

CHAPTER 2:

2.1: Sañjaya said (*sañjaya uvāca*): Arjuna’s eyes brimmed with tears (*aśru-pūrṇākulekṣaṇam*). Overwhelmed by grief and compassion for his relatives (*taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭam*), he wanted to leave the battlefield. Kṛṣṇa, the killer of the Madhu demon and the reservoir of all sweetness, spoke to dispel his friend’s ignorance (*viṣṭadantam idaṁ vākyam uvāca madhusūdanaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Sañjaya uvāca: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Sañjaya said...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that when Sañjaya told Dhṛtarāṣṭra that Arjuna wanted to leave the battlefield, Dhṛtarāṣṭra became very excited. (2) Thus, Sañjaya speaks this verse. I understand that Sañjaya may not originally have intended to relate the entire conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, but then decided it was the best way to dispel Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s false hopes of victory. This is a theme that recurs in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purports. (3,4)

Taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Seeing Arjuna full of compassion...” In his purport, he explains that Arjuna’s compassion for the material well-being of his relatives is a sign of his spiritual ignorance. (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura refers to it as the darkness of bewilderment. (1)

Aśru-pūrṇākulekṣaṇam / viṣṭadantam idaṁ vākyam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines in reverse as “his mind depressed / his eyes full of tears...”

Uvāca madhusūdanaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Madhusūdana, Kṛṣṇa, spoke the following words.” In his purport, he 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. In a lecture on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the reason people suffer is because they act sinfully, and the reason they act sinfully is due to ignorance of the self’s true identity. This ignorance is comparable to a demon. (5) By referring to Kṛṣṇa as Madhusūdana, Sañjaya hints that Arjuna’s misunderstanding will soon be dissipated. (1,2)

Baladeva offers a different perspective on why Sañjaya refers to Kṛṣṇa as Madhusūdana. He explains that madhu means sweet. His inference is that Arjuna's grief would be dispelled by Kṛṣṇa's sweetness. (2)

Evidence:

1: "In this second chapter, after destroying the darkness of bewilderment and lamentation of Arjuna by distinction of soul and body, Kṛṣṇa speaks about the characteristics of the liberated soul." (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.1 commentary)

2: "In the second chapter, the Lord explains knowledge of the soul, the method of realizing ātmā, niṣkāma-karma, and the characteristics of the sthita-prajña. Seeing that Dhṛtarāṣṭra was joyful on hearing that Arjuna was renouncing the kingdom and he was hopeful of not losing the kingdom for his sons, Sañjaya then spoke. Madhusūdana here indicates that Kṛṣṇa, because of being possessed of sweetness, Madhu, would destroy Sudhana, the lamentation of Arjuna." (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.1 commentary)

3: "Sañjaya informed King Dhṛtarāṣṭra very tactfully that his unwise policy of deceiving the sons of Pāṇḍu and endeavoring to enthrone his own sons on the seat of the kingdom was not very laudable." (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 1.16–18 purport)

4: "Dhṛtarāṣṭra must have been very glad to understand that Arjuna was not going to fight and was instead leaving the battlefield for the begging profession. But Sañjaya disappointed him again in relating that Arjuna was competent to kill his enemies (*param-tapaḥ*)." (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 2.9 purport)

5: "...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...So similarly, all kind of sins we perform, it is due to ignorance." (Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 7.28–8.6, October 21st 1966 in New York)

2.2: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): What has clouded your judgement at this critical moment of the conflict (*kutas tvā kaśmalam idaṁ viṣame samupasthitam*)? One who knows life's higher purpose does not act like this. If you renounce your kṣatriya duty and leave the battlefield, you will neither attain liberation nor heaven (*anārya-juṣṭam asvargyam*).

Furthermore, having lost your excellent reputation and being scorned by all, you will suffer in this life (*akīrti-karam arjuna*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.2, August 3rd 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Śrī-bhagavān uvāca: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “The Supreme Personality of Godhead said...” In a lecture on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasises that Vyāsadeva intentionally refers to Kṛṣṇa as Bhagavān to highlight that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. (3) Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa cite Parāśara Muni’s definition of the word Bhagavān: “The Supreme Personality who possesses all riches, all strength, all fame, all beauty, all knowledge and all renunciation is called Bhagavān.”

Kutas tvā kaśmalam idaṁ / viṣame samupasthitam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first half as “...how have these impurities come upon you?” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that Kṛṣṇa expresses His surprise with the word *kutaḥ*, meaning how, wherefrom, or why. He is surprised that Arjuna, who is raised as an āryan, one who is trained in spiritual values, should express such confusion in His presence.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Baladeva and Viśvanātha translate *kaśmalam* as ‘dirtiness’, ‘impurities’, ‘contamination’ and ‘bewilderment’. (1,2) Baladeva explains Kṛṣṇa is using the word in a derogatory sense to criticise Arjuna’s poor judgement. (2) The word suggests that Arjuna’s intelligence has been clouded by material desires.

He leaves the meaning of *viṣame samupasthitam* implicit. In the word-for-word, he translates *viṣame* as “in this hour of crisis” and *samupasthitam* as “arrived”. Viśvanātha and Baladeva specify that *viṣame* refers to a critical time in the conflict. (1,2) In other words, Arjuna could not have thought of a worse time to be having second thoughts.

Anārya-juṣṭam asvargyam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “They are not at all befitting a man who knows the value of life. They lead not to higher planets...” *Anārya* is the antonym of *āryan*. In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda defines *āryan* as “...persons who know the value of life and have a civilization based on spiritual realization.” Viśvanātha explains that an *āryan* conducts his life according to scriptural principles, dharma, and Baladeva adds that an *āryan* is one who aspires to attain liberation in this life. (1,2) Conversely, *anārya* refers to one who

speculates about what will most satisfy him and how to achieve it. Kṛṣṇa is warning Arjuna that such poor judgement is unworthy of one who understands that abiding by scriptural principles to attain liberation is the real purpose of human life.

Akīrti-karam arjuna: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...but to infamy.” In other words, the only result of such poor judgement is that Arjuna will lose his good reputation. So not only will leaving the battlefield not lead to liberation or heaven in his next life, but in this life Arjuna will be scorned and be the object of others’ contempt. (1,2)

Evidence:

1: “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)

2: “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)

3: "So in this verse Vyāsadeva is writing...In other ślokaś he writes arjuna uvāca, sañjaya uvāca, like that. Similarly, he could write here kṛṣṇa uvāca. ... No. He's writing bhagavān uvāca. So Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. By this writing it is established, śrī-bhagavān uvāca. He cannot be equal with Arjuna or Sañjaya or anybody else. Asammanudhva. Bhagavān, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is supreme. Nobody is equal to Him, nobody is higher than. Everyone is lower. That is the meaning of Bhagavān." ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.2, August 3rd 1973, London](#))

2.3: Arjuna, Lord Indra fathered you in the womb of my aunt Pṛthā. Thus, you have both the privilege of an outstanding lineage and the status of my intimate friend. It is

therefore unbecoming for you to succumb to such unmanly and cowardly sentiments (*klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha / naitat tvayy upapadyate*). O defeater of your foes, give up this foolishness clouding your judgement. Get up and prepare to fight (*kṣudraṁ hṛdaya-daurbalyaṁ / tyaktvottiṣṭha paraṇ-tapa*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.3, August 4th 1973 London](#)

Explanatory note:

Klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O son of Pṛthā, do not yield to this degrading impotence.” (1,2) All three ācāryas explain that Kṛṣṇa refers to Arjuna as Pārtha to remind him of their blood relationship as cousins and their consequent close friendship. (1,2) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds that by referring to Arjuna as Pārtha, the Lord is reminding him that he was fathered by Lord Indra and thus has the capacity to conquer the universe. (2)

Considering his great heritage, his prowess, and his intimate friendship with the Supreme Lord, he should not give in to this impotence—*klaibyam*. The Sanskrit word *klaibyam* comes from *klība*, which implies unmanliness, weakness, incapacity, or lack of virility. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura translate *klaibyam* as cowardice, emphasising how his inability to act is perceived in this situation. (1,2)

Naitat tvayy upapadyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “It does not become you.” Viśvanātha says such cowardice is not proper for Arjuna, and Baladeva uses the phrase “not suitable for” Arjuna. (1,2) In other words, such behaviour is unworthy of Arjuna and inconsistent with his character as a kṣatriya.

Kṣudraṁ hṛdaya-daurbalyaṁ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “... such petty weakness of heart...” In some lectures on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to it as weakness of mind. (3) Baladeva describes it as a momentary lapse of judgement on Arjuna’s part. (2) According to him and Viśvanātha, any deviation from scriptural values and prescribed duties, as given by the Lord, is considered a weakness. (1,2) In other words, a strong heart is resolved to do what Kṛṣṇa wants, whereas a weak heart lacks that resolve.

Later in the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Śrīla Prabhupāda analyses the two reasons for such weakness, or poor judgement. One is mistakenly thinking one can control the outcome of one's endeavours. The second is desiring to enjoy the outcome. These two tendencies weaken one's discriminatory faculty and moral fortitude. (4)

Tyaktvottiṣṭha paran-tapa: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Give up... and arise, O chastiser of the enemy." *Tyaktvā* means give up. Give up what? The weakness of heart. *Uttiṣṭha* means prepare for battle. The ācāryas use words like chastiser, afflicter, and conqueror to translate *Parantapa*. (1,2) By addressing Arjuna as *Parantapa*, Kṛṣṇa assures him that he is perfectly capable of overcoming the enemy.

Evidence:

1: "Do not become cowardly (*klaibyam*), impotent. O Pārtha, you are the son of Pṛthā, but in spite of that you have acted like this. Do not yield to this. ... But in you, my friend, it is not proper at all... This is not discretion based on dharma and mercy, but bewilderment and lamentation, indications of a weak mind (*kṣudram hṛdaya-daurbalyam*). Therefore give up this weakness of mind and rise up, O conqueror of enemies, Parantapa. You who afflict enemies, fight!" (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.3 commentary)

2: "By the mercy of Indra, you have been born as the son of Kuntī, Pārtha. Do not succumb to cowardice (*klaibyam*), kṣatriya. Such cowardice of a kṣatriya in name only is not suitable for you, Arjuna, since you have the capacity to conquer the whole universe and you are the friend of Me, the Supreme Lord.... this is not correct judgement nor compassion, but a transitory (*kṣudram*) weakness of heart (*hṛdaya-daurbalyam*). Therefore give up, give up that weakness and prepare for the fight, Kṛṣṇa. O afflictor of the enemy, Parantapa, do not become the laughing stock of the enemy." (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.3 commentary)

3: "So Kṛṣṇa wants to Arjuna that, "Why you are indulging in this weakness of mind? You are under My protection. I am ordering you to fight. Why you are denying?"" ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.3, August 4th 1973 London](#))

4: "The most important thing one has to surmount is weakness of the heart. The first falldown is caused by the desire to lord it over material nature. Thus one gives up the transcendental loving service of the Supreme Lord. The second weakness of the heart is

that as one increases the propensity to lord it over material nature, he becomes attached to matter and the possession of matter. The problems of material existence are due to these weaknesses of the heart.” (Bhagavad gīta as It is 15.20 purport)

2.4: Arjuna said (*arjuna uvāca*): Even if they attack me, Bhīṣma and Droṇa remain my respected elders. O killer of the Madhu demon, you have never attacked your grandfather, King Ugrasena, or your teacher Sandipani Muni (*kathaṁ bhīṣmam ahaṁ saṅkhye / droṇaṁ ca madhusūdana*). How then, O killer of enemies, can I retaliate against my elders who deserve to be worshipped by me with flowers, rather than assailed by my arrows (*iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi / pūjārḥāv ari-sūdana*)?

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.4–5, August 5, 1973, in London](#)

Explanatory note:

Kathaṁ bhīṣmam ahaṁ saṅkhye / droṇaṁ ca madhusūdana: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...O killer of Madhu, how can I counterattack with arrows in battle men like Bhīṣma and Droṇa...” (1,2,3) According to all three ācāryas, Arjuna is anticipating that Kṛṣṇa might say that since the warriors on the other side do not think it irreligious to fight him, why is he objecting to fighting them. (1,2) In this verse, Arjuna dismisses this argument by saying they are worthy of his worship and therefore, according to scripture, he should not retaliate even if they are attacking him. (1,2) He refers to Kṛṣṇa as Madhusūdana to remind Him that He only kills His enemies, such as the demon Madhu, not respectable elders like Ugrasena or his teacher, Sāndīpani Muni. (1,2,3)

Iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi / pūjārḥāv ari-sūdana: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “counterattack with arrows men.... / who are worthy of my worship... O killer of enemies.” (1,2,3) Arjuna emphasises that these men are worthy of being worshipped by him, not attacked. (1,2) He refers to Kṛṣṇa as Ari-sūdana to reinforce his point that Kṛṣṇa attacks enemies, but not those who are worthy of respect, such as His elders. (1,2,3)

Evidence:

1: “If Bhīṣma and others attack, why should you not attack them? Is this not proper for the kṣatriyas?’.... ‘Bhīṣma....and Droṇa 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 Kṛṣṇa, 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.)

2: “‘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 (*pūjārha*): I should offer flowers to their feet in devotion rather than sharp arrows in anger. O friend Kṛṣṇa! Even you injure only enemies in battle, and not your own guru Sandipani Muni or your friends the Yadus, O Madhusūdana, killer of Madhu!’” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.4 commentary)

3: “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 pūjārhaṁ 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-gītā 2.4–5, August 5, 1973, in London](#))

2.5: Kṣatriyas are forbidden to beg. However, I would rather endure that humiliation (*śreyo bhoktuṁ bhaikṣyam apīha loke*) than commit the sin of killing such saintly teachers (*gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān*). Though they choose to fight us for financial reasons, they are worthy of my veneration for their deep study of scripture, their practice of celibacy, and their mastery of time's influence (*hatvārtha-kāmāṁs tu gurūn ihaiva*). Killing such respectable elders is a sin that will contaminate everything I may subsequently enjoy (*bhuñjīya bhogān rudhira-pradigdhān*).
(h, e, r)

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 4.34–39, January 12th, 1969, Los Angeles](#)

Explanatory note:

Gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān / śreyo bhoktuṁ bhaikṣyam apīha loke: Śrīla

Prabhupāda translates these two lines in reverse as follows: “It would be better to live in this world by begging than / to live at the cost of the lives of great souls who are my teachers.” (1, 2) All three ācāryas state that Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and other elders on the other side, such as Kṛpācārya, were fit to be rejected as gurus because they had lost their good discrimination. (1, 2, 3) Arjuna, however, is attached to them as his gurus and cannot contemplate killing them. (1, 2) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that Arjuna recognises that for a kṣatriya to live by begging would be humiliating in this life, but he reasons that the karmic consequences for his next life would be far worse if he killed them. (1, 2)

Hatvārtha-kāmāms tu gurūn ihaiva: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Even though desiring worldly gain, they are superiors.” Arjuna seems to anticipate Kṛṣṇa’s objection that, according to Bhīṣma’s own admission, their respectability has been compromised by greed for wealth. Viśvanātha and Baladeva explain that Arjuna nevertheless still considers them his superiors because of their study of the Vedas, their practice of celibacy, and their ability to choose their own time of death. (1, 2)

Bhuñjīya bhogān rudhira-pradigdhān: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “If they are killed, everything we enjoy will be tainted with blood.” Viśvanātha clarifies that Arjuna means that since killing his elders is a sin, if he wins the kingdom by killing his elders, the royal happiness he subsequently enjoys will be tainted with that sin. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “Not killing my elders, I will live by begging, though it is condemned in the śāstra to do so. It is better to eat that food got from begging. ... These gurus ...are great souls, *mahānubhāvān*. What fault is there in Bhīṣma and others who have control over time and lust?’ ‘But Bhīṣma said to Yudhiṣṭhira, “Man is a servant of wealth. Wealth is not a servant of anyone, O king. I have been bound by wealth to the Kauravas” (mahābhārata 6.41.36). Therefore has not their great character been destroyed by such desire for wealth?’ ... though they have desire for wealth, they are still my gurus. Therefore in killing them, because I commit the sin of killing guru, my enjoyment will be mixed with that sin.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.5 commentary)

2: “It is better to subsist by begging for food without having to kill the elders, even though that is condemned for the kṣatriya, because though it is a cause of infamy in this life, it will not

create impediments in the next life.’ ... Bhīṣma and others .. have the most outstanding powers among all persons. *Mahānubhāva*, caused by their study of the Vedas and their *brahmacarya* life, having brought time, lust and other factors under control, they are free from the faults arising from these factors.’...’What is the great authority of those who have sold their souls out of greed for wealth?’ ...’Even if I kill these gurus who are unqualified because of their desire for wealth, *artha-kāma*, and I enjoy this world, I cannot enjoy in the next life, for those enjoyments will be mixed with their blood, *rudhira-pradigdham*. It is not pure enjoyment because it has been obtained through killing them.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.5 commentary)

3: “So real *guru* is never to be killed, but the so-called *guru* has to be killed. The so-called, pseudo *guru*, false *guru*, he should be killed... Unqualified *guru* means who does not know how to guide the disciple. *Guru*’s duty is to guide. So such kind of *guru* can be at least rejected. That is Jiva Gosvāmi’s... *Kārya-kāryam ajānataḥ*. A *guru* who does not know what to do and what not to do, but by mistake, by mistakenly I have accepted somebody as *guru*, he can be rejected. By rejecting him, you can accept an actual bona fide *guru*. So *guru* is not killed, but he can be rejected. That is the injunction of the *śāstra*. So Bhīṣmadeva or Droṇācārya, certainly they were *gurus*, but Kṛṣṇa indirectly giving indication to Arjuna that “Although they are in the position of *guru*, you can reject them.” *Kārya-kāryam ajānataḥ*. “They do not know factually.”” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.4–5, August 5th 1973 London](#))

2.6: Furthermore, even if I fight, there is no guarantee I will win. Indeed, I am not sure whether I would rather win or lose (*na caitad vidmaḥ kataram no garīyo yad vā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ*). How would I live with myself after killing Uncle Dhrtarastra’s sons, for that is the only way to win, since they have all come out to oppose us (*yān eva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas te ’vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ*)?

Explanatory note:

Na caitad vidmaḥ kataran no garīyo / yad vā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: “Nor do we know which is better – conquering them or being conquered by them.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda summarises Arjuna’s reasoning as follows:

“Arjuna did not know whether he should fight and risk unnecessary violence, although fighting is the duty of the kṣatriyas, or whether he should refrain and live by begging. If he did not conquer the enemy, begging would be his only means of subsistence. Nor was there certainty of victory, because either side might emerge victorious. Even if victory awaited them (and their cause was justified), still, if the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra died in battle, it would be very difficult to live in their absence.”

In other words, Arjuna thinks that even if he fights, he might lose and end up having to beg anyway. Even if he happened to win, he considers that would make him more unhappy than if he lost. (1, 2) Thus, regardless of the outcome, he believes he will be unhappy.

Yān eva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas / te ’vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: “If we killed the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, we should not care to live. Yet they are now standing before us on the battlefield.” In other words, not only is Arjuna unwilling to kill his elders, but he does not even want to kill his cousins, Duryodhana and his brothers. (1, 2) Killing them would be worse than dying himself.

Evidence:

1: “Moreover, I do not know if I shall be victorious or defeated, even if I am prepared to kill them. And I do not know which will be better, victory or defeat: if I conquer them, or they conquer me. And even if I am victorious, that also is defeat, for I will not want to live.”
(Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.6 commentary)

2: “I do not know which is better for me, fighting or begging. I do not know if it is better to give up violence and live by begging, or if it is better to fight according to my duty. And I do not know whether I will be victorious over Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, or they will be victorious over me in the battle once it has started.’ ... ‘I will not desire to live having killed all of them (*yān*)—the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and elders like Bhīṣma—what to speak of enjoying the fruits of victory. Though we will be victorious, we will certainly be defeated in terms of the results (with no desire to live or to enjoy the result of victory). Thus, the superiority of fighting over begging has not been established.’ ... Thus, such a verse as this shows Arjuna's qualification for *jñāna*, which is well known in the *śruti*: One who has knowledge, who has control of the mind and senses, who is

indifferent to the world and who is tolerant and filled with faith, should see the Supreme Self within himself (Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.23). ... In verse 32 of the first chapter, he displays control of senses and mind, *śama* and *dama*, by saying ‘What is the use of kingdom, enjoyment and living?’ He shows indifference (*uparati*) to the enjoyment of this life and the next life in verse 35 of the first chapter, with the statement, I do not desire to kill them, even if I have sovereignty over the three worlds. When he says in this verse that it is better to live by begging, he shows his tolerance of dualities of nature (*titikṣā*). His deep faith in the words of the guru (*śraddhā*) will be shown in the next verse.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.6 Commentary)

2.7: I recognise that my unwillingness to fight is a fault, rooted in my miserly preference for enjoying family relationships over pursuing self-realisation (*kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ*). I am thus confused about my religious duty. Should I fight my elders and family members, or, out of respect for them, walk away and live by begging? Please tell me what to do (*prcchāmi tvāṁ dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ*). I want to know definitively what will bring about my highest good (*yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me*). Be assured that I will no longer argue with You, as I now accept You as my spiritual master. Therefore, please instruct me (*śiṣyas te ’haṁ śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam*).

Recommended Hearing: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.1–11, 17 October 1975, Johannesburg](#)

Explanatory note:

Kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “I... have lost all composure because of miserly weakness.” He translates *kārpaṇya* as miserliness, which in his purport he explains as follows:

“He is a miserly man who does not solve the problems of life as a human and who thus quits this world like the cats and dogs, without understanding the science of self-realization.’ This human form of life is a most valuable asset for the living entity, who can utilize it for solving the problems of life; therefore, one who does not utilize this opportunity properly is a miser.”

In other words, when one has a valuable asset but refuses to use it, that is miserliness.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this indicates a person who does not use the human form of life to realise Brahman—transcendence. (2)

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *doṣa* as weakness. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that the weakness refers to his giving up his natural courage and warrior prowess. Baladeva adds an additional perspective. He translates *doṣa* as fault and explains that Arjuna’s fault or error is identifying himself with his family members. (1,2) In other words, Arjuna recognises that his lamentation for his family members and his unwillingness to fight is a weakness or fault in him, and that this fault is because he is forgetting that the human form of life is not meant for enjoying family life but for cultivating self-realisation. (3)

Pr̥cchāmi tvāṁ dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this phrase as “I am asking You” — *pr̥cchāmi* — and “Now I am confused about my duty” — *dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ*. Baladeva explains that Arjuna cannot decide what his duty is in this situation: to fight his elders and family members, or to show them respect by walking away to live by begging. Viśvanātha suggests that, more generally, it is often difficult to judge what the correct choice is, as scripture contains many subtleties that must be weighed up. (1,2)

Yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this phrase as: “...tell me for certain what is best for me.” Baladeva explains that Arjuna wants Kṛṣṇa to tell him definitively (*niścitaṁ*) the best course of action for him which will bring about the highest good (*śreyaḥ*). (2)

Siṣyas te ’haṁ sādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: “Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that Kṛṣṇa is reluctant to give Arjuna a definitive answer because He thinks Arjuna will just argue with Him. (1) Baladeva says Kṛṣṇa hesitates, thinking, ‘But we are friends. How can I instruct you?’ (2) Either way, seeing Kṛṣṇa’s hesitation, Arjuna assures Him that he is now surrendering to Him as a disciple. In other words, he wants to shift the relationship from friendship to discipleship, and he will not argue with Him.

Evidence for Explanatory note:

1: “Giving up my natural courage as a kṣatriya is my weakness (*kārapaṇyam*). My intelligence has become bewildered in trying to understand the implementation of *dharma*, as the path of *dharma* is very subtle. Therefore, it is better that You decide and tell me.’ ... ‘But if you defeat My words by posing yourself as learned, what should I say?’ ... ‘I am Your student and will no longer uselessly oppose You.’” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.7 commentary)

2: “Because of the lack of knowledge of Brahman (*kārpaṇya*), I have developed the fault (*doṣa*) of possessiveness of family members, as mentioned in the previous verse. This, in turn, has caused me to develop weakness of nature (*upahata-svabhāvaḥ*)—making me give up my desire to fight as a kṣatriya. My mind is bewildered about my duty (*dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ*), having doubt whether my duty is the *kṣatriya-dharma* of fighting, or giving that up and wandering around begging. Because I am in that state, I now ask You. Tell me what is the conclusion (*nīścitam*) which will bring about the greatest benefit for me (*śreyah*). That advice will be beneficial if it brings definite results from practice (*aikāntikam*) and brings permanent results, not subject to change after being established (*atyantikam*).’ ... ‘Therefore, how can I teach you who are My friend?’ ... ‘I am now Your student. Please teach me (*śādhī*).’” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.7 commentary)

3: “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-gītā 2.1–11, 17 October 1975, Johannesburg](#))

Kṛṣṇa thought: You already know what the scriptures prescribe as the duties of a kṣatriya. If you wish to act for your own ultimate benefit, consider those teachings carefully and act accordingly. Why do you need to become My disciple? I am your friend. If you truly feel you need guidance from an authority, why not approach Veda Vyāsa, whom you greatly revere?

Explanatory note:

This transition from verse 2.7 to 2.8 is inspired by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura’s and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentaries.

Evidence:

“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?” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.8 commentary)

“But you have a friendly relationship with me, not one of respect. Therefore how can I make you a student? You should thus surrender to someone like Veda Vyasa, whom you greatly revere.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.8 commentary)

2.8: Arjuna said: I cannot think of any way to free myself from this grief, nor can I think of anyone who could advise me better than You (*na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād*). My pain is so intense and overwhelming that it has robbed me of all vitality, leaving me unable to act or even think (*yac chokam ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām*). I cannot see how anything could remove my sorrow, whether it be winning an unrivalled kingdom on earth (*avāpya bhūmāv asapatnam rddham*) or even becoming the ruler of heaven (*rājyaṁ surāṇām api cādhipatyam*).

Explanatory note:

Na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “I can find no means to drive away this grief...”. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says Arjuna cannot by himself think of anything he can do which will remove the grief he is experiencing. (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura adds a different perspective. He says Arjuna means he cannot think of anyone better able to help him find a solution than Kṛṣṇa. (2) In other words, Arjuna is implying that no one is more intelligent than Kṛṣṇa, not even Bṛhaspati, the spiritual master of the demigods in heaven. (2)

Yac chokam ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...which is drying up my senses.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the problem facing Arjuna was so severe that it was “drying up his whole existence...”. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura compares the effect of Arjuna’s grief on him to “intense summer heat” drying up a small pond. (2) In more conversational English, I understand Arjuna to mean that his grief is so overwhelming that it is depriving him of all his physical and intellectual energy, rendering him unable to function.

Avāpya bhūmāv asapatnam rddham: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “I will not be able to dispel it even if I win a prosperous, unrivalled kingdom on earth...”. Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that Arjuna says this in reply to Kṛṣṇa’s assurance that once he fights he will feel better. (1, 2) Arjuna replies that not even winning and enjoying an undisputed kingdom will make him feel better. (1, 2)

Rājyaṁ surāṇām api cādhipatyam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...with sovereignty like the demigods in heaven.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

“even an unrivaled kingdom on earth or supremacy like that of the demigods in the heavenly planets would be unable to drive away his lamentations... Even elevation into a higher planetary situation..”

It is therefore ambiguous whether Śrīla Prabhupāda means that Arjuna’s earthly kingdom could rival heaven in its opulence, or whether he means that Arjuna would attain sovereignty in heaven after being killed. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explicitly state that the second meaning is intended. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “I do not see what action will remove my lamentation. He defines that lamentation: It is drying up my senses. Therefore, to destroy this lamentation, I surrender to you.’ ‘If I am victorious, I will have an undisputed kingdom, and if I am killed, I will gain sovereignty over devas in Svarga. But still that will not drive away my lamentation. The happiness of this life and the next, attained through fighting, will not extinguish the lamentation, since fighting will not take away my lamentation. Please tell me how fighting is beneficial.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.8 Commentary)

2: “I do not see even one person at all (*pra paśyāmi*: *pra* indicates ‘to a high degree’) in all three worlds, except you, who can remove *apanudyāt*, my sorrow. I do not know anyone more intelligent than yourself—even Bṛhaspati. Therefore, to whom else should one who is full of sorrow surrender? Due to that sorrow (*yad*), my senses have dried up completely, just as intense summer heat dries up a small pond.’ ‘Now you are full of grief, but if you fight by conquering the enemy, you will attain a kingdom; absorbing yourself in the enjoyment of that kingdom, your grief will disappear.’ ‘Even if I attain a kingdom over the whole earth, or sovereignty in Svarga, controlling all the devatās, my mind will still be dried up.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.8 commentary)

Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s eyes lit up with excitement. If Arjuna abandoned the battlefield, his sons would surely win.

Explanatory note:

This observation is inspired by Srila Prabhupada's purport to Bhagavad-gita as It is 2.9, and also by Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary to 2.9.

Evidence:

"What did Arjuna then do?... Sañjaya extinguished the hope which arose in Dhṛtarāṣṭra's heart of gaining the kingdom for his own sons." *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.9 commentary.

2.9: To dash Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hopes, Sañjaya said (*sañjayaḥ uvāca*): Arjuna can conquer both ignorance and his enemies (*guḍākeśaḥ paran-tapaḥ*). Before telling Kṛṣṇa, the master of the senses (*evam uktvā hr̥ṣīkeśam*), that he would not fight, he addressed Him as Govinda, acknowledging His expertise in Vedic knowledge and expressing his trust that the Lord would give him expert guidance (*na yotsya iti govindam*). Then he fell silent (*uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.7–11, March 2nd 1966, New York](#)

Explanatory note:

Evam uktvā hr̥ṣīkeśam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Having spoken thus... told Kṛṣṇa." Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa reminds us that this is a reference to Arjuna's comments in 2.8. (1) He also explains that by referring to Kṛṣṇa as Hr̥ṣīkeśa, which means controller of the senses, Sañjaya is hinting to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that Kṛṣṇa will soon change Arjuna's mind about not fighting. (1)

Guḍākeśaḥ paran-tapaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Arjuna, chastiser of enemies..." In his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 1.24, he explains that Guḍākeśa means one who has conquered sleep and ignorance. (2) In other words, by referring to Arjuna as Guḍākeśa here, Sañjaya is reminding Dhṛtarāṣṭra that Arjuna's ignorance will be dispelled by Kṛṣṇa. *Paran-tapaḥ* means that Arjuna can defeat his enemies. (1) Thus, Sañjaya is hinting that Arjuna's ignorance will soon be dispelled by Kṛṣṇa, the master of the senses, and that he will defeat his enemies. (1, 2)

Na yotsya iti govindam / uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Govinda, I shall not fight / and fell silent." Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that Sañjaya

immediately extinguishes Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hope that Arjuna will leave the battlefield by telling him that Arjuna addressed Kṛṣṇa as the knower of the Vedas—Govinda. (1) In a lecture on this section of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrīla Prabhupāda adds that Govinda means one who gives pleasure to the senses. (3) Thus, by referring to Kṛṣṇa by this name, Arjuna implies that Kṛṣṇa knows the Vedas perfectly and is best suited to guide him towards his ultimate happiness. (1, 3)

Evidence:

1: "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. In this way Sañjaya extinguished the hope which rose in Dhṛtarāṣṭra's heart of gaining the kingdom for his own sons." (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.9 commentary)

2: "*Guḍākā* means sleep, and one who conquers sleep is called *guḍākeśa*. Sleep also means ignorance. So Arjuna conquered both sleep and ignorance because of his friendship with Kṛṣṇa." (Bhagavad gita as It is 1.24 purport)

3: "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, March 2nd 1966, New York)

2.10: O King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Kṛṣṇa suppressed his friendly laughter into a slight smile and replied gravely, as befitting a spiritual master (*tam uvāca hṛṣīkeśaḥ / prahasann iva bhārata*). Their conversation took place in full view of both armies for everyone's benefit (*senayor ubhayor madhye / viśīdantam idaṁ vacaḥ*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.10, August 16th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Tam uvāca hṛṣīkeśaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "...at that time Kṛṣṇa... spoke...". In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda adds that the Lord spoke with gravity, as befitting a spiritual

master instructing a disciple. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds that the Lord spoke profound words. The Lord’s speech is reported in the next verse. (1)

Prahasann iva bhārata: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O descendant of Bharata, at that time Kṛṣṇa, smiling...”. The ācāryas explain that if Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were still relating as friends, Kṛṣṇa would have laughed at Arjuna for speaking so foolishly. However, it is improper for a guru to laugh at his disciple, so Kṛṣṇa suppressed his laughter, resulting in Him smiling. (1, 2)

Senayor ubhayor madhye / viśīdantam idaṁ vacaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “in the midst of both the armies, / spoke the following words to the grief-stricken Arjuna.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that this exchange between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna took place in full view of everyone in both armies, giving everyone the opportunity to equally benefit from hearing it.

Evidence:

1: “This verse describes how the Lord then began to speak, revealing a hidden meaning. Hṛṣīkeśa Bhagavān then spoke very profound words to the lamenting Arjuna. The instructions start in the next verse. 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)

2: “‘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)

2.11: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): You speak of detachment, ethics and karmic consequences as if you have realised the atma (*prajñā-vādāṁś ca bhāṣase*). Yet you lament something that does not warrant grief (*aśocyān anvaśocas tvam*). No spiritually

enlightened person grieves for the body, whether alive or dead (*gatāsūn agatāsūmś ca / nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Aśocyān anvaśocas tvaṁ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...you are mourning for what is not worthy of grief...”. In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that no condition of the body merits being lamented: “...one who is learned... does not lament for any stage of the body, neither in the living nor in the dead condition.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that the problem is that Arjuna is lamenting for friends or relatives, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa specifies that Kṛṣṇa is criticising Arjuna’s lamentation of unworthy relatives, such as Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons. (1,2)

Prajñā-vādāmś ca bhāṣase: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “While speaking learned words...”. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura suggest that Kṛṣṇa is being sarcastic when He says this. (1,2) Arjuna thinks that his talk of compassion, respect for elders and non-violence is how a wise person would speak, but the reality is that only a person lacking all wisdom would speak as Arjuna has done.

Gatāsūn agatāsūmś ca / nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “Those who are wise lament / neither for the living nor for the dead.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says Kṛṣṇa is referring to the gross and subtle bodies. Since the gross body must perish, and the subtle body does not perish until the time of liberation, there is no use lamenting for either. (1,2) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds that the word *ca* indicates that Kṛṣṇa is including the soul proper in the list of things a wise person does not lament. (2)

In his word-for-word section, Śrīla Prabhupāda also translates *paṇḍitāḥ* as “the learned.” In his purport, he describes a learned person as “...one who is learned – one who knows what is body and what is soul...”. In a lecture, Śrīla Prabhupāda says a *paṇḍitaḥ* has attained the spiritual platform. (3) The *paṇḍita* is also described in *Bhagavad-gītā* 5.18 and in 18.54 as one who has attained *brahma-bhūta* realisation. (4)

Evidence:

1: “You are continually lamenting (*anu śocah*) for what is not worthy of grief (*aśocyān*)... You speak words (*vadan*) of wisdom (*prajñā*)... The intention behind the Lord’s words is the opposite. Actually, you have no wisdom... Those who are wise (*paṇḍita*) do not lament for that

from which life has passed (*gata asūn*), the gross bodies... Neither do they lament for the subtle bodies, from which the life airs have not passed (*agata asūn*), for those subtle bodies will certainly be destroyed before liberation..." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.11 commentary)

2: "O Arjuna, you are lamenting (*anvaśocah*) for the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who are not even worthy of lamentation (*aśocyan*)... But you do not have even a drop of wisdom. Those who are wise do not lament for the gross bodies from which the life airs have departed (*gatasūn*), nor for the subtle bodies from which the life airs have not departed (*agatasūn*), nor for the souls, indicated by the word *ca*... There should be no lamentation for the soul because it is devoid of the six changes and is eternal." (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.11 commentary)

3: "*Paṇḍita means one who has attained the spiritual platform.*" ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gīta 4.13, April 2nd, 1974, in Bombay](#))

4: "So *brahma-bhūtaḥ* stage... *Jñāna* stage means he has no more lamenting or hankering. *Prasannātmā*: "Oh, I am..., *ahaṁ brahmāsmi*. What I have got to do with this body? My business is to cultivate transcendental knowledge, *brahma-jñāna*." So in that stage, *brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu* [Bg. 18.54]. That is the test. He has no lamenting. He has no hankering. And he's equal to everyone. *Paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*." ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 7.1, January 27th 1973, Culcutta](#))

2.12: Understand that I have eternally existed as the unlimitedly powerful Lord (*na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ*), and that you and all the other kings present here have always existed as infinitesimal individual spirit souls (*na tvam neme janādhīpāḥ*). Neither I nor any of you will ever lose our individual spiritual identities at any time in the future (*na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ / sarve vayam ataḥ param*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.12, November 17th 1972, Hyderabad](#)

Explanatory note:

Na tv evāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Never was there a time when I did not exist...". Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that

Kṛṣṇa is referring to Himself as Paramātmā or Bhagavān, not as a jīvātmā. (1,2) In effect, Kṛṣṇa is saying that He has always been the Supreme Lord.

Na tvaṁ neme janādhīpāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...nor you, nor all these kings...”. The ācāryas explain that Kṛṣṇa identifies Arjuna and the other kings as jīvas, categorically different from Himself, the Supreme Soul. (1,2) In effect, the Lord is not just saying they have all always existed as individuals, but that He has always been the Supreme Lord, and they have always been individual infinitesimal souls. In other words, none of them have ever been an undifferentiated spirit. They have all always had individuality.

Na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ / sarve vayam ataḥ param: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “nor in the future / shall any of us cease to be.” In other words, not only is Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord, not subject to destruction, but neither is any living entity. Since both the Supreme Soul and the infinitesimal souls are not subject to destruction, there is no cause for lamentation. (1,2) Baladeva draws out an additional lesson from this verse: the infinitesimal living entity always remains infinitesimal. We can never become the infinitely powerful Supreme Lord. (2)

Evidence:

1: “Now, O friend, I will ask you a question. When you see the death of a person you love, you lament. But is the object of affection while the person is in this world the soul or the body? Śukadeva says that the soul is most dear in all living beings: *sarveṣāṁ eva bhūtānāṁ nṛpa svātmāiva vallabha*, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.14.50. If the soul is the object of affection, the soul should not be the object of lamentation because it cannot suffer death, since both types of ātmā, the jīva and īśvara, are eternal.’ ... It is not that I, the Paramātmā, have ever not been in existence, but rather I have always existed. You also, a jīvātmā, have always existed. These kings, also jīvātmās, have existed. ... it is not that I, you, and all these kings, *sarve vayam*, will not exist in the future. Rather, we will certainly exist. Here He shows that the soul is devoid of destruction, *dhvaṁsābhāva*. By this He concludes that since the Paramātmā and the jīva are both eternal, there is no cause of lamentation.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.12 commentary)

2: “Thus, having established Arjuna’s lack of wisdom through his unsuitable lamentation, the Lord of all beings, Bhagavān, next speaks about the fundamental difference between the jīvas and Himself... That difference is established in the śruti... O Arjuna, it is not that I, the Lord of

all, Bhagavān, have not existed at some time, *jātu*, previously... I have certainly existed. It is not that you also have not existed. You existed for certain. It is not that these kings did not exist. They existed for certain. ... Because the jīva, like the Lord of all, exists in all three phases of time. It is not proper to lament concerning the jīva.... ‘The mutually contrary qualities of the Lord and the jīva, greatness and smallness, lordship and servitude, can be understood only through scripture. ... In this way real difference between the soul and the Lord has been established.’” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.12 commentary)

Arjuna thought: Although the soul is eternal, it is natural to lament the loss of the bodies with which we have a relationship.

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is inspired by Baladeva Vidyabhusana and Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura’s commentaries.

Evidence:

“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)

2.13: Kṛṣṇa said: No one laments when the embodied soul passes from a boy’s body to a youth’s body and then from that to an old body (*dehino ’smin yathā dehe / kaumāraṁ yauvanam jarā*). Similarly, no self-realised person laments when the soul passes into another body at death (*tathā dehāntara-prāptir / dhīras tatra na muhyati*).

Explanatory note:

Dehino ’smin yathā dehe / kaumāraṁ yauvanam jarā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, / from boyhood to youth to old age...”.

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that Kṛṣṇa first establishes the premise: the embodied soul is always visibly changing bodies, but no one laments this change. (1,2) In other words, when a baby becomes a child, and then the child becomes a youth, and the youth becomes an adult, others' relationship with that embodied soul also changes, but no one laments that change.

Tathā dehāntara-prāptir: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "...the soul similarly passes into another body at death." Having set up His premise, Kṛṣṇa now draws the conclusion: there is no reason to lament a change of body. (1,2) Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura argue that when a person dies, it should be a cause for celebration: having given up an old or ailing body, they will get a new, vigorous body. (1,2)

Dhīras tatra na muhyati: Therefore, no one who is genuinely spiritually enlightened is disturbed by the apparent death of the body. (2,3)

Evidence:

1: "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.' ... 'With the destruction of boyhood and attainment of youth, one rejoices. With the destruction of the worn-out bodies of Bhīṣma and Droṇa, they will attain new bodies and will also become joyful.'" (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.13 commentary)

2: "This is not so. The soul, which has many bodies in the past, present and future, has three states of childhood, youth and old age while existing in the present body. Just as one does not lament for gaining a succession of bodies related to the soul and suitable for his enjoyment, in the same way, with the destruction of the series of previous bodies, the acquisition of another body with the destruction of the present body should be a source of jubilation for you rather than a source of lamentation... The intelligent person (*dhīraḥ*), one who knows the true nature of the recurring karmas upon the jīva in combination with his impression (*svabhāva*) and body, is not bewildered by the change.'" (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.13 commentary)

3: “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](#))

Arjuna thought: I am clearly not self-realised, for I feel an intolerable grief at the thought of separation from great personalities such as Grandfather Bhīṣma and my teacher, Droṇācārya.

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on the commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.

Evidence:

“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)

“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)

2.14: Kṛṣṇa said: O son of Kuntī, all the senses can make it difficult to do one’s duty (*mātrā-sparśās tu kaunteya*). For example, in winter it is difficult to bathe in a cold river, and in the hot summer it is difficult for women to cook over a fire (*śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ*). Like the seasons, such difficulties come and go (*āgamāpāyino ’nityās*). Therefore, O descendant of King Bharata, anyone who wants to attain self-realisation must tolerate such difficulties and continue to do one’s duty (*tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.14, August 20th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Mātrā-sparśās tu kaunteya / *śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “O son of Kuntī... are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception...”. Kaunteya means son of Kuntī. Śrīla Prabhupāda

explains: “To address him as Kaunteya signifies his great blood relations from his mother’s side...”

In his lectures, Śrīla Prabhupāda often uses this verse to illustrate that unavoidable difficulties of all types can be more easily tolerated if we remember that all things must pass just like winter and summer seasons. (3,4) In such instances, he does not say we should fatalistically tolerate. He encourages us to do our best to avoid such difficulties, but when they are unavoidable, remembering that they will pass is a good way to pacify the mind. (3,4) This is certainly true and it reminds me of the Sufi maxim, “This too shall pass.”

However, according to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport, Kṛṣṇa refers to summer and winter seasons to emphasise that one must do one’s prescribed duties despite climatic changes:

“One has to execute his duty in spite of climatic inconveniences.”

He translates *mātrā-sparśās* as “sensory perception.” Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains this refers to the experience the senses have when contacting the sense objects. (2) For example, when entering cold water (a sense object) in the hot summer, the skin will have a pleasant experience. When entering the same cold water in the middle of winter, the skin will have a painful experience. (1,2) The experience of pleasantness or pain is what is meant by the sensory experience—*mātrā-sparśās*. In other words, according to Viśvanātha, it is not only the mind which causes suffering in the course of doing one’s duties, but all the senses can create similar obstacles. (2)

Āgamāpāyino ’nityās: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “The nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course...”. Āgama means appearing, apāyinaḥ means disappearing, and anityāḥ means nonpermanent. (1,2) Viśvanātha draws out the practical implication of this: we have no control over the circumstances that make a sensory experience pleasing or displeasing. (2)

To illustrate this, the ācāryas give the examples of bathing and cooking. These are scripturally prescribed duties that must be performed. (1,2) During the winter, taking a bath is unpleasant, and in the summer, cooking is unpleasant. We do not have any control over the climatic conditions that create this unpleasantness, but we should know that these circumstances are fleeting, the experience will change, and in the meantime, we should tolerate the difficulty and

do our duty anyway. (1,2,3) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that Kṛṣṇa is intimating that Arjuna should similarly tolerate the temporary feeling of suffering arising from fighting with his elders and fight anyway because that is his duty according to scripture. (1)

Tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.” He writes in his purport:

“One has to follow the prescribed rules and regulations of religious principles in order to rise up to the platform of knowledge, because by knowledge and devotion only can one liberate himself from the clutches of māyā (illusion).”

In other words, without attaining steadiness in performing our scripturally prescribed duties, we cannot attain freedom from bodily identification and rise to the platform of transcendental knowledge. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa echoes this as follows: “From dharma comes the appearance of jñāna, and from jñāna arises liberation....” (1) He further adds that once we have attained self-realisation, prescribed duties no longer apply to us, but if we give these duties up prematurely, we will create obstacles in our spiritual advancement. (1)

Viśvanātha adds a very interesting perspective. He says that the purpose of prescribed duties is to target and purify us of our lower qualities. (2) Lower qualities arise from the modes of ignorance and passion, and they are described in *Bhagavad-gītā* 14.7–8 and verses 12–13. Prescribed duty challenges us to confront and overcome these tendencies. (2) In other words, tolerance is an activity, it is not passivity. It requires us to know what tendency in ourselves must be checked, and we apply ourselves to doing so.

By addressing Arjuna as Bhārata, Kṛṣṇa is appealing to Arjuna’s great parentage from his father’s side of the family. He has already appealed to his heritage from his mother’s side by addressing him as Kaunteya. In other words, Kṛṣṇa is stressing that both sides of Arjuna’s family have a long tradition of tolerating difficulties in their discharge of duties, and they have given him the training and culture to continue in that vein. Thus, it would be out of character for him to betray the example of his ancestors by neglecting his duty. (1)

Evidence:

1: "...*Mātrā* means 'the functions of the senses such as skin, by which the sense objects are defined (*mīyante*).' Thus *mātrā* refers to the senses. The perceptions bestow sensations of hot,

cold, happiness or distress. Cold water, which in the summer gives pleasure, gives pain in the winter. Tolerate these temporary experiences (*anityān*) since they appear and disappear (*āgamāpāyinaḥ*), since they are uncertain. This means that just as one takes a cold bath in the month of *Māgha*, though it is difficult, because it is the injunction, by having 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... Giving up *dharma* without first becoming firmly established in *jñāna* gives rise to obstacles. 'O son of Kuntī, O descendant of Bhārata, 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)

2: "...The various functions of the mind, in the form of all the senses such as skin, experiencing their sense objects, produce this problem (*anartha*). One has the experience (*sparsā*) of the sense object (*mātrā*). In the hot season, cold water is pleasant, and in the cold season, it is painful. This happens in an uncontrolled manner, appearing and disappearing (*āgamāpāyinaḥ*). Therefore you must tolerate these experiences of the sense objects... Following *dharma* gradually rids one of all low qualities... One should not give up one's scripturally prescribed duty to fight by that consideration. Not performing the prescribed duty eventually brings about great problems." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.14 commentary)

3: "You should know... Just like the summer season comes. You should know, "It has come; it will go away. The winter season has come. It has come; it will go away." So just to try to protect yourself as far as possible, but you are not affected by such summer season or winter season." (Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.14, August 20th 1973, London)

4: "So we should not be disturbed by the so-called distress and happiness. They are coming and going. Kṛṣṇa has advised in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *āgamāpāyino 'nityās tāmś titikṣasva bhārata*. The so-called distress and happiness, they come and go like seasonal changes. Just like we have got summer season, winter season. The winter also not staying for good, neither the summer is staying for good. It will change." (Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.5, September 3rd 1972, New Vrindavan)

2.15: O best among men, Arjuna (*puruṣaṁ puruṣarṣabha*), since you are My intimate friend, such difficulties should not disturb you (*yaṁ hi na vyathayanty ete*). Remember that only one who remains steady in performing his duties, in happiness and in distress (*sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ*), is qualified to achieve higher levels of self-realisation, attaining which one never takes another material birth (so '*mṛtatvāya kalpate*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.15, August 21st 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Yaṁ hi na vyathayanty ete: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “the person who is not disturbed ...” The ācāryas clarify that the distressing things which are tolerated are the pleasing or displeasing sensory experiences one encounters while doing one’s duty. (1,2) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that when these sensory obstacles to doing one’s duty are appropriately tolerated, they eventually cease to be distressing. (1) In other words, they no longer agitate one’s inner calm or disrupt one’s focus on attaining self-realisation. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds an additional interesting perspective. He says that it is not only difficulties which must be tolerated, but the delusion of material enjoyment must also be tolerated if one is to stay steady in performance of duty. (2)

Puruṣaṁ puruṣarṣabha: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O best among men [Arjuna]...” In a lecture on this verse, he says that Arjuna is the best among men because of his close friendship with Kṛṣṇa, and thus it is unbecoming of him to become materially disturbed and give up his duty. (8)

Sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...happiness and distress and is steady in both...” Baladeva explains that the word *dhīraṁ* refers to a person who remains focused on doing his prescribed duties regardless of whether doing so is pleasing or displeasing to his mind and senses. (2)

So 'mṛtatvāya kalpate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “is certainly eligible for liberation.” (1) We learn in Bhagavad-gītā 18.54 that the ability to remain undisturbed in happiness and distress is the symptom of being on the *brahma-bhūta* platform. Later in *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, Śrīla Prabhupāda calls *brahma-bhūta* the liberated platform. (6) The question naturally arises why Kṛṣṇa says that one is eligible for liberation after attaining this stage of equilibrium.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the answer in a lecture where he says that Brahman realisation is only the beginning of liberation but that to remain permanently liberated one must attain higher stages of liberation. (3, 4, 5) In one purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes it as “semi-liberation.”

The more mature levels of liberation are Paramātmā realisation, when one sees the Lord, and then beyond that is Bhagavān realisation, when one experiences the bliss of serving the Supreme Lord. (5) Only when we experience the bliss of serving the personal form of the Lord are we safe from falling back down into material consciousness. (3,4,7)

Evidence:

1: "Practicing tolerance with this discernment, the experience of the sense objects will, with the passage of time, not give distress at all. When one reaches this state where there is no distress from the objects of the senses, he is qualified for liberation (*amṛtatvāya*).\" (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā, 2.15 commentary)

2: "The word *dhīra* indicates a person who makes (*īrayati*) his intelligence (*dhī*) active in these matters of *dharma*. The experiences of the sense objects (*ete mātrā-sparśāḥ*), regarded as either favorable or unfavorable for oneself, do not throw that person fixed in *dharma* (*dhīram*) into the delusion of happiness and suffering (*na vyathayanti*). That person is fit for liberation... The person performing his duties of *dharma* is unmoved in the face of the suffering due to the difficulties encountered attaining the goal of those duties and is as well unmoved on attaining the happiness which ultimately results from following the duties. He is neither disgusted because of the difficulties encountered during practice nor jubilant because of attaining the eventual happiness.\" (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa*, 2.15 commentary)

3: "Brahma-bhūtaḥ, you have become now self-realized, that's all right... But you have to enter into the *parā-bhakti*. Then your self-realization will stand. Otherwise again you will fall down... if you simply remain *brahma-bhūtaḥ*, then you will fall down.\" (Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.54, Bombay, 30 September 1973)

4: “The *Bhagavad-gītā* says if you are *brahma-bhutaḥ*, then come to this point = *mad-bhaktim labhate param* [Bg. 18.54]. Then you will stay. And if you simply stay on *brahma-bhutaḥ* stage, then you'll again fall down. ...if you think, "Now I have become liberated," maybe ... but it will not stay. You'll fall down again. ... If he does not go up to that point, *mad-bhaktim labhate param*, then you are unstable. You can fall down at any moment. *Brahmeti paramātmēti*

bhagavān iti śabdyate [SB 1.2.11]. If you are in Brahman stage, then you make further progress to understand Paramātmā. Then you must make further progress to understand the Supreme Person, God. *Brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti*. So unless you come to the stage of understanding Bhagavān, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, there is no safety.” (Morning Walk, November 4th 1975, Bombay)

5: “This realization of Brahman, impersonal realization, is the beginning of self-realization. That is not final, or ultimate.” (Lecture, September 26th 1969 in London)

6: “Unless one is able to relish happiness from within, how can one retire from the external engagements meant for deriving superficial happiness? A liberated person enjoys happiness by factual experience. He can, therefore, sit silently at any place and enjoy the activities of life from within. Such a liberated person no longer desires external material happiness. This state is called *brahma-bhūta*, attaining which one is assured of going back to Godhead, back to home.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 5.24 purport)

7: “These semiliberated souls falsely claim to be liberated, but unless one engages in devotional service to the Lord, he remains materially contaminated. Therefore these living entities are described as *vimukta-māninaḥ*, meaning that they falsely consider themselves liberated although their intelligence is not yet purified. Even though they attain the *brahma-bhūta* stage and realize the Supreme Personality of Godhead through His bodily effulgence, they fall down due to neglecting the Lord’s service. Not attaining *ānanda*, or bliss, they come down to the material world to enjoy.” (Caitanya Caritamrita Madhya 6.269 purport)

8: “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?.... Actually, the best of the men should not be disturbed by any material condition. He should discharge his duties.” (Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.15, August 21st 1973, London)

2.16: To endure the difficulties of fulfilling your prescribed duties, you need to understand that the material body, the source of all suffering, is ephemeral (*nāsato vidyate bhāvo*). The soul within the body, however, is eternal (*nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ*). Yogīs who have seen the soul (*tv*

anayos tattva-darśibhiḥ) have reached this conclusion by directly observing the characteristics of both the body and the soul (*ubhayor api dṛṣṭo 'ntas*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.16, August 22nd 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa both explain that from this verse Kṛṣṇa gives the required knowledge which will enable one to tolerate difficulties and remain fixed in one's duty.

Nāsato vidyate bhāvo / nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...of the nonexistent [the material body] there is no endurance / and of the eternal [the soul] there is no change.” Viśvanātha explains that the material body is the cause of all suffering, not the soul. (2) This is because the qualities of the body are opposite to those of the soul. (2) This raises the question of what their respective qualities are. The key difference that Śrīla Prabhupāda, Baladeva and Viśvanātha emphasise is that the body is by nature temporary—prone to destruction—whereas the soul is by nature permanent and indestructible. (1,2,3) In lectures, Śrīla Prabhupāda broadens this comparison to explain that the soul is not only inherently eternal, but also inherently knowledgeable and blissful, whereas the body is inherently prone to destruction, forgetfulness, and pain. (3)

Ubhayor api dṛṣṭo 'ntas / tv anayos tattva-darśibhiḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “This they have concluded / by studying the nature of both.” His Holiness Bhānu Swami offers a more literal rendering: “Those who see things as they are (*tv anayos tattva-darśibhiḥ*) see this conclusion about both of these (*ubhayor api dṛṣṭo 'ntas*).” The question may arise as to whether it is possible to directly see the spirit soul. In his commentary on Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 6.29, Baladeva explicitly states that when the yogī sees the Supersoul, he also sees himself, the ātmā. (4) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains the same concept in a conversation recorded in Science of Self-Realization. (5)

Evidence:

1: “Now worship of the Lord is alone the means of destroying lamentation, and this arises from recognising the difference between the worshipper, jīva, and the object of worship, the Lord. ... Such statements show that the person who has knowledge about the svarūpa of conscious aṁśa, the jīva, is qualified for knowledge of the svarūpa of the conscious aṁśī, the Supreme

Lord. ... With this and the following verses, the Lord thus begins the teaching of ātmā by giving an understanding of the difference between body and ātmā, ... An object which is subject to change, such as the body, *asat*, does not have unchangeable nature (*bhāvaḥ*). The unchanging ātmā (*sataḥ*) does not have the nature of changing (*abhāvaḥ*). The body has the nature of changing and the soul has the nature of not changing. This conclusion (*antaḥ*) about the body, designated by the word “*asat*—temporary”, and soul, designated by the word “*sat*—permanent”, is realised (*drṣṭaḥ*) by those men who know the natures of these two (*tattva-darśibhiḥ*). ... Destructible, unconscious things, such as the body, are called *asat*, and the indestructible soul with consciousness is called *sat*. ... (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.16 commentary)

2: “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 ayaṁ 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)

3: “Our body is just the opposite. It is not *sat*, it is not eternal; it is temporary. And it is not full of knowledge. We are full of ignorance. We do not know what is there beyond this wall. Therefore it is full of ignorance. We are proud of our eyes. If the electricity is immediately gone, we cannot see. So we see, we act, under some conditions offered by the material nature. So we are not fully aware of everything; neither our body is eternal; neither we are blissful. This body is the source of so many diseases. The body is subjected to birth, death. The body is forgetful. The body is suffering old age. So this is not blissful body.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 4.1–6, January 3rd 1969, Los Angeles](#))

4: “This yogi who has achieved samadhi (yoga-yuktatma), seeing both his atma and Paramatma, realizes that Paramatma is all-pervading ...” (Gita Bhusana 6.29 commentary)

5: “God consciousness includes self-consciousness, but self-consciousness is not necessarily God consciousness.... You are now in the sunlight, and consciousness of

the sun includes your ability to see yourself. In the darkness you cannot see yourself. At night you can't even see your own hands or legs, but if you come before the sun, you see the sun and yourself also. Without sunlight, without God consciousness, self-consciousness is incomplete. However, God consciousness makes self-consciousness very clear.” (Science of Self Realization chapter 7)

2.17: The eternal soul that pervades the body with consciousness is indestructible (*avināśī tu tad viddhi / yena sarvam idaṁ tatam*), and therefore, nothing can deplete its energy or qualities (*vināśam avyayasyāsyā / na kaścit kartum arhati*).

Explanatory note:

Avināśī tu tad viddhi / yena sarvam idaṁ tatam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “That which pervades the entire body / you should know to be indestructible.” All three ācāryas explain that in this verse and the next Kṛṣṇa further explains the nature of the soul. (1, 2) *Avināśī* means the soul is indestructible, an additional quality to eternality, which was mentioned in the previous verse. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa attributes the soul’s indestructibility to its small size (2).

Vināśam avyayasyāsyā / na kaścit kartum arhati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “No one is able / to destroy that imperishable soul.” *Avināśī* means the soul is imperishable (2). In other words, the passage of time does not deplete or diminish its energy or qualities, as it does with anything material. This is an additional characteristic to its being eternal and indestructible (1, 2).

All three ācāryas concur that consciousness is a manifestation of the soul’s presence in a body (2).

Evidence:

1: “This verse clarifies the meaning of the previous verse. Know this *jīva-tattva* as indestructible, which is spread throughout the body (*sarvam idaṁ tatam*)....” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.17 commentary)

2: “The Lord further explains the nature of the body and *jīvātmā* just discussed in two more verses.... This whole body, *idaṁ sarvam*, is pervaded by this soul. The body is pervaded by the

ātmā's consciousness...No gross object, and not even the body of a living entity, can destroy (*vināśam*) that jīva, which is indestructible (*avyayasya*) because it has a very small size...”
(Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.17 commentary)

2.18: On the other hand, the material body inhabited by the eternal soul is bound to diminish to the point of non-existence (*antavanta ime dehā / nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ*). However, no one can see the immeasurably small soul, let alone destroy it (*anāśino 'prameyasya*). Therefore, O descendant of Bharata, since there is no point in lamenting either the perishable material body or the indestructible, eternal soul, do your prescribed duty and fight, for doing so will bring you both immediate and eternal happiness (*tasmād yudhyasva bhārata*).

Explanatory note:

Antavanta ime dehā / nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “The material body ... is sure to come to an end / of the ... eternal living entity...” Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that the natures of the soul and the material body it inhabits are diametrically different. The soul by its nature is eternal, and the material body by its nature is sure to come to an end. Therefore, they argue, there is no need to lament over either one. (2)

Antavanta means perishable to the point of non-existence. This characteristic of the material body stands in direct contrast to that of the soul, which cannot be depleted or diminished—*avyayasya*—as described in the previous verse.

Anāśino 'prameyasya: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “of the indestructible, immeasurable ... living entity...” His Holiness Bhānu Swami translates this line as “the eternal soul, which is indestructible and very small...” Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura attribute the soul’s indestructible—*anāśinaḥ*—nature to its infinitesimal, immeasurable size—*aprameyasya*. (1) Baladeva made the same point in his commentary to the previous verse.

Tasmād yudhyasva bhārata: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata.” All three ācāryas agree that since there is no need to lament either the inherently destructible body or the inherently indestructible soul, Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna not to unnecessarily abandon his duty of fighting. (1, 2) Baladeva adds that since both worldly and

eternal happiness come from doing one's duty, from either point of view, Arjuna should fight.

(2)

Evidence:

1: "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*).

Therefore you should fight. This means you should not give up your dharma as prescribed in scripture." (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.18 commentary)

2: "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 the jīva and his body have such natures, eternal and destructible, respectively, neither the jīva nor his body is worthy of lamentation. ... Therefore, since both earthly enjoyment and liberation are attained by dharma, O Arjuna, fight." (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.18 commentary)

2.19: It is a mistake to think that you can kill anyone, or that anyone can be killed (*ya enaṁ vetti hantāraṁ / yaś cainaṁ manyate hatam*). Both ideas are false (*ubhau tau na vijānīto*). Since the soul cannot be killed, it cannot kill anyone either (*nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.19–20, August 25th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Ya enaṁ vetti hantāraṁ / yaś cainaṁ manyate hatam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Neither he who thinks the living entity the slayer / nor he who thinks it slain..." In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

"When an embodied living entity is hurt by fatal weapons, it is to be known that the living entity within the body is not killed. The spirit soul is so small that it is impossible to kill him by any material weapon, as will be evident from subsequent verses. Nor is the living entity killable, because of his spiritual constitution. What is killed, or is supposed to be killed, is the body only."

Kṛṣṇa's point is that since the soul, the living consciousness, cannot be killed, it is a fallacy to say another soul has killed it. (1, 2) He is not saying that no one can be held responsible for forcefully making the eternal soul leave the body it inhabits.

Ubhau tau na vijānīto / nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Neither... is in knowledge / for the self slays not nor is slain.” *Ubhau* refers to both types of people mentioned in the first half of the verse: those who think the soul kills and those who think the soul is killed. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura also explain Kṛṣṇa to mean that since the soul cannot be killed, it is ignorance to say another soul can kill it. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “O friend Arjuna, you, a soul as well, are neither the performer of killing nor the object of killing. ... He who thinks the jīva (*enam*) is the killer, that Arjuna is the killer of Bhīṣma and others, and he who thinks that the jīva is killed, that Arjuna is killed by Bhīṣma, are both ignorant. ...” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.19 commentary)

2: “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, using a sword or other instrument, and thinks that such a jīva is harmed by the sword, does not know. The ātmā, a very fine particle of consciousness, which cannot be cut or transformed in any way, is not a killer nor is it killed. It is neither the performer of the act of killing nor the victim of killing. ... One should understand that there is no destruction of the ātmā simply by separation of the ātmā from the body. ...” (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.19 commentary)

2.20: Unlike the body, the soul is neither created nor destroyed (*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin*). It did not come into existence in this life or in previous births, nor will it do so in the future (*nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ*). It is called ancient because it is eternal, never created, and free from decay (*ajo nityaḥ śāśvato ’yaṁ purāṇo*). Since bodily transformations do not affect the soul, it does not die when the body dies (*na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.19–25, October 14th 1968, Seattle](#)

Explanatory note:

Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that in this verse Kṛṣṇa alludes to the six changes of the body taught by the sage Yāska in the *Nirukta*. (2) Śrīla Prabhupāda describes these changes as follows:

“The body is subject to six kinds of transformations. It takes its birth from the womb of the mother’s body, remains for some time, grows, produces some effects, gradually dwindles, and at last vanishes into oblivion.”

In other words, Kṛṣṇa’s point is that though the body is subject to creation and destruction, the soul is not. (1, 2)

Nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva explain that just as the soul was not created in this birth, it was never created in any past birth, nor will it be created in any future birth. (1, 2) In other words, the soul is never created. (1, 2)

Ajo nityaḥ śāśvato ’yaṁ purāṇo: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval.” In verses 2.16, 17, and 18, Kṛṣṇa has already said that the soul is eternal—*nitya*, and ever-existing (without decay)—*śāśvata*. Thus I understand Kṛṣṇa’s point here in 2.20 to be that the soul is not created—*aja*—because it is eternal and ever-existing. (1, 2) These qualities are the reason that the soul is called ancient. (1, 2) Viśvanātha explains that the soul is *purāṇa* because it is eternal (as if new), not because it ages like the body. (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda reiterates the same point as follows:

“The soul does not at any time become old, as the body does.”

Na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “He is not slain when the body is slain.” In his purport, he explains that since bodily changes do not affect the soul, the soul does not die when the body dies. (2)

“The changes of the body do not affect the soul. The soul does not deteriorate like a tree, nor anything material.”

Evidence:

1: The eternal nature of the jīva is here clearly proven. The first line negates the possibility of birth and death for the jīva at the present time. The second line negates birth and death in the past and the future. Therefore it is unborn (*aja*), in past, present, and future. ... It exists at all times (*śāśvata*), meaning that at no time in the past, present, or future will it be destroyed (*dhvaṁsa*). Therefore it is eternal (*nitya*). ... ‘But because the soul exists for a long time, it can

grow old.’ ‘No, although it is old, *purā* (*purā*), it is as if new (*na* for *nava*), because of absence of the six states of transformations.’ ... ‘With the death of the body, will it not die along with the body?’ ‘It does not die when the body dies, because it does not have a relationship with the body. The soul is not subservient.’” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.20 commentary)

2: “This verse confirms the eternal nature of the ātmā mentioned previously by showing that it is devoid of the six changes mentioned by Yāska: birth, existence, increase, transformation, decay and dying, *Nirukta* 1.2. ... With the words *na jāyate*, *mriyate* (the ātmā is not born nor does it die at any time), creation and destruction are both excluded. ... The jīva, having neither birth nor death (*ajo nitya*) also does not have growth (*na bhūyah*). *Śāśvata* means that the jīva does not decay. It exists at all times without decay (decay is represented by *apakṣīyate* in Yāska’s verse.) The word *purāṇa* indicates that the soul is without change or transformation (*vipariṇamate*). Though the ātmā is *purā*, ancient, it is *nava*, new. ... Thus the ātmā, devoid of the six changes, is called *nitya*. Since the ātmā has this nature, when the body is killed, the ātmā is not killed.” (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.20 commentary)

2.21: How then can you think that someone who, like Myself, is well versed in scriptural knowledge and therefore knows that the soul is eternal, indestructible and undiminished (*vedāvināśinaṁ nityaṁ / ya enam ajam avyayam*), kills anyone, O Pārtha, or causes anyone else to kill (*kathaṁ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha / kaṁ ghātayati hanti kaṁ*)?

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.21–22, August 26th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Vedāvināśinaṁ nityaṁ / ya enam ajam avyayam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “who knows that the soul is indestructible, eternal / unborn and immutable...” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa interpret the word *nityam*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda translates as “eternal”, differently. They say it functions as an adverb, “constantly”, which modifies the word “knows”. (2, 3) In other words, they interpret these lines as “He who knows constantly that this soul is indestructible, unborn, and eternal...” (2, 3) I have incorporated both perspectives in my rendering of the verse.

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the word *avyayam* as ‘immutable’. In his commentary to this verse, Baladeva explains it means ‘without decay’. (1, 3) Thus it conveys a similar meaning as *śāśvata* in the previous verse. The two words overlap in meaning: *śāśvata* means permanence without decay, and *avyayam* means no diminution or loss. (3)

Katham sa puruṣaḥ pārtha / kaṁ ghātayati hanti kaṁ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O Pārtha, how can a person... / ... immutable kill anyone or cause anyone to kill?” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that *puruṣa* refers to the person who acts in the knowledge described in the previous two lines; this includes Himself. (2) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s perspective is that *puruṣa* refers to a person with scriptural wisdom. (3) Baladeva explains these are rhetorical questions. (3)

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that Kṛṣṇa’s point is that when He orders someone to be killed, such killing is not violence, and when a person in knowledge acts on the Lord’s order, that killing is also not violence. He gives the example of surgery. When a physician puts a knife in someone, he is not cutting them but curing them.

Evidence:

1: “How can he who knows constantly that this soul is indestructible (*avināśīnam*), unborn (*ajam*), and without decay (*avyayam*) kill anyone or cause others to kill?” (His Holiness Bhanu Swami’s translation of Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.21)

2: “With this knowledge, neither you, who are fighting, nor I, who am urging you to fight, have any fault. Here *nityam* is used as an adverb. He who knows constantly that the soul is indestructible, unborn, and eternal. ... 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 2.21 commentary)

3: “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. How can he who understands through logic and scripture that the soul is indestructible (*avināśīnam*), unborn (*ajam*), and without decay (*avyayam*) kill anyone when engaged in battle? Though he causes others to engage in battle, how can he cause them to kill anyone? The use of the interrogative means that he does not kill anyone and cannot do it by any means, and he does

not cause others to kill anyone and cannot cause it by any means. *Nityam* is here used adverbially with the word *veda*, he knows, meaning ‘constantly.’” (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.21 commentary)

Arjuna thought: Bhīṣma and the others are happy in their current bodies. So, although the soul is indestructible, it would surely still be a sin to destroy their bodies. Otherwise, why do the scriptures prescribe atonement for such killing?

Explanatory note:

This transition between verses 21 and 22 is inspired by the commentaries of both Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa.

Evidence:

“But by my fighting, Ajātaśatru will give up the body known as Bhīṣma, and you and I will be the cause of that.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.22 commentary)

“The soul may be indestructible, but with the destruction through war of those bodies known as Bhīṣma and others, which gave them happiness, we will deprive them of their happiness. This is the sin. If it were not so, then scriptures prescribing atonements for such killing would be useless.’ The answer to this objection is given in this verse.” (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.22 commentary)

2.22: Kṛṣṇa said: When one is killed in battle, the soul immediately receives a new celestial body (*anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī*) upon leaving the old one (*tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny*). The transference happens as easily as taking off an old, worn garment (*tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny*) and putting on a new one (*anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.22, November 26th 1972, Hyderabad](#)

Explanatory note:

Vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya / navāni gṛhṇāti naro 'parāṇi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these lines in reverse as “As a person puts on new garments, / giving up old ones...” Bhānu Swami’s translation keeps the order of the lines intact: “As a man gives up old clothes / and accepts

new ones...” (1) Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that Kṛṣṇa speaks this verse in reply to Arjuna’s objection. (2, 3)

Tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāṇy / anyāni samyāti navāni dehī: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these lines in reverse as “...the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.” Bhānu Swami’s translation keeps the order of the lines intact: “...so the soul gives up the old bodies and attains new ones.” (1) Baladeva and Viśvanātha explain that by dying in battle, Bhīṣma will immediately exchange his old body for a new celestial body without the inconvenience of gestation in the womb. This will give him much greater happiness. (2, 3) Śrīla Prabhupāda makes the same point in his purport to *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.31. (4)

Evidence:

1: “As a man gives up old clothes and accepts new ones, so the soul gives up the old bodies and attains new ones.” (Bhanu Swami’s translation of Sārārtha-varṣiṇī and *Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.22)

2: “What fault is there in a person giving up old worn cloth to put on new cloth? In a similar way, Bhīṣma will give up an old body and attain a new divine body. What fault is there for me or you in that?” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.22 commentary)

3: “Just as giving up old worn clothing and putting on new clothing gives happiness, giving up an old human body and accepting a new, devata 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 *samyāti*, meaning ‘directly attain’, indicates that one will very quickly attain that body without even undergoing the pains of staying in the womb and other inconveniences. The prescriptions for atonement are applicable to killing persons other than during conditions of war or sacrifice.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.22 commentary)

4: “In the battlefield, a king or kṣatriya, while fighting another king envious of him, is eligible for achieving the heavenly planets after death, ... Therefore, killing on the battlefield on religious principles ... are not at all considered to be acts of violence, because everyone is benefited by the religious principles involved. ... the kṣatriyas killed on the battlefield also attain the heavenly planets....” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.31 purport)

Arjuna thought: When a house is destroyed, the person inside is also harmed. Could my powerful weapons not similarly harm their souls?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on the commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa.

Evidence:

“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)

2.23: Kṛṣṇa said: You cannot cut the soul with your weapons (*nainam chindanti śastrāṇi*). 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:

Nainam chindanti śastrāṇi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon...” Bhānu Swami translates it as “Weapons do not cut the soul.” (1) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says Kṛṣṇa is referring to swords, (2) and Śrīla Prabhupāda explains this principle applies to any weapon: “...the soul can never be cut into pieces, nor annihilated by any number of weapons, regardless of scientific devices.”

Nainam dahati pāvakaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...nor burned by fire...” Bhānu Swami translates it as “The fire weapon does not burn it.” (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva intimate Kṛṣṇa is referring to a specific fire weapon in Arjuna’s arsenal, (2, 3) and Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the same principle is true about any weapon using fire.

Na cainam kledayanty āpo: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...nor moistened by water...” Bhānu Swami translates it as “The water weapon does not wet it.” (1) Viśvanātha and Baladeva both intimate Kṛṣṇa is referring to a rain weapon in Arjuna’s arsenal. (2, 3) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the rain weapon would have been used to counter fire weapons.

Na śoṣayati mārutaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...nor withered by the wind.” Bhānu Swami translates it as “The wind weapon does not dry it.” (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the soul cannot be killed by any kind of weapon, including tornado weapons. It seems that Arjuna would have had a wind weapon in his arsenal, and Kṛṣṇa is assuring him it will not harm the soul either. (2, 3)

Evidence:

1: “Weapons do not cut the soul. The fire weapon does not burn it. The water weapon does not wet it. The wind weapon does not dry it.” (Bhānu Swami’s translation of Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.23)

2: “But just as the house dweller is destroyed when his house is burnt, when the body is destroyed by the blow of weapons, the soul should also be destroyed.’ Swords, (sastrani) cannot cut it. The fire weapon (pavakah) cannot burn it. The rain weapon, (apah) cannot wet it. The wind weapon (marutah) cannot dry it. Accordingly, the atma is not destroyed 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)

3: “Also, it is not possible to injure the soul at all by the weapons used by you in the battle. That is explained in this verse. Weapons such as swords cannot cut it. The fire weapon cannot burn it. The rain weapon cannot wet it, nor can the wind weapon dry it out.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.23 commentary)

2.24: This is because the soul cannot be broken, burned, dissolved, or dried out (*acchedyo ’yam adāhyo ’yam akledyo ’śoṣya eva ca*). The soul survives in all material conditions and thus moves from one type of material body to another throughout the universe, without ever changing its form or qualities. Be assured that the soul is always eternal and cannot be moved from the body without My sanction (*nityaḥ sarva-gataḥ sthāṇur acalo ’yam sanātanaḥ*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.24, November 28th 1972, Hyderabad](#)

Explanatory note:

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that Kṛṣṇa now enumerates the qualities of the soul

which “definitely prove that the individual soul is eternally the atomic particle of the spirit whole, and he remains the same atom eternally, without change.”

Acchedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “This individual soul is unbreakable ... and can be neither burned...”. Bhānu Svāmī translates it as “The soul cannot at all be cut, cannot be burned...”. (1) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that Kṛṣṇa is enumerating the soul’s qualities that make it invulnerable to Arjuna’s weapons. (2, 3)

Akledyo 'śoṣya eva ca: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “and insoluble ... nor dried.” Bhānu Svāmī translates it as “cannot be moistened or dried.” (1) *Akledyo* means to be made wet, but Śrīla Prabhupāda’s translation brings out a perspective from Baladeva’s commentary: that water cannot dissolve the soul. (2) The word *aśoṣyaḥ*, which means ‘not able to be dried’, describes the quality which makes the soul invulnerable to being withered by Arjuna’s wind weapons (*śoṣayati mārutaḥ*: “withered by the wind”).

Nityaḥ sarva-gataḥ sthāṇur: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “He is everlasting, present everywhere, unchangeable...”, and Bhānu Svāmī as “It is eternal, travelling in all types of bodies, with fixed form...” (1)

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s perspective on *sarva-gataḥ* focuses on the fact that living entities permeate every part of the creation. Baladeva and Viśvanātha focus on the fact that the living entity travels from one type of material body to another throughout the universe. (2, 3) They point out that a soul which is in a human body in one life might be in a beast, bird, celestial, or any other type of body in the next life. These perspectives are not contradictory but merely express the different facets of *sarva-gataḥ*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *sthāṇuḥ* as ‘unchangeable’ and the word *acalaḥ* from the next line as ‘immovable’. On a morning walk he explains that *acalaḥ* means that once the soul is placed in the heart, it cannot be moved. He gives the example of heart transplants. (4) Once the soul is present in the body, in the location of the heart, even if the heart organ is moved, the soul does not move, because it is immovable. (4) Since the soul does move from the body at the time of death, it seems reasonable that Śrīla Prabhupāda means that the soul does not change its position without the Lord’s sanction.

Viśvanātha and Baladeva offer different perspectives. Viśvanātha explains that both *sthāṇuḥ* and *acalaḥ* have the same meaning: stability; and that Kṛṣṇa repeats ‘stability’ to make sure Arjuna clearly grasps this quality. (3) Baladeva adds that though *acalaḥ* means stability, it refers to stability of the soul’s qualities, whereas *sthāṇuḥ* refers to stability of the soul’s form. (2)

Acalo 'yam sanātanaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...immovable and eternally the same”, and Bhānu Svāmī as “and fixed qualities”. (1) *Acalaḥ* has been discussed above. *Sanātanaḥ*, like *nityaḥ* from the previous line, both mean ‘eternal’. (2) Viśvanātha and Baladeva explain that this repetition is not a fault, but intentional to clearly emphasise this unique quality of the soul. (3, 5)

Evidence:

1: “The soul cannot at all be cut, cannot be burned, cannot be moistened or dried. It is eternal, travelling in all types of bodies, with fixed form and fixed qualities.” (Bhānu Svāmī’s translation of Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.24)

2: “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)

3: “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)

4: “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 14th, 1975, in Philadelphia](#))

5: “The Lord, in teaching the nature of the atma with such statements as *avinasi tu tad viddhi*, had used repetition of words with similar meaning in order that the atma, which is difficult to understand, can be easily understood. Thus this is not a fault. All the repeated words can be explained as useful for emphasizing the unique quality of the atma.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.25 commentary)

2.25: Being infinitesimal and extremely subtle, the soul is imperceptible, and since it can be known only through the authority of the scriptures, it is called inconceivable (*avyakto 'yam acintyo 'yam*). The Vedas explain that, unlike the material body, the soul does not undergo changes such as birth or old age, nor does it change its infinitesimal nature to become infinite like the Supreme Soul (*avikāryo 'yam ucyate*). By understanding these truths about the soul with complete certainty (*tasmād evaṁ viditvainaṁ*), you will no longer grieve for the fate of the material body (*nānuśocitum arhasi*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.25, November 29th 1972, Hyderabad](#)

Explanatory note:

Avyakto 'yam acintyo 'yam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...the soul is invisible, inconceivable...”, and Bhānu Svāmī as “...imperceptible, inconceivable...”. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the soul is *avyaktaḥ*—invisible—because of its infinitesimal size, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura ascribes its imperceptibility to its ‘fineness’. (3)

A useful synonym for ‘fine’ is subtle. Thus, a spider’s web is difficult to see because it is very subtle or fine; an idea is difficult to grasp because it is very subtle or fine; and a fragrance is difficult to detect because it is very subtle or fine. Similarly, according to Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, the soul is not perceptible by any of the material senses. (2)

Baladeva explains that the soul is inconceivable—*acintyaḥ*—because there is no material method of understanding it, and Viśvanātha adds that it cannot even be conceptualised. The only source of knowledge about the soul is revealed scripture. (2, 3)

Avikāryo 'yam ucyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “It is said that the soul is ... immutable...”, and Bhānu Svāmī as “...without changes...”. In his word for word, Śrīla Prabhupāda also translates *avikāryaḥ* as unchangeable. Thus, over the course of verses 24 and 25, three different words have been used to describe the soul as unchanging: *sthāṇuḥ*, *acalaḥ*, and *avikāryaḥ*. Baladeva said *sthāṇuḥ* referred to the soul’s unchanging form, and *acalaḥ* to the soul’s unchanging qualities.

In his purport to 2.25, Śrīla Prabhupāda gives two different explanations of what type of change *avikāryaḥ* refers to. One is that it does not undergo the changes like the body, and the second is that it never changes its nature of being infinitesimal to become infinite like the Supreme Lord. In other words, the individual spirit souls never become God.

Regarding the soul not undergoing the same changes as the body, this is the sense in which both Baladeva and Viśvanātha explain *avikāryaḥ*: the soul does not undergo the six changes the material body undergoes. (2, 3) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains this more fully in his purport to Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 2.20:

“The body is subject to six kinds of transformations. It takes its birth from the womb of the mother’s body, remains for some time, grows, produces some effects, gradually dwindles, and at last vanishes into oblivion. The soul, however, does not go through such changes.”

Ucyate means “it is said”. From this comment in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport, I understand Kṛṣṇa is referring to the Vedas:

“The soul is consciousness and conscious – that also is the statement of the Vedas, and we have to accept that.”

Tasmād evaṁ viditvainaṁ / nānuśocitum arhasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body,” and Bhānu Svāmī as “knowing it thus, you should not lament.” Baladeva explains that to the extent one has no doubts about the soul’s nature as explained by Kṛṣṇa, to that extent one will not lament. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “This imperceptible, inconceivable and without changes, knowing it thus, you should not lament.” (Bhānu Svāmī’s translation of Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.25)

2: “The ātma is not perceptible by the material senses (*avyaktaḥ*). It is beyond logic (*acintyaḥ*), being understood only through scriptures. By the scriptures the ātma is understood to be *jñāna-svarūpa*, knowledge itself and a knower of things, and is not subject to the six changes (*avikāryaḥ*).... To the extent that you know the nature of the ātma (*evam veditvā*) with certainty, you will no longer lament.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.25 commentary)

3: “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* 2.24–25 commentary)

2.26: But perhaps you believe, like the Lokāyatikas, that consciousness arises from the combination of matter and is destroyed with the body. Or perhaps, like the Vaibhāṣikas, you think that consciousness exists independently of the body, but that there is no eternal soul (*atha cainam nitya-jātam / nityam vā manyase mṛtam*). Still, there is no cause to mourn the body’s destruction because thousands of tons of chemicals break down regularly and no one grieves (*nainam śocitum arhasi*). Yet I would be surprised if a mighty warrior like you, brought up in the Vedic tradition, adhered to such schools of thought (*tathāpi tvam mahā-bāho*).

[Hear: Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.26, November 30th 1972, Hyderabad](#)

Explanatory note:

Atha cainam nitya-jātam / nityam vā manyase mṛtam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “If, however, you think that the soul [or the symptoms of life] will always be born / and die forever...” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that, having told Arjuna that according to the Vedic concept of the material body and the soul there is no reason to lament, Kṛṣṇa now presents an alternative perspective. (1, 2)

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Śrīla Prabhupāda explain that Kṛṣṇa is referring to two schools of philosophy that existed at that time: the Lokāyatikas and the Vaibhāṣikas. (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda compares the Lokāyatikas to modern scientists who believe that consciousness arises when the material body reaches a certain mature stage of development and is destroyed with the body. In other words, life comes from matter. (1)

Kṛṣṇa's point is that if you think your consciousness is a symptom of the body, which is just a bag of chemicals, there is no reason to lament its destruction. As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport, every day “many tons of chemicals are wasted” and no one grieves for their loss.

The Vaibhāṣikas are akin to modern nihilistic Buddhist schools of thought that accept consciousness as different from the body. However, they do not accept an eternal soul and think that consciousness is destroyed with the destruction of the body. (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that since the soul dies with the body, Arjuna does not have “to be afraid of being affected by sinful reactions due to his killing his grandfather and teacher.”

Tathāpi tvam mahā-bāho / nainam śocitum arhasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “you still have no reason to lament, O mighty-armed.” He splits the first line into ‘you still’ (*tathāpi tvam*), and ‘O mighty-armed’ (*mahā-bāho*), and inserts the last line – ‘have no reason to lament’ (*nainam śocitum arhasi*) in the middle. Baladeva and Śrīla Prabhupāda explain that Kṛṣṇa is being sarcastic when he addresses Arjuna as ‘O mighty-armed’. The point is that Kṛṣṇa does not expect such a great warrior to hold such aberrant views. (1)

Evidence:

1: “Having given his own opinion on why one should not lament for the soul, the Lord now speaks of the opinion of others in order to give other viewpoints. ... the human form composed of the four elements, consciousness arises simply from that, ... That body made of four elements is itself the ātmā. ... This is what the Lokāyatas maintain. The Buddhists, such as the Vaibhāṣikas, maintain that the ātmā is vijñāna svarupa, different from the body, but is still subject to destruction at every point. In both these philosophies there should be no lamentation for the ātmā.... In this philosophy, which claims that the body is the ātmā, you consider that the self, the body, is continually born and dies. ... This is because in these two philosophies there is no fear of sin continuing into next life, since there is no next birth and there is unavoidable creation and destruction of the selves (body), whose very nature is change. The Lord then addresses Arjuna with a mocking tone: O mighty-armed one, you being the best of warriors following Vedic traditions should not hold such wrong views.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.26 commentary)

2: “I have presented to you the conclusive truth according to the scripture. Now I will present the truth according to material vision. Please understand it.’ Then he speaks this verse. If you think that the soul is always born (*nitya jātam*) when the body is born and always dies (*nityam mṛtam*) with the death of the body, you should not lament for it...” (Śārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.26 commentary)

2.27: However, whether or not you accept the soul’s eternality, birth and death are inevitable. If you accept the soul’s eternality, you should know that having taken birth in a material body, it will inevitably leave that body and take another, according to the destiny it creates through its own actions (*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca*). Therefore, since abandoning your duty will degrade you in this life and the next, give up this lamentation and fight (*tasmād aparihārye ’rthe / na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi*).

Explanatory note:

Jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur / dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again.” In his purport, he writes:

“One has to take birth according to one’s activities of life. And after finishing one term of activities, one has to die to take birth for the next.”

In other words, when the soul takes a material birth it performs materialistic activities. Those activities determine the soul’s destiny, including when the soul leaves its current body (dies) and the type of body it accepts next (takes birth).

Tasmād aparihārye ’rthe / na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, / you should not lament.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that there is no point in lamenting the soul’s inevitable departure from one body (death) and acceptance of another body (birth). (1) They both stress that this change will happen whether or not Arjuna fights. (1) Therefore, Arjuna should not degrade himself by deviating from his duty of fighting over something he cannot stop.

Evidence:

1: “The body is redundant and the atma is eternal. Birth is a combination of atma with

previously non-existing senses and body. Death is the separation of the atma from that body with its senses. ... For ... the atma, which attains birth (jātasya) by accepting a body under the laws of karma, death is certain with the destruction of those karmas. After death birth is certain, caused by the karmas of the previous body. This is impossible to avoid (aparihārye). For this reason (arthe), because atma has the very nature of birth and death, you, being learned, should not lament. Even if you decline to fight, these people will die with the exhaustion of their present karmas, but you will have deviated from your duty of fighting.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.27 commentary)

2.28: Even if you think one is the body, there is still no reason to lament (*tatra kā paridevanā*). The elements of the body exist even before they come together to form a body (*avyaktādīni bhūtāni / vyakta-madhyāni bhārata*). After death, only the body disintegrates; but the ingredients continue to exist in a dispersed form (*avyakta-nidhanāny eva*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.28, August 30th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Avyaktādīni bhūtāni / vyakta-madhyāni bhārata: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “All created beings are unmanifest in their beginning, / manifest in their interim state...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that if one thinks the real self is the material body, then there is still no reason to lament. (1, 2) Why?

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains it is because the material ingredients which will manifest the body still exist. Viśvanātha and Baladeva add that the subtle karmic destinies which will shape those ingredients into the next body also exist. (1, 2) In other words, every material body exists in a subtle form before it is manifest through birth. Its subtle form is the dispersed material ingredients that will later come together to manifest it, along with the subtle karmic destiny that is its blueprint.

Avyakta-nidhanāny eva: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “and unmanifest again when annihilated.” When a soul’s current body is dismantled, it continues to have an invisible potential material body. In other words, the soul’s next body is already decided by its karmic destiny, and the ingredients that will constitute that body also exist in fragments. (1, 2) It is simply a matter of time before the next body is manifested.

Evidence:

1: “... the causes of lamentation .. are eliminated ... Devas, humans and animals are not visible before their birth. However, their subtle and gross bodies do exist invisibly in a potential form ... they become visible in the middle period and invisible after death. Even at the time of mahāpralaya these bodies exist in a subtle form through the continued existence in subtle form of karmas and other elements. Thus all living entities' bodies are invisible before birth and after death and are visible in the interval....” (Śārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.28 commentary)

2: “If one thinks that the body is the self, or one thinks that the body is different from atma, there is no need to lament for the destruction of the body, since the elements composing the body are eternal. This is expressed in this verse... The bodies are invisible at the beginning and end because of loss of name and form. They become visible in the middle period because of attaining name and form. The composing elements, however, always remain. Thus the meaning is ‘If the elements in reality remain, then why do you moan due to grief (paridevana)?’” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.28 commentary)

Arjuna thought: I am hearing so many amazing things about the soul. It is both knowledge and the knower; it is infinitesimal yet pervades the body with consciousness; it enters many types of bodies yet remains unchanged by them. This is all astonishing!

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on the commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.

Evidence:

“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 jivais astonishing.” (Gita Bhusana 2.29 commentary)

“What an astonishing thing you are describing! And this is more astonishing: though I am being enlightened by you, my lack of discernment does not go away.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.29 commentary)

2.29: Krishna said: All transcendentalists agree that the soul is amazing. The Paramātmā-realised yogīs who see the soul consider it amazing (*āścarya-vat paśyati kaścid enam*). The Brahman-realised yogīs who are qualified to speak about the soul find it amazing, as do their students who come to hear about it (*āścarya-vad vadati tathaiva cānyaḥ*). Unfortunately, some people fail to understand the truth about the soul despite hearing about it (*śrutvāpy enam veda na caiva kaścit*).

Explanatory note:

Āścarya-vat paśyati kaścid enam / āścarya-vad vadati tathaiva cānyaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Some look on the soul as amazing, / some describe him as amazing...”

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that one who has attained the spiritual master’s mercy and who has a pure heart sees the true nature of the living entity, which has many contradictory qualities. (2)

In these two lines Kṛṣṇa seems to be describing the Paramātmā and Brahman-realised yogīs. The Paramātmā-realised yogī sees the Supersoul and the ātmā, (3) and the Brahman-realised yogī is fixed in transcendental knowledge. He is qualified to teach about the soul because he has realised transcendental knowledge. He is known as a jñānī and a paṇḍita. (4)

Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva explain some of the contradictory qualities of the soul which make it so amazing. (2) For example, it occupies the largest and the smallest bodies; although it is so small, it pervades the entire body; and although it inhabits many different types of bodies, it is not affected by the transformations the bodies undergo. (2)

Āścarya-vac cainam anyaḥ śṛṇoti / śrutvāpy enam veda na caiva kaścit: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “and some hear of him as amazing, / while others, even after hearing about him, cannot understand him at all.” In these two lines Kṛṣṇa seems to describe two types of students of the soul: those who understand and those who misunderstand the teachings: (2)

“Some people who are inclined to hear about the soul may be attending lectures, in good association, but sometimes, owing to ignorance, they are misguided by acceptance of the Supersoul and the atomic soul as one without distinction of magnitude.”

Evidence:

1: “What an astonishing thing you are describing, and this is more astonishing, though I am being enlightened by you, my lack of discernment does not go away.’ ‘Yes, the ātma is truly astonishing.’” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.29 commentary)

2: “Though I have been taught many things by you, who are omniscient, I do not understand the nature of the ātma, which will drive away lamentation. Why is this?... Though the jīva is knowledge itself, it also takes the role of the knower. Though the jīva 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 jīva taught by me is astonishing. That person (*kaścit*) who has attained the mercy of guru and has a pure heart, realizes (*paśyati*) the true nature of this astonishing jīva with contrary qualities (*enam*) ... Similarly, someone speaks of the jīva as astonishing, or speaks about the jīva with astonishment, and hears about the jīva as an astonishing thing, or hears about the jīva with astonishment. Even having heard about the ātma, a person who is not pure in heart (*kaścid*) does not understand about it. Thus the true nature of the jīva is difficult to understand.... One who speaks about the ātma is rare, and a skillful speaker is rare. One who attains the ātma is rare. One who knows from a skillful teacher is rare.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.29 commentary)

3: “This yogi who has achieved samadhi (yoga-yuktatma), seeing both his atma and Paramatama, realizes that Paramatma is all-pervading ...” (Gita Bhusana 6.29 commentary)

4: “So when one is freed from the bodily concept of life, he's called jñānī. Otherwise, ajñānī.... If you are giving your identification on the ground of your body, then you are ajñānī. Jñānī means paṇḍita. Paṇḍitāḥ sama-darsinaḥ.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.13, on November 19th, 1972, in Hyderabad](#))

2.30: In conclusion, O descendant of Bharata, since the soul dwelling within every material body is indestructible (*dehī nityam avadhyo 'yaṁ dehe sarvasya bhārata*), you need not grieve for anyone (*tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam śocitum arhasi*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.30, August 31st 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Dehī nityam avadhyo 'yaṁ / dehe sarvasya bhārata: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O descendant of Bharata, he who dwells in the body can never be slain.” Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that in this verse Kṛṣṇa concludes His teachings on the nature of the soul. (2)

Tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni / na tvam śocitum arhasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Therefore you need not grieve for any living being.” Baladeva summarises that one should not lament for the soul since it is eternal, and one should not lament for the body since it will inevitably be destroyed by its inherent nature. (2) According to Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, Kṛṣṇa’s point is that Arjuna should stop lamenting and fight. (1)

Evidence:

1: “Therefore speak clearly. What should I do and not do?’ ‘Do not lament, fight.’ In two verses Kṛṣṇa explains this.” (Śārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.30 commentary)

2: “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. ... Since this jīva (dehī) situated in the destructible bodies of all living entities (dehe) is eternal and cannot be killed at any time, you should not lament for any of the living entities that have attained bodies, including Bhīṣma (sarva-bhūtāni). You should not lament for the ātmas because they are eternal, and you should not lament for the bodies because they will inevitably be destroyed by their very nature.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.30 commentary)

2.31: Even from the standpoint of what scripture ordains as your duty, you should have no anxiety about fighting (*sva-dharmam api cāvekṣya / na vikampitum arhasi*). The best course is to fight, as that is the religious principle (*dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyo 'nyat*) for kṣatriyas (*kṣatriyasya na vidyate*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.31, September 1st 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Sva-dharmam api cāveksya / na vikampitum arhasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Considering your specific duty as a kṣatriya / ... there is no need for hesitation.” Bhānu Swami translates these two lines as: “Even considering your own duties, / you should not be fearful.” (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that in 2.30 Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that since the soul is eternal, he need not be anxious about fighting. In 2.31 He further explains that Arjuna need not fear fighting because it is his prescribed duty. (2)

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that one who is in the material bodily concept of life must do his varṇāśrama duties as well as his spiritual practices, such as hearing about and glorifying Kṛṣṇa. I understand being in the ‘material bodily concept of life’ to mean identifying one’s happiness with bodily enjoyment and success. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa refers to such persons as sakāma-karma devotees. Sakāma-karma refers to one who does his duty (karma) because he has material desires (sakāma) which he wants to fulfil. Baladeva calls such devotees saniṣṭha devotees. Saniṣṭha devotees are trying to purify themselves, but as they still have material desires they want to satisfy, their path is a gradual one.

Dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyo ’nyat / kṣatriyasya na vidyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...there is no better engagement for you than fighting on religious principles...” Bhānu Swami translates these two lines as: “There is nothing better for the warrior than to fight for the right cause.” (1) According to Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentaries, the right cause is dharma. (2, 3) Dharma refers to one’s scripturally prescribed duties. For a kṣatriya to fight when challenged is prescribed by scripture, and therefore fighting is the correct and most beneficial course of action for a kṣatriya in such circumstances.

Evidence:

1: “Even considering your own duties, you should not be fearful. There is nothing better for the warrior than to fight for the right cause.” (Bhānu Swami’s translation of Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.31)

2: “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.” (Śārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.31 commentary)

3: “...the Lord will now speak to the *sanīṣṭhas* (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)

2.32: Moreover, Arjuna, heroic warriors are happy (*sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha*) when such opportunities come of their own accord (*yadṛcchayā copapannam*), for heaven’s doors open wide (*svarga-dvāram apāvṛtam*) at the time of such righteous battles (*labhante yuddham īdṛśam*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.32, September 2nd 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Yadṛcchayā copapannam / svarga-dvāram apāvṛtam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “...to whom such fighting opportunities / come unsought...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that going to heaven by being slain in battle is much easier than attaining heaven by performing the *Jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice, which is one of the primary sacrifices recommended for attaining heaven. (1, 3)

Sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha / labhante yuddham īdṛśam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O Pārtha, happy are the *kṣatriyas* ... come unsought...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that if a warrior is victorious in battle, he attains fame and kingdom, and if he is killed, he quickly goes to heaven. (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that the warriors slain in battle attain more happiness than the victorious warriors because they will immediately go to heaven without any obstruction. (2)

Evidence:

1: “Fortunate (*sukhinaḥ*) kṣatriyas obtain such battles with great warriors such as Bhīṣma, which come to them without effort—for if they are victorious, they gain fame and kingdom by honest effort, and if they die, they very quickly attain Svarga. ..., whereas by performance of the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice one attains Svarga only after a long time.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.32 commentary)

2: “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)

3: “In the *Vedas* many sacrifices are recommended for elevation to the heavenly planets, especially the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifices. In fact, it is stated that anyone desiring elevation to heavenly planets must perform these sacrifices...” (Bhagavad gīta as it is 2.42-43 purport)

2.33: On the other hand, if you abandon your prescribed duty and refuse to fight (*atha cet tvam imam dharmyam / saṅgrāmaṁ na kariṣyasi*), you will not only lose your reputation and fame (*tataḥ sva-dharmaṁ kīrtiṁ ca*) but also incur sinful reactions for which you will have to suffer in future lives (*hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.33–35, September 3rd 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Atha cet tvam imam dharmyam / saṅgrāmaṁ na kariṣyasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “If, however, you do not perform your religious duty / of fighting...” Having explained the benefits of doing his warrior duty and fighting, in this verse and the next few verses, Kṛṣṇa will explain the problems Arjuna will experience if he does not perform his duty—dharma. (1, 2) Our dharma, or religious duty, is allocated by God Himself and conveyed to humanity via scripture. (3, 4) One of a kṣatriya’s duties is to fight when challenged, even if that means killing his own relative. (5)

Tataḥ sva-dharmam kīrtim ca / hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “...then you will certainly incur sins / for neglecting your duties and thus lose your reputation as a fighter.” Bhānu Swami translates them in the right order as follows: “giving up your duty and the fame you have already attained, / you will instead reap sin.”

Arjuna has many military achievements for which he is famous both among the celestials and mankind. Kṛṣṇa warns him that if he turns his back on this battle, not only will he lose his good reputation in this life, but he will also implicate himself in sin that will cause suffering in future lives. (2)

Evidence:

1: “In four verses he describes the fault in doing the opposite.” (Śārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.33 commentary)

2: “In this and the following verses, the Lord shows the faults in not fighting. Giving up your duty of fighting (*dharmyaṁ saṅgrāmam*) and also the glory attained by pleasing Śiva and killing the Nivātakavacas and others, you will reap only sin by neglect of your duty, since such conduct is forbidden by the Smṛtis. *Na nivartate saṅgrāmād:* One should not turn away from battle. (Manusmṛti 7.88)” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.33 commentary)

3: “*Dharma* means the orders given by the Supreme Lord, or Supreme Being, God.”
([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 4.7, March 27th 1974, Bombay](#))

4: “...one must accept the authority of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and surrender to Him and whatever He says. That is *dharma*. ... the order of Kṛṣṇa is *dharma* ... It may be concluded that *dharma*, religion, refers to that which is ordered in the *Vedas*, and *adharma*, irreligion, refers to that which is not supported in the *Vedas*.”
(Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.40 purport)

5: “The code of sacred duty for warriors ... enjoins that one may have to kill even his own brother. That is indeed a most dreadful law.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.54.40)

2.34: People will constantly speak ill of you, calling you a coward (*akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni / kathayiṣyanti 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 in this way (*sambhāvitasya cākīrtir / maraṇād atiricyate*).

Explanatory note:

Akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni / kathayiṣyanti te 'vyayām: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “People will always speak / of your infamy...” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “The Lord says, ‘Arjuna, if you leave the battlefield before the battle even begins, people will call you a coward.’” 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. (2)

Sambhāvitasya cākīrtir / maraṇād atiricyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...and for a respectable person, / dishonour is worse than death.” In other words, for one who is accustomed to the level of prestige Arjuna has enjoyed, being dishonoured would be worse than being killed. In a lecture, Śrīla Prabhupāda adds that Kṛṣṇa would prefer it if Arjuna were to die than to disgrace himself. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “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.’ ... death is preferable (*atiricyate*) to infamy for one who has attained such a high position (*sambhāvitasya*).” (Gita Bhūṣaṇa 2.34 commentary)

2: “Arjuna is famous as a great fighter. Not only that, he is personal friend of Kṛṣṇa, so much so that Kṛṣṇa has agreed to become his chariot driver. Just try to understand what is his position. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, who is worshiped by Lord Brahmā, govindam ādi-puruṣam tam ahaṁ bhajāmi, He has agreed to drive the chariot of Arjuna on accounts of friendship. Now, we have to imagine how much famous he is. ‘Everyone will say, “Oh, Kṛṣṇa is his so intimate friend that He has agreed to drive his chariot.” This is your reputation all over the world.’ So *sambhāvitasya cākīrtiḥ*. ‘And if you don’t fight now, what people will say? Better you die.’ Kṛṣṇa is advising that ‘Instead of becoming a very good man, nonviolent, you lay down your life. That is My advice. You die. I shall see that you have died, I will be very much pleased.’ This is Kṛṣṇa advising. How much He has become, I mean to say, dissatisfied with the decision of Arjuna, ‘Kṛṣṇa, I am not going to fight this battle.’ So Kṛṣṇa’s last advice is that ‘If you don’t

fight,' better you die before Him. 'I shall be very much pleased.'" Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā
2.33–35, September 3rd 1973, London

Arjuna thought: Why would people criticise me for withdrawing out of compassion and to avoid the sin of destroying my family?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna's thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary.

Evidence:

"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)

2.35: Kṛṣṇa said: No warrior, not even your friends, let alone your enemies, will believe that you left the battle out of compassion. Previously, even your enemies thought highly of your courage and valour (*yeṣāṁ ca tvaṁ bahu-mato*); but all those heroes will think (*maṁsyante tvāṁ mahā-rathāḥ*) that you abandoned the battlefield out of fear of the enemy (*bhayād raṇād uparataṁ*). Thus, they will regard you with contempt, considering you most insignificant (*bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam*).

Explanatory note:

Bhayād raṇād uparataṁ / maṁsyante tvāṁ mahā-rathāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as: "The great generals ... will think / that you have left the battlefield out of fear only..."

In other words, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that no warrior will believe that anyone would abandon a fight out of compassion. They will all think he left out of fear of Karna and other heroes. (1, 2)

Yeṣāṁ ca tvaṁ bahu-mato / bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "...who have highly esteemed your name and fame... / and thus they will consider you insignificant." Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that previously even his enemies thought highly of him, but if Arjuna abandons the battle, even his friends will lose respect for him. (1) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says that other warriors will feel contempt for Arjuna if he abandons the battle. (2)

Evidence:

1: “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)

2: “Mahārathas like Duryodhana will think that you have left the battle for fear of Karṇa and others, not out of compassion for friends. Warriors do not give up battle out of compassion and do so only out of fear of the enemy. Previously those who respected you as a warrior and worthy opponent, possessing many good qualities (*bahu-matah*), will now, at the time of battle, think that you have given up the battle because you are a coward. You will reap intolerable contempt from them.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.35 commentary)

2.36: Your enemies, especially, will insult you (*avācya-vādāṁś ca bahūn / vadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ*), causing you unbearable pain (*tato duḥkha-taram nu kim*) by even disparaging your previous heroic achievements (*nindantas tava sāmāthyam*).

Hear: [Bhagavad-gītā 2.36–37, September 4th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Avācya-vādāṁś ca bahūn / vadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as “Your enemies will describe you / in many unkind words...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this verse brings to a close Kṛṣṇa’s warnings that abandoning the battle will only bring Arjuna infamy and deprive him of any prospect of attaining the heavenly planets in his next life. He adds that the enemies Kṛṣṇa is referring to are Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sons, who will insult Arjuna as being useless. (1)

Nindantas tava sāmāthyam / tato duḥkha-taram nu kim: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “and scorn your ability. / What could be more painful for you?” Baladeva explains that Arjuna’s enemies will even minimise his previous acts of bravery, and that Arjuna will be extremely pained by their mocking words. (1)

Evidence:

1: “Moreover, your enemies (*ahitah*), the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, will criticise your previously recognised bravery, and call you many displeasing words, like ‘barren sesame seed.’ (What a useless person!) What extreme pain you will receive from hearing such displeasing words. Thus the six verses have shown that avoiding the war will bring about infamy and loss of Svarga.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.36 commentary)

Arjuna thought: Since there is no certainty that I will win, why are you insisting that I fight?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on the commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura.

Evidence:

“In this battle, my victory is not even certain. Therefore, why should you encourage this war?” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.37 commentary)

“I am giving up the battle because it is uncertain that I will even be victorious.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.37 commentary)

2.37: Krishna said: Whatever the outcome of this battle, fighting is your best course. If you are killed, you will immediately attain the heavenly realms (*hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṁ*); if you win, you will enjoy sovereignty over the earth (*jītvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm*). Therefore, get up, Arjuna, and fight with determination (*tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛta-niścayaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṁ / jītvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as follows: “...either you will be killed on the battlefield and attain the heavenly planets / or you will conquer and enjoy the earthly kingdom.” Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna’s uncertainty about victory. He explains that both victory and defeat will bring him an auspicious result. (1)

Tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya / yuddhāya kṛta-niścayaḥ: Srila Prabhupada translates these two lines as follows: “O son of Kunti.... Therefore, get up / with determination and fight.” In other words, since both outcomes are favourable, Arjuna should do his duty with firm determination.

Evidence:

1: “I am giving up the battle because it is uncertain that I will even be victorious. Even being defeated and killed, you will attain *Svarga*. Being victorious, you will enjoy the earth. In both cases, you gain.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 2.37 Commentary)

Arjuna thought: You say that by failing to fulfil my duty to fight I will incur sin. But surely that sin is not as bad as the sin of killing brāhmaṇas and my gurus to gain a kingdom.

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentary.

Evidence:

“You have explained by verse 33 and the verses following it, that I will attain sin by not fighting since I will be giving up my duty. But still, I should not fight because sin will arise from killing brāhmaṇas and gurus in a war to gain a kingdom.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 2.38 commentary)

2.38: Kṛṣṇa said: Fight because the Lord has prescribed fighting as your duty (*tato yuddhāya yujyasva*). You must do your prescribed duty whether doing so enhances your personal happiness or causes you distress (*sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā*), or whether it brings profit or loss, victory or defeat (*lābhālābhau jayājayau*). For by always acting as He ordains, you will never incur sin (*naivam pāpam avāpsyasi*)

Explanatory note:

In this verse Kṛṣṇa transitions from speaking about *sakāma-karma*, action performed with material desires, to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, action performed without material desires. (2)

Sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā / lābhālābhau jayājayau: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first line as, “without considering happiness or distress”, and the second line as “loss or gain, victory or defeat”. In this verse, Kṛṣṇa is reviving a theme He first introduced in *Bhagavad-gītā* As It Is

2.15: *sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ*. In effect, Kṛṣṇa is instructing Arjuna to act as a *dhīra*, or one who is transcendently situated—Brahman realised. (3)

Tato yuddhāya yujyasva / naivam pāpam avāpsyasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first half of this couplet as “Do thou fight for the sake of fighting”, and the second half as “and by so doing you shall never incur sin.” In his purport, he further clarifies that ‘fighting for the sake of fighting’ means “fight for the sake of fighting because He desires the battle.” In other words, Arjuna should do his prescribed duty because that duty has been ordained by the Lord. There should be no other material consideration. Whether one anticipates a pleasant or unpleasant outcome, one should always perform one's prescribed duty. By acting exclusively in a mood of obedience to the Lord's directions, one incurs no karmic reactions. (1)

Evidence:

1: “‘It is not so. You will not incur sin by killing them when you are fighting with the desire for liberation.’ This is explained in this verse.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 2.38 commentary)

2: His Holiness Bhānu Swami's note to the *Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* commentary: “The transition from *sakāma-karma* to *niṣkāma-karma*, whose goal is *ātma-jñāna* and liberation, is made in this verse.”

3: "So one who is in the transcendental position, he's *dhīra*. One poet, Kālidāsa, has described *dhīra* to mean: 'Even in the presence of provocation, one who is not disturbed, he's called *dhīra*.'" (Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.12, November 17, 1972, Hyderabad)

Arjuna thought: How is it possible to act without desiring something?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna's thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary.

Evidence:

“How does one become inclined to fighting, charity, or other actions without desire for results? It is difficult. ‘Understand that attachment to the infinite bliss of the ātmā is the inspiration...’” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 2.38 commentary)

2.39: Kṛṣṇa said: So far, I have presented sāṅkhya—an analysis of the soul’s nature (*eṣā te ’bhihitā sāṅkhye*)—to help you understand why you should practise niṣkāma-karma-yoga and perform your God-given duties without selfish, material motives. However, because your heart is still impure, you are either uncertain about your duty or too materially attached to perform it. I will therefore explain buddhi-yoga (*buddhir yoge tv imām śṛṇu*), which encompasses both regulative devotional service and niṣkāma-karma-yoga. Through regulated devotional practices such as śravaṇam and kīrtanam, you will develop the wisdom to discern the Lord's desire and the spiritual taste that inspires you to carry it out selflessly. Thus, Arjuna, by practising these two aspects of buddhi-yoga, you will free yourself from karmic bondage (*buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha / karma-bandhaṁ prahāsyasi*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.39, September 12th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Eṣā te ’bhihitā sāṅkhye: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Thus far I have described this knowledge to you through analytical study.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that Kṛṣṇa now concludes His teaching on jñāna-yoga by perfectly analysing the true nature of matter and spirit—sāṅkhya. (1, 2) Such analysis is meant to awaken the transcendental knowledge that I am not this body, but an eternal spirit soul. This is known as Brahman-realisation. (3) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that impurities in the heart may prevent realisation of the soul from awakening, despite hearing that analysis. (1) Therefore, Kṛṣṇa decides to teach Arjuna buddhi-yoga. (1, 2)

Buddhir yoge tv imām śṛṇu: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Now listen as I explain it in terms of working without fruitive results.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa supplies the Sanskrit term for working without fruitive results: niṣkāma-karma-yoga. (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, however, equates buddhi-yoga with bhakti, and Śrīla Prabhupāda corroborates this definition in his purport:

“Lord Kṛṣṇa made an analytical description of the soul just to bring Arjuna to the point of buddhi-yoga, or bhakti-yoga.”

In what sense is buddhi-yoga both niṣkāma-karma-yoga and bhakti? Śrīla Prabhupāda further explains in his purport:

“One should therefore understand that buddhi-yoga means to work in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, in the full bliss and knowledge of devotional service. One who works for the satisfaction of the Lord only, however difficult such work may be, is working under the principles of buddhi-yoga and finds himself always in transcendental bliss.”

In other words, when one experiences transcendental happiness through performance of devotional practices such as śravaṇam and kīrtanam, only then is it possible to perform one’s worldly duties as service to the Lord without any material motivation. Thus, buddhi-yoga requires both the performance of regulative devotional service and the execution of the worldly duties prescribed for us by scripture. (6)

Buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha / karma-bandham prahāsyasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O son of Pṛthā, when you act in such knowledge / you can free yourself from the bondage of works.” Bhānu Swami translates these two lines as follows: “By engaging your intelligence in this yoga of bhakti-yoga, you will become free from the bondage of karma.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives greater clarity on both translations in his purport:

“This buddhi-yoga is clearly explained in Chapter Ten, verse ten, as being direct communion with the Lord, who is sitting as Paramātmā in everyone’s heart. But such communion does not take place without devotional service.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s translation says, “when you act in such knowledge.” What is that knowledge? According to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport, it is the knowledge which the Lord promises in Bhagavad-gītā 10.10 that He will communicate to us from within our heart.

Bhānu Swami’s translation is “By engaging your intelligence in this bhakti-yoga...” This explains what we must do to receive that guidance from the Lord. As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains, “such communion does not take place without devotional service.” As Viśvanātha explains, we must first absorb our intelligence in bhakti. (2) How we do this is explained in Bhagavad-gītā 10.9:

“The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss

In summary, in this verse Kṛṣṇa explains that the only way we can act in this world without receiving any karmic reactions is if we receive the correct intelligence from the Lord in our heart. That intelligence comes by regularly discussing His teachings with other like-minded spiritual aspirants in a manner which is satisfying for all involved. This conclusion is further corroborated by the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.3.30–31:

“One should learn how to associate with the devotees of the Lord by gathering with them to chant the glories of the Lord. This process is most purifying. As devotees thus develop their loving friendship, they feel mutual happiness and satisfaction. And by thus encouraging one another they are able to give up material sense gratification, which is the cause of all suffering. The devotees of the Lord constantly discuss the glories of the Personality of Godhead among themselves. Thus they constantly remember the Lord and remind one another of His qualities and pastimes. In this way, by their devotion to the principles of bhakti-yoga, the devotees please the Personality of Godhead, who takes away from them everything inauspicious.”

Arjuna’s partial understanding:

Arjuna does not have access to the ācāryas' commentaries. Thus, he only partially understands buddhi-yoga. (4, 5, 6) He thinks Kṛṣṇa is referring only to devotional practices such as śravaṇam and kīrtanam. (4) He does not realise that Kṛṣṇa is using the term more broadly to include niṣkāma-karma-yoga. (5, 6) Hence his questions at the beginning of chapter 3. (4, 5)

Below is my reconstruction of how Arjuna may have understood this verse:

“Thus far I have analysed the nature of the soul (eṣā te ’bhihitā sāṅkhye). Now listen as I explain the process of buddhi-yoga—regulative devotional service, beginning with practices such as śravaṇam and kīrtanam (buddhir yoge tv imāṁ śṛṇu). By becoming steady in these devotional practices, Arjuna (buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha), you will become free from the karmic reactions that bind you to repeated birth and death (karma-bandhaṁ prahāsyasi).” (4, 5, 6)

Evidence:

1: “Sāṅkhya means that by which truth is completely explained (samyak khyāyate) that by

which the true nature of *ātma* is presented. ... 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*. ..." (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.39 commentary)

2: "“In this verse, Kṛṣṇa concludes the *jñāna-yoga* which He has just taught. *Sāṅkhya* means ‘that by which true knowledge of things (*vastu-tattva*) is perfectly (*samyak*) revealed (*khyāyate*).’ ... Now hear about the intelligence resulting from *bhakti-yoga* (*yoge*) which will now be explained. Equipped with this intelligence, which is absorbed in the subject of *bhakti-yoga*, you will give up *saṁsāra* (*karma-bandham*).” (*Śārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.39 commentary)

3: “The other process is *jñāna*—knowledge. Knowledge means analytical survey of your existence—distinguishing spirit from matter. That is the process of knowledge gradually you will come to that knowledge that you belong to none of these things: you are spirit soul. That is Brahman realization..” (Lecture, December 1st 1969, London)

4: “Sometimes Kṛṣṇa consciousness is misunderstood to be inertia, and one with such a misunderstanding often withdraws to a secluded place to become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious by chanting the holy name of Lord Kṛṣṇa. ... Arjuna also thought of Kṛṣṇa consciousness or *buddhi-yoga*, or intelligence in spiritual advancement of knowledge, as something like retirement from active life and the practice of penance and austerity at a secluded place.” (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 3.1 purport)

5: “Having surrendered to the superiority of *bhakti* which is transcendental to the *guṇas*, over *jñāna-yoga* and *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* in previous statement ... Arjuna in a friendly manner censures the Lord ‘If fixed intelligence (*buddhi*), *bhakti*, transcending the *guṇas*, is superior (*jyāyasī*), then why do you engage me in this terrible action in the form of war?’” (*Śārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 3.1 commentary)

6: “There are two types of *yoga* explained in this section of the chapter: in the form of *bhakti*, including hearing chanting and other such activities, and in the form of activities offered to the Lord without personal desire (*niṣkāma-karma-yoga*)...” (*Śārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.40 commentary)

2.40: One never loses the benefits of regulative devotional service (*neha abhikrama-nāśo 'sti*). Procedural mistakes, such as mispronouncing mantras, do not cause adverse reactions (*pratyavāyo na vidyate*). Even briefly practising devotional service, beginning with śravaṇam and kīrtanam (*sv-ālpam apy asya dharmasya*), protects one from descending into a fearful state of existence, whether in a lower species of life or on the hellish planets (*trāyate mahato bhayāt*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.40, September 13th 1973, London](#)

Explanatory note:

Nehābhikrama-nāśo 'sti: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, “In this endeavor there is no loss...” *Iha* refers to the endeavour (abhikrama) under discussion: buddhi-yoga. According to Viśvanātha, from this verse (2.40) through 2.45, Kṛṣṇa uses the term buddhi-yoga to refer specifically to regulative devotional practices such as śravaṇam and kīrtanam, rather than the niṣkāma-karma-yoga aspect. (1) In other words, whatever little wisdom and attraction to Kṛṣṇa one develops, even after a short period of practice, is a permanent benefit to the living entity. (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda illustrates this principle with the example of Ajāmila, showing how even a little taste for śravaṇam, kīrtanam, and the other practices of bhakti can save one from the most dangerous type of fear. (4, 5)

Pratyavāyo na vidyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, “there is no ... diminution...” In his purport, he explains that ‘diminution’ means that there is benefit even if the endeavour remains incomplete. (2) In any material endeavour, if one does not achieve full success, there is no benefit from the effort. For example, one may work hard to develop a business. If one succeeds, one achieves some financial reward, but if one fails, one gains nothing. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that this is not the case with regulative devotional service. Even if one does not attain the goal, one still derives benefit from the effort. (2)

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura give a further explanation of the word *pratyavāyaḥ*. They say it also means that if one makes mistakes while practising, there are no negative ramifications. (1, 2) In other Vedic practices, mistakes in procedure, including mispronouncing mantras, could have serious consequences. The history of King Nrga illustrates this principle. He practised the vow of charity and inadvertently gave the same cow

to two different brāhmaṇas. Consequently, he was condemned to take birth as a lizard (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.64). Bhakti, however, is different. Even if one makes procedural mistakes, there is no adverse reaction. (1, 2)

Sv-alpam apy asya dharmasya: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *sv-alpam* as, "...and a little advancement on this path..." In his purport, he explains that whatever progress we do make we never lose. (3) In other words, even if one purifies one's consciousness by only 1% in this life, one will begin the next life from that same point of spiritual development. As for *dharmasya*, it refers to the endeavour introduced by iha in the first line.

Trāyate mahato bhayāt: This line means "can protect one from the greatest type of fear." In other words, even a little effort to hear and chant about Kṛṣṇa will save one from the greatest type of fear. (3) What is this greatest fear (*mahato bhayāt*)? Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes explains this fear as descent into hell (4) and at other times as descent into a lower species of life. (3) I have combined these two perspectives.

Evidence:

1: "There are two types of yoga explained in this section of the chapter: in the form of bhakti, including hearing chanting and other such activities, and in the form of activities offered to the Lord without personal desire (*niṣkāma-karma-yoga*), which is expressed starting with the verse *karmaṇy evādhikāras te* (BG 2.47). Before that, however, bhakti is discussed.... And the bhakti found in karma-yoga in the form of offering to the Lord is present there just makes karma lose its uselessness and bear material fruits.... Therefore, in this verse and in the verses till 45, bhakti characterised only by hearing, chanting, and other devotional acts, practiced only to attain the sweetness of the Lord's lotus feet, is being defined. Of course, *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* will also be defined. Both of these are indicated by the word *buddhi-yoga* mentioned in verse 39. In the phrase *dadāmi buddhi-yogaṁ* indicates bhakti-yoga. In the phrase *dūreṇa hy avaram karma buddhi-yogād dhanañjaya* (BG 2.49), the word *buddhi-yoga* indicates *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. Thus, this present verse is a glorification of the process of bhakti with hearing and chanting, which is beyond the modes of nature. In bhakti-yoga there is no destruction (*nāśaḥ*), and there is also no sin incurred (*pratyavāyaḥ*), if the practice has just began (*abhikrama*) and then stopped. If karma-yoga, however, is begun and then stopped,

there is both destruction of the fruits of karma-yoga and sinful reaction as well..” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.40 commentary)

2: “There is not destruction of its power to give results for a person who begins (*abhikrama*) the practice of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* (*iha*).....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 (*pratyavāyah*) for imperfection in chanting mantras or other components..... And because the process has the goal of *ātmā* and includes utterance of the name of the Lord, no sin is incurred.” (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 2.40 commentary)

3: “As confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.40), *svalpam 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.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.6.1 purport)

4: “Ajāmila, for example, was saved by the Supreme Personality of Godhead from the greatest danger, that of going to hell.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 8.5.48 purport)

5: “The eagerness to hear about God is the first qualification of a devotee eligible for entering the kingdom of God.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.2.16 purport)

2.41: O beloved of the Kurus, the intelligence of those who engage properly and consistently in regulative devotional service, especially *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*, becomes fully focused on awakening their eternal loving relationship with the Lord. Through these practices, they gradually recognise that the Supreme Lord’s instructions are for their highest welfare and develop a spiritual taste for hearing and discussing them (*vyavasāyātmikā buddhir / ekeha kuru-nandana*). However, those whose practice of *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam* is inconsistent or improper will continue to have many desires and pursue many goals, and thus they fail to develop the single-minded determination required to awaken the soul’s pure devotion for the Lord (*bahu-śākhā hy anantās ca / buddhayo ’vyavasāyinām*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.40-45, December 13th 1968, Los Angeles](#)

Explanatory note:

Vyavasāyātmikā buddhir: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this phrase as “Those who are on this path are resolute in purpose.” In his word-for-word synonyms, he translates vyavasāyātmikā as “resolute in Kṛṣṇa consciousness” and buddhiḥ as “intelligence.”

According to Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, Kṛṣṇa is referring specifically to attentive śravaṇam and kīrtanam in this section of the chapter (1), for it is primarily through these two practices that resolute intelligence develops (4, 5, 6, 7, 9). Through such practice, one gradually becomes convinced that Kṛṣṇa's instructions are always for one's highest welfare and develops a spiritual taste for hearing and discussing them. The combination of conviction and spiritual taste enables one to perform one's prescribed duties as niṣkāma-karma-yoga.

Ekeha kuru-nandana: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, “their aim is one. O beloved child of the Kurus...” Viśvanātha explains that this singular aim is to awaken one's eternal loving relationship with the Lord (2). Thus, when one's devotional practices are performed properly, one gradually gives up other desires, such as wealth, position, or even liberation (8), and becomes singularly focused on this one goal.

Bahu-śākhā hy anantāś ca / buddhayo 'vyavasāyinām: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, “the intelligence of those who are irresolute is many-branched.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that many Vedic practices are designed to help the practitioner attain different goals, such as material prosperity, elevation to heaven, or even liberation from material existence (3, 10). Viśvanātha further clarifies that unlimited desires produce an intelligence divided among unlimited goals (10). In practice, this may mean pursuing wealth and position, then seeking heavenly enjoyment, and finally even liberation, as each successive goal fails to satisfy the heart. Thus, birth after birth, one never develops the singular determination required to awaken devotion to the Lord.

Evidence:

1: “Therefore, in this verse and in the verses till 45, bhakti characterised only by hearing, chanting, and other devotional acts, practiced only to attain the sweetness of the Lord's lotus feet, is being defined.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.40 commentary)

2: “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* 2.41 commentary)

3: “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)

4: “Therefore, with one-pointed attention, one should constantly hear about, glorify, remember and worship the Personality of Godhead, who is the protector of the devotees.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 1.2.14)

5: “Without hearing sufficiently and properly, no one can make any progress by any of the methods of practice.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 2.2.36 purport)

6: “In the association of pure devotees, discussion of the pastimes and activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is very pleasing and satisfying to the ear and the heart. By cultivating such knowledge, one gradually becomes advanced on the path of liberation, and thereafter he is freed, and his attraction becomes fixed. Then real devotion and devotional service begin.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 3.25.25)

7: “To hear and explain them is more important than reading them. One can assimilate the knowledge of the revealed scriptures only by hearing and explaining. Hearing is called *śravaṇa*, and explaining is called *kīrtana*. The two processes of *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* are of primary importance to progressive spiritual life. Only one who has properly grasped the transcendental knowledge from the right source by submissive hearing can properly explain the subject.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 1.1.6 purport)

8: “If one is infected with the desire for material enjoyment or material liberation, he cannot rise to the platform of pure loving service unto the Lord, even though he may superficially render devotional service according to the routine regulative principles.” (Caitanya Caritamrita Madhya 19.175)

9: “When we speak of hearing and chanting, it means that not only should one chant and hear of the holy name of the Lord as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa (or systematically the sixteen names Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare),

but one should also read and hear the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in the association of devotees. The primary practice of *bhakti-yoga* will cause the seed already sown in the heart to sprout, and by a regular watering process, as mentioned above, the *bhakti-yoga* creeper will begin to grow.” (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 2.2.30 purport)

10: "The intelligence of others, however, is not one. Those intellects are unlimited (anantāḥ) rather than one, because of the unlimited desires to fulfil in karma-yoga. The intellects have infinite branches because of the infinity of actions in their practices." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.41 commentary)

Arjuna thought: If the Vedas teach both material and spiritual goals, why do those pursuing material rewards not become as purified and spiritually resolute as those engaged in devotional practices?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentary.

Evidence:

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

2.42: Kṛṣṇa said: Arjuna, since they do not understand the Vedas’ true purpose, they become attached to the Vedas’ poetic mantras and elaborate rituals for the fulfilment of material desires and attainment of the heavenly planets (*pravadanty avipaścitaḥ veda-vāda-ratāḥ pārtha*), mistaking these for the highest goal of life (*yām imām puṣpitām vācam / nānyad astīti vādinaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Yām imām puṣpitām vācam / pravadanty avipaścitaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this in reverse as, “Men of small knowledge / are very much attached to the flowery words of the Vedas.” In his purport, he explains that this is a reference to the *karma-kāṇḍa* section of the Vedas, which makes attractive promises of eternal pleasure in the heavenly planets. Although these promises are not meant to be taken literally, since the heavenly planets are not eternal,

less intelligent people take them as such and thus fail to realise that there is something greater: the spiritual abode. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura compares these promises to poisonous flowers because, although they are alluring, they ultimately harm those drawn to them by diverting their intelligence from the true path to eternal happiness. (2) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that it is due to faults in their own hearts that they become attracted to this section of the Vedas instead of the spiritual sections. (1)

Veda-vāda-ratāḥ pārtha / nānyad astīti vādinaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first half of this couplet as “very much attached to” and the second half as “they say that there is nothing more than this.” Viśvanātha seems to imply that such people speculate that even God is governed by the laws of the material energy, for they do not believe in a spiritual abode beyond the heavenly realm in the material cosmos. (2)

Evidence:

1: “No, this fixed intelligence will not arise because they have faults in the heart.’ ... Those with little knowledge (*avipaścita*) speak words (*imām vācam*) such as *jyotiṣṭomena svarga-kāmo yajeta*: ‘A person desiring *svarga* should perform the *Jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice.’ ... They think that these are the best words in the Vedas. Intelligence fixed on *ātmā* does not arise in the minds of those people whose consciousness is stolen by these words. ... The words are like flowering creepers which are full of poison, appearing attractive, but with no beneficial purpose. ... They say that there is no supreme eternal happiness in the form of liberation attained through spiritual knowledge of *jīva* and God. There is nothing other than reaching *svarga* through *kāmya-karma* (*nānyad asti*).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.42 commentary)

2: “This verse speaks of the persons with wavering intelligence involved in *sāṅkhya-karma*, who are very dull-witted. They speak excellently (*pra vadanti*) pleasant words of the Vedas, which are like a poisonous flowering plant. Since their consciousness has been deluded by those words, they are not endowed with fixed intelligence (*tayāpahṛta-cetasām*, *vyavasāyātmikā-buddhiḥ*, *samādhau na vidhīyate*). ... They speak in this way because they are fools (*avipaścitaḥ*) because they interpret the words of the Vedas (*veda-vāda-ratāḥ*) ... They say there is no God other than this (*nānyad asti*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.42 commentary)

2.43: They cannot even imagine there could be anything greater than enjoying sense gratification (*kāmātmānaḥ svarga-parā*); therefore, they perform the rituals (*kriyā-viśeṣa-bahulāṁ*) meant for acquiring power, good birth, and other material rewards (*janma-karma-phala-pradām / bhogaiśvarya-gatiṁ prati*).

Explanatory note:

Kāmātmānaḥ svarga-parā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Being desirous of sense gratification... for elevation to heavenly planets...” Baladeva explains that because such people have a strong desire for sense gratification, they cannot even consider there could be anything better than this. (1)

Janma-karma-phala-pradām: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “resultant good birth, power, and so forth.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that these teachings promise good birth, fruitive results, and other material rewards. (1, 2)

Kriyā-viśeṣa-bahulāṁ / bhogaiśvarya-gatiṁ prati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first half of this couplet as “...recommend various fruitive activities...”, and the second half as “for... power, and so forth. Being desirous of sense gratification and opulent life...” Due to their strong material desires, they are only interested in the rituals which promise external rewards. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “...Their hearts are possessed by desires for material happiness (*kāmātmānaḥ*). If that is the case, they have no desire for liberation at all. Rather, they consider *svarga* alone... to be the best goal (*svarga-parāḥ*). Being so afflicted by desires, nothing else occurs in their minds. They speak... words which describe many rituals, such as Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifices (*kriyā-viśeṣa*), directed towards the attainment (*gatiṁ*) of enjoyment (*bhoga*)... and lordship (*aiśvarya*)... They speak words which continually promise to bestow (*pradām*) birth... (*janma*)... and attain fruits (*phalam*)...” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.43 commentary)

2: “They speak words about various rites, giving them results, in terms of power and enjoyment, words which give good results of action in terms of birth.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.43 commentary)

2.44: Material wealth and power allure people who do not recognise their transient nature (*bhogaiśvarya-prasaktānām / tayāpahṛta-cetasām*). Preoccupied with attaining these ephemeral goals, they fail to develop the resolute, focused intelligence required for self-realisation (*vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ / samādhau na vidhīyate*).

Explanatory note:

Bhogaiśvarya-prasaktānām / tayāpahṛta-cetasām: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “those who are too attached to sense enjoyment and material opulence” / “and who are bewildered by such things...”. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this refers back to the desire for power and enjoyment mentioned in the previous verse. He further explains that people become overly attached because their power and enjoyment do not appear to be temporary. (2) In other words, when one is in a position of power and enjoyment, it can seem that one will always remain in that position. It does not occur to one that these circumstances could ever change or that one might find oneself in a position of vulnerability and suffering.

Vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ / samādhau na vidhīyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “the resolute determination for devotional service to the Supreme Lord” / “does not take place.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that one who is overly attracted to sense enjoyment cannot firmly orient their mind towards self-realisation—the realisation of the soul’s eternal relationship with the Supreme Lord. (1, 2)

Evidence:

1: “...Those whose minds are attracted by the flowery words, who are attached to power and enjoyment, do not have the determined intelligence fixed firmly on one point (*samādhau*) on only the Supreme Lord.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.44 commentary)

2: “...Those people attached to the power and enjoyment mentioned in the previous verse are absorbed in those things, because those objects do not manifest their temporary nature. Their discriminating knowledge (*cetasām*) has been plundered by attractive but deceptive words (*tayā apahṛta*). Fixed intelligence does not take place in their minds (*samādhau*).” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.44 commentary)

Arjuna thought: Whether or not one is attracted to material opulence, performing one's prescribed duties inevitably yields material benefits. How, then, can engaging in one's prescribed duties help one rise above the bodily concept of life and become fixed in spiritual consciousness?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna's thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary.

Evidence:

“‘Even in performing activities without expecting results, the actions will bring about their results by the very nature of action. How then is it possible for those executing actions without desire to develop fixed intelligence?’ This verse answers.” (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.45 commentary)

2.45: Kṛṣṇa said: The karma-kāṇḍa section of the Vedas teaches how to enjoy material prosperity, and the jñāna-kāṇḍa section teaches how to escape the suffering of birth and death. These two sections of the Vedas address desires governed by the modes of material nature (*traī-guṇya-viṣayā vedā*). You should transcend the modes of nature by following the highest section of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, which teach how to attain self-realisation by awakening the soul's loving relationship with the Supreme Lord (*nīstrai-guṇyo bhavārjuna*). Then you will become free of the dualities of material existence, such as love and hate, happiness and distress, and realise your eternal spiritual nature (*nīrdvandvo nitya-sattva-stho / nīryoga-kṣema ātmavān*).

Explanatory note:

Traī-guṇya-viṣayā vedā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, “The Vedas deal mainly with the subject of the three modes of material nature.” All three ācāryas explain that the major portions of the Vedas are the karma-kāṇḍa (the portion that deals with how to work for material progress) and the jñāna-kāṇḍa (the portion that deals with attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and death). Since both these sections deal with pursuing one's own interests, they are within the modes of material nature. (1, 2)
Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that together they encompass the four goals of

material religiosity: dharma (religion), artha (economic development), kāma (sense gratification), and mokṣa (liberation). (1) Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that because most people are interested in pursuing their own interests, the Vedas attract them by showing them how to fulfil their desires. Then, as they develop faith in the Vedas and their intelligence matures, they become more receptive to the Upaniṣads, the section of the Vedas dealing with transcendence. (2)

Nistrai-guṇyo bhavārjuna: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, “O Arjuna, become transcendental to these three modes.” Viśvanātha explains Kṛṣṇa is urging Arjuna not to concern himself with following the teachings of the karma-kāṇḍa and jñāna-kāṇḍa sections of the Vedas, but instead follow the teachings of Vedānta, which culminate in bhakti, devotion to God. (1)

With this instruction, Kṛṣṇa dismisses all the objections Arjuna raised in Chapter One that were rooted in the teachings of the karma-kāṇḍa and jñāna-kāṇḍa sections of the Vedas. He implies that these teachings are less important than the bhakti teachings revealed in Vedānta, namely the Upaniṣads, the Vedānta-sūtras, and their natural commentary, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. (3, 4) Bhagavad-gītā is also considered an Upaniṣad. (5)

Nirdvandvo nitya-sattva-stho: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: “Be free from all dualities.” Nirdvandvaḥ means be free of duality. In his fluent translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda does not seem to explicitly translate nitya-sattva-sthaḥ. However, he does in his word-for-word translation. There he renders nitya-sattva-sthaḥ as “in a pure state of spiritual existence”. Baladeva explains that this means, “You should observe the eternally non-transforming state of the jīva, nitya-sattva-stha.” (2) This suggests Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna that he should tolerate the dualities of material existence like happiness and distress, by keeping his mind focused on the fact that he and everyone else are eternally unchanging jīvas, not the changing body and mind.

Niryoga-kṣema ātmavān: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: “Be free ... and from all anxieties for gain and safety, and be established in the self.” All the ācāryas agree that niryoga-kṣema means don’t be concerned about gaining something or preserving what you have. (1, 2) However, they offer different perspectives on ātmavān. Śrīla

Prabhupāda intimates that it means being completely dependent on Kṛṣṇa's good will. Viśvanātha suggests it means to be fixed in the intelligence given by Kṛṣṇa, or in other words, to let Kṛṣṇa's teachings be his guiding light. (1) Baladeva says it means to meditate on Paramātmā. (2) Taken together, they present a picture of someone who fixes his mind on the Supreme Lord, is guided by Him and depends on Him, and thus stops worrying about how to gain something or preserve the status quo.

Evidence:

1: *"Give up all concern with dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa, and simply take shelter of bhakti-yoga. The Vedas primarily reveal karma, jñāna, and other subjects within the three modes of material nature for the sake of self-interest... Do not concern yourself with those Vedic statements dealing with karma and jñāna... Rather, always follow the Vedic teachings concerning bhakti... By following the path of nirguṇa-bhakti... you will transcend the paths governed by the three guṇas... You will become free from the dualities... become free from the desire to acquire what you lack and preserve what you possess... You will become fixed in the intelligence I have given, being established in Me." (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.45 commentary)*

2: *"Trai-guṇyam refers to actions composed of the three guṇas. The karma-kāṇḍa section of the Vedas deals with actions performed within the three modes for self-enjoyment. However, you should become fixed in Vedānta... The Vedas first inspire faith... by awarding the results people seek. Following the Vedas with such faith, they eventually attain true intelligence through the Upaniṣads... You should tolerate the opposites... You should observe the eternally non-transforming state of the jīva... make no attempts to attain what you do not yet have, and make no attempts to protect what you already possess... Be a person whose object of meditation is Paramātmā." (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.45 commentary)*

3: "Caitanya Mahāprabhu continued, "The Vedānta-sūtra is the summary of all the Upaniṣads; therefore whatever direct meaning is there in the Upaniṣads is also recorded in the Vedānta-sūtra, or Vyāsa-sūtra." (Caitanya Caritamṛta Madhya 6.133)

4: “The Brahma-sūtra means Vedānta-sūtra. And the real commentary and explanation is Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, of Vedānta.” ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.22–25, on December 13th, 1970, in Indore](#))

5: “The Bhagavad-gītā is also one of the Upaniṣads, and therefore Bhagavad-gītā is known as Gītopaniṣad.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 10.2-3](#))

2.46: Just as a large reservoir of water can fulfil all the needs that would otherwise require many small wells (*yāvān artha uda-pāne / sarvataḥ samplutodake*), the Upaniṣad section of the Vedas can also fulfil the goals of the *karma-kāṇḍa* and *jñāna-kāṇḍa* sections (*tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu / brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.46-62, December 16th 1968, Los Angeles](#)

Explanatory note:

Yāvān artha uda-pāne / sarvataḥ samplutodake: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as follows: “All purposes served by a small well” / “can at once be served by a great reservoir of water.” The metaphor is based on how in Indian villages different wells were used for different purposes, such as drinking water, bathing, washing clothes, and washing cooking utensils. Different wells were used for different purposes to avoid contaminating the water. However, a large overflowing reservoir of water could serve all these purposes, as the constantly flowing water would not become contaminated. Similarly, all the different goals described throughout the Vedas can be fulfilled by exclusive devotion to the Supreme Lord. (2)

Tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Similarly, all the purposes of the Vedas.” These “purposes of the Vedas” include the many worldly benedictions and the promise of elevation to the heavenly planets, as well as the promise of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The *karma-kāṇḍa* section of the Vedas teaches elaborate rituals for worshipping different demigods to secure different worldly benedictions and elevation to the heavenly planets. The *jñāna-kāṇḍa* section teaches spiritual concepts and recommends austerities and meditative practices for achieving liberation from material existence. This type of liberation is impersonal because one simply becomes free from material bondage but does not realise one’s eternal loving relationship with the Lord. (3) The point is that all one’s desires

for either material happiness or liberation from material entanglement will be fulfilled simply by awakening the soul's devotion for the Lord.

Brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this line as “can be served to one who knows the purpose behind them.” Baladeva and Viśvanātha explain that *brāhmaṇasya* means one who has studied the Vedas. Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *vijānataḥ* as “who is in complete knowledge.” *Brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ*, therefore, refers to one who has studied the Vedas and understood their true purpose, which is to attain self-realisation, or to awaken the soul's devotional relationship with the Supreme Lord. (1)

Evidence:

1: "... whatever serves the goal of attainment of knowledge of *ātmā*, that much alone from the Vedas is used by the person who studies the Vedas, *brāhmaṇasya*, and desires knowledge of *ātmā*, *vijñāta*. That intelligence will thus appear quickly in the mind by knowledge of the Upaniṣads, in one's particular branch of the Vedas." (*Gītā-bhūṣaṇa* 2.46, commentary)

2: “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)

3: “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-gītā 10.1-3, March 6th, 1973, in Calcutta](#))

Arjuna thought: Since Kṛṣṇa wants me to attain transcendental knowledge (jñāna), I must follow the path of the great sages by practising rigorous penance and austerity.

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna's thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary.(1) The *jñānīs'* practice involves much austerity and penance. (2)

Evidence:

1: "If jñāna is attained by performance of prescribed duties, then sense control and other practices must also be practised, since they are included in jñāna. But that takes a great effort." (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.47 commentary)

2; "*Jñānīs*, they also want something, liberation, to merge into the Supreme. There is want. They undergo austerities, penances, *āruhya kṛcchreṇa param padaṁ tataḥ* [SB 10.2.32]. They are severe, but there is a desire: "I shall become one with God." (Paṇḍāl Lecture, November 14th 1971, Delhi)

2.47: Kṛṣṇa said: It is better for you to perform your prescribed duty to purify your heart of material attachment (*karmaṇy evādhikāras te*). Do not think that prescribed duties are meant to secure material enjoyment (*mā phaleṣu kadācana*), nor that you can determine what results your duties will produce (*mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr*). These mistaken beliefs will entangle you in karmic reactions. Furthermore, never think that the best way to avoid karma is to abandon your prescribed duties, for that will implicate you in sinful karma (*mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi*).

Explanatory note:

Karmaṇy evādhikāras te / mā phaleṣu kadācana: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "You have a right to perform your prescribed duty..." / "... but you are not entitled to the fruits of action." In his word-for-word section, he translates *adhikārah* as "right" in the sense of "entitlement". Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura translates *adhikārah* as "qualification," and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa as "suitability." In other words, Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna that performing his prescribed duties is his appropriate entry point onto the path of self-realisation. (1, 2)

Viśvanātha explains that Kṛṣṇa had previously spoken about jñāna-yoga and bhakti-yoga. He discussed jñāna in verses 11–30, where He emphasised that the wise do not lament for either the living or the dead because they understand that the self is distinct from the material body. This is the classic meditation of the jñānīs. He then discussed bhakti in verses 2.40–45.

Now, in verse 47, Kṛṣṇa introduces niṣkāma karma-yoga because He considers that Arjuna currently lacks the purity of heart to authentically operate on the platform of jñāna-yoga or to dedicate himself fully to the practices of bhakti-yoga. Knowing that Arjuna's heart is nevertheless sufficiently pure to practise selfless action, He instructs him in niṣkāma karma-yoga. (1)

Before moving to the next section, let us address a question which may naturally arise: if prescribed duties are not meant to help us lead more enjoyable and happier lives, what are they meant for? The answer is given in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: they are meant to please Kṛṣṇa. When the Lord is pleased our consciousness is gradually purified and we eventually reach the point of spiritual enquiry which is the subject matter of Vedānta—the concluding portion of the Vedas.

Mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr / mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities” / “and never be attached to not doing your duty.” He writes in his purport: “Arjuna was therefore advised by the Lord to fight as a matter of duty without attachment to the result. His nonparticipation in the battle is another side of attachment. Such attachment never leads one to the path of salvation. Any attachment, positive or negative, is cause for bondage. Inaction is sinful.”

In other words, the reason for karmic bondage is neither doing one's prescribed duties nor renouncing one's prescribed duties. The reason is our motivation for performing or renouncing them. Whether we perform our prescribed duties or renounce them, if we identify with the material body and mind and desire to secure the happiness of this false conception of ourselves, then we will become entangled in karmic reactions whatever we do. As Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his purport to 2.47, "One who is attached to the result of his work is also the cause of the action. Thus, he is the enjoyer or sufferer of the result of such actions."

In other words, the false conception that I am the doer and the enjoyer is the reason one becomes karmically responsible for one's actions. (6) Likewise, the cause of self-realisation is

neither working nor renouncing work, but rather giving up this false conception of ourselves and acting on the platform that "I am Kṛṣṇa's eternal servant, and my duty is to satisfy Him."

Arjuna's preferred outcome is that his loved ones survive the battle and live happily. (3) Kṛṣṇa tells him to perform his God-given duty without attachment to the result. (2) If we neglect our God-given responsibilities because we want to avoid their consequences, that negative desire also implicates us in karmic reactions. Any action done with a desire to enjoy the result will produce either sinful or pious karmic reactions. (2, 7)

Baladeva corroborates this point. He adds that just as working with a desire for results further implicates us in the cycle of birth and death, performing our God-given duties without any desire for the results enables us to realise our spiritual nature. (2)

Evidence:

1: "The Lord wanted to speak about the processes of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma-yoga* to Arjuna... 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... And do not become attracted to non-performance of your duty or to doing sin, *akarmaṇi*. Rather, you should hate doing that.'" (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā 2.47 commentary)

2: "'If *jñāna* is attained by performance of prescribed duties, then sense control and other practices must also be practised, since they are included in *jñāna*. But that takes a great effort.' ... 'You, whose dharma is to fight... have the privilege for actions such as fighting. But I am the enjoyer of those actions. You do not have jurisdiction over the results. This mentality of attachment to the results causes bondage. I am the enjoyer of the results.' ... 'You should not be the cause of those results. Actions performed with desire are linked to their results... But because you may fear that results cause bondage, do not develop fondness (*saṅga*) for avoidance of work. Rather, show repulsion to that. Actions performed without desire will produce within themselves steadiness in *jñāna*...'" (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.47 commentary)

3: "Excessive attachment for material things puts a man in such a bewildering condition of existence. ... Arjuna envisioned only painful reverses in the battlefield – he would not be happy even by gaining victory over the foe. ... When a man sees only frustration in his expectations, he thinks, 'Why am I here?' ... Arjuna thought that his victory in the battle would only be a cause of lamentation for him." (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 1.30, purport)

4: “O best among the twice-born, it is therefore concluded that the highest perfection one can achieve by discharging the duties prescribed for one’s own occupation according to caste divisions and orders of life is to please the Personality of Godhead.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.13)

5: “Athāto brahma jijñāsā. This is the beginning of Vedānta-sūtra. ...So if, after executing your duties very properly, if you do not develop your consciousness to know about yourself or the Supreme Self, then whatever you have done, it is simply waste of time. That's all. Śrama eva hi kevalam. Simply laboring after nothing. That's all.” (Conway Hall Lecture, September 15th, 1969 in London)

6: “The person in false ego takes all credit for doing everything independently, and that is the symptom of his nescience.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 3.27 purport)

7: “For one who is not renounced, the threefold fruits of action – desirable, undesirable and mixed – accrue after death. But those who are in the renounced order of life have no such result to suffer or enjoy.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 18.12)

2.48: When you fully purify your heart of material attachment, you will experience a profound bliss by concentrating your mind on the Supersoul. Then, Arjuna, you will always be able to perform your prescribed duty as niṣkāma-karma-yoga, free from material attachment (*yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*), and thus your mind will no longer be agitated by either success or failure (*saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañ-jaya / siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā*). Acting with such equanimity is called attaining yoga, connecting with the Supreme (*samatvaṁ yoga ucyate*).

Explanatory note:

Yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi: Srila Prabhupada translates this as “Perform your duty equipoised...”
Kuru karmāṇi means do your prescribed duty, and he translates *yoga-sthaḥ* as “equipoised”.

The word *sthaḥ* means to be established in or situated in. In more modern language, it could be understood as being grounded in. Baladeva explains that in the compound *yoga-sthaḥ*, *yoga* means equality in any circumstance, regardless of the outcome of one's endeavour. Together, *yoga-sthaḥ* means being anchored in the yogic principle of equanimity. Thus, *kuru karmāṇi* means do your duty. In effect, Kṛṣṇa is instructing Arjuna to live a responsible, dutiful life and not swerve from his God-given duties because of external factors. (1, 3)

Sanṅam tyaktvā dhanañ-jaya / siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā: Srila Prabhupada translates this as "...O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment..." / "...to success or failure..." Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that abandoning attachment includes giving up both the desire for the results of one's work and the conception that one is the independent doer. (3, 6) Srila Prabhupada explains that the living entity's duty is merely to obey the Lord and execute his God-given duties with the knowledge that external results, such as victory and defeat, do not depend on him but on Kṛṣṇa. Visvantha says one should see all external results equally, and Baladeva says one should not be attached to any particular outcome. (3)

From this I conclude that the *niṣkāma-karma* yogi remains equipoised in all circumstances because he is convinced that simply by doing his duty in obedience to the Lord, whatever result ensues is the arrangement of the all-good Lord. Since the Lord is all-good, His will is ultimately for everyone's benefit, regardless of how it might appear to those who are sensually attached. Knowing this, the yogi does not waver from his duty, regardless of the anticipated outcome.

Samatvaṁ yoga ucyate: Srila Prabhupada translates this as "Such equanimity is called yoga." Baladeva says that the ability to remain equipoised in all circumstances is called *yoga* because it arises from intense concentration of the mind. (3) In *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* 5.21 we learn that intense concentration on the Lord results in unlimited spiritual bliss:

"Such a liberated person is not attracted to material sense pleasure but is always in trance, enjoying the pleasure within. In this way the self-realized person enjoys unlimited happiness, for he concentrates on the Supreme."

One who experiences this profound inner happiness remains equipoised amid material dualities—such as heat and cold, happiness and distress, and success and failure—because he is indifferent to material pleasure.

Arjuna is a prime example of this principle. Although, during the battle of Kurukṣetra, he experienced intense grief when his grandfather fell on the bed of arrows and when his teacher Droṇācārya was killed, he nevertheless maintained his focus on Kṛṣṇa's instructions and was thus able to continue doing his duty. Similarly, after Kṛṣṇa's worldly departure, Arjuna regained control of his mind by concentrating on Kṛṣṇa's teachings in the Bhagavad-gītā. (8)

Arjuna's partial understanding:

Although Kṛṣṇa's intended meaning becomes clear when His words are carefully scrutinised with the help of the ācāryas' commentaries, Arjuna heard these instructions for the first time while standing on the battlefield, on the brink of a fratricidal war and in a highly anxious state. Consequently, by the Lord's will, he only partially understood Kṛṣṇa's intent. (4)

Arjuna's misunderstanding centred on three key points.

First, Arjuna had already understood *buddhi-yoga*, first mentioned in 2.39, as referring only to devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*. (2, 7) Therefore, when Kṛṣṇa instructed him to perform his prescribed duty while established in yoga (*yoga-sthaḥ*), Arjuna naturally thought Kṛṣṇa meant he should maintain those devotional practices while carrying out his duty. (7)

Second, Arjuna did not yet realise that Kṛṣṇa was specifically instructing him to perform his duty as a kṣatriya gr̥hastha—a married warrior. He still thought he could abandon the battlefield and adopt the scripturally recognised life of a retired kṣatriya, living as a mendicant in the forest. In old age, many kṣatriyas retired in this way. For example, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Canto 4, Chapter 23 describes how Mahārāja Pṛthu retired from his kingly duties to live in the forest. It is therefore understandable that Arjuna thought Kṛṣṇa was instructing him to retire into the forest, where, as a vānaprastha, he could focus on devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*. (7)

Third, *samatvaṁ yoga ucyate* literally means, "Such equanimity is called yoga." Throughout many of the verses that follow, Kṛṣṇa describes one who remains equal-minded in all circumstances as one who has attained Brahman realisation. Normally, Brahman realisation is associated with the contemplative path of jñāna-yoga, which requires a secluded life of austerity and meditation in the forest. Viśvanātha Cakravartī

Ṭhākura confirms in his commentary on 3.2 that Arjuna understood Kṛṣṇa's use of the word *yoga* to refer to *jñāna-yoga*. This reinforced his misunderstanding that Kṛṣṇa was instructing him to retire into the forest and practise regulative devotional service to cultivate transcendental knowledge. (4, 5)

Thus, by the beginning of Chapter 3, Arjuna, feeling confused, asked Kṛṣṇa why He was asking him to fight in this terrible war if He thought *buddhi-yoga*—practising regulative devotional service—was better than doing one's occupational duties. (4, 7)

Thus, Arjuna would likely have understood Kṛṣṇa's instruction as follows:

Do your duty along with your devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam* (*yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*). In this way, Arjuna, give up material attachment (*saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya*). Remain undisturbed by success or failure (*siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā*). Such equanimity, attained by renounced self-realised sages, is called *yoga* (*samatvaṁ yoga ucyate*).

Evidence:

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

2: “Therefore, in this verse and in the verses till 45, *bhakti* characterised only by hearing, chanting, and other devotional acts, practised only to attain the sweetness of the Lord's lotus feet, is being defined. Of course, *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* will also be defined. Both of these are indicated by the word *buddhi-yoga* mentioned in verse 39. In the phrase *dūreṇa hy avaram karma buddhi-yogād dhanañjaya* (BG 2.49), the word *buddhi-yoga* indicates *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.40 commentary)

3: “Giving up desires for results and giving up the thought of being the doer (*saṅgaṁ tyaktvā*), being situated in *yoga*, perform such duties as fighting. By desiring results, you become entangled in *māyā*, and by thinking yourself the doer, you steal the quality of independence which belongs to the Lord. ... 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-*

stha means ‘being equal to all events (*samatvam*)’ because it takes the form of intense concentration of the mind.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.48 commentary)

4: “O scion of Bharata, O conqueror of the foe, all living entities are born into delusion, bewildered by dualities arisen from desire and hate.” (Bhagavad-gita As It Is 7.27)

“You throw me into an ocean of doubt. You bewilder my intelligence by those words which are a mixture of many meanings (*vyāmiśreṇa*). Though You have spoken about action (*karmaṇy evādhikāras te*), You also speak of *jñāna* using the word *yoga* in such statements as *yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi ... samatvaṁ yoga ucyate* (BG 2.48) and *buddhi-yukto jahātiha ... yogah karmasu kauśalam* (BG 2.50). And You speak only of knowledge in such statements as *yadā te moha-kalilaṁ buddhir vyatitariṣyati* (BG 2.52). ...”

5: Bhānu Swami’s note to *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā*: “Confusion arises in Arjuna’s mind because of the use of the words ‘buddhi’ and ‘sama’, which are associated with *jñāna*. In *karmaṇy evādhikāras te* the Lord also speaks about complete renunciation of the fruits. And by the end of Chapter Two Kṛṣṇa shows that *niṣkāma-karma* matures into *jñāna*.”

6: “The Lord again states here that it is most difficult to separate the material mind from its objects because the material mind by definition considers itself to be the doer and enjoyer of everything. It must be understood that giving up the material mind does not mean giving up all mental activities, but instead means purifying the mind and engaging one’s enlightened mentality in the devotional service of the Lord.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.13.26 purport)

7: “Arjuna also thought of Kṛṣṇa consciousness or *buddhi-yoga*, or intelligence in spiritual advancement of knowledge, as something like retirement from active life and the practice of penance and austerity at a secluded place. In other words, he wanted to skillfully avoid the fighting by using Kṛṣṇa consciousness as an excuse. But as a sincere student, he placed the matter before his master and questioned Kṛṣṇa as to his best course of action.” (Bhagavad-gita As It Is 3.1 purport)

8: “Now I am attracted to those instructions imparted to me by the Personality of Godhead [Govinda] because they are impregnated with instructions for relieving the burning heart in all circumstances of time and space. Sūta Gosvāmī said: Thus being deeply absorbed in thinking of the instructions of the Lord, which were imparted in the

great intimacy of friendship, and in thinking of His lotus feet, Arjuna’s mind became pacified and free from all material contamination.” (Srimad bhagavatam 1.15.27-28)

2.49: By working to fulfil material desires, including the desire for liberation, one becomes further entangled in the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, Arjuna, O winner of wealth, work solely for the Supreme Lord’s pleasure through niṣkāma-karma-yoga (*dūreṇa hy avaram karma / buddhi-yogād dhanañ-jaya*). Make what I have just taught your guiding principle (*buddhau śaraṇam anviccha*), for those who seek to enjoy the fruits of their work squander their valuable lives (*kṛpaṇāḥ phala-hetavaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Dūreṇa hy avaram karma / buddhi-yogād dhanañ-jaya: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first line as “Keep all abominable activities far distant ...” and the second as “by devotional service ...”. The ācāryas explain that abominable activities—*avaram karma*—are those performed with material desire, including the desire for liberation. (1, 2) In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

“Except for work in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, all activities are abominable because they continually bind the worker to the cycle of birth and death.”

Baladeva and Viśvanātha specify that *buddhi-yoga* in this verse refers to *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*—doing one’s occupational duties as an offering to the Lord. (1, 2) Baladeva explains that by acting in *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, one will gradually realise one’s transcendental nature—Brahman realisation. (2)

One might ask why someone who strives for liberation simply implicates himself in repeated birth and death. The answer is that one may attain brahman-realisation by practising severe austerities, but unless one satisfies the Supreme Lord, one will again fall into the cycle of birth and death. (4, 6)

Buddhau śaraṇam anviccha: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...and in that consciousness surrender unto the Lord.” *Buddhau*—in that consciousness—refers to the truths Kṛṣṇa has just spoken in verses 2.47 and 2.48. *Śaraṇam* means following the

Lord's instructions. One might think, 'My material conditioning is so strong that I am unable to obey the Lord as I should. Perhaps spiritual realisation is beyond my reach.' Kṛṣṇa adds anviccha—try. We just need to try. Even if we do not always achieve perfect surrender, Kṛṣṇa simply says, 'try'—do your best. (8) Thus the entire line—buddhau śaraṇam anviccha—means that Arjuna should try to make the teachings imparted in verses 2.47 and 2.48 the guiding principle of his intelligence.

One might question the value of trying if one has little hope of succeeding. The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam answers this question. If one succeeds, one will attain self-realisation, but even if one does not, one's sincere efforts still mitigate the material suffering one is karmically destined to endure. (9)

Kṛpaṇāḥ phala-hetavaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "Those who want to enjoy the fruits of their work are misers." He explains that a miser is one who squanders valuable assets. The human form of life is a valuable asset because it is the only form in which the living entity can end entrapment in the cycle of birth and death and awaken to an eternal blissful life. (3) Baladeva explains why a miser wastes the valuable opportunity afforded by the human form of life. He says they forfeit the greater happiness of realising the ātmā because they are allured by insignificant material happiness. (2) The superiority of spiritual realisation over material enjoyment is beautifully illustrated by Dhruva Mahārāja. After he saw the Lord, Dhruva said: "I had been searching out some pieces of broken glass, but instead I have found the most valuable jewel." (7) Material rewards, however attractive they may appear, are insignificant compared with the opportunity afforded by human life to attain loving devotional service.

Arjuna's partial understanding:

When this verse is understood with the help of the commentaries of the ācāryas, we hear a very clear directive to act in niṣkāma-karma-yoga. (1, 2)

However, as explained in the explanatory note to 2.39, Arjuna does not fully understand buddhi-yoga. He thinks it refers only to contemplative devotional practice and does not realise that Kṛṣṇa is using the term more broadly to include niṣkāma-karma-yoga. This

misunderstanding is reinforced by his own preference not to fight. Consequently, he begins to think that devotional practice and selfless action are two separate paths. (5)

Below is my reconstruction of how Arjuna would probably have understood this verse:

“Completely give up all ghastly worldly duties (dūreṇa hy avaram karma) and instead focus on practising regulative devotional service, Arjuna (buddhi-yogād dhanañ-jaya). By trying to lead a contemplative life of devotion, you will be able to fully surrender to the Lord (buddhau śaraṇam anviccha). Those who engage in worldly works that produce material results are like misers, for they waste the valuable opportunity of the human form of life (kṛpaṇāḥ phala-hetavaḥ).”

By seeing the verse from his perspective, we are better able to understand why he asks the questions recorded in Bhagavad-gītā 3.1–2.

Evidence:

1: “The actions done with material desire (avaram karma) are far inferior to niṣkāma-karma-yoga, offered to the Supreme Lord (buddhi-yogāt). Take shelter of niṣkāma-karma-yoga (buddhau). In this verse, buddhi-yoga refers to niṣkāma-karma-yoga, rather than bhakti-yoga.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī, 2.49 commentary)

2: “Kāmya-karma, which causes problems such as birth and death, is far inferior (dūreṇa avaram) to niṣkāma-karma (buddhi-yogād), which brings about the understanding (buddhi) of the true nature of ātmā. Because of this (hi), take shelter of understanding the ātmā (buddhau śaraṇam anviccha)—take shelter of performing niṣkāma-karma-yoga. ... Those who desire results (phala-hetavaḥ) ... are unfortunate and miserable, kṛpaṇa ... The misers, greedy for some insignificant morsel of happiness from their hard-earned wealth, cannot give up their wealth, and are thus cheated of the great happiness of giving. Those persons who perform kāmya-karmas, greedy for insignificant results from their great toil in performing actions, are similarly cheated of the great happiness of realizing the ātmā. This is the indication of the word kṛpaṇa, or miser.” (Gītā-bhūṣaṇa, 2.49 commentary)

3: “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)

4: “Others, however, who want to fulfill desires even up to the limit of liberation, what to speak of material success, never attain peace. The fruitive workers, the salvationists, and also the yogīs who are after mystic powers are all unhappy because of unfulfilled desires. But the person in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is happy in the service of the Lord, and he has no desires to be fulfilled. In fact, he does not even desire liberation from the so-called material bondage.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is, 2.70 purport)

5: “Having surrendered to the superiority of bhakti which is transcendental to the guṇas, over jñāna-yoga and niṣkāma-karma-yoga in previous statement ... Arjuna in a friendly manner censures the Lord ‘If fixed intelligence (buddhi), bhakti, transcending the guṇas, is superior (jyāyasī), then why do you engage me in this terrible action in the form of war?’” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā, 3.1 commentary)

6: “The *jñānīs* and *yogīs* may rise to the highest position, Brahman realization, but because of their lack of devotion unto the lotus feet of the Lord, they again fall down into material nature.” (Śrīmad Bhagavatam 4.23.11 purport)

7: “In the Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya there is another example, forwarded by Mahārāja Dhruva. He says there, ‘My dear Lord, I have practiced austerities and penances because I was desiring to receive something from You, but in exchange You have allowed me to see You, who are never visible even to the great sages and saintly persons. I had been searching out some pieces of broken glass, but instead I have found the most valuable jewel. I am therefore fully satisfied, my Lord. I do not wish to ask anything more from Your Lordship.’” (Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 46)

8: “The word *anīśvara* indicates that because of one’s past sinful activities and bad habits one may not immediately be able to completely extinguish the enjoying spirit. The Lord here encourages such a devotee not to be overly depressed or morose but to remain enthusiastic and to go on with his loving service. ...” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.27–28 purport)

9: “Revival of the dormant affection or love of Godhead does not depend on the mechanical system of hearing and chanting, but it solely and wholly depends on the causeless mercy of the Lord. When the Lord is fully satisfied with the sincere efforts of the devotee, He may endow him with His loving transcendental service. But even with the prescribed forms of hearing and chanting, there is at once mitigation of the superfluous and unwanted miseries of material existence.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.7.6 purport)

2.50: On the other hand, by performing all one's duties in the spirit of niṣkāma-karma-yoga, one is liberated from all the pious and sinful reactions accumulated since time immemorial (*buddhi-yukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte*). Therefore, try to cultivate the necessary knowledge and expertise to act without incurring karmic reactions (*tasmād yogāya yujyasva / yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*).

Explanatory note:

Buddhi-yukto jahātīha: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “A man engaged in devotional service rids himself ... even in this life.” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura infers that *buddhi-yuktaḥ* refers to niṣkāma-karma-yoga, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa states this explicitly. (1) *Jahātīha* is a compound of two words: *jahāti*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda translates as “can get rid of”, and *iha*, which he translates as “in this life”. Thus the line means that by acting with the intelligence of niṣkāma-karma-yoga, one becomes free, even in this life. (1) In other words, one does not have to wait until death to become liberated.

Ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...of both good and bad reactions...” When one faithfully performs one’s prescribed duties for personal benefit, whether that be material happiness or liberation, one still accrues good karma, which keeps one in the realm of birth and death. However, when one performs those same duties solely for the Lord’s pleasure, one incurs neither good nor bad karma. Baladeva further explains that one also becomes free from past karmic reactions, enabling one’s elevation to the transcendental platform. (1)

Tasmād yogāya yujyasva / yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates the first half as “Therefore strive for yoga...”, and the second half as “...which is the art of all work.” Although,

in his word-for-word translation, he renders *yujyasva* as “be so engaged”, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa clarify that it means “endeavour” or “strive for.” (1, 3) In other words, it may take time to practise *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* correctly, but one should learn how to do so and keep practising what one has learned. Why does it take time to learn and practise *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*? Because, as the last line explains, it is a *kauśalam* which Baladeva and Viśvanātha explain means “skill.” (1, 3) Bhānu Swami explains that the skill lies in acting without incurring karmic reactions. (4) In other words, a conditioned soul does not spontaneously act in *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. One must cultivate the spiritual intelligence required for *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* by learning its principles and repeatedly trying to put them into practice. Like any skill that requires cultivation, at first one may fail, but gradually one will fail less and less until one has mastered the skill.

Arjuna’s partial understanding:

Although Kṛṣṇa is continuing His explanation of the *niṣkāma-karma-yoga* aspect of *buddhi-yoga*, Arjuna still thinks *buddhi-yoga* refers only to devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*. Consequently, he understands *buddhi-yuktaḥ* to mean one who is fully engaged in those devotional practices. Likewise, he takes Kṛṣṇa's instruction, *tasmād yogāya yujyasva*, as an exhortation to perfect one's practice of devotional service rather than to become skilled at working without incurring karmic reactions—*niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. Below is my reconstruction of Arjuna’s likely understanding of this verse:

“One who remains fully engaged in devotional practices (*buddhi-yukto jahātīha*) is purified of all pious and sinful reactions accumulated since time immemorial (*ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte*). Therefore, engage yourself fully in regulative devotional service (*tasmād yogāya yujyasva*), which is the best method for avoiding karmic reactions (*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*).”

Evidence:

1: “This verse speaks of the great power of the *buddhi-yoga* (*niṣkāma-karma-yoga*) just mentioned. That person who performs his actions with intelligence directed in all activities (*iha*) towards renunciation of the primary results in action and towards maintaining equal nature when either attaining or not attaining any related results (*buddhi-yuktaḥ*) destroys (*jahāti*) both good and bad reactions (*sukṛta-duṣkṛte*) accumulated from beginningless time in

the past.... Therefore, strive for (*yujyasva*) this *buddhi-yoga* which has been described. This engagement in action (*yoga*)... is a skill (*kauśalam*), because it transforms actions which normally are a cause of bondage into causes of liberation.” (*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.50 commentary)

3: “Therefore, endeavour for the yoga as described here (*yogāya yujyasva*). Between all actions done with or without desire (*karmasu*), action performed with indifference to results (*yogaḥ*) is a skill (*kauśalam*).” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.50 commentary)

4: Bhānu Swami’s note to *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.50: “Skill here means that action is performed but does not accrue reactions.”

2.51: Many great sages and devotees have practised niṣkāma-karma-yoga to free themselves from karmic reactions (*karma-jam buddhi-yuktā hi / phalam tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ*). They all attained freedom from the cycle of birth and death in the material world (*janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ*), and returned to the spiritual abode, Vaikuntha, where there is no misery (*padam gacchanty anāmayam*).

Explanatory note:

Karma-jam buddhi-yuktā hi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “By thus engaging in devotional service to the Lord...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this devotional service refers to niṣkāma-karma-yoga. He says that *buddhi-yukta* denotes the intelligence by which one acts without attachment to results. (1) Taken together, these points indicate that when, through śravaṇam and kīrtanam, one understands that one is an eternal spirit soul, a part and parcel of the Supreme Spirit, meant to serve Him with love, one engages in niṣkāma-karma-yoga.

Phalam tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...great sages or devotees free themselves from the results of work...”. Baladeva explains that *manīṣiṇaḥ*—translated by Śrīla Prabhupāda as “great sages or devotees”—refers to self-realised souls (1), and Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasises that this means they have realised their spiritual nature in relation to the Supreme Lord. In other words, by practising niṣkāma-karma-yoga, one attains self-realisation.

Janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "...become free from the cycle of birth and death...". Baladeva explains that such a self-realised person is no longer obliged to take birth in the material world. (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that he becomes eligible for Vaikuṇṭha. In other words, when he leaves his present body, he can enter the spiritual abode, Vaikuṇṭha.

Padam gacchanty anāmayam: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "...attain the state beyond all miseries [by going back to Godhead]." Baladeva explains that the realisation of these devotees encompasses both Brahman and Paramātmā, and that it is through Paramātmā realisation that they can enter Vaikuṇṭha. (1) Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that in Vaikuṇṭha there are no material miseries, no influence of time, and no danger.

Arjuna's partial understanding:

Since Arjuna does not yet understand that *buddhi-yoga* includes *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, he would understand this verse slightly differently. Unaware that Kṛṣṇa is telling him to do his duty of fighting as *niskama-karma yoga*, he thinks Kṛṣṇa is telling him to become a sage and engage only in devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*. Below is my reconstruction of how Arjuna might have understood this instruction:

By always engaging in devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*, one is freed from karmic reactions born of work (*karma-jaṁ buddhi-yuktā hi*). Great sages and devotees thus give up fruitive materialistic work (*phalaṁ tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ*), and by so doing, they are freed from karmic reactions (*janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ*) and go to Vaikuṇṭha, where there is no suffering (*padam gacchanty anāmayam*).

Evidence:

1: "Being thus intelligent (*buddhi-yuktaḥ*).....theyrealize the *ātmā*....(*manīṣiṇaḥ*). Then, becoming free from the bondage of birth, these persons attain the place free of suffering (*anāmayam padam*), *Vaikuṇṭha*. ... knowledge of *ātmā* is the cause of knowledge of *Paramātmā* (which is the direct cause of attaining *Vaikuṇṭha*)...." (*Gītā Bhūṣaṇa* 2.51 commentary)

Arjuna thought: How will I know when my intelligence is directing me to act for self-realisation rather than for material gain?

Explanatory note:

This question is inspired by Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's commentary.

Evidence:

"When will my intelligence become directed towards ātmā as I perform *niṣkāma-karma*?"

(*Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* 2.52 commentary)

2.52: Kṛṣṇa said: When one's intelligence is purified of all misconceptions and resulting poor judgement (*yadā te moha-kalilaṁ / buddhir vyatitariṣyati*), one will no longer be either attracted or repulsed by any worldly topic, whether heard in the past or to be heard in the future (*tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ / śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*).

Explanatory note:

Yadā te moha-kalilaṁ / buddhir vyatitariṣyati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines together as "When your intelligence has passed out of the dense forest of delusion..." All the commentators agree that before transcendental realisation can awaken, one's intelligence must first become completely released from (*vyatitariṣyati*) the ensnaring influence of the dense forest of delusion (*moha-kalilaṁ*). (1, 2)

Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *moha* both as illusion and delusion. An illusion is when something appears to be different from what it actually is. For example, magicians create illusions. A delusion is a false belief arising from an illusion. Thus, *moha* encompasses both English terms: seeing something as being other than what it is and then arriving at false beliefs. What is the *moha* that must be dispelled? The false belief that we can enjoy or control the material energy independently of Kṛṣṇa. (3) According to Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, this is the root cause of our material addictions, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that the solution to such material cravings is to practise *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*: introducing into our lives some attempt to do what pleases the Lord solely for His pleasure. (2)

Tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ / śrotavyasya śrutasya ca: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as follows:

"you shall become indifferent to all that has been heard and all that is to be heard." All three

ācāryas unpack nirvedam to mean disinterest. Śrīla Prabhupāda also uses the word ‘callous’ in his word-for-word translation. In other words, tadā gantāsi nirvedam means that once our intelligence is disentangled from illusion, we shall no longer be allured or repulsed by topics concerning material enjoyment that we have heard about in the past or will hear about in the future. (1, 2) In the language of Bhagavad-gītā 7.27, we shall be free from both icchā and dveṣa: neither desiring to attain material enjoyment nor feeling aversion towards it. In today's world, this includes the countless forms of media that encourage us to pursue material enjoyment—mundane social media posts, videos, and similar content. According to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, attraction to such topics is one of the greatest obstructions to self-realisation. (4)

Evidence:

1. "When your intelligence has... completely... surpassed the denseness of illusion (*moha-kalilam*), you will become indifferent to all the subjects about which you have heard in the past and will hear in the future." (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.52 commentary)
2. "When your intelligence completely transcends... the dense forest of ignorance (*moha-kalilam*)... then you will become indifferent (*nirvedam*) to topics concerning... material results, whether heard in the past or to be heard in the future... While performing *niṣkāma-karma*, a person gradually becomes indifferent to the results of action, and in this way his intelligence becomes absorbed in ātmā." (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.52 commentary)
3. “*Moha* means to misunderstand that there is anything without Kṛṣṇa. That is *moha*, illusion.”
([Room Conversation on June 30th, 1971 in Los Angeles](#))
4. "There is no stronger obstruction to one's self-interest than thinking other subject matters to be more pleasing than one's self-realization." (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.22.32)

2.53: At that time, one will also be indifferent to the flowery promises of the karma-kāṇḍa section of the Vedas (*śruti-vipratipannā te / yadā sthāsyati niścalā*), for one's intelligence will be sthita-prajñatā—absorbed in one's eternal relationship with the Supreme Lord (*samādhāv acalā buddhis / tadā yogam avāpsyasi*).

Explanatory note:

Śruti-vipratipannā te: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as, "When your mind is no longer disturbed by the flowery language of the Vedas..." Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura understands this to include all material topics as well as the karma-kāṇḍa section of the Vedas (1,3). In other words, when the mind is no longer distracted by hearing about all sorts of material topics (vipratipannā), including the karma-kāṇḍa sections of the Vedas (śruti). The phrase "flowery language of the Vedas" does not occur in this verse. However, by using this phrase, Śrīla Prabhupāda highlights the contrast between the bewildered man described in Bhagavad-gītā 2.42 (puṣpitām vācam) and the jīvan-mukta described here.

Yadā sthāsyati niścalā / samādhāv acalā buddhiḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "..., and when it remains fixed in the trance of self-realisation..." According to Viśvanātha, niścalā indicates that the mind is no longer drawn to external agitation or stimulation (1). This is because the mind is fully absorbed in the trance of the soul's eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa (samādhāv acalā) (1). Śrīla Prabhupāda confirms that this verse refers to Bhagavan realisation:

"To say that one is in samādhi is to say that one has fully realized Kṛṣṇa consciousness; that is, one in full samādhi has realized Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān."

Tadā yogam avāpsyasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as "then you will have attained the divine consciousness." Here, yoga denotes the perfection of yoga: realisation of the soul's relationship with the Supreme Lord (1,2). Baladeva and Viśvanātha use terms such as sthita-prajñatā, jñāna-niṣṭhā and jīvan-mukta to denote this perfectional stage of self-realisation (1,2). By introducing the term sthita-prajñatā in his commentary on 2.53, Baladeva helps the reader understand why, in the next verse, Arjuna asks about its characteristics (2).

Evidence:

1: "At that time you will become detached from hearing about all sorts of material and Vedic subjects because of being adverse to the agitation created by these subjects, *niścalā*. And your intelligence will be fixed in *samādhi*, *samādhau acalā*... At that time, by achieving direct realization, you will achieve the status of *jīvan-mukta*, *yogam avāpsyasi*." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.53 Commentary)

2: “...When your intelligence, completely perfected, *vipratipannā*, through Śruti statements... and when the intelligence becomes devoid of doubt and contrary conceptions... and remains fixed without motion, *niścalā*, in the mind, *samādhi*... then you will attain the yoga characterized by realization of *ātma*... Activities performed without craving for results produce steadiness in knowledge, *jñāna-niṣṭhā*, also known as *sthita-prajñatā*. The *sthita-prajñatā* or *jñāna-niṣṭhā* is the realization of *ātma*.” (*Gita Bhūṣaṇa* 2.53 Commentary)

3: “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)

2.54: Arjuna said (*arjuna uvāca*): O Kṛṣṇa, what is the primary characteristic of a *sthita-prajñatā* who has realised his relationship with the Supreme Lord (*sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā / samādhi-sthasya keśava*)? How does he think or speak in different circumstances (*sthita-dhīḥ kim prabhāṣeta*), and how does he restrain and engage his senses (*kim āsīta vrajeta kim*)?

Explanatory note:

Sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā / samādhi-sthasya keśava: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “O Kṛṣṇa, what are the symptoms of one whose consciousness is thus merged in transcendence?” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that Arjuna uses the term *sthita-prajñasya* to refer to the person Kṛṣṇa described in the previous verse (2.53). Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura similarly explains that *sthita-prajña* corresponds to the *acalā buddhi* Kṛṣṇa described in 2.53. *Sthita-prajña* and *samādhi-stha* are both used to refer to a liberated, self-realised soul—the *jīvan-mukta*.

Kā means ‘what’. In his word-for-word translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *bhāṣā* as ‘language’. Baladeva explains that *kā bhāṣā* means “How is he described?” Thus, Arjuna appears to be asking what language describes the symptoms or qualities of a *sthita-prajña*. All three ācāryas explain that Arjuna is asking about the *sthita-prajña*’s distinguishing

characteristics. They simply use different words to express the same meaning: Baladeva and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura use the word ‘qualities’, whereas Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the word ‘symptoms’.

Sthita-dhīḥ kim prabhāṣeta: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “How does he speak, and what is his language?” The term *sthita-dhīḥ* is another way of referring to the *sthita-prajña* described in the previous verse. In his purport, he explains that speech is the most obvious and revelatory symptom of a self-realised soul. Viśvanātha explains that Arjuna wants to know how a self-realised soul responds to happiness and distress, honour and dishonour, praise and criticism. Baladeva adds that Arjuna is not just asking how he speaks to others, but also about his thoughts—his internal language when faced with different situations.

Kim āsīta vrajeta kim: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “How does he sit, and how does he walk?” “How does he sit” refers to how he restrains his senses from engaging with the sense objects. “How does he walk” refers to how he engages his senses with the sense objects.

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)

2.55: The Supreme Lord said (*śrī-bhagavān uvāca*): O son of Pṛthā, the mind of the conditioned soul is attracted to a variety of sense objects, in the false belief that they can make one happy (*sarvān pārtha mano-gatān*). When one is purified of all such desires (*prajāhāti yadā kāmān*), one experiences the innate bliss of the pure soul (*ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*). This bliss is the distinguishing characteristic of a self-realised soul (*sthita-prajñas tadocyate*).

Explanatory note:

Prajāhāti yadā kāmān / sarvān pārtha mano-gatān: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as “O Pārtha, when a man gives up all varieties of desire for sense gratification / which arise from mental concoction...” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that attaining self-realisation requires being 100% free of material desires. Both he and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that material desires can be given up because they arise from the material mind and are not intrinsic to the soul. (1, 3) However, Śrīla Prabhupāda cautions that this cannot be done artificially; one becomes genuinely free of material desires only through genuine advancement in devotional service to Kṛṣṇa:

“Artificially, such sense desires cannot be stopped. But if one is engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then, automatically, sense desires subside without extraneous efforts.”

Pārtha is an address for Arjuna. It means “son of Pṛthā,” one of the names of Arjuna’s mother, who is also known as Kuntī; thus Arjuna is sometimes referred to as Kaunteya. She was known by two names because she had two fathers: her seminal father, Pṛthu, and her adopted father, Kuntibhoja. (2)

Ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ / sthita-prajñas tadocyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as: “...and when his mind, thus purified, finds satisfaction in the self alone, then he is said to be in pure transcendental consciousness.” In his word-for-word translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda renders ātmanā as “by the purified mind”; in other words, the soul’s original mind is free of all material conceptions. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura calls this the soul itself, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that ātmanā refers to the soul’s original form, its svarūpa, which is all-blissful. (1, 3) Thus, once one is free of all material desires and misunderstandings, one experiences the soul’s intrinsic bliss within the purified mind. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that such a purified soul experiences the bliss of devotional service to the Lord. Only when the spiritual practitioner is experiencing the soul’s unlimited, ever-increasing bliss in service to the Lord is he said to be self-realised.

“The highly developed soul always remains satisfied in himself by realizing himself as the eternal servitor of the Supreme Lord. Such a transcendently situated person has

no sense desires resulting from petty materialism; rather, he remains always happy in his natural position of eternally serving the Supreme Lord.”

Evidence:

1: “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 (*ātmanī*), which has withdrawn from sense objects.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī-ṭīkā* 2.55 commentary)

2: “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.” (Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.1, February 22, 1969, Los Angeles)

3: “‘O son of Pṛthā, when a person completely gives up all desires situated in the mind, he is known as *sthita-prajña*.... He becomes completely satisfied (*tuṣṭaḥ*) with his *svarūpa* or the Lord (*ātmanā*), whose essence is self-manifesting bliss, his mind having withdrawn itself from material desires (*ātmanī*). The person who gives up all sense objects as insignificant and enjoys the bliss of the self is said to be situated in *samādhi*. He is called *sthita-prajña*, self-realised.’” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.55 Commentary)

2.56: Such a person never boasts, laments nor complains, for he is neither elated nor disturbed in any circumstance (*duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ / sukheṣu vigata-sprhaḥ*). Whether speaking to others or to himself, he refers to both distressful and enjoyable circumstances as either his karma or the Lord’s mercy. Such steady mental equilibrium in all circumstances is possible because he is free from attachment to material enjoyment, fear of material loss, and anger in the face of material frustration (*vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ*). Such is the speech of a self-realised philosopher—*sthita-dhīra muni* (*sthita-dhīr munir ucyate*).

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that this verse answers Arjuna's second question: how does the *sthita-dhīra muni* speak? (1)

Duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ / sukheṣu vigata-sprhaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “one who is not disturbed in mind even amidst the threefold miseries / or elated when there is

happiness.” In his purport, he explains that the *sthita-dhīra* muni remains undisturbed by accepting both happiness and distress as the Lord's mercy. Baladeva and Viśvanātha offer an additional reason for the *sthita-dhīra* muni's undisturbed state. They explain that he sees everything as karmic reactions, which must be tolerated. (1)

Vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “who is free from attachment, fear and anger.” Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva seem to suggest that the root problem is attachment, the desire to have something for one's own sense gratification. Due to this, one also experiences fear and anger. (2,3)

Sthita-dhīr munir ucyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “is called a sage of steady mind.” Viśvanātha explains that it takes a wise and intelligent person to distinguish a genuine manifestation of this quality from a pretentious display. In other words, without adequate scriptural knowledge, one may mistake a pretender for a genuinely self-realised person. (1)

Evidence:

1: “This verse and the next verse answer the question, ‘How does he speak?’ ... 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. ... 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)

2: “He is devoid of affection for desirable objects (*vīta-rāga*). When objects are taken away from him, he does not exclaim, “You supposedly righteous people steal from me, who am very weak.” Thus he is free from fear (*vīta-bhaya*). And he does not exclaim in anger when objects are stolen, “How can you feeble fellows steal from me, who have great strength?” Thus he is devoid of anger (*vīta-krodha*). Such a *muni*, absorbed in contemplating the *ātmā*, is called *sthita-dhīra* or *sthita-prajña*.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.56 commentary)

3: “*Rāga* is here defined as absorption in objects. Fear is here defined as thinking oneself helpless to prevent those dear objects from being taken away. Anger is defined as having those dear objects taken away even though one thinks oneself capable of defending them.” (Bhānu Swami's Footnote to Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.56)

2.57: Furthermore, since he is neither elated by pleasurable circumstances nor disturbed by difficulties (*yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehaḥ*), the self-realised person (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*) neither praises those who treat him well nor curses those who mistreat him (*tat tat prāpya śubhāśubham / nābhinandati na dveṣṭi*).

Explanatory note:

Yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehaḥ / tat tat prāpya śubhāśubham: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “In the material world, one who is unaffected / by whatever good or evil he may obtain,...” In his word-for-word, he translates *anabhisnehaḥ* as “without affection.” According to Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, 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 to anyone. In the verse translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda renders *anabhisnehaḥ* as “unaffected.” In other words, having neither partiality nor repulsion towards anything in the material world, nothing external influences his language. His purport further suggests that his equanimity arises because he sees both materially good and materially bad circumstances—*śubhāśubham*—as opportunities to serve Kṛṣṇa.

Nābhinandati na dveṣṭi / tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...neither praising it nor despising it / is firmly fixed in perfect knowledge.” Baladeva explains that this verse (2.57) describes what the *sthita-prajñā* would not say, whereas the previous verse describes what the *sthita-prajñā* would say. Together, these two verses describe how a self-realised person’s speech reveals that he is not influenced by either material attachment or aversion.

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-prajña* by indicating what he does not say (the previous verse described what he would say).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.57 commentary)

2.58: Regarding your third question, how the self-realised transcendentalist, the *sthita-prajña*, withdraws his senses from their objects. He does so as effortlessly as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell (*yadā samharate cāyaṁ / kūrmo ’ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ*). The ease with which he refrains from engaging with the sense objects is especially noteworthy (*indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas / tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*).

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that from this verse Kṛṣṇa begins to answer Arjuna’s third question: how does the perfect transcendentalist restrain his senses—*kim āsīta?* (1, 2)

Yadā samharate cāyaṁ / kūrmo ’ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “One who is able to withdraw his senses... / as the tortoise draws its limbs within the shell...”

Baladeva’s commentary emphasises how easily one fixed in self-realisation controls the senses, describing it as effortless. (1)

Indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas / tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...completely from the sense objects... / is firmly fixed in perfect consciousness.” A person firmly fixed in self-realisation can withdraw his senses from all sense objects with the same ease as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell.

Let us examine what it means to be *prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*—firmly fixed in perfect consciousness. There are three stages of self-realisation: Brahman realisation, in which one realises the soul’s eternality; Paramātmā realisation, in which one attains knowledge of both the Lord’s and one’s own spiritual form; and finally, Bhagavān realisation, in which one experiences the bliss of a loving relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Sanskrit terms for these three stages of realisation—eternity, knowledge and bliss—are *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*. As I understand it, being firmly fixed in perfect transcendental consciousness means experiencing the *ānanda* of Bhagavān realisation. (3)

Evidence:

1: “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-prajña* (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*). An example is given: just as a tortoise withdraws its head, hands, and feet into its shell, the *sthita-prajña* 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)

2: “This verse answers the question, “How does he sit?” (*kim āsīta*?) He withdraws his senses, such as the ear, from the objects of the senses, such as sound, stopping the movement of the independent senses toward the external objects. He establishes them without movement within. This is the sitting of the person situated in *prajñā*. An example is given. He does so just as the tortoise fixes his senses, such as its mouth and eyes, within itself by its will.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.58 commentary)

3: “The impersonal Brahman is the goal of those who cultivate the study of books of transcendental knowledge, and the Supersoul is the goal of those who perform the *yoga* practices. One who knows the Supreme Personality of Godhead surpasses realization of both Brahman and Paramātmā, because Bhagavān is the ultimate platform of absolute knowledge. The Personality of Godhead is the complete form of *sac-cidananda* [full life, knowledge and bliss]. By realization of the *sat* portion of the Complete Whole [unlimited existence], one realizes the impersonal Brahman of the Lord. By realization of the *cit* portion of the Complete Whole [unlimited knowledge], one can realize the localized aspect of the Lord, Paramātmā. But neither of these partial realizations of the Complete Whole can help one realize *ānanda*, or complete bliss. Without such realization of *ānanda*, knowledge of the Absolute Truth is incomplete.” ([Garden Conversation, June 27th 1976, New Vrindavan](#))

Arjuna thought: Many people refrain from sense gratification when ill. Why, then, is such restraint considered remarkable?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna's thinking is based on the commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. Śrīla Prabhupāda also often uses the example of voluntarily refraining from sense gratification because of illness to illustrate the difference between voluntary restraint caused by suffering and a higher stage of voluntary restraint where the individual no longer has any inclination to enjoy something.

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-prajña*?” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.59 commentary)

“But even the fool is able to stop the movement of his senses by fasting or by being under the influence of sickness.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.59 commentary)

“Just like a person is diseased. He is advised by the doctor that ‘You shall not take such-and-such things.’ So he is starving or he is fasting. Suppose in the typhoid fever the doctor has advised him not to take any solid food. So under the instruction of the doctor, he is not taking any solid food.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.58–59, April 15th, 1966, New York](#))

2.59: Kṛṣṇa said: Although a sick person may refrain from sense enjoyment, he remains attracted to it. The same applies to those who practise spiritual disciplines that restrict sense gratification (*viṣayā vinivartante / nirāhārasya dehinaḥ*). However, a self-realised soul who experiences the spiritual bliss of seeing the Paramātmā loses even the desire for material enjoyment (*rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya / paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.59–69, April 18th, 1966, New York](#)

Explanatory note:

Viṣayā vinivartante / nirāhārasya dehinaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Though the embodied soul may be restricted from sense enjoyment....” Viṣaya refers to gratifying the bodily demands of eating, sleeping, mating and defending. (3) Anyone aspiring to achieve self-realisation must restrict these four viṣayas—bodily gratifications. In his purport, he refers to the different processes of aṣṭāṅga-yoga which severely restrict the senses. In his lectures, he further elaborates on the severe nature of these restrictions. (3)

For example, the yogī can only eat once a day, and the type of edibles, how one sits and breathes, everything is severely restricted. (3) Neophytes on the path of bhakti also must follow rules restricting sense gratification, but the restrictions are less severe, and the process of bhakti, when properly done, is simultaneously awakening our attraction to Kṛṣṇa, which is the higher taste we need to become immune to returning to a life of sense gratification. (3)

Rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...the taste for sense objects remains.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa characterises rasa as a thirst for the sense objects, and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura characterises it as a desire for them. (1,2) What I take from this is that it is possible to voluntarily restrain our senses by force, as in times of illness, while internally continuing to long to enjoy the things we are refraining from. (1,2,3)

Param dṛṣṭvā nivartate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “But, ceasing such engagements by experiencing a higher taste, he is fixed in consciousness.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes this happens when we taste “the beauty of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa”. (3) Baladeva says this happens when we see the ātmā and Viśvanātha says this happens when we see the Supersoul. (1,2) These are all different ways of expressing the same truth. At the stage of Paramātmā-realisation, we see both the soul and the Supersoul. (4)

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives the example of when we are in the darkness of night, we can neither see the sun nor ourselves, but at sunrise, when we see the sun, we simultaneously can see ourselves. (4) This is the point at which we experience the higher taste which makes us lose our attraction for sense gratification. (3) In his lecture on these verses, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that even in the beginning stages of buddhi-yoga, we begin to experience an alternative higher enjoyment which strengthens our resolve to refrain from sense enjoyment. (3) However, once we attain Paramātmā-realisation, there is no need for resolve, for one simply loses the taste for sense gratification. (1,2,3)

This seems to contradict the conclusion reached in 2.58 Explanatory note, which states that Paramatma realisation is partial and that one is not impervious to falling down until one experiences the full bliss of Bhagavan realisation. I have a tentative perspective on this apparent contradiction. As I understand it from Nectar of Devotion, one can attain Brahman and Paramatma realisation by different means. Through the path of jnana yoga, with an emphasis on austerity and penance, one can attain Brahman realisation. Through the path of

astanga yoga, with an emphasis on meditation, one can then attain Paramatma realisation. However, both these stages of realisation can also be achieved through the path of bhakti: hearing about, glorifying, remembering and worshipping the Supreme Lord. If one achieves Brahman and Paramatma realisation by the process of bhakti, one can experience transcendental pleasure—ananda. Those who achieve Brahman and Paramatma realisation by practising austerity and meditation do not experience the transcendental pleasure derived from personal contact with the Supreme Lord. (5) All three processes require the yogi to hear about, glorify, remember and worship the Lord. However, those whose emphasis is on austerity, penance, or meditation do not cultivate the same inner spiritual bliss as those whose emphasis is bhakti: hearing about, glorifying, remembering and worshipping the Lord's personal Deity form. In Nectar of Devotion, chapter 36, Srila Prabhupada cites a verse from the Padyavali which suggests to me that if one achieves Brahman and self-realisation primarily by hearing about, glorifying, remembering and worshipping the Supreme Lord, then by the time they attain Brahman realisation they are already experiencing the bliss of personal service to the Lord. (6)

Evidence:

1: “For a person (*dehina*), even if he is a fool, who refrains from eating out of fear of becoming ill (*nirāhārasya*), the experiences of the sense objects also cease, but not the thirst or attraction for them (*rasa-varjam*). However, for the *sthita-prajñā* (*asya*), who has realised the *ātmā* (*param̐ dr̥ṣṭvā*), which is superior to the sense objects and full of self-manifesting bliss, even the thirst for the sense objects (*rasa*) is destroyed (*nivartate*).” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.59 commentary)

2: “But even the fool is able to stop the movement of his senses by fasting or by being under the influence of sickness. For one who stops eating (*nirāhārasya*), the objects of the senses disappear, except for the desire for them (*rasa-varjam*). For the person situated in *prajñā*, however, having seen the Paramātmā, the desire for the sense objects does disappear.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.59 commentary)

3: “*Viṣayāḥ* means four things: *āhāra*, *nidrā*, *bhaya*, *maithuna*—eating, sleeping, defending and mating. These are called *viṣayāḥ*. The materialistic way of life means these four things: eating, sleeping, defending and mating—sense gratification. But if we want to go to the spiritual

platform, then these bodily demands, at least for the present, we have to regulate. ... Just like in the yogic process there is strict regulation that ‘You cannot eat this. You cannot eat this. You shall have to eat like this. You shall have to sit like this. You have to breathe like this,’ so many restriction. ... One process is that by force I am asking you, ‘Do not do this.’ But another process is that you have become so much elevated that you do not like to do this yourself. ... But if you dovetail your consciousness with the supreme consciousness, so, in spite of without being restriction, you'll not like the restricted things. *Rasa-varjaṁ raso 'py asya param dṛṣṭvā nivartate*. You'll dislike those restricted things. ... The other process of restraining the senses from enjoyment, that is forced, but that forceful enjoyment may not stand. It may fail sometimes. But this process, having dovetailed oneself in the transcendental loving service of the Supreme Lord, one becomes completely detached from all these *viṣayā*.” (Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 2.59-69, April 18th 1966, New York)

4: “We are self, and Kṛṣṇa is also Self. So just like if you fix up your eyes on the sun, then you can see the sun and yourself also. Sometimes in dense darkness we cannot see ourself also. ... So if you are in the sunshine, sunlight, then you see the sun as well as yourself. ... Therefore to see the self means first of all see the Supreme Self.” (Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 6.25–29, February 18th, 1969, Los Angeles)

5: “*When one is actually able to maintain the transcendental position, his stage is called neutrality in devotional service. Some great sages have attained this neutral position by practicing austerity, penance and meditation to control the senses. Such sages are generally called mystic yogīs, and in most cases they are inclined to appreciate the spiritual pleasure of the impersonal feature of the Absolute Truth. They are practically unaware of the transcendental pleasure derived from personal contact with the Supreme Godhead. Actually the transcendental pleasure derived in association with the Supreme Person is far greater than the pleasure derived from impersonal Brahman realization, because of the direct meeting with the eternal form of the Lord. Impersonalists do not directly derive the transcendental pleasure of association with the Lord by hearing of His pastimes.*” (*Nectar of Devotion* chapter 35)

6: “In *Padyāvalī* a devotee says, “Persons who are attached to speculative knowledge for self-realization, who have decided that the supreme truth is beyond meditation and who have thus become situated in the mode of goodness – let them peacefully execute their engagement. As

for us, we are simply attached to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is by nature so pleasing, who possesses a complexion like a blackish cloud, who is dressed in yellow garments and who has beautiful lotuslike eyes. We wish only to meditate upon Him.” Those who are from the very beginning of their self-realization attached to devotional service are called *sevā-niṣṭha*. *Sevā-niṣṭha* means “simply attached to devotional service.”” (*Nectar of Devotion chapter 36*)

2.60: Without experiencing this higher pleasure, Arjuna, even a spiritually discerning person striving for self-realisation must remain vigilant (*yatato hy api kaunteya / puruṣasya vipaścitah*). For until one is firmly established in the bliss of one’s spiritual relationship with the Supreme Lord, the senses remain powerfully attracted to the sense objects. Thus, they can easily divert the mind from self-realisation to sense gratification (*indriyāṇi pramāthīni / haranti prasabham manaḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Yatato hy api kaunteya / puruṣasya vipaścitah: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as follows: “O Arjuna, ...who is endeavouring to control them / ...even of a man of discrimination...”. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that *vipaścitah*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda translates as “a man of discrimination”, refers to someone seeking self-realisation and therefore trying to control the senses. (1) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that at this stage of spiritual development, controlling the senses requires great effort and is not always successful. (2)

Indriyāṇi pramāthīni / haranti prasabham manaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as “The senses are so strong and impetuous... / ...that they forcibly carry away the mind...”. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that *pramāthīni* means “causing agitation”, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa says this agitation can overpower one’s knowledge. (1,2) In other words, the senses are so powerful that they can overpower even a sincere aspiring transcendentalist who has not yet achieved full self-realisation. (1,2)

Evidence:

1: “This verse speaks of the rarity of being such a *sthita-prajña*, established in that knowledge of *ātmā*. For a man who is intent on conquering the senses, who can distinguish his real nature as *ātmā* from sense objects, *vipaścita*, the senses ... still take away the mind by force, *prasabham*. ... ‘Because the senses are very strong, *pramāthīni*, they can suppress that knowledge. Therefore, the *sthita-prajña* carefully protects his steadiness in *jñāna* from the senses...” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.60 commentary)

2: “The effort at the stage of *sādhana* is very great, without the power to turn back the senses completely. *Pramāthīni* means ‘causing agitation.’” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.60 commentary)

Arjuna thought: If completely restraining the senses is not enough to attain self-realisation, what is?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on the commentary of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa. (1)

Evidence:

"Even for those who have conquered the senses, realization of *ātmā* is not known. What is the method for realizing the *ātmā*?" (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.61 commentary)

2.61: Kṛṣṇa said: Successfully restraining the senses from material enjoyment (*tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya*) requires one to become absorbed in hearing about, glorifying, remembering, and worshipping Me (*yukta āsīta mat-parah*). This is how a self-realised person’s senses remain controlled (*vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi / tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*).

Explanatory note:

Tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya / yukta āsīta mat-parah: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as “One who restrains his senses... / ...and fixes his consciousness upon Me.” All three commentators focus on the word *mat-parah*, which suggests that to successfully control the senses one must focus on cultivating a taste for devotional service to Kṛṣṇa rather than on simply restraining the senses. (1, 2) In other words, we must find enjoyable ways to redirect our senses in Kṛṣṇa’s service; then we will gradually lose the inclination to engage in material

sense gratification. The inference is that those yogīs who do not accept the Personality of Godhead will never succeed in permanently overcoming the powerful urges of the senses.

Vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi / tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as “...keeping them under full control.../ ...is known as a man of steady intelligence.” Baladeva and Viśvanātha both emphasise that conquering the powerful agitation of the senses is only possible by devotional service. (1, 2) The primary practices of devotional service are hearing about, glorifying, remembering and worshipping the Personality of Godhead. (3) When one is more attracted to engaging his senses in Kṛṣṇa’s service than in sense gratification, then “is known as a man of steady intelligence.” (2) If one seems to have gained control of his senses by any other method, he is not truly a *sthita-prajñā*—fixed in self-realisation. (2)

Evidence:

1: "Having completely controlled all the senses, fixing himself in devotion to me, *mat-para*, he will remain situated, *āsīta*... by the power of devotion to me, while maintaining control of the senses, the person will very easily attain a vision of his *ātmā*... The last line of the verse clarifies: this is the situation of the *sthita-prajñā* with control of the senses." (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.61 commentary)

2: “*Mat-para* means my devotee. Without devotion to me, one cannot conquer the senses... The person whose senses have been brought under control, *vaśe hi*, is the *sthita-prajñā*. This distinguishes him from the *sādhaka*, the person attempting to do so.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.61 commentary)

3: “Therefore, with one-pointed attention, one should constantly hear about, glorify, remember and worship the Personality of Godhead, who is the protector of the devotees.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.14)

2.62: If the mind does not concentrate on Me, it will focus on sense objects (*dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsaḥ / saṅgas teṣūpajāyate*). This leads to attraction and longing to enjoy them (*saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmāḥ*). When these desires are thwarted, anger arises (*kāmāt krodho ’bhijāyate*).

Hear: [Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.62-72, December 19th 1968, Los Angeles](#)

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this verse and 2.63 explain what happens if one only controls the senses but does not absorb the mind in Kṛṣṇa. (1,2)

Dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsaḥ / saṁgas teṣūpajāyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “While contemplating the objects of the senses / a person develops attachment for them...”

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that a *sthita-prajñā* controls the mind as well as the senses. (1) A *sthita-prajñā* is one who is fixed in transcendental knowledge, or, in other words, Brahman-realisation. (7) This state is referred to in Bhagavad-gītā 18.54 as *brahma-bhūta*. (7) Such a person has no desire for material enjoyment because his mind is attracted to Kṛṣṇa’s service, especially to hearing about Him, glorifying Him, remembering Him and worshipping Him. (6, 8)

There are others who have controlled the senses by practising severe restrictions, but not their minds. (2,5) They may think that occasionally entertaining thoughts of sense gratification is harmless, but gradually they will become habituated to such thoughts; and since they do not derive pleasure from devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, they will eventually want to enact their hitherto fantasies. (4,5,6)

Saṁgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ / kāmāt krodho ’bhijāyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...and from such attachment lust develops / and from lust anger arises.” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that once one becomes attracted to a sense object, *kāma*, or a lust to enjoy it, envelops the mind. (1,2) Viśvanātha describes this as a strong desire to enjoy, and Baladeva as a longing. (1,2) When this longing is obstructed, one becomes angry. (1,2)

Evidence :

1: “The *sthita-prajñā* controls also the mind. That indeed is the cause of control of the senses. If one does not have control of the mind at all, please hear the result. A person who thinks of the sense objects develops attachment (*saṁga*) to them. And by that attachment, he develops strong desire (*kāma*) for those objects. From desire, anger develops due to obstruction to fulfilling the desire from someone or something.” (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.62 commentary)

2: “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. Because of that attachment, thirst for pleasure from those objects arises. When that longing is thwarted by something or other, anger—a burning in the heart—arises to counteract the obstacle.” (*Gīta Bhūṣaṇa* 2.62 commentary)

3: “It is clearly stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that to realize Brahman identification is not all. Brahman identification may help one become joyful without material attachment or detachment and to achieve the platform of equanimity, but after this stage one has to take to devotional service. When one takes to devotional service after being elevated to the platform of Brahman realization, he is then admitted into the spiritual kingdom for permanent residence in association with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That is the result of devotional service. ... Those who are devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead never fall down like the impersonalists. ...” (*Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, chapter 2)

4: “All living entities have this pleasure-seeking potency, for all beings are trying to have pleasure. This is the very nature of the living entity.” (Teachings of Lord Caitanya; Introduction)

5: “Unless one is transcendently situated, it is not possible to cease from sense enjoyment.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* As It Is 2.59 purport)

6: “... you love more Kṛṣṇa, automatically material desires will be finished. Because you do not love Kṛṣṇa cent percent, therefore material desires. The balance is filled up by material desires. Just like in a glass there is some ink, and if you fill up with water, the full glass, the ink will vanish; there will be no more ink. It will be all..., all white. This is the way. *Bhaktiḥ pareśānubhavo viraktir anyatra syāt* [SB 11.2.42]. To love Kṛṣṇa means you have no more material desire. The percentage you are lacking Kṛṣṇa love, the percentage material desires are there. *Ye yathā māṁ prapadyante* [Bg. 4.11]. If you love Kṛṣṇa ten percent, then ninety percent material desires. And if you love Kṛṣṇa ninety percent, ten percent material desires. And if you love Kṛṣṇa cent percent, there is no material desire.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 9.34, on August 3rd, 1976 in New Mayapur](#))

7: “In this verse the word *vijñāna* is specifically important. *Jñāna*, the knowledge of spiritual identity that one attains when he does not consider himself to be the body, is explained in *Bhagavad-gītā* as *brahma-bhūta*, the revival of spiritual realization. In the conditioned state of

material existence one cannot be spiritually realized because he identifies himself materially. The understanding of the distinction between material existence and spiritual existence is called *jñāna*. After coming to the platform of *jñāna*, or the *brahma-bhūta* state, one ultimately comes to devotional service, in which he completely understands his own position and the position of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This understanding is explained here as *vijñāna-viśeṣa*. The Lord says, therefore, that knowledge of Him is *vijñāna*, science. In other words, when one is strengthened by scientific knowledge of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his position of liberation is guaranteed.” (Śrīmad Bhagavatam 4.21.32 purport)

8: “Therefore, with one-pointed attention, one should constantly hear about, glorify, remember and worship the Personality of Godhead, who is the protector of the devotees.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.14)

2.63: Anger breeds doubt about the relevant scriptural passages. Having lost faith in scriptural restrictions, one loses the ability to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful (*krodhād bhavati saṁmohaḥ*). Poor choices weaken one’s spiritual resolve (*sammohāt smṛti-vibhramah*). Finally, one loses even the desire for self-realisation (*smṛti-bhramśād buddhi-nāśo*) and returns to a materialistic life, devoid of transcendental knowledge (*buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati*).

Explanatory note:

Krodhād bhavati saṁmohaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “From anger, complete delusion arises...” Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that saṁmohaḥ denotes a complete loss of discrimination regarding what should and should not be done. (1, 2) This idea recurs in Bg. 16.7. In that purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that it means either ignorance of what the scriptures recommend and prohibit, or a lack of faith in what the scriptures say on these matters. (3) Scriptural recommendations and prohibitions vary according to one's āśrama. For example, scripture authorises regulated sense gratification for the gr̥hasthas, whereas it prohibits any sense gratification beyond what is required for subsistence for those in any of the renounced āśramas—brahmacārī, vānaprastha or sannyāsī. (5)

Sammohāt smṛti-vibhramaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...and from delusion, bewilderment of memory.” Viśvanātha explains that this bewilderment of memory—*smṛti-vibhramaḥ*—means forgetting the benefits of following scriptural recommendations and prohibitions. (2) Forgetting that scripture seeks to protect us, one deviates from its injunctions to accommodate certain desires. (2, 3) For example, desiring honour, one may artificially assume a level of spiritual commitment for which one is not qualified, or, having made a commitment, one may minimise those obligations that inhibit sense gratification. (3, 5) According to Baladeva, such deviations ultimately lead to *buddhi-nāśa*—the loss of one’s good intelligence. (1)

Smṛti-bhramśād buddhi-nāśo: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost...” Baladeva explains that this loss of intelligence—*buddhi-nāśa*—means losing one’s determination to attain self-realisation, and Viśvanātha explains that it means losing one’s resolve to pursue spiritual practices. (1, 2) Throughout his teachings, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasises that spiritual practices must be performed properly to be spiritually effective.

Buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...and when intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool.” Baladeva explains that falling down again into the material pool—*praṇaśyati*—means returning to a life of sense gratification, which Viśvanātha compares to a well. (1, 2) In his lectures, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that materialistic life is compared to a well because, like a well, it is very dark and difficult to escape from. (4)

Evidence:

1: “From anger arises loss of discrimination (*saṁmoha*) regarding what is proper and improper action. From *saṁmoha* arises destruction of the memory of one's resolve to conquer the senses (*smṛti-vibhrama*). From this destruction of memory arises the destruction of the determination necessary for obtaining knowledge of the ātmā (*buddhi-nāśa*). From the destruction of determination, one again sinks into the ocean of material enjoyment and continues in *saṁsāra* (*praṇaśyati*). Without surrender to me, the senses connect the weak mind to their respective sense objects. Therefore, one who wants to conquer the mind must worship the Lord.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.63 commentary)

2: "From anger develops the absence of discrimination regarding what should be done and what should not be done (*saṁmoha*). From bewilderment develops the loss of remembrance of one's own benefit derived from the instructions of scripture (*smṛti-vibhrama*). From that comes the destruction of one's resolve for spiritual practices (*buddhi-nāśa*). Then one falls into the well of *saṁsāra*." (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.63 commentary)

3: "Especially among the Āryans, those who adopt the Vedic civilization and who are known as the most advanced civilized peoples, those who do not follow the scriptural injunctions are supposed to be demons. Therefore it is stated here that the demons do not know the scriptural rules, nor do they have any inclination to follow them. Most of them do not know them, and even if some of them know, they have not the tendency to follow them. They have no faith, nor are they willing to act in terms of the Vedic injunctions." (bg as it is 16.7 purport)

4: "If one falls down in the dark well, it is very difficult to get out, because he may cry very loudly and people may not hear. These dark well are sometimes there in the paddy field. I have seen one dark well. In your country, when I was guest in John Lennon's house in 1969, we saw in the garden there was a dark well. Dark well means a very deep ditch, well, but it is covered with grass. You cannot know that there is a deep well, but while walking, you may fall down within it. And it is already covered with grass, and it is very deep. If you fall down and you try to get out of it, because it is lonely place, nobody is there, nobody may hear you, and you may simply die without any help." ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.3 on August 24th, 1971, in London](#))

5: "But they should live also on the bare necessities of life. They should not be luxurious. A brahmacārī cannot be luxurious. A sannyāsī cannot be luxurious. A vānaprastha cannot be luxurious. Luxury is allowed only to the householder, because they are earning their own money. Others are dependent. So one cannot be luxurious at the expense of others. That is not allowed." ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 2.1.2-5 on October 23rd, 1968, in Montreal](#))

2.64: Regarding your fourth question: how does the self-realised person engage the senses? He is neither attracted to nor repulsed by the sense objects (*rāga-dveṣa-vimuktais tu*), for he is

concerned only with serving the Lord (*ātma-vaśyair vidheyātmā*). Thus, he engages the senses according to the Lord’s directions in scripture (*viṣayān indriyaiś caran*) and, by doing so, he experiences complete peace of mind (*prasādam adhigacchati*).

Explanatory note:

Both Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explain that in this verse Kṛṣṇa answers Arjuna’s final question, “How does the self-realised person engage his senses?” (*vrajeta kim*). (2,4) Their explanations reveal that the defining characteristic of the self-realised person is not that he is physically aloof from the sense objects, but that he can continue to engage with them without becoming either attached or averse. (2,4) The following notes explain how each line of the verse contributes to this understanding.

Rāga-dveṣa-vimuktais tu: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “But a person free from all attachment and aversion...” In his word-for-word translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda has translated *dveṣa* as detachment. This seems to be a mistake by his editors, whom Śrīla Prabhupāda authorised to do the Bhagavad-gītā translations. (5) Every other time the word *dveṣa* appears in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, it is translated as either hate, hatred or envy. So it seems that aversion rather than detachment is the correct translation.

In his purport, Srila Prabhupada explains that although a Kṛṣṇa conscious person may interact with the sense objects, he is neither attached nor averse to them. (2) Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that there is no fault in interacting with the sense objects as long as one has no attachment or aversion to them (4), and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this type of detached engagement is only possible when the mind is absorbed in serving Kṛṣṇa. (2) In conclusion, all three commentators seem to agree that the defining characteristic of the self-realised person is not that he is physically aloof from the sense objects, but that he is mentally neither attracted nor repulsed by them. (2,4)

Viṣayān indriyaiś caran: In his word-for-word translation, Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these words as follows: *viṣayān* — sense objects; *indriyaiḥ* — by the senses; *caran* — acting upon. I could not determine which part of his full verse translation corresponds to these words. Bhānu Swami, however, does explicitly translate this line. (1, 3) In his translation of Gīta Bhūṣaṇa, he writes, “He experiences the sense objects...”, and in Sārārtha-varṣiṇī he translates it as “who engages in the sense objects...”. (1, 3) His translations are strongly

supported by the respective commentaries of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, and indirectly by Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport, which likewise describes the Kṛṣṇa conscious person as continuing to interact with the sense objects while remaining free from attachment to them. (2, 4)

Ātma-vaśyair vidheyātmā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...able to control his senses through the regulative principles of freedom...” Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura explains that ātma refers to the mind, and vidheya means submissive, compliant, controlled, well-behaved, polite and equal. (4) Together they mean that the mind is controlled because it is submissive to the Lord’s instructions. (4) Śrīla Prabhupāda translates vidheyātmā as “regulative principles of freedom.” Putting these different lights together, I understand that the scriptures, being the Lord’s instructions, provide the principles by which we can regulate our sense gratification. This line refers to those who do not minimise the Lord’s instructions but instead submit to and follow them. (2, 4)

Prasādam adhigacchati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...can obtain the complete mercy of the Lord.” What is the complete mercy of the Lord? Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in his purport that the consciousness of being free from either attraction or aversion to the sense objects is the mercy of the Lord. (2) Baladeva reiterates this (2), and Viśvanātha adds that only one who has attained this mercy experiences real peace. (4)

Evidence:

1: “One whose mind is controlled by offering it to me attains a pure mind. He experiences the sense objects by senses free of attachment and repulsion, which are under the control of the mind.” (H.H. Bhanu Swami’s translation of Bhagavad gita 2.64 in Gita Bhūṣaṇa)

2: “If one conquers the mind, there is no fault, even if the senses are not subdued. In eight verses, the Lord answers the last question, ‘How does the sthitaprajña engage in actions of the senses? ’... Even though experiencing (caran) the forbidden sense objects by the senses, he finally attains a pure mind, prasādam, free from the appearance of contamination of attraction to sense objects. This is because the senses are now devoid of attraction and repulsion, under the control of the mind, ātma-vaśyaiḥ, which is offered to me.” (Gita Bhūṣaṇa 2.64 commentary)

3: “One whose mind is submissive, who engages in the sense objects with the senses freed of attachment and repulsion, under the control of the mind, attains peace.”

(Bhanu Swami’s translation of Bhagavad-gita 2.64 in Sārārtha Varṣiṇī)

4: “This verse answers the question, ‘How does the sthita-prajña go?’ (prajeta kim?) The Lord explains that it is not a fault to accept the objects of the senses if it is done with controlled senses, with absence of attachment to the objects in the mind. According to Amarakośa, videya means ‘submissive, situated in words, compliant, controlled, well-behaved, polite, and equal.’ One whose mind, atma, is submissive to instructions (videya atma), who contacts objects with senses controlled by the mind, senses devoid of attachment and repulsion, attains peace (prasādam).” (*Sārārtha Varṣiṇī* 2.64 commentary)

5: “Hayagrīva: I would like to see that in going over mine. I’ll have to go over it chapter by chapter. But I will compare the version I have with that version, and... I know the translations themselves, they were somewhat changed in *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* as it came out in Macmillan. Did you like those translations?

Prabhupāda: Whichever is better, you think. That’s all. You can follow this Macmillan.

Hayagrīva: That was the second... They’re good. I think they’re very good.

Prabhupāda: Yes. You can follow that translation. Simply synonyms we can add, transliterations.” ([Discussion with BTG Staff, December 24th, 1969, Boston](#))

Arjuna thought: What happens once the mind has thus been fully purified?

Explanatory note:

This insight into Arjuna’s thinking is based on Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentary.

Evidence:

“What happens after he attains a pure mind?” (Gita Bhūṣaṇa 2.65 commentary)

2.65: Kṛṣṇa said: When, by engagement in devotional service, the mind is fully purified of attraction or repulsion for the things of this world, one is no longer disturbed by the distresses of material life (*prasāde sarva-duḥkhānām / hānir asyopajāyate*). The intelligence can then

unwaveringly focus on attaining the soul's ultimate goal: realisation of one's eternal loving relationship with the Supreme Lord (*prasanna-cetaso hy āśu / buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate*).

Explanatory note:

Prasāde sarva-duḥkhānām / hānir asyopajāyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as “For one thus satisfied [in Kṛṣṇa consciousness], the threefold miseries of material existence / exist no longer.” Although Śrīla Prabhupāda does not write a purport for this verse, in a lecture on it he explains that a devotee has no material misery because, by the Lord's grace, he comes to see everything as the Lord's mercy. (3)

Prasanna-cetaso hy āśu / buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...in such satisfied consciousness / one's intelligence is soon well established.” When the mind is peaceful and satisfied by engaging in devotional service, the intelligence becomes unwaveringly focused on its desired goal. Given the meaning of the verses from *Bhagavad-gītā* *As It Is* 2.59, I surmise that desired goal means realising one's eternal relationship with the Supreme Lord.

Evidence:

1: “The intelligence is fixed completely in its desired goal (*paryavatiṣṭhate*).” (Sārārtha Varṣiṇī 2.65 commentary)

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

3: “*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](#))

2.66: Failure to realise one's relationship with the Supreme Lord stems from deficient transcendental knowledge (*nāsti buddhir ayuktasya*) and an inability to remain steadily

absorbed in meditation on the Lord (*na cāyuktasya bhāvanā*). Consequently, the mind is not truly peaceful, as it remains susceptible to material attraction, fear, and anger (*na cābhāyataḥ śāntiḥ*). Thus, such a person cannot experience unadulterated happiness (*aśāntasya kutaḥ sukham*).

Explanatory note:

Nāsti buddhir ayuktasya / na cāyuktasya bhāvanā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “One who is not connected with the Supreme [in Kṛṣṇa consciousness] can have neither transcendental intelligence / nor a steady mind...” He specifically translates *ayuktasya* as one who is not connected with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explain that it refers to one whose mind is not controlled, and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa adds that it refers to one who is not a yogī. (1, 2) In other words, *ayuktasya* refers to one who has not yet fully mastered the yoga process. The point is that one cannot attain perfection in yoga (*yuktasya*) without cultivating both transcendental knowledge (*buddhiḥ*) and unwavering meditation (*bhāvanā*) on the Lord. (1, 2)

Na cābhāyataḥ śāntir: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...without which there is no possibility of peace.” The ācāryas suggest that unless one is absorbed in meditation on the self and the Supreme Lord, one remains prone to agitation from the sense objects. (1, 2) The nature of this agitation is specified in Bhagavad-gītā 4.10 as “attachment, fear and anger”—*vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhāḥ*. The yogī is freed of these when he comes to see the Supreme Lord as Paramātmā and, simultaneously, to perceive his own spiritual identity. (3, 4) Thus, until one is fixed in this realisation, one cannot attain lasting peace.

Aśāntasya kutaḥ sukham: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “And how can there be any happiness without peace?” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that when one understands that Kṛṣṇa is the enjoyer, proprietor, and real friend of all living entities, one can have real peace. To have peace means to no longer be agitated by desires to independently control and exploit the Lord’s energy, nor to assume the role of being another’s benefactor, independently of Kṛṣṇa. One who is still agitated by desires to usurp the Lord’s position can never experience the happiness of Bhagavān-realisation. (5)

Evidence:

1: “Kṛṣṇa makes his statement clear by stating the effects of the opposite condition. For one who has not controlled the mind (*ayuktasya*), there is no intelligence (*prajñā*) fixed on the soul. For one who, not having such *prajñā* arising from a controlled mind, meditation on the Supreme Lord (*bhāvana*) also is not possible. Not performing meditation (*abhyāsa*), he does not have peace—the cessation of agitation from sense objects. This peaceless person does not have bliss (*sukham*) from the soul.” (Sārārtha Varṣiṇī 2.66 commentary)

2: “This verse makes the point by stating the opposite. For the person who is not a yogi (*ayuktasya*), who does not engage his mind in Me, the intelligence does not have the above-mentioned quality of being fixed; nor does he even have contemplation of the atma (*bhāvana*). Without such contemplation on the atma, there is no destruction of thirst for material objects (*śānti*). How can a person who is afflicted by thirst for enjoyment (*aśāntasya*) have happiness, which is available only by realization of the atma, with its self-manifesting bliss?” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.66 commentary)

3: “Just as the sun on rising destroys darkness and reveals objects, knowledge of atma and Paramatma attained through instructions of the authorized guru reveals the real atma and Paramatma directly as they are.” (Gita Bhusana 5.16 commentary)

4: “We are self, and Kṛṣṇa is also Self. So just like if you fix up your eyes on the sun, then you can see the sun and yourself also. Sometimes in dense darkness we cannot see ourself also. So if you are in the sunshine, sunlight, then you see the sun as well as yourself. ... Therefore to see the self means first of all see the Supreme Self.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 6.25–29, on February 18th, 1969, in Los Angeles](#))

5: “So *sac-cid-ānanda*. The Brahman realization is *sat* realization, Paramātmā realization is *cit* realization and Bhagavān realization means *ānanda* realization.” ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.25.36, on December 5th, 1974, in Bombay](#))

2.67: Being thus attracted to the sense objects (*indriyāṇāṁ hi caratām / yan mano 'nuvidhīyate*), the mind can divert the aspiring transcendentalist from the path of self-realisation (*tad asya harati prajñām*) as easily as a powerful wind sweeps a boat off

course (*vāyur nāvam ivāmbhasi*).

Explanatory note:

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that this verse explains the vulnerability of one whose mind is not absorbed in Kṛṣṇa. (1)

Indriyāṇāṁ hi caratām / yan mano 'nuvidhīyate: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these lines as “...even one of the roaming senses / on which the mind...” In other words, the senses are constantly interacting with the sense objects, different sounds, sights, tastes, odours, and tactile sensations. Each of these sensory experiences are processed by the mind. (2)

Tad asya harati prajñām / vāyur nāvam ivāmbhasi: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...can carry away a man’s intelligence. / As a strong wind sweeps away a boat on the water...” Bhanu Swami translates it as “steals away the intelligence, as wind moves a boat on the water.”

Prajñā means intelligence. Baladeva and Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura both explain that even intelligence which is aiming for self-realisation can become diverted by association with the sense objects. (2) Although the intelligence is a higher faculty than the mind and ideally is meant to direct the mind, when the mind becomes too agitated, it can overpower the intelligence of even an aspiring transcendentalist. (3, 4)

Evidence:

1: “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)

2: “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)

3: “But even though the soul is the master of intelligence and mind, and the senses also, still, unless it is strengthened by association with Kṛṣṇa in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there is every chance of falling down due to the agitated mind.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 3.42 purport)

4: “The mind is so strong and obstinate that it sometimes overcomes the intelligence, although the mind is supposed to be subservient to the intelligence. [...] Intelligence is supposed to direct the mind, but the mind is so strong and obstinate that it often overcomes even one’s

own intelligence, as an acute infection may surpass the efficacy of medicine.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 6.34 purport)

2.68: Therefore, as you previously conquered your enemies, O mighty-armed Arjuna, you must now conquer your mind and senses (*tasmād yasya mahā-bāho*). This is possible by engaging them in the Lord’s service with the sole intent of realising your eternal loving relationship with Him (*nigrhītāni sarvaśaḥ / indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas*). Then you will attain transcendental realisation (*tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*).

Explanatory note:

Tasmād yasya mahā-bāho: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “Therefore, O mighty-armed...” Kṛṣṇa evokes Arjuna’s reputation as being powerful enough to conquer his enemies, to infer that he should conquer his mind and senses. (3)

Nigrhītāni sarvaśaḥ / indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “one whose senses are restrained / from their objects...” Bhanu Swami translates it as “He who completely restricts the senses / from the sense objects...” Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa explains that Kṛṣṇa is implying this is only possible when the mind is absorbed in Him, and Śrīla Prabhupāda adds the further implication that the senses can only be restricted from enjoying the sense objects when they are fully engaged in serving Kṛṣṇa. (1,2)

Baladeva makes another very interesting point in this regard. The sthita-prajñā spontaneously restricts his senses, but the practitioner can achieve this through his sādhana (devotional practices) if he practises with the explicit intention of achieving this. This reminds me of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.29.8–12, which describes devotional service in the three modes and spontaneous devotional service. Baladeva’s point seems to be that those who practise devotional service in ignorance and passion cannot achieve this goal because this is not their aim. The practitioner in the mode of goodness can achieve this goal if that is his aim. So it’s not just what we do, but why we do it that will determine our success. (2)

Tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “is certainly of steady intelligence.” Baladeva equates being prajñā-pratiṣṭhita with being “established in ātmā,” by which I understand that one is on the transcendental platform, no longer polluted by the

modes of nature. Both Śrīla Prabhupāda and Baladeva emphasise that an aspiring devotee must understand that the goal is to absorb the mind in Kṛṣṇa and keep all the senses engaged in His loving service in order to become a genuine spiritual practitioner—a sādḥaka—and ultimately achieve self-realisation. Śrīla Prabhupāda adds that a practitioner must learn how to absorb the mind in Kṛṣṇa from someone who has achieved this goal, who has already mastered his mind and senses—a spiritual master. (1,2)

Evidence:

1: “O mighty-armed Arjuna, he who completely restricts the senses from the sense objects by fixing the mind on Me becomes fixed in *ātmā*.” (Bhanu Swami’s translation of 2.68 in Gīta Bhūṣaṇa)

2: “One whose mind is fixed on Me can become established in *ātmā*, *prajñā pratiṣṭhā*. O mighty-armed one, just as you conquer the enemies, you should conquer the senses. From these verses, it should be understood that conquest of the senses takes place spontaneously for the perfected *sthita-prajña* by absorbing the mind in Bhagavān. But it will arise only from practice for the person aspiring to attain the state of *sthita-prajña*.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.68 commentary)

3: “O mighty-armed one, just as you control your enemies with your strength, you should also control your mind.” (Sārārtha-bhāṣya 2.68 commentary)

2.69: When the self-controlled transcendentalist awakens to transcendental reality and sees the Supersoul and himself, the soul, he experiences spiritual bliss (*tasyām jāgarti saṁyamī*). The materialist, remaining asleep to transcendental reality (*yā niśā sarva-bhūtānām*), identifies with the material body and only experiences material enjoyment, along with the accompanying lamentation and bewilderment (*yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni*). The transcendentalist, no longer attracted to material enjoyment, likewise does not experience lamentation and bewilderment, even when in the same circumstances as the materialist (*sā niśā paśyato muneḥ*).

Explanatory note:

Yā niśā sarva-bhūtānām / *tasyām jāgarti saṁyamī*: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “What

is night for all beings / is the time of awakening for the self-controlled...” Viśvanātha graphically explains what Kṛṣṇa means by this statement. (1) He says that the self-realised soul established in spiritual consciousness—the *sthita-prajña*—directly experiences the bliss of fixing his intelligence on the soul. (1) I understand this to mean focusing his intelligence on the soul’s activities in relation to the Supreme Soul. (1,2) The bliss arising from the spiritual exchange of the soul and Supersoul is night for the materialist because he does not experience it and may not even be aware that it exists. (1,2)

Yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni / sā niśā paśyato muneḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...and the time of awakening for all beings / is night for the introspective sage.” Viśvanātha again draws a graphic picture of what is meant by “the time of awakening for all beings”. (1) He explains that materialistic people directly experience material happiness, lamentation and bewilderment. (1) The *sthita-prajña*, who is firmly established in self-realisation, still experiences his manifest karma, but he does not experience happiness, lamentation or bewilderment, because he is indifferent to his material situation. (1,2)

This is how I understand his point. Both the materialist and the embodied transcendentalist have a body which is the result of their past karmic reactions. (2) Their bodily designation may be rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, attractive or unattractive, popular or unpopular, etc. The materialist, who still to some degree or other identifies with the material body and its circumstances, will experience happiness, lamentation or bewilderment due to his circumstances. (1) On the other hand, the self-realised transcendentalist, who is experiencing spiritual bliss, may be in the same material situation, but he will be indifferent to his material circumstances, neither experiencing happiness, lamentation nor bewilderment. (1,2) That is because his consciousness is absorbed in his spiritual experience. (1) Baladeva gives a wonderful example of a dancing girl whose full attention is on the pot she is balancing on her head. (2) The implication is that she is indifferent to the audience’s reaction because her attention is not on the audience but on the pot. (2)

Evidence:

1: “Just as in the night, people dreaming do not know what is happening at that time, so all living entities do not know the things which are being perceived by the intelligence directed towards the soul. But during that night, the *sthita-prajña* or *samyamī*,

controlling his senses, is awake, not dreaming. In other words, he directly realizes the bliss from fixing his intelligence on the soul. When the living entities are awake with intelligence directed towards material sense objects, they realize directly the happiness, lamentation, and bewilderment of those sense objects upon which their intelligence is fixed. ... But that is night for the *muni*, the *sthita-prajña*, who does not experience fixing his intellect on those objects at all. But he does see, he looks upon, *paśyata*, all those sense objects which give happiness and distress to the people bound in *saṁsāra*, with disinterest. ..." (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.69, commentary.)

2: "It has been stated that for the *sādhaka* or person practicing to attain the state of *sthita-prajña*, control of the senses is the goal of his efforts. This verse states that for one who has achieved the stage of *sthita-prajña*, sense control is automatically achieved. There are two types of intelligence: that fixed on the *ātmā* and that fixed on material sense objects. The intelligence fixed on *ātmā* is compared by a metaphor to the night for all living entities. ... The person controlling the senses, *saṁnyamī*, however, is awake, not asleep during that night. He realizes the *ātmā* which is to be attained by that intelligence. Other living entities awake with intelligence fixed on material enjoyment, experience that material enjoyment. They are not sleeping at that time. That, however, is night to the *muni*, the *sthita-prajña*. It does not bring about material pleasure for him. ... The person directly perceiving the *ātmā* also experiences with indifference the sense objects which come to him by *aparāpta karma*, *paśyata*. But one who sees the *ātmā* does not experience the taste for other objects. He is like a dancing girl who pays full attention to the pot balanced on her head." (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.69 commentary)

2.70: The embodied soul continues to experience the demands of the senses (*tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve*). However, when he is fully satisfied in his relationship with the Lord, he no longer tries to gratify those demands (*sa śāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmaḥ*). He is therefore compared to an ocean that remains undisturbed despite many rivers entering it (*āpūryamāṇam acala-pratiṣṭhaṁ / samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat*).

Explanatory note:

Āpūryamāṇam acala-pratiṣṭhaṁ / samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat: Śrīla Prabhupāda

translates these two lines as follows: “the ocean, which is ever being filled but is always still”, and “desires – that enter like rivers into the ocean”. He reverses the two lines and inserts them into the middle of his translation as follows: “...desires – that enter like rivers into the ocean, which is ever being filled but is always still..”

Bhānu Swami also reverses the lines in his translation, but places them together at the beginning of his translation as follows: “Just as the rivers enter the ocean which has fixed shores and is never quite full..” (1)

Tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve / sa śāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmī: Śrīla Prabhupāda splits these two lines and puts the first at the beginning of his translation, and the second at the end, as follows: “A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of desires”, and “can alone achieve peace, and not the man who strives to satisfy such desires.”

Bhānu Swami puts them together in the correct order at the end of his translation of this verse as follows: “...so the objects of enjoyment enter into the *sthita-prajña*, but he remains peaceful. This is not so for the desirer of those objects.” (1)

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains the purpose of the river-ocean metaphor as follows:

“As long as one has the material body, the demands of the body for sense gratification will continue. The devotee, however, is not disturbed by such desires, because of his fullness.” In other words, the self-realised transcendentalist is compared to an ocean that is full of spiritual bliss. Nevertheless, the rivers of material desires still enter him. However, because of his fullness, those rivers of material desires do not agitate him in the least bit. Rather, he remains absorbed in Kṛṣṇa.”

This explanation is repeated by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, both of whom reiterate that though the rivers enter the ocean, they cannot disturb the ocean. Furthermore, they both add an extra perspective. Even when the self-realised transcendentalist receives objects of sense gratification, he is not allured or affected by them. (2, 3) I am reminded of Prahāda Mahārāja’s encounter with the perfected yogi practising the python vow. The yogi’s mentality, which is described in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.13.37–44, vividly illustrates Kṛṣṇa’s point in this verse.

Evidence:

1: “Just as the rivers enter the ocean, which has fixed shores and is never quite full, so the objects of enjoyment enter into the *sthita-prajña*, but he remains peaceful. This is not so for the desirer of those objects.” (Bhānu Swami’s translation of *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī* 2.70)

2: “This verse describes the condition of the *sthita-prajña*, 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)

3: “Similarly, sense objects (*sarve kāmāḥ*) come to the *sthita-prajña* due to his *prārabdha-karma*, 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)

2.71: Because he is intent on satisfying the Lord, such a self-realised soul does not accept more than is necessary to sustain the body (*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān / pumāṁś carati niḥspṛhaḥ*). Having realised his eternal spiritual identity in relation to the Lord, he no longer identifies with the body or regards it or anything else as his own. Knowing the Lord to be the sole proprietor, he engages everything in His service (*nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ*). This realisation of his spiritual identity in relation to the Lord enables him to remain peaceful and unagitated (*sa śāntim adhigacchatī*).

Explanatory note:

Vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān / pumāṁś carati niḥspṛhaḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates these two lines as follows: “A person who has given up all desires for sense gratification / who lives free from desires...” Śrīla Prabhupāda’s translation suggests that these two lines explain what it means to be desireless. This interpretation is reflected in his purport to this verse, where he

writes: “To become desireless means not to desire anything for sense gratification. In other words, desire for becoming Kṛṣṇa conscious is actually desirelessness.”

Bhānu Swami translates the same lines differently in the Gīta Bhūṣaṇa as follows: “...having given up all objects of sense enjoyment / acts only to maintain his body.” (1) Baladeva expands on this in his commentary, where he explains that even if opportunities for sense gratification come to this person, he does not accept anything beyond what is required to maintain his body. (2) In other words, wealth, good edibles, and other luxuries may come unsought, but the *sthita-prajña* will not accept more than is necessary to keep his body healthy. Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura reiterates this. The *sthita-prajña* never engages in gratifying his senses. (3)

Nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this line as follows: “...who has given up all sense of proprietorship and is devoid of false ego...” In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that because the *sthita-prajña* knows that nothing belongs to him—*nirmama*—but that everything belongs to Kṛṣṇa, he engages everything in Kṛṣṇa’s service. Viśvanātha adds that the *sthita-prajña* does not even think his own body belongs to him. (3) In other words, he knows that his body belongs to Kṛṣṇa and must be used to satisfy the Lord and not for sense gratification.

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that such detached consciousness is possible because the *sthita-prajña* does not in any way identify himself as the material body. He writes, “His transcendental knowledge is based on self-realization – namely, knowing perfectly well that every living entity is an eternal part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa in spiritual identity, and that the eternal position of the living entity is therefore never on the level of Kṛṣṇa or greater than Him.” Anyone can say they are free of false ego, but the evidence of such freedom is that they never engage in sense gratification even when the opportunity comes unsought, but only accept what is required for basic bodily maintenance, and that too, only to keep the body fit to serve Kṛṣṇa. (1,2,3) Śrīla Prabhupāda also explains in his lectures that this principle extends beyond what is required for bodily maintenance: a self-realised transcendentalist can use any material facility when it is required for serving Kṛṣṇa. (4)

Sa śāntim adhigacchati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...he alone can attain real peace.” His comment in his purport in this regard is very interesting. He writes: “This transcendental knowledge is based on self-realization – namely, knowing perfectly well that every living entity

is an eternal part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa in spiritual identity, and that the eternal position of the living entity is therefore never on the level of Kṛṣṇa or greater than Him. This understanding of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the basic principle of real peace.”

Here is how I understand this: if someone is inclined to sense enjoyment over and above what is required for keeping the body healthy, that suggests that they do not perfectly know “that every living entity is an eternal part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa in spiritual identity, and that the eternal position of the living entity is therefore never on the level of Kṛṣṇa or greater than Him.”

In the Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 5.29, we learn what Kṛṣṇa’s position is: He is the only legitimate enjoyer, the only genuine controller, and the only real well-wishing friend of all living beings. Thus, when Śrīla Prabhupāda suggests that one who is still inclined to unnecessarily gratify his senses, that tells me such a person continues to be contaminated by the false notions that he, not Kṛṣṇa, is the legitimate enjoyer of the world’s resources, that he has the capacity and entitlement to control others, and that others depend on his goodwill for their happiness.

Evidence:

1: “He attains peace who, having given up all objects of sense enjoyment, being devoid of possessiveness and false identity, acts only to maintain his body.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.71 translation)

2: “That person who eats only to survive (*carati niḥsṛhaḥ*), after having renounced all sense objects which come to him, except for bodily maintenance, being devoid of possessiveness (*nirmamaḥ*) and being devoid of thinking of his body as his self (*nirahāṅkāraḥ*), attains peace. Another meaning is as follows. That person who, wherever he goes, having renounced all sense objects, remains devoid of possessiveness and false identity, attains peace.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.71 commentary)

3: “This verse describes the person who, not having faith in the sense objects, does not enjoy them at all. He is devoid of possessiveness and ego, regarding his body and objects related to the body (*nirmamo nirahāṅkāra*).” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.71 commentary)

4: “But we see everything has got Kṛṣṇa connection. Therefore we utilize it for Kṛṣṇa. Just like you're talking about Kṛṣṇa, it is being recorded. So it is useful for Kṛṣṇa's service. ... Because the aeroplane is there, therefore my preaching has been easier. In every year I am wandering all over the world twice, thrice. Because if you use aeroplane.

... It is giving me facility to preach my Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, why shall I give it up ...We have no attachment for all these things. We are sitting in this palatial building, that's all right. But you can talk these things underneath a tree. But if I sit down underneath a tree, nobody will come to me.” ([Room Conversation, July 30th 1973, London](#))

2.72: Buddhi yoga, comprising devotional sadhana and niskama karma yoga, is the only means by which one can attain such transcendental God-consciousness (*eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha*), whereby one never again misidentifies with the material body (*nainām prāpya vimuhyati*). If one attains this consciousness even at the last moment of life (*sthitvāsyām anta-kāle 'pi*), one will enter the Lord's eternal spiritual kingdom (*brahma-nirvāṇam ṛcchati*).

Explanatory note:

Eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “That is the way of the spiritual and godly life.” In his purport, he explains that *brāhmī sthiti* means “not on the platform of material activities.” I understand the phrase “the way of the spiritual and godly life” to refer to the behaviour of the *sthita-prajña* described in Bhagavad-gītā 2.71. In other words, the phrase “spiritual and godly life” means to give up all sense gratification, accept the bare minimum required for one's bodily maintenance, and dedicate the bulk of one's activities and resources to the Lord's service.

I understand the word *eṣā*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda translates as “That is the way...”, to point back to the *buddhi-yoga* which Kṛṣṇa began speaking about in Bhagavad-gītā 2.39. The ācāryas explain that *buddhi-yoga* has two aspects: the cultivation of transcendental knowledge through devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*, and *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*, which means executing one's scripturally prescribed worldly duties, known as *varṇāśrama*, exclusively for the Lord's satisfaction, and not with the intention of enjoying the results of the work oneself. (1,2)

I think this interpretation of *eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ* is supported by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's claim that this final verse succinctly summarises Kṛṣṇa's key message in Chapter 2, and

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s statement that this verse is the essence of the second chapter. (1,2)

Baladeva also reiterates, in different words, the two aspects of *buddhi-yoga*: the cultivation of transcendental knowledge, which occurs through devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*, and the performance of *niṣkāma-karma-yoga*. (2)

Interestingly, Baladeva concludes his commentary to this verse by saying that if one tries to achieve transcendental consciousness by any method other than *buddhi-yoga*, one will simply create obstacles in the path of one’s spiritual progress. (2)

Nainām prāpya vimuhyati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “...after attaining which a man is not bewildered.” In this context, Śrīla Prabhupāda is not using the English word “bewildered” with the same connotation as he did in Bhagavad-gītā 2.63, where he translated *smṛti-bhramśāt* as “after bewilderment of memory”. Here, he is using “bewildered” to translate the Sanskrit word *vimūhyati*.

Vimūhyati appears again in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.1.43, where he translates it as “becomes bewildered by identification.” In the purport to that verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that when we are influenced by the illusory energy, we identify ourselves as the body we inhabit. However, once freed from the influence of the material energy, we no longer misidentify ourselves with the material body, but understand ourselves to be Kṛṣṇa’s eternal servant. (3) From this, I understand that “bewildered” in Bhagavad-gītā 2.72 refers to the same kind of bodily misidentification that is expressed through *nirahankārah* in Bhagavad-gītā 2.71.

Sthitvāsyām anta-kāle ’pi / brahma-nirvāṇam ṛcchati: Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this as “If one is thus situated even at the hour of death / one can enter into the kingdom of God.” In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda narrates the history of King Khaṭvāṅga, who managed to attain this purified consciousness just a few minutes before he died, and thus he returned back home to Godhead. Viśvanātha also emphasises that this means if we succeed in fully purifying our consciousness even at the point of death, we will go back home to Godhead. (1,2)

Arjuna’s Partial Understanding:

The reader may recall that Arjuna did not fully understand Kṛṣṇa’s intent when He told him in Bhagavad-gītā 2.39 that He would now teach *buddhi-yoga*. At that point, he understood Kṛṣṇa to mean that He would teach him how to engage in *sādhana-bhakti*. As I explain in the section “Arjuna’s Partial Understanding” for Bhagavad-gītā 2.48, Arjuna thought that when Kṛṣṇa told

him to do his duties equipoised, He meant the duties of a retired kṣatriya who lives a life absorbed simply in devotional practices such as *śravaṇam* and *kīrtanam*. This mistake also leads him to misunderstand Kṛṣṇa's instructions in this verse, hence his questions in Chapter 3.1–2.

Though the ācāryas do not specify what Arjuna understands, if we carry his misunderstanding of *buddhi-yoga* through to the current verse, it is reasonable to suggest he thought Kṛṣṇa meant something like this:

“Buddhi yoga, or leading a life dedicated to devotional sadhana, is the only means by which one can attain such godly consciousness whereby one desists from all unnecessary sense gratification and focuses all one's energy and resources in the Lord's loving service. Once one's consciousness is thus fully purified of all materialistic desires one is no longer influenced by false ego and the mistaken belief that one owns or controls anything. If one can attain this purity of consciousness even at the last moment of one's life, one will enter the Lord's eternal spiritual kingdom.”

Evidence:

1: “This verse concludes the topic. *Brāhmī* means that which gives attainment of Brahman. Even one at the point of death, *antakāle*, what to speak of one of young age, by this practice attains *brahma-nirvāṇa*. Having presented very clearly *jñāna* and *karma* and indirectly *bhakti*, this chapter is called the *sūtra* (abbreviated form) of the Gītā.” (Sārārtha-varṣiṇī 2.72 commentary)

2: “This verse praises the state of the *sthita-prajñā*. This state enables one to attain Brahman (*brāhmī*)... The Lord can be attained only by *bhakti*... Because the state of *sthita-prajñā* is caused by *bhakti* to the Lord, and also brings about *bhakti* to the Lord, it is said to be the cause of attaining Brahman. A person will become a *jñānī*, remembering the Lord by performance of *niṣkāma-karma*. To do otherwise creates only obstacles. This is the essence of the second chapter.” (Gīta Bhūṣaṇa 2.72 commentary)

3: “By the influence of *māyā*, the illusory potency of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the living entity thinks that he is this person, that person, American, Indian, cat, dog, tree or whatever. This is called *māyā*. When one is freed from this bewilderment and understands

that the soul does not belong to any shape of this material world, one is situated on the spiritual platform (*brahma-bhūta*)... When the living entity receives these different forms, he identifies with them, and not with his original, spiritual form. As soon as the living entity returns to his original, spiritual form and understanding, he immediately surrenders to the supreme form, the Personality of Godhead.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.1.43 purport)