna, who was His dear friend. Having spoken of *jñāna* and *bhakti-yoga*, the Lord considered that these two were not suitable for Arjuna. He then spoke of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. 'You are qualified for works. But those who crave the results are very impure in consciousness. But you have an almost pure heart. I can say this about you since I know you.... By doing an action with a desire for a certain result, you become the cause of that result. But you should not act in that manner.'" (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.47 commentary)

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2.48: To perform *niškāma-karma-yoga*, you must practise doing your duty with equanimity. In other words, you must make a determined and informed effort not to be disturbed by the outcome of your work (*yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*). This is possible, *Dhanañjaya*, if you are not attached to obtaining a specific result (*saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya*). Then it will be possible to remain equipoised in success or failure (*siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā*), and you will be situated in *niškāma-karma-yoga* (*samatvaṁ yoga ucyate*).

**Explanatory note:**

The *ācāryas* explain that *yoga-sthaḥ* means to be situated in equanimity—remaining even-minded in all circumstances. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that such equanimity in happiness or distress, success or failure, requires a conscious, determined, and informed effort. But informed by what? Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport that one must know Kṛṣṇa’s position as the Supreme Lord and understand His desire.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says that in this verse Kṛṣṇa begins teaching Arjuna how to perform *niškāma-karma-yoga*.

**My evidence:**

“The Lord then explains the word *yoga-stha*. Yoga means to be situated with equality both in attaining and not attaining results of action such as victory. Being without attachment or repulsion to the results, perform the action. Yoga in the phrase *yoga-sthaḥ* means ‘being equal to all events (*samatvam*) because it takes the form of intense concentration of mind.’” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.48 commentary)

“With this verse, Kṛṣṇa starts teaching the subject of *niškāma-karma*.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.48 commentary)

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2.49: Actions impelled by one’s own desires are far inferior (*dūreṇa hy avaram karma*) to *buddhi-yoga*. O winner of wealth, Arjuna, *buddhi-yoga* is performing prescribed duties without personal desire—*niškāma-karma-yoga*—as an offering to the Supreme Lord (*buddhi-yogāt dhanañjaya*). You must firmly resolve to act in *buddhi-yoga* to attain transcendental loving service to the Lord (*buddhau śaraṇam anviccha*). Acting with a desire for one’s own happiness leads to misery and reflects a failure to recognise the great opportunity that human life provides (*kṛpaṇāḥ phala-hetavaḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Buddhi-yoga*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in his word-for-word rendering as “on the strength of Kṛṣṇa consciousness,” and in his purport as “transcendental loving service to the Lord.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, however, specify that here it refers to *niškāma-karma-yoga* offered to the Lord. I have tried to integrate both perspectives.

*Buddhau śaraṇam anviccha:* Śrīla Prabhupāda renders this as “in that consciousness surrender unto the Lord,” whereas Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura translate it more literally as “take shelter of *buddhi-yoga*.” I understand this to mean: commit yourself to acting only for the pleasure of the Lord.

*Kṛpaṇāḥ:* Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this word as “misers.” In his purport to Bg 2.7, he explains that a miser is one who, despite having a valuable asset, does not utilise it. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, however, translates it as “miserable.” Thus, the word *kṛpaṇaḥ* appears to carry both senses: miserable and miserly. I have tried to integrate both perspectives.

**My evidence:**

“This verse speaks of the inferior nature of *kāmya-karma*. *Kāmya-karma*, which causes problems such as birth and death, is far inferior (*dūreṇa avaram*) to *niṣkāma-karma* (*buddhi-yogāt*), which brings about understanding (*buddhi*) of the true nature of the self (*ātman*)... Those who desire results (*phala-hetavaḥ*), who perform these inferior actions, are unfortunate and miserable (*kṛpaṇāḥ*), being under the control of the cycle of birth and death caused by their *kāmya-karmas*.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.49 commentary)

“Kṛṣṇa here criticises actions performed with material desires. Such actions (*avaram karma*) are far inferior to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* offered to the Supreme Lord (*buddhi-yoga*). Take shelter of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* (*buddhau*). In this verse, *buddhi-yoga* refers to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* rather than *bhakti-yoga*.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.49 commentary)

“This human form of life is a most valuable asset for the living entity, who can utilise it to solve the problems of life; therefore, one who does not utilise this opportunity properly is a miser.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 2.7 purport)

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2.50: One who knows how to act exclusively for the Lord’s pleasure is freed from all karmic reactions—both good and bad—within this very lifetime (*buddhi-yuktaḥ jahāti iha ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte*). Therefore, commit to engaging in *buddhi-yoga* with expertise (*tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Kauśalam:* Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this word as “an art”—the art of work—while Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura translate it as “a skill.” I have rendered this as “expertise.”

**My evidence:**

“This engagement in action (*yoga*), being joined with such intelligence, is a skill (*kausalam*), because it transforms actions which normally are a cause of bondage into causes of liberation by contact with intelligence, like mercury which has been purified of its poisonous effects.” (*Gita Bhusana* 2.50 commentary)

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2.51: By applying good discrimination, the wise cease seeking their own gratification and instead engage in *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* by performing their prescribed duties for the pleasure of the Lord (*karma-jarṇ buddhi-yuktā hi phalaṁ tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ*). Consequently, they are freed from all karmic reactions which bind one to the cycle of birth and death, and they attain My spiritual kingdom, where there is no suffering (*janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ padam gacchanty anāmayam*).

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**Arjuna's unspoken comment:** When, by the practice of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, will my mind become steadily focused on attaining self-realisation?

**Explanatory note:**

“When will my intelligence become directed towards atma as I perform *niskama-karma*?”  
(Gita Bhusana 2.52 commentary)

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2.52: The subtle body, comprising the mind, material intelligence, and false ego, is like a dense forest of delusion, for it is a tangled mass of past impressions, misconceptions, and material desires (*yadā te moha-kalilam*). When your discriminatory faculty is no longer influenced by these factors (*buddhir vyatitariṣyati*), then you will no longer be attracted to topics regarding material enjoyment, whether heard in the past or to be heard in the future (*tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*).

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that the dense forest of delusion (*moha-kalilam*), which must be transcended (*vyatitariṣyati*) by means of proper discrimination (*buddhi*), refers to the subtle material body (*antaḥkaraṇa*), comprising the mind, material intelligence, and false ego. The *antaḥkaraṇa* is a dense tangle of past impressions and material desires, which distort one's discrimination. These must be purified through scripturally guided intelligence before one can become steady in the pursuit of self-realisation.

**My evidence:**

“When your intelligence completely gives up (*vyatitariṣyati*) the *antaḥkaraṇa*, a dense forest of ignorance, the cause of craving insignificant results (*moha-kalilam*), then you will become indifferent to topics relating to these insignificant material results about which you have heard in the past and will hear in the future.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.52 commentary)

Bhānu Swami's accompanying footnote: “*Antaḥkaraṇa* refers to the internal organ, composed of mind, material intelligence, and false ego.”

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2.53: When you are no longer confused by the teachings of the Vedas (*śruti-vipratipannā te*), but understand their true intent, then you will no longer be confused about what is real, what truly matters, and what is worth pursuing (*yadā sthāsyati niścalā*). Thus absorbed in meditation on the self with unwavering intelligence you will have attained yoga—the union of your consciousness with the Supreme Lord (*samādhāv acalā buddhiḥ tadā yogam avāpsyasi*). Such a person, fixed in realisation of the self, is known as *sthita-prajñatā*.

**Explanatory note:**

**Śruti:** The ācāryas understand this word in two ways. Śrīla Prabhupāda and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura take it to refer to the karma-kāṇḍa sections of the Vedas, which promise material results. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, however, understands it to refer to the Upaniṣads, which teach knowledge of the self and the Supreme Lord.

**Vipratipannā:** They also differ in how they understand this word. Śrīla Prabhupāda and Viśvanātha take it in its usual sense of “bewildered” or “confused,” meaning that the intelligence becomes disturbed by hearing many different promises of material results in the Vedas. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, however, understands it more positively, as referring to intelligence that becomes fully clarified or perfected through properly understanding the teachings of the Upaniṣads.

**yadā sthāsyati niścalā:** Śrīla Prabhupāda renders this together with the following line as “remains fixed in the trance of self-realisation.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this refers to a state in which the intelligence becomes free from doubt and misconception, and steady in understanding. I have tried to convey this sense in my own words.

The phrase “flowery language of the Vedas” does not occur in this verse. Śrīla Prabhupāda uses it to connect this verse with *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.42 (*puṣpitām vācam*).

In explaining the last two lines of the verse, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa refers to a term Arjuna introduces in the next verse: *sthita-prajñatā*, which describes one who is fixed in realisation of the self (*ātma*). This corresponds to what Kṛṣṇa later calls *brahma-bhūta* in 18.54. Although the term *sthita-prajñatā* does not appear in this verse, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa indicates that it is implied. I have introduced it here to help the reader understand Arjuna’s question in the following verse.

**My evidence:**

“When your intelligence, completely perfected (*vipratipannā*) through statements of *śruti* such as *tam etam vedānuvacanena brāhmaṇā vividisanti yajñena dānena tapasā anāsakena*, which explain that action brings knowledge of the *ātma*, and when the intelligence becomes devoid of doubt and contrary conceptions about objects (*acalā*), and remains fixed without motion (*niścalā*) in the mind (*samādhau*), like a flame in a windless place, then you will attain the yoga characterized by realization of the *ātma* (*yoga*). The meaning is this: activities performed without craving for results produce steadiness in knowledge (*jñāna-niṣṭhā*), also

known as *sthita-prajñatā*. This *sthita-prajñatā* or *jñāna-niṣṭhā* is the realization of the *ātma*.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.53)

Bhānu Swami’s note on the verse Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa cites above:

“Brāhmaṇas seek to know the Lord by study of the Vedas, by sacrifice, by charity, by austerity, and by fasting.” (*Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.22)

“The Vedas deal with three departments of activities. One is called *karma-kāṇḍa*, or activities under Vedic injunction, which gradually purify one to understand his real position; the next is *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the process of understanding the Absolute Truth by speculative methods; and the third is *upāsanā-kāṇḍa*, or worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and sometimes of the demigods also.” (*Kṛṣṇa: The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Chapter 87)

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### 2.54: Arjuna asks four questions about the *sthita-prajña*

2.54: Arjuna said (*arjuna uvāca*): O Keśava, killer of the Keśī demon, please tell me more about the general qualities of one fixed in realisation of the self—the *sthita-prajña* (*sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhi-sthasya keśava*). Specifically, how does such a liberated person, absorbed in *samādhi*, respond when faced with agitating circumstances—how does he speak, both to himself and to others, how does he withdraw his senses from the sense objects, and how does he engage them (*sthita-dhīḥ kim prabhāṣeta kim āsīta vrajeta kim*).

#### Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura specify that Arjuna is asking about the person Kṛṣṇa described in verse 2.53. Viśvanātha specifies that this is a liberated person, a *jīvan-mukta*. They both state that, in addition to inquiring about the *sthita-prajña*’s general characteristics, Arjuna specifically wants to know how such a person responds in times of distress. How does he speak, both to himself and to others? How does he engage his senses with the sense objects, and how does he restrain his senses from engaging with the sense objects?

#### My evidence:

“Hearing about intelligence fixed in *samādhi* (*samādhau acalā buddhiḥ*), Arjuna asks about the characteristics of that yogī. *Sthita-prajña* in this verse has the same meaning as *acalā buddhi* in the previous verse: fixed intelligence. What qualities describe the *sthita-prajña* (*kā bhāṣā*)? What are the qualities of the person situated in *samādhi* (*samādhi-stha*)? Actually, the terms *sthita-prajña* and *samādhi-stha* both refer to the *jīvan-mukta*. What will that person say in the face of happiness and distress, respect and disrespect, praise and condemnation (*kim prabhāṣeta*)? What will he say, either loudly or to himself? In what way will his senses remain unresponsive to external objects (*kim āsīta*)? In what way will his senses respond to objects (*vrajeta kim*)?” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.54 commentary)

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### 2.55–57: Kṛṣṇa answers the first two questions

2.55: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): O son of Pṛthā, when one frees oneself from all desires born from the mind (*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha mano-gatān*), and feels fully satisfied by experiencing the natural bliss of the soul (*ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*), then he is said to be a liberated, self-realised soul—a *sthita-prajña* (*sthita-prajñas tadocyate*).

#### Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that the desires given up originate from the mind, not the soul. When these are given up, one experiences the soul’s intrinsic bliss within the mind.

Pṛthā is the birth name of Arjuna’s mother, who, after being adopted by King Kuntibhoja, was also known as Kuntī. Kṛṣṇa therefore sometimes addresses Arjuna as Pārtha (“son of Pṛthā”) and Kaunteya (“son of Kuntī”).

#### My evidence:

“He is able to give up these desires because they belong to the mind (*mano-gatān*); they are not an intrinsic quality of the soul. If they were intrinsic to the soul, they could not be given up, just as fire never gives up heat. The cause for this is stated. He is satisfied by the soul, whose very nature is bliss (*ātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*), within the mind (*ātmani*), which has withdrawn from sense objects.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.55 commentary)

“Arjuna’s mother was known as Pṛthā. Her father’s name was Mahārāja Pṛthu. Therefore Arjuna is known as Pārtha. Sometimes Arjuna is addressed as Pārtha. It comes from the root meaning of Arjuna’s mother’s father, grandfather.” (Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.1, February 22, 1969, Los Angeles)

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2.56: The philosopher-sage—the *sthita-dhīra muni*—remains mentally equipoised in all material circumstances (*sthita-dhīr munir ucyate*). He is not disturbed when faced with distressing circumstances. He neither laments within himself nor complains to others about his situation. He understands such misfortune philosophically, either as the result of his past karma to be tolerated, or as the Lord’s mercy meant to deepen his surrender (*duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ*).

Similarly, when presented with opportunities for enjoyment, he is not eager to indulge. He neither delights within himself nor speaks of his good fortune to others. Rather, he understands such happiness to be temporary—arising from past karma—or as the Lord’s mercy, an opportunity to increase his service (*sukheṣu vigata-sprhaḥ*).

He is free from attachment to material enjoyment, free from fear in the face of danger, and free from anger when things do not go his way (*vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that this verse answers Arjuna’s second question: how does the *sthita-dhīra muni* speak. Viśvanātha adds that it takes an intelligent person to distinguish a genuine manifestation of this quality from a pretentious display. Both explain that the *sthita-dhīra muni* attributes material happiness and distress to karma that must be tolerated. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda offers a complementary perspective, explaining that the *sthita-dhīra muni* sees both happiness and distress as the Lord’s mercy, and thus remains unagitated.

**My evidence:**

“This verse and the next verse answer the question, ‘How does he speak?’ His mind is not disturbed by *ādhyātmika* suffering in the form of hunger, thirst, fever, or headache; by *ādhibhautika* suffering coming from snakes or tigers; or by *ādhidāivika* suffering arising from extremes of wind or rain. When someone asks about himself, he says simply that this suffering is his *prārabdha-karma*, which he must unavoidably endure. He is not agitated by suffering (*duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ*). He does not say anything to himself or out loud to others. This absence of disturbance is understood by an intelligent person to be the symptom of one who is steady. False indifference to suffering, however—the mark of an impostor—is recognised by the wise. Such a pretender is considered fallen or depraved. In the face of opportunities for happiness, he is without desire and says to himself or others that it is simply his *prārabdha-karma*, which he must tolerate. The intelligent person recognises this quality of being devoid of desire for happiness.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.56 commentary)

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2.57: The *sthita-prajñā*, who is fixed in realised transcendental knowledge (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*), is kindly disposed towards everyone, without being partial towards anyone (*yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehaḥ*). When encountering circumstances or people favourably disposed towards him, he does not praise them, and when faced with those who treat him poorly, he does not curse them (*tat tat prāpya śubhāśubham*), for he is neither elated by pleasurable circumstances nor disturbed by difficulties (*nābhinandati na dveṣṭi*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Anabhisnehaḥ*: A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda translates this word as “without affection.” Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that this does not mean he is heartless or cold. Out of compassion, he has a general affection for all living beings; however, he is not partial towards anyone.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that in verse 2.56, Kṛṣṇa describes what the *sthita-prajñā* would say—“It is my karma and must be tolerated,” or “It is Kṛṣṇa’s mercy and therefore to be welcomed.” In this verse (2.57), Kṛṣṇa describes what the *sthita-prajñā* would not say.

**My evidence:**

“He is devoid of specific affection (*anabhisnehaḥ*) for any living beings (*sarvatra*). However, since he possesses compassion, he maintains a little general affection. When receiving favourable items such as fine food, garlands, or sandalwood (*śubham*), he does not rejoice by praising others with words such as, ‘You are very righteous; may you live long!’ Nor does he show hatred when receiving unfavourable treatment, such as being disrespected or struck with a stick (*aśubham*). He does not curse, saying, ‘You are a vile sinner; may you die!’ This verse shows the quality of the *sthita-prajñā* by indicating what he does not say (the previous verse described what he would say).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.57 commentary)

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**2.58–63: Kṛṣṇa answers the third question: *kim āsīta***

2.58: Now regarding your third question—how does the self-realised transcendentalist, the *sthita-prajñā*, withdraw his senses from the sense objects? He can do this as effortlessly as a tortoise withdrawing its limbs into its shell (*yadā samharate cāyaṁ kūrmo ’ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ*). In other words, one can recognise when someone is firmly established in self-realisation by the ease with which he withdraws his senses from the sense objects (*indriyāṅindriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*).

**Explanatory note:**

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that from verses 2.58 to 2.63, Kṛṣṇa answers the question *kim āsīta*—how the *sthita-prajñā* withdraws his senses from the sense objects. The point of Kṛṣṇa’s analogy is that the *sthita-prajñā* easily refrains from sense gratification; he does not have to force himself.

**My evidence:**

“Six verses now answer the third question, ‘How does he remain, suppressing his senses (*kim āsīta*)?’ When this yogī (*ayam*), without effort, completely withdraws the independent senses, such as the ear, from the sense objects, such as sound, then he is known as a *sthita-prajñā* (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*). An example is given: just as a tortoise withdraws its head, hands, and feet into its shell, the *sthita-prajñā* remains with his senses situated within, withdrawn from the sense objects. That is how he remains (this is his sense control).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.58 commentary)

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**Arjuna’s unspoken comment:** Arjuna’s unspoken objection: Everyone naturally refrains from sense gratification when they are very ill. How, then, is this a characteristic of self-realisation?

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura introduce this unspoken objection.

**My evidence:**

“But we can see that even a fool who is sick restrains his senses. How, then, can this be the outstanding quality of the *sthita-prajñā*?” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.59 commentary)

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2.59: It is true that under certain conditions, such as illness, one naturally refrains from sense gratification (*viśayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ*). Nevertheless, such a person still retains a taste for sense enjoyment (*rasa-varjam*). When one sees the beauty of the Supersoul, however, one no longer has any attraction for sense gratification (*raso ’py asya param dr̥ṣṭvā nivartate*).

**Explanatory note:**

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda both describe a person who sees and relishes the Lord’s personal beauty.

**My evidence:**

“For the person situated in *prajñā*, however, having seen the Supersoul (*paramātmā*), the desire for sense objects disappears.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭikā* 2.59 commentary)

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2.60: On the other hand, Arjuna, a thoughtful person who is striving to attain self-realisation (*yatato hy api kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ*) must be vigilant, for the powerful senses are easily agitated and may induce the mind to engage in sense gratification (*indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabham manaḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that this verse describes the *sādhaka*, who is still endeavouring to attain the stage of *sthita-prajñā*—self-realisation.

**My evidence:**

“At the stage of *sādhana*, the effort is very great, and one does not yet have the power to completely restrain the senses.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭikā* 2.60 commentary)

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2.61: Thus, one who properly understands the science of self-realisation (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*) knows that the only way to restrain the senses from engaging in sense gratification (*vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi*) is by keeping them fully and constantly engaged in My devotional service (*tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta mat-parah*).

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2.62: Even a self-realised person with controlled senses must keep his mind focused on Me. For if he allows his mind to dwell on sense objects, he will become attached to them (*dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsaḥ saṅgas teṣūpajāyate*); he will then desire to enjoy them, and when that desire is frustrated, he will become angry (*saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho 'bhijāyate*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that the *sthita-prajña* must be careful to keep his mind focused on Kṛṣṇa; otherwise, even after attaining control of the senses, he can still fall down.

**My evidence:**

“Even for those who have controlled the senses, if they do not direct their minds to Me, it is inevitable that calamities will again arise. This is expressed in two verses. For the yogī who repeatedly contemplates sense objects, thinking he will derive pleasure from them (*dhyāyataḥ*), attachment (*saṅgaḥ*) to those objects arises. From that attachment, thirst for enjoyment develops. When that longing is obstructed, anger—a burning in the heart—arises to counteract the obstacle.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.62 commentary)

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2.63: As a result of anger, one loses the ability to discriminate between prescribed duty (which must be performed), unauthorised action, and inaction, both of which must be avoided (*krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ*). When this discrimination is lost, one forgets that, according to the scriptures, the senses can only be conquered by keeping them engaged in My service (*sammohāt smṛti-vibhramah*). With this forgotten, one gradually loses the determination to pursue self-realisation (*smṛti-bhramśād buddhi-nāśah*), and reverts to a life of sense enjoyment, remaining bound in the cycle of birth and death (*buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Sammohaḥ*: Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain this as the loss of discrimination regarding what should and should not be done—what is proper action and what is improper. To clarify this, I have drawn on the language of *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.17: *karmaṇah*, *vikarmaṇah*, and *akarmaṇah*.

*Smṛti-vibhramah*: From the combined commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, this may be understood as forgetting that, according to the scriptures, we must conquer our senses if we desire our own good. In his purport, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda adds that the scriptures recommend that we see how our material duties are connected to Kṛṣṇa and perform them for His pleasure, rather than artificially abandoning them. Thus, if we attempt to control the senses artificially, it leads to *buddhi-nāśah*.

*Buddhi-nāśah*: Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain this as the loss of determination to continue one’s spiritual practice. This may be understood as occurring gradually, due to the difficulty of artificially repressing the senses.

*Praṇāśyati*: All three ācāryas describe this as a “fall-down,” meaning a return to a life of sense gratification, and consequent entanglement in the cycle of birth and death.

**My evidence:**

“From anger arises loss of discrimination (*sammohaḥ*) regarding what is proper or improper action. From *sammohaḥ* arises destruction of memory of one’s effort to conquer the senses (*smṛti-vibhramah*). From this loss of memory comes the destruction of the determination necessary for attaining knowledge of the self (*buddhi-nāśah*). From the loss of determination, one again sinks into the ocean of material enjoyment and continues in *saṁsāra* (*praṇāśyati*). Without surrender to Me, the senses connect the weak mind to their respective objects. Therefore, one who wishes to conquer the mind must worship the Lord.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.63 commentary)

“From bewilderment develops loss of remembrance of one’s own benefit derived from the instructions of the scriptures (*smṛti-vibhramah*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.63 commentary)

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**2.64-71 : Kṛṣṇa answers the fourth question: ‘vrajeta kim’**

2.64: But a person who absorbs his mind in understanding My instructions becomes free from both attachment and aversion to the sense objects (*rāga-dveṣa-vimuktas tu*). With his mind fixed in My teachings (*ātma-vaśyair vidheyātmā*), he controls his senses by engaging them in executing his prescribed duties for My satisfaction (*viṣayān indriyaiś caran*). In this way, by My mercy, his mind becomes fully purified and unagitated by material desires (*prasādam adhigacchati*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that in this verse Kṛṣṇa answers the question *vrajeta kim*—how the self-realised person engages his senses.

All three ācāryas explain that the self-realised person may externally appear as though he is enjoying his senses, but because his mind is absorbed in Kṛṣṇa’s teachings as given in the

scriptures, there is no fault in this. In other words, he may seem to be enjoying family life, material opulence, etc., but because he performs his scripturally prescribed duties for the Lord's pleasure, he can engage his senses without becoming implicated in karmic entanglement. I have made this explicit in my unpacking of the verse.

**My evidence:**

“This verse answers the question, ‘How does the *sthita-prajña* go (*vrajeta kim*)?’ The Lord explains that it is not a fault to accept the objects of the senses if this is done with controlled senses and without attachment to those objects in the mind. One whose mind (*ātma*) is submissive to instruction (*vidheyātmā*), and who engages with sense objects through senses that are controlled and free from attachment and aversion, attains peace (*prasādam*). Contact with the sense objects is not a fault; rather, it is a good quality when done with control.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.64 commentary)

“In these verses, the Lord answers the final question: ‘How does the *sthita-prajña* engage the senses?’ That person, offering his mind to Me (*vidheyātmā*), destroys the impurities of the mind, such as attachment to enjoyment. Even while experiencing sense objects (*caran*), he ultimately attains a pure mind (*prasādam*), free from the appearance of contamination by attraction to those objects.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.64 commentary)

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2.65: One who sees everything as My mercy becomes peaceful, for he is no longer disturbed by circumstances that would ordinarily cause distress (*prasāde sarva-duḥkhānām hānir asyopajāyate*). When the mind is thus peaceful and free from agitation, the intelligence quickly becomes free from doubt and confusion regarding the path of self-realisation, which one then pursues with steady determination (*prasanna-cetaso hy āśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate*).

**Explanatory note:**

*Prasāde sarva-duḥkhānām / hānir asyopajāyate*: In a lecture on this verse, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that a devotee has no material misery because he sees everything as the Lord's mercy.

*Buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate*: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura indicate that this refers to the intelligence becoming firmly fixed in the pursuit of self-realisation.

**My evidence:**

“The intelligence is fixed completely in its desired goal (*paryavatiṣṭhate*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.65 commentary)

“The intelligence of that person whose mind is peaceful (*prasanna-cetasah*), being directed toward the self (*ātman*), then remains fixed (*paryavatiṣṭhate*).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.65 commentary)

“*Prasāde sarva-duḥkhānām hānir asyopajāyate* [Bg. 2.65]. Simply we have to admit, ‘After all, Kṛṣṇa is giving us everything.’ Kṛṣṇa wants us to recognise that everything comes from Him. He is supplying everything, even to the nondevotees. But the nondevotee does not recognise that ‘It is Kṛṣṇa’s *prasādam*; by His mercy I have received it.’ That is the difference between a devotee and a nondevotee.” ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.26.46, January 21, 1975, Bombay](#))

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2.66: One cannot be certain about the goal of life and the means to attain it without firm conviction in transcendental knowledge of Me—that everything is meant for My pleasure, that I am the controller, and the dearest friend of all beings (*nāsti buddhir ayuktasya*). In the absence of such conviction, one will not think of Me in all circumstances (*na cāyuktasya bhāvanā*) and will therefore not be able to remain peaceful and free from mental agitation (*na cābhāvayataḥ śāntiḥ*). How can one who is always mentally agitated be happy (*aśāntasya kutaḥ sukham*)?

**Explanatory note:**

My interpretation of this verse is largely shaped by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda’s purport to 2.66.

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2.67: The problem with not keeping one’s mind on Me is that it will follow one or more of the senses as they interact with their objects (*indriyāṇām hi caratām yan mano ’nuvidhīyate*). When this happens, the mind is diverted from life’s goal—self-realisation—by attraction to them, just as a boat is swept off course by a strong wind (*tad asya harati prajñām vāyur nāvam ivāmbhasi*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that this verse describes the problem that arises when the mind is not fully absorbed in Kṛṣṇa: one loses sight of the goal of self-realisation and fails to keep the senses under control.

**My evidence:**

“This verse describes the faults that arise from lack of sense control, which result from not absorbing the mind in Me.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.67 commentary)

“This verse examines the person who lacks intelligence due to absence of control over the mind (*ayuktasya buddhir na asti*, as described in the previous verse). Among the senses

moving toward their respective objects, the mind follows one of them. Such a mind carries away the person’s intelligence (*prajñā*), just as an unfavourable wind carries a boat off course on the water.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.67 commentary)

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2.68: Therefore, O mighty-armed Arjuna, just as you have conquered your enemies in the past, you must now conquer your senses (*tasmād yasya mahā-bāho*). By correctly restraining them from the sense objects (*nigrhītāni sarvaśaḥ indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas*), you will become firmly established in self-realisation (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*).

**Explanatory note:**

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explain that the only means of conquering the senses is by correctly practising the regulative principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This requires the expert guidance of a bona fide spiritual master.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that the significance of addressing Arjuna as *mahā-bāho* (“mighty-armed”) is to exhort him to conquer his senses with the same success with which he has previously conquered his enemies.

**My evidence:**

“One whose mind is fixed on Me can become established in the self (*prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*). O mighty-armed one, just as you conquer your enemies, you should conquer your senses. From these verses it should be understood that conquest of the senses arises spontaneously for the perfected *sthita-prajña* by absorbing the mind in Bhagavān. But for one aspiring to attain this state, it arises only through practice.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.68 commentary)

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2.69: There is a metaphor here describing two types of intelligence: that of the self-realised transcendentalist—the *sthita-prajña*—and that of the materialist. People sleep at night and can thus be said to be unaware of what is going on at that time. Similarly, the topics and practices of self-realisation, which are of great interest to the self-controlled transcendentalist, are like night to the materialist—in other words, they are unaware that such happiness exists (*yā nisā sarva-bhūtānām tasyām jāgarti saṁyamī*). On the other hand, the pursuits and inclinations of materialists are like night to the transcendentalist, who experiences a higher happiness—in other words, they hold no attraction for him (*yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni sā nisā paśyato muneḥ*).

**Explanatory note:**

All three ācāryas explain that this metaphor refers to two types of intelligence: materialistic intelligence and transcendental intelligence. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that “night” for the materialist indicates ignorance of the happiness of devotional service—they have never experienced it. “Night” for the *sthita-*

*prajñā*, however, indicates disinterest in sense gratification; for even when such experiences arise due to past karmic reactions, they hold no attraction for him.

**My evidence:**

“Just as, in the night, people who are dreaming do not know what is actually happening, so all living beings do not know the realities perceived by intelligence directed toward the self.”  
(*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.69 commentary)

“Other living beings, whose intelligence is fixed on material enjoyment, remain awake to that enjoyment; they are not asleep at that time. Yet this is night for the *muni*, the *sthita-prajñā*, for it brings him no material pleasure. The person who directly perceives the self also experiences the sense objects that come to him by *prārabdha-karma*, but does so with indifference (*paśyataḥ*).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.69 commentary)

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2.70: While still embodied, a self-realised transcendentalist may experience impulses for material enjoyment, but he does not become attached to them. Sometimes, due to past karmas, he may experience sense enjoyment that comes unsought; yet even this does not deviate him from devotional service to Me. Just as the ocean remains undisturbed by the flow of rivers into it (*āpūryamāṇam acala-pratiṣṭhaṁ samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat*), the self-realised transcendentalist remains unaffected by such impulses or experiences. Thus he remains free from anxiety and lamentation (*tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve sa śāntim āpnoti*), unlike one who hankers for material enjoyment (*na kāma-kāmī*).

**Explanatory note:**

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda presents this verse somewhat differently from Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the *sthita-prajñā* may experience impulses for material enjoyment, yet is not disturbed by them. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, however, explain that the self-realised person may experience sense enjoyment that comes unsought due to past karmas, yet remains undisturbed and unchanged by it. I have tried to incorporate both perspectives.

One might wonder what it means that he remains undisturbed or unchanged by sense gratification. My light is that he does not develop either attachment or aversion, nor do such experiences give rise to further desires for sense enjoyment. Rather, he remains absorbed in Kṛṣṇa.

**My evidence:**

This verse describes the condition of the *sthita-prajñā*, who is not affected or agitated when he encounters sense objects. Just as, in the rainy season, rivers (*āpaḥ*) flow into the ocean, almost filling it, yet are unable to overflow it or cause it to exceed its bounds (*acala-pratiṣṭham*), in the same way the objects of sense enjoyment (*kāmāḥ*) come to the *sthita-*

*prajña*, yet cannot disturb him. Whether the rivers enter or not, the ocean remains undisturbed; similarly, the *sthita-prajña* remains unaffected whether he obtains sense objects or not.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.70 commentary)

“Similarly, sense objects (*sarve kāmāḥ*) come to the *sthita-prajña* due to his *prārabdhakarma*, but they cannot cause any change in him. He does not undergo any transformation because he is satisfied by realising the bliss of the self (*ātma*). But one who desires sense objects (*kāma-kāmī*) does not attain such peace.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.70 commentary)

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2.71: While executing his duties, the *sthita-prajña* does not hanker for any material result, but lives free from all longing (*pumāś carati niḥsprhaḥ*). Nor does he claim anything or anyone to be his, nor does he identify with his material body (*nirmamo nirahankārah*). Having given up all desires for material happiness (*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān*), he lives in a state of peace, free from all anxiety (*sa śāntim adhigacchati*).

**Explanatory note:**

This verse continues to describe how the *sthita-prajña* acts in this world.

**My evidence:**

“This verse answers the question, ‘How does the *sthita-prajña* move about (*vrajeta kim*)?’” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.71 commentary)

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**2.72: Kṛṣṇa concludes by praising the sthita-prajna**

2.72: In summary, one who always speaks of everything in relation to Me, restrains the senses from activities not related to My service, and engages them appropriately in My service becomes fixed in transcendental realisation (*eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha*). The symptom of one who has attained such realisation is that he no longer identifies with the material body and is therefore neither allured by nor disturbed by any material situation (*nainām prāpya vimuhyati*). If one attains this state before death, one enters the spiritual realm (*sthitvāsyām anta-kāle ’pi brahma-nirvāṇam ṛcchati*).

**Explanatory note:**

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that this verse concludes the topic. I understand this to mean that it summarises both the characteristics and the destination of the *sthita-prajña*. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds that in this verse Kṛṣṇa praises the state of transcendental realisation.

**My evidence:**

“This verse concludes the topic.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.72 commentary)

“This verse praises the state of the *sthita-prajña*.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.72 commentary)

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#### CHAPTER SUMMARY:

Chapter 2 opens with Krishna rebuking Arjuna for his weakness and urging him to fulfil his duty as a kshatriya. Arjuna, recognising his confusion, formally surrenders to Krishna as his spiritual teacher.

Krishna begins by giving spiritual instruction on the difference between the ephemeral body and the eternal soul. Even if Arjuna doubts the soul’s existence, he should not lament, since death is inevitable for all embodied beings.

He then instructs Arjuna on the religious duty of a kshatriya, stressing that fighting in a righteous war is glorious, while retreating would bring dishonour and sin. Performing one’s duty leads to either worldly success or heavenly reward; therefore, Arjuna should act without attachment to the outcome of the war.

Next, Krishna introduces Buddhi Yoga — action guided by spiritual intelligence — and highlights its benefits. He explains the obstacles that prevent most people from practising it, encourages Arjuna to rise above them, and outlines the key qualities and rewards of one who follows this path.

Arjuna then asks about the characteristics of a person who has perfected his practise of Buddhi Yoga. The chapter concludes with Krishna’s description of the perfected Buddhi Yogi.