Hinduism: Divine Love, Inevitable Conflict, and the Evils of Envy

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General remarks

Gentleness of spirit, harmlessness, and kindness toward all living beings are held as the highest value, the ultimate ideal, and the practically applied ethic in everyday life in those traditions arising from sacred India.[1] These essential qualities are characteristic of those who have achieved perfection in yoga or the foundations of divine love. The underlying principle operative here is simple: no one can expect to find happiness if a person participates in the suffering of another human or living being. This Indian ideal is commonly known as "nonviolence," a word that often translates the Sanskrit word *ahiṁsā*.[2] Included in this ideal is not only the resistance or absence of violence, and not only the positive attitude and kindliness toward living beings, but also a connotative sense that one may be willing to receive or accept abusive mental or physical acts of violence on oneself. There is no urge to perform violence on the aggressor or on anyone else, and such a person does not retaliate or even wish or desire for retribution of any sort.[3]

There is, however, a place for the enactment of physical violence within the context of the ancient Indian hierarchically arranged society.[4] Force, coercion, or manipulation of and violence toward other living beings are condoned only in very exceptional circumstances, usually for purposes of personal self-defense or in irresolvable political conflicts. Such conflicts, however, are only to occur among warriors. Even so, these exceptional admittances of violence stand in subtle but great tension with the highest ideal and value of gentleness toward all humans and to all living beings.

Acts of what we in the West may call "terrorism" simply transgress Hindu principles of ethics. Such acts of terrorism arise out of the darkest depths of the human soul fueled by deep-seated envy and fear, and are rooted in what many of us would identify as unbridled hatred. Let it be boldly stated, therefore, that any form of aggression, which includes the practice of committing harm and violence against innocent persons, individually or en masse, that includes the cultivation of fear and psychological torment in innocent per-

sons, which may also engage various forms of physical torture as a means of killing, is unequivocally condemned and lies absolutely outside any and all Hindu codes of ethics.

The Indian mind is not naive or unrealistic about the mixed world in which humans live. There will always be, in general, goodness, beauty, and a kindly spirit in and among humans. There will also be, from time to time, conflicts that will arise among persons or peoples that may lead to the misery and untold suffering of war. And yet there will also be some humans who are capable of causing suffering and torment to one's fellow humans and other living beings. The ancient Indian world, ideally, designed society to favor, promote, and develop the goodness in humans, and also to be able to protect its citizens from personal or political conflict by recognizing an important role for a ruling or warrior class of men. The responsibility to prevent or fight against the evil of terrorism is seen as that of such a military class.

Three general realms from which suffering in this world can arise are described: from outside a person, from within a person, and from the interaction of persons and other beings. Natural catastrophes, a tormenting mind, or one person inflicting pain on another person or living being, respectively, are, according to Hindu traditions, the basic origins of suffering in this world. Among these three arenas, our focus is the third, the suffering that can arise between one human and another or another creature. In this third arena, we are not speaking about accidental or unintentional suffering caused by humans. Rather, we are speaking about one human being's deliberate, conscious intention to torment, torture, hurt or kill an innocent or nonviolent person or being. Moreover, in terrorism, such an intention to hurt or kill often engages the two aforementioned arenas, the natural world as well as the psychological, in order to inflict as much pain or suffering as possible. We shall now turn to Hindu sacred texts in order to illuminate further these three dimensions of the Hindu vision, namely goodness, protection, and acts of envy or hatred.

Envy as the root of terrorism: The Rāmāyana

The epic poem known as the Rāmāyaṇa is one of the most beloved sacred texts of India. It relates the story of the abduction of Rāma's wife, Sītā, by the evil, envious, but extremely powerful demon Rāvaṇa. Through the great efforts of Rāma to win his beloved Sītā back, along with the help of his brother Lakṣmana, and the much beloved and devoted monkey warrior, Hanumān, Rāma was finally reunited with his beloved Sītā. However, Rāma eventually lost his wife because of his own rejection of her. It is a sad and heartbreaking story. Even though Sītā successfully proved to Rāma that she had not been unchaste or even sexually abused or raped by Rāvaṇa while

under his control, Rāma was unable to accept her back into their marital union. Rāma's rejection of Sītā was due to the expectations of society: Rāma was to sustain only the purest and most exemplary royal family. Thus ultimately Sītā returned to the earth out of which she was originally born—in effect, she died—and Rāma was deprived of his beloved Sītā forever.

The character of Rāvaṇa is important for our discussion here because he exemplifies in part the terrorist mentality. It is significant that Rāvaṇa did not take advantage of Sītā during her long abduction.[5] Rāvaṇa's success as a "terrorist," one could claim, was not his abuse of Sītā (which never really occurred), but was in his ability to take Sītā away from Rāma, which led to the destruction of their royal marriage. Though Rāma won his beloved Sītā back, and externally won the fight against Rāvaṇa, in the end Rāma lost his wife, his marriage, and his love.

Is this not the very point of envy? It is not in gaining what another has that satisfies envy, which is what in essence satisfies jealousy.[6] Rather, it is the achievement of another's loss and consequent suffering that is gained in envy. Rāvaṇa's success was not in having Sītā, but in Rāma's loss of Sītā. In envy it is the removal of what another has and the misery and suffering in his or her loss that satisfies envy, even if it means that the envious person must lose his or her own life in order to achieve its objective. Indeed, we see in modern day acts of terrorism that terrorists often are very willing, even desiring to sacrifice their own lives to facilitate the loss of life or the suffering of others.

Prior to the start of the Rāmāyaṇa, a short prologue anticipates this tale of idyllic love and devastating loss. It is a short story that reveals how the author of this sacred poem, the sage Vālmīki, becomes inspired to write the epic story and poem of the Rāmāyaṇa. This prologue itself is a brief but very poignant tale that reveals, for our discussion here, something of the Hindu view of terrorism. My summary retelling of the prologue is as follows:

> Nārada, the peripatetic minstrel and renowned ageless sage who travels the universe, dropped in to visit Vālmīki at his hermitage in the wilderness. It was there that Vālmīki made an inquiry to Nārada asking, "Who is the hero in this world who is most virtuous and wise?" Nārada responded by claiming that there is such a person and then proceeded to narrate the epic story of Rāma. Vālmīki began to contemplate the story and was deeply moved by it so much so that even long after Nārada departed, Vālmīki continued to be preoccupied by its sorrowful tale.
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> One morning, after Vālmīki went to the Tamasa River to perform his ritual ablutions, he took a walk along the riverbank. Vālmīki came across two loving birds sitting together in a nearby tree. They were singing to one another, rejoicing in their love and their life together. These particular birds were cranes, a species of bird that are known to be especially affectionate.[7]

> Suddenly, a hunter's arrow pierced the body of the male crane, who fell to the ground and began to roll around in agony. The female crane attended her beloved mate, while she cried out with intense grief and helplessness. As Vālmīki witnessed this painful scene, out of anger he immediately uttered a curse to punish the hunter for his cruelty, a curse that would force the hunter to wander homelessly for the remainder of his life.
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> After Vālmīki became aware of how his anger had consumed him, he questioned his right to curse the hunter. He then recalled the curse he uttered and became aware, to his delight, that its words contained a beautiful rhythm and music. Thus, from the angry curse came poetic verse. He discovered that his tormenting grief, *śoka*, expressed itself through the words of the curse as poetic verse, *śloka*. The relationship between grief and beauty, or *śoka* and *śloka,* respectively, inspired Vālmīki to meditate on this as the mysterious work of the divine. And as Vālmīki entered more deeply into his meditation on the story of Rāma and Sītā, it was revealed to him that out of this sorrowful event would come the inspiration to write their story, and that it should be told in the same meter and rhythm of the verse in which the curse was originally delivered.

We might say that the curse was "poetic justice," so to speak, literally and figuratively. Even so, Vālmīki still reconsidered whether the punishment truly did fit the hunter's crime. The relationship between the hunter's violent act and the author's curse is intriguing: the great work of the Rāmāyana was written out of an inspiration derived from his perhaps extreme retributive reaction to the hunter's horrific act. In other words, the sacred text may not have ever taken the poetic form that it did had the hunter not killed the love-struck crane with his arrow, which in turn precipitated a curse in the form of verse that ultimately inspired the creation of Vālmīki's great poetic work.

The effect that such terrible acts in this world have on softhearted souls is perhaps what is at stake here. The painful irony is that such devastating acts of violence and terror can act on those who observe them as a call to go deeper into the creative and spiritual heart. And furthermore, those who have been sacrificed in such horrific acts are, in some sense, the vital participants in a call to the rest of humanity to wake up to its true heart, and to the loftiest achievements of the human spirit.

We can draw many observations from this prologue story that are relevant to our discussion here. The hunter senselessly and needlessly cut short and interrupted the loving relationship of these two lovebirds. The hunter took the life of an innocent crane and deprived that crane of living out his life with his beloved mate. And the hunter caused the beloved mate of the dying crane extreme torment and grief at the loss of her husband crane.

We might ask, what part of the crime does Vālmīki's curse address? In what way is the curse a response to the hunter's crime? Most relevant to our discussion here, and perhaps a more subtle aspect of the crime that the hunter

committed that is directly related to the content of Vālmīki's curse, is the way the hunter's act had elements of terrorism: First, the two cranes did not see the violence coming to them; second, the cranes, once receiving this violence, could not perceive any reason behind it, for such violence appeared to be without cause and senseless; third, the surviving female crane, who was traumatized, it can be assumed will always be plagued by a fear that such a senseless act of violence will again occur with someone she loves; and fourth, and most relevantly, a loving home is disrupted—the tree was the natural home for the birds, and their home environment was shattered forever by the hunter's violence and aggression against them. The hunter, therefore, received a curse that involved homelessness because he, in effect, made it impossible for the surviving female crane to ever feel that she had the security, safety, and shelter of a home away from danger. The hunter took away a life of love in a home from the female crane. And thus Vālmīki's curse took away a life in a home of love from the hunter.

From the simple story, it is reasonable to assume that the hunter was not envious in a deliberate way, going out to hunt for the explicit purpose to cause suffering to other living beings and to cause such deep grief and loss. After all, he was a hunter, and hunters hunt animals, albeit for a variety of reasons. Envy here, then, can be interpreted as a deeper, subtle but darker side of the human creature. It is largely unconscious as an underlying element in human nature. The message toward which the prologue seems to point is this: we as humans must be more conscious of our true nature and what can go bad. The Hindu ideal is to avoid the participation, directly or indirectly, in the suffering of other living beings as much as possible, and to attain a state of unbounded happiness in transcendence and ultimately attain supreme felicity at the very heart of the divine.

The Divine Contains Everything: Bhagavad Gītā

The theodicean challenge easily arises here in this kind of discussion. How does envy, the root of terrorism, or for that matter any evil, exist in a world that has some kind of direct or even indirect relationship or connection with the divine? Why does the dark side of humanity exist at all? It is to the Bhagavad Gītā that we now turn for gaining further understanding of the place terrorism has within the general Hindu theological picture.

Unlike the abrahamic traditions of the West, which are known as "religions of the book," Hindu traditions engage not just one book of revelation but many sacred texts and writings. Revelation is something ongoing and unlimited and not something finite and fixed in one limited text for all time. And yet among all sacred texts arising from sacred Hindu traditions, the Bhagavad Gītā is unquestionably the most read and commented upon by tradi-

tional theologians and teachers within the Hindu complex of religious traditions. Thus we may gain further insights on the ways Hindu theology addresses the question of the existence of evil in a world that has a relationship with the divine by engaging some of the ideas in the Bhagavad Gītā.

When first reading this famous work among ancient Indian writings, the most daunting, inscrutable, and startling feature of it becomes evident: How could this sacred conversation between the supreme Lord Krishna and the blessed Prince Arjuna be advocating, among other profound ethical and spiritual principles, the virtue of nonviolence, in the middle of the battlefield on which Arjuna, the great warrior, was about to fight with his own army of qualified soldiers against an opposing army that aggressively faced him? Here, in this most sacred of Hindu texts, is the veritable testimony that nonviolence is part of the highest ideal of human behavior. Yet, at the same time, there is a place for combat as a very last resort, but only between warriors, as we find on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the battlefield on which Arjuna finds himself struggling.

This short, eighteen-chapter book of about 700 beautiful flowing Sanskrit verses opens with the mounting tension of immanent battle as each of the armies looks over the other. By the end of the first chapter and the beginning of the second, our narrator describes how the full impact of the immanent battle suddenly dawns on Arjuna, as he is about to lead his own men into battle against an enemy army that consists of many of his own friends and teachers, along with his own kinsmen. Arjuna, anticipating that he will have to fight, perhaps even kill, ones for whom he has felt love or deep respect, is overcome by grief and hurled into a deep depression.

The Gita opens with an irresolvable ethical conflict in order to teach its readers first that there will always be conflict in this world, and as a last resort war may be necessary. Thus a military class of men must be assembled for society. Second, the ethical conflict that Arjuna faced states that there will always be painful and irresolvable conflicts in this world that must be resolved at a level that goes beyond ethics, as such conflicts defy resolution by any ethical system, no matter how comprehensive and thorough it may be. Such irresolvable ethical conflicts urge the human mind and heart to probe deeper realms of the self to find resolution. Third, we encounter a familiar dynamic, as we saw in the Rāmāyana. Exposure to the conflict, suffering, and grief in this world can catalyze the loftiest spiritual teachings. Had this conflict not arisen with Arjuna at the start of the Bhagavad Gītā, Krishna would not have delivered his teachings to humanity.

But the most signficant point is that the reality of things in this world contains and, indeed, must contain the beautiful, the horrible, and everything in between. Several places throughout the text, and especially in Chapter Eleven, Krishna gives Arjuna a vision that reveals “the big picture,” as it were,

were, the total picture of this world in all its splendor and with all its horrors. Krishna introduces this daunting, cosmic manifestation with the following words:

> Behold my forms,
> O Pārtha,
> by the hundreds,
> or by the thousands—
> Divine, of various types,
> and of various colors
> and appearances.[8] (BG 11.5)

Everything in this world, from true happiness to untold suffering and misery, is facilitated by this external dimension of the divine, or the "universal form" (*viśva-rūpa*).[9] It is in the experience of this vision that Arjuna learns that there is a total world process of change in which everyone and everything participates that necessarily includes the hazards of envy and hatred, which are just a few agents of change: "Before you, in one place, behold now the entire universe, with every moving and nonmoving being within my body . . ." (BG 11.7). Thus within that divine body is everyone, including envious persons, terrorists, etc.

The inclusion of the total spectrum of goodness and evil in this world has fundamentally to do with the law of love: if humans did not have the total freedom to act in goodness or even from the darkest depths of evil, then the human heart would be without total freedom and therefore, in some measure, would be coerced or forced. For love to be love, there can be no coercion of any kind. True and pure love can only be issued forth from a heart that has total freedom of choice. Anything less than total freedom of the heart would dissolve love into nothing or, even worse, a fear-induced obedience and surrender.

The vision of evil within Hindu theology

According to the Hindu vision of the divine, simply put, nothing can exist outside of ultimate reality. Therefore, acts of envy, extreme selfishness, and even the evils of terrorism, as well as other evils fueled by deep-seated fear and envy, are at some level part of that ultimate reality. But they are part of this very mixed world, a world that must possess this mixture of the beautiful and the dreadful, as has already been discussed. But this world, in relation to the divine, is external. This world is not closer to the heart of the divine, but rather it is further away from the divine. It is a permanent world divinely or-

dained and sustained that is filled with impermanence, and its divine status is less than the inner worlds of the infinite divine spirit.

Thus the ultimate reality, discernable in the Bhagavad Gītā, has four layers. The divine contains everything, and yet the integrity of deity within the divine is preserved in different ways and especially at the highest. The purpose of these four layers, as we shall see, is to reciprocate at different levels of the divine with the human heart: in the outer, inner, and innermost worlds. To appreciate this manifestation of the universal form that contains divine might, it is important to understand the outer world manifestation of the divine in relation to the hierarchical arrangement of the other divine manifestations, and how each corresponds to the refinement and achievements of the heart. The four types of manifestations of the divine, who is Krishna, are the following, going from the outer world or external divine manifestation, to the inner and finally to the innermost worlds of the divine:

(1) "The Universal Form," Vishva Rūpa: The picture of this part of the divine manifestation painted by the text is one of a range of forms conveying a divine presence, but it is a picture of the divine presence and actions specifically within the outer world:

> Whatever form of existence
> possesses abounding power,
> contains the beautiful,
> or is well-endowed
> with excellence—
> Understand that
> every such form
> has become fully manifest
> from but a part of my splendor. (BG 10.41)

A vision of fate is projected by the Gītā's display of this divine manifestation, even though Arjuna was left with a choice by the end of the Gītā either to fight in the battle that was in front of him, or not. The Universal Form displayed a terrifying aspect to this world that itself originates in the divine. This Form is a combination of all that is attractive and sublime and at the same time all that is terrifying and horrific.[10] The Universal Form cultivates an appreciation of the presence of the divine in this world, while this mixed world also can draw one away from such an appreciation as well—a kind of love-hate relationship, as it were. Additionally, in its displays of might, beauty, and sublimity, the Universal Form delivers "the big picture" for Arjuna, putting into perspective the smaller painful pictures through which everyone must go. The message here is that no matter

how horrific and painful the events of this world may be, there is ultimately a more loving purpose of which they are a significant part. The human heart at this initial stage develops a deep reverence, and one has the opportunity to see both the light and the dark in nature and the nature of things. And one makes choices that fuel and focus upon the true heart, true love, and a true vision of the world that sustains and uplifts the human spirit to greater spiritual depths beyond this world.

(2) "The Total Utimate Reality," Brahman: It is both the immanent and transcending all-encompassing spiritual foundation in which everything is situated and on which everything depends. "Therefore eternal Brahman . . . pervades everything . . ." (BG 3.15). And yet this spiritual all-inclusive power has its original source at the highest level of the divine, namely from Krishna, the fourth innermost world of the divine: "Truly, of Brahman, I am its foundation . . ." (BG 14.27). The soul who has realized this inner world of Brahman experiences an imperishable and boundless happiness:

> The self who is not attached
> to external contacts,
> who finds happiness
> within the self—
> That one whose self
> is absorbed in the yoga
> of Brahman through yoga,
> attains imperishable happiness. (BG 5.21)

> Thus, with the self
> always absorbed in yoga,
> the yogi who is completely
> free from impurity,
> Happily enjoys,
> due to contact
> with Brahman,
> boundless happiness. (BG 6.28)

It is in this manifestation of the divine, known as Brahman, that the human heart evolves to total acceptance and tranquility. Now the human heart can let be what is. The heart now knows a level of humility that includes the blissfulness of serenity. It is the experience of a divine union as a deeply interconnected being that is part of all Being.

(3) "The Personal Divine Presence," Purusha: In the Fifteenth Chapter of the Gītā, Krishna explains that there are three types of *puruṣas*, or "persons." The first two types pertain to both conditioned and liberated humans. The former is known as the "perishable person" (*kṣaya-puruṣa*) and the latter as the "imperishable person" (*akṣaya-puruṣa,* BG 15.16). The third *puruṣa* pertains to the divinity, known as "the supreme Self" and "the everpresent supreme Lord":

> Yet there is another—
> an ultimate person
> called "the supreme Self,"
> Who, entering into
> the three worlds,
> maintains them
> as the everpresent
> supreme Lord. (BG 15.17)

It is here that the soul perceives the personal presence of the divine in everything and in all living beings. "Vasudeva [the cosmic form of Krishna] is everything!" (BG 7.19) exhorts such a soul. Such a person sees all humans, whether they be fulfilled, miserable, or evil, as the same because they each possess this divine presence, since such a soul possesses a special kind of knowledge that informs the heart:

> Among these,
> the person of knowledge,
> who is constantly absorbed
> in yoga that is solely
> an offering of love,
> is exceptional.
> For I am so dearly loved
> by the person of knowledge,
> and that person
> is dearly loved by me. (BG 7.17)

By now the heart has perceived so strongly the powerful pantheistic presence of supreme being, or supreme existence in Brahman. Such a heart has cultivated a humility of total acceptance, and has also the capacity of heart to be compassionately loving toward all beings. Such a soul can perceive the presence of the One who abides in all beings:

> One who,
> abiding in oneness,
> offers love to me
> as the One who abides
> in all beings,
> In whatever way one
> appears to be living—
> that one is a yogi
> who lives in me. (BG 6.31)

And finally there is such a high degree of empathy in such compassionate love for all beings:

> One who sees,
> by comparison to one's self,
> the same in all [beings],
> O Arjuna,
> Whether it be happiness
> or suffering—
> that yogi is considered
> to be the highest. (BG 6.32)

(4) "The Ultimate Divine Person," Purushottama: The source of the pervasive personal presence of the divine and the source of both Brahman and the Universal Form is the Ultimate Divine Person. This is the highest and yet most intimate and most personal divinity. These different manifestations of the divine are different ways that divinity embraces souls that correspond to souls' capacities to love and embrace divinity. As the previous stage develops "compassion," this stage develops the soul's "passion" for the highest and most intimate form of the divine that one can know. This passion of souls is ignited when comprehending and feeling the passion and desire that divinity has for souls:

> Hear still further
> the greatest secret of all,
> my supreme message:
> "You are so much loved by me!"
> Therefore I shall speak
> for your well-being. (BG 18.64)

Concluding reflections

The passion of souls for the divine, and the passion of the divinity for souls, represents the innermost world of the heart. The achievement here for souls is pure love, and a love that is such a totally self-transforming state of being that one's life in this world or another world makes little difference. The Hindu tradition of the Gītā places the perfection of the heart and divine love far above and away from the evils of this world, which would include terrorism.

And yet there is, in a peculiar sense, an important connection between this most secret, most interior world of the divine and the everyday world in which all humans find themselves. Acts of terrorism and similar acts of evil are tacitly yet monumentally testimonials of a heart that has reached the darkest depths of fear, hatred, cowardice, and even a pleasure in the suffering of others. And those who have suffered at the cowardly hands of evil are themselves the real martyrs of the heart, the true and courageous souls who unwittingly have become participants in a greater world process that ultimately facilitates the evolution of the heart. And thus such persons sacrifice for the freedom required for a heart to offer itself in love for the sake of other hearts.

Divine love, then, is juxtaposed and in sharp contrast to the inevitability of social and political conflict that may require battle, as a last resort. This tension here is most acutely felt in the text of the Bhagavad Gītā and the Mahābhārata story out of which it comes. What is referred to as "terrorism" in the modern age is, according to Hindu traditions, what is born out of an uncontrolled and eruptive fear and hatred that transgresses the Hindu ideal of divine love and all ethical codes concerning conflict and even war, which is always seen as a last resort. With regard to the conflict of war, the tradition seems to consistently express the inevitable futility of it: no one wins, everyone loses. Yet, Hindu theology must make room for the hearts gone bad in this world, as love cannot be coerced, it cannot be forced, it cannot be manipulated nor can it be shaken or taken by anyone. This mixed world, as we have seen, in some sense must have this mixture of good and evil in order to ensure the freedom of the heart.

The message of the futility of war appears to be one of the overarching themes in Hindu sacred literature. Terrorism for the tradition is almost an unthinkable act on a societal and political level. But according to the Hindu vision, terrorism begins with the individual who is him- or herself terrorized by fear, by hatred, and by death, and thus ultimately it is seen as first a personal act. Finally, according to the Hindu vision, the universe is ultimately a loving place. Evil never wins out. There is no such thing as "pure darkness" for the soul, yet there is such a thing as pure light and goodness, or *viśuddha-*

sattva. And the Hindu vision challenges humans to be grateful for all that is good in this mixed world, and if confronted by evil to respond not with retribution. Rather, the tradition calls us to be transformed by a world of beauty and poetry, a world that goes beyond evil—just as the author of the Rāmāyaṇa, Vālmīki, transforms the "angry curse" into "poetic verse."

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[1] India is the birthplace of numerous ancient religious traditions, many of which have not survived throughout time, and others that have flourished to this day. Here I'm including in the phrase "traditions arising from sacred India" not only the traditions that currently make up the Hindu complex of religions, but I am also including the so-called "high traditions" of Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, and even the independent practices of Tantra and Yoga that have often influenced and become an essential part of South Asian traditions.

[2] The meaning "nonviolence" may give the impression, however, that *ahiṁsā* is limited to nonparticipation in physical violence. But its sense also includes nonviolent mental acts or a state of mind. The word *ahiṁsā* breaks down as two parts: the negative prefix *a-* that can be translated as "without" and the qualities indicated by the positive noun stem *hiṁsā*. The word *hiṁsā* possesses meanings that pertain to physical violence, such as "harm" or "injurious," but it also has meanings that pertain to mental states of violence, such as "hostile," "bearing malice," "abusive language," or even "mischief" (Monier Monier-Williams *Sanskrit English Dictionary*).

[3] This approach to nonviolence can be seen especially in the lives of the Buddha in the ancient world and Mohandas K. Gandhi in the modern world.

[4] Ancient Indian society was divided into four major areas of functioning that were compared to the parts of the human body as early as the Vedas. The educating class, or *brāhmaṇas*, were compared to the head of the body or the intelligence of society. The ruling and military or warrior class, *kṣatriyas*, were compared to the powerful arms of the body. Persons in business or trade of all kinds, *vaiśyas*, were compared to the stomach of the body. And the skilled workers who supported the upper three portions of the society, *śudras*, were compared to the legs of society. Each is necessary and constituent to a smoothly functioning society. And it was only the ruling or warrior class who were supposed to engage in acts of violence to protect society. These four divisions of ancient Indian society, or *varṇas*, should not be confused with the oppressive "caste" or *jāti* system that arose more during the much later Muslim period of Indian history.

[5] The story relates that Rāvaṇa was cursed to lose his immortality should he take advantage of any woman. So he would keep a harem from which many women would voluntarily give themselves to him. But Sītā would not be seduced by Rāvaṇa or succumb to the pressure of the other women in the harem to submit. Despite this detail of the story, however, what's relevant to our topic here is effectively what Rāvaṇa achieves by abducting Sītā.

[6] In common parlance, the words jealousy and envy are often employed synonymously or interchangeably. However, our presentation of the two words here requires a strict and clear distinction between the two, to bring out the essential force of each of the two words.

[7] OED describes this special type of bird, known as the crane, with the following: "a tall, long-legged, long-necked bird, typically with white or gray plumage and often with tail plumes and patches of bare red skin on the head. Cranes are noted for their elaborate courtship dances."

[8] Translation mine, and any following translations are also mine. See my *Bhagavad Gītā: The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).

[9] The external dimension of the divine is called *bahiraṅga-śakti*, or literally "the outer realm of the divine energy," by theologians of the Chaitanya school of Hindu-Vaishnava theology, most notably Jīva Gosvāmin and Rūpa Gosvāmin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Bhagavad Gītā itself speaks about or implies (see BG 7.5) these different layers in terms of height, i.e., a lower, higher, and highest realms of divine being. These two ways of configuring the divine layers of reality can or should also be understood together: the outer world is the lowest; the inner world is the higher; and the innermost world is the highest. Additionally, I have explored yet a third way, as degrees of divine secrecy, to understand these layers (see the section entitled, "Textual Illuminations" in my *Bhagavad Gītā: The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song* [New York: Harper Collins, 2007]). The "great secret" corresponds to the outer world and the Universal Form; the "greater secret" corresponds to the inner world and the Brahman and the Puruṣa; and "the greatest secret of all" (see BG 18.63-64) corresponds to the innermost world of the Puruṣottama, or the Ultimate Divine Person.

[10] Many 20th century Western interpreters of the Bhagavad Gītā have considered the Universal Form of Krishna to be the Gītā's ultimate presentation of the divine, the climactic portion of the text. I have shown in my translation and interpretation that this is highly unlikely to be the case if one takes seriously what the text itself says. By the end of the Eleventh Chapter, Krishna explains that his most intimate humanlike form is his highest divine form, which is rarely seen and attained. Moreover, it is Arjuna who begs Krishna to show his Universal Form to him no longer. While he may have found it fascinating and amazing, it ultimately was unattractive and too daunting and overwhelming. For example, Rudolf Otto, in his work, *The Idea of the Holy*, interprets the Universal Form as demonstrative of his key formula of the divine, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.