

## CHAPTER 3

In Chapter 2, verse 39, Krishna introduces *buddhi-yoga* as a means to liberation. Modern readers, approaching the text calmly, can recognise this as a single, integrated path: action guided by spiritual intelligence.

Arjuna, however, hears Krishna's explanation of *buddhi-yoga* amid crisis, not as a detached commentator but as an internally conflicted warrior on the battlefield. Although Krishna clearly instructs him in verses 2.47–48 to perform his duty without attachment, Arjuna misinterprets verse 2.49 to mean that "karma (action) should be replaced by *buddhi-yoga*." He also takes Krishna's description of the *sthita-prajña*—one firmly established in spiritual intelligence (*buddhi-yoga*)—in verses 2.55–72 to indicate a renounced, contemplative life.

He mistakenly thinks *karma-yoga* and *buddhi-yoga* are two separate paths. Thus, he also misunderstands Krishna's instruction in 2.50 to mean that only *buddhi-yoga* frees one from all karmic reactions.

Thus, he cannot understand why Krishna concludes 2.50 by saying he should practise *karma-yoga*. While detached action in *karma-yoga* may be better than work performed with attachment, it still accrues karmic reactions. Since he perceives *buddhi-yoga* and *karma-yoga* as separate paths, with only *buddhi-yoga* liberating one from karmic reactions, he struggles to understand why Krishna urges him to act in what he regards as the "lower" discipline of detached action (*karma-yoga*).

Influenced by these misunderstandings, and by his own inner conflict about fighting, Arjuna raises his doubts at the opening of Chapter 3.

### 3.1-2: Arjuna's confusion

3.1: Arjuna said (*arjuna uvāca*): If You conclude that *buddhi-yoga*—a life of spiritual contemplation—is superior to performing one's worldly duties (*jyāyasī cet karmaṇas te*), then why are You, O Janārdana, who are concerned with the ultimate welfare of Your devotees, advising me to act in ways that will cause me distress (*matā buddhir janārdana*)? Why are You urging me towards this terrible deed of killing my own relatives (*tat kiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām*)? O Keśava, You killed the demon Keśī, so please destroy the demonic doubts within my heart. Since, as the controller even of Brahmā and Śiva, Your instruction cannot be disregarded, please explain why You are urging me to fight (*niyojayasi keśava*).

Explanatory note:

In his purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that Arjuna here expresses a common misconception that *buddhi-yoga* (regulated devotional service) requires one to abandon prescribed duties and meditate in seclusion. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa echoes this understanding in his commentary.

Janārdana: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains Janārdana means one whose guidance is sought for one's ultimate welfare. Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura draws out a different meaning: one who causes distress to His own devotees. I have tried to incorporate both perspectives into this rendering.

Keśava: In his purport to Bg. 18.1, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that Keśava refers to Kṛṣṇa's pastime of killing the demon Keśī, and that by addressing Kṛṣṇa in this way, Arjuna is asking Him to destroy the demonic doubts within his heart. Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, however, emphasise another meaning of the name. They explain Keśava means the controller of Brahmā and Śiva, and that by referring to Kṛṣṇa as Keśava, Arjuna acknowledges that Kṛṣṇa's instruction cannot be disregarded. I have tried to incorporate both meanings into this version.

My evidence:

“If You consider that intelligence (*jñāna-buddhi*) directed towards the ātmā is superior to *niṣkāma-karma* (*karmaṇaḥ*), whose goal is to produce *ātma-jñāna*, why do You engage me in terrible actions involving violence? Why do You incite me with words commanding me to fight?.....Janārdana means ‘one who is the object of entreaty for those desiring their ultimate benefit’ ....Keśava means ‘one who controls Brahmā and Śiva.’...You, whose instructions cannot be transgressed (since You control even Brahmā and Śiva)...” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.1 commentary)

“O Janārdana, by Your order You are causing pain (*ardana*) to Your own people (*jana*). It is also not possible to avoid following Your order, O Keśava, controller even of Brahmā and Śiva! *Ka* means Brahmā, *īśa* means Śiva, and *va* means *vayase*, ‘You control.’” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.1 commentary)

“Keśī was a most formidable demon who was killed by the Lord; now Arjuna is expecting Kṛṣṇa to kill the demon of doubt.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.1 purport)

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3.2: You use the same words in different ways. For example, You use the word *yoga* to sometimes describe the practice of *sāṅkhya-yoga* and at other times the practice of *karma-yoga*; and at other times, You use the word *yoga* to refer to the goal of these paths (*vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena*). I know it is not Your intention to confuse me, but that has been the effect (*buddhirṁ mohayasīva me*). Therefore, please speak clearly about the one path I

should follow if I am to attain my ultimate good (*tad ekam vada niścitya yena śreya 'ham āpnuyām*).

Explanatory note:

*Vyāmiśreṇeva*: All three ācāryas interpret this word as meaning equivocal. Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says Arjuna points out that Kṛṣṇa's statements can convey different meanings. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says that Kṛṣṇa uses similar words to describe different topics: sometimes *sāṅkhya-yoga*, sometimes *karma-yoga*; sometimes the goal, and sometimes the method.

*Iva*: Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura say this word indicates that Arjuna knows Kṛṣṇa is not intentionally trying to confuse him.

My evidence:

“You bewilder my intelligence by those words which are mixtures of many meanings (*vyāmiśreṇa*). Though You have spoken about action (*karmaṇy evādhikāras te*), You also speak of *jñāna* using the word *yoga* ... The word *iva* indicates that ‘Your words are not actually filled with many meanings, and it is not Your desire to bewilder me, as You are merciful.’” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.2 commentary)

“A statement concerning intellect directed towards both *sāṅkhya-yoga* and *karma-yoga*, concerning both stopping and engaging the senses, concerning both the goal of practice (*sādhya*) and the practice (*sādhana*), is called a mixed statement (*vyāmiśra*). By that statement, You seem to bewilder my intelligence (*mohayasi iva*). In reality, You, the Lord of all beings, and my friend as well, would not bewilder me. But I, because of faults in my intelligence, think like this. That is the implication of the word *iva*. Therefore, make one statement, without mixture of the two elements.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.2 commentary)”

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### 3.3-9: Duty done for the Lord is better than renouncing work

3.3: The Supreme Lord replied (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): O virtuous Arjuna, I have just explained to you the two standard paths for attaining self-realisation (*loke 'smin dvi-vidhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha*). One is the path of *jñāna-yoga* for those whose hearts have become completely free from material attachment through analysing the difference between matter and spirit—*sāṅkhya (jñāna-yogena sāṅkhyānām)*. The other is *buddhi-yoga*, often referred to as *karma-yoga*, which is meant for those who still retain some material attachments (*karma-yogena yoginām*).

Explanatory note:

*Karma-yogena*: In his purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that Kṛṣṇa uses the terms *karma-yoga* and *buddhi-yoga* interchangeably.

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that only those whose hearts are completely purified of material desires are qualified to engage in *jñāna-yoga*, which includes *sāṅkhyā*—the analysis of reality and non-reality. Those who still have some desires for material happiness and freedom from material suffering should engage in *karma-yoga*.

My evidence:

“For those engaged in knowledge (*sāṅkhyānām*), who have risen to the state of knowledge through purity of heart, there is steadiness in *jñāna-yoga*.....For those who are not able to ascend to the platform of knowledge through purity of heart, there is a means to ascend to that platform. They are fixed in *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, activities without selfish desire offered to Me. They are known as those engaged in karma.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.3 commentary)

“One who desires liberation does not immediately achieve steadiness in *jñāna*, along with its components such as sense control, but rather first purifies the heart through *karma-yoga* performed with prescribed duties.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.3 commentary)

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3.4: One cannot control the senses simply by giving up one’s occupational duties (*na karmaṇām anārambhān naiṣkarmyaṁ puruṣo ’śnute*). Such premature acceptance of the renounced order of life, *sannyāsa*, will not lead to spiritual perfection (*na ca sannyasanād eva siddhiṁ samadhigacchati*).

Explanatory note:

Once the heart is fully purified of all desires for material happiness—including desires for good reputation and followers—one can renounce one’s prescribed occupational (*varṇa*) duties and adopt the renounced order of life, *sannyāsa*. All three ācāryas explain that if one prematurely renounces occupational duties and adopts *sannyāsa*, one will not attain spiritual perfection. His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda further explains that such so-called *sannyāsīs*, being unable to properly control their senses, create disturbance within society.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says that Kṛṣṇa explains the importance of performing one’s prescribed duties throughout the next thirteen verses (3.4–17).

My evidence:

“By not engaging in activities recommended in the scriptures, one cannot attain *jñāna* (*naiṣkarmyam*). One with an impure heart cannot attain *jñāna* by renunciation of activities recommended in the scriptures (*sannyāsāt*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.4 commentary)

“One with an impure heart should perform prescribed activities for purification of the heart. This is explained in thirteen verses. A person with an impure heart cannot attain steadiness in *jñāna* or detachment from action in the form of stopping the actions of all the senses

(*naiṣkarmyam*) without performing prescribed actions (*anārambhān*) as part of the cultivation of *jñāna*. Nor does he attain liberation (*siddhim*) simply by renouncing those actions.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.4 commentary)

“So *aiśvaryaśya samāgrasya vīryasya yaśasaḥ*. *Yaśasaḥ* means fame. Everyone, we are hankering after, every one of us, name, fame. *Lābha-pūjā-pratiṣṭhaḥ*. This materialistic life means we want some profit, we want some fame and we want some good name.” ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1967, in San Francisco](#))

“na dhanam na janam na sundarim  
kavitam va jagad-isa kamaye  
mama janmani janmaniśvare  
bhavatad bhaktir ahaituki tvayi

[O Almighty Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. I only want Your causeless devotional service, birth after birth.]” (*Śikṣāṣṭaka* verse 4 by Lord Chaitanya)

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3.5: The living entity is active by nature and thus cannot even momentarily refrain from doing something (na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarma-kṛt). If he does not engage in the activities prescribed by the Lord in scripture, he will instead act under the influence of material attraction and aversion arising from impressions carried over from previous lives (kāryate hy avaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛti-jair guṇaiḥ).

Explanatory note:

In his purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that activity is the inherent nature of the soul. We will, therefore, inevitably act either according to the Lord’s guidance in scripture or under the influence of the modes of material nature. Our minds carry impressions from previous lives which determine how the modes influence us.

My evidence:

“Rather, the person with an impure heart who gives up scriptural activities becomes engrossed in material actions.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.5 commentary)

“By qualities such as desire and repulsion (*guṇaiḥ*) arising from his nature (*prakṛti-jaiḥ*), he will perform all actions beyond his control (*avaśaḥ*).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.5 commentary)

Bhānu Swāmī’s note to *Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.5:

“Later it is explained that nature or *svabhāva* means the impressions fixed within the jīva from experiences in successive previous bodies.”

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Arjuna's unspoken comment: But there are *sannyāsīs* who, having given up their occupational duties, externally restrain their senses even though they may still think of sense gratification.

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura suggest there is an unspoken bridge between verses 5 and 6.

My evidence:

“ ‘But we see some such *sannyāsīs*, devoid of actions of the senses, with closed eyes.’ This verse answers.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭikā* 3.6 commentary)

“But it is seen that there are persons who have closed up their senses like the ear, and are therefore devoid of actions of attraction and repulsion.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.6 commentary)

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3.6: One who neglects to purify his consciousness of all material desires by following the path of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, and prematurely accepts the *sannyāsa* order of life, is misguided and will not attain self-realisation. Even if he manages to externally restrain his senses from engaging with sense objects (*karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya*), if his mind, being attracted to sense objects, continues to dwell on them (*ya āste manasā smaran indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā*), then he is a hypocrite and a cheater (*mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate*).

Explanatory note:

All the ācāryas agree that a person who gives up his occupational duties and externally acts like a renounced *sannyāsī*, while internally still being attracted to sense enjoyment, is a cheater whose display of sense control and yoga produces no spiritual benefit. Even if he successfully keeps his senses externally restrained, he will not attain self-realisation.

My evidence:

“He who controls the working senses such as speech and hands (*karmendriyāṇi*) but continues remembering sense objects while pretending to meditate is a cheater (*mithyācāraḥ*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭikā* 3.6 commentary)

“The *sannyāsī* is a fool who, restraining his working senses such as speech, still remembers sense objects such as sound within the mind while pretending to meditate. He is called an imposter. Because he continues mentally dwelling upon sense objects despite externally restraining the senses, due to impurity within the mind caused by neglecting *niṣkāma-karma*, he does not attain *jñāna* even though he desires it. He is therefore called a false practitioner and a cheater.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.6 commentary)

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3.7: On the other hand, a married devotee regulates sense gratification according to the prescriptions of scripture while keeping the mind absorbed in spiritual cultivation (*yas tv indriyāṇi manasā*). O Arjuna, such a devotee can perform his occupational duties as an offering to the Lord, without the desire to personally enjoy the results (*niyamyārabhate 'rjuna karmendriyaiḥ karma-yogam*). Such a devotee is far better situated than one who has prematurely accepted *sannyāsa* (*asaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate*).

Explanatory note:

All three ācāryas explain that this verse contrasts the properly engaged householder with the premature *sannyāsī* described in the previous verse. I have expressed “householder” by the more colloquial term “married devotee”.

In the purport to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 13.8–12, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda clearly explains four practices that married devotees should prioritise so they can perform their occupational duties without attachment.

My evidence:

“In contrast to this, the householder (not the *sannyāsī*), who performs scriptural actions (*karma-yogam*) without longing for the fruits of his actions (*asaktaḥ*), is superior.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.7 commentary)

“If one is in full Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he can make his home very happy, because this process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is very easy. One need only chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, accept the remnants of foodstuffs offered to Kṛṣṇa, have some discussion on books like *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and engage oneself in Deity worship. These four things will make one happy. One should train the members of his family in this way. The family members can sit down morning and evening and chant together Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. If one can mould his family life in this way to develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness, following these four principles, then there is no need to change from family life to renounced life. But if it is not congenial, not favourable for spiritual advancement, then family life should be abandoned.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 13.8–12 purport)

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3.8: Therefore, executing your occupational duties alongside the daily *sādhana* prescribed for you by the bona fide spiritual master (*niyataṁ kuru karma tvam*) is far better than giving up one’s work (*karma jyāyo hy akarmaṇaḥ*). Working is the honest means for maintaining the body. Even *sannyāsīs* must beg for food simply to keep body and soul together. If one still desires bodily comfort beyond the bare necessities, one should honestly work rather than prematurely accept *sannyāsa* and expect the charity of others to fulfil those desires (*śarīra-yātrāpi ca te na prasidhyed akarmaṇaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

In his purport, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda says that before taking *sannyāsa*, one should be free of all materialistic propensities to lord it over material nature. This means that if one still desires material comfort, fame, or followers, one should not accept *sannyāsa*. Rather, one can pursue those desires legitimately in married life. Since one lives on the charity of others in the renounced order, one must be satisfied with the minimum required for keeping body and soul together.

*Niyatam karma*: all the ācāryas describe this as prescribed duties. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa emphasises performing one's prescribed occupational (*varṇa*) duties without personal desire. He mentions *sādhana* as the means to purify oneself of personal desire. Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura equates the prescribed duties with the *sādhana* itself. In his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.35, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda acknowledges that both the *sādhana* prescribed by the bona fide spiritual master and one's occupational (*varṇa*) duties are included within the term "prescribed duties". Thus, I have tried to make that clear in this rendition.

My evidence:

"Therefore, you should engage in daily obligatory activities such as *sandhyā-vandana* (*niyatam karma*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.8 commentary)

"Therefore, since you have an impure heart, you must necessarily (*niyatam*) perform prescribed activities for purification of the heart. This means, 'Perform these prescribed activities without personal desire.' Performing such activities is better than renouncing all action out of enthusiasm, because the performance of these duties will gradually lead to attainment of *jñāna*, just as steps lead to the top of a staircase....Because he must maintain the body, purified through *sādhana*, for as long as he lives, even the *jñānī* performs actions such as begging for food. But such begging is not meant for you, a *kṣatriya*." (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.8 commentary)

"Materially, prescribed duties are duties enjoined according to one's psychophysical condition, under the spell of the modes of material nature. Spiritual duties are as ordered by the spiritual master for the transcendental service of Kṛṣṇa." (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.35 purport)

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Arjuna's unspoken comment: The scriptures say that performing actions, even prescribed duties, implicates one in karmic reactions and thus forces one to take birth again in the material world.

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura cite the same verse from the *Mahābhārata*.

My evidence:

“The *smṛti* scriptures say that one is bound by actions: *karmaṇā badhyate jantuḥ* (*Mahābhārata* 12.24.71). Therefore, I will become bound by performing actions.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.9 commentary)

“ ‘But by performing actions, one will become bound up. We hear such statements as *karmaṇā badhyate jantuḥ*: living entities are bound by actions.’ ” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.9 commentary)

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3.9: Kṛṣṇa replied: When one acts on the order of the Lord and offers the results to Him for His satisfaction, it is known as *yajñā*—sacrifice. Such work does not cause bondage (*yajñārthāt karmaṇo ’nyatra*). Anything done without the Lord’s sanction or not offered to Him, however, does produce karmic reactions (*loko ’yam karma-bandhanaḥ*). Therefore, O Arjuna, execute your prescribed duties for His pleasure (*tad-artham karma kaunteya*), and give up all attachment and aversion to the results (*mukta-saṅgaḥ samācara*).

Explanatory note:

All the ācāryas agree that Kṛṣṇa is recommending Arjuna perform whatever duties the Supreme Lord ordains, while giving up all personal attachment and aversion to the results. When work is done solely for the satisfaction of the Lord, it becomes *yajñā*—sacrifice.

My evidence:

“Dharma offered to Viṣṇu without personal desire is called *yajñā*. Persons become bound by karma through any other action performed for any other purpose.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.9 commentary)

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### 3.10-16: The Benefits of Working for Visnu

3.10: In the beginning of creation, Lord Viṣṇu created varieties of celestials and humans along with methods for offering sacrifice to Him (*saha-yajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā*). He then said (*purovāca prajāpatiḥ*), ‘I bless you that by performing sacrifice for My pleasure you will live comfortably in this life and attain liberation after death (*anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo ’stv iṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*).

Explanatory note:

*Prajā-patiḥ*: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa both say that this word refers to Lord Viṣṇu. Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says it refers to Lord Brahmā. These interpretations are not contradictory, as Lord Viṣṇu frequently addresses the demigods and sages through Lord Brahmā.

*Iṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*: Vishvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura suggests this phrase refers to *sa-kāma-karma-yoga*—working as a sacrifice to Viṣṇu while still having desires for one’s own material comfort and happiness. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says it refers to those who desire liberation. His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda says it refers to both desires. Desiring anything other than Kṛṣṇa’s satisfaction—whether material enjoyment or liberation—is *sa-kāma-karma-yoga*. *Niṣkāma-karma-yoga* means there is no desire other than Kṛṣṇa’s satisfaction.

My evidence:

“Now, if you cannot be desireless in your actions, then you should still perform actions offered to Viṣṇu with desire, rather than give up action completely.....Brahmā created the living beings qualified for offering sacrifice to Viṣṇu and said, ‘Increase the population more and more through this dharma, or *yajña*. May this *yajña* bestow all desired enjoyments (*iṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*).’ ” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.10 commentary)

“At the beginning of creation (*purā*), the Lord—Yajña, or Viṣṇu—created progeny such as the devas and human beings together with sacrifice.....‘May this sacrifice (*eṣa*) offered to Me become the giver of the desired goal of liberation (*iṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*) by supplying bodily maintenance and knowledge of the *ātmā*, which purifies the heart.’ ” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.10 commentary)

“If someone has a desire for material enjoyment or for becoming one with the Supreme, these are both considered material concepts. Because the impersonalists cannot appreciate the spiritual happiness of association and the exchange of loving affairs with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, their ultimate goal is to become one with the Lord. This concept is simply an extension of the material idea.” (*The Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 3)

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3.11: Such sacrifices also satisfy the administrative demigods (*devān bhāvayatānena*), who will thus provide all your necessities and fulfil your desires (*te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ*). This reciprocal relationship between mankind and the demigods will increase the prosperity and well-being of both (*parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ param avāpsyatha*).

Explanatory note:

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains in his purport to this verse that performing *yajña* for *Viṣṇu* also pleases the administrative demigods, who oversee the supply of necessities such as sunshine and rain on the Lord’s behalf.

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3.12: When satisfied by the appropriate sacrifice for the age, the administrative demigods will fulfil all desires that do not degrade one (*iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā dāsyante yajña-bhāvitāḥ*). However, if one accepts their provisions, such as sunlight and rain, but does not perform *yajña*, then he is considered a thief and will be punished in his next life (*tair dattān apradāyaibhyo yo bhukte stena eva saḥ*).

Explanatory note:

In his purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda points out that the sacrifice for this age is *saṅkīrtana-yajña*. Thus, I have pointed out that one should perform the *yajña* appropriate for the age.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa points out that when one performs *yajña*, the demigods will increasingly fulfil one's material desires which are compatible with one's ultimate liberation. Conversely, if one accepts the demigods' general provisions but does not reciprocate by performing *yajña*, he will be punished in his next life for the sin of stealing.

My evidence:

"These previously created devatās, who are My limbs, will give you more and more desired objects dependent on the performance of sacrifice, which are useful for those desiring liberation (*iṣṭān bhogān*)... Having stolen the devatās' properties, he nourishes himself by that. As a thief is punished by the king, he deserves to be punished by Yamarāja." (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.12 commentary)

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3.13: The Lord's pure devotees only eat food which has first been offered to Lord *Viṣṇu* (*yajña-śiṣṭāśinaḥ santo*), and thus they do not receive any sinful reactions incurred in its preparation (*mucyante sarva-kilbiṣaiḥ*). On the other hand, the impious cook only for the gratification of the tongue and thus receive the sinful reactions incurred in the food preparation (*bhuñjate te tv agham pāpā ye pacanty ātma-kāraṇāt*).

Explanatory note:

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that even in the preparation of vegetarian foods, one inevitably commits violence against other living entities.

My evidence:

"The five violent actions (*pañca-sūnā*) are described in the *smṛti*: ... 'The *grhastha* does not enjoy *svarga* by commission of the five violent actions towards other living entities caused by using the mortar, grinding stone, stove, broom, and water pot.'" (*Viṣṇu-smṛti* 59.19–20, *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.13 commentary)

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3.14: Food grains are essential for life to exist (*annād bhavanti bhūtāni*). However, food grains can only grow when there is rainfall (*parjanyaḍ anna-sambhavaḥ*). Rain depends on

the performance of sacrifice (*yajñād bhavati parjanya*). Sacrifice requires the performance of prescribed duties (*yajñah karma-samudbhavaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says that in this verse Kṛṣṇa explains the cycle that generates and sustains life. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa details the cycle: the performance of sacrifice leads to Indra providing rain, which results in food grains. These are eaten and transformed into semen, which produces new life and leads to further sacrifice.

My evidence:

“One should perform the yajna because it causes the cycle movement in the universe. From food living entities exist.... The cause of food is rain..... The cause of rain is the yajna.... The cause of yajna is karma, action.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.14 commentary)

“Living entities (*bhutani*) arise from food such as rice, for the food transforms into semen and blood, which in turn nourishes the body. Food arises from rain (*parjanya*). Rains arises from sacrifice. It is said: ... ‘The oblation offered in the fire goes to the sun. Rain arises from the sun. From rain arises food, and from food arise the progeny.’ *Manu Smṛti* 3.76.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.14 commentary)

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3.15: To perform *yajña*, one must understand one’s prescribed duties through the authority of the Vedas (*karma brahmodbhavam vidhi*), for if one acts contrary to the Vedas, one’s actions do not qualify as *yajña*. The Vedas are authoritative because they originate from the Supreme Lord (*brahmākṣara-samudbhavam*). Therefore, in every age, one can become conscious of the presence of the all-pervading Lord by performing sacrifice (*tasmāt sarva-gatam brahma nityam yajñe pratiṣṭhitam*).

Explanatory note:

*Brahma*: All three ācāryas agree that this refers to the Vedas.

*Akṣara*: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa say this refers to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says it refers to the impersonal Brahman. The word *kṣara* means subject to decay, death, deterioration, change, and destruction. *Akṣara* means not subject to these conditions. Thus, it can refer to both the Personality of Godhead and the impersonal Brahman. Furthermore, since the impersonal Brahman is the energy of the Supreme Lord, there is no contradiction.

*Pratiṣṭhitam*: In all the editions of the *Bhagavad-gītā* I have access to, this word is translated as ‘situated in’. This raised the following confusion for me: the Supreme Lord has already been described as *sarva-gatam*—all-pervasive. Why therefore does Kṛṣṇa emphasise that He is situated in sacrifice specifically? I understand that although the Supreme Lord is present everywhere, we can become conscious of His presence by performing sacrifice. ‘To become

conscious of' is not the literal meaning of *pratiṣṭhitam*, but I understand it to be implied by the word. I have supported this understanding with statements His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda makes in his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.16.

My evidence:

“The cause of this action is the Veda (*brahma*).... The cause of the Vedas is brahman (*akṣaram*), as the Vedas arise from the Lord.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.15 commentary)

“Know that the Brahman, the Vedas, appears from the Supreme Lord (*akṣara*).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.15 commentary)

“...when one masters the performance of *yajñas* one is sure to become Kṛṣṇa conscious.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.16 purport)

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3.16: The cycle of sacrifice is thus established by the Vedas (*evam pravartitaṁ cakram*). If one attains the human form of life but does not follow this cycle (*nānuvartayatīha yaḥ*), choosing instead to simply gratify the senses (*aghāyur indriyārāmo*), then, Arjuna, he has wasted the opportunity afforded by receiving a human body (*moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvati*).

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### 3.17-19: Self-realised souls have no duty

3.17: On the other hand, one whose only desire is to satisfy the Supreme Lord (*yas tv ātma-ratir eva syād*) has no obligation to perform prescribed occupational duties (*tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate*). Such a self-realised soul is fully satisfied and blissful hearing about, glorifying, remembering, worshipping, and serving the Lord, and has no inclination for anything else (*ātma-tṛptaś ca mānavaḥ ātmany eva ca santuṣṭas*).

Explanatory note:

All the ācāryas agree that once one has attained self-realisation, he is no longer obligated to perform *yajña*. *Yajña* is the means by which one can engage in regulated sense gratification without incurring sinful reactions that obstruct one's self-realisation. It is not required for a self-realised soul who is both sinless and has no material desires.

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains that to take pleasure in the Self means to take pleasure in serving Kṛṣṇa.

My evidence:

“The devotees (*santah*), who take the remnants to maintain their bodies after worshipping the Lord of all beings, become free from all sins accumulated since beginningless time

(*sarva-kilbisaih*). This purification is necessary because the sins create an obstacle to realisation of *atma*.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.13 commentary)

“It has now been stated that if you cannot be without desires, you can perform actions with desires. But he who reaches the stage of *jnana* because of purity of heart never does actions out of desire. That is expressed in two verses.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.17 commentary)

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3.18: A self-realised person neither has any material desire which he needs to fulfil by performing his prescribed duties (*naiva tasya kṛtenārtho*), nor any material aversion which will prevent him from doing his prescribed duties if the Lord wills it (*nākrteneha kaścana*). Nor does he feel obliged to perform prescribed duties because he wants to curry favour with any other living entity like the demigods (*cāsyā sarva-bhūteṣu kaścid artha-vyapāśrayaḥ*).

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3.19: Until you attain that stage, take My advice and act without attachment to the result of your work (*tasmād asaktaḥ satatam*). It is your duty to act according to the directions of scripture (*kāryam karma samācara*), and if you do that without attachment or aversion to the outcome of your work (*asakto hy ācaran karma*), you will return to the Supreme Lord’s abode (*param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says that in this verse Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he is not yet at the stage where he is completely free from material attachment and can thus naturally act on the platform of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*—acting for the pleasure of the Lord without any personal motivation. However, because Arjuna possesses spiritual intelligence, he should apply himself to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explains in his purport that such engagement requires proper guidance. This understanding is reflected in the way I have rendered the opening of the verse.

My evidence:

“Therefore (*tasmad*) since you do not have qualification for rising to the platform of *jnana*, and performing actions with desires is not suitable for you since you have spiritual intelligence, you should perform action without desire.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.19 commentary)

3.20-26: Societal leaders should set the right example for others

3.20: Follow the example of King Janaka, who attained self-realisation by performing his prescribed duties without material motivation—*niṣkāma-karma-yoga* (*karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ*). And if you think you are already self-realised and

therefore no longer need to do that, then, like King Janaka, do your prescribed duties to set a good example for people in general (*loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampaśyan kartum arhasi*).

Explanatory note:

In his purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda says that King Janaka was already a self-realised soul, but he still performed his prescribed duties to set a good example for his citizens. Interestingly, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that in the first half of the verse Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that King Janaka attained self-realisation by performing his prescribed duties, and in the second half of the verse Kṛṣṇa responds to Arjuna's unspoken objection that he no longer needs to perform prescribed duties because he is already self-realised. Both perspectives are valid, because even after attaining self-realisation, King Janaka continued to perform his prescribed duties to set a good example for others.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa stresses that prescribed duties do not refer only to one's occupational duties, but also to one's spiritual duties of hearing about, glorifying, remembering, and worshipping Kṛṣṇa. He explains that both must be performed alongside each other. Kṛṣṇa later makes this explicit in *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 8.7 when He declares: *mām anusmara yudhya ca*.

My evidence:

“In this verse, the Lord gives proof of acting according to duty. Becoming pure in heart by means of prescribed action (*karmana eva*), Janaka and others attained (*asthitah*) the perfection of seeing their own atma (*samsiddhim*)..... prescribed actions of karma-yoga do not exclude hearing and other devotional processes. Some say the word karma itself in this context has a more general meaning of hearing and other processes along with performance of sacrifice and other prescribed rites of karma, instead of prescribed duties.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.20 commentary)

“He gives proof of such actions in the first part of the verse. In the second part of the verse he says that if you think that you are qualified for *jnana*, even then, you should perform action in order to teach the people.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.20 commentary)

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3.21: People are best guided by example, whether they are one's children or one's citizens. The reality is that people are influenced by those they look up to (*yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janaḥ*). People naturally follow the behaviour of their role models and thus embrace the same scriptures and values (*sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate*).

Explanatory note:

*Pramāṇam*: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda translates this word as “example” and “standards.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa specifies that the word refers to “scriptures.”

All three ācāryas explain that in this verse Kṛṣṇa teaches how people learn to behave.

My evidence:

“In this verse he explains how the people are taught: by following example.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.21 commentary)

“Whatever scripture (*pramanam*) the superior person considers in performing his actions (*kurute*), the lower persons will follow that.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.21 commentary)

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3.22: Arjuna, I certainly have no obligation to perform prescribed duties (*na me pārthāsti kartavyam*). Everything throughout the three worlds belongs to Me. Therefore, I do not have to endeavour to attain anything (*triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana*). Furthermore, since I possess all opulences and am filled with bliss, I do not need anything within the material universe (*nānavāptam avāptavyam*). Still, see how I perform prescribed duties to set the right example for others (*varta eva ca karmaṇi*).

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that in the next three verses (3.22–24), Kṛṣṇa gives Himself as an example of someone who performs prescribed duties not because He is obliged to, but to set the right example for others. His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa both point out that the Lord does not need to perform prescribed duties as sacrifice because He has no material desires. Everything belongs to Him, and He is completely blissful and self-satisfied.

My evidence:

“Making Himself an example of this, the Lord speaks in three verses. I, the Lord of all, dedicated to truth, whose every wish is automatically fulfilled, who is filled with bliss, have no duties to perform.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.22 commentary)

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3.23: If I, the Supreme Lord, who have appeared in the Yadu family to teach right conduct, did not diligently perform all the prescribed duties of a ksatriya (*yadi hy aham na varteyam jātu karmaṇy atandritaḥ*), then, Arjuna, others, who accept Me as the Supreme Authority, would follow my example and also neglect their duties (*mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha*).

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explain that Kṛṣṇa, being the Supreme Lord, descended to personally establish religious principles. Therefore, if He did not follow those principles Himself, others would also neglect them.

My evidence:

“If I, the Lord of all, who, though complete in all respects, having appeared in the Yadu family, were ever (*jātu*) to fail to attentively perform actions prescribed in the scriptures (*atandritaḥ*), men, taking My example, would follow My path, since I am the leader.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.23 commentary)

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3.24: If I did not perform prescribed duties the whole world would be ruined (*utsīdeyur ime lokā na kuryāṁ karma ced aham*). Taking Me as their example, people would stop following religious principles (*saṅkarasya ca kartā syām*), including the principles governing family life and reproduction. Thus they would give birth to an unruly population who would create havoc in the world (*upahanyām imāḥ prajāḥ*).

Explanatory note:

All the ācāryas agree that when people neglect religious principles, they also neglect the principles governing family life and reproduction. When that happens, an unruly population arises which creates havoc in society.

My evidence:

“Taking Me as an example, the people, not performing dharma, would be destroyed. Mixed castes would result. I would be the cause of this. I would pollute the progeny.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.24 commentary)

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3.25: O descendent of Bharata, conditioned souls should perform their prescribed duties to fulfil their material desires—*sa-kāma karma* (*saktāḥ karmaṇy avidvāṁso yathā kurvanti bhārata*). Self-realised souls should engage in those same duties even though they have no material desires—*niṣkāma karma* (*kuryād vidvāṁs tathāsaktaḥ*). They do this to teach others how to live responsibly in accordance with the Lord’s will (*cikīrṣur loka-saṅgraham*).

Explanatory note:

All the ācāryas agree that this verse teaches that conditioned souls who still have material desires should perform their prescribed duties because they seek material enjoyment. Those who are self-realised, however, should perform those same duties simply to set the proper example for others.

I intentionally use the technical terms *sa-kāma karma* and *niṣkāma karma* to familiarise the reader with them, since they are routinely used by Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. *Kāma* means material desire. The prefix *sa* means “with”, so *sa-kāma karma* means work performed with material desires. The prefix *nis* means “without”, so *niṣkāma karma* means work performed without material desires. Another word that His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda sometimes uses synonymously with *niṣkāma* is *akāma*. The prefix *a* also means “without”.

My evidence:

“He summarizes here that action should be done even by a person established in *jñāna*.”  
(*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.25 commentary)

“Those engaged in His service are called *sakāma* and *akāma*. Those who approach the Supreme Personality of Godhead with desires for material enjoyment are called *sakāma*, and those devotees who have no material desires for sense gratification but serve the Supreme Lord out of spontaneous love for Him are called *akāma*.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.21.24 purport)

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3.26: The realised devotee should not criticise materialists and neophyte devotees for desiring material results, since doing so may destroy their incentive to practise devotional service (*na buddhi-bhedaṁ janayed ajñānām karma-saṅginām*). Rather, he should encourage them to perform both their occupational and spiritual duties. He reassures them that by pleasing Kṛṣṇa in this way, the Lord will help fulfil those material desires which are not harmful to them (*joṣayet sarva-karmāṇi*). For himself, however, the intelligent devotee acts without material desires, but simply to satisfy Kṛṣṇa (*vidvān yuktaḥ samācaran*).

Explanatory note:

How does a learned Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee encourage materialists and neophyte devotees to perform their *varṇāśrama* duties and spiritual practices such as *śravaṇam*, *kīrtanam*, and *viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam*? He reassures them that if they please Kṛṣṇa by performing these duties, the Lord will remove the sinful reactions which obstruct both their material and spiritual progress. According to *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Kṛṣṇa does reciprocate with the desires of *sa-kāma* devotees.

My evidence:

“As all surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Pṛthā.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.11)

“If one takes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, his life becomes fulfilled both materially and spiritually. ... You give every living entity the chance to enjoy this material world as he desires. ... You are like the desire tree in the heavenly planets, which awards benediction according to one’s desires. Everyone is free to achieve the highest perfection, but if one does not so desire, then Your awarding of lesser benedictions is not due to partiality.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.72.6 purport)

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3.27- 30: The difference between a conditioned and self-realised soul

Arjuna’s unspoken doubt: If both self-realised and conditioned souls perform similar activities, how are they to be distinguished?

Explanatory note:

Both Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that verses 27 and 28 answer this doubt.

My evidence:

“The doubt may arise: how does one distinguish a person in knowledge (*vidvān*) from an ignorant person, if the person in knowledge also performs actions? These two verses explain the difference. The ignorant person thinks that he is the performer of all actions, though they are actually carried out entirely by the material senses, which themselves are products of the *guṇas* (*prakṛteḥ guṇaiḥ*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.27 commentary)

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3.27: Everything the material body does is carried out by the modes of nature under the Lord’s supervision (*prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ*), not by the embodied soul. For example, you desire to pick up your bow, so your hand reaches out and grasps it. The conditioned soul then thinks, “I picked up my bow,” “I hit my target,” and so on. In reality, however, he simply desired to perform those actions. The body itself was moved by the modes of nature acting under the Lord’s supervision. If the Lord does not sanction the modes of nature to move the hand and grasp the bow, then the hand cannot move despite the soul’s desire. Bewildered by false ego, the conditioned soul misidentifies himself as the body and incorrectly thinks, “I did it. I am the doer” (*ahaṅkāra-vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate*).

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that in verses 27 and 28, Kṛṣṇa explains how to distinguish between self-realised and conditioned souls.

My evidence:

“Though both persons are equally engaged in action, the difference between the person in knowledge and the person in ignorance is explained in two verses.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.27 commentary)

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3.28: On the other hand, O mighty Arjuna, the self-realised person is convinced that the material body and its inclinations are products of the modes of material nature (*tattva-vit tu mahā-bāho guṇa-karma-vibhāgayoḥ*). Not only does he fully grasp this intellectually, but he can actually see how everything material is simply an interaction of the modes of nature and has nothing to do with him, the soul (*guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta*). Therefore, he no longer seeks fulfilment through anything connected to matter: not sense gratification, not family members, nor even his own body (*iti matvā na sajjate*).

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Arjuna's unspoken doubt:

If the living being's happiness has nothing to do with the material body and senses, why are people so attached to these things?

Explanatory note:

Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura raises this question as a natural transition between verses 28 and 29.

My evidence:

"If the jīvas are separate from the senses and the sense objects, without relationship to them, then why is it seen that people are attached to the sense objects? This verse answers." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.29 commentary)

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3.29: Conditioned souls who are too lazy to understand spiritual knowledge become bewildered by the modes of material nature (*tān akṛtsna-vido mandān prakṛter guṇa-sammūḍhāḥ*). They therefore become attached to sensual gratification and material achievement, thinking these things to be the source of happiness (*sajjante guṇa-karmasu*). The wise should not unnecessarily disturb such people by trying to defeat them through philosophical debate (*kṛtsna-vin na vicālayet*).

Explanatory note:

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa both explain that absorption in material life is caused by laziness to understand spiritual knowledge.

My evidence:

"One who has full knowledge of ātmā (*kṛtsna-vit*) does not disturb those of little intelligence (*akṛtsna-vidaḥ*) who are lazy in understanding ātmā (*mandān*)." (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.29 commentary)

"*mandān* — lazy to understand self-realization". (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* word-for-word translation)

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3.30: So, Arjuna, act for My satisfaction (*mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi*) by giving up bodily identification and remaining absorbed in the knowledge that you are not this body, but an eternal spirit soul who exists to serve Me (*sannyasyādhyātma-cetasā*). Give up all reservations and doubts about obeying Me, and stop thinking that anything belongs to you (*nirāśīr nirmamo bhūtvā*). Then, free from inner anguish and doubt, you will be able to fight (*yudhyasva vigata-jvarah*).

Explanatory note:

The ācāryas focus on the four words below. I have tried to synthesise their explanations.

*Adhyātma-cetās*: Absorbed in spiritual realisation of one's relationship to the Supreme. This sums up the ācāryas' definition of this phrase.

*Nirāśīḥ*: A mood of unconditional obedience to the Supreme Lord.

*Nirmama*: Devoid of any sense of proprietorship, either of ability to act or results of action.

*Vigata-jvara*: No longer unable to act due to inner anguish and doubt.

My evidence:

"The phrase *adhyātma-cetasā* therefore means 'with consciousness fixed in the ātmā.' ... being without desires for the results, being *niṣkāma* (*nirāśīḥ*), devoid of possessiveness in all respects (*nirmamaḥ*), fight." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.30 commentary)

"...*adhyātma-cetas*, meaning 'consciousness in the ātmā.' ... Devoid of desires for personal results, thinking that you do this only by the order of your master (*nirāśīḥ*), devoid of possessiveness (*nirmamaḥ*), such as 'the results of my actions are for me,' having given up the anguish arising from thoughts of killing friends (*vigata-jvaraḥ*), Arjuna should fight, because that is his duty as a kṣatriya." (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.30 commentary)

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3.31-35: Doing one's duty for Kṛṣṇa's pleasure is always good

3.31: Those who have faith in these teachings of Mine and who consistently try to apply them in their lives (*ye me matam idaṁ nityam anuṣṭhanti mānavāḥ*), become freed from karmic bondage when they act (*mucyante te 'pi karmabhiḥ*).

Even if they cannot follow perfectly at first, if they do not disparage My teachings by thinking, "This does not work," "This is unrealistic," or some other criticism born of envying My authority, but instead continue trying to follow with faith, then gradually the obstacles preventing them from properly applying these teachings will disappear. In this way, they too will become freed from karmic bondage (*śraddhāvanto 'nasūyantaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda explain that even if one cannot immediately follow Kṛṣṇa's teachings perfectly, one will still attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death by continuing to follow them faithfully without diminishing or disparaging them out of envy toward Kṛṣṇa. This same reassurance is echoed in the Eleventh Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

My evidence:

"Those who follow My teachings, and even those who cannot follow but have faith and also

do not disrespect the teachings—even they can be free of the bondage of action. Even though at the present time they cannot follow, by faith in the teachings and lack of envy, their obstacles decrease. A little later, by performing the instructions, they become free.” (GB 3.31 commentary)

“Having awakened faith in the narrations of My glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery, but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyment, My devotee should remain happy and worship Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.20.27–28)

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3.32: Some people, however, not fully appreciating My greatness, minimise the importance of My instructions and do not follow them (*ye tv etad abhyasūyanto nānutiṣṭhanti me matam*). This is because they either do not understand the self, the Supreme Lord and the importance of prescribed action, or possess only a very shallow understanding of these truths (*sarva-jñāna-vimūḍhāms tān*). Consequently, all their endeavours ultimately fail (*viddhi naṣṭān acetasaḥ*).

Explanatory note

In his purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda says that such a person “is ignorant of his own self, and of the Supreme Brahman, Paramātmā and the Personality of Godhead.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds that he also does not understand prescribed action. Since verse 3.33 explains that even a *jñānavān*—a person possessing discrimination and some knowledge of Kṛṣṇa’s teachings—acts according to conditioned nature, I have expanded Śrīla Prabhupāda’s explanation to include those who possess only a shallow or superficial understanding of these truths. The failure arising from such ignorance is echoed later in *Bhagavad-gītā* 9.12.

My evidence:

“...consequently being ignorant (*vimūḍhān*) of all knowledge (*jñāna*) concerning prescribed action and Paramātmā, and consequently being devoid of all discrimination (*acetasaḥ*), are thus lost (*naṣṭān*).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.32 commentary)

“...In that deluded condition, their hopes for liberation, their fruitive activities, and their culture of knowledge are all defeated.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.12)

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Arjuna’s unspoken doubt:

Surely anyone with some understanding of Your position as the Supreme Lord and of Your instructions would know they will be punished for disobeying You. Why then are they not afraid to do so?

Explanatory note:

Both Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa raise this doubt as a segue between verses 32 and 33.

My evidence:

“The scriptures say that there is punishment for those who do not follow the instructions of You, the Lord of all beings. Do they not have fear of You?” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.33 commentary)

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3.33: Everyone is compelled to act according to the modes of nature conditioning them (*sadṛśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ*). This is true even of those who understand My teachings but have not yet realised them (*prakṛter jñānavān api*). Everyone must act according to their conditioned tendencies (*prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni*). These tendencies cannot be suppressed simply by willpower (*nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati*).

Explanatory note:

*Jñānavān: This word refers to a person who has knowledge of Kṛṣṇa’s teachings in Bhagavad-gītā and faith in them. He understands that he is not the material body but an eternal spirit soul, as well as the cause of the soul’s entanglement in the material world. However, he has not yet become fully situated on the transcendental platform described in Bhagavad-gītā 18.54.*

My evidence:

“Still, even the person of discrimination performs actions which yield a burden of suffering.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.33 commentary)

“Even a person who knows the punishment stated in the scriptures (*jñānavān*) acts according to (*sadṛśam*) his evil nature (*svasyāḥ prakṛteḥ*)—his sinful impressions which have existed since beginningless time. What then to speak of a person who does not even know about the punishment?” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 3.33 commentary)

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3.34: Each of the senses is naturally attracted or averse to particular sense objects according to the impressions carried from previous lives (*indriyasyendriyasyārthe*). Thus the eyes may naturally be drawn to the beauty of women, and the ears and tongue to speaking with other men’s wives; conversely, one may feel disinclined to hear from liberated souls and discuss their teachings (*rāga-dveṣau vyavasthitau*). However, one should use one’s modicum of free will to hear from liberated saintly persons and discuss their teachings with other sincere spiritual aspirants. By doing so, one gradually becomes freed from the control of these attachments and aversions (*tayor na vaśam āgacchet*). Otherwise, the attractions and aversions carried from previous lives will obstruct one’s spiritual advancement (*tau hy asya paripanthinau*).

## Explanatory note

I have based my interpretation of this verse primarily on Baladeva Vidyābhusana's commentary. He explains that the senses are pre-programmed to be attracted to some things, like womanising, and averse to other things, such as *sādhu saṅga*. However, one should strenuously try not to give in to these inclinations. Specifically, if one can resist the tendency to avoid *sādhu saṅga*, then by virtue of proper *sādhu saṅga*, one's intelligence will gradually become fortified against one's sinful predispositions.

Even though Baladeva Vidyābhusana uses terms like 'associate with', 'talking to', and 'speaking to' saintly persons, I have specified hearing from liberated souls and discussing their teachings. This interpretation is influenced by the evidences from the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* that I cite below.

## My evidence

Attraction and hatred (*rāga-dveṣau*), pleasure and discomfort to the individual, are fixed firmly (*vyavasthitau*).... Even if actions are prescribed by scripture, such things as talking to saintly persons, serving them, or going to holy places become the object of hatred, since they are viewed as unfavourable or disagreeable to the individual. But even though living entities have the tendency to follow these feelings of desire and hatred, the person desiring the highest good should not fall under the control of desire and hatred (*tayoh*), since (*hi*) they cause obstacles on his path (*paripanthinau*).... Impressions (*vāsanās*) which have operated since beginningless time give rise to such things as desire to speak to others' wives, even though it is forbidden in the scriptures..... In a similar way, hatred may develop concerning speaking to saintly persons, which is prescribed in the scriptures..... The scriptures, which direct one to associate with saintly persons, will turn one away from, and make one detest, what is forbidden, even though it is pleasurable to the mind, by making one understand the undesirable consequences of the forbidden act. And they will also make one have attraction for and engage in acts prescribed by scripture by making one understand their favourable results, even though these may be unpleasant to the mind. Thus the positive and negative injunctions of scripture are not useless." (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.34 commentary)

H.H. Bhanu Swami's note to *Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.34 commentary:

"*Vāsanās* or *saṁskāras*, impressions, are the means by which experiences of previous lives stay with the *jīva* life after life. Under certain conditions, the impressions activate, creating memory of previous likes or dislikes. Desires appear, and thus the *jīva* acts. Though *vāsanās* or impressions (also called *svabhāva*) are powerful in instigating the *jīva* to action, they do not make the *jīva* powerless to make choices. The free will of the *jīva* exists alongside the experience of *vāsanās*. This free will enables the *jīva* to choose the advice of scripture over material desires. This, however, takes place through association with devotees."

“One should take shelter of a pure devotee, who has nothing to do with this material world but is simply engaged in devotional service. By serving him only, one can transcend the qualitative material condition. In this verse it is recommended (*yogeśvara-upāsanayā*) that one serve the lotus feet of the topmost yogī, or the devotee. To serve the topmost devotee means to hear from him about the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. To hear the glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead from the mouth of a pure devotee is to acquire a pious life.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 4.22.22 purport)

“The Lord understands the mentality and sincerity of a particular living entity who is engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and gives him the intelligence to understand the science of Kṛṣṇa in the association of devotees. Discussion of Kṛṣṇa is very potent, and if a fortunate person has such association and tries to assimilate the knowledge, then he will surely make advancement toward spiritual realisation.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 9.1 purport)

“The word *asaṅga* is very important in this connection because the attachment for sense enjoyment and lording it over the material nature is very strong. Therefore one must learn detachment by discussion of spiritual science based on authoritative scriptures, and one must hear from persons who are actually in knowledge. As a result of such discussion in the association of devotees, one comes to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 15.3-4 purport)

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Arjuna’s unspoken comment: I understand You to be saying that the heart can be purified of material attachment and aversion by following the prescribed duties given in scripture. Since I cannot fight without experiencing attachment and aversion, would it be better for me to follow the prescribed duties of the *brāhmaṇas* by adopting a non-violent life and maintaining myself by gathering leftover grains?

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhusana presents this as a segue into verse 35.

My evidence:

“You have said that we should give up the proclivities of desire and hatred arising from our natures, which are common to animals, and engage in *dharma* according to scripture. This tendency should disappear through purification of the heart by following the duties of *dharma*. The scriptures prescribe both fighting and non-violence. Because I cannot fight without desire and hatred, the *dharma* of non-violence, with subsistence gained by gathering surplus grains, is superior to fighting for me.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.35 commentary)

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3.35: You are best advised to do your own duty. A *kṣatriya* should fight, even though fighting might be sinful for others, and non-violence and tolerance seem more virtuous. Even if

attachment and aversion prevent you from fighting as well as expected, it is still best to stick to your own duty (*śreyān sva-dharmo viguṇaḥ*). This will be far better for you than doing someone else's duty, even if you can perform the other duty perfectly (*para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt*). If you die doing your own duty, that will be better for you because doing one's own duty gradually purifies the heart of attachment and aversion (*sva-dharme nidhanam śreyah*). On the other hand, doing someone else's duty is dangerous because disobeying what scripture ordains for one is sinful and thus results in suffering. (*para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

*Viguṇaḥ*: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada translates this word as 'even though faultily'. Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhusana both suggest that the fault lies both in the work itself and in one's execution of the work. Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, however, puts more weight on one's performance of the work being faulty. He suggests that the reason one may not do his prescribed duty well is not because he lacks competence, but because he may be reluctant to do it due to attachment or aversion. Baladeva Vidyābhusana puts more emphasis on the work itself having some fault. He says the work itself may lack the virtuous qualities of another's work, even when it is done properly.

Baladeva Vidyābhusana explains why it is better to do one's own duty even though that duty possesses less virtuous traits than another's duty. He says one does not get sinful reactions for doing one's own duty, whether they be duties related to one's varṇa or āśrama, even if that duty involves aspects which might in other circumstances be considered sinful. The reason is that by doing one's own duty, gradually one's selfish desires (attachment and aversion) are purified. When, however, one deviates from the ordinance of scripture, even apparently virtuous deeds are sinful because they are prohibited for that person by scripture. The conclusion is that one should always follow scripture, even if the duties scripture prescribes for one seem less savoury or virtuous than the duties prescribed for another. The theme that doing one's own duty is the safer path again arises in Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.48 and Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.59–60.

My evidence:

"In this verse the Lord answers those who desire to perform the duties of others, such as non-violence, because such duties are easy to execute and not independent of *dharma*, and because of one's inability to fight due to attachment and aversion. One should boldly perform one's own duties, even though they may possess some slight fault. This is better than performing another's duties, even if those duties are executed well and are full of good qualities." (*Sarārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.35 commentary)

"Whatever *dharma* is prescribed by the Vedas in terms of *varṇa* and *āśrama*, performed incompletely and lacking some elements (*viguṇaḥ*), is better than executing a different

*dharma* (*para-dharmāt*), even though it is executed completely, with all its parts (*su-anuṣṭhitāt*)..... One should not execute *dharma* beyond the sanction of the Vedas. .... The reason why this is better is then stated. It is better to die (*nidhanam*) in the execution of one's own *dharma*. This produces the best results because there is no loss or sin in acting imperfectly, and because in the next life one will be able to execute that *dharma* properly. Performing a different *dharma* causes misfortune for the person (*bhayāvahaḥ*) by creating sin, since it is prohibited in scripture..... By performing one's prescribed duties in the previous *āśrama*, one decreases desire until one becomes qualified for renunciation. One can then practise non-violence because it becomes one's prescribed *dharma*." (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.35 commentary)

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### 3.36: Arjuna asks what makes people sin

3.36: Arjuna said (*arjuna uvāca*): What is it that impels one to sin (*atha kena prayukto 'yam pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ*)? Sometimes, Kṛṣṇa, knowing one will be punished, a person does not want to sin (*anicchann api vārṣṇeya*), but nevertheless is compelled by some powerful force (*balād iva niyojitaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhusana both explain that in this verse Arjuna asks where the attachment and aversion that impel one to sin come from. Do they come from the Lord or from one's impressions from previous lives? Arjuna does not think either the Lord or one's impressions would force one to sin. The Lord would not because He is merciful, and one's past impressions could not because they are unconscious. So he asks what is at the root of sin.

My evidence:

"O Kṛṣṇa....inspired by what thing (*kena prayuktaḥ*), does the *jīva* commit sin? Though he does not want to do it (*anicchan*), know that it is forbidden by the scriptures, he does it as if by force (*balād iva*)..... Who is the instigator? Is it the Lord or the *jīva*'s previous impressions (*saṁskāra*)? It cannot be the Lord who inspires a person to do sinful acts, since He is merciful and only plays the role of the witness. Nor can it be impressions, since those are all dull unconscious things." (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.36 commentary)

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### 3.37-43: Lust is the cause of sin

3.37: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): The reason why the soul engages in sin is because contact with the mode of passion gives rise to lust, which when frustrated turns into anger (*kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajo-guṇa-samudbhavaḥ*). Lust can never be satiated. The

more one indulges it, the more it wants (*mahāśano mahā-pāpmā*). Thus, it is considered one's greatest enemy (*viddhy enam iha vairiṇam*).

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3.38: Lust is a problem for every conditioned soul in the universe, but it functions at three different levels of intensity. In its most mild form, it can be compared to smoke covering a fire (*dhūmenāvriyate vahnir*). In a thicker layer, lust is compared to dust covering a mirror (*yathādarśo malena ca*), and in its most dense layer it is compared to the womb covering an embryo (*yatholbenāvṛto garbhas*). Similarly, with a slight covering of lust, one can still understand life's spiritual goal. With a thicker covering, one is no longer conscious of life's goal, and with the most dense covering, one apparently loses all consciousness (*tathā tenedam āvṛtam*).

Explanatory note:

Vishvanatha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that in this verse Kṛṣṇa points out that lust is the enemy of every conditioned soul in the universe. All three ācāryas point out that lust has three different levels of intensity. In its most moderate form it is compared to smoke covering fire. You cannot see the fire, but by virtue of the smoke, it is obvious fire exists. Similarly, when covered by this level of lust, the living entity can still remember life's spiritual goals. When lust becomes more intense, it is compared to a thick layer of dust covering a mirror's surface. Just as the dust obscures the mirror's ability to function, similarly when one is covered by this greater level of lust, one cannot even remember life's spiritual goal. The last level of lust is compared to the womb covering the foetus and completely impeding the foetus's movement. Similarly, this most dense level of lust completely represses one's consciousness.

My evidence:

“Lust is not just an enemy for some, but an enemy for all. This is explained with examples.” (*Sarārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.38 commentary)

“Examples of smoke, dust and womb are given to illustrate three stages of *kāma*'s influence: slight, medium and intense. The fire covered by smoke is not bright, but is able to perform its function of heating to some degree. The mirror covered with dust cannot receive the reflection..... The embryo covered by the womb cannot stretch its legs, nor can it be perceived. In the same way, knowledge covered slightly by *kāma* can grasp something of truth. Knowledge covered moderately however cannot grasp truth. Knowledge intensely covered by *kāma* cannot function and cannot even be perceived (as knowledge).” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.38 commentary)

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3.39: The living entity's awareness of his spiritual nature is covered over by lust—his eternal primordial enemy (*āvṛtaṁ jñānam etena jñānino nitya-vairiṇā*). Lust is like a blazing fire

which can consume any amount of fuel and still never be extinguished. In other words, Arjuna, you cannot free yourself of lust by indulging it (*kāma-rūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇānalena ca*).

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3.40: The Vedas say that having covered the spirit soul's awareness, lust then controls his senses, mind and intelligence (*indriyāṇi mano buddhir asyādhiṣṭhānam ucyate*). Through these three strongholds, lust misleads the living entity into thinking sense enjoyment, not self-realisation, is desirable (*etair vimohayaty eṣa jñānam āvṛtya dehinam*).

Explanatory note:

The ācāryas say Kṛṣṇa now describes what happens after lust has already captured its major strongholds from which it continues to overpower the spirit soul.

Vimohayati: All three ācāryas translate this word as 'bewilders'. Baladeva further specifies that 'bewilders' means to make the spirit soul disinclined to self-realisation and inclined to sense enjoyment.

I have interpreted 'ucyate' as a reference to the Vedas.

My evidence:

"Since the enemy lust has already gained strongholds, it easily conquers. That is explained in this verse. The senses, mind and intelligence become the abodes of lust (*adhiṣṭhānam*); they become the huge, fortified cities for manifesting *kāma*, by enjoying the sense objects (by the senses), by decision (by the mind) and ascertainment (by the intelligence).... Bewilderment means that lust makes the *jīva* disinclined to know *ātma* and inclined to enjoy sense objects." (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.40 commentary)

"The process of speaking in spiritual circles is to say something upheld by the scriptures. One should at once quote from scriptural authority to back up what he is saying. At the same time, such talk should be very pleasurable to the ear. By such discussions, one may derive the highest benefit and elevate human society." (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 17.15 purport)

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3.41: Therefore, Arjuna, as soon as one understands the urgency of achieving self-realisation, one should immediately begin regulating their sense gratification by practising niṣkāma-karma-yoga, consisting of both one's occupational duties and one's spiritual duties prescribed according to one's āśrama (*tasmāt tvam indriyāṇy ādau niyamya bharataraṣabha*). This is the only way to destroy lust—the soul's most vicious enemy (*pāpmānaṁ prajahi hy enaṁ*). If one fails to do this, then lust will again destroy whatever little knowledge and realisation one has attained (*jñāna-vijñāna-nāśanam*).

Explanatory note:

Ādau: Both His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa say that *ādau*, “from the beginning,” means from the time of understanding the urgency of self-realisation. Ideally, that should be from the beginning of life, but if that is not the case, one should start controlling the senses as soon as one understands the urgency of attaining self-realisation.

Niyama: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa both translate this as “regulating the senses.” Baladeva specifies this refers to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. As explained several times in this chapter, *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* means to do both our occupational duties and our spiritual duties. Spiritual duties are designated differently by scripture for the different āśramas, and their practical application is taught by the bona fide self-realised spiritual master.

My evidence:

“Therefore, at the beginning of the dawning of knowledge (*ādau*), after first regulating all the senses by engagement through *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* (*niyama*), making them favourable to *ātma*—you, who possess a body, mind and senses made of matter, destroy (*prajahi*) this evil enemy, lust.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.41 commentary)

“One should therefore discharge his prescribed duties in full Kṛṣṇa consciousness rather than those prescribed for others. Materially, prescribed duties are duties enjoined according to one’s psychophysical condition, under the spell of the modes of material nature. Spiritual duties are as ordered by the spiritual master for the transcendental service of Kṛṣṇa. But whether material or spiritual, one should stick to his prescribed duties even up to death, rather than imitate another’s prescribed duties. Duties on the spiritual platform and duties on the material platform may be different, but the principle of following the authorized direction is always good for the performer.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.35 purport)

“The duties for the *grhastha-āśrama* and *brahmacarya-āśrama*, as well as the duties for *sannyāsīs*, are prescribed in the *śāstras*.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.12 introduction)

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Arjuna’s unspoken comment: You say that the senses can be controlled by keeping them engaged in prescribed duties. Sometimes, however, bodily maintenance requires activities not included within prescribed duties. Is there, therefore, not a danger that at such times the senses will again be overcome by lust?

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa raises this question as a segue between verse 41 and 42.

My evidence:

“You have shown that lust can be destroyed by controlling the senses through inclining them to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. This is like water held back by a closed dam. But at the time of performing activities related to the body (while not performing prescribed actions), with the freedom of action for the senses, lust will again revive, like water freed from a dam.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.42 commentary)

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3.42: The senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) are considered superior to gross matter (*indriyāṇi parāṇy āhur*). This is because, unlike the gross body, they can release pent up lust. Furthermore, being subtle they are not destroyed when the gross body made of earth, water, fire, air and ether is destroyed. Finally, they are so powerful that no amount of physical prowess can conquer them.

The mind is considered superior even to the senses (*indriyebhyaḥ param manah*) as unlike the senses it remains active even during sleep, and because it is the central control of all the other senses. The intelligence is considered superior to the mind (*manasas tu parā buddhir*) because unlike the mind it continues to function during deep sleep, and it can make decisions. The soul is considered superior even to the intelligence (*buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ*) because it alone has the capacity to experience pleasure and to defeat lust.

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda say that in this verse and the next Kṛṣṇa reiterates His teaching in chapter 2.59: the senses can be controlled when one realises the higher happiness of the *ātmā*.

Each of the ācāryas has a different perspective on why the senses are higher than the body. His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda says it is because they, and not the body, are the only outlets of lust. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says it is because the senses cannot be conquered even by physically powerful warriors, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says it is because the senses are different from the gross body and are not destroyed when the gross body dies. In other words, the senses are features of the subtle body, which continues to exist after the destruction of the gross body.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda say the mind is superior to the senses because it remains active even when the senses

become inactive during sleep. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa has a different perspective. He says the mind is superior to the senses because it is the control panel for all the senses.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says the intelligence is superior to the mind because it continues to function during deep sleep, a time when even the mind is inactive. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says the intelligence is superior to the mind because the intelligence can make decisions, something the mind cannot do.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says that the soul is superior to the intelligence because it is the soul which has the capacity to experience pleasure. He also agrees with Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, who attributes the soul's superiority to its ability to conquer lust.

My evidence:

“The Lord shows in two verses what He taught before in chapter two—that lust will be completely destroyed by realization of *ātmā*: *raso 'py asya param dṛṣṭvā* (*Bhagavad-gītā* 2.59). The wise say that the senses are superior to the body because they are more subtle and are not destroyed when the gross body perishes. The mind is superior to the senses because the mind sets the senses in motion during the waking state, and during sleep the mind remains as ruler while the senses merge into it. Intelligence is superior to the mind because the intellect's function of determining truth (*niścaya*) brings about the mental function of decision (*saṅkalpa*). That which is superior to the intelligence is the *jīvātmā* residing in the body. It is the cause of the complete destruction of lust. The *jīva*, the enjoyer, is superior to the intellect because it is the very means of enjoyment or experience.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 3.42 commentary)

“The senses are considered superior, for they cannot be conquered even by warriors. But the mind is superior to the senses, not being destroyed during dreams when the senses do not function. But compared to the mind, the intelligence is stronger. During deep sleep, even the mind does not function, but the intelligence remains undestroyed. But compared to the intelligence, that which is superior in strength is the famous *jīvātmā*, which is the conqueror of lust.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.42 commentary)

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3.43: Having heard from Me, you know that the spirit soul is superior to the intelligence (*evam buddheḥ param buddhvā*). Now, you, the spirit soul, should use your properly informed intelligence solely to achieve self-realisation (*saṁstabhyātmānam ātmanā*). By doing so, O mighty-armed Arjuna, you will certainly defeat this powerful enemy, lust, which

is otherwise extremely difficult to overcome, just as in the past you defeated many formidable warriors (*jahi śatruṃ mahā-bāho kāma-rūpaṃ durāsadam*).

Explanatory note:

*Evam buddheḥ param buddhvā*: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains this means Arjuna has now understood the superiority of the soul by hearing from Kṛṣṇa.

*Sarṁstabhyātmānam ātmanā*: Of the different ways the ācāryas translated this phrase, I found this explanation in His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda’s purport most illuminating: “by steady intelligence directed toward one’s pure identity.”

*Mahā-bāho*: Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that by addressing Arjuna as mahā-bāho—“mighty-armed”—Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna that he must now defeat his most powerful enemy, lust, just as in the past he defeated many formidable enemies.

*My evidence*:

“By My teaching (*evam*), realizing (*buddhvā*) that ātmā, which is superior to the intelligence (*buddheḥ param*) ... You are mighty-armed to conquer physically. Now you should conquer lust, O mighty-armed Arjuna.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa 3.43 commentary*)

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Chapter summary:

In Chapter 3, Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna’s misunderstanding of His earlier teachings. Arjuna had assumed that Sāṅkhya and Buddhi-yoga referred to a single path. To correct this misunderstanding, Kṛṣṇa explains they are two paths, reframing them as Jñāna-yoga (Sāṅkhya) and Karma-yoga (Buddhi-yoga) to make His meaning clearer.

Kṛṣṇa explains that one cannot attain the renunciation of the jñāna-yogīs merely by imitating their external lifestyle while remaining internally attached to material enjoyment. Rather, such premature renunciation is sinful and results in hypocrisy. However, when a materially attached person acts in karma-yoga, offering the results of his work as a sacrifice for the pleasure of the Supreme, he incurs no karmic reactions and gradually becomes purified of material attachment. Kṛṣṇa further advises Arjuna that, as a leader in society, even if he has no material attachments, he should still act in karma-yoga to set the proper example for others.

Kṛṣṇa then distinguishes between those who perform their duties with attachment to the results and those who act without attachment. Both benefit by doing their duty. Arjuna asks why people neglect their duties, and Kṛṣṇa explains that the root cause is lust, which bewilders a person's discrimination and drives him to act against his best interests. He concludes that the solution is Buddhi-yoga: using spiritually informed intelligence to regulate the senses and act without attachment.