

## Chapter XIV

Objective and integral knowledge; introduction to: Brahman, supreme spirit, action, the material creation, tutelary deities, and the Lord of the sacrifice; the meaning of Brahman; Brahman as existence-knowledge-bliss.

“There is nothing to equal wisdom (*nahi jnanena sadrisham*).” And what is wisdom? That which makes you cross this sea of change (*samsara*). Of course, wisdom is of two kinds: objective knowledge (*vishaya-jnana*) and integral spiritual knowledge (*a-bheda-jnana*).

The first type is knowledge of the world; the second is knowledge of the identity of *Brahman* and the individual *Atma*, which is called undifferentiated or integral (*a-bheda*) wisdom. This wisdom is not a function of the intellect (*buddhi*); it is a feature of something beyond it, something that witnesses the activities of even the intellect. It destroys the delusion about this constant flux, which is mistaken to be a reality; it removes fear from the heart; it reveals to people the *Brahman* that they and all this is. So it is called the right (*samyak*) wisdom, the nearest (*sameepa*) wisdom.

There are two paths by which people can approach this integral knowledge: the inner and the outer. The outer spiritual discipline is engagement in activity without attachment (*nish-kama-karma*), dedicating the result of activities to the Lord. The inner spiritual discipline is meditation and total absorption (*samadhi*). In *Vedantic* terminology, this is inner concentration (*nidi-dhyasana*). Listen and meditate on what you have listened to—these two steps are the bases of this inner concentration. Without these, meditation is impossible to achieve.

This is the meaning of what is called control of the senses, detachment from the outer sensory world, withdrawal of the mind from the outer world. This is the goal of all life: knowing the highest *Atma*, attaining liberation. There can be no second aim for people. People are endowed with life not to build bungalows, acquire estates, accumulate wealth, add progeny, earn titles, or ascend to higher rungs of social life. Their greatness does not depend on these. The chief success in life lies in winning permanent bliss, permanent escape from grief and agitation.

“Listen, oh ye children of immortality, all over the world (*Sravanthu vishwe amrithasya putraah!*)” is the call, the invitation. The heritage of immortality must be recognized and experienced; it must be won back. The bonds of name and form must be removed; they are but bonds made of dream-stuff. They are changeable and temporary. They are not genuine natural characteristics of the soul (*jiva*). Real wisdom consists in recognizing that one is pure bliss; bliss that persists from the past into the present and the future. Escape from grief for a brief period of time and the attainment of joy for a short time—these are not signs of real liberation. “If you seek this steady, genuine, pure state of bliss, you must be attached to Me,” said Krishna.

“Arjuna! Whoever does spiritual practice after attaching himself to Me with a view to liberate himself from old age and senility will know all that is to be known of *Brahman*, *karma*, and *Atma*. I am the master of the material creation (*adi-butha*), the presiding deities (*adi-daiva*), and that which pertains to sacrifice (*adi-yajna*). If I am thus worshiped, the worshiper will develop equanimity and full control of the vagaries of the mind. Besides, such a person will dwell on Me without forgetting Me even in the last moment. For that reason, such a person will reach Me. That is to say, such a person will merge in Me.

“Arjuna! Everyone is anxious to avoid old age and death; that is human nature. But of what avail is mere

anxiety? One's conduct and behaviour should be in accordance with one's objective. If one has sincere yearning, and if one places full trust in and faithfully surrenders to the Lord, the fog of grief will be dispersed by the rays of His grace. If, on the other hand, one places trust on the objects of this world, the consequent grief will never end; nor can it be ended by any other than the Lord. Serve the Master of delusion, the designer of all this dreamland, rather than the dream itself. How can attachment to delusion yield anything but disappointment? How can joy be won by such pursuits? If joy is not won and grief avoided, how can liberation be achieved?" Krishna asked.

Then, Arjuna intervened. "Krishna," he said, "can't such people attain you? You say that grief must be conquered before one can attain you. Well, what is the origin of that grief? How is it to be tackled? How does it arise? How can one try to overcome it without knowing its origin and course of development? Please tell me how this grief arises in the human mind."

"Listen, Arjuna," Krishna condescended to reply. "The source of all types of sorrow is ignorance. You might now ask Me what the source of ignorance is. I shall tell you. It is identification with the body, the delusion that you are the body. This can be removed only by acquisition of right knowledge. To remove darkness, light is needed. You cannot frighten darkness away or make it yield by prayer or petition or protest. Unless light is on, darkness will not disappear, howsoever you may try. So too, ignorance will not disappear by merely wishing for its disappearance. Once you understand the nature and ramifications of this trait, this ignorance, the truth will be laid bare and grief will vanish.

"When ignorance goes, grief goes also. So attach yourself to Me, earn the light of true knowledge, and tread the path of no grief," said Krishna.

Immediately, Arjuna interjected with, "Krishna! Until now, you talked of certain paths by which we can reach You. Now, at the end of it all, if you throw this cannon ball, how can I grasp its meaning? You did not even confer, as a preliminary, a little power to do so! Please make me happy by describing this point in greater detail, so that I might follow You better and attain You."

Krishna replied, "My dear brother-in-law! Listen. My mystery can be understood once you are clear about the meaning of *Brahman*, Supreme Spirit (*Adi-atma*), *karma*, the material creation, deities presiding over the material realm, and what pertains to sacrifice. Let Me tell you this also. Whoever understands My mystery attains Me."

"Then, oh Lord, tell me about the first of these, *Brahman*," exclaimed Arjuna.

"Arjuna! *Brahman* is referred to as the imperishable (*a-kshara*) that is the highest (*para*). *A-kshara* means without destruction, or indestructible. *Brahman* comes from a root that means big, vast, etc. How vast, you may ask. Vaster than whatever you call vast is the answer. The word *a-kshara* has another meaning: omnipresent, immanent, everywhere. *Brahman* is not mere *a-kshara*, as you will have noticed. It is the highest *a-kshara*. What does that mean? It is the type of *a-kshara* that is beyond the reach of time and space and knowability; it cannot be known by any or all the categories; it never declines or ends; it is the highest Indestructible, Indescribable.

"The goal of humanity is to attain that *Brahman*; Indestructible (*a-kshara*) and *Brahman* signify the same goal. They indicate the with-qualities (*sa-guna*) aspect and the without-qualities (*nir-guna*) aspect of the same truth. For *a-kshara* means also the letter *Om*, which is a symbol of *Brahman*. That is why it is called the *yoga* of the indestructible highest *Brahman*. *Brahman* has two adjectives, highest (*para*) and indestructible (*a-kshara*). *A-kshara* indicates the *Om* (*pranava*) as well as delusion (*maya*). Delusion is also subsumed by *Om*. These two

are ‘attribute-ful’, qualified. *Brahman*, however, is attribute-less, without qualities and pure in Its own right. He who understands this attains Me.

“Now for the second point. It is *Brahman* that dwells in everybody in the form of ‘I’. In fact, everybody hangs around this entity called ‘I’. In the body, each part and organ in the organization performs one chief task. Each sense contacts and informs about one particular set of impressions from the outer world. But, though related to the senses, there is an ‘I’ shining in the body, above and behind all of them. If that relationship is broken, everything becomes inert material!

“When the ‘I’-power flows through the senses, they are able to carry on their allotted tasks. That power is spirit; it cannot be known without great effort. Use the sharpest discrimination and you know it to some small extent. *Brahman* is the ‘That (*Thath*)’ entity; the individual soul is the ‘this Thou (*thwam*)’ entity.

“To make the matter clearer to you, take these two as appearance and character, form and substance. *Brahman* is the form, the individual soul is substance,” said Krishna.

Let us dwell on this matter a little. The scriptures describe *Brahman* as existence-knowledge-bliss (*satchid-ananda*), right? This is a way of denoting it, in the *Vedantic* vocabulary. It is also described as *asthi-bhathipriyam*. Are they the same, or do they have different meanings? *Sat* means that which persists in the past, present, and future; the same meaning is conveyed by *asthi*. *Chit* means that which is conscious of everything; the same meaning is conveyed by *bhathi*. *Ananda* means unending source of joy, and so does *priyam*. These three are found in every human being—in every beast and bird.

Take the first of these, existence (*sat*), and this will become clearer. The body is subject to destruction, sooner or later. Everyone is aware of this; no one is ignorant of this elementary fact. Nevertheless, everyone is apprehensive of death! No one welcomes death or is eager to meet it. Death is inevitable; you have to meet it, even though you do not welcome it or you try to avoid it. All that is born has to die some day. Still, no one likes to die.

What is the key to this paradox? Note this: What does not welcome death? What meets with death? What leaves and what remains? The answer: the body dies; the body falls. What doesn’t die is the *Atma*. But you delude yourselves into thinking that it is the *Atma* or “you” that dies. The *Atma* has nothing to do with death or birth. The body experiences death; the *Atma*, which is eternal, true, and pure (*nithya*, *sathya*, and *nir-mala*), does not die. You are the *Atma*, which does not like to die. That is to say, you are the eternal; your nature is eternal. The *Atma* is the “child of immortality”, not the body. The *Atma* is the eternal, not the body.

You are the eternal (*sat*), the *Atma*, the entity that has no death. It is this *Atma* that is in every casement, so every being feels the force of that eternal in the form of eternal unchanging existence. This is clear and unmistakable.

Now take the second term: consciousness (*chit*), the force that urges you on to know everything. Everyone is eager to know about anything that is apparent to their consciousness; they ask the questions: “What is this? How does this happen?” Those who succeed in knowing may be only a few. Others may have only eagerness, and not the steady intelligence needed to persist and win. That makes no difference. The essential fact is the thirst, the urge.

Take a little boy to a market, bazaar, or exhibition. You will note that the boy does not simply move along, seeing the various things on both sides. He will be continuously asking the person who is leading him by the hand

what this is and what that is. It may be something he does not need or something that is beyond his power of understanding, and yet, the stream of questions will not dry up.

Consider the inner significance of this hunger for knowledge. It is the power of intelligence that expresses itself. It is not its nature to leave things alone. It can't rest until knowledge is gained, so the hunger emerges as a stream of questions. The principle of intelligence is self-luminous, so it has the power to illuminate even inert things. That is why these qualities shine in people and make other things clearer to them. This is enough to make it plain that people have in them the principle of intelligence.

Now for the third: bliss (*ananda*). Even beasts and birds crave joy without any prompting or persuasion from others. They make every effort to win it. Not one of them craves grief or pain; they make every effort to escape from pain and grief and put an end to them, when they become unavoidable.

As for people, no further elaboration is necessary. They seek unbroken joy at all times and in all acts and activities. At no time or place, at no stage of life, do they desire grief. They pray for the joy and happiness of themselves and their kindred through whatever worship they offer, devotional songs they share in, vows they fulfil, rites they perform, pilgrimages they undertake, or gifts they make for spiritual merit. When the body suffers from any illness and the doctor prescribes a medicine to cure it and make one whole, one wants even that to be sweet, soothing, and pleasant!

What is at the root of this desire? You are fundamentally happy-natured. Bliss is your very personality. You are not of the nature of the body that you occupy. You are *Atma*. Happiness is the nature of the *Atma*. That is why no one is surprised when you are happy; they are not inquisitive about your happiness, for it is something natural to you. Surprise arises only when you observe something that was not there before. What you see every day does not arouse your curiosity. It comes only when something unnatural happens or is observed.

Take this instance. A child is in the cradle. It playfully laughs at jingling bells or some toy or perhaps some sensation that is pleasant enough to make it bloom. No one is surprised or worried at all this. No one loses peace of mind as a result of this. Now, let the child that was playing and laughing start shrieking and weeping. Everyone within earshot will run toward the cradle and frantically search the bed and bedclothes to discover the cause of all this commotion. This is the experience of all who have something to do with children. No one was worried to find out why the child was happy, but all sought the cause when it wept. Why? Because joy is its nature; grief is unnatural, against its inner composition.

This is not the entire point; there is something more. Let us take another example from experience. When some friend or kinsman of yours is happy and affluent, no one takes the trouble to ask him why he is so happy; they ignore him and do not harry him with questions regarding himself. But when grief strikes him and he is unhappy, you start worrying him and yourselves. Why? Happiness is natural, it is to be expected, it is not surprising. For it is the nature of the *Atma*, which everyone is. That is why one craves constant happiness.

The above three (being, awareness, and bliss) we see in every being as the very core of its very existence, as its reality itself. So it is the Lord Himself who has assumed the pose of individuality and plays as an individual, in that role. It is this inner meaning upon which Krishna elaborated, so that the relationship of the *Brahman* and the individual soul, that is to say, the identity of both with Him, could be understood by Arjuna.