

CHAPTER V

Religion and Commonsense

Some people are apt to fancy that commonsense is some special peculiar faculty with which a few people or a number of people are invested. It is just as well to correct that error at once. Commonsense is no special faculty. It is the exercise of the ordinary powers of every mind utilised in observing facts, whether facts of life, modes of behaviour, their effects, or facts of nature, etc. and the arrival at the conclusion as to the most appropriate course of conduct or the most proper inference from the facts and positions observed. Religion is found throughout the human race and therefore, the commonsense of the entire humanity dictates the course of conduct called religion. No doubt the course of religious life in various countries and at various times have differed very widely.

Some ideas underlying such conduct are found to be fit to be called systems of philosophy. These systems have been boldly declared in some cases and we find one system often opposed to another. Nothing is more often heard in

religious circles, Hindu and Christian, than the assertion that life is a vale of tears, that the best thing for a man to do is to get rid of it so that he may reach an eternal Heaven where everything is peace, bliss, and happiness. This may be called the *pessimistic religion*- The converse of it is the optimistic religion. Many people in many countries have rebelled against the idea that life is all bitter. Commonsense shows that if life is bitter, people would part with it readily and cheerfully. In fact, nobody likes to give up life whatever may be the privations, sorrows and troubles he may be put to. In spite of numerous grievances, troubles, pain and sorrow, the general drift of life is found to be on the whole bearable and happy for the majority of mankind at any rate. Therefore the optimistic religion is one of self-complacency linked with the idea of God. Without that link, it will not be religion. It will be merely barren conceit, but people who are in a mood to observe the existence of higher powers and who seek the explanation of the various phenomena around them in the existence of an all powerful, knowing, benevolent supreme power, find that the world with its preponderance of joy, especially one's own individual life is due to that Supreme Ruler, God. So, the optimist in religion is thankful to God, recognises the numerous beneficial laws and principles obtaining everywhere and he makes the best use of these laws for promoting the greatest good of himself and of humanity, not merely for the present moment but for life as a whole. Many consider that Hinduism is pessimistic, but this is an inaccurate statement. In fact, far too many here are optimistic amongst the religious in conduct and experience while uttering pessimism with lips. Some twist passages in well-known scriptures to suit their ideas. In latter day works in India, there is no doubt an abundance of pessimistic literature. Pessimism has become the fashion with many a man, and is too often assumed to be the basis of religion.

This is not a matter which one can view with complacency. To be fair to oneself and to God, and to understand Sri Sai and other great souls, one should frankly face the truth and see whether life is really a vale of tears. If any one conscientiously analyses the nature of all the experiences he has, say, within the last day or week or month or year, he will have to admit that the majority of

experiences are pleasant and joyous. Even if a man is not in good health, the few pleasures that are allowed to him give him so much joy, and the power of recuperation of health is inside each individual. One feels that there is a vast preponderance of joy and material for joy in life, and as the Giver of all things is God, one must be thankful to God for providing the existing good and the power to develop one's life so as to provide more and more of good for oneself and for his surroundings. It is not necessary to go exhaustively into the latter day pessimistic authorities. It is enough if we take the earlier authorities e.g. the Bhagawad Gita, which is the summary of the Upanishads and therefore cannot be considered to be a latter day publication. The Gita does not say that life is bitter and a thing to be eschewed. There are two sentences in the Gita, which must be examined. One sentence is—

Anityam asukam lokam

Imam prapya bhajasv mam

This means, 'Being in a world which is not happy and which is evanescent, take refuge in Me and worship Me'.

The other sentence is —

Maam tipetya punarjanma dhuhkalayam ascascvalam

Na aapnuvanti mahaatmanah samsiddhim paramam gataah.

This means, 'The great souls, who have attained the goal of their existence, seek God and escape this existence which is full of sorrow and which is evanescent'. The second sentence is but the repetition of the previous idea. Now it is well-known that a single sentence should not be taken out of a whole composition as indicating the author's ideas, especially when separated from the context. Here the context is all important. Sri Krishna addressed these two sentences towards Arjuna in a discourse which resulted from Arjuna's absolute despondency and declaration that he found nothing in life worth living for and that life was bitter to him from any aspect whether the battle he was about to start was won or lost. So Sri Krishna's words saying that life was painful referred to *Arjuna's* state and view that life was painful.

There is abundance of evidence in other parts of the Gita to show that life properly lived is not painful. Again the Gita rests upon the Upanishads. The Upanishads contain numerous views of numerous Rishis uttered at various times under various circumstances. As to the question of life being bitter, it cannot be said that the Upanishads declared it to be so. (1) Schedule of Bliss given in Taittiriya Upanishad begins with experienced human bliss of a life time of a virtuous and healthy youth; (2) When an analysis of life is given in the Upanishads, we find that there is a clear statement that the central keystone of life, its nucleus or pith of it is that life is essentially bliss. Life-human is analysed, and the human life called Jiva is resolved into Brahman, which is Satchidananda. In the Panchakosa Vidya life is analysed into five sheaths. The *Annamaya kosa*, the *Pranamaya kosa*, the *Manomaya kosa*, and the *Vignanamaya kosa*, are the first lower four sheaths of the central factor, namely, *Anandamaya kosa* or *Ananda*. Man is said to realise it everyday in his deep sleep when all other *kosas* are forgotten. (3) When asked as to what Brahman is, the pupil investigates what constitutes Brahman. The Upanishad i.e. seer says first that *Anna*.....to be Brahman but not really Brahman.

Then *prana*, then *manas*, and then *vijnana* or reason, all these thrown out, and it is only bliss or Ananda that is said to be Brahman or God. *Anando Brahmeti, Vyajanath*. That is 'He knew that Ananda was bliss or God'. The individual soul is declared to be part and parcel of or identical with Brahman or God. So with that as the central essence of the Upanishad, one cannot say that life of the individual is miserable or a mere magazine of pain. It will be so, if the laws regulating it are not properly observed. If God's ordinances are violated, then pain results, pain being the stimulus to redirect the individual to follow Dharma. So, there is no sufficient theoretical basis for the position that life is sorrow.

Theories apart, let us consider practice. Here there are Gurus and Gurus. Some merely repeat and make their pupils repeat dicta about the painfulness of life. But there are other Gurus who point out that life properly lived is full of the joy of living, the joy of performance of duty. One who is determined not to

swallow conventionalities and give up his happiness may find great solace in approaching Gurus of the latter type.

Sri Sai Baba is pre-eminent among Gurus who shook off conventional and meaningless aphorisms and shibboleths drowning people in pessimistic ideas and making them inert and unfit for life's activities. Sri Sai Baba had various devotees, large numbers of whom believed that life in samsara was painful. Only one or two seem to have had the courage to mention it to Baba, for example, Nana Saheb Chandorkar. As soon as Nana Chandorkar told Baba, 'Baba! this samsara is dreadful. I do not wish to touch it even with a pair of tongs, Let me be free from it,' Baba retorted that though there was some grain of sense or meaning in what he said, the total of what he said was absurd. Baba said, 'Your idea that the sorrows of life can be escaped by man by running away from society into the forest, etc., is absurd. Wherever you go, you have got your body and mind, and your body and mind give you your joys and sorrows in any place and every place. The body, as long as it lasts, must produce its *prarabdha karma* of sorrows and joys. Therefore the proper course would be to face facts and lead the proper life'. Rebirth is considered a terror by many. But Baba did not, even on one out of the numerable occasions when he mentioned rebirth, say that rebirth was a matter for sorrow. He mentioned numerous births of his own in the past, and said that he would be born again, and nowhere did he say that rebirth was a deplorable fact. He said that as long as any pupil of his was still undeveloped, he would be born again and again with him until he took him to God. Such a life of Baba being reborn again and again to see to the safety and success of people's lives is far from being a life of sorrow. It is a series of Avatars and no one has the hardihood to say, outside the lines of poetry, that God in undergoing Avataras is undergoing suffering.

Vishnuryene dasavaiara gahane kshipto mahan sankate,

Brahma yena kulalavat myamito brahmandabandodare

That is, Karma is addressed by the poet jocularly by saying that even Maha Vishnu was drawn by karma into ten Avataras or rebirths. This is of course poetic

flair. It is ridiculous to suppose that God takes Avatara by compulsion of karma. God takes fresh life whenever he considers fit of his own free will.

Yadayadahi dharmasya glanir bhavati bharata

Abhyuttanam adharmasya tadatmanam srujamiaham

That is, 'Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and an uprising of unrighteousness, then I (God) incarnate myself in human form in order to help the good, curb the wicked, and establish dharma'. This free will of God to take up a human form is not considered to be any pain. Therefore, when a life modelled on such activities, for instance, the life of Sri Sai Baba, is being reborn for the benefit of devotees, it is ridiculous to suggest that rebirth is pain. In fact there is a pleasure in taking pains on behalf of others. That highest pleasure is *scanti*, mental calm, and the correct view therefore is that if one can work himself up to be free from excessive attachment and excessive repulsion and lead a life of the golden mean, to enjoy as much poise or peace as possible in this present life and ensure power control one's future lives and carry them on the same lines and promote the benefit of all, that life is a brilliant and happy period. And a series of such lives is one brilliant and happy continuous span. For these great souls remember all their previous and future births even, and their life is anything but unhappy. Therefore, Baba by his words and deeds exploded the theory that life is a vale of tears necessarily for everyone.

One form which pessimism takes in matters of religion is misanthropy and absolute seclusion from all human contacts. Timon of Athens is the Beau ideal of this class. There is an abundance of direction in spiritual books regarding shunning of *sanga* and the need for *ekanta* or solitude for a Yoga practitioner. Some people forgetting the difference between the beginner's stage and the later stages think that everyone religiously minded would be doing the best by running away from society and from all human contact and getting into a perch in some remote forest or some remote hill in order to forget his body in absolute trance for days, weeks, and months, as according to Valmiki's Ramayana Viswamitra did by way of tapas for becoming a Brahman. This notion is eminently unpractical and anyone who tries it will be quickly rewarded with severe punishment both in

body and mind, may be, even by loss of life. The miserable ending of such a life, with pain and sorrow in the mind, far away from all human help and sympathy can never be the ideal for any person with commonsense. Sri Sai Baba and several other prominent saints warned people against being carried away by such examples and trying such feats of asceticism (fit for perhaps one in a million). For persons living in society, it is absolutely absurd and even cowardly to run away from the midst of their contacts and seek calm and relief in some distant, remote, uninhabited place. Wherever we go, the mind is with us with its past traces giving us real company though unseen and imposing a number of mental fancies and feelings which one cannot escape from. The attempt is purely infructuous to avoid the physical while the physical is enshrined in the mental from which one cannot get away. As Emerson said, 'When you seek to fly from me, I am the wings with which you fly'. The mind seeks to escape from itself, but it cannot. One wants to escape from Prakriti or Nature, but one cannot do so at least instantaneously. A very, very, gradual and partial change of nature is possible, but escape from nature is an absurdity. Many people find that their present contacts with family, friends, acquaintances, social circles, etc., are the causes of much pain and that these drag them down, in their effort to attain purity of soul and ability to identify themselves with the Paramatma or be forever at the feet of Parameswar. These contacts were not created in a day and cannot be cut off in a minute. They have become part and parcel of one's nature and they have to be reckoned with. If one understands them aright and uses them properly, far from being impediments in one's spiritual progress they may be made the stepping stones of higher and higher progress.

To take one instance, let us consider *Love*. Love towards one's wife, children, parents, sisters brothers, and friends, is one of the commonest items, and many consider them even in their ordinary stale ennobling, but those intrepid souls burning with eagerness to attain the highest in a minute, find that these social shackles are an absolute bar to any attempt at thinking of the highest even for a few moments and absolute bars for absorption in the highest. Hence they desire to escape from these fetters. Now this question has been raised and

solved by great saints like Sri Sai Baba, and if we wish to make satisfactory progress, we cannot do better than seek their aid at present and follow their example and the counsels they gave and give to various persons at various times.

First let us take up theory and authorities. Even, from the point of theory and authority, the warnings against family fetters are few and of later day origin.

Kaate kaantaa kaste put rah

Samsaro uyam ateeva vichitrah

This means that, Sri Sankara says in his Moha Mudgara, "Think on this constantly: Who is 'your wife' and who is 'your son?' This samsara (family) is most surprising". These words were evidently addressed to sanyasis who have to shed their previous life and start a new ashram with new ideals, and have no application to persons who wish to achieve spiritual progress even from their present ashram, say, Grihastashrama or Brahmacharya Ashrama, take for instance, love to the wife mentioned above. This is a fairly common feature of social life, and no doubt, in the vast majority of cases, wives being what they are, having a wife proves a drag upon a man's chances of progress, except perhaps for this that the wife often gives trouble and troubles make man think of his spirit and of God. But this need not necessarily be so, and in numerous cases is not the fact and in any case thinking of God is practised by grihasthas. A wife is intended by the sastras to be a *Sahadharamacharini*, that is, a companion or helpmate to one in social and religious life enabling him to fulfil his various duties to members of his family, strangers, guests, etc. In that view, there is no necessity to have any revulsion at the idea of having a wife. Relationship towards the son is very similar. Usually a son is loved very dearly by both the parents and a son is said, according to puranic ideas, to be a necessity for saving one from going to hell (*Put Naraka*), But a son reminds one that he can continue the geneological line only through the son, and that the family's status, name, fame, and traditions require some one to carry on the work of oneself, and the son may become the prop of one's life when one gets into the last stage of life *sans* teeth, *sans* eyes, *sans* taste, *sans* all, *sans* everything.

The love of offspring is deeply implanted in nature and is perhaps best illustrated in the case of the tigress which, when lying down with a cub, will not allow persons to come even within a distance of one hundred yards for fear that safety of the cub may be endangered. The tigress is fierce when it has its cub with it and that is due to the fact of maternal love. Philoprogenitiveness is a fact of nature, and phrenologists locate a portion near the pituitary gland as its location. As for the need for the love of progenys apart from the tigress, let us go to the first tigress that begot the Universe. '*So Akamayata Bahusyam Prajayeya Iti*'. This means, 'He (Brahman) desired (this): Let me become many and have issue'. It is that same desire for issue that originated the universe that is still underlying the desire for issue and the love of issue in every being, whether feline or human. Such an urge cannot be a mistake of nature, and cannot be considered fit for absolute condemnation. There may be necessity for curbing it, moderating it, regulating it, or otherwise dealing with it. But the total extinction and abhorrence of the idea of having issue or abhorrence for the issue instead of love for the issue is not found. No doubt there are cases of parents who poison the child or children to get wealth, etc. But these are monstrous freaks of nature and not to be held as models for a religious aspirant.

Apart from all question of authority, going into the principle, we see that love is in itself a very noble idea and a human being with love is far superior to one without love. So noble indeed it is that most religions declare that *God is Love*. Love beams as bliss. God is Love and Bliss, and we find the statement that God is Love and Love is God not only in English poerty but also in other literature. What is the meaning of the term, 'God is Love?'¹ What is God in the first instance? God is conceived of as the primary source of all manifestation or put into personal language, God is treated as the father of all creatures.

Father of all in every age In every clime adored. By saint or savage or by sage, Jehovah Jove or Lord.

A father, human or divine, naturally loves his children, and God is conceived of by every religionist as loving all created beings with equal love, and yet we find persons of several religions sometimes condemning love as a fetter

and feeling a great desire to get away from love. If love is banished from the soul, then nothing is left. In fact God himself vacates the heart when love is driven away from it. Pure love being bliss, a heart without love must be as barren as a rock, and it is difficult to believe that anybody should desire to become a barren rock instead of being a person with feelings who can appreciate love and return love. The harmful working of the principle of love in actual practice can be prevented by noting how the harm comes in.

A man with limited resources having some sense is very anxious to ensure that the benefits which his worldly goods enable him to give his sons are not shared away by others as that may diminish the quantity which the sons might get. Hence he begins to be jealous of or hating other people for the sake of his sons. This is called exclusive love or more properly 'exculsive attachment' for all attachment is not love. Pure love ought to have no element of hatred in it. God's love to all his creatures is pure love. There is no element of hatred in that love and there can never be. That is the model for all persons who care to have love in their soul. To avoid the danger of love of offspring developing into hatred of others, one ought to constantly recall one's social duties and one's duties to oneself.

Harbouring hatred is harbouring poison. One's real nature is destroyed by the insertion of even a small idea of hatred in it. One gets miserable if one hates others, for when there is hatred, there is ever-present peril to one's own safety and comfort even temporal. It is the nonhater that is free from danger. "*Lokat na udviyate*". Love, i.e. pure love, leads to sacrifice. And sacrifice should never have any touch of hatred or contact with hatred in it. If I sacrifice to my God and hate the other Gods, the work I do is not the work of God but of Satan. Love can be enabled and made purer by constant watching of oneself and one's behaviour. It is perfectly possible to love one's wife and offspring without introducing elements of hatred, in spite of the limited nature of one's resources and nature. It is perfectly possible to restrain oneself from harbouring the hatred of others while living with one's family. Examples of this sort have been set by saints who lived with families. For instance, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had a wife. That did

not make him hate others. Also Mahasaya Durgacharan Nag. Numerous other instances may be mentioned from the history of saints in Europe.

There is no doubt a difficulty in reconciling one's duties towards the family with the calls made upon one by others. But the reconciliation is possible and increasing success will attend upon one's efforts, the more one tries. The most proper course for any sadhaka or any grihasta with lofty and high spiritual aims is to carry the love he has in the circle of his family to as distant lengths as possible. If I love my own children, my endeavour ought to be that I should begin to love the children of others on the sample of my love to my own children. The idea of love cannot originate in a mind unless there is the relationship of father and son and so on. Therefore, there is no meaning in condemning the very root and saying that a sadhaka must sacrifice the roots of love. The roots of love and noble feeling are in the family relation. By loving one's parents or wife or children one begins for the first time to understand what love is. Then one's duty is to purify and expand that love and see that it assumes the character of divine love. No doubt God can love millions and human beings cannot easily love even a dozen. But it is the duty of any serious sadhaka who starts on his spiritual enterprise to see how far he can go. He can surely expand his love beyond the limits of family. He can surely help his neighbours and love his neighbour's children. He can surely sympathise with the people of his clan or gotra and have love expanded to the limits of the gotra. Similarly it can be further expanded to the nation and ought finally to embrace all humanity. No doubt with the increase in the extent to which love is applied, there is a necessary tendency to diminish its intensity. Ultimately when a man says 'I love all mankind', it is apt to be a mere lip profession with very little of feeling in the heart. But one must remember that this is an ideal, and an ideal can be accomplished or nearly accomplished only by great efforts and gradually. Therefore it is pointed out in great works like the Gita that spiritually great ones are those who are '*Sarvabhuta Hite Ratah*'. that is, loving all creatures. *Ran* is love or deep interest. The direction is given that the highest bhakti or yoga should aim at sympathising with and helping on with the friendly feeling or loving heart all creatures, whether they belong to one's family

or even one's species or not. Men must love cats and dogs, ants and flies, and feel that God is in them all, and that God in those forms compels them to yield their heart as freely as possible. It is easier no doubt to love your son than to love an ant or fly, but that is no reason why you should not help a fly or an ant or a dog or a cat as much as you can. In any case, you must start by beginning with 'Ahimsa'. If you are cruel to creatures, you cannot possibly love them. Himsa and Love are the opposite poles. So to start universal love, avoid hatred of any one. '*Nirvairah sarva bhuteshu*' That is, a man who hates no creature at all is said to be the best devotee of Sri Krishna in Chapter XII of the Gita. Starting therefore by avoiding hatred, proceed next to see in what possible cases sympathy can take more positive and concrete forms than avoidance of injury. Whatever is possible for you to do to other creatures, try and do that. That will be a positive act which engenders a feeling of love and enables you to achieve love to all beings. That is, *Sarvabhuta Hite Ratah*.

Let us take concrete instances to inspire us in this course of conduct. Sri Sai Baba was the best illustration that we can have of this *Sarvabhuta Hite Ratah*. With his vast power of *Antaryatnitva*, he could get inside every creature (man, cat or dog), and make it perform any act that he wanted, and he was also feeling what happened to it as something that happened to him. When after a full meal he was seated in the Mosque or Dwarkamayee after feeding as many creatures as possible, a bitch came up hungry putting out its tongue and gazing at him wistfully as much as to say, "Lo and behold; I am hungry". Baba at once told a lady (Lakshmi Bai) who was near that he was hungry, and made that lady bring a plateful of good food intended for him. Baba at once placed the whole of it before the bitch. Lakshmi Bai was thunderstruck. "What! you said that you were hungry, and now you have given the whole thing to the bitch" she asked. Baba then said, 'I and the bitch are one. She is hungry. Dogs do not speak. But we speak. It is the same whether she eats or I eat'. This is the peak reached by one who climbs up the ladder of *samatva* and *Sarvabhuta Hite Ratah* and *Antaryatnitva*. He placed himself inside the heart of each creature, and this really shows that He is '*Sarvabhuta Atma Bhuta Atma*', that is, the soul of all creatures.

That, of course, is the position of God or one who realises himself as God. For, God is the soul of all creatures. This is the aim of religion to lose one's being in divinity, and that is done by becoming *Sarvabhuta Atma Bhuta Atma*. Many people may think that this is a hopelessly impossible task for any sane man to attempt. But Baba's example shows that it is a perfectly feasible task and that Baba accomplished it. Incidentally this shows that love to creatures may take the shape of offering material assistance whenever that is possible regardless of the low position usually assigned to many creatures such as dogs.

Love—overflowing love—naturally rebels against the idea of classification of creatures, some as low and some as high. In Narada Bhakti Sutras, Sri Narada says, 'Amongst them (that is. bhaktas), there is no high and no low. All are one'. If one's heart overflows with love to God, differences between man and man, or man and creatures, or creatures and creatures pales away into insignificance. That is the sign of true and powerful love, and the extent to which man has ripened in his love can be tested by seeing what distinctions he draws, how he treats the various creatures as they contact him and what he thinks of his own conduct in respect of all that he contacts.

Sai Baba's dealings with various creatures and persons of various types and classes gives one the impression that his was uniform love, loving everyone that came within his contact or reach. That is the example for one to copy or the ideal for one to achieve. Of course all are not Sai Baba but all should try to become Sai Babas. The world will be Heaven when this is achieved.

Thus we see that love is capable of expansion from the family on to the widest limits of existence. Sai Baba never hated family ties and never condemned them as hopeless fetters. During the period of probation of H.S. Dixit's Vanaprasta, he kept him away from contacts, family contacts as well as other contacts for a period of nine months, and then the probation ended and his contacts were resumed. Baba never condemned all contact. In the case of Upasani Baba, he tried to sever his contact with family and that was for a very high purpose to turn him into a remarkable specimen of spiritual achievement. But for Baba himself, family ties were never considered hindrances. He referred

to the fact that he had various relations, namely, father, sisters, brothers, and cousins and that he maintained a high level of duty towards everyone of them in every Janma or birth. For instance, he has in one Janma supported his brothers by undertaking contract work and helped to feed them all when the managing brother was starving them. Then on another occasion when a brother of his was excommunicated, he worked hard and got him readmitted to caste. When his father's mistress, whom he considered to be his mother, (however loose moralled she might be) was suffering, he fed her, treated and cured her, and was kind towards her because she was the wife of his father. Again when a girl playmate of his died, he went to the tomb that girl was haunting as a ghost, and brought her up to Shirdi and placed her in a position where she could listen to holy scripture and thus improved her spiritual condition. He did his very best for his friends like Veerabhadrapa, Basappa, Gauri, etc., giving them whatever help was absolutely essential. A perusal of the Gospel of Sai Baba would show that Baba valued social ties and never condemned them. The correct course therefore for any Sai devotee seems to be not to hate family ties but to honour them and see that they are worked not in a narrow spirit but in a spirit of universal love and sympathy. Our love to our friends and relations and mankind should enable us to love others and go on widening the circle of persons who would receive our help and sympathy. If we work on those lines which are the lines of Sai Baba, family ties will not be a curse but a blessing.

Religion is a very broad term and authorities on religion are varied and innumerable. Even for Hinduism there are so many books of which special sets are honoured by special groups. Yet, for practical purposes, we may take it that the Bhagavad Gita is a book on which there is practically unanimity amongst all groups and sub-sects, and there are numerous people who have resolved to make the Bhagavad Gita the guide for their conduct in everyday life, chiefly in matters of religion. The question, therefore, is whether the Gita counsels abdication of one's best in life and running away to remote forests or hills for leading an absolutely quiet self-centred life, full of the happiness of Brahman, or whether it advocates a life led in the din and bustle of life attending to hundreds

of persons with thousands of claims upon one meeting each in his own field with his own arms and in his own appropriate way.

To commonsense, it would appear that absolute desertion of society is impossible or, if possible, mad and absurd. It is like a man who, unable to cure a painful ulcer on his nose, cuts his own throat as a cure. If, therefore, the authority of the Gita on the point is wanted, that is patent. Arjuna was at the beginning of the Gita in an absolutely hopeless condition. He could not see which way he should go. Whatever he did would only result in misery, sin and trouble, and there was no happiness in view in following any course, fighting or not fighting. He, in his dejection, first declared that he would not fight and that he would run away from his duties. The Gita corrects him, and the Lord told him that he should stick to his post and do his duty, however wretched it might appear..

Screyan svadharmo vigunah paradharmat svanushtitat

Svadharme nidhanam screyah, paradharmo bhayavahah

This means, 'Even if one's duty is not charming and appears to be without merit, that is better than deserting it and adoption of others' dharmas. Death in the course of doing one's own duty is conducive to one's ultimate welfare. Adoption of others duties (by neglecting one's own) is full of terror (terror being the terrors of hell).' In the result, Arjuna gave up his dejection and his desertion of his asrama duty and resumed his original attitude of determination to do his Kshatriya's duty of battling in war.

Hence, passages should not be pieced out of Bhagavad Gita and twisted so as to bear the construction that what Sri Krishna advised was that a person be completely absorbed in the self and not attend to anything else. There are such passages in the Gita which have been sometimes so misunderstood. As an instance, we may cite one. In the sixth chapter, as elsewhere, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that he must treat friend and foe alike and that he should show samatva towards all. Should this be taken to mean that Arjuna should slay his brother quite as readily as he would slay the enemies in the opposite camp? Obviously not. The passages which say that a person should be completely absorbed in the Lord are as plentiful as blackberries. Here are some.

*Alma aupamyena sarvatra samam pascyatyo arjuna,
Sukhamva yadiva dhuhkam sa yogi paramo matah:
Prascantatma vigatabhiih brahmachari vratesitah
Manas samyamyachchitto yukta aaseeta matparah
Suhritu mitrah udaasina madhyasta dveshya bandhushu
Sadhushu apicha papeshu samabhuddhih visishyate
Yata indriya mano bhuddhih munih moksha parayanah
Vigata icha bhaya krodho yas soda mukta eva saha.*

Like these many may be quoted which are being too literally applied and which are taken to authorise one's action of giving up the present dealings with innumerable friends and foes and simply sitting concentrating on one's own self, in whatever way that self may be understood. It is patent that the Gita is no authority for escape of duty. The Gita gives numerous directions which are useful to numerous persons in various walks of life and in various circumstances. All of them should not be taken together as one advice applicable to every one in every circumstance. In the battle field a man who mistakes friend for foe and foe for friend or for neutral will see his mistake all too quickly. He will have no more of physical life to judge the mistake of his conduct, for his head would roll on the ground all too soon. Commonsense should enable everyone to note how each piece of advice is to be applied.

There is a distinct body of counsels or advice given to a person wishing to obtain perfect bliss—*Brahmananda*. He has to begin with the practice of something like *Ashtanga Yoga* beginning with *Yama* and *Niyama* and going on with *Asana*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyanam*, *Samadhi*, including probably *Pranayama* which, however, is not mentioned expressly in *Abhyasa Yoga* of Chapter VI of the Gita, the omission being probably rectified by reference to *Pranayama Parayanah* in the other chapters of the Gita. The description given in Chapter VI of a person who goes on with *Abhyasa Yoga* is so charming and one would be tempted to adopt this *Ashtanga Yoga* perpetually as the sole business of his life. Verses 20 and 21 say that the man who is absolutely concentrated in the self will be absorbed in that alone and will find supreme delight therein.

Verses 22 and 23 say that the said delight is par excellence the one thing to obtain. Thereafter pain and sorrows cannot trouble one. The direction is given in verses 23—

Tamvidhyat dhuhka samyoga viyogam yoga samgitam
Sa nischayena yoktavyo yogo anirvinna chetasa.

Verse 24 says—

Sankalpa prabhavaan kaamaan tyaktva sarvan aseshatah
Manasaiva indriva graamam viniyamya scamantatah.

Verses 25 and 26 say : 'After concentrating the mind, the man should not think of anything else, and even if his thoughts wander, they must be drawn back again to the self. Verse 27 says that by these efforts the self becomes peaceful, calm, and the highest bliss, born of contact with the Supreme, will come to him, and all Rajas, etc., will go away. Verse 28 says—

Yunjannevensada aatmaanam yogi vigathakalmashah
Sukhena Brahmasamsparscam atyantam sukham Asnute.

This means, 'The Yogi who ever concentrates on and harmonises the self will reach infinite bliss by contact with Brahman.'

These seem to advise that a man should do nothing except thinking of Brahman and being Brahman, that he should have nothing to do for instance with the question whether the shield is all right, whether his arrows are sharp, whether his horses for the chariot are in good condition, etc. This looks patently absurd, for if you are in a field of battle, your arrows or shield and horses must be in proper condition. Else you will be failing in your duty to yourself and to the side to which you belong. Death and defeat will be the consequence of such neglect. Surely unreasonable courting of death and defeat is not counselled by Lord Krishna. Hence one is obliged to infer that Sri Krishna in the field of battle was forced to teach Arjuna many a truth not applicable to him immediately, and in certain cases not applicable to him at all.

Sri Krishna was compelled to lay down general principles of conduct for all classes and various circumstances. He pointed out the need for concentration in Yoga. Is it to be supposed that he wanted Arjuna straightaway to sit up on his

chariot and lose his mind in samadhi? Obviously not. In fact, he tells him, 'Stand up and fight' which is inconsistent with sitting and concentrating. The advice of Sri Krishna on the above matter of practising Ashtanga Yoga seems to be this. Arjuna is to practise this Ashtanga Yoga after the toils of war are over and when there is time for him to practise it. The advice is not confined to Arjuna. The advice is extended to all classes, and whoever is physically and mentally able to practise Ashtanga Yoga is advised to practise it, for it leads to realisation of perfect bliss. When one is so engaged, he has reached samatva. Friend and foe, high and low, do not exist for one in that condition. Heat and cold also to the extent possible must be ignored. Of course, if there is excess cold, namely, minus 60 degrees, round the yoga practitioner, that would make an end of the yoga practice and of the practitioner. If he is lost in a trance when a sudden cold sets in, the practitioner may not regain life enough to see that he has lost life in the course of his concentration. The net result is that, paying due regard to rules of commonsense, one should carry on the Ashtanga Yoga ending in samadhi and remain in samadhi as long as possible, practicable, and desirable. Flesh and blood being what they are, there comes an end to the practice of yoga also, and a man has to get up from his yoga practice and attend to the body.

Yuktahara vihara is the stanza wherein the Gita tells him that he has to attend to food, rest, exercise, etc., in order to avoid pain and grief. Similarly in the advice about treating high and low, virtuous, dangerous and calm animals or other surroundings as the same, commonsense must enable one to see when this advice can safely be followed and to what extent. One may be able to see that at certain times he can go on practising samatva without upsetting his own life career and without disregarding the duties that are incumbent upon him. Thus, carefully restricted samatva has its application to almost every one. More and more of samatva can be worked into one's life first by avoidances. The good and bad, the virtuous and vicious, are to be treated alike, is the motto of samatva. This is not immediately practicable but to some extent one can avoid doing harm or talking ill against those that are bad. For one's own peace of mind,

the advice is given that he should not poke his nose into others' affairs and go on praising one and decrying another.

Nastuvita nanindeta kurvatah sadhu asadhuva

vadato gunadhoshabhyam varjetah samadruk munih.

'Whether others talk or behave ill or well, the Muni bent on carrying on his samatva should say nothing, should neither praise nor blame' is the advice given by Lord Krishna to Uddhava showing how to apply samatva. This may be done in many circumstances, of course not by the magistrate who is called upon to decide whether a person charged with an offence is guilty and has to be punished. Samatva can be manifested more and more by increasing our powers of endurance. If we can easily put up with persons who talk wildly or with inclement weather or with hot atmosphere, we might gradually increase our powers of endurance. As for samatva between a clod of earth, stone (precious or not) and gold, one might, if he aspires very high, try it in slight degrees. '*Samaloshta Asma Kanchanah*' is the ideal praised by Lord Krishna again and again. To carry out this idea, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa sat on the banks of the Ganges, took up a clod of earth (*loshta*) and took up some coins (*kanchana*) and exercised his mind in the faculty of belief repeating to himself "This earth and that kanchana or coin are the same", and threw them into the Ganges trying to develop equal indifference to both. Of course if clay is gone into the river, there is nothing to lose and no sorrow. Similarly if coins also go into the river, one must develop equal indifference and by repeatedly saying to oneself, 'I care a brass button whether these coins go or remain' and one might develop some degree of indifference. Even Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was struck with doubts about the correctness of this course. The thought struck him that Kanchana represents Lakshmi, Goddess of Wealth, who might get angry at being treated with contempt and who might inflict as a punishment dire poverty, etc., on him. There are numerous other difficulties besides Sri Ramakrishna's difficulty in the matter of such practice. But all these can be overcome and gradually overcome and increasing success is sure to attend upon one's efforts at increasing achievement of samatva. That is certainly a gain worth having. To that extent, the Gita advice

of *Samaloshta Asma Kanchana* may be adopted. That is, the express advice may be treated as an ideal to be worked up to, and a life may be adopted taking one nearer and neareer to that goal or ideal.