

The Three Types of Vision and the Chariot Festival

Whoever is fully awake and has developed his powers of discrimination will not suffer from sorrow nor be subject to fear. Only a person who has attachment to the body and attachment to objects, will experience fear and suffering. Therefore, Krishna told Arjuna to develop an integral vision. The term used for integral vision is Sudarshana, which also means good vision. Today's man has three kinds of vision. The first is body-oriented vision. This is a superficial vision; the nature of such people is to see only the external appearance of others such as the dress and the ornaments that are being worn, the facial features, the body size and characteristics, the peculiarities of speech, etc. This type of vision is totally oriented towards the phenomenal world.

The second kind of vision is mental vision. Rather than focus on the external characteristics, those who have mental vision perceive the behavior of others, as reflected in their conduct and expressions. Therefore, those with mental vision try to ascertain the feelings emanating from another's heart and the thoughts going through their mind, as these manifest in what they say and do. In other words, the mentally-oriented person focuses on outward actions which reflect the inner being. The attitude of one with such a vision is that people will always speak and act as they feel and think.

The third kind of vision is Atmic vision. One who has Atmic vision does not restrict his perception only to other's external features or their inner feelings, as revealed by their outward behavior and expressions, but they have an integral vision. They see the inner unity, the divine consciousness that pervades all, despite body differences and differences in behavior. They realize that feelings, thoughts and behavioral characteristics all undergo change and transformation. Therefore, those with Atmic vision do not develop any interest or any special like or dislike for people's bodily make-up and ways of expression. Their vision is wholly oriented towards the indwelling divinity. This is a sacred vision. People with such an integral and wholesome vision are in the hands of God. Not merely are they in the hands of God, truly, they become God Himself. The Upanishads say that one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. So that, a person who gains such a sacred vision takes on the nature of divinity. As one perceives so he becomes. To become a Stithaprajna, a person of the highest wisdom, one must develop this integral vision or Sudarshana, and steadily abide in the inner unity that is within all the outer diversity. Therefore, Krishna's command to Arjuna was to always turn his vision towards Atma and to maintain this integral vision under all circumstances.

In India there has been a tradition right from ancient days, for temples in villages and towns to conduct chariot festivals. During these festivities the idol of the deity installed in that temple, will be taken in procession. First, a huge chariot constructed for this purpose will be elaborately decorated, and a beautiful seat will be provided therein for the deity. On the auspicious day, the deity will be transferred from the temple to the chariot with appropriate rituals and incantations. The chariot is then taken through the streets in a colorful procession pulled by devotees and preceded by different groups of dancers, musicians and singers. Along the course of the procession, many people will offer worship to the deity by lighting sacred lamps and performing Aarati.

During these chariot festivals, thousands of people will gather, coming from all the surrounding villages. Three kinds of people will come. The first kind, which constitutes the bulk of the people present for the festival, concentrate all their attention on the chariot and its external appearance. Then there will be others who concentrate mostly on the expressions and actions of the participants, the people pulling the chariot, the priests and those who are performing the dances and dramas. Thirdly, there are a few who will recognize the real purpose for which this festival has been arranged. Only this small handful will care to see the indweller, the sacred person who is seated in the chariot. Of course, the festival is being celebrated for the purpose of installing the idol of God in the chariot. Without the idol of God, the festival would have no meaning. This idol represents the indweller, who is God Himself. But only the rare individual will turn his full attention towards that divinity.

Most of these people will see only the physical appearance of the chariot, its decorations, and other such things as the dress put on the idol and the costumes worn by the dancers and musicians, their antics, and all the sound and color of the festivities. The largest number will concentrate only on these external things. But there will also be some people who will concentrate their attention on the rituals of worship and the offerings being made, such as the breaking of coconuts, the waving of lamps and incense, and the devotion which is being expressed through these rituals. The number of people with this kind of vision and interest will be much smaller than those who concentrate mostly on the decorations, the dances and dramas, and all the external paraphernalia associated with the festival.

But, the divine person who has been installed in this chariot, who is driving this chariot, and who is the resident of this chariot, will be seen by only a very small number of intensely-devoted people who yearn to have the sacred vision of the divinity. In the huge throng turning out for the festival, such people may be counted on the fingers of one's hand. For them, all the outer trappings and all the sound and excitement of the procession, tend to get in the way of their having a real vision of the beautiful God, whose representation is seated in the chariot.

What is the deeper meaning of this chariot? How many such chariots are there? The chariot that is being spoken of here is the human body. So there is not just one chariot but millions upon millions of chariots. Every day these chariots move from street to street and house to house, taking the indwelling resident in procession. You have been developing your vision in such a way that you see only the body and its external features or the expressions connoting various emotional states, but you have not learned to develop the internal vision, the vision which perceives the indwelling person in this chariot of the body, and understands who he really is. It is a very rare individual who attempts to look deeper, beyond the external and superficial aspect of the body, and beyond the emotional and mental traits of the individual, to try to discover the sacred Atmic principle which is there inside.

The bodies of human beings are not the only chariots. The bodies of animals like dogs or tigers or elephants are also chariots. In fact, the body of every being is a chariot. For example, Shiva is depicted as riding on Nandi, the bull. The bullock is Shiva's chariot.

Yet, when you see a bullock, you don't think of Shiva; still He will be there. When you see a rat, you won't be thinking of Ganesha, but he will also be there, riding on that rat. The rat is the vehicle for Ganesha, so it is also a chariot on which God is installed. In a similar way, lions, crows, dogs, snakes, eagles, and so many other animals and birds are used as vehicles for the many different aspects of God. In truth, every living being is a chariot taking God in procession. These days you are developing the vision that sees only the chariot. You are focusing all your concentration on the external decorations. In this age, almost your entire time is spent on adorning the chariot and seeing to the comfort and pleasures of the body. As a result, you are paying attention only to the external differences and you are not spending any time in trying to see the indweller.

"Therefore, Arjuna", said Krishna, "know that all these people about whom you are so concerned, are only chariots. They may be grandfathers, they may be brothers, they may be cousins, whoever they may be, they are only chariots. In truth, you are seeing only chariots in the form of these various relatives. You have been keeping your vision clouded by seeing only the body, but a sacred person like you should not care so much for externals. You must concentrate your mind on the indweller who is seated in every human body. Then only will your vision become sacred vision. Such sacred vision alone can provide the basis for your victory. Only a person who has sacred vision can achieve success in great undertakings. Arjuna, people are giving the same value to the shadow as they give to the sacred object which is casting the shadow; they are giving the same value to the reflection as they give to the sacred object whose image they are seeing. But that is not correct. The unchanging, sacred object is the Atma. Its value is unlimited and beyond all measure. Whereas, the external beauties of these bodies and all the thoughts and feelings and behaviors that are being manifested in these bodies, are all just images. They are only shadows, without any real substance or lasting value." as become genuine and sanctified, and thereby worthwhile.

Fearlessness and Integral Vision - Gajendra and the Crocodile

When you have steady faith and an integral vision, and when you constantly think of the indwelling divinity, you will not become elated by joy nor shrink away from sorrow; it is only then that you will become completely fearless, or Abhaya. Bhaya means fear; Abhaya means fearlessness. There is another word, Nirbhaya, which means the absence of fear. Although they appear to be the same, there is a big difference between Abhaya and Nirbhaya. Nirbhaya is the removal of fear. An example of this would be if you happen to see a rope lying on the ground after dusk. Although it is only a rope, in the failing light you might think that it was a snake. Fearing that the snake might harm you, you would switch on your flashlight to get a better look at it and see if it is a poisonous snake. But immediately when the light shines on it, you realize that it is not a snake at all, but a piece of rope, and with this realization your fear disappears instantly. Becoming subject to fear and then becoming free from fear are both momentary experiences; they come and they go.

Fear is only a delusion created by the mind; lack of fear is also a delusion created by the mind. Mistaking one thing for another leads to fear; recognizing the mistake and rectifying it, leads to the removal of fear. These two, Bhaya and Nirbhaya, are associated with fear and the freedom from fear. Abhaya is not associated with these two, at all. Abhaya means fearlessness; it is a permanent state where there is no question of ever experiencing any fear. A person with Abhaya is continuously aware of his own reality; for him to become subject to fear would be impossible. You should not consider this quality of Abhaya as just the absence of fear. In fearlessness one is not aware of any second entity. One gets fear only when there exists a second object; but for one who has Abhaya there is never any second, at all. Therefore, fearlessness is associated with unity consciousness; it refers to Advaita, where there can be no two, but always just the one. Only when you are in such a state of Advaita will you be truly fearless.

When you forget your Self, when you forget the Atma, you will suffer from fear. When you remember only the world and not God, you will suffer from fear. When you are filled with desires and attachments, you will suffer from fear. When you are deluded by objects, you will suffer from fear. On the other hand, when you are immersed in the transcendental reality, you will be totally free from fear; you will never be afraid of anything. Then you will always be Abhaya, fearless. Krishna said, "Arjuna, there is only one thing you will have to develop. You need not further develop your vision of the phenomenal world; you need not further develop your mind. You need only to develop the vision of the One which is existing everywhere in everyone. If you know it, and if you remember it, then you will not be subject to this constant cycling between fear and the removal of fear, between Bhaya and Nirbhaya. So long as you have the deluded perspective that the world is real and made up of separate objects, your vision will be clouded and you will be subject to fear. But when you recognize the truth of the unity of the whole creation, you will be Abhaya, forever fearless. A person like you should become a wise man, a Stithaprajna, and never again experience fear."

You will have to control your tendency to look outwards towards the body and its deeds, and towards the mind with its thoughts and feelings, and instead develop the inward vision of the sacred Atma. This is the good vision, the integral vision, the Sudarshana. There is a fine example of this in the Srimad Bhagavatham. It is the story of Gajendra, an elephant, who was caught by a crocodile. This elephant, Gajendra, had a strong ego and he was convinced that with his great strength he would be able to fight and free himself from the crocodile. But here two facts must be known; elephants are very powerful on land, crocodiles are very powerful in the water. When an elephant enters the water he will not have so much strength, and when a crocodile comes out on land, he will also be less mighty than in his natural habitat, the water. In this case, because the crocodile was in the water he was able to exercise all his great strength. But the elephant, Gajendra, was very arrogant; he was blown up with ego, and felt that no crocodile could ever be the equal of an elephant, who was the lord of the forest. He didn't know that a crocodile in the water would be more than a match for any elephant away from land.

For a long time they fought relentlessly; finally the elephant got tired and lost all his physical strength as well as his mental strength. He had placed all his confidence in his physical and mental prowess, but having exhausted all that, he began praying to the Lord.

As long as his vision had been directed to his body, he did not look towards God. As long as he had confidence in his own bodily and mental strength, the thought of God did not arise and the Lord's grace did not descend. When the elephant lost his physical and mental power and turned to God, immediately Lord Vishnu sent His Sudarshana wheel and freed him from the catastrophe that had overtaken him. Now, the Sudarshana spoken of here does not refer to a mere disc used by the Lord as His weapon; Sudarshana refers to the sacred vision. Once you turn your vision towards God, God turns His vision towards you. Sudarshana refers to evoking the grace and the vision of the Lord on you. When will you acquire God's vision, basking you in His grace? When you renounce all your egocentric beliefs in your own strength of body and mind, and just as this elephant Gajendra did, surrender yourself completely to God, putting yourself in His hands and turning your vision wholly towards Him.

Only when you turn your vision towards Swami will Swami turn His vision towards you. Even if Swami's vision were to fall on you, if you had not at the same time turned towards Swami, you would not have been able to experience His beneficent gaze. Now all your vision is concentrated on the body. The effulgence of the shining sun may be all around you but its light will not have entered the room where you are staying. What is the reason for this? You have put curtains and shutters on the windows and kept the warm rays of sunlight out. Only when you break open these dark curtains and shutters will the effulgence of the sun enter your inner apartment. In the same way, you have covered your vision with shutters of doubt and ego and thick curtains of body-consciousness, and so, the rays of grace are not able to penetrate through and enter your heart. You might say, "I have not been able to get the grace of the God." But how will you be able to get it if you don't turn your gaze on Him?

When you do not look to God then surely you will not be able to see God. If I am standing directly in front of you and you are standing directly in front of me, and we are looking at each other, what is it that we will see? Who will you see in My eyes and who will I see in your eyes? We will see each other, in each other's eyes. When we stand face-to-face, I can see My vision in you and you can see your vision in me. But if you stand behind, how can I see My vision in you, or you see your vision in Me? It would be impossible. Therefore, come and be directly in front of me and concentrate your vision on Me. When the sight of the elephant, Gajendra, was turned towards God, God's sight met with it, because then God's sight turned towards him. Once that happens, then automatically all problems are solved.

Who is this elephant? This proud elephant is arrogance and pride. When a man is full of arrogance and pride he develops desire. Desire may be compared to thirst. When this proud man develops thirst, he goes to the waters of the world to drink; he enters Samsara. Even before he enters these waters completely, attachment catches hold of him. Attachment and possessiveness are the powerful crocodile that robs you of all your strength and makes you cry so pitifully. Before entering the waters of Samsara, before having gained so many attachments, you will have only rarely cried. For example, before marriage a young man will feel free and unencumbered. But after marriage there will be a continuous growth of attachments. Then one has to take care of wife, children, parents,

in-laws, and quite a few other relatives, and soon it feels like the whole world has hold of him and is pulling him down under the waters.

Once you develop egoism and pride, then desires follow; soon attachments come, and from attachments all these bonds develop. When bonds develop you will be so distracted you will not be able to turn towards God and see Him. Only when you look towards God will you be able to see Him. "Therefore, Arjuna", Krishna said, "Do not become a victim of this bondage. Keep your mind clear and pure, always looking towards the Atma, the universal principle, the one divinity existing in all things. Cultivate this inner vision in your mind. Do not allow the weeds and shrubs of ego and body-consciousness to develop in your heart. Instead, grow the tree of God's grace in your heart. Turn your sight towards God. Let this be your objective. Make this your goal."

Is There A Difference Between Human Beings and Animals?

Of all the great virtues, fearlessness occupies a place of primary importance. It is the ideal virtue. A person who is truly fearless will have detachment from all the objects of the world and be saturated with the love of God. Truly speaking humanity is divine, and fearlessness is its very nature. What is the special feature of mankind that sets it apart from other living beings? Here is a story that deals with this question.

There once was a very fearful forest, and living in this forest there were a large number of animals. In most forests where there are lions there will be no elephants, and if there are elephants roaming about then there will be no lions present. But in this forest, there were all types of animals, lions, elephants, jackals, apes, deer, dogs, the whole animal kingdom was represented there. One day, a clever fox thought to himself, 'Human beings boast that there is something special and unique about human nature. They say that it is next to impossible to get human birth. But human beings are born the same way that we animals are born. The word Jantu is the name given to all beings who are born from the womb of a mother. The question is: Why are human beings given the name Manava, instead of being called Jantu? In what way are we inferior to them?'

The fox thought out, within himself, all the various arguments and counter-arguments to this question that was perplexing him, and he resolved to prove that there is no distinction between humans and animals. From that day onwards, he started airing this problem to all the denizens of that forest. He sought out other animals and said, "Why should we accept the present state of affairs? People are considering animal life as inferior to human life. We should take steps to reverse this erroneous belief." In this way he began to encourage all the animals living there to think about this issue and get excited about it. He showed how these false beliefs had been taught and accepted by all the animals, even by the mighty elephant who was stronger than anyone and the dauntless lion, who was their king. The fox resolved to have a very big meeting of the animals to discuss these points and frame some resolution on which they could all agree. The 'Chatuspada Mahasabha' was the name proposed for this meeting. It means, 'The great gathering of the four-footed ones.' It was decided that on a particular day, at a particular

time, all of them would come together in a big open area and assemble for this special meeting.

Initially, three agenda items were agreed upon. The first was that human beings, just like animals, are born from the womb of a mother; therefore there should be only one name, both for men and animals. And, properly speaking, that name should be Jantu, one who is born from the womb of a mother. Either man should be called Jantu, or animals should be called man; but there should not be two different names and two different titles. That was the first resolution they wanted to pass at the meeting. The second agenda item was that animals had been called unwise, while humans claim to be endowed with wisdom; but animals should not accept this. In what way does man have superior wisdom to the animals? The fox was particularly insistent on this point. He asked, "What is this wisdom that man has, that we do not have? We have to firmly resolve that there is the same wisdom in both men and animals."

The third agenda item that the fox proposed, was, 'Man is considered to be a talking animal where as we are dumb; that is considered to be a very great disadvantage to us, which they claim makes a big difference. But even if we are dumb, what is it that we are lacking? By having learned the ability to talk and by possessing that skill, what is the extraordinary happiness that human beings have derived from that? Let us propose that talking and dumbness be considered more or less the same.'

"Then there is also a fourth point we should consider," the fox added. "Human beings think of us as being Rajasic whereas they consider themselves to be Satvic in nature. But none of us should agree to this. The Satvic nature that we have, even humans do not possess. We deserve the reputation and recognition that we are far superior in Satvic nature to humans." They all agreed that these four points should be discussed in the meeting. But then they wondered whom they should ask to preside over their meeting.

The fox pointed out that there were a number of Rishis and Mahatmas, who had been doing penance in the forest. "We should select a very highly accomplished sage to preside over our meeting", he suggested. They all agreed and resolved to send the fox to find a Maharshi and request him to chair their meeting. The fox went to a cave and there he saw a sage engaged in penance. He reverentially approached the sage and prayed to him, "Swami, in the kingdom of animals we have decided to have a very important meeting, a Chatushpada Mahasabha, and we request you to preside over it." The Rishi who recognized everything as living divinity itself, said, "All right, I will be happy to come and preside over your meeting." So, in a vast open field they arranged to have their meeting.

In that forest, every animal from the smallest to the biggest came with all their children, and many brought their grandchildren also, to attend this important meeting. They were all in very high spirits and extremely happy to take part in such a grand meeting. And they all showed a great deal of respect for their president. A high platform was provided for the president. Just beside the chair for the president, a chair was provided for the lion. The Maharshi presiding over the function was also in very fine spirits and was not the least bit afraid of the lion who was sitting next to him. This Maharshi recognized the existence of God in every living being, therefore he was full of fearlessness. Once all of

the animals were seated, there was a need for properly welcoming the Maharshi into their midst. The secretary for this great meeting was the fox. The fox began his welcoming address.

"Revered president, your excellency the king, honored minister, dear brothers and sisters! This day is a day which will be written in golden letters in the annals of this great forest and all its inhabitants. This is an epoch-making day which will never be forgotten in the whole animal kingdom, for today we will achieve a grand success in this most important meeting for which we have all assembled here. In coming together here you have all made some notable sacrifices. You have given up a great number of activities, and have made time available in your busy lives to participate in this meeting. So, in the very first place, let me express my deepest gratitude to all of you." Then the secretary went on and explained the items on the agenda. As soon as the agenda had been presented, the lion got up and addressed the vast gathering.

The lion told them, "You have all heard what my brother has said to you. I want you to know that the great qualities you have like valor and courage, man does not really have. I am myself direct proof of this. If you consider the courageous spirit, the magnificent prowess and strength which I have, where can you find any man who is my equal? Though I am king of animals, I never engage in any wrong or unjustifiable actions. Without reason I don't kill animals. Only when I am hungry will I take a little food. I do not kill any animals for sport; I never waste any food. And what holds true for me also holds true for the rest of the animals. Consider our courage, our code of ethics, our high level of morality; can we find such great qualities in human beings? No! They don't have them at all. Therefore, why should we be afraid of man? Why should we be thought of as inferior to man? Today, let us resolve to wipe out this blot on our reputation."

The elephant, who was sitting just by the side of the lion got up and said, "Man is not even half as big as my leg. In form I am certainly mighty and magnificent. In intelligence I have attained proverbial greatness. Kings, emperors, distinguished leaders, all have developed great faith in me. If ever a coronation was to be performed and I were not there, it would have to be postponed. When I am so great, how can you say that man is superior to me? My intelligence is extraordinary. Therefore, even if you consider just these two, my intelligence and my physical form, you must conclude that man can never be equal to me."

The fox got up and said, "The lion, our Mararaja, has just talked to you, and the big elephant, our distinguished minister, has also spoken his mind. Now we would like to invite a representative of the smaller animals to come and address us." At this point the wild dog was asked to speak to the gathering. It offered its humble salutations to the president, to the king, to the minister, to the secretary and to all in that great throng who had assembled there. Then it said, "Although I am very small and weak, in faith there is no one that can be compared to me. I have unswerving faith and unlimited loyalty to the person who has brought me up, and who looks after me. I will always be grateful and faithful, even if I lose my life. Even if I am hurt and harmed by my master I will not return harm to him in kind."

Everyone knows that human beings do not have this sense of loyalty which a dog has. In this quality of loyalty I can never be considered inferior to man. Man often resolves to give trouble to the one who has most lovingly taken care of him and guided him, whether it be his master or his own parents. Man will think nothing of doing bad in return for the good which is given to him. He will criticize and concoct schemes to deceive and hurt the very one who has looked after him so carefully. Man does not have any gratitude at all. He does not have any loyalty. Only so long as his purpose is being served will he pretend to be obedient. The moment his own selfish interests have been taken care of he begins to give trouble to his own master. When mankind is like that how can we be considered inferior to them?"

In this way, one by one, others got up and had their say. Appropriate to their status and experience, they gave speeches, extolling the many fine qualities practiced by the animals but which were being ignored by man., Finally, there was the speech of the president. The Rishi addressed the gathering, "Dear animals. All that you have just spoken of is true. Whenever a great teacher does something or says something to us, it is meant for our own good. It is intended to promote understanding and friendship with all of life. But as soon as this understanding flowers and friendship blossoms forth, people become suspicious and think that something bad is being done to them. In front they will offer salutations but behind they will criticize. In front they will use words of praise but behind they will use words of derisions and criticism. Filling themselves with opposites like that and low forms of cleverness, people waste their intelligence and their very life. All the defects that have been pointed out here are certainly true and present in mankind. As for food, sleep, breathing and such things there is absolutely no difference between human beings and animals."

The Rishi continued, "I do want to point out, however, that there is one speciality in human beings that is unique, in which they cannot be compared with the animals. Animals may inherit a streak of cruelty; once they have acquired that they cannot change it. A tiger, however hungry he may be, will not eat rice and curry. He only aspires to have mutton. He will not settle for just a little tea and cookies. However much he may try to change his habits, he will not succeed. On the other hand, if sufficient efforts are made by humans, they can change their cruelty and they can change any of their bad habits. The most important difference between humans and animals is that with effort, humans can bring about a complete transformation in themselves, whereas animals will not be able to accomplish that. These special capacities and skills for transforming themselves are only available to human beings."

The fox got up and said, "Swami, we will concede that human beings have these special capacities for changing themselves, but if they do not make use of these capacities, do they deserve the high status that they now enjoy?" The president declared, "If anyone has the capacity to change himself but does not use it, then he is much worse than an animal." At this all the animals burst into loud applause. The Maharshi repeated the principal point he had just made...that any human being who had the capacity for doing good, but who didn't use this quality to improve his own behavior and develop the good within himself, was, without a doubt, worse than an animal. The Rishi added, "What is the use of all the learning that man accumulates? Will it change his faith? As soon as bad thoughts enter

his head, his thinking becomes dull and he becomes an idiot. In learning and skills, humans have attained a high status. But all this learning is only for the sake of getting some bread: they use it only to fill their bellies and eke out a livelihood."

At this point the fox got up and added to what the president had just said, "In the process of eking out his livelihood, man uses all kinds of unethical means. In taking care of our daily needs we animals are clearly much better than human beings." The fox got all excited and carried away by his own rhetoric; he continued for some time on the same theme. "We are always fair in gaining our livelihood. In all respects, when compared to man, we are far better. Really, we are the best!" He got an enthusiastic ovation from the whole four-footed assembly. But now the fox had exceeded his limits and the president pounded the gavel and called for order. At this point, the Rishi explained the second major difference that make human beings unique. He said, "Man has been able to conquer Maya; that is, he has the capacity to completely dispel illusion. Once he has done that he is able to experience Atma, and then he can reach the state of Nirvana. This is a vital difference between human beings and animals.

To emphasize his point, the Maharshi repeated, "Human beings have the power and also the authority to conquer Maya. If man takes the trouble and makes the effort, he will be able to directly experience the Atma. With the help of spiritual exercises he can reach Nirvana. All these you animals do not have." Then he added, "Dear children! In the English language, human beings have been collectively called mankind, using the generic term, M-A-N. The same is given in Sanskrit as 'Manava'. The inner significance of M-A-N is that human beings can separate out and remove this illusion, [M]aya; they can get the vision of [A]tma, and immerse themselves in wisdom and joy and enter the state of [N]irvana. This, then, is the meaning conveyed by these letter MAN. 'M' stands for 'Maya removed', 'A' stands for 'Atma seen', and 'N' stands for 'Nirvana attained'. Attaining Nirvana means that man becomes one with joy and bliss. So, a true human being, a true man, is one who has removed the ignorance of Maya, who has had a vision of Atma, and who has merged himself in the supreme state of bliss."

When the Rishi had finished, all the animals bent down their heads and agreed that these three are things which they could not achieve. But then the question was raised, "Have all human beings been able to attain this?" "No!" came back the answer. "Only very, very few." "Those people who do not make any effort at all in these directions are just like us and there is absolutely no reason for distinguishing them from the animals", they decided. The Maharshi agreed. He said, "Although humans have this great capacity for wisdom and bliss, they have not developed themselves in this direction and, therefore, they have not been able to derive much joy from their lives."

Then, on a personal note, the president explained the reasons why he had come into the forest to live. He said, "Men do not care much about these noble qualities. Animals give trouble only to those who give them trouble; otherwise they will live in peace with each other. But man harms people who do not harm him at all. Without any reason he begins to blame and foment trouble, harming people who are unblemished and who have given him no cause for provocation. Man also enters into all kinds of improper work which he has no right to be engaged in." He concluded, "It is for these reasons that the Rishis have

given up the company of men and have gone into the forest to live. Man is becoming increasingly selfish. whatever he says, whatever he does, whatever he thinks, is full of selfishness. Animals do not have such selfishness. Animals are not harming other animals and accumulating wealth. Therefore can man even be compared to an animal?"

It is in this context that Krishna said, "Arjuna! Be a true human being, not one who is even worse than an animal. Rise above the animal nature to your true human nature. There are two qualities of animals that you should never have. You are neither a sheep, which is always timid and fearful, nor are you a tiger which is always cruel to others. You are a man. You are worthy of higher things. Be fearless! Do not ever allow yourself to be subject to fear." Then Arjuna folded his hands and said, "Dear Lord, I will obey your commands implicitly."

There is infinite power inherent in the human heart. But despite such power, man does not have faith in himself. What is the reason for this? The reason is that he feels separate, and he believes that he is different from the divinity, which, in truth, is always inside him as his very core. This same divinity pervades the entire universe. When you develop a firm faith in God, you will never have any fear whatsoever; you will recognize that the God you worship is the One who is present everywhere in everyone and in everything, and also in yourself. That belief will remove all vestige of fear from your heart. But, if you don't have that faith then you will be ridden with fear. Every moment, every step, you will be frightened. When you have an examination you will be afraid. While going in an airplane, you will be afraid. When a truck comes in the opposite direction on the road, you will be afraid. Right from the very moment when you get up from bed until you again go to bed you will be afraid. And even in bed you will be afraid that thieves might break into the house and steal your belongings. You will be expending your entire time in fear. But this is not right. You should become fearless.

Your faith in the omnipresent is the key to developing fearlessness. Only when you lose faith will you develop fear; only when you forget your true Self will fear arise. You have forgotten your own true nature; you have forgotten the Atma. You are considering yourself to be this little five-foot body, but the truth is that you are infinite in form and that your power is unlimited. When you make an effort to remove the delusions and get a vision of the Atma, you become merged in Nirvana; then you can call yourself a real human being. If you do not make any effort along this path you are not a man but a nam, a man in name only. When a person has self-confidence, in other words, when he is awake to the Self, he is called Sakshara. Such a person has complete control over the senses; that is the meaning of Sakshara. Sakshara is composed of the three Sanskrit syllables Sa-Ksha-Ra. Opposed to such a noble soul, there is the person who has no control over the senses; he is a Ra-Ksha-Sa, in other words, a demon, a Rakshasa.

When you read these terms in reverse, you begin to see the two different types of human beings, those who are filled with Shanti (peace) and those who have nothing but A-shanti (turmoil), those who can truly call themselves man and those who are nam, artificial men who carry only the name of man. Therefore, you have to conduct your life so that you can truly call yourself a human being, and live up to the high ideal that accompanies this great gift, of having been given a sacred human birth.

What is True?

Every day at every time, there will be change occurring in all the objects of creation. Once you recognize that the world is basically a stage for the continuous natural occurrence of change and that change is inherent to the very nature of the objects of the world, then you will become free from suffering. The Lord has taught in the Gita, that instead of undergoing all the sufferings that go with developing attachments and then getting disillusioned when the inevitable changes begin to happen, it would be far better from the very beginning, to remain unattached towards the things and objects of the world. Here is an example which illustrates the illusory nature of the world and the detachment you should have to it.

King Janaka had acquired extraordinary proficiency in Brahma-Jnana, the knowledge of Brahman. He was called 'The King of Videha'. Videha means 'deprived of body', in other words, one who did not have any sense of body-consciousness. One particular night, after dinner, he was discussing certain administrative problems with his ministers. He got back to his bedroom a little late. A meal had been set out for him but he didn't touch it. He relaxed on a sofa, while the queen massaged his feet. Soon King Janaka fell asleep. The queen asked the various attendants present to leave the room and made sure that the king, who was extremely tired, would not be disturbed in his sleep. She put a cover over him and banked the light low, quietly remaining by his side. Shortly afterwards, King Janaka quite suddenly opened his eyes, sat up, looked around incredulously at his surroundings, and in a most peculiar way began to ask, "Is this real or is that real. Is this the truth or is that the truth?"

The queen became a little frightened by his bewildered look and strange question; she tried to find out what exactly he was asking, but he would not explain or answer any of her queries. He just went on saying, "Is this the truth or is that the truth?" She called for the ministers, counsellors, and other important officials. They all assembled and began questioning the king. "Maharaja, what is your doubt? What exactly are you asking?" But the Maharaja would not respond to them. Finally the ministers brought the great Sage Vashishta to the court. Vashishta asked the king, "What are you asking? What is your doubt? May I clarify it for you?" The king was replying to all the questions with the same query, "Is that the truth or is this the truth? Is this reality or is that reality?"

Sage Vashishta being omniscient closed his eyes and meditated for a while to find out the cause of the king's strange behavior. Vashishta realized that King Janaka had suddenly awakened from a vivid dream in which he had forfeited his kingdom and found himself wandering lost, alone and despondent in a forest. He was feeling very hungry and also very tired and forsaken. As he wandered through that forest he kept shouting, "I am hungry, I am hungry." It happened that there were some dacoits in that forest. Those dacoits were just sitting down in a glade nearby to have their meal, eating from plates

made of leaves. Taking pity on him, the dacoits made themselves known and invited him to join them, offering him a portion of their meal.

Just at that moment, a tiger came upon them and they all ran for their lives. The tiger helped himself to all the food. Again Janaka found himself staggering through the forest crying out, "O, I am so hungry. I am so very hungry." When he woke up he discovered he was in a palace, on a royal sofa by the side of the queen, with a silver tray filled with luxurious food and dainties sitting on the table nearby, and he began asking whether he was the starving, forsaken wretch begging food from dacoits in a fearful forest, or whether he was an emperor living in a sumptuous palace surrounded by all possible luxuries. "Is this true or is that true?"

Maharishi Vashishta immediately recognized the king's confusion and said, "King Janaka, neither of these two roles is true. You alone are true. You, yourself, are the truth. The you who was present as the witnessing conscious in both the dream state and in the waking state; that you who witnessed both these states, is the true reality. Life during the daytime is a day-dream; during the night it is a night-dream. They are both illusions. They are filled with defects and flaws because they constantly change from one thing to another; so they cannot be real. Only you who remain unchanged in all these states are real, free of all change and illusion." This was also emphasized in the Gita, where Krishna pointed out the important truth that the world is constantly changing and that the Self alone is real and ever unchanging.

Purity in Action

Bhagavad Gita has not asked that you should renounce all worldly activities and take up Sanyasa. The inner significance of the Gita has to be understood in the context of human nature as it is expressed in the world, in the everyday activities of people. The most important objective of the Gita is to bring down the priceless, ancient wisdom to the level of the mundane world and to raise the worldly life to the level of the highest wisdom. Bhagavad Gita transforms Vedanta into daily life and elevates daily life to the level of Vedanta; it not only introduces philosophy and spirituality into daily life, but it also introduces daily life into philosophy and spirituality. Hence, it reconciles spirituality and daily life.

Bhagavad Gita teaches the sanctity of human life; it directs man to his ultimate goal. It teaches him how to make his livelihood in the world in a way that enables him to transcend the human condition and in a way that doesn't bind him to further human births. You will not be bound by your actions when they are performed with disinterestedness, without any interest in the fruits. Bhagavad Gita taught the Sadhana of Anasakti, which means developing nonattachment to all your activities and duties. What actually happens by having this Anasakti is that your actions become sacred. The Gita does not encourage you to renounce work; on the contrary, it encourages you to do your duty and perform all the activities appropriate to your status in life. But, you must transform all these actions into sacred works by offering them to the Lord.

Krishna held out King Janaka as an ideal person because he ruled his kingdom with a sense of Anasakti and detachment, and thereby attained perfection. There are some people who have only outward vision. There are others who have developed inward vision. Outward vision sees only the illusory world outside. The inward vision transforms the mind and fills the heart with sacred feelings. In order to gain the inner vision, this Anasakti has to be developed. There is a story to illustrate this.

Once upon a time, the young sage, Suka, was travelling in the neighborhood of Mittilapura. King Janaka heard that Suka had entered his kingdom, but he did not know where he would make his camp. To find out, the king sent out several messengers to get news of Suka's whereabouts. They spent a week going round the kingdom and, finally, were able to locate Suka living in a shelter in a forest, nearby the capital city of Mittilapura. Janaka, along with his ministers, went to visit Suka. Janaka did not go there as a king or emperor. He went as a servant of the Lord; he had long ago removed all traces of ego, and now he went as a humble spiritual practitioner. Suka was giving a discourse to the disciples on some spiritual topic. During this discourse, Janaka stood and listened with full concentration. Evening came. Before he left, Janaka went to Suka and asked, "Swami, may I join this divine discourse every day?" Suka replied, "Janaka, spirituality and philosophy are not anyone's private property. Whoever has the interest, whoever enjoys listening to these teachings, whoever believes in reaching the goal, has a right to this knowledge. Certainly you may come. You are most welcome." Janaka went back to his palace and returned each day to attend the discourses.

Now, Suka wanted to demonstrate to the world that King Janaka had inward vision, whereas most people have only outward vision. With this in mind, he moved to an elevated spot near Mittilapura, from where the entire city was visible, and there he put up a little cottage. From this place, he began giving discourses on Vedanta. One particular day, King Janaka, on account of some urgent responsibilities of administration, was delayed in coming there. Suka purposely held up starting his discourse until Janaka had arrived. Suka took no cognizance of the large gathering of people that were already assembled there, waiting for the discourse to commence. To demonstrate his interest, Suka started asking questions of this person and that, trying to find out why King Janaka had not yet come. He also told some people to go and find out what had delayed the king. He himself stood on the roadside and watched for the royal party to arrive.

At this, some murmur began among the people there. The disciples, the elders and youngsters who had assembled there, began whispering amongst themselves. One said, "Look at Suka. He is considered to be such a great sage who has renounced everything; but it does not seem to be true. Here he is waiting for King Janaka. Just because Janaka is an emperor, Suka is not paying any attention to us and does not seem to care at all about giving the discourse to us." Another person said, "Look at this peculiar behavior of Suka. Why does he show so much partiality to kings? For a sage, should there be any difference in his feeling for a king and for others?" Now, Suka noted all this talk that was going on. In fact, it was with the intention of teaching them a good lesson that he had conducted himself this way. A half hour passed. Two hours passed. Suka continued to wait for Janaka to come; he did not make any attempt to start the discourse.

Meanwhile, those people whose hearts were a little dirty, gave expression to their feelings of jealousy and anger. All those impure feelings which were inherent in them but had been hidden inside, now started coming out. That is just what Suka wanted, for only after the venom that was in their hearts had come out, could the teachings of Vedanta enter there. If there is nothing inside one's head, then it can be filled with sacred teachings. But if one's head is already filled with all sorts of impure stuff, how can it take anything pure and sacred in? Without emptying the head of bad things, good things cannot be put in. So, Suka's wish was that all these bad feelings should manifest themselves and be expressed. He wanted his students to pour out all the dirt and filth which was inside their minds. He knew that as long as their hearts harbored attachments and bad feelings, his teachings would not take hold. So he had them undergo this process of purification.

Meanwhile with a great deal of anxiety, Janaka rushed to attend the discourse. Suka noted the approach of Janaka. He could be seen coming from a long ways off, because Janaka did not usually come alone. Although Janaka was not interested in bringing ministers and servants, they would invariably accompany him to provide security and protection for the king. Soon all the people became aware that King Janaka was approaching. Entering the area where the discourse was given, Janaka prostrated himself before the Guru and humbly asked his pardon for coming late; then he spread his durba grass mat and sat down. Immediately Suka commenced his discourse. Now, in the hearts of the young disciples who had assembled there, hatred fructified. Their faces began changing because of their feelings towards Suka and King Janaka. 'Look at this Suka!', they thought to themselves. 'He only cares about pleasing the king. That is the extent of his Vedanta'.

Suka decided to teach a lesson to all the people assembled there who were harboring such bad feelings. After some time, he interrupted his discourse suddenly and said, "Janaka, look at your kingdom. It is on fire.!" King Janaka, who had closed his eyes and was totally concentrated on listening to the sacred teachings, took no note of these words. He had fixed his mind on Vedanta, and so he kept his concentration only on Vedanta. The other people who had assembled there saw the flames and smoke rising above the city. Some of the disciples, thinking of their relatives and belongings, began running towards Mittilapura. All the attachment which had laid hidden deep in their hearts now came to the surface and fully exposed itself. A few moments later, Suka told King Janaka, "Janaka, this fire has now spread to your palace." Even then, Janaka did not take any note of Suka's statement; Janaka did not move from his seat. He had the true feeling of Anasakti, complete disinterestedness and indifference to all things worldly. His interest was only in Atma; except for this absorption in Atma he had no other feelings.

Among those in attendance at the discourse were a number of famous pundits and celebrated scholars, having worldwide reputations. Suka wanted to demonstrate to them that they might have been very great scholars, but they had not killed their attachments. When these scholars saw the flames, they were fearful; they turned to King Janaka and began praying, "O, King! O, King!" But Janaka had entered into a state of Samadhi; he was enjoying the bliss of Atma. Tears of joy were rolling down his cheeks. He did not waver for even a moment from the holy thoughts on which he had fixed his concentration. Suka observed Janaka's state and he was very pleased. After some time those disciples

who had run away towards Mittilapura returned, reporting that, in fact, there had been no fire at all. Then Suka began to explain to the disciples the meaning of all that had gone on.

Suka said, "Well, children, I did not delay starting my discourse for two hours because Janaka is the king, and, therefore, a very important man. I delayed because he is a deserving person, a true Sishya; and I believe in waiting for one such as him. Because he has purged himself of ego and pride, because he has true humility and dedication, he has the authority to hold up the discourse. You listen, but you do not hear what is said or put it into practice; therefore, you have no such authority. Instead of teaching hundreds of people who have made no effort in applying these teachings to their daily lives, I can teach at least one person who truly has a right to being taught, because he has integrated these sacred precepts into his very life. What is the use of teaching people full of attachment and egoism? It is something like throwing a stone into the water. For any number of years the stone may lie in the water, but it will not absorb even a drop of it. Even if I can get just one person like Janaka it is sufficient for me to go on. Why have useless shining stones in great numbers? If there is at least one gem which is truly valuable, that is enough. Why have 10 acres of barren land if you can have even a small plot that is fertile and abundant in its yield. If one king like Janaka can become sacred, then he can transform his entire kingdom, and turn it into a sacred realm that will be an example to the whole world." Suka's intent was to make Janaka a sacred king, a Rajayogi, and at the same time to teach a valuable lesson to the conceited disciples, who had gathered around him.

Krishna had a similar intent when He taught the Gita to Arjuna. Arjuna was also a sacred person, and he had qualified himself for the teachings by his character and his high ideals. Arjuna had control of the senses; he had won a great deal of spiritual power from the penance he had performed. He had, to a large extent, suppressed his worldly attachments. He had a highly developed intellect and had become skilled in many arts. And he had surrendered himself to Krishna in true humility. Krishna decided that Arjuna was ready for this wisdom and resolved to turn him into a Sitihaprajna. With the intention that if Arjuna could be corrected, the whole world would benefit thereby, Krishna took great care to give these sacred teaching to Arjuna. Arjuna had both the capacity and the virtue to rise to great spiritual heights, being under all circumstances in complete control of his senses. That is the reason why he had been given a number of titles. Arjuna means the pure one; another title was the sacred-hearted one; another was the jewel-of-men. It was such an outstanding hero that Krishna chose, and it was His wish and Sankalpa, that by teaching the Gita to Arjuna, the entire world would benefit thereby. Arjuna's name is Parthiva, which means son of the earth. All of you are sons of the earth. Since Arjuna may be considered an outstanding representative of all human-kind, by converting him into a sacred person, Krishna felt that the whole world would in time be transformed.

Compared to ordinary actions which are done thinking of oneself as the doer, actions done without desire for the fruits, that is Nishkama Karma, will be much greater. Anasakti Karma, that is action with complete desirelessness, performed impersonally with total indifference, and without any attachment, is even greater than Nishkama Karma. But, action offered completely to the Lord is more sacred than all these. Thus, Krishna

commanded Arjuna to offer all his acts to the Lord. When Arjuna reached this state of evolution, that is, when Arjuna began to offer all his acts to the Lord, Krishna began to teach him the Gita.

Seeing Only the Divinity Everywhere

Recognize the defects and weakness of things. One day or another, all the things existing in the world have to undergo modifications and change. The same five elements that are to be found in your body and the bodies of all other beings are all that you will ever be able to discover in the world. Whatever you may search for in this world you will soon discover that you are really just seeking the five elements; they are all you will ever find in any of the things of the world. But since they are already within you, what is the point of seeking them in the things outside? It is natural for you to seek and aspire for something which you do not have. But it is unnatural to seek and aspire for something which you already have. There is only one entity which transcends the five elements, and that is divinity. This is what you should aspire for. Jnana or wisdom, is seeing that One everywhere. That all-pervasive unity is the Atma. Seek out this unity and keep it constantly in view. When all your actions are based on Atma they become sacred and pure. When all your activities are performed for the sake of Atma or for the pleasure of God, then you become sanctified and filled with wisdom. A number of Rishis, right from ancient days, have made heroic efforts to attain this state of Stithaprajna, of being ever established in the highest spiritual wisdom.

Once upon a time, the King of Greece, Alexander, reached the banks of the Sindhu river. He intended to conquer and plunder India, and for this purpose he had come with a big army. In those days there were no royal roads; the few roads that existed were more like footpaths. The king crossed the banks of the Sindhu river and entered the forest with his army. The scouts preceding the army found a Yogi lying under a tree, legs spread, deep in sleep. This Yogi had reached the stage of Stithaprajna; he was a wise man. One soldier went up and awakened the Yogi and told him to move out of the path, but the Yogi was indifferent to the efforts made by the soldier. He did not move. The Greek soldier started threatening the Yogi, telling him that the great emperor of Greece, Alexander, was coming with his army, and that this emperor had decided to invade India and plunder the entire nation. While the soldier was shouting at this Yogi, Alexander arrived on the scene. The Greek soldier was enraged to see that even after the emperor had come, this Yogi remained completely indifferent. The Yogi was not paying the proper respect and courtesy due to the emperor. At this, the soldier threatened to cut off the Yogi's head.

The moment that the Yogi heard that the enraged Greek soldier wanted to cut off his head, he started laughing loudly, and stood up. On the Yogi's face there was no trace of fear; he was thoroughly serene. The emperor saw the great effulgence on his face and he spoke to him. "After hearing my soldier threatening to cut off your head, why are you laughing so loud? If you were an ordinary person you would immediately surrender, prostrate before him and ask for pardon. But you are only laughing. What is the meaning of this?" The Yogi replied, "I am the embodiment of Sat-Chit-Ananda, I am eternal truth, awareness, bliss. I am ever free. Your weapons can never harm me. Fire cannot burn me.

Water cannot wet me. Wind cannot blow me away. I was never born and I will never die. I am the immortal Atma; that is my reality. Here this soldier is threatening to kill me by cutting off my head. This is what provoked me to laughter." The moment the emperor heard these words, he was very surprised. He thought, "It is quite natural for people to get frightened when they are about to face death, or when someone threatens to kill them; but rarely will anyone laugh and be so happy when they are about to die. In India, there are people who have attained such a state of excellence in spiritual life that they are not even afraid of death. How can I plunder such a nation? No, I won't do that." Having resolved on this, he turned his army around and went no further into India. From times immemorial, great beings such as this Yogi have existed in India, and by the way in which they led their lives, have taught various other nations the highest truths about spirituality.

A number of powerful kings have created great mansions and palaces, enjoyed luxurious comforts, eaten a variety of luxurious foods, traveled in luxurious cars, and indulged themselves in countless vanities, all the while thinking that they were enjoying all the great pleasures available on the earth. However, if one were to think a little more deeply as to whether a king was enjoying the luxuries or whether his luxuries were enjoying him, then one would have to conclude that it is these luxuries which were enjoying him. It was he who was being enjoyed by the sense objects. They were literally eating him up. Soon he becomes weak, he becomes diseased and gets old. If he had really enjoyed the sense objects, he would have attained unbounded health and strength; but as he was being enjoyed by the sense objects, he loses all his health, and his life span gets reduced. Not recognizing this truth he temporarily experienced some happiness. He kept his vision on these transient sense objects without realizing the consequences which were to come his way because of his desire to enjoy them.

A particular person went to an astrologer who could read palms. The person showed the astrologer his hand. The astrologer mentioned that he had a certain line which meant that he would be very wealthy. The moment the person heard this he was overjoyed. After observing his hand some more, the astrologer told him that he would get a lot of honors. The person felt even more joyful. Then after examining the hand still further, the astrologer said, "You are going to occupy a very high position." The man felt so happy, it was as if he had just been told that he would become prime minister, that very day. After a while, the astrologer told him that he was going to get many children. Joy was now heaped on joy. Then after telling all these things, the astrologer said, "But your life span is going to be very short!" The moment the person heard this, all his joy left him; he got very dejected and shrank down in despair. The inner significance of this is, whatever may be your property and wealth, whatever position you may occupy, whatever honors you may get and however many children you may have, if you do not have sufficient span of life, then what will be the use of all these things? If you are not going to be permanent, then how can these things be of permanent value to you?

True and permanent things cannot be obtained, and can never be found in this world. All that you see in the external world is only a reflection of what is inside you. That one truth within you that is all-pervasive and ever unchanging is Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram, that which is eternally true, eternally auspicious, eternally beautiful. Make every effort to obtain that permanent truth. Try to live in this auspiciousness; be one with the divinity

which is the very embodiment of all beauty. After explaining the qualities of a wise man to Arjuna, Krishna directed him to enter the battlefield. Krishna told him, "Keep all your attention on Me. Concentrate on Me alone. Obey My commands and do your duty. For the purpose of discharging your duty this body has been given to you. It is on account of your actions in the past that you have gotten this birth; now, by making all your actions sacred and proper you will sanctify your life."