

GĪTĀ-DHYĀNAM

Verse 1

ओं पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयं
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्येमहाभारतम् ।
अद्वैतामृतवर्षिणीं भगवतीमष्टादशाध्यायिनीम्
अम्ब त्वामनुसन्दधामि भगवष्टीते भवद्वेषिणीम् ॥ १ ॥

*oṃ pāṛthāya pratibodhitāṃ bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayaṃ
vyāseṇa grathitāṃ purāṇamuninā madhye-mahābhāratam
advaitāmaṛtavarṣiṇīṃ bhagavatīmaṣṭādaśādhyāyinīṃ
amba tvāmanusandadhāmi bhagavadgīte bhavadveṣiṇīm (1)*

ओम् *Om* — name of the Lord; अम्ब भगवष्टीते *amba bhagavadgīte* — Oh! Mother *Bhagavadgītā*; भगवता नारायणेन *bhagavatā nārāyaṇena* — By Lord *Nārāyaṇa*; स्वयम् *svayam* — himself; पार्थाय *pāṛthāya* — to the son of *Pṛthā*; प्रतिबोधिताम् *pratibodhitām* — (you who were) taught; पुराण-मुनिना व्यासेन ग्रथिताम् *purāṇa-muninā vyāseṇa grathitām* — (you who were) incorporated by the ancient sage *Vyāsa*; मध्ये-महाभारतम् *madhye-mahābhāratam* — in the middle of *Mahābhārata*; अद्वैत-अमृत-वर्षिणीम् *advaita-amṛta-varṣiṇīm* — (you who have) the nature of showering the nectar of *Advaita*; अष्टादश-अध्यायिनीम् *aṣṭādaśādhyāyinīm* — (you who are) in the form of eighteen chapters; भवद्वेषिणीम् *bhavadveṣiṇīm* — (you who are) the destroyer of the life of becoming, *saṃsāra*; भगवतीम् *bhagavatīm* — (you who are) the Goddess; त्वाम् अनुसन्दधामि *tvām anusandadhāmi* — I repeatedly invoke

Om. Oh! Goddess Mother, Oh! Bhagavadgītā, (you who were) taught by Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa himself for the sake of Arjuna, the son of Pṛthā (Kuntī), (you who were) faithfully collected and reported by the ancient sage, Vyāsa, (and placed) in the middle of the Mahābhārata, (you who are) in eighteen chapters, you who have the nature of showering the nectar of non-duality, who is the destroyer of the life of becoming (saṃsārā), again and again I invoke you.

AN AUSPICIOUS BEGINNING

Any beginning is considered to be auspicious. Since the word ‘*Om*’ is the name of *Bhagavān*, the Lord, it is an auspicious way to begin these verses in which we invoke the Lord's help as we begin our study of the *Gītā*.

THE GĪTĀ INVOKED AS MOTHER

A mother is a symbol of love, affection, and spontaneous care, is someone who always prays for your welfare, who never lets you down when you are in trouble. This is also true of the Vedas because, with great compassion, the Veda takes into account the need for the human being to achieve various things in life and talks about the various means and ends for one to achieve them. And finally through self-knowledge in the *Upaniṣads*, gets the person out of the pursuit of means and ends. Therefore the Veda or the *śruti* is given the status of a mother. And because the *Gītā* says exactly what the Vedas say, it is also looked upon as a mother.

In this opening verse, the *Gītā* is invoked in this way: Oh! Mother, I invoke you. I meditate upon you again and again as a mother of blessing.

FOR WHOSE SAKE IS THE GĪTĀ TAUGHT?

The *Gītā* was taught to *Arjuna*. He is called *Pārtha* in this verse because he is the son of *Prthā*, another name for his mother, *Kuntī*. Because the *Gītā* was taught for *Arjuna's* sake, *Arjuna* is said to be its cause, *nimitta*.

THE TEACHER OF THE GĪTĀ

The knowledge contained in the *Gītā* was taught by the Lord, *Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa*. It was not taught by any other *guru*, but directly by *Nārāyaṇa*. Even though every *guru* is considered to be *Nārāyaṇa*, this verse makes it clear that the all-knowing Lord himself, as *Kṛṣṇa*, was the teacher of the *Gītā*.

THE MEANING OF NĀRĀYAṆA

There are many ways of looking at the meaning of the word *Nārāyaṇa*, one of which is particularly relevant here. The word *nara* is used to refer to a human being. It also means indestructible, that which always remains, not destroyed — *na rīyate iti naraḥ*. *Nara*, therefore, can only refer to that which pervades everything and is timeless, *ātmā* in Sanskrit. *Ātmā* here refers to ‘I’— the essence of the subject who performs various actions and enjoys various forms of experiences. This is an entirely different meaning from what we commonly understand by the word ‘I.’ Therefore, the real meaning of the word *nara*, human being, is to be understood from the *śāstra*, to be the all-pervasive and timeless *ātmā*, *paramātmā*.

Narasya idaṃ nāram — that which belongs to the *nara* is *nāra* or *jagat*, the world. The world is born out of the all-pervasive, timeless *paramātmā*, and is sustained by *paramātmā* and goes back to *paramātmā*. *Nāra*, then, is the entire world. And, *nāram eti iti Nārāyaṇa* — the one who knows this *nāra*, the world, is *Nārāyaṇa*, the omniscient Lord, *Parameśvara*. Therefore, the same *ātmā*, the *nara-ātmā*, the human being, is the omniscient *paramātmā*, *Parameśvara*, the Lord. Because this omniscient *Nārāyaṇa* is the one who is teaching *Arjuna* here, everything that is taught in the *Gītā* is considered valid. *Nārāyaṇa* is the one who knows everything and is also the one to be known through *Vedānta*.

VYĀSA AS A REPORTER

How would we know about the Lord's teaching to *Arjuna* without *Vyāsa*? Any gospel is the report of a disciple and, therefore, its accuracy depends on the disciple. If the disciple is adept, he or she will report properly. If the disciple has limitations, then there will be problems with the report.

In the *Gītā* the reporter is very important. *Nārāyaṇa* taught and *Arjuna* heard; but it was *Vyāsa* who reported it all. The reporter here is not an ordinary person, as we shall see in a later verse. *Vyāsa* is the one who is capable of elaborating a brief statement into one thousand verses, complete with intricate details and cogent arguments.

Vyāsa is described here as a *purāṇa-muni*, an ancient sage. A *muni*, a *manana-śīla*, is a person who is capable of bestowing careful thought over a particular subject matter. The word *purāṇa* can also mean the ancient legends based on the teaching found in the *Vedas*. *Vyāsa* gathered these legends together and, remaining faithful to the Vedic vision, put them into writing, called *Purānas*. Therefore, he is referred to as *purāṇa-muni*.

Because the subject that is being taught in the *Gītā* was so well-known to him, *Vyāsa* had no problem with reporting it properly. Where did *Vyāsa* report what was taught by the Lord to *Arjuna*? He presented it in the middle of the epic *Mahābhārata*, in the *Gītā*, in eighteen chapters.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GĪTĀ

What is the subject matter of the *Gītā*? What did Lord *Nārāyaṇa* teach *Arjuna*? What was taught is described as a shower of *amṛta*, nectar. Nectar generally comes only in drops, but in the *Gītā*, nectar is showered upon us. What kind of nectar is it? All nectars are sweet to the taste but do not last forever. The nectar that is showered by the *Gītā* is different. Not only does it provide happiness here, but also showers us with the *amṛta* of *advaita*, non-duality. Here the word *amṛta* is used in the sense of that which gives you immortality. Here the knowledge frees you from mortality in the form of life and death.

In non-duality there is no second thing. Therefore, with this knowledge, all fear is eliminated. Only in duality can there be fear. Fear cannot exist in non-duality because there is no second thing to fear.

THE NECTAR OF NON-DUALITY

That you are everything, that there is nothing other than you, is not an ordinary subject matter. This is what is meant by non-duality. Non-duality means that you are the whole. That which gives you this vision is the nectar of non-duality. Nectar is used here because, just as nectar is something to be tasted, to be experienced, non-duality is something to be understood to be yourself.

The Goddess *Gītā* showers the nectar of non-duality upon you. This shower of nectar is the vision of non-duality. It is the message of the Lord. The *Gītā* is *Bhagavatī*, the Goddess and, therefore, not separate from *Bhagavān's* vision. She knows that *Kṛṣṇa* is *Īśvara*, the Lord, and along with him she blesses you because she gives you this knowledge.

THE EIGHTEEN CHAPTERS OF THE GĪTĀ

In this verse the *Gītā* is addressed as the one who has eighteen chapters. It is said, 'Oh! *Gītā*, the one with eighteen chapters, I salute you.'

THE GĪTĀ AS A DESTROYER OF SORROW

The nectar of non-duality destroys the *bhava*, the *saṃsāra*, completely. *Bhava* means a life of becoming with all of its problems and fears, a life of sorrow, bondage, birth, and death. This teaching is, therefore, the medicine for *saṃsāra*, that by which the whole *saṃsāra* is destroyed. The destroyer of *saṃsāra* and the nectar of non-duality go together and refer to the *Gītā* as the mother who destroys the *saṃsāra* by showering the nectar of non-duality.

In the first verse, then, we salute the mother *Gītā* by meditating upon her, by invoking her, before we start our study. Also, we cannot think about the *Gītā* without thinking about *Vyāsa*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and *Arjuna*, called *Pārtha* in this verse. The second verse, therefore, is addressed to *Vyāsa*.

Verse 2

नमोऽस्तु ते व्यास विशालबुद्धे फुल्लारविन्दायतपत्रनेत्र ।

येन त्वया भारततैलपूर्णः प्रज्वालितो ज्ञानमयः प्रदीपः ॥ २ ॥

namo'stu te vyāsa viśālabuddhe phullāravindāyatapatranetra
yena tvayā bhāratatāilapūrṇaḥ prajvālito jñānamayaḥ pradīpaḥ

विशाल-बुद्धे *viśāla-buddhe* — one whose intellect is vast; फुल्ल-अरविन्द-आयत-पत्र-नेत्र *phulla-aravinda-āyata-patra-netra* — one whose eyes are clear and pleasing like a fully blossomed lotus; व्यास *vyāsa* — Oh! *Vyāsa*; येन त्वया *yena tvayā* — by you; भारत-तैल-पूर्णः *bhārata-taila-pūrṇaḥ* — full of the oil of the *Mahābhārata*, ज्ञानमयः *jñānamayaḥ* — in the form of knowledge; प्रदीपः *pradīpaḥ* — the lamp; प्रज्वालितः *prajvālitaḥ* — is well lighted; ते *te* — to you; नमः अस्तु *namaḥ astu* — let (my) salutation be

Oh! *Vyāsa* the one whose intellect is vast, whose eyes are clear and as pleasing as a fully blossomed lotus, who lit the lamp of knowledge well by filling it with the oil of the *Mahābhārata*, to you, my salutations.

THE VASTNESS OF VYĀSA'S INTELLECT

Shakespeare's intellect has been described as the 'platform of the world,' upon which its drama unfolds. He was able to write excellent characterisations for the stages of the world. Similarly, in this verse, *Vyāsa* is described as one whose intellect, whose knowledge, is vast. He wrote thousands of verses, meaning that they simply flowed out of him.

There is a story told that when *Vyāsa* was planning to write the *Mahābhārata*, he wanted to dictate the epic to a stenographer. Because there was no shorthand at the time, stenographers had to write very quickly in longhand. But no human being could take dictation from *Vyāsa* because his mind was so quick and clear. He just reeled out the verses and no one could hope to keep up with him. So he asked Lord *Gaṇeśa* to be his stenographer.

Gaṇeśa agreed on the condition that *Vyāsa* would not stop dictating once he began. *Vyāsa* agreed; but, he also had a condition that, *Gaṇeśa* should understand everything he said in every sense. Agreeing to this condition, *Gaṇeśa* pulled out one of his tusks, sharpened it, and with it wrote down *Vyāsa's Mahābhārata* on palm leaves. That is why Lord *Gaṇeśa* is portrayed as having only one tusk.

In the *Mahābhārata* you will find, for the most part, simple, descriptive verses. But every once in a while there will be a verse which is all-profound — a purple verse with different meanings. The reason *Vyāsa* did this was so that, he could have a breather. Because *Gaṇeśa* understood so easily what was being written, *Vyāsa* had to throw out a difficult verse whenever he wanted a break. If we count these verses, then, we can find out how many times he stopped. By the time *Gaṇeśa* figured out the meaning, *Vyāsa* had had his time out and was ready to begin again. This is *Vyāsa*.

THE CLARITY OF VYĀSA'S VISION

Vyāsa had beautiful big eyes. They are described in this verse as being like a fully blossomed lotus, eyes that were clear and pleasing. *Vyāsa* is also compared here to a lamp that sheds light, the light of knowledge. This lamp is very well lit. He is, therefore, the one who lights the lamp of knowledge for us.

The lamp that was lit by *Vyāsa* is filled with the oil of the *Mahābhārata*. This epic is considered to be the fifth *Veda* because it is true to the knowledge found in the *Vedas*. It seems to have been written for the sole purpose of lighting up this knowledge.

When a small object is presented against a much larger background, its beauty is often more evident. The *Mahābhārata* is like a canvas from whose vast background the Vedic knowledge emerges. Knowledge is the lamp and the epic is its fuel. The fuel is for the lamp; the lamp is not for the fuel.

This verse, then, is paying tribute to *Vyāsa*, who lit up the wisdom of the *Vedas* with the oil of the *Mahābhārata*. So, unto you, *Vyāsa*, who lit the lamp of knowledge with this epic fuel, my salutations.

Verse 3

प्रपन्नपरिजाताय तोत्रवेत्रैकपाणये ।

ज्ञानमुद्राय कृष्णाय गीतामृतदुहे नमः ॥ ३ ॥

prapannapārijātāya totravetraikapāṇaye

jñānamudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītāmṛtaduhe namaḥ (3)

प्रपन्न-परिजाताय *prapanna-pārijātāya* — unto the one who is the wish-fulfilling tree for those who have surrendered to him; तोत्रवेत्र-एक-पाणये *totravetra-eka-pāṇaye* — unto the one who has the whip in one hand; ज्ञान-मुद्राय *jñāna-mudrāya* — unto the one whose other hand assumes the gesture symbolising knowledge; गीता-अमृत-दुहे *gītā-amṛta-duhe* — unto the one who milks the nectar of the *Gītā*; कृष्णाय *kṛṣṇāya* — unto that *Kṛṣṇa*; नमः *namaḥ* - my salutations

Unto the one who is the wish-fulfilling tree for those who have surrendered, who has the whip in one hand and the symbol of knowledge in the other, (and) who milks the nectar that is the *Gītā* — unto that *Kṛṣṇa*, my salutations.

KṚṢṆA AS A WISH-FULFILLING TREE

In the third verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is likened to a wish-fulfilling tree said to be found in heaven. Whatever you wish for while sitting under this tree immediately appears in

front of you. *Kṛṣṇa* is this wish-fulfilling tree for those who have surrendered unto him. To them he is the giver of everything.

KṚṢṆA'S CONTROL

In one hand, *Kṛṣṇa* is holding the whip with which he drives the horses. His other hand assumes the gesture symbolising knowledge. This means that *Kṛṣṇa* does not give up the job of charioteer when *Arjuna* wants to be taught. Right in the middle of the battlefield, when *Arjuna* wants to know, *Kṛṣṇa* assumes the role of a teacher.

Knowing full well that *Arjuna* would fight, *Kṛṣṇa* did not drop *the* whip. *Arjuna* dropped his bow and arrows, but *Kṛṣṇa* kept the whip in his hand. He loosened the reins for the interim, but everything was under control. Unto the one who thus holds the symbol of knowledge, I offer my salutations.

THE SYMBOL OF KNOWLEDGE

We offer our salutations, not to the symbol of knowledge, but to the one who has this knowledge of non-duality, which cannot be negated. The symbol of knowledge, *Jñānamudrā*, is formed by joining the three fingers and separating them from the index finger. The index finger then joins with the thumb to form a circle.

The index finger, also called the accusing finger, stands for the self and usually joins the other three, representing the body, mind, and senses. By separating them out, we see that the body, mind, and senses are all *anātmā*, not 'I.' One generally thinks that these are *ātmā*, but they are not. They are all *anātmā* and are therefore to be understood as such. Whatever is not *anātmā* is the self and is revealed by the teaching as identical with the limitless *Brahman*, represented by the thumb.

Without the thumb, the fingers cannot grasp anything. It is important that the thumb be away from the fingers in order to do so. Similarly, the limitless *Brahman* is away from, unattached to, the body, mind, and senses. At the same time, without the limitless *Brahman*, the body, mind, and senses have no being, much less any function.

Previously, we thought of ourselves as limited. The circle created by the index finger and thumb signifies that, because we now have the knowledge of non-duality, the sense of limitation is gone. Just as a circle has no beginning and no end, we know ourselves to be limitless.

KṚṢṆA, THE GIVER OF THE NECTAR OF GĪTĀ

The *Gītā* is likened to milk and *Kṛṣṇa* is the one who provides the milk. From where does the milk come? From the *śruti*. Therefore, all the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, are likened to a cow, its milk being the *Gītā*. Unto *Kṛṣṇa* the one who gives out the nectar that is the *Gītā*, my salutations.

Verse 4

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः ।

पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥ ४ ॥

sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopālanandanah

pārtho vatsah sudhīrbhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat (4)

सर्व-उपनिषदः *sarva-upaniṣadaḥ* — all the *Upaniṣads*; गावः *gāvaḥ* — cows; गोपाल-नन्दनः *gopāla-nandanah* — joy of cowherds; दोग्धा *dogdhā* — one who milks; पार्थः *pārthah* — Arjuna; वत्सः *vatsah* — calf; सुधीः *sudhīḥ* — one whose mind is clear; भोक्ता *bhoktā* — enjoyer; महत् गीत-अमृतम् *mahat gīta-amṛtam* — great (invaluable) nectar of the *Gītā*; दुग्धम् *dugdham* — milk

The *Upaniṣads* are the cow; the joy of cowherds, *Kṛṣṇa*, is the one who milks; *Arjuna* is the calf; the one whose mind is clear is the one who drinks the milk; and the invaluable, timeless *Gītā* is the milk.

The first two verses praised the *Gītā* and *Vyāsa*. Because the *Gītā* was taught to *Arjuna* by Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, he is praised in the third verse as the teacher of the *Gītā*, as *gītācārya*. In the fourth verse, the nature of the *Gītā* and the Lord are both mentioned. This is the subject matter of the *Gītā* and it is being praised here.

THE UPANIṢADS AND THE GĪTĀ AS A COW AND ITS MILK

All of the *Upaniṣads* are taken into account in the *Gītā*. To present the *Gītā* as the essence of the *Upaniṣads*, a popular imagery is used in this verse. Here, the cow, a symbol of wealth and sanctity, is presented to represent all of the *Upaniṣads*. Together, they form the body of the cow. If the *Upaniṣads* are the cow, then its milk is the *Gītā*.

KṚṢṆA AS THE MILKMAN

Who is the milkman? Nowadays, milking is all done by machines, but previously it was not easy to coax milk from a cow. The cow has its own moods and will not yield for just anyone. In this verse *Kṛṣṇa* is acknowledged as the best milkman. Born into the family of a milkman, in a cowherd community, *Kṛṣṇa* did not need to be taught how to milk a cow. Even from cows with empty udders, *Kṛṣṇa* was able to get milk. Just as he could get milk from a cow, *Kṛṣṇa* is able to milk the *Upaniṣads*. He knows exactly what the subject matter is. In fact he is the subject matter. Since he knows the subject matter so well, he is the best one to milk the *Upaniṣads*.

Milk is the essence of the cow in that the many things a cow eats are all converted into milk. In the same manner, the *Upaniṣads* talk about a variety of topics, but it is all converted into the milk of *vedānta-śāstra* (*brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra*). These are

the two most important topics in all of the *Upaniṣads*. They form the milk and there can be no better milkman than *Kṛṣṇa*.

LORD KṚṢṆA AS GOPĀLA-NANDANA, THE JOY OF COWHERDS

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is referred to here as *Gopāla-nandana*, the joy of cowherds. The word ‘go’ in Sanskrit, not only means ‘cow’; it also means ‘words’ and ‘earth.’ The one who gives meaning to all of these words is Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and the one who nourishes and sustains the earth with life is also Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. In this verse, he is also referred to as the milkman who is the joy of all the cowherds because he is the nourisher and protector of cows.

ARJUNA: THE CAUSE OF THE GĪTĀ

A cow produces milk for the sake of its calf. Here, also, there must be a calf to generate the milk that is the *Gītā*. *Arjuna*, *Pārtha*, is the *vatsa*, the calf, because he is instrumental in drawing the *Gītā* out from *Kṛṣṇa*. Just as the cow's milk is born for the sake of the calf, the *Gītā* was born for the sake of *Arjuna*.

Since the calf cannot take all of the milk produced by the cow, there is extra milk for the people. In the same way, *Arjuna* acquired the milk of the *Gītā* and others are also the partakers of it.

PARTAKERS OF THE GĪTĀ

Unlike the milk from the cow, the milk of the *Gītā* is endless. The enjoyer of this milk is the one whose mind is clear and who has discrimination. The person who is capable of inquiry, *sudhī*, is the partaker of this milk.

The *Gītā* is likened to milk because it is nourishing to all. Milk is a complete food, a universal food. The message of the *Gītā* is also universal. It is applicable to everyone at any time or place because it deals with certain facts that do not change with time or place.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

That which does not change is the very subject matter of the *Gītā* and is, therefore, described here as *amṛta*. There are many meanings for the word *amṛta*, but the one that is most relevant here is ‘that which is not subject to death.’ Whatever is not bound by time, does not undergo any change, that which immortalises you, nourishes you, makes you happy, is considered to be *amṛta*. Anyone can take it; it is applicable to all. This timeless, nectarine *Gītā* is described here as something that becomes more available the more it is given. The milk of the *Gītā* is knowledge. The more knowledge you give, the more you have because, as you keep giving, the knowledge becomes clearer for you.

Verse 5

वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम् ।

देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥ ५ ॥

vasudevasutam devam kaṁsacāṇūramardanam

devakīparamānandaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ vande jagadgurum (5)

वसुदेव-सुतम् *vasudeva-sutam* — son of *Vasudeva*; कंस-चाणूर-मर्दनम् *kaṁsa-cāṇūra-mardanam* — destroyer of *Kaṁsa* and *Cāṇūra* (demonic kings); देवकी-परम-आनन्दम् *devakī-parama-ānandam* — the greatest joy of *Devakī* (*Kṛṣṇa*'s mother); जगद्-गुरुम् *jagad-gurum* — the teacher of the world; देवं कृष्णम् *devam kṛṣṇam* — the Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; वन्दे *vande* — I salute

I salute *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord, the teacher of the world, son of *Vasudeva*, destroyer of *Kaṁsa* and *Cāṇūra*, the greatest joy of *Devakī*.

KṚṢṆA AS THE TEACHER OF THE WORLD

In the fifth verse, *Kṛṣṇa* is presented as the teacher of the world, *jagad-guru*. A teacher can only be a teacher of the world if he or she has a universal message. Also, one can teach only those people who want the subject matter he or she is teaching. For instance, only those who are interested in calculus will go to a teacher of calculus. A universal message is relevant to everyone everywhere, even though not everyone will be interested in it.

Here, the message of the *Gītā* can be given to anyone because it is relevant to everyone. *Kṛṣṇa* is not considered to be a teacher merely because he is accepted as such, but because he has a message acceptable to all. This we must know. It is a message that is extremely valuable to everyone. Without it, one's life is a search that never comes to an end. This message, which *Kṛṣṇa* is giving here in the *Gītā* is what makes him a *jagad-guru*.

KṚṢṆA AS A PERSON FOR PURPOSES OF MEDITATION

As a teacher of the world, *Kṛṣṇa* is looked upon as a person with certain qualities or attributes, but only for the purpose of meditation. When that which is being discussed is free from all attributes, it is a matter for knowledge. It is something to be understood. But when a particular form with a set of attributes is being talked about, such as *Kṛṣṇa* as a person, it is purely for the purpose of meditation.

In this verse, some historical facts are given about *Kṛṣṇa* to create a figure for meditation. He is described as the son of *Vasudeva*, *Vasudeva-suta*, and, at the same

time, he is the Lord, *deva*, father of all, including *Vasudeva*. Obviously, he is not an ordinary son. If he were, we would not meditate upon him.

KṚṢṆA AS THE DESTROYER OF EVIL

Kṛṣṇa is also referred to here as the destroyer of evil. We should know that there is no evil beyond our own minds and that there is no such thing as an evil mind. There is only wrong thinking that needs to be corrected. *Kṛṣṇa*, as the Lord, is the chastiser of wrongdoers. By giving them what they deserve he removes this evil of incorrect thinking.

KṚṢṆA AS THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

Kṛṣṇa is the greatest joy of his mother, *Devakī*. He is the most attractive, the one who is the source of all-happiness. Anything that attracts (*karṣati*) is *Kṛṣṇa*; anything that attracts is happiness. What pleases you attracts you because it makes you happy. This is why the source of happiness is the focus of complete attraction. Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, teacher of the world, whose message is universal, I salute you.

Verse 6

भीष्मद्रोणतटा जयद्रथजला गान्धारनीलोत्पला
 शल्यग्राहवती कृपेण वहनी कर्णेन वेलाकुला ।
 अश्वत्थामविकर्णघोरमकरा दुर्योधनावर्तिनी
 सोत्तीर्णा खलु पाण्डवै रणनदी कैवर्तकः केशवः ॥ ६ ॥
bhīṣmadroṇataṭā jayadrathajālā gāndhāranīlotpalā
śalyagrāhavatī kṛpeṇa vahanī karṇena velākulā
aśvatthāma-vikarṇaghoramakarā duryodhanāvartini
sottīrṇā khalu pāṇḍavai raṇanadī kaivartakah keśavaḥ (6)

भीष्म-द्रोण-तटा *bhīṣma-droṇa-taṭā* — with *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* as its banks; जयद्रथ-जला *jayadratha-jalā* — with *Jayadratha* as its water; गान्धार-नीलोत्पला *gāndhāra-nīlotpalā* — with *Gāndhāra* (*Śakuni*, the prince of *Gāndhāra*) as the blue lily; शल्य-ग्राहवती *śalya-grāhavatī* — with *Śalya* as the shark; कृपेण वहनी *kṛpeṇa vahanī* — with *Kṛpa* as the speed of the water's flow; कर्णेन वेलाकुला *karṇena velākulā* — with *Karṇa* as its breakers; अश्वत्थाम-विकर्ण-घोर-मकरा *aśvatthāma-vikarṇa-ghora-makarā* — with *Aśvatthāmā* and *Vikarṇa* as its killer whales; दुर्योधन-आवर्तिनी *duryodhana-āvartini* — (and) with *Duryodhana* as its whirlpools, सा रणनदी *sā raṇa-nadī* — that river of battle; पाण्डवैः *pāṇḍavaiḥ* — by the *Pāṇḍavas*; खलु *khalu* — indeed; उत्तीर्णा *uttīrṇā* — was crossed over; कैवर्तकः *kaivartakah* — the boatman (being); केशवः *keśavaḥ* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*

With *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* as its banks, *Jayadratha* as its water, *Gāndhāra* (*Śakuni*) as the blue lily, *Śalya* as the shark, *Kṛpa* as the speed of the water's flow, *Karṇa* as its breakers, *Aśvatthāmā* and *Vikarṇa* as its killer whales, and *Duryodhana* as its whirlpools, the river of battle was indeed crossed by the *Pāṇḍavas*, because the boatman was *Kṛṣṇa*.

THE PĀṆḌAVAS

The *Pāṇḍavas*, *Pāṇḍu's* sons, were five in number. The oldest son was *Yudhiṣṭhira*, also called *Dharmaputra*. The second son was *Bhīma*. *Arjuna*, who appears in the *Gītā*, was the third son. The fourth and fifth were *Nakula* and *Sahadeva*.

THE RIVER OF BATTLE

It is said that the *Pāṇḍavas* crossed a river of battle, *raṇanadī*, which is described poetically in this verse. Every river must have two banks within which the water flows. Without the banks there would be no river at all. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* are the two banks of this river of battle.

BHĪṢMA AND DROṆA

Bhīṣma, *Arjuna's* grandfather, was the eldest in the family and a man of great vows. He was considered to be invincible even though he was an old man. *Bhīṣma* was such a great warrior that he never lost a battle; only trickery could destroy him. *Droṇa* was the greatest archer, the *guru* who taught archery to *Arjuna* and his brothers, as well as his cousins.

DURYODHANA

Both *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were in *Duryodhana's* ranks against the *Pāṇḍavas*. *Duryodhana* took care of them during the thirteen years that the *Pāṇḍavas* were in exile. He pampered them so much that they felt obliged to him. And he made sure they felt obliged. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were his strength and, because of them, he thought he could win the war. He had one more important ally in *Karṇa*. Therefore, these three people were the indirect causes of this war. Without them, *Duryodhana* would definitely not have embarked upon it.

In a river, there are always whirlpools. In this verse, *Duryodhana* is likened to a whirlpool because anyone who went near him got sucked in. Once caught in a whirlpool, it is very difficult to get out. They all got sucked into this battle — *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, *Kṛpa*, his uncle, all of them got sucked in. Even though they were all very kind to the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Duryodhana* was able to drag them into his grip because he was such a scheming person.

DURYODHANA'S OTHER ALLIES

Although *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were the banks of this river of battle, the river would have been empty if *Jayadratha* and his huge army had not been there. *Jayadratha* provided the manpower and was, therefore, the water.

There are areas in the river where the water collects and remains. This is where the blue lilies grow, making the river not only beautiful but difficult to move through because of their entangling stalks. The prince of *Gāndhāra*, *Śakuni* is referred to here as the blue lily.

The river being described was one that had sharks in it. *Śalya* is likened to a shark and is called the great grabber. He was *Karṇa's* charioteer and was considered the greatest driver. A charioteer is very important in battle. He must not only have great expertise in driving, but he must also encourage the warrior, whose chariot he is driving. But, during the battle with the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Śalya* discouraged *Karṇa* as much as he could because of a promise he had made earlier to the *Pāṇḍavas*.

The current in this river was very fast. Its speed was provided by *Kṛpa*. Because of *Karṇa*, it was full of breakers. *Aśvatthāmā*, the son of *Droṇa*, was a great archer and also a killer. *Vikarṇa*, was one of the hundred sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. These two, *Aśvatthāmā* and *Vikarṇa*, were the youngest and are described as killer whales.

CROSSING THE RIVER OF BATTLE

To cross such a terrible river is not easy. It is only possible by boat. Swimming across is impossible because of all of the whales, whirlpools and breakers. Even a boat may not make it.

There is, however, a way. If *Kṛṣṇa* is your boatman, you can cross this river of *saṃsāra*. We too face the various problems mentioned here; we have whirlpool problems, breaker problems, whale problems, credit card problems, etc. If Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is the boatman, you will definitely make it.

Verse 7

पाराशर्यवचःसरोजममलं गीतार्थगन्धोत्कटं
नानाख्यानककेसरं हरिकथासम्बोधनाबोधितम्।
लोके सज्जनषट्पदैरहरहः पेपीयमानं मुदा

भूयाद् भारतपट्टजं कलिमलप्रध्वंसि नः श्रेयसे ॥ ७ ॥

pārāśaryavacaḥsarojamamalaṃ gītārthagandhotkaṭam
nānākhyānakakesaraṃ harikathāsambodhanābodhitam
loke sajjanaṣaṭpadairaharahāḥ pepīyamānaṃ mudā
bhūyād bhāratapañkajaṃ kalimalapradhvaṃsi naḥ śreyase (7)

पाराशर्य-वचः-सरोजम् *pārāśarya-vacaḥ-sarojam* — the lotus born of the waters of the words of the son of *Parāśara*, (*Vyāsa*); गीता-अर्थ-गन्ध-उत्कटम् *gītā-artha-gandha-utkaṭam* — having the *Gītā* as its sweet fragrance; नाना-आख्यानक-केसरम् *nānā-ākhyānaka-kesaram* — with many stories as its stamens; हरि-कथा-संबोधन-आबोधितम् *hari-kathā-sambodhana-ābodhitam* — fully opened by the revealing stories of the Lord, *Hari*; लोके *loke* — in the world; सज्जन-षट्पदैः *sajjana-ṣaṭpadaiḥ* — by the honeybees who are right thinking people; अहरहः *aharahaḥ* — day after day; मुदा *mudā* — happily; पेपीयमानम् *pepīyamānam* — being relished; कलि-मल-प्रध्वंसि *kali-mala-pradhvaṃsi* — the destroyer of the blemishes of *Kali-yuga*; अमलम् *amalam* — spotless; भारत-पट्टजम् *bhārata-pañkajam* — the lotus of *Mahābhārata*; नः श्रेयसे *naḥ śreyase* — for our good; भूयात् *bhūyāt* — may it be

May the spotless lotus, *Mahābhārata*, born of the waters of the words of the son of *Parāśara* (*Vyāsa*), having the meaning of the *Gītā* as its sweet fragrance, with its many stories as stamens, fully opened by the revealing stories of the Lord, *Hari*, relished happily day after day by the honey bees who are the right thinking people of the world, (this lotus of *Mahābhārata*) which destroys the blemishes of *Kali-yuga*, may it be for our good.

IN PRAISE OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

This is a verse in praise of the *Mahābhārata* itself. It says, 'Let it be for the good of all people. Let this beautiful lotus epic be for *mokṣa*, liberation, the most desired end.' It destroys all of the problems of *kaliyuga*. *Kali* is that which is selfish. Any evil is called *kali*. *Kaliyuga* is a *yuga*, a time period when people become easily caught up in their own likes and dislikes, *rāgas* and *dveṣas*.

The *Mahābhārata* has a number of guidelines for people to follow. It talks about ethics — personal, social and political values, and even logistics through interpretative illustrations.

THE LOTUS THAT IS THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

What kind of a lotus is the *Mahābhārata*? Just like any other lotus, it is born of water. It comes from the water of words. This water of words springs forth from *Vyāsa*, the son of *Parāśara*. Also, this word-lotus is as clean as the lotus in the pond. It has the strong, sweet fragrance of the meaning of the *Gītā*.

A meaning is something silent; it is something that you understand. You can repeat a word because it is a sound, but its meaning is always silent. You can see a flower, but the smell cannot be seen anywhere. You can only sense it. Similarly, the meaning of the *Gītā* makes the whole *Mahābhārata* waft with fragrance. This epic is the lotus that exudes the fragrance of the meaning of the *Gītā*.

There are many small stories within stories. These stories are like the rows of stamens of the lotus. The stamens of the saffron flower are the most fragrant, whereas stamens of the lotus are known for their beauty. If the *Gītā* is the fragrance of the *Mahābhārata*, then the stories are the stamens which impart beauty to it.

Because of *Kṛṣṇa's* presence in the *Mahābhārata*, it is the Lord's story. Without it, the *Mahābhārata* would be a lotus that had not yet bloomed. The opening of a bud generally requires the Sun; here the Lord's story is the Sun. It opens up the *Mahābhārata* with devotion. It provides the light necessary for this opening.

ENJOYMENT OF THE GĪTĀ

The *Gītā* is being enjoyed happily. People are drinking deeply from it, taking more and more, day after day. Who are these people? They are likened to an insect with six legs, the honey bee, for instance. Human beings have five sense organs plus a thinking intellect. Some extra intellect is necessary to extract the nectar from the epic flower that is the *Gītā*. The people who enjoy the *Gītā* are therefore, thinking people, those who use their intellects.

Let this *Gītā* which is the destroyer of all problems in *kaliyuga*., of the problems caused by likes and dislikes, be for the good of all people.

The next verse is in praise of the Lord, which says, 'I salute the Lord who is all *ānanda*, joy, fullness, whose form and expression are *ānanda*, and who is Lord *Kṛṣṇa*.'

Verse 8

मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्गुं लङ्घयते गिरिम् ।
 यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्दमाधवम् ॥ ८ ॥
mūkam karoti vācālam paṅgum laṅghayate girim
yatkṛpā tamahaṃ vande paramānandamādhavam (8)

यत्-कृपा *yat-kṛpā* — whose grace; मूकम् *mūkam* — the mute; वाचालम् *vācālam* — eloquent; करोति *karoti* — makes; पङ्गुम् *paṅgum* — one who is lame; गिरिम् *girim* — mountain; लङ्घयते *laṅghayate* — causes to scale; तम् *tam* — him; परमानन्द-माधवम् *paramānanda-mādhavam* — *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord of *Lakṣmī* (wealth), whose nature is fullness; अहम् वन्दे *aham vande* — I salute

I salute *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord of *Lakṣmī* (wealth), whose nature is fullness, whose *kṛpā*, grace makes the mute eloquent and causes the lame to scale mountain tops.

Mādhava is another name for Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, one who has all the resources and wealth with him, who is *Bhagavān*, the Lord. I salute the one who is *Mādhava*, *Bhagavān*, and whose expression and essential nature is fullness, *ānanda*.

THE LORD'S GRACE

This verse adds something more — grace, *kṛpā*. Grace is something that is earned. It is not something that the Lord randomly distributes day by day. If he did, he would be partial, which is not the case. Grace is a graceful expression for *karma-phala*. *Karma* is what you do and *phala* is the result of what you do.

PRAYER AS AN ACTION

Prayer is also a *karma*, an action. Because it is an action, it necessarily produces a result. The result is two-fold — seen, *dṛṣṭa-phala* and unseen, *adṛṣṭa-phala*.

One example of a seen result is the psychological benefit of prayer. The very fact that you are able to pray is itself a benefit. Also as a result of prayer, there can be the psychological benefit of having someone upon whom you can rely. Any individual has limitations, whereas the one you pray to is looked upon by you as limitless. Even without understanding, the Lord is looked upon as someone who is omniscient.

WHAT IS OMNISCIENCE, ALL-KNOWINGNESS?

No one understands totally what it means to be omniscient, to be all-knowing. To understand all-knowledge you must be all-knowing. However, our knowledge is limited.

From this limited knowledge we can always know a little more, but that also will be limited. What we can very easily understand, however, is limitation in knowledge. From that we are able to appreciate that an omniscient person is free from limitation with respect to knowledge. This is what is meant by having an appreciation of omniscience.

Who is the omniscient person? Is he or she another kind of person or one of us? There is, therefore, a great deal of knowledge to be known in order to appreciate *Īśvara*, the Lord. I invoke this *Īśvara* in the form of a prayer.

THE RESULTS OF PRAYER

Prayer is a *karma* and it produces an immediate result, a visible result. That you are able to invoke the Lord is the result. You have someone to rely on, someone who is all-powerful, almighty, all-knowledgeable, unlike anyone else. From this, you gain a certain strength, knowing that you can draw on this power to the extent that your capacity to draw on it allows. It is like having a huge reservoir of water. You need not bring all the water at once; it does not matter that your receptacle is small. Just knowing that there is so much water in the reservoir gives you a certain strength.

Thus, the immediate benefit you experience, because you are able to pray, is that there is someone for you who is all-knowledge, upon whom you can draw whenever and as much as you want. This is the *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the seen result. You experience it even as you pray. There is also an *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the unseen result of prayer. This is what we call grace — which accounts for benefits which we cannot attribute to a particular day's prayer.

HOW DOES GRACE COME TO YOU?

Grace is earned in the same way that you earn anything else. Since you are not able to relate an unseen result to a given course of action on your part in the immediate past, we are constrained to call this result, grace. This grace is able to convert a mute into one who is eloquent and enables a lame person to climb a mountain.

Kālidāsa, the celebrated poet, was considered to be a mute but, because of grace, he began pouring out verses. Similarly, *Vālmīki* became a great poet because of grace. In day-to-day life, we often hear various stories of the disappearance of incurable diseases. Cancer suddenly vanishes and no one knows how. We call it grace because the causes are not known. You can call such happenings grace, accident, or chance. However, a perceptive person, with a certain maturity and understanding of *Īśvara*, appreciates these unseen results as what we call grace.

THE INVISIBLE RESULT OF PRAYER

In a prayer, what you really release is an invisible force causing the *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the unseen result. The very system, the laws, that produce certain results which are not

visible to us are reorganised by prayer. Certain elements are introduced, through prayer, into this invisible system, causing it to reorganise itself. However, we do not know how it will be reorganised. This is why the results are said to be caused by grace.

Grace, therefore, is something that we receive purely as a result of our own *karma*, actions done either in our immediate past or in the remote past. Because of this result, this grace, certain situations happen in our favour. What is generally taken to be impossible is made possible by grace. In fact, all life is like that — the impossible is made possible.

With this verse I salute *Bhagavān*, the one, by whose grace the mute becomes eloquent and the lame scales mountain tops, the one, by whose grace the impossible is made possible.

The final verse of the *Gītā-dhyānam* describes the various beings who praise this all-knowing Lord

Verse 9

यं ब्रह्मा वरुणेन्द्ररुद्रमरुतः स्तुन्वन्ति दिव्यैः स्तवै-

वेदैः साङ्गपदक्रमोपनिषदैर्गायन्ति यं सामगाः ।

ध्यानावस्थिततट्टेन मनसा पश्यन्ति यं योगिनो

यस्यान्तं न विदुः सुरासुरगणा देवाय तस्मै नमः ॥ ९ ॥

*yaṃ brahmā varuṇendrarudramarutaḥ stunvanti divyaiḥ stavair-
vedaiḥ sāṅgapadakramopaniṣadairgāyanti yaṃ sāmagaḥ
dhyānāvasthitatadgatena manasā paśyanti yaṃ yogino
yasyāntaṃ na viduḥ surāsuragaṇā devāya tasmai namaḥ (9)*

ब्रह्मा *brahmā* — *Brahmāji*; वरुण-इन्द्र-रुद्र-मरुतः *varuṇa-indra-rudra-marutaḥ* — *Varuṇa, Indra, Rudra, and Marut devatās*; दिव्यैः स्तवैः *divyaiḥ stavaiḥ* — with divine hymns of praise; यम् *yam* — whom; स्तुन्वन्ति *stunvanti* — praise; सामगाः *sāmagaḥ* — the singers of the *Sāmaveda*; वेदैः *vedaiḥ* — by the *Vedas*; साङ्ग-पद-क्रम-उपनिषदैः *sāṅgapada-krama-upaniṣadaiḥ* — along with the *Upaniṣads* and the limbs (of chanting) such as *pada, krama*, and so on; गायन्ति *gāyanti* — sing in praise; यम् *yam* — (of) whom; योगिनः *yogināḥ* — contemplative people; ध्यान-अवस्थित-तट्टेन मनसा *dhyāna-avasthita-tat-gatena manasā* — with a mind resolved in him in a state of meditation; यम् *yam* — whom; पश्यन्ति *paśyanti* — see clearly; सुर-असुर-गणाः *sura-asura-gaṇāḥ* — the celestials as well as demons; यस्य अन्तम् *yasya antam* — whose nature; न विदुः *na viduḥ* — do not know; तस्मै देवाय *tasmai devāya* — unto him, the Lord; नमः *namaḥ* — my salutations

To the Lord about whom *Brahmā*, *Varuṇa*, *Indra*, *Rudra*, and the *Marut-devatās* praise with divine hymns, the one whom the singers of the *Sāmaveda* praise by singing with a full complement of the limbs (of singing) in the order of *pada* and *krama* and the *Upaniṣads*, the one whom contemplative people see with minds resolved in him in a state of meditation, whose nature the celestials and demons do not know, unto him, the Lord, my salutations.

The word *deva* has different meanings. The root meaning is that which is effulgent. *Deva* can refer to any god, a celestial, or even a sense organ. The Lord is also called *deva*, meaning the one who is all-knowing. Unto this Lord, my salutations.

PRAISE BY EXALTED BEINGS

Who is this Lord? He is the one about whom all the gods, from *Brahmāji*, downward, sing hymns of praise. In addition to *Brahmāji*, the verse specifically mentions the *devas Varuṇa*, *Indra*, *Rudra*, and the *Marut-devatās*. Even though these *devas* are exalted beings, they are still *jīvas* (individuals) occupying special positions. Their songs in praise of *Īśvara* are found in the *Vedas*.

PRAISE BY SCHOLARS

Those who are able to sing the *Sāmaveda* also praise the Lord. To sing the *Vedas*, one must have the knowledge to do so. Six other disciplines of knowledge are required. They are called the *ṣaḍaṅgas*, *the six limbs*. They are: phonetics (*śikṣā*), grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), rituals (*kalpa*), etymology (*nirukta*), prosody (*chandas*), and astronomy with astrology (*jyotiṣa*). The reciters of the *Sāmaveda with the full knowledge of these six limbs* sing in praise of the Lord the hymns of *Sāmaveda* in the form of *pada* and *krama* along with the *Upaniṣads* which reveal the truth of the Lord.

PRAISE BY CONTEMPLATIVE PEOPLE

Then there are the contemplative people who meditate upon the truth of *Īśvara*, whom they see very clearly. How do they see? With their minds. What kind of mind? A mind that is in a state of contemplation, a mind that is absorbed, tranquil, and subtle. These people contemplate, again and again, with minds that are awake to the true nature of the Lord, which they have come to appreciate through listening to and analysing the *Īśvara*, the teaching.

PRAISE BY OTHERS

There are people who praise the Lord as one with a form and attributes. The whole creation with all of its glories is nothing but the Lord's form. There are others, *yogīs*, who see the Lord as formless, whose nature is not known by either gods or demons.

Even though these gods are all exalted beings, they do not necessarily know that they are limitless. Being a god or a celestial does not mean that the person is enlightened. Self-knowledge is not something that comes with an exalted position. They must have a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*, to know this truth about themselves.

Thus salutations are offered to the Lord, who is praised by the gods and demons alike — the demons also praise the Lord to gain various powers by his grace — and by the singers of the *Sāmaveda*, whom the contemplative people realise in their meditations and whose glories even gods and demons know not.

Thus, these nine verses praise the *Gītā* in general. First, the *Mahābhārata*, in which the *Gītā* is placed, is praised. Then Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is praised as a boatman because of whose tact and grace the *Pāṇḍavas* were able to cross the great river of battle with all of its hurdles.

The *Gītā* herself is also praised, after which *Vedavyāsa*, the chronicler of the *Mahābhārata*, is praised because of whose grace we now have the *Gītā*. *Arjuna* is recognised in these verses as being its *nimitta*, cause. Without him, there would be no *Gītā*. Because *Arjuna* asked for it, we have the Lord's Song, the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Life as we know it, that is, *saṃsāra*, is considered to be a river of battle, *raṇanadī*, in which people drown. The verses do not tell us how this river can be crossed. Nor do they mention *Kṛṣṇa's* grace. We simply need to understand that the boatman is *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord. *Kṛṣṇa* is the one whose grace enables us to cross.

Having invoked the Lord's help by this prayer to the *Gītā*, we can now commence our study. Before we begin the first chapter, we will see briefly the context, in which the *Gītā* is set, and its purpose.

