

Gita's Sthita Prajna Darshan



- Swami Shantananda Puri

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(A crash course for Moksha)

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SAMARPAN

*This book is dedicated with veneration
to the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru*

Swami Purushottamanandaji
Vasishta Guha, U.P., Himalayas

*but for whose infinite and Divine Compassion
I would not have been able to formulate
my thoughts and put them down
in this book
and
to the thousands of spiritual
Sadhakas all over the world*

– Swami Shantananda Puri

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Introduction _____

Srimad Bhagavad Gita is the best hand book available covering all aspects of spirituality. There again, the characteristics of a Sthita Prajna given in a dozen verses in the 2nd chapter forms the entire essence of Sadhana required for Self-realisation, the ultimate goal of all.

The very term ‘Sthita Prajna’ itself contains the main sadhana to reach the ultimate bliss irrespective of the path - Karma or Yoga, or Jnana or Bhakthi. The term, interpreted in a simple way means the one whose mind (Prajna) is ‘still’ - not wavering. The ultimate purpose of all sadhana is to control and still the mind - a mano-nasa, an annihilation of the mind. Yoga is defined as ‘Chitta Vritti Nirodhah’. It is the mind which has projected this illusory world of multiplicity - this so called waking state is also part of

a dream drama. The entire world is a ‘thought’. If you keep your mind bereft of all thoughts, the dream drama disappears and you the dreamer alone are left.

All these thoughts of the world are based on past impressions (vasanas). The vasanas have accumulated through repeated actions motivated by desire. The Gita, in the guise of describing a sthita-prajna gives us the methods by which the vasanas can be removed; our itching to do some action or the other is curbed so that we get released from the great delusion (Moha). Whenever a sadhana or a method is presented to us, where some hard work is involved, we always come out with an excuse “How can I possibly do all these things? It is very difficult to treat happiness and sorrow alike or success and defeat alike and to cultivate an equal vision! It is a rare Ramakrishna Paramahamsa or a Bhagavan Ramana who can do it”. Nothing is impossible for any of us. Our own negative thinking constitutes

the biggest mental block and becomes an impediment. It is the mind which has bound us and it is the mind which can release us from the bondage. Sincerity, faith and a firm determination backing incessant repeated practice will surely take us all to the goal. Even by getting by heart and repeating often these verses relating to the Stitha Prajna, we will get inspired one day to put it all in action.

I had long resolved not to write any more books. Mr.D.N.Anand of Bangalore, who is the real 'Sutradhara' behind the publication of all my books, very casually rang me up one day at Ghazipur (near Benares) and suggested that I should write on 'Sthita Prajna'. It just appealed to me and I got an inner command too. The very next day the work was started. My blessings to him.

I must also express my gratitude to Sri.Venkatesh Babu of Omkar Offset Printers of Bangalore who, though overwhelmed with many orders lucratively

several times more beneficial, has always been kind enough to accord priority out of his sincerity, love and devotion to get printed these books emanating from my hands, using the best paper, designing excellent cover page etc, and to deliver them promptly in time.

May the Supreme Lord's blessings be on us all.

Love and Hari Om

-Swami Shantananda Puri



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Photo of
Swami Shantananda Puri

Sri Swami Shantananda Puri

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The purpose of life for all beings is to achieve continuous permanent happiness unadulterated or unmixed with sorrows and sufferings. In this process, death is perhaps the greatest of all sorrows and without an exception, whoever is born is also subject to death and vice versa too. So, getting out of the inevitable cycle of birth and death and to become immortal is also part of our quest for happiness. The Vedanta philosophy as also the Scriptures (on which the former is based) affirm that our unhappiness and our inability to be permanently rooted in happiness is all due to a delusion which has led to an ignorance of what we really are i.e. our real nature (Swaroopa) and on the contrary, believing that we are individual souls endowed with

limitations of time, space etc. The various systems of philosophy have prescribed various disciplines and paths (like Jnana yoga, Bhakti yoga etc.) for dispelling our ignorance so that the Ultimate Truth will stand revealed resulting in the achievement of our goal. All these disciplines (Sadhana) are meant for removal of the shroud which veils Reality i.e., the various obstacles in the way of realisation of our real Self which is not to be attained from somewhere but is a *fait accompli* i.e. a thing already attained but not recognised. Whatever may be the yoga path or disciplines we may pursue for reaching the spiritual goal, our endeavour should be continuous and stable. A person with a wavering mind will not be able to concentrate his mind on the Reality. Further he may adopt Bhakti yoga for a few days and then he may take up Ashtanga yoga. Further he may worship Lord Vishnu for a few days and then change over to meditating on the unconditioned attributeless Brahman for a few days. These persons will go on changing their decisions often and remain irresolute.

The one who is decisive and has a stable and firm mind is a ‘Sthita Prajna’. It is only a ‘Sthita Prajna’ who can attain liberation or Mukti from all bondages limiting his freedom and depriving him of the permanent bliss which is his real form. The qualities or characteristics of a Sthita Prajna have been described in detail in the second chapter of Bhagavad Gita (Verses 55 to 71). According to various scholars, the terms Sthita Prajna and Gunāteeta are considered as synonymous. The qualities of a Gunāteeta described in chapter fourteen will be found to be identical. The characteristics mentioned of a Bhakta (a devotee) in the 12th chapter are also identical with those of a Sthita Prajna and a Gunateeta. In fact the word ‘Sthiramatih’ – stable mind – comes also as a *sine-qua-non* for a devotee, in the 12th chapter. All these Sthita Prajnas can also be called as Jivan muktas (including Videha muktas and Atyasramis) like Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi of Arunachala (Tiruvannamalai).

Obviously, these characteristics of a Sthita Prajna are self evident in those who have already become Sthita Prajnas. Here, the characteristics mentioned in the second chapter are not simple descriptions. These verses in the second chapter can be considered as a crash course for the seekers of Self-realisation. They contain the Sadhana to be done for achieving Mukti along with the rationale behind it. It is a summarised collection of various sadhanas which remain dispersed in various chapters like chapter III (verses 34 and 41) chapter V (verses 18, 20, 21 to 26), chapter VI (verse 18), chapter IX (verse 28) and chapter XII (verses 13 to 19) of Bhagavad Gita.

‘Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavati’ – a realised soul becomes verily the Brahman, the Supreme Being. As the Brahman is indescribable and beyond the reach of both mind and words, how is it possible to delineate the qualities of a Jivan Mukta? He will look so common that if you meet him in the street you will not be tempted to have a

second look at him. Many Mahatmas used to ask “Do you think that a Jivan Mukta develops two horns on his head?” A Jivan Mukta is free to behave as he likes. So all the descriptions of a Sthita Prajna are not really meant to recognise a Jivan Mukta. These are descriptions from our ignorance point of view but being objective you cannot apply these norms and verify whether a person is a Sthita Prajna or not. For instance, lack of fear and lack of anger (veeta raga bhaya krodhah) are two qualities mentioned in Gita (2-56). A great saint was sitting in his Ashram along with his disciples when the news came that a number of armed dacoits were on their way on horseback to loot that village and while on the rampage it was their hobby to shoot down the villagers. On hearing the news, all the disciples ran away in order to hide themselves in the nearby jungle. The Guruji (saint) who had been haranguing them on fearlessness as an essential feature for spiritual seekers, was the first to run along with them. The disciples were thinking that the Guruji was as much

a coward as they were and did not have the quality of fearlessness which he preached to others. When they questioned the Guruji about it later, he answered - “It is far better for me to be ridiculed with derision and contempt as a coward in the eyes of the world than for my ego to proclaim and boast later “See, all people have run away. I am the only fearless saint who has stuck to his seat.” So the judgement of the disciples was proved to be wrong.

Once Bhagawan Ramana was asked whether he could recognise another realised soul, a Jivan Mukta on seeing him. He replied in the negative. For a realised saint, all are ever liberated (Nitya muktas) and he sees all of them as the Brahman itself. So there is no question of even a liberated saint recognising a ‘Sthita Prajna’. How can words describe the indescribable?

In verse no. 39 of second chapter of Bhagavad Gita, the Lord, while instructing Arjuna, starts with Buddhi (wisdom or

intellect) being the essential factor in any path (yoga) leading to the Supreme Truth.¹ The purpose of all the Scriptures is the purification of the intellect. The entire Gita was professedly meant for reforming the intellect of Arjuna and to endow it with right understanding by removing the delusion. Only when the intellect is conditioned with the right knowledge and understanding, all the defects which are the cause of grief, delusion and the transmigratory circle will be removed (Sankara Bhasya of Sri Sankaracharya). Sankara in his Bhasya under verse 10 of chapter X has defined² Buddhi as the right knowledge of the truth of God (Samyagdarsanam mattattva vishayam)

The importance of the intellect (Prajna) is again stressed in verse 21 of chapter VI where Bhagavan says that the ultimate truth which is of the form of bliss can be grasped

१ एषा तेऽभिहिता सांख्ये बुद्धिर्योगेत्विमां शृणु ।
बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पर्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥ (गीता २-३९)

२ ‘बुद्धिः सम्यग्दर्शनं, मत्तत्त्वविषयं’

only by intellect (Buddhi grahyam)³. Similarly in chapter II (Sl. 53), when Lord Krishna exhorts Arjuna that only when the buddhi (mind) gets rid of its wavering and irresolute nature, having been bewildered by the multifarious teachings of the Vedic texts and remains still to enable one-pointed concentration, he will be able to attain the supreme yoga⁴. In this context, Arjuna requests the Lord to describe the characteristics of the person who has reached such a stage of a stable mind. This was perhaps an indirect way wherein instead of asking the Lord about the means of gaining a stable wisdom, Arjuna asks about the way a Sthita Prajna behaves and as to how he is described by others. According to Sankara, the meaning of the word ‘Sthita Prajna’ is one whose mind is rooted in the given conviction that ‘I am the Supreme Being,

३ सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तद्बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् । (VI-21)

४ श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला ।
समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि ॥ (II - 53)

Brahman'. In his Bhasya against verse no. 55, Sankara has defined 'Sthita Prajna' as the one who has become stabilised in the wisdom born of discrimination between the Self (Atman) and all other Non-self things (including this world and the other worlds and the body-mind complex)⁵. Ultimately both mean the same thing. This is the background in which the Lord starts giving his crash course on what characteristics a person should develop in order to become a Sthita Prajna, a sage of stable wisdom⁶.

Lord Krishna starts with the most important factor which is capable of ruining our intellect and peace of mind by destroying the discriminative capacity of the intellect. Kama or desire is that prime factor. It has to be uprooted. There is a verse which a drum

५ स्थिता प्रतिष्ठिता ‘अहं अस्मि परं ब्रह्म’ इति प्रज्ञा यस्य सः

स्थितप्रज्ञः । (Sankara Bhashya under verse 54)

६ स्थितप्रज्ञः स्थिता प्रतिष्ठिता आत्मानात्मविवेकजा प्रज्ञा यस्य सः
स्थितप्रज्ञः ।

beater sang once while walking through the streets of a city at night in order to alert the people against any thieves entering into the house : -

“There are four notorious thieves who are already inside your body in order to snatch away your jewel called “Wisdom” (do not bother about thieves coming from outside). They are kama, anger, greed and delusion. Wake up, Wake up.”⁷

As anger is only a gross manifestation of desire (kama), Krishna clubs them together⁸ and dubs them as our deadly enemies (Gita 3-37). Krishna starts -

“When a person completely renounces all desires subsisting in the mind and his mind

७ कामक्रोधौ लोभमोहौ देहे तिष्ठन्ति तस्कराः ।

ज्ञानरत्नापहरार्थं तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

८ काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।

महाशनो महापापा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ (३-३७)

is content with the Self, he is called a sage of stable wisdom.”⁹

Most of the religions including Buddhism and Jainism are unanimous in declaring that desires are the prime factor contributing to our miseries and sorrows. Desire includes lust, passion and a craving for the companionship and intimacy of the other sex. Next in merit to the sexual desires comes the desire for wealth and money. Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to denounce desire for sex and money (Kamini-Kanchana) as the greatest obstacles towards spiritual progress. Even Ashtavakra who does not advocate any sadhana (including meditation) and does not prescribe any qualifications is vociferous in deprecating the desires for money and sex in no uncertain terms as follows -

“Even after having been established in the firm knowledge of the non-dual Reality and

९ प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थं मनोगतान् ।
आत्मन्यैवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ (II-५५)

intent on getting liberation, it is amazing that you become agitated, being overwhelmed with passion on account of the past vasanas¹⁰.

How can one be so attached to sexual dalliance and get polluted ?¹¹

After having known the non-dual imperishable Self in reality how can you who profess to be a realised person desire for earning money or wealth?¹² (Ashtavakra Gita).

Unless one makes efforts to renounce all desires by resorting to Satsang, prayers, Japa and invoking Guru's Grace etc., it will not be possible for one to realise the Self. When a man is mad after money, sex, name and

१० आस्थितः परमाद्वैतं मोक्षार्थेऽपि व्यवस्थितः ।
आश्र्य कामवशगः विकलः केलिशिक्षया ॥ (Ashtavakra Gita III - 6)

११ उपस्थेऽत्यन्तसंसक्तो मालिन्यमधिगच्छति (Ashtavakra Gita III - 4)

१२ अविनाशिनमात्मानं एकं विज्ञाय तत्त्वतः ।
तवात्मज्ञस्य धीरस्य कथमर्थार्जिने रतिः ॥ (Ashtavakra Gita III - 1)

fame etc. and is unable to get them through honest means, then he resorts to dishonest and fraudulent means to achieve his end. Such an one is always beset with the fear of being detected and punished. His mind will never be at peace but will remain agitated. Thus unless the desires are abandoned, one's mind will always be wavering and one cannot become a Sthita Prajna.

If desires are our main enemies, we should know whether they come from outside or are permanently imbedded inside our body-mind complex. Lord Krishna says that these desires reside in the mind. They are not real but are purely psychological feelings. They are, in other words, our imaginations or thoughts. We are the Self (Atman) and desires have nothing to do with the Self. When once we recognise that they are all only imaginations we should be able to abandon them by repeating to ourselves with a stern conviction that "these desires do not belong to me. I have nothing to do with them. The pleasure I got by the

fulfilment of the desires is very momentary and is purely mental.”

Further, some people think that by indulging in the desires, like sexual pleasures, their mind will get satisfied and no more desire there - for will arise. In practice, this is not the case. In Srimad Bhagavatam there is a story of King Purooravas who was so mad after sexual pleasure that when he was beset with old age resulting in his inability to enjoy, he manages to exchange his old age with the youth of his youngest son and thus continues to enjoy his sexual pleasures for thousands of years. One day he awoke to the fact that this desire is insatiable and the more one feeds it with fulfilment, the more it increases. Hence it is that Lord Krishna calls such desires as “Mahas' anah” (III-37) – the one whose voracious appetite never gets satisfied. The King Purooravas sang a song as follows¹³ -

१३ न जातु कामः कामानामुपभोगेन शास्यति ।
हविषा कृष्णवर्त्मेव भूय एवाभिवर्धते ॥ (Bhagavatam IX-19-14)

“At no time desires get extinguished by their fulfilment through enjoyment. Just like the fire whose flames shoot up further by pouring of the oblations of ghee, they will grow more and more.”

The Upanishads go to the extent of saying¹⁴ that when once a mortal gets rid of all the desires which reside in his heart, he becomes immortal and attains the Brahman here and now. What further guarantee do we want ?

When a child wants to play with some undesirable object, the best way to divert its mind is by proffering something more alluring. If we want to divert the mind from all desires, the best thing we can offer to it is our own Self. No joy or happiness ever comes out of any worldly object. If a sweet dish like burfi or gulab jamun gave you immense pleasure on your eating it, the pleasure did not at all come from the sweet

१४ यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः

अथ मत्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्रुते ॥

(Kathopanishad II -6-14)

dish but was attributable to the past conditioning of your likes and dislikes. All the Bliss is inside you. Your Self is verily the Bliss, the source of all the happiness in this world. The Self is the substratum of the entire world and its objects. All the objects and the world have been super-imposed on the Self which is identical with the Brahman (the Supreme Being). The Self itself took on the appearance of all the objects due to superimposition just like a rope in darkness appearing like a snake. With this conviction if we can turn our mind to meditate on the Self with one-pointed concentration, we can get such a non-pareil bliss with which no happiness derived from any object like money, sex etc. can be compared. Thus by the satisfaction derived by constant meditation on or remaining as the Self itself in pure consciousness (i.e. in the sheer awareness of one's existence as 'I AM') one will be able to get rid of all desires resulting in stable wisdom (Sthita Prajna). Thus the first two factors necessary for becoming a Sthita Prajna are – renouncing all desires and

remaining always content in oneself without depending on external objects for his satisfaction.

Now Lord Krishna moves over to two other factors. He says that “The one whose mind remains unperturbed by any sorrow or suffering, whose attachment to pleasure is completely gone and who is free from attachment, fear and anger is called a sage with stable wisdom.”¹⁵

Sorrows or miseries are categorised into three kinds –

1. Adhyatmika (personal) – where the circumstances for the unhappiness were created by you personally. For instance, you overeat a lot of sweets inspite of being a diabetic patient. You got stomach ache. This sorrow was caused by your act of folly.

१५ दुःखेष्वनुद्विममनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ (II-56)

2. Adhibhoutika (inter personal) – where somebody else was apparently responsible for your sorrow - for example burglary of your house by thieves, yourself being stung by a scorpion etc.
3. Adhidaivika – (Acts of God) – where an earthquake resulted in the collapse of your house and loss of property, floods or tsunami etc. causing damage.

We can see that we will not be able to prevent the occurrence of the circumstances leading to the miseries and sufferings. Even great saints like Bhagawan Ramana, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Ma Anandamayee got either cancer or other serious diseases in their last days. Such events like death in the family, loss of money etc. go on happening and we cannot prevent them. But we can develop insensitiveness and indifference to such happenings so that we can remain unperturbed. Joys and sorrows are all temporary and transient. They come and

go.¹⁶ We should be able to develop forbearance. Here again Lord Krishna had already told that a person who develops an immunity against his reactions towards joy and sorrow and thus looks at both of them with an even mind becomes fit indeed for immortality¹⁷. While it is understandable that one should avoid sorrows, what could be the objection in our enjoying the pleasures of life? It is told that when a man gets enjoyment of pleasures, he gets inebriated and tends to transgress the laws of decorum and good conduct as also the ethical and moral laws. Secondly, the more he enjoys, the stronger his conditioning becomes. He begins to crave more and more for those pleasures and is prepared to use fair or foul means to achieve his end. When he is unable to get his desire satisfied, he will become angry too. All these tend to unsettle his mind which gets disturbed.

१६ आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत (Gita II-14)

१७ यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।
समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ (II-15)

Further, the happiness and sorrow we get are only mental imaginations and there is nothing concrete about it.

An old businessman found one night that his entire fifty-years old factory building was in conflagration and was being consumed in the fire. As he had not insured the factory, he began to ululate and weep at this unexpected calamity. Just then his first son came to him and reminded that in the same morning they had finalised the sale of the entire factory to one Mr. Banerjee to whom his brother had gone to collect the cheque. On hearing this, his father became jubilant and began to dance with glee. In another ten minutes, his second son arrived on the scene to inform him that Mr. Banerjee had changed his mind regarding the purchase of the factory and has refused to give any cheque. Again the old man began to wail and weep. Now while the circumstance of the burning of his factory remained the same all through, the old man became unhappy at first but became joyful when he thought that the

factory had been sold. Again the joy turned into sorrow. So the factory building was not responsible for his sorrow or joy. The entire gamut of the quickly changing feelings of joy and sorrow was purely an imagination, a thought.

There is another illustrative story, Ram and Kishan were two good friends who lived in a village in U.P. in India. Both went away together to America to find their fortune. Even though their parents in the village never got any news of or communication from them for a long time, they were happy in the hope that their sons were busy earning money. Nearly after ten years, a resident of the same village, Mr. Govindan who was going to America was commissioned by the parents of Ram and Kishan to contact their respective sons and to bring news of them. When Govindan met Mr. Ram, the latter told him about the sad demise of Kishan soon after his arrival in America. He further said that his own business was prospering very well and he proposed to return to India

within a few months. When Govindan returned to India he was confused about the names of the two persons (Ram and Kishan) and so he told wrongly Ram's father that his son was dead long back and told Kishan's parents that their son was prospering very well and was planning to return to India soon. This was exactly the reverse of what was factual. In Ram's house the parents were grief - stricken bemoaning the loss of their son, even though Ram was quite alive. In Kishan's house it was all merriment and celebration as they were all very happy about the welfare of their prospering son who had in fact been long dead. Now Ram who was alive was not responsible for the sorrow of his parents nor was Kishan who was dead, responsible for the joy of his people.

Hence joy and sorrow are only psychological states of the mind for which no object is responsible. It is thus possible to reason with one's own mind and make it impervious to the reactions of joy and sorrow

so that the mind could remain undisturbed and stable.

It will also be seen that the feeling of sorrow or joy is based on ego i.e., on the identification of oneself with one's body. We are all the Atman and it is the same Atman which pervades all the bodies. Atman is in no way related to the body just like the electricity pervading all the bulbs, not being affected by anything which happens to the bulb. So the circumstances which lead to sorrow like the death of a close relative relate to the body as the relatives are attached to the body and not to the Self. This is all due to ignorance of who we are in reality. When once a person gets the knowledge of the Supreme Being (Brahma Jnana or Atma Jnana) from the Guru and the Scriptures, he should be able to develop immunity to sorrows and joys.

The next in importance of the factors which militate against the stability of wisdom is a three-in-one. They are attachment, fear and

anger. Attachment or liking includes its opposite which is aversion, hatred or enmity too. Perhaps hatred is stronger than even attachment.

Once a young rich lady (unmarried) went to a market for purchase of some things, where she was bitten by a rabid dog. She went ahead with her purchases which took a long time and she began to feel a lot of uneasiness in her body. She drove her car to the house of her family doctor, which was quite far off. The doctor, after examining her declared that it was too late and the poison had already spread in her body. As she would begin to behave like a dog in a few hours barking and biting people, he suggested that she should write her will and handed over a sheaf of papers and pen. The lady went on writing pages after pages. When the Doctor, who was surprised enquired about it, she coolly said that for her own remembrance she was writing out the names of people whom she hated and whom she would like to bite when once she began to behave like a dog. This is how hatred is stronger than attachment.

It was because of his attachment to his relatives, cousins and his Gurus like Drona and Bhishma that Arjuna became confused and was bewildered about what his duty was – whether to fight and kill them or withdraw from the battle. If it were any other people who were arrayed in the battle against him, he would have had no compunction in exterminating them in a jiffy.

As per Valmiki Ramayana, when Ravana was lying dead in the battlefield, and Vibhishana was standing unconcerned at a distance, Rama advises him to make arrangements for the final rites of Ravana as all enmity or hatred should cease atleast on the death of the enemy.

Fear is another factor which disturbs the mind. The Upanishads as well as Bhagavata say that the origin of fear is duality. So long as we think that each one of us is an individual and one is different from the other, there will be fear from other persons or things. It is the same Lord who appears

in various forms. If, in a cinema, one and the same actor takes the role of a traveller as also a dacoit who accosts him on the road, who will be afraid of whom? In recent times we have heard of Bhagavan Ramana having been threatened and beaten by thieves while he was standing fearlessly. Even when the latter were caught and brought before him by the police he refused to recognise any of them.

Even in the biography of late Tiruchi Swamigal of Bangalore an incident is narrated where, in his young days, while in Sri Lanka, he subdued a mad elephant in rut running amuck in a crowded place and about to trample a group of Buddhist monks/nuns, just by looking at it. Fear can be overcome either by the firm knowledge that it is the one Self which pervades all the bodies and objects of the world and there is nothing apart from the Self which can cause any harm to it. Alternatively, in Bhakti marga, when one knows that it is the same

God who appears in all the forms or has firm faith that God will protect him at all times, all fears will vanish.¹⁸

As regards anger, we have already clubbed it with desires (kama) as it is the concomitant of desires. Whenever any obstruction comes in the way of fulfilling the desires, one gets angry. The mind of a person who gets angry gets so befuddled that he does not know what he says or does. He would say such unspeakable things for which he regrets later. Many murders are also committed in anger. In the Sundara Kanda of Ramayana (of Valmiki) there is a long soliloquy of Hanuman on the evils of anger when he reflected on his impetuous act of setting fire to the entire Lanka forgetting, in his anger, the fact that Sita was also in Lanka and might have well perished in the fire. Unless a

१८ भयं द्वितीयाभिनवेशतः स्यात् ईशादपेतस्य विपर्ययोऽस्मृतिः।
तन्माययातो ब्रुधं आभजेत्तं भक्त्यैकयेशं गुरुदेवतात्मा॥ (XI-2-37)

person is able to free himself from the thraldom of attachment, fear and anger, he can never reach the state of a Sthitaprajna.

Now Lord Krishna goes to the next factor.
He says –

The wisdom of that person is stable, who has no clinging attachment to those occurrences which redound to his good and neither greets the good nor shuns the evil that befalls him.¹⁹

A similar idea has been expressed by Ashtavakra also :

“By leaving off the preferences or choices based on the concept of ‘this is good’ and ‘this is bad’ I live happily.”²⁰

१९ यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् ।
नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ (II-57)

२० शुभाशुभे विहायास्मादहमासे यथासुखम् ॥

(Ashtavakra Gita XIII-7)

Any attachment is an obstacle to spiritual progress. This subject has already been discussed earlier. This Gita verse has been interpreted also to mean that one should not praise when something is favourable nor one should condemn that which is unfavourable or bad. Greeting or praising an act or a person etc. and rejecting or shunning or condemning an act which is bad, should all be abandoned. In using your choice to select the good things, your eyes will always be looking for and weighing the merits, virtues and the defects of another person or things. This will result in differentiation and favouritism. Further, whatever happens in a programmed cosmic play of the Lord and whether good or bad, it is all His will. Any depreciation of what is bad will be tantamount to a criticism of what is willed by the Totality. All these things will disturb the mind. It is also told in Srimad Bhagavata that one should not tell whether something is good or bad, nor should one think that something is good or bad. A sage should be

insensitive to good or bad and be like an insentient thing.²¹

So far, Lord Krishna has told that first renunciation of desires, then satisfaction in one's own self, remaining evenly without any reaction in both sorrow and happiness, and leaving off attachment, fear and anger as the prime factors to cultivate stability of mind. Krishna moves further on to the fourth factor namely control over senses. He says –

The wisdom of that person is stable who wholly withdraws his senses from their objects just like a tortoise withdrawing its limbs (into its shell) from all sides.²²

Do not allow your senses to rove over the respective objects. For instance, when a very

२१ न कुर्यान्ति वदेत् किञ्चिन्न ध्यायेत् साध्वसाधु वा ।
आत्मारामोऽनया वृत्या विचरेज्जडवन्मुनिः ॥

(Bhagavata 11-11-17)

२२ यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽज्ञानीव सर्वशः ।
इंद्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ (II-58)

well dressed person of opposite sex is walking on the road, immediately withdraw your eyes as otherwise you may get attracted by the other person or it may induce a desire in you to purchase a similar dress for your life partner. Thus it will agitate your mind. Similarly if some voluptuous, vulgar and dirty songs are being sung in a transistor in a shop on your way, you should immediately withdraw your ears from hearing such music which will induce bad vibrations in your mind at that time as also later whenever its memory recurs. Whenever a tortoise moving on the road encounters any obstruction it will immediately withdraw its head as also the legs into the shell. In the same way, whenever one encounters any form, sound, taste, touch etc. one should immediately withdraw the respective senses like the eye, tongue, etc. from those respective objects, otherwise they will be disturbed not only at that time but later too because of the impressions those actions leave.

It is told that a monk who was learning under Mahatma Buddha for ten years wanted to leave in order to preach the Dharma and propagate it in different parts of the country. While bidding farewell he asked Buddha for some parting advice. The latter told him - “If ever you meet a member of the opposite sex, turn your eyes away and do not look at her.” Ananda, Buddha’s favourite disciple intervened and asked him - “Master, he has to see well enough to know whether the person is of opposite sex or not.” Buddha replied - “O.K. Even if you see, there is no problem, but never touch that person of opposite sex.” Again Ananda protests - “Do you mean to say that if a person of opposite sex is drowning in a river, the Bhikku (monk) should not rush to her succor and drag her to the river bank or if a person on the road falls unconscious, the monk should not make efforts to revive her ?” Buddha pondered for a while and said - “yes, in such special circumstances there is no harm in touching the other person. But one thing is a must. Be

always fully conscious.” The moment a tortoise comes across any object whatsoever, immediately it shinks back into its shell. The same thing a seeker should do. In Viveka Choodamani, Sankara says that while poison (visha) kills a person only when it is drunk and tasted, the objects (vishaya) kill a person (spiritually) the moment he looks at them or comes into contact with them. Thus the tortoise is a symbol of firmness of the mind. In the Bhagavata, the story comes of the gods and demons churning the milky ocean in order to get ambrosia. When the Mandara mountain used as the churning stick refused to stay still and was oscillating vigorously, Lord took the form of a tortoise (kurmavatara) and became a firm base for the mountain.

Even a man who is badly sick has no reaction on seeing food or other attractive objects and his senses are withdrawn. Does it mean that his mind will become stable ? No, even though the senses may be withdrawn and starved of their food namely the various

objects like form (roopa), taste (rasa), smell (gandha), touch (spars'a) and sound (s'abda) the mental attachment to the objects does not leave so easily. Abandoning of attachment also is a necessity as stressed by Lord Krishna earlier. So Bhagawan continues –

“In respect of a person who starves his senses of their respective objects, no doubt the objects fall away on being repulsed but the subtle taste or the impression of the joy in the objects persists. This subtle taste also wanes once for all only on realisation of the Supreme Reality.”²³

Every seeker would have experienced the enjoyment of various objects in his life and that earlier experience of joy would have left an impression of that taste in his mind. Just as the jar which contained asafoetida continues to retain the smell even after the

२३ विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।
रसवर्ज रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥ (II-59)

jar is emptied of its contents, even if we push away the objects by averting our senses and refuse to see, smell or touch anything by withdrawing into a shell like a tortoise, the taste (rasa) or joy in the object remains impressed in the mind. Even a moment's contact, a casual glance or a touch may be sufficient to leave a taste.

There were two monks who were travelling together. They had to cross a river where the water was flowing hip-high. A young attractive woman was standing there with her hands full of luggage. She had to go to her husband's house on the other bank and was perplexed as to how to cross the river. She requested the younger monk to carry her and leave her on the other bank along with her possessions as she did not want to get wet and soil her sari and present herself in a dishevelled condition before her husband. The younger monk complied with her request while the other monk was looking at it with disapproval. Both the monks spent the night in a traveller's guest

house on the other side of the river. For a long time the elder monk was thinking as to how wrong it was on the part of the other monk to break his vow of celibacy by touching and carrying the young woman in his hands. In the morning, as he could not contain his resentment, the elder monk just broached the subject by asking the other one as to whether the girl whom he carried to the other bank of the river was very heavy. The younger monk replied - "I carried her only for a few minutes but you should know better as you had carried her (in your mind) all through the night."

The taste left behind by the objects is actually an attachment to the objects concerned. Even this subtle attachment has to go but it can be removed only when one realises the Supreme Reality as "I am verily that Reality." No seeker should think at any stage that he has become immune to all the attractions of objects until and unless he reaches the stage of final realisation. The one who has had the realisation becomes the

Brahman and remains as one. His individuality no longer remains to enable him to think that he has reached. While remaining away detached from the objects is a must, it is not enough. One has also to root out the attachment or taste for the objects as otherwise it will unstabilise the mind. Eternal vigilance in this respect is needed. To say on the one hand that all attachment and vasanas are to be uprooted for getting Self - realisation and on the other hand to insist that all attachment will go only on Self - realisation becomes a vicious circle. Most of the attachment must be and is possible to be removed at the sadhana stage by our own efforts and by the grace of the Lord and the Guru. It has been my own experience that Satsang (company of spiritually evolved persons) Mantra Japa and Prayers to the Supreme Lord or any personal God of our choice are definitely of positive help. Whether you call it as Self or Supreme God or Siva or Vishnu, and irrespective of whether it is inside or outside, that consciousness, called by any name

responds to our sincere prayers. At the Sadhana stage, whenever any obstacle or doubt arises, Prayers positively help in removing them. I have personally had several experiences in this direction. When once the mind is concentrated on the Self as a result of severe sadhana, all vasanas will begin to wane away without our being aware of them. The very subtle taste which is left out even after all the Sadhana will be hibernating in a seed form without being active but it can at anytime be aroused by the least intimacy or contact with objects unless we keep alert all the time.

Now, Lord Krishna goes on to emphasise the need for control of the senses (samyama) without which the right knowledge (samyag darsan) which is the essence of stable wisdom will remain an impossibility. He says²⁴ : -

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- २४ (a) यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः ।
इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसर्भं मनः ॥ (II-60)
- (b) तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत मत्परः ।
वशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ (II-61)

“Oh Arjuna, even if a learned person is making all the efforts, the senses are so powerful and capable of thoroughly shaking the man to the core that they forcibly drive the mind astray (away from the contemplation of Atman).

The mind of a person who keeps his senses under control by withdrawing and subduing them by means of uniting his mind at all times with the Lord and being completely engaged in Him with devotion (yukta) is considered as stable or well-established.”

Even though this factor had been dealt with earlier, Krishna wants to stress on its importance. The Lord draws our attention again to the necessity for controlling the senses in verse 68 also of chapter II.

At no time of Sadhana can a seeker be complacent that all his attractions to the objects have ceased. The senses bide their time. In Valmiki Ramayana, Valmiki describes how Mandodari wept on seeing her husband Ravana lying dead on the

battlefield with all his glory ‘shrunk to this little measure’. She said – “Oh Ravana, you had conquered all your senses long back (while performing austerities) and that is why you won suzerainty over all the three worlds. As if they were biding their time for revenge, in an unguarded moment of your negligence, they have brought disaster on you.” Never for a moment relax your reins over the senses but continue doing the Sadhana till your ‘I, the seeker’ disappears so that there is nobody to think that ‘I am keeping my senses under control’.

I have heard of a story of Sage Vyasa. Once sage Vyasa was explaining the following verse to his disciple Jaimini.

“The various senses are so powerful that they drag him down even if he be a man of knowledge.”²⁵ Jaimini repudiated it vehemently that the verse ought to have been – “No doubt the senses are very

२५ बलवानिन्द्रियग्रामः विद्वांसमपि कर्षति ।

powerful but they cannot drag down a Vidwan (a man of knowledge).²⁶ I am myself an example of it.” Vyasa did not contradict him. Vyasa went out of his cottage which was situated in a dense jungle, for a few days leaving Jaimini incharge of his residence. That night it began to rain very heavily. That same night at about 9 p.m. there was a knock at the door of the cottage and when Jaimini opened the door, he found a young beautiful damsel standing with her body shaking with cold and with all her clothes wet and sticking to her body. She requested shelter for the night as she had missed the way to her house and Jaimini who was standing enraptured with her beauty readily admitted her inside. He gave her dry clothes to wear, offered some fruit and milk and arranged a bed for her to sleep inside while he himself lay down on the verandah outside the door of the cottage. Thinking of the beauty of the girl, Jaimini could not sleep. At midnight he

२६ बलवानिन्द्रियग्रामः विद्वांसं तु न कर्षति ।

climbed up the roof, made an opening in it and jumped into the room in front of the girl who got up in consternation. When Jaimini tried to embrace the girl, he found his hand entangled in somebody's beard. To his shame, he found that it was his bearded Guru Vyasa who was standing in place of the lovely maiden. Vyasa asked smilingly "Do you still think that the sloka we discussed the other day requires the amendment you suggested?" Jaimini answered - "yes sir, it does require an amendment but a different one. It should be "The senses are so powerful that they definitely drag down even a man of knowledge." ²⁷ The way to fight it down is constant remembrance of God or Self. Let your mind be totally engaged in the Lord with sincere love and devotion so that you are 'yukta' - integrated in Him. The definition of the term 'yukta' is given in verse 8 of chapter VI of the Gita as follows : -

२७ बलवानिन्द्रियग्रामः विद्वांसमपि कर्षति कर्षति कर्षत्येव ।

He is called a Yukta (an integrated one) who is content with the knowledge gained from scriptures and the experience gained by putting them into practice, who is unshakable and with all his senses controlled with an even attitude when he looks at both a clod of earth and a piece of gold as equal in all respects. It is told that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to take a few gold coins and some mud and throw them in the river Ganges alternately saying that ‘this is gold’ and ‘this is mud’. The intention is that one should cease to have any value for anything in this world, let it be gold or mud.

In a dream, an elephant and a mouse or a woollen suit and a kerchief cannot have different values as they are not real and serve no real purpose. Similarly, a spiritual seeker has no attraction or value for anything except for God and God alone. In the present context ‘yukta’ means the one who one-pointedly concentrates on God. Love for God should replace the love and devotion to worldly objects.

As self control is highly essential in order to become a Sthita Prajna, Krishna goes on to expound and expatiate on the disaster which befalls a seeker who fails to control his senses. He says²⁸ :

- (a) “By going on pondering over sense objects a person develops an attachment towards those objects. On account of the attachment, desire arises. The desire gives birth to ire (anger).
- (b) Out of anger arises delusion. The delusion results in loss of memory and loss of memory results in destruction of intelligence. From the destruction of intelligence, utter ruination of the person occurs.

Seeing an object, hearing an obscene song or touching a young person of opposite sex

- २८ (a) ध्यायतो विषयानुःः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।
सङ्गात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ (२-६२)
- (b) क्रोधाद्ववति सम्मोहः संमोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥ (२-६३)

etc. casually is not so harmful as going on pondering about those objects and mentally reliving that past event thinking of the pleasure the objects gave you etc. By thus contemplating on the objects, attachment towards those objects grows. By adopting this principle, if we go on continuously contemplating and remembering God we will develop love towards Him and finally will merge in Him. It is told in Bhagavata “By going on contemplating on worldly objects, the mind gets engaged in those objects. The mind of one who thinks of Me (God) continuously will get merged in Me.”

It is not only pondering over an object which creates attachment that leads to desires but even keeping company or contact with the object for some time continuously can create attachment. If you had never liked western music, let you begin to hear it everyday for 1 or 2 hours for a year. You will begin to love it. Supposing you never liked pigs, get a small piglet and allow it to grow in your home. Play with it daily for an hour or so.

Within a few months you will begin to love even that ugly animal and you will sorely miss it if it runs away.

In many episodes in the Puranas (epics) it is told that whenever a sage did intense penance (tapasya), Indra, the king of gods became apprehensive that the sage was undertaking those austerities so that he might occupy Indra's post. He, therefore, used to send a bevy of divine nymphs to go and dance before the sage in tempting poses so that the sage should fall a prey to their charms and be enticed away from his tapasya. Once a sage called Soubhari went deep down into the ocean in order to avoid the company of people and in that lonely place sat in meditation/samadhi for thousands of years. One day when he opened his eyes and saw around him shoals of fish playing with each other in couples and also with their children, that single glance was sufficient to arouse in him a surging wave of a desire to marry and enjoy with a

wife and children born out of the latter. His years of self-control were swept off in that one moment. He got up and went to a king called Mandhata who had one hundred young daughters and sought the hand of one of them in marriage.

Anger being a concomitant of kama (desire), one completely loses consciousness of what one is talking or what one is doing. The person concerned does not become angry but becomes anger itself. He completely gets identified with anger. Later towards the close of the third chapter in Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asks Krishna “Impelled by what, does a man commit sin? Even though all his spirit rebels against doing such sinful acts, it seems as if some ghost or evil spirit has taken possession of him and forcibly compels him to do it.” Krishna²⁹ answers that it is kama (desire) and krodha (anger) born of Rajoguna (dynamic tendency to go on

29 काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।
महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ (III-37)

performing actions), which are our redoubtable enemies, that are responsible for such sinful actions.

When once we have understood the seriousness and the deleterious consequences of kama and krodha, the main question which arises is how to tackle and exterminate them. No doubt Lord Krishna has given the ultimate solution in the second verse quoted in this context and repeats it in more detail in verses nos. 41 and 43 of 3rd chapter.³⁰

As kama stems from the contact of the object with the respective sense (say the smell of masala dosa smelt by the nose), the senses have to be controlled first so that they may not be enticed by attractive objects. As these senses pass on the information regarding the

30 (a) तस्मात्वमिन्द्रियाण्यादौ नियम्य भरतर्षभ ।
पाप्यानं प्रजहि ह्येनं ज्ञानविज्ञाननाशनम् ॥ (III-41)

(b) एवं बुद्धेः परं बुद्ध्वा संस्तथ्यात्मानमात्मना ।
जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ॥ (III-42)

object and the mind goes on thinking of the object (say, masala dosa), the mind has to be diverted from these thoughts and it has to be fixed firmly on the contemplation of the Self. Especially in the modern days of multiple diversions, plentiful entertainments and eye-catching advertisements, it may not be possible for all to adopt this method successfully.

Desires and especially lust and passion are the last things to leave a sadhaka inspite of all the sadhanas. Even when a person becomes very old, the vasana of kama expresses itself in apparently innocuous ways. Speaking with young persons of other sex in privacy, cracking jokes to make the other sex laugh, fondling them by touching their heads, cheeks etc. as if in benediction, conferring the blessings and other such apparently innocuous acts have been dubbed as equivalent to the ultimate act (ashtavidha maithuna) of sexual dalliance. So one should avoid such situations. As sensually exciting pictures are published in

various magazines one should avoid even seeing such pictures and events in magazines, cinema theatres and also in certain channels of T.V. which deal with matters suggestive of pornographic or obscene songs, talks etc.

Even in food one should be careful not to take foods of Tamasic and Rajasic categories as defined in the 17th chapter of the Gita (verses 8 to 10).

There is a verse somewhere³¹ that even the great saints like Visvamitra and Parasara whose only food was air (cosmic energy from the air) and water, being unable to resist the charms of beautiful damsels, fell into delusion by just a single glance at them. What is there to say of people taking such food with ghee, milk etc ! - If they can have

३१ विश्वामित्र पराशर प्रभृतयः वातांबु पर्णशनाः
दृष्टा रसीमुख पङ्कजं सुललितं तत्रैव मोहं गताः ।
शाल्यन्नं घृतदुधपायससयुतं ये भुजते मानवाः
तेषां इन्द्रियनिग्रहो यदि भवेत् विन्ध्यस्तरेत् सागरम् ॥

self control, Vindhya Mountain will float on the ocean.

Those who are not able to concentrate on the Atman should chant the Guru Mantra as many times as possible everyday without fail and engage themselves in Puja or havan. Seek the company of saints (satsanga). Daily pray to the Lord sincerely to rid you of all desires including lust. Prayers are extremely effective. Engage yourself in the reading of the biographies of saints, both ancient and modern, so that the intensity of longing they had, the austerities they performed etc. will all inspire you to emulate them. Last but not the least is Guru Krupa. The grace of the Guru is something par excellent and infallible. It is said that one of the prime disciples of Sri Ramakrishna rushed to his Guru pleading for help to erase the impersonal lust which had suddenly arisen in him. Ramakrishna asked him to extend his tongue and wrote on it the bijakshara 'KLEEM' which is called the 'kamabija'

which was capable of erasing ‘kama’. That disciple did not have any recurrence of it.

Whatever may be the path we adopt (Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga etc.) the ultimate sadhana is to remain in the Pure Consciousness of the entirety of Existence (in ‘I am’, I being the totality where the Atman has merged in the all-pervasive non-dual Brahman, the supreme being). It is both the Sadhana (means) as also the goal – the destination. Any of the paths prescribed in the scriptures is sure to lead one to the ultimate Reality.

Gita is a beautiful synthesis of all the main Yogas. All these qualifications or attributes of a Sthitha Prajna are from Jnana Yoga (Sankhya Yoga) point of view. Bhagawan Sri Krishna deals with the same subject from the point of view of the constituent building blocks namely the three Gunas (Sattwa, Rajas, tamas). At the end of the chapter XIV, Arjuna asks an exactly similar question as to how to recognise a person who has gone

beyond the control of the three Gunas (Gunatita), his conduct in life and as to the means of reaching that state (chapter XIV - 21). We will find from the reply of Bhagawan that all the description of a 'Gunatita' tallies exactly with that of a Sthita Prajna.

One of the main attributes³² of a Gunatita is to be even - minded and not to be agitated by joys or sorrows, to look at a clod of mud and a golden coin as equal and having no value, having no likes and dislikes (that is attachment or aversion) and treating alike censure and praise. A Gunatita should always remain in his Self (swasthah) and not go after outside objects. These are all the descriptions of a Sthita Prajna also as given in verse nos. 55, 56 and 57, and dealt with in detail earlier in this text. Only when a person becomes a Gunatita³³ by transcending the

३२ समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाशकाश्चनः ।
तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरस्तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥ (XIV-24)

३३ (a) स गुणान् समतीत्यैतान् ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥ (XIV-26)
(b) जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ (XIV-20)

influence of all the three gunas does he get liberated and attain immortality (XIV-20). For a Sthita Prajna also Krishna³⁴ says that this is the final state of Brahman and the one who gets established in it even at the last moment of his death gets liberated and reaches the ultimate Reality.

After having spent the entire life in earning money and in engagement of sensual pleasure, if one dreams of becoming a Sthita Prajna at the death bed, one will find it impossible. One has to do sadhana all the life which may fructify at the last moment of death or he must have done a lot of sadhana in his previous births.

Now, Bhagawan continuing the description of a Sthita Prajna says: -

“Continuing to allow the senses to move among objects but without attachment or

३४ एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थं नैनां प्राप्य विमुद्यति ।
स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥ (II-72)

revulsion and keeping a control over them with his mind, one attains eternal peace.”

This is just a summary of what has already been told so far. So long as we are in the world, we cannot sit for 24 hours a day throughout life shutting our eyes and ears and not coming into contact with any object whatsoever. Just as Gita speaks of a skill or expertise in doing action but escaping its repercussions or fruits, there is a skill in moving with the world and its objects. Allow your senses to move among the objects of the world, which perforce come in your way but ensure that they are neither attracted nor revulsed with any object³⁵. Let it be a choiceless perception of objects without exercising any prejudice for or against as a result of likes and dislikes imbedded in our Chitta due to past latent tendencies (vasanas). Normally, if we come

३५ रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् ।
आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥ (II-64)

across a purse containing golden coins we like to possess it. That desire causes an agitation in the mind as we want to find out the means for surreptitiously appropriating it. On the contrary, if we have unwarily trodden over an old and dirty rag with blood spilt on it we get a revulsion and we want to wash our feet clean with water and dettol. This has also agitated our mind. In order to keep the mind steady and unwavering, one should be indifferent to the objects and accept all without any like or dislike. When one keeps the senses and the mind under one's control, the mind is at peace (Prasada) and all sorrows are obliterate.

The word 'Prasada' has been translated by Sridhara as 'Shanti' i.e. peace or security. Sankara has translated it as "prasannata or swasthyam" which means 'satisfaction' or a 'healthy feeling'. Some have translated 'swasthyam' as self-abidance which, in my opinion, does not fit in here easily.

In verses 65-66 Krishna does not give any new qualification or a new technique but has just told what benefits accrue by the ‘Prasada’ – the serenity of mind³⁶. He says that when the mind becomes serene, all sorrows disappear and the mind becomes firm and steadfast. If the mind is not concentrated or one pointed (ayukta), such a person cannot have the wisdom born of the perception of the real self nor can he have ‘Bhavana’. Again the word ‘Bhavana’ has been interpreted by Sridhara as meditation (dhyanam) while Sankara has interpreted it as ‘Atma- jnanabhinivesah’ i.e. yearning for Self-knowledge. Again, in this context, Sridhara’s interpretation seems to fit in better.

Krishna goes on to tell how the senses and the mind work together to unstabilise the mind.

३६ प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजायते ।
प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठते ॥ (II-65)

“While the senses are moving (amidst the objects), the mind (which has not been controlled) follows the senses and it sweeps away the perception or wisdom (born of discrimination between the Self and non-Self) just like a boat sailing on the waters is thrown off its course by the wind. ”³⁷

First the eye sees a nice sweet dish like gulab jamun, the mind goes behind it and desires to have it. The mind is so taken up with the sweet that it has forgotton about the high blood sugar content and the diabetes the person was suffering and that the money he had at the moment was meant only for purchase of medicines for his ailing mother. The mind was only intent on thinking of how to procure the gulab jamun and eat it. One has to be alert at all times and keep both the senses and mind under control.

After having discoursed on the importance of having control over the senses, Krishna

३७ इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनु विधीयते ।
तदस्य हरति प्रजां वायुनावमिवाभसि ॥ (II-67)

winds it up by affirming that “stability of wisdom can be ensured only by withdrawing the senses on all sides from their respective objects.³⁸” The man of stable wisdom is always awake to the Supreme Truth and abides in it while the rest of the ignorant world is immersed in the darkness of ignorance.³⁹ You may say that in respect of the spiritual goal while a Sthita Prajna remains vigilant keeping his senses and mind under control, it is night or darkness for the ignorant who indulge in the material desires being unaware of the Ultimate Reality. As regards the enjoyment of the objects and the pleasures of the material world to which the ignorant world is fully awake and sensitive, a wise sage is utterly indifferent to them as if he is asleep. He is no longer interested in the activities of the

38 तस्माद्यस्य महावाबो निगृहीतानि सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ (II-68)

39 या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जाग्रति संयमी ।
यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ (II-69)

world as his senses have been withdrawn from all the objects of the world.

The gains and losses in this world, like and dislike towards objects etc. cease to have any interest as if they are all happening in a dream. While the world ignores the state of Samadhi where the senses and mind cease working and which looks like a state of inactivity, the man of stable wisdom revels in the transcendental state of samadhi.

Krishna started his discourse by stressing the need for renouncing all desires – the root of all evil and now ends it also on the same strain by devoting two more verses.

“Just as more and more waters flow⁴⁰ into the ocean which is being constantly filled in by the various rivers but which still remains stable and unmoved (by the inputs), when more and more desires flow into the mind

४० आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।
तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥

(II-70)

of a wise man without affecting his stability, such a person alone begets the final peace i.e. the state of liberation and not the one who is full of desires.

A person who abandons⁴¹ all desires and moves about without any attachment, without any ego and without any sense of possession ('mine', 'mine') is bestowed with the ultimate peace (which is known as liberation)."

The question arises that as a person has to move in this world and cannot avoid perforce coming into contact with the objects of the world, how does a Sthita Prajna deal with it? For explaining this Krishna cites the example of the ocean.

When I go to the banks of a river, I see so many stones lying on the ground but I do

४१ विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्युमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥ (II-71)

not even look at any of them specifically and none of them raises any ripple of thought in my mind. On the contrary, if I happen to see a gold chain lying on the sands, it excites my interest so that I rush nearer to have a closer look at it and ultimately a desire to possess it arises. My mind gets agitated. This is because of the past conditioning and latent tendencies of like and dislike or impressions of attraction and aversion developed in the past and lying imbedded in the archives of the mind. So the sight of the chain provokes those vasanas which express themselves as desires. As regards the stones lying on the sand, they neither provoked my admiration nor dislike. I was thoroughly indifferent. You cannot prevent the objects from entering into your mind. Certainly, by effort, logic and reasoning you can conquer your reaction to it so that you will remain in the neutral gear neither desiring the object nor rejecting it. Yours is an attitude of indifference. You can control your reactions to the input with a firm mind. For example, the ocean is

always getting filled up by the waters of hundreds of rivers and if on account of heavy rains etc. more waters enter into it, the ocean does not get inundated nor overflows. It continues to remain still and unaffected. Thus a Sthita Prajna allows all the objects of the world to enter into his mind (it cannot be helped) but as he has developed an even mind without any preferences or aversions to different objects, he can control his mind and remain impervious to the influence of these objects. No desires or aversions arise in his mind. No impressions of like or dislike arise. Thus all the objects (i.e., in the form of form, taste, touch, smell and sound) enter into his mind and get absorbed without provoking any reaction. Such a person is bestowed with ultimate peace and bliss – a state which is called Moksha or Liberation. A man of desires can never aspire for this status.

Now, in the other verse mentioned above, Krishna gives a concise sadhana capsule for

getting God-realisation, which alone can take a person to his destination.

There are actually two types of desires – one where I want to procure and possess certain objects which either I do not have at present or I have them in an inadequate measure (apraptasya praptih). For example, I may not possess a ball pen and I may desire to procure one or I may have one ball pen with me but I may desire to have two more pens as one is insufficient and I want to have one or two in reserve. The second type of desire is to protect and maintain what I already possess because I want it to remain with me for a long time in an undiminished state of efficiency (praptasya samrakshanam) and I do not want any harm to befall them. As I am attached to my house, wife and children as a householder, the least damage to my house due to rains or earthquake, the loss of my wife, any ailment to my family members etc. perturb my mind. Further I want to keep them in great comfort by adopting any straight or crooked means – say through

smuggling, taking bribes etc. which will all unsettle the peace of my mind. This attachment or desire is called 'Sprha', while the other desire to procure objects not possessed by me is called 'kama'.

What is the basic root cause for all the desires mentioned above? The basic cause is the ignorance of what we are and wrongly considering this body of ours as 'I' while we are the Atman (like the electricity inside a zero watt bulb identifying itself with the bulb as 'I'). As naturally we begin to love our body as 'I', anything connected with the body viz., family members, property, other possessions all become objects of our love and attachment. It is ego or I identifying itself with an inert matter as a body, while being a conscious energy which is all pervasive, that gives rise to desires. This ego, on account of the desires, performs activities to fulfil the desire considering itself as the doer of those actions (karta). The activities may be righteous or may involve crooked means leading to papa (sin) or punya (merit) which

results in another birth in order to earn the fruits (good and bad) of these activities. Thus the ego becomes the experiencer (bhokta).

Hence the way to abandon desires is to abolish the ego, which can be done by leaving off the doership (agency) and experienceship as also all sense of possession ('mine'). The main point to understand is that there is no individual packet of electricity in each of the various bulbs which shed light. The light we get in each bulb comes from the Totality of Electricity emanating from the Generator and passing through all the bulbs. There is no individual packet of electricity which can claim that it is the doer (karta). There is no individuality or ego separately for each body. All actions in the world are done in Totality and each body is a helpless passive instrument through which the Conscious Totality which pervades all bodies gets the action done. Thus by acquiring the correct understanding through the Guru and the Scriptures and contemplating on them, when once we get convinced that we are not individuals but

the only Totality that exists, we get rid of the ego and the sense of possessions. When the ocean has entered into the drop of water and absorbed it, the individuality of the drop drops and there is nobody to desire. Thus by getting rid of the sense of 'I' and mine, when all desires and attachment drop, it is bliss and freedom from all bondages.

What can be a more direct path to liberation than this encapsulated sadhana which Lord Krishna himself has given.

If I were asked to select one verse out of the entire Bhagavad Gita, representing its essence I will unhesitatingly point out to the penultimate verse of the second chapter discussed in the last few pages, starting with "Vihaya Kaman yah sarvan" (verse 71). Supplementary to it is the last verse (verse 72), where the compassion galore of Mother Gita is revealed. Gita is rightly addressed as 'the Mother' in the Dhyana⁴² verse. What

४२ 'अम्ब त्वामनुसंदधामि भगवद्गीते भवद्वेषिणी ।

about people who in their death bed having lived a full life of sorrows and enjoyment in the material world are extremely desperate to get Moksha? A case in point is that of King Parikshit who knew that he was to die on the 7th day and desperately wanted to know as to what he should do to attain liberation within those seven days. The compassionate Mother Gita says⁴³ that even at the last moment of life if one could leave off all desires and attachment and remains without ego and sense of possessor, he would reach the highest stage of Brahmanhood, a stage from which once reached a person never slips down to delusion. As a result of satsang, prayers or grace of God, if only a dying person were to will himself strongly to leave off all desires and surrender himself to the Lord ignoring the doctor, the medicines and all the near and dear ones surrounding him he could fulfil the requirements of verse 71.

४३ एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थं नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।
स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥ (II-72)

This is not impossible as I have, in my own life, come across such cases. A young friend of mine (Mr. Gupta) who was working in a Co-operative Bank at Meerut some years back and suffering from some illness was being taken one night in a car to Delhi for immediate blood transfusion. One Swamiji was accompanying him in the car and Mr. Gupta was lying down in his seat. Mr. Gupta's parents, his wife (married four years earlier) and his child about 2 years old were also travelling in another car which was going in front. Half-way to Delhi, Mr. Gupta requested his car to be stopped, raised himself to a sitting posture and asked the Swamiji to ensure that none of his parents, wife etc. would come anywhere near his car for another half an hour. He asked the Swamiji and the driver to go out and stand at some distance. He sat alone inside the car in meditation and breathed his last in another 20 minutes or so. In his lifetime, though devoted to Sri Ramakrisna, Mr. Gupta, to my knowledge, had never done much of

sadhana but was living an ordinary householder's life. Even at the last minutes if only one is convinced that he is the only Reality, the All - Pervasive Pure Consciousness and has nothing to do with the body, there will be no desires or ego left. Remember that all your desires never get fulfilled. Unexpected events torpedo all your plans and well planned programmes in no time. Did the illustrious Rajiv Gandhi or John F. Kennedy ever imagine that they were to be blasted or shot dead? **The entire life is a drama whose script has already been written. So every event in your life has been willed and controlled by the Lord.** Atleast at the last moment surrender yourself completely to the Lord. You have absolute free will to keep your mind on the Lord or the World. At that moment no power, no money, no relatives or friends can help you. Lord is the only guaranteed refuge. Concentrate all your love on him and pray to him. If you cannot pray at the last moment, mentally repeat 'Maa, Maa', 'Lord, Lord',

'Ram Ram' or any favourite name. If you cannot do that also, keep a pre-recorded cassette and get it played on a transistor by your side, which will be repeating several times the names of the Lord or any prayer of your choice. For devotees on the Bhakti Marga, the aforesaid method of surrender is the ultimate sadhana as advised by Lord Krishna in verses 65 and⁴⁴ 66 of chapter 18. Even if the entire Gita and all the scriptures were to be lost except for these two verses (65 & 66 of ch.18) and the last two verses of chapter II, they alone are sufficient to guide and uplift the entire humanity to the pinnacle of BLISS.

The direct path need not be the simplest path for all. Simplicity or complexity depends on one's own subjective view coloured with the previous conditioning of the mind. Many

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- 44 (a) मन्मना भव मद्दक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्वसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥ (XVIII-65)
- (b) सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः॥ (XVIII-66)

may have a psychological blockage which will not allow them to surmount their present convictions. For them, the way to abandon ego is by resorting to satsang, japa of the mantra given by the Guru, meditation and intense prayers to the personal God of one's choice (which is not apart from the Supreme Being) and complete surrender to the Guru or the Lord. This will ultimately result in getting rid of the ego and the sense of possession, thus uprooting all the desires. The ultimate factor for success is Lord's Grace or Guru's Grace. This is a common factor in all the paths irrespective of what type of sadhana we adopt. This does not come from 'nowhere' all of a sudden. The Grace has to be invoked by our efforts and a deep longing to attain the Lord or Self.

The one who has been termed as 'Sthita Prajna' in the Jnana Path has been described again calling him as Gunatita in chapter XIV (as discussed earlier) based on the three constituent Gunas - viz. Sattva, Rajas and

Tamas. In the Bhakti marga again they are re-termed as ‘Bhaktas’ and all the qualities delineated below are for the Bhakta (chapter XII - verses 13 to 19)

1. To be always self-satisfied
2. Being rid of ‘I’ and ‘mine’
3. To have an even mind towards joy and sorrow
4. Having control over the mind and being firm in his decisions
5. To be rid of anger; fear etc.
6. Indifference to events and objects
7. No attachment and no aversion, abandoning all desires
8. Being alike in censure and praise

Whether a person reaches the Supreme Reality by Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga or other means, the same qualities as described above have to be cultivated irrespective of whether he is called a Sthita Prajna, Gunatita or a Bhakta. Even chanting repeatedly the verses 55 to 72 of II chapter of Gita with proper

understanding will help us in intensifying our spiritual sadhana and lead us to the goal.

The main key factor in becoming a Sthita Prajna is renouncing of all desires/attachment by controlling the senses and the mind and getting rid of ego i.e., considering the body – mind complex as ‘I’. When once the desires are quelled and the ego is got rid off, all the other qualities like choiceless perception, removal of anger and fear, even - mindedness etc., will all follow. It is a question of ‘Detach and Attach.’ When the mind desires for worldly objects detach it from them and attach it to the Lord. Love the Lord dearly. Be sure that the Lord’s Grace has been with us ever since we were born and it is with us during every moment of our sadhana. It gives us all active encouragement and help and ensures that we reach our destination. A princess lost her golden necklace and she was searching for it everywhere with concern and worry. At last when somebody among the courtiers pointed out that the necklace was already in

her neck, the princess became happy. It was not a case of finding the necklace but she had only to recognise the necklace which was already with her. Same is the case with the Self (Atman). All the search is meant to recognise the Self which has always been with us. We are that ‘Self’. Bhagawan Ramana calls this illustrative story as a story of “Kantabharanam” (the ornament which was already in the neck).

May we all become Sthita Prajnas and have Self-realisation in this very birth.

Hari om