

Gita Flow Reflections:

1: Reflection for 1.1:

(How to Attract Kṛṣṇa's Protection from the Dangers of Kali-yuga)

"Bhagavad-gītā is the widely read theistic science summarized in the Gītā-māhātmya (Glorification of the Gītā). There it says that one should read Bhagavad-gītā very scrutinizingly with the help of a person who is a devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and try to understand it without personally motivated interpretations."

In these two opening sentences to this purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda succinctly but cryptically explains exactly how we can always keep ourselves under Kṛṣṇa's protection. If we follow the instruction he gives in the second sentence, we will discover the secret.

The summary of *Bhagavad-gītā* is Bhagavad-gītā 18.66, where Kṛṣṇa instructs us to surrender to Him and promises to protect us from all our sinful reactions. In his purport to that verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

"Now, in summarizing Bhagavad-gītā, the Lord says that Arjuna should give up all the processes that have been explained to him; he should simply surrender to Kṛṣṇa. That surrender will save him from all kinds of sinful reactions, for the Lord personally promises to protect him."

Kṛṣṇa speaks *Bhagavad-gītā* at the dawn of Kali-yuga, a very dangerous age of quarrel and hypocrisy. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 12, Chapter 2, we hear:

"As the Age of Kali progresses, all good qualities of men diminish and all impure qualities increase. Atheistic systems of so-called religion become predominant, replacing the codes of Vedic law. The kings become just like highway bandits, the people in general become dedicated to low occupations, and all the social classes become just like śūdras." (Srimad Bhagavatam 12, chapter 2 Introduction)

At the dawn of this terrible age, the compassionate Lord spoke *the Bhagavad-gītā* to give suffering humanity the means of protecting itself from the evils to come.

The question may arise: exactly what do we need to do to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and keep ourselves and our loved ones safe? By carefully unravelling these two opening sentences, we

will discover that Kṛṣṇa's instruction to surrender is restated more clearly in the Gītā-māhātmya 2, which Śrīla Prabhupāda cites in his introduction to the Bhagavad-gītā As It Is:

“If one reads Bhagavad-gītā very sincerely and with all seriousness, then by the grace of the Lord the reactions of his past misdeeds will not act upon him.” (Gītā-māhātmya 2 found in Bhagavad-gītā As It Is Introduction

In the second sentence of his purport to Bhagavad-gītā 1.1, Śrīla Prabhupāda further clarifies exactly what it means to read Bhagavad-gītā very sincerely and with all seriousness:

“There it says that one should read Bhagavad-gītā very scrutinizingly with the help of a person who is a devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and try to understand it without personally motivated interpretations.”

In this second sentence, he spells out exactly how to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and thus attract His protection.

In many places throughout his books, lectures, letters, morning walks, and room conversations, Śrīla Prabhupāda further clarifies how to scrutinise *Bhagavad-gītā* with the help of another devotee, how to avoid materially motivated interpretations, and what counts as ‘trying’ to understand it. We have collated many of those instructions under ten headings which we have called [Improving Saṅga's 10 Principles](#). We have tried and tested these and can personally testify to the power of these 10 Principles to positively transform our lives.

Someone may object that surrender to Kṛṣṇa is much more complicated than just scrutinising *Bhagavad-gītā* with the help of a devotee and trying to understand it without personally motivated interpretations. They may point to this verse from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya 22.100:

“The six divisions of surrender are the acceptance of those things favorable to devotional service, the rejection of unfavorable things, the conviction that Kṛṣṇa will give protection, the acceptance of the Lord as one's guardian or master, full self-surrender, and humility.”

In reply, I suggest that discussing *Bhagavad-gītā* as Śrīla Prabhupāda instructs is certainly favourable to devotional service, avoiding personally motivated interpretations counts as rejecting unfavourable things, and prioritising such discussions in our lives is evidence of our

conviction in Kṛṣṇa's promise that He will protect us. Surrender may not stop at prioritising such discussions. We may need to significantly broaden and deepen our surrender to go back home to Godhead, but it is sufficient to attract Kṛṣṇa's protection while we remain in the material world.

2: Reflection for 2.5:

(Sometimes a Guru Must Be Rejected)

The relationship between guru and disciple is a central concept in the Bhagavad-gītā. The importance of the self-realised spiritual master in the life of the disciple, together with the respect and service a disciple should render to the guru, is emphasised throughout the scriptures. Yet, as explained in Srila Prabhupadada's purport to Bhagavad-gita 2.5, there are circumstances in which the guru must be rejected:

"According to scriptural codes, a teacher who engages in an abominable action and has lost his sense of discrimination is fit to be abandoned."

We will see this illustrated in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Canto Eight, Chapter Twenty, in the history of Bali Mahārāja, who rejected his guru Śukrācārya.

Oftentimes aspiring transcendentalists rush into the guru-disciple relationship without being sufficiently versed in scripture. However, Srila Prabhupada advises that deepening our understanding of scripture is more important than initiation.

"...initiation or no initiation, first thing is knowledge....Initiation is formality. "

[\(Press Interview, October 16th 1976, Chandigarh\)](#)

He assures us there will be no difficulty for one who is adequately versed in scripture to find a genuine spiritual master:

"So to find out a bona fide guru is not difficult, provided one is bona fide to search out a guru." ([Lecture on Nectar of Devotion, October 30th 1972, Vrndāvana](#))

Conversely, without scriptural knowledge, we are likely to blindly accept an unqualified pseudo-spiritual master:

“Blind following and absurd inquiries. These things are condemned in this verse. Blind following means, “Oh, there is a svāmī. So many thousands of people are following. Let me become his disciple.” This is called blind following. You do not know what is that svāmī, whether he is a svāmī or he is rascal. You do not know. But because everyone is going, “Oh, let me become his disciple.” This is blind following. Without any knowledge, blind following.” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 4.34–39, January 12th, 1969, Los Angeles](#))

The duty of the spiritual master is to help us deepen our grasp of śāstra, clarify our doubts and misgivings, guide us in how to act according to scripture, and exemplify the teachings of scripture.

*“In the *paramparā* system, the instructions taken from the bona fide spiritual master must also be based on revealed Vedic scriptures. One who is in the line of disciplic succession cannot manufacture his own way of behavior....one who wants to understand the mystery of revealed scriptures must approach a bona fide spiritual master, hear from him very submissively and render service to him. Then the import of the scriptures will be revealed....Neither a *sādhū* (saintly person or Vaiṣṇava) nor a bona fide spiritual master says anything that is beyond the scope of the sanction of the revealed scriptures. Thus the statements of the revealed scriptures correspond to those of the bona fide spiritual master and saintly persons.” (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi 7.48 purport)*

One who has failed to study scripture will not know whether the guru is instructing him correctly or whether he should be rejected.

*“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 Jīva Gosvāmī'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](#))

3: Reflection for 2.6:

(Reconciling Apparent Contradictions)

In Bhagavad-gītā Chapter 2, Text 11, Kṛṣṇa calls Arjuna a fool, and in that purport Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

“Arjuna argued that religious principles should be given more importance than politics or sociology, but he did not know that knowledge of matter, soul and the Supreme is even more important than religious formularies. And because he was lacking in that knowledge, he should not have posed himself as a very learned man.”

In other words, Arjuna is not enlightened. Yet in the purport to 2.6, Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to contradict himself by saying that everything Arjuna says demonstrates that he is a great devotee and highly enlightened:

“All these considerations by Arjuna definitely proved that not only was he a great devotee of the Lord but he was also highly enlightened and had complete control over his mind and senses. His desire to live by begging, although he was born in the royal household, is another sign of detachment. He was truly virtuous, as these qualities, combined with his faith in the words of instruction of Śrī Kṛṣṇa (his spiritual master), indicate. It is concluded that Arjuna was quite fit for liberation. Unless the senses are controlled, there is no chance of elevation to the platform of knowledge, and without knowledge and devotion there is no chance of liberation. Arjuna was competent in all these attributes, over and above his enormous attributes in his material relationships.”

How would you reconcile these apparently contradictory statements?

My view is that although Arjuna is confused about the relative importance of different scriptural instructions, he displays many noble qualities that will make it easy for him to

overcome his confusion. As Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa states in his commentary, Arjuna reveals his noble qualities in 1.32, 1.35, 2.5 and 2.7.

In chapter 1.32 Arjuna demonstrates his detachment when he says, “...of what avail to us are a kingdom, happiness, or even life itself...”. In chapter 1.35, he demonstrates his unselfishness and lack of avarice by saying: “I am not prepared to fight with them even in exchange for the three worlds, let alone this earth.” In chapter 2.5, he demonstrates his willingness to tolerate personal difficulty for the good of others by saying: “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.” Most importantly, Arjuna demonstrates his great faith in Kṛṣṇa by seeking His guidance in chapter 2, text 7.

In summary, to become qualified for self-realisation, we must cultivate these noble qualities: the ability to control our mind and senses from engaging in sense gratification, indifference to our own gratification either in this life or the next, the ability to tolerate difficulties, and faith in Kṛṣṇa’s guidance.

Evidence:

1: “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)

4: Reflection for 2.11:

(Defining Vipra, Jñānī, Vijñānī and Other Terms)

Scripture describes three types of knowers of scripture: a *vipra*, a *jñānī*, and a *vijñānī*. A *vipra* is learned in the scriptures, a *jñānī*'s scriptural knowledge has matured into transcendental knowledge, and a *vijñānī*'s transcendental knowledge has further matured into realised knowledge. (1, 3)

To be a *vipra* does not require academic learning, but one must follow the spiritual master's instructions to study *Bhagavad-gītā*. The illiterate South Indian brāhmaṇa is an example of someone who, though lacking formal education, followed his spiritual master's instructions to read the *Bhagavad-gītā* daily. (4) Consequently, despite his lack of formal learning, Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu recognised his learning.

“Indeed, you are an authority in the reading of the Bhagavad-gītā. Whatever you know constitutes the real purport of the Bhagavad-gītā.” (Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya 9.102)

When one's assimilation of scriptural knowledge matures, one becomes a *jñānī*. A *jñānī* has attained transcendental knowledge. This means that he no longer identifies the self with the material body. (1) A *jñānī* is also referred to as a *brāhmaṇa*, brahman-realised, *brahma-bhūta*, and a *paṇḍita*. (1, 5, 6) A *vijñānī* is one who has realised knowledge, which means that not only does he no longer identify the self with the material body, but he has also seen the soul and the Supersoul. Brahman realisation and Paramātmā realisation are both partial realisations of the Absolute Truth. (7)

Often, aspiring devotees use the phrases ‘transcendental knowledge’ and ‘realised knowledge’ loosely to refer to book knowledge or conviction in the books. However, the scriptures use these terms to refer to Brahman realisation and Paramātmā realisation, respectively.

Evidence:

1: "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)

2: "So the *jñānīs* and the *yogīs*, they cannot understand perfectly what is God. God is transcendental, *sat-cit-ānanda*, combination of eternity, knowledge and blissfulness. So if we realize the Absolute Truth partially, simply the eternity knowledge, that is called *brahma-jñāna*. And when one is further advanced and he realizes the Absolute Truth as the localized aspect, Paramātmā, or Lord Viṣṇu within anyone's heart, by the yogic practice, that is called *paramātmā-jñāna*, or knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Actually, the objective is one, but different degrees of understanding". ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 7.1-3, June 13th 1974, Paris](#))

3: "So *vipra*, *vipra* means one who is fully conversant with Vedic knowledge. He is called *vipra*. For spiritual elevation there are gradual evolutionary stages. *Vipra* stage is just before becoming a qualified *brāhmaṇa*." ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.9.10, July 10th 1968, Montreal](#))

4: "His spiritual activities did not depend on material things such as correct pronunciation. Rather, his success depended on strictly following the instructions of his spiritual master." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Madhya 9.98 purport)

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

6: "You can attain *bhakti* when you are already Brahman-realized person, or perfect *brāhmaṇa*. *Brahma jñātīti brāhmaṇaḥ*." ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.11, April 26th 1974, Tirupati](#))

7. “Brahman is His transcendental bodily effulgence, and Paramātmā is His partial representation. As such, Brahman or Paramātmā realization of the Absolute Truth is but a partial realization.” (Śrīmad Bhagavatam 1.2.12 purport)

5: Reflection for 2.14:

(Tolerance Requires Discernment and a Higher Taste)

Bhagavad-gita 2.14 tells us we must learn to tolerate happiness and distress, for they come and go like summer and winter seasons. However, this does not mean we should blindly accept and tolerate everything. Blind acceptance is dangerous on the spiritual path. (4) Therefore, it is important to prioritise discussing scripture to learn what we should tolerate and what situations we should leave. Discussing scripture correctly also enables us to cultivate a higher spiritual taste, which will give us the strength to tolerate difficulties in performing our prescribed duties. (1, 2)

We are all looking for enjoyment. The nature of the soul is *ānandamayo 'bhyāsāt*—pleasure-seeking. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that the purpose of life is *ānanda*, pleasure. We are not meant to tolerate suffering for suffering’s sake, but to learn how to accept temporary difficulties that help us progress toward a higher and more lasting happiness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s gives many easy and highly effective instructions on how to improve our discussion of scripture. These are available on our Improving Sanga website:

<https://improvingsanga.com/ten-principles/>. By learning to discuss scripture correctly with our family and friends we please Kṛṣṇa, and by His grace all of us will develop scriptural discrimination and a higher spiritual taste. (3)

Evidence:

1: “Discussion of Kṛṣṇa is very potent, and if a fortunate person has such association and tries to assimilate the knowledge, then he will surely make advancement toward spiritual realization.” (Bhagavad gita as it is 9.1 purport)

2: “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.” (Srimad bhagavatam 3.25.25)

3: “For a devotee, there is no point in making friendships with ordinary persons; he should make friendship with other devotees so that by discussing among themselves they may elevate one another on the path of spiritual understanding.” (Srimad bhagavatam 3.29.17 purport)

4: “Leaders who have fallen into ignorance and who mislead people by directing them to the path of destruction [as described in the previous verse] are, in effect, boarding a stone boat, and so too are those who blindly follow them. A stone boat would be unable to float and would sink in the water with its passengers. Similarly, those who mislead people go to hell, and their followers go with them.” (Śrīmad Bhagavatam 6.7.14 purport)

6: Reflection for 2.15:

(An Honest and Patient Approach to Becoming a Dhīra)

In the Bhagavad Gita 2.15, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that one who can continue to fulfil his duty despite temptations or adversity is eligible for liberation. I am far from being so qualified, for I am equally derailed from the path of duty by both material temptations and adversity. How will this ever change?

I have heard many aspiring devotees advocate faking being a dhīra until we become one. I have seen that approach frequently lead to personal devastation, harm to others, and public humiliation. Furthermore, in Bhagavad-gītā 3.6, Kṛṣṇa expresses His disapproval of imitation. Śrīla Prabhupāda narrates an amusing story about a wise doctor and his servant to illustrate how dangerous it is to imitate a dhīra.

“‘There was a physician and his servant. One day the physician was called ... to treat his horse... The physician took a hammer and strongly struck the swollen portion, and it was at once cured. ... The servant saw, ‘So this is the process of curing swollen parts of the body.’ ... Whenever he was called to treat such disease, he used to hammer over that swollen part and the patient died. ... So he explained, ‘You nonsense, the swelling is not cured by beating. That was a special case. The horse took a squash while he was

in the garden, and he could not swallow it up.’ ... But you foolish, you are simply striking on swollen parts?” (Lecture on Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 7.118-120, on February 24th, 1967, in San Francisco)

The dhīra is like the wise doctor. He knows not only what to do but also why he is doing it. His actions are guided by scriptural understanding and proper discrimination, and, importantly, he has no subconscious personal motivation. When someone who still has material desires and an imperfect understanding of scripture imitates the external behaviour of a dhīra, he simply causes problems in others’ lives and consequently implicates himself in sinful karmic reactions for which he will suffer in future lives.

Such pretenders are sometimes referred to as *sahajiyas*, or people who try to cheaply imitate spiritual advancement. Srila Prabhupada warned us about becoming *sahajiyas*.

“Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, he said that "When our men will be sahajiyā, oh, they'll be more dangerous." So our men are becoming, some of them, sahajiyās. This very word he said, that "When our men will be sahajiyā, he'll be more dangerous." (Room Conversation, January 24th 1977, Bhubaneswar)

Therefore, as disappointing as it may be to have made so little progress, I think it wiser to remain honest and to take courage from the Lord’s assurance in the Srimad Bhagavatam:

“Having awakened faith in the narrations of My glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery, but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyment, My devotee should remain happy and worship Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities. When an intelligent person engages constantly in worshiping Me through loving devotional service as described by Me, his heart becomes firmly situated in Me. Thus all material desires within the heart are destroyed.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 11.20.27–29)

7: Reflection for 2.16:

(Verse 16’s pivotal Role in Chapter 2)

This chapter opens with Arjuna openly admitting that his grief at the thought of killing his elders and family members is so intense that it has robbed him of his intelligence and physical strength. He turns to Kṛṣṇa as the only person capable of easing this terrible sorrow in his heart. From verse 2.11, Kṛṣṇa assures him that no self-realised person would grieve, because they know that all souls are eternal individuals who can never be destroyed. (2.11–12)

This knowledge doesn't help Arjuna because it does not ease the love he feels for the bodies of his elders and family members, nor the grief he feels at the thought of hurting those bodies. Kṛṣṇa tries to help him see the irrationality of his feelings by pointing out that souls are always changing bodies, and no one grieves those changes. For example, no one grieves when their child changes from a baby's body to a child's body and then to a youth's body. We may have had relationships with those bodies, but we don't grieve when our child leaves one body for another. Why then is Arjuna lamenting at the thought of his elders changing their bodies for young, strong ones?

Although Arjuna can see the error in his thinking, he still cannot overcome the grief he feels at being separated from the elderly bodies of his grandfather and teachers.

From verse 14, Kṛṣṇa takes a new tack. He acknowledges that the mind creates obstacles to doing our duty, but so do all our other senses. For example, the tactile sense creates obstacles to taking one's prescribed bath in winter, and the same sense creates obstacles for women to cook in the heat of the summer months. However, people tolerate these difficulties to fulfil their duties. He urges Arjuna to similarly tolerate the difficulty presented by his mind and to do his duty of fighting. In 2.15, He reminds Arjuna that only by remaining steady in the execution of one's duty is it possible to attain self-realisation and freedom from the cycle of birth and death in the material world.

From Bhagavad-gita 2.16 to 2.30, Kṛṣṇa teaches Sankhya Yoga to help Arjuna endure the difficulties of his mind and remain steadfast in his duty. Sankhya Yoga clearly analyses the distinction between the self (the spirit soul) and one's material body. From verse 31 to 37, Kṛṣṇa explains how understanding Sankhya Yoga naturally leads to Karma yoga: doing one's duty. He explains that anything Arjuna may want, whether it be to be happy in this life or the next, can only be attained by applying the teachings of Sankhya to steady his mind so that he can do his duty—Karma yoga. One starts by doing sakāma karma yoga: doing one's duty as a

sacrifice for Viṣṇu because one wants the Lord to satisfy one's material desires. (1) From verse 38 to 53, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna it is much better to do one's duty without any material desires. This is known either as *akāma* or *niṣkāma* karma yoga, which leads to the first stage of liberation: brahman-realisation. (2)

Recognising that Sankhya alone is insufficient to help Arjuna overcome his emotional resistance to fighting, Kṛṣṇa introduces him to buddhi yoga from verse 39. He assures Arjuna that by practising buddhi yoga he will develop both wisdom and a higher spiritual happiness, enabling him to overcome the resistance in his heart, fulfil his duty and achieve self-realisation. In verse 54, Arjuna asks about the characteristics of a self-realised person. From verses 2.55 to 2.72, Kṛṣṇa answers Arjuna's questions.

Thus, the chapter progresses from Arjuna's problem to Kṛṣṇa's solution, starting with Sankhya Yoga, then to Karma Yoga, and finally to Buddhi Yoga. Verse 16 is the pivotal verse in which the solution begins to be introduced.

Evidence:

1: "There are two kinds of devotees, known as *sakāma* and *akāma*. Pure devotees are *akāma*, whereas devotees in the upper planetary systems, such as the demigods, are called *sakāma* because they still want to enjoy material opulence." (Śrīmad Bhagavatam 6.9.40 purport)

2: "...*niṣkāma* means those who have no desire for sense gratification ... Their other name is *akāma*. They have no desires. Personally they have no desires. Their only business is how to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. That is their only desire." ([Lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.14, November 10th 1970, Bombay](#))

8: Reflection for 2.22:

(The Benefit Enjoyed by Honourable Warriors)

Srila Prabhupada writes in the purport of Bhagavad-gita 2.22:

"One who lays down his life on the sacrificial altar, or in the proper battlefield, is at once cleansed of bodily reactions and promoted to a higher status of life."

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa further clarifies that a warrior who dies in a religiously conducted battle will immediately attain a celestial body “without even undergoing the pains of staying in the womb and other inconveniences.” (Gīta-bhūṣaṇa 2.22 commentary)

This, however, does not apply to everyone. We learn in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 6.1.31–68 that for a sinful person, transference from one body to the next is very traumatic. In that section of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, we hear how the Yamadūtas, the messengers of Yamarāja, drag the terrified living entity from his body, take him to Yamarāja to be punished for his sinful activities, and then assign him his new body.

In Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.30.19–24, we learn more about the horrific journey the sinful living entity is subjected to on his way to Yamarāja’s domain. He is forced to travel under a scorching sun along roads of burning-hot sand, with forest fires on both sides. He suffers unceasing whipping, hunger, thirst and exhaustion. Then, in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.31, the sufferings of the baby in a mother’s womb are described.

In Bhagavad-gīta 2.22 Kṛṣṇa assures Arjuna that any warrior killed on the battlefield will bypass all these miseries and receive a celestial body as easily as one takes off his old clothing and puts on new ones.

The idea that soldiers killed in battle go to heaven is found in many religious traditions. However, the Vedas set certain qualifications. This is true only when soldiers die in fair combat, as at Kurukṣetra, or for a righteous cause, such as defending dependents or civilians. (2) This excludes those killed while intentionally attacking unarmed civilians, women, children or the elderly. (1) If the natural guardians of such people fail to protect them, they will be punished for their sin. (3)

Evidence:

1-5: “It is the custom – according to kṣatriya fighting principles – that an unarmed and unwilling foe should not be attacked.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 1.45 purport)

2-6: “According to Vedic injunctions there are six kinds of aggressors: (1) a poison giver, (2) one who sets fire to the house, (3) one who attacks with deadly weapons, (4) one who plunders riches, (5) one who occupies another’s land, and (6) one who kidnaps a wife. Such aggressors

are at once to be killed, and no sin is incurred by killing such aggressors.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 1.36 purport)

3-7: “The defenseless creatures, according to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, are the cows, brāhmaṇas, women, children and old men. ... Therefore the Lord especially instructs that no one should be envious of these five, ... Those who are helpless must be taken care of by their respective guardians; otherwise the guardians will be subjected to the punishment of Yamarāja, who is appointed by the Lord to supervise the activities of sinful living creatures.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.16.10 purport)

9: Reflection for 2.31:

(Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s Terms Saṇiṣṭha, Pariniṣṭhita and Nirapekṣa)

In Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s *Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* commentary to 2.31, he says the Lord now speaks to the saṇiṣṭhas. Therefore, below I include an excerpt from Bhānu Swami’s foreword to *Gīta-bhūṣaṇa* where he explains three terms Baladeva uses in his analysis of Bhagavad-gītā: sāṇiṣṭha, pariniṣṭhita, and nirapekṣa.

“In Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s commentary, we will find... original ideas. He presents the concept of three types of devotees: the sāṇiṣṭha, pariniṣṭhita, and nirapekṣa, in order to bring unity to the whole of the Gītā. The sāṇiṣṭha bhakta follows the gradual process: niṣkāma karma-yoga varṇāśrama, followed by jñāna-yoga, aṣṭāṅga-yoga, and finally bhakti-yoga. Thus all the processes described in the first six chapters can be considered essential for the sāṇiṣṭha bhakta’s development. The pariniṣṭhita bhakta directly engages in the devotional processes of hearing and chanting as his main sādhana. He also performs varṇāśrama rules, but without attachment, only to set an example for less advanced persons who do not have strong faith to practise bhakti as their main sādhana. The nirapekṣa bhakta performs only bhakti and rejects the rules of varṇāśrama. He is usually a renounced person. The latter two types of devotees are called ananya-bhaktas or pure devotees, though they are practising sādhana. They are considered superior because of their direct practice

of bhakti. These two types are described in the middle six chapters and at the conclusion of the Gītā. This explanation of the relationship of varṇāśrama to bhakti may be useful to the readers for application in their own lives.”

The literal meaning of these three terms is as follows: saniṣṭha — firmly established; pariniṣṭhita — completely/thoroughly established; nirapekṣa — without dependence or expectation.

As I understand it, the saniṣṭha devotee, although steady in his varṇāśrama and devotional duties, still has material ambitions he seeks to fulfil. It seems to me that he is the sakāma-karma devotee Kṛṣṇa speaks of in Bhagavad-gītā chapter 3. A pariniṣṭhita devotee is more advanced. It appears that he corresponds to the niṣkāma-karma devotee described in Bhagavad-gītā chapter 5. Such a devotee performs his varṇāśrama duties to set a good example for others, but he places greater emphasis on his devotional practices. Finally, in this progression, the nirapekṣa devotee is completely renounced because of his full absorption in spiritual happiness. However, I advise the reader to study the entirety of Bhagavad-gītā several times before coming to his own considered conclusion.

10: Reflection for 2.47:

(Our Spiritual Practice Must Match Our Qualification)

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura writes in his commentary to 2.47:

“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)

From this, we learn that Kṛṣṇa does not indiscriminately instruct Arjuna to act on a platform beyond his current realisation. Instead, He knows Arjuna well enough to tailor His instructions

to Arjuna's level of spiritual qualification. In doing so, He demonstrates an important principle of spiritual life: our practice must correspond to our internal qualification. In other words, we should not artificially adopt a higher level of practice than we are genuinely qualified for. (1)

This principle opposes a common misunderstanding among modern spiritual practitioners that one can 'Fake it till you make it'. This serious misunderstanding can stunt one's spiritual progress and lead to hypocrisy. (2)

Evidence:

1: “One who restrains the senses of action but whose mind dwells on sense objects certainly deludes himself and is called a pretender.” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 3.6)

2: “Instead of becoming a pseudo transcendentalist for the sake of wanton living and sense enjoyment...” (Bhagavad-gītā As It Is 3.7 purport)

11: Reflection for 2.48:

(The Need for Continual Sādhū-Saṅga)

When a ship goes off course by one degree, the error may seem insignificant at first, but after travelling many miles, that tiny deviation takes the ship far from its intended destination. The same problem can occur on our life's spiritual journey.

Arjuna did not completely misunderstand Kṛṣṇa's instructions—he only partially understood them. Yet that partial understanding was enough to lead him astray. He mistakenly thought he should retire to the forest when Kṛṣṇa wanted him to remain on the battlefield and fight. Fortunately, Arjuna was eager to act righteously. Therefore, rather than assuming he had understood correctly, he clarified his confusion by asking thoughtful questions. (1)

Many aspiring sādhakas, however, do not follow Arjuna's example. We may attend a few lectures, read a few books, and gain a general grasp of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We then build our lives on that partial understanding, assuming it is complete. When the results are disappointing—when spiritual life feels dry, confusing, or frustrating—we often blame the process rather than considering that we may have misunderstood it. More concerning still, we may pass our partial understanding on to others, unintentionally

misleading them as well. For this reason, Srila Prabhupada repeatedly urges us to carefully scrutinise the scriptures and ask thoughtful questions. (2, 3)

One of the defining qualities of a sincere devotee is that he is *jijñāsuḥ śreyas uttamam*—genuinely inquisitive about the highest good. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that without such inquisitiveness, one is not even eligible for spiritual initiation. Genuine inquiry does not mean asking questions merely for argument or curiosity. It means asking questions that dispel doubts, clarify meaning, and help us understand how Kṛṣṇa's instructions should be properly applied in our own lives. (3)

A good rule of thumb to check whether we are understanding and applying scriptural principles correctly is to see if we feel inner happiness and peace. If we discover that our spiritual life has become confusing or unsatisfying, the solution is not to abandon the journey or to continue suffering in the name of spiritual life. The solution is to rectify our understanding and practices. (4)

Evidence:

1: “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)

2: “In this verse, both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned. Not only should one hear submissively from the spiritual master, but one must also get a clear understanding from him, in submission and service and inquiries.” (Bhagavad-gita As It Is 4.34 purport)

3 “... Suppose you hear something of the Bhagavad-gītā, and it appeals to you, or even does not appeal to you. Just try to think over: 'What Bhagavad-gītā says? How has Swāmījī discussed this matter?' Apply your arguments. Apply your logic. Don't take it as a sentiment or as in a blind faith. You have got reason; you have got argument; you have got sense. Apply it and try to understand it. Neither it is bogus. It is scientific. ...” ([Lecture on Bhagavad-gita 4.11-12, on July 25th, 1966 in New York](#))

4: “So if I am actually rendering devotional service and I'm not getting any happiness, that means there is some *māyā*'s play. Otherwise there is no such reasoning. He must feel happy. Then he has to rectify the process of his service. Not to change, but rectify the process.”

([Lecture on Bhagavad-gītā 2.13-17, November 29th, 1968, in Los Angeles](#))

12: Reflection for 2.51:

(The Abuse of Power Always Backfires)

Bhagavad-gītā 2.51 speaks of the benefits of performing our God-given duties without personal motivation. Our duties generally include obligations to protect and elevate other living beings. For example, a ksatriya's duties involve guiding and protecting the citizens of his country. (3) A father's duty is to provide for, protect and spiritually elevate his wife and children. A wife's duty is to create a stable, loving environment in which to raise her children to know and love God. A vaisyas' duty is to protect cows. (4) Along with duty comes some authority over those for whom we are responsible. (2) If, due to selfish material desires, we abuse our authority to exploit others rather than protect and elevate them, we will be punished by the laws of karma. (1)

Kṛṣṇa says He is the father of every living entity. (5) If we use our power to abuse and exploit even the apparently most insignificant among them, in our next life we will suffer as we have made them suffer. (1) In fact, the punishment is worse than the crime. If I steal £100, for example, I will have to repay the £100 plus an extra fine. Similarly, the scriptures say that if we abuse animals, we will have to suffer the same fate for as many lives as there are hairs on their bodies (6). What to speak of aborting our unborn babies, a most heinous abuse of power against a helpless creature whom the Lord has entrusted to our protection. (7)

Undoubtedly, fulfilling our duties may entail some personal hardship. However, when we perform them for the Lord's pleasure, our suffering in this life is mitigated, and we incur no further karmic reaction. (8, 9) The principle of karma is expressed indirectly in many of the world's major religions. (10) We should bear this in mind and never neglect or abuse our responsibilities.

Evidence:

1: “Those sinful persons who are ignorant of actual religious principles, yet consider themselves to be completely pious, without compunction commit violence against innocent animals who are fully trusting in them. In their next lives, such sinful persons will be eaten by the same creatures they have killed in this world.” (Srimad bhagavatam 11.5.14)

2: “The word *daivam* indicates a demigod or one who accepts worship from a dependent. Ordinarily, the spiritual master, husband, father, mother or superior relative accepts worship from an inferior relative... Everyone should be very responsible and take charge of his dependents just as a spiritual master takes charge of his disciple or a father takes charge of his son.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 5.5.18, purport)

3: “The duty of a pious king is described very nicely in this verse. His first and foremost duty is to give protection to the citizens from thieves and rogues as well as from ministers who are no better than thieves and rogues.” (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.14.17, purport)

4: “The animals, and especially the cows, were protected exactly in the manner of one’s children. Vasudeva was a *kṣatriya*, and Nanda Mahārāja was a *vaiśya*. It is the duty of the *kṣatriyas* to give protection to the citizens, and it is the duty of the *vaiśyas* to give protection to the cows. The cows are as important as the citizens. Just as the human citizens should be given all kinds of protection, so the cows also should be given full protection.” (*Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead*, Chapter 5)

5: “It should be understood that all species of life, O son of Kuntī, are made possible by birth in this material nature, and that I am the seed-giving father.” (Bhagavad gita As It Is, 14.4)

6: “Cow-killers are condemned to rot in hellish life for as many thousands of years as there are hairs on the body of the cow.” (*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādi-līlā* 17.166)

7: “Presently in Kali-yuga there are many pregnancies due to illicit sex, and sometimes abortions ensue.Those involved become implicated in these sins, so much so that they are punished in the same way the next life. Thus in the next life they also enter the womb of a mother and are killed in the same way.” (Srimad bhagavatam 5.14.9 purport)

8: “The material miseries of the living entity, which are superfluous to him, can be directly mitigated by the linking process of devotional service. But the mass of people do not know

this, and therefore the learned Vyāsadeva compiled this Vedic literature, which is in relation to the Supreme Truth.” (Srimad bhagavatam 1.7.16)

9: “Work done as a sacrifice for Viṣṇu has to be performed; otherwise work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kuntī, perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain free from bondage.” (Bhagavad gita as it is 3.9)

10: Christianity: “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” — *Galatians* 6:7.

Judaism: “With the measure that a person measures, he is measured with it.” — *Mishnah Sotah* 1:7.

Islam: “And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself.” — *Qur’an* 6:164.

Buddhism: “Like fine dust thrown against the wind, evil falls back upon that fool who offends an inoffensive, pure and guiltless man.” — *Dhammapada* 125.
