

Bhagavad Gita

Introduction to The Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita teaches us how to live happily in this world. It is an ancient holy book of Hindu Dharma (also known as Sanātana Dharma or Hinduism), and it can be understood and followed by people of any faith. Any spiritual aspirant will find guidance in the teachings of The Bhagavad Gita. The Gita has eighteen (18) chapters and a total of only 700 verses.

The word ‘Bhagavad’ means God or The Supreme Lord, also Bhagavān in Sanskrit. ‘Gita’ means song. Thus, The Bhagavad-Gita means the Song of God or the Sacred Song, because it was sung by Bhagavān Shri Krishna himself.

Here is the introduction to the Gita:

In ancient times there was a king who had two sons, Dhritarāshtra and Pāndu. Dhritarāshtra was born blind; therefore, Pāndu inherited the kingdom. Pāndu had five sons. They were called the Pāndavas. Dhritarāshtra had one hundred sons. They were called the Kauravas. Duryodhana was the eldest of the Kauravas.

After the death of king Pāndu, his eldest son, Yudhisthira, became the lawful King. Duryodhana was very jealous, he wanted the kingdom. The kingdom was so divided into two halves between the Pāndavas and the Kauravas. Duryodhana still was not satisfied with his share. He wanted the entire kingdom for himself. He tried several evil plots to kill the Pāndavas and take away their kingdom. Somehow he took over the entire kingdom of the Pāndavas and refused to give it back without a war. All peace talks by Lord Krishna and others failed, so the big war of Mahābhārata could not be avoided.

The Pāndavas didn’t want to fight and were willing to live respectfully even if they got 5 villages to rule, but Duryodhana left them with no alternatives but a war. The entire eighteen chapters of the Gita are the talk between confused Arjuna and his best friend, mentor and cousin, Lord Krishna --- an incarnation of God --- that took place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra near New Delhi, India, about 5,100 years ago. This conversation was reported to the blind king, Dhritarāshtra, by his charioteer, Sanjay.

All lives, human or nonhuman, are sacred, and nonviolence or Ahimsā is one of the most basic principles of Hinduism. So when Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to get up and fight, it may confuse us about the principle of Ahimsā if we don’t keep in mind

the background of the war of Mahābhārata. The battle was not for personal gain, it signifies truth over evil, the battle for righteousness.

This spiritual talk between the Supreme Lord, Krishna, and His devotee-friend, Arjuna, occurs not in a temple, a lonely forest, or on a mountain top, but on a battlefield on the eve of a war. Arjuna's questions represent our confusions, and the teachings of The Bhagavad Gita are thus the answers for the confusions of all human beings.



The Gita Jayanti, or the birthday of the Bhagavad Gita, is celebrated throughout the World by all the admirers and lovers of this most sacred scripture on the eleventh day (Ekadashi) of the bright half of the month of Margaseersha (December-January), according to the Hindu almanac. ***The Gita is a source of power and wisdom. It strengthens you when you are weak, and inspires you when you feel dejected. It teaches you to embrace righteousness and resist unrighteousness. Living on high moral values is humanity but liberation can be attained only by following the teachings of The Bhagavad Gita.***

It is a matter of great regret that many young men and women of India know very little of this most unique scripture. One cannot consider oneself as having attained a good standard of education if one does not have a sound knowledge of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. All post-graduate knowledge, all research in universities is mere husk or chaff when compared to the wisdom of the Gita.

Mere talks or lectures will not help us in any way. It is said in The Bhagavad Gita, to live in the spirit of the teachings of the Gita, means “Perform thou action, remaining united with Me at heart”.

GITA MAHAATMYA (Glory of The Gita)

(1) He who studies this Gita scripture with humility is freed from fear and misery and attains the feet of Lord Vishnu.

(2) That person who is in the habit of reading the Gita and who is also devoted to practicing praanayama (breathing exercises) is not touched by sins, even those done in his previous birth.

(3) Human beings must bathe in water every day to get rid of the dirt (of the body), but bathing in the water of the Gita regularly is necessary to get rid of the dirt of this samsara (cycle of birth and death).

(4) This Gita which has come out of the lotus-like face of the Lord (He who has the lotus in His navel) and which is so melodious, should be studied. There is no need to study any other scriptures in detail, the Gita should be studied in detail.

(5) After drinking the water of the Gita which is the nectar of the entire Bhaarata (the epic Mahabharata) and which has come out of the mouth of Vishnu, there is no more birth (in this world).

(6) All the Upanishads are the cows, the one who milks the cows is Krishna, Arjuna (Partha) is the calf. Men of purified intellect are the enjoyers; the milk is the great nectar of the Gita.

(Copied from the book The Bhagavad Gita For Children by Patirica Buehler)

Chapter 1: Arjuna gets confused

It was the first day of battle on the field called Kurukshetra. Dhritarashtra was eager to see what was going to happen, but since he was blind, he asked Sanjaya to tell him everything that he saw.

Sanjaya looked intently at the field. The first thing he saw was Duryodhana talking to his guru Drona. Duryodhana pointed out the greatest fighters on his side, the Kaurava's side. They were Bhishma, Karna, and many others. He noticed that the Kauravas had many more soldiers than the Pandavas, and he felt confident of winning the war.

Suddenly Bhishma blew his conch. Drums were heard. Krishna, Arjuna and the other sons of Kunti blew their conches. It was a great roar of sound.

Arjuna said to Krishna, "O Achyuta" (Achyuta is a very respectful name meaning that Krishna was divine like a god) "bring the chariot to an open space between the two armies. I want to see the enemy. I want to see those who have taken the side of the evil Duryodhana."

Krishna drove the chariot to the middle of the field. He stopped in front of the place where Bhishma and Drona stood ready in their chariots.

Arjuna looked very carefully at the enemy. First he saw his grandfather Bhishma and his teacher Drona, two elders he loved very much. He looked past them and he saw more of his relatives. He saw his uncles, cousins, and friends. These were all people he had been very friendly with in the past.

Suddenly Arjuna was confused. He felt strange. He was not sure if he really wanted to fight with his relatives. Many new thoughts troubled his mind. Arjuna began to feel dizzy. His arms were shaking. His hands were sweating. His bow slipped out of his hand. He had to sit down. He began to explain to Krishna what was happening to him.

“I don’t know if this war is a good idea,” said Arjuna. “Why was I so eager to win? Did I want to be a powerful or a wealthy ruler? It does not seem right to kill my relatives for that. Or, maybe I was thinking that I would go to heaven if I won in battle. Now it looks like I would be committing a sin if I killed these people. Anyway, how could we ever be happy even if we won the war? The whole family would be destroyed. When the family is destroyed the society is also ruined. Then there is crime on the streets. There are all kinds of other evils because people forget what is right or wrong. Religion will be forgotten. Then the people will go to hell. All this will happen because of me!”

Arjuna was so troubled by these thoughts that he dropped his bow and arrows. He sat down in the chariot with his head in his hands.

Chapter 2: Wise Advice

After Arjuna sat down in the chariot, tears were all over his face. Krishna thought that it was time to say something.

“What is happening to you, Arjuna? This distress is disgraceful in a warrior like you. Do not give in to weakness. It is not like you to feel cowardly. Stand up, you are the one who defeats the enemy!”

Arjuna was startled by these words of Krishna. He did not think he was being a coward or weak. He began to explain to Krishna why he felt the way he did, hoping he would understand better.

“Don’t you see, Krishna, that I cannot fight Bhishma or Drona? They are great souls. I am not afraid of them, but I am thinking that if I kill them I could never forgive myself. I think it would be better if I gave up my duties as a soldier and started begging for my bread. I don’t know. Whatever happens here on the battlefield seems to be bad. If we win or they win, how does it matter? I am really confused. Am I forgetting my duties, as you say? Please, be my teacher. Tell me what is good for me. You are the only person I trust. As it is now I am feeling miserable about this war. I absolutely cannot fight anymore.”

A sweet smile came across Krishna's face. Here, in the middle of the battlefield, was the place where he would give all his advices that he always wanted to share with Arjuna.

Krishna said, "You consider yourself to be an intelligent person, and yet here you are crying over the fate of these soldiers. Have you forgotten that death is just a stage of life, like birth, childhood, youth and old age? As easily as a man throws away his worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so does he throw away a worn out body and take birth in a new one. A warrior like you should not be worried about every change in life. Pleasures and pains come and go. You do not cry over them. Why get upset about death? The real self, called Atman does not die. Weapons do not cut Atman into pieces. Fire does not burn Atman. Water does not wet Atman. Wind does not dry Atman. You should seek to understand that this Atman is beyond all the changes one can possibly think. Most people do not understand Atman at all, even after they hear about it."

Then, seeing that Arjuna was not uplifted by talk of Atman, the undying self, Krishna tried another way to get his attention.

"You asked about your duties, O Arjuna. You are a soldier. Your duty is to fight for a good cause. Surely you do not doubt that you are fighting for justice! If you find any reason to avoid this duty, people will consider you a coward. They will say that you ran away from your duties out of fear. They will laugh at you. The enemy will insult you. What could be more painful than that?

Whether you win or lose, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you did the right thing. Do not worry about winning or losing. Stand up and fight, Arjuna!"

Krishna looked into Arjuna's eyes. He saw a glimmer of hope there, but also a shadow of doubt. Arjuna was not sure if his duty was that simple. Krishna continued:

"Let me tell you more about Self Knowledge. Then you will understand your duty better. If you know who you are, then you will think clearly and decide well, O Arjuna. Those people who run after one desire or another cannot make a wise decision. They argue one way and then another way, because they are looking only for pleasure or power or fame. They cannot know what real duty is, because they are always concerned about getting a reward for what they do.

"You are right, Arjuna, duty is not such a simple thing. You have to have some even-mindedness to do your duty well. You have to get away from likes and dislikes, and think about your ultimate goal. What you need is yoga, the goal of becoming one with God. What you need is Karma Yoga, the path of action."

Then Arjuna was eager to ask a question. Krishna listened carefully. Arjuna said: "A man who has Self-Knowledge, who understands Atman, I am curious to know about him. How does he talk? How does he look? How does he act? Can I recognize such a man?"

Krishna smiled again. Arjuna had been his friend for a long time, but he had never asked such a question. Arjuna thought he knew what a true saint looked like. A

saint recited the Vedas, and said prayers on his beads. Now Arjuna started to wonder if his own friend Krishna had been a saint all along, and he had not noticed.

Krishna said, “I will simply tell you what makes one a true saint. He has no desires that are unsatisfied. He is completely happy all by himself. You will notice that he does not get upset when things go wrong, nor is he eager for things to go his way. He is not afraid of anything. He never gets angry. A saint looks like a turtle. Yes, a turtle, because he can withdraw his eyes and ears and other senses away from the world, just like a turtle pulls its limbs into its shell.

“The senses are a problem for mankind, Arjuna. Let me tell you why that is so. First a man gets attracted to something that he sees or hears or tastes or touches. He cannot get that attractive object out of his mind. He keeps thinking about it until he is sure that he wants to possess it. Then, when he gets hold of it he wants it to make him happy. But it does not quite satisfy him. Some problem comes along and he begins to get frustrated and angry. Then he gets desperate and he forgets all the wise advice he had heard. He does something very foolish. He gets in trouble. In the end he is sorry he got so carried away. That is what the uncontrolled senses do to a person. He is tossed by his feelings like a ship is tossed about in a stormy sea.

“The saint is just the opposite in his behavior. He is peaceful. He is very peaceful. He is contented. He is happy no matter what happens. Arjuna that is the power of Yoga. The saint is a yogi. He is the only happy person.”

Chapter 3: The Path of Action

“It seems to me,” said Arjuna to Krishna, “that you are telling me to do two opposite things. You say I must fight, and then you say that I should be wise and control my senses. I am interested in becoming wise like a saint. Tell me more about that.”

“Well, Arjuna, there are different kinds of people in this world. Some like to think, and others like to be active, but no one does just one or the other. A man cannot just think. He has to act. If he thinks he can avoid problems by not doing anything, he is mistaken. Sooner or later his mind will lead him into trouble. Everyone who has a body has to act, just to take care of himself. It is much better to be active than to be careless and lazy.

“Let me tell you the secret of wise action. When God created this universe, he made a law for all people to follow. It is called the law of sacrifice. Human beings worship Gods. They offer food to the Gods. This is a sacrifice. The Gods are pleased with these unselfish actions and they send rain in the proper season. The rain makes the crops flourish, and there is plenty of food. Man is rewarded with all that he desires. The whole earth is in harmony because of the sacrifice of each creature. This is the path that leads to God.

“Only foolish creatures would try to enjoy this world without giving anything back. They cook food only for themselves, and the result is selfishness and evilness.

“Of course, the saint who has no desires does not have to do anything. Yet, he does act with an attitude of sacrifice. He wants to show other people how to work without selfishness. That is exactly what I am doing, Arjuna. I don’t need to drive your chariot. I do it to show you that all activities are noble. If I sat on the sidelines you would think that work was for low-born people. I want to show you that work is the path to wisdom.”

“Krishna, are you saying that I have to fight and also have an attitude of sacrifice?” asked Arjuna

“Others are fighting for selfish reasons. They are greedy, or angry, or eager for the competition to fight. Fight because that is what you do best in. That is your own Dharma, your job. You are not a saint or a beggar, Arjuna. You have been trained to defend the good people of this land. Your job may be full of problems, but it is better to do that than to do anyone else’s job. You will get confused by doing someone else’s duty. I want you to have faith in my wisdom. I would not allow you to do a wrong thing.”

Arjuna had another question. “What makes a person do evil deeds, Krishna? Is it his evil nature that drags him down?”

“Desire and anger are the enemies,” said Krishna. “The wisdom inside is buried under so many desires that can never be satisfied. To overcome these strong desires a man must use his reason. He must have knowledge of his higher self, the Atman. That is the only way to destroy evil.

Chapter 4: The Sword of Knowledge

Krishna wanted Arjuna to know that Yoga was not a new idea. “This Yoga which I am talking about is very old, Arjuna. I myself taught it to the sun god Vivasvat. He taught it to Manu, the ancient sage. Manu taught it to Ikshvaaku, your noble ancestor. For a long time the knowledge was passed down from teacher to students, but eventually it was forgotten. Arjuna, I have decided to revive the knowledge by teaching it to you today.”

Arjuna was puzzled. “What are you saying, Krishna? You are the same age as I am, and yet you taught the sun god who goes back to the beginning of time?”

“Oh!” laughed Krishna, “You do not know it, but we both have been born many times, Arjuna. You have forgotten all your previous births, while I remember each one of them. Whenever evil takes over the world I am born to protect the good and to destroy the wicked. Those who recognize me as the Avataar, the Divine Being in human form, are freed from all miseries.

“Of course most people worship God only for their personal desires. For them the path of action, Karma Yoga, is best. There are many things to be learned from action. First of all a person has to learn to avoid actions that are wrong. Then he learns that activity is not always what it appears to be. Sometimes a person who seems to be doing nothing can be really very active, while an active person can be doing nothing.”

“What do you mean?” asked Arjuna.

“What I mean is this: If a person is not eager for rewards, if he is content and unconcerned about the results of his actions, he is really not doing anything. He does not have to worry if things go wrong. He does not have to worry about making mistakes. He thinks of God as the doer of all. He offers his services to God.

“Just as a priest offers butter to the gods in the sacrificial fire, so the wise man offers himself to God through his activities. When he is enjoying sights and sounds he thinks that is how God wants it to be. He thinks of his wealth as God’s wealth. If he is poor, poverty is his offering to God. He studies for God’s sake. He eats only what he thinks God would like him to eat. But the best offering a person can make to God is the offering of knowledge, Arjuna.”

“How does one offer knowledge to God?” asked Arjuna. “When a man, like you, wants to know about the truth, that is the sacrifice of knowledge. Humbly seeking a wise person for help, he bows down and cooperates with his teacher so that he can learn about the laws of God. This is a great sacrifice, Arjuna! Not many people are willing to admit that they don’t know the purpose of life. They are confused, but they don’t like to say so. They want to appear intelligent, even if they are not.

“I tell you, Arjuna, that any sincere person who comes to Me (God) for knowledge is the wisest of all men. If he has done evil deeds in the past, he need not have any fear. His determination to change his life will destroy all his evil. If he has faith in Me (God) or in his teacher, he will have peace of mind right away.

“Do not doubt what I am saying to you, Arjuna. When you perform actions the way I explain, a great weapon will come into your hands – a sword called KNOWLEDGE. With that sword you will cut through ignorance, misery, doubt and confusion in one stroke. You will stand up and be a hero inside, where it really matters.”

Chapter 5: How to Live in this World

Arjuna said, “I am not sure which kind of life is best for me. A Sanyasi(sanyaasi) leaves his family and friends. After getting instructions from a guru he practices spiritual disciplines. Is that what I should do? Or should I go into battle as you have said?”

Krishna said, “Arjuna, for you I am recommending the battlefield. I will tell you why. A man who leaves his family is called a Sanyasi. He has lost all interest in the activities of this world. He has no likes or dislikes. He can seek God in his meditation. You will not be able to meditate like a Sanyasi until you do Karma Yoga.

To practice Karma Yoga you must get your senses under control. You must try to be calm in the mind, and avoid selfishness in your actions. When this happens you will have less egoism. You will not be running after desire. You will be like the lotus leaf in the water. Have you seen how the drops of water fall off its smooth surface? Though it lives in water, it is always dry. In the same way you can live in this world and be unaffected by its agitation. You want to become a Yogi. You are going to live in this world and learn to be detached and peaceful.”

Arjuna said, “How is it, that there are a few wise Yogis in the world while everyone else is so foolish and ignorant? Does God want people to be stupid?”

“No,” laughed Krishna. “God does not favor some people over others. He loves all. He shines like the sun over the whole Earth. It is not the sun’s fault if people choose to hide themselves from him.”

“Let me tell you what happens to the wise Yogi who seeks knowledge of God. He becomes a perfect human being. His faults disappear. He sees everything in this world as God’s creation. He does not think that there is any difference between a very respectable man, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or a beggar. He is not overjoyed at getting pleasant things, nor does he complain about getting what is unpleasant. He is always happy in the thought of God. He does not get angry. He does not hope to get anything in this world. He loves all people and wishes them well. His knowledge is called Self-Knowledge, because feelings of fear, desire, or anger do not control him. When he fixes his mind on God he leaves this external world behind. Even while he is in his body he experiences the bliss of God’s companionship. When he dies he is free and peaceful forever.”

Chapter 6: The Yoga of Meditation

Krishna said, “I want to tell you one more thing about the Sanyasi, the Yogi, or the man of God. It is not enough that he gives up his worldly duties and tries for the religious life. He must give up his desires for worldly success. He must be unselfish in his duties until all his desires are gone. Then he is ready for the Yoga of Meditation.

Arjuna this is something that a person must do by himself only. No one can do it for him. Each person is his own best friend or his own worst enemy. If he can control his desires he is a friend of himself. If his desires are out of control he drags himself down like an enemy. Self-discipline is very important.

A Yogi must be able to look at expensive gold pieces with the same attitude that others look at stones or clods of dirt. He must not be partial to his relatives and friends. He should treat all the people he meets with the same friendly concern. Then only is he ready to get rid of his possessions and live a solitary life.

The Yogi finds himself a quiet place to sit. There he practices the Yoga of Meditation as often as he can. He sits straight and still, turning his mind away from outside distractions. He thinks of God. He is peaceful and without fear. He has set his mind on reaching God. He would not think of trying for any other goal. The Yogi does not eat too much, or sleep too much, or get too much exercise. He does not deprive his body of these needs, either. He trains his mind to concentrate on the God within. His mind becomes as steady as the flame of a lamp that is set in a windless place so it does not flicker.

At first the Yogi feels contended. Then, with practice he feels a great inner happiness. He does not think about sense enjoyments anymore. He thinks that there is no greater enjoyment than real meditation. Even if great troubles come to him he does not want to give up his practice.

Then little by little, he gets closer to his goal. He thinks only of God. He does not allow his mind to wander after any other thought. Constantly meditating like this he experiences the bliss of Brahman. He touches God and becomes one with him. It is an inner experience of endless joy that cannot be described.

After he experiences God within himself, then he sees God in every person. Wherever he goes and whatever he does, he feels connected to God. He does not feel that the pleasure or the pains of other people are different than his own. He feels that all people are the same in God.”

Arjuna had been listening quietly. Now, when Krishna paused he was eager to interrupt with a comment. “Krishna, you make Yoga sound very easy, like going from one step to another, but I did not find it so. When I went up to the Himalayas to meditate on Lord Shiva I found my mind to be as restless as the wind. Because I had such a strong desire to obtain Shiva’s powerful weapons my mind was able to concentrate for a few hours at a time. I do not know if I could even do that well in other circumstances.

“Certainly the mind is restless,” said Krishna, “but you will learn to control it by the right method. You must practice meditation over and over again. You must also control your desire for all kinds of temporary rewards and pleasures. Believe me; meditation can be done if you are determined to learn it.”

“There is one more thing that bothers me,” said Arjuna. “What happens to a person if he doesn’t succeed at meditation? I have been wondering about this for a long time. What if a person gives up a good career as a soldier to become a Yogi, and then fails at Yoga? It seems to me that he would miss both paths. He would not have enjoyed the pleasures of the world and he would not get the bliss of seeing God either.”

“Arjuna, I am glad you asked that question. Do not forget the answer I am giving you: THE DOER OF GOOD NEVER COMES TO GRIEF. Do you understand what that means? I would never allow a person who dedicates time to me to lose anything. He does not lose anything in this life or the next life. If he misses any joy in life, he gets it in heaven later. Then he is reborn into a family of good and prosperous parents. Better still, he may be born to parents who themselves practice Yoga, although they are hard to find. With his family to encourage him he remembers his love for God and he starts to meditate on me again. Soon he regains all the ability he had in his former body. For however many births it takes, I make sure he finally reaches his goal.”

“You must not get discouraged, Arjuna. The Yogi is closer to Me than all the religious people who practice for the sake of worldly rewards. I want you to be a Yogi, my friend.”

Chapter 7: The bliss of knowledge

Krishna said, “Listen closely, Arjuna. I want to explain to you the bliss of knowledge. There is a kind of knowledge which, when you get it, you do not need to know anything else in this world. You will become happy all the time, like Me.

“Maybe only a few thousand people in the world know about this Knowledge. Out of those, maybe only one makes a serious effort to control his senses and get rid of his faults. Out of those who succeed in becoming real devotees, again, maybe only one gets The Bliss of Knowledge.”

Arjuna was rather surprised that this knowledge Krishna mentioned was so rare and difficult to achieve. Seeing his reaction, Krishna said, “Think about everything a person has to know, Arjuna. First he learns all about this world, everything that can be seen or heard, touched or otherwise understood. He learns through feelings and through reason. He understands his place in this world as a human being. All that is just lower knowledge. The knowledge I am talking about begins when a person thinks about his place in this whole universe. He begins to wonder who created all this, why he is here, and when it will come to an end. Then he has a little glimpse of Me. He sees that these worlds are just small pearls strung together on an invisible string, which is in the mind of God.

Look for me everywhere, Arjuna. In water, for instance, I am the pure taste that refreshes you so much when you drink it. I am the brilliant light of the sun or the moon. I am the beautiful sound of ‘OM’ that has no particular meaning, but begins all holy prayers. I am what we call good character in human beings. I am the fresh smell of the newly turned soil. I am life itself. I am also the suffering that turns life into a sacrifice for the good of all.

Look for the meaning in things. That is how you will get to know Me, Arjuna. I am creation, beauty, intelligence, and desire, but you must not be fooled by the appearance of these things. You must not think that just by enjoying these wonderful things you know Me.”

Arjuna looked puzzled, and Krishna laughed a little when he continued. “When this world was created it was called Maya (Maayaa), which means an illusion, a trick to fool the eye, Arjuna. Once your attention is fixed on this Maya it is very hard to see the Lord behind it. There is only one way to see behind the Maya; that is to seek refuge in Me. Ask the lord himself to help you. Become devoted to me, Arjuna, and I will show you how to cross over all your difficulties.”

There was a pause of silence. Arjuna felt his love for Krishna welling up in his heart. He wanted to say something, but he did not have the words to express what he felt.

“There are four types of good people who worship Me,” continued Krishna. The first is the man who is in distress. He is desperate for relief from sickness, pain, or some worldly trouble, and so he prays to Me. A second type seeks wealth. He has discovered that the Lord is the source for all wealth, and so he wastes no time getting me to help him succeed in life. A third devotee is the seeker of knowledge. He is curious about the way God runs this universe, and he wants to understand his place in the Divine Plan. A fourth devotee is called Jnani (Gyaani). He is the wise person. He knows who I am and he is constantly devoted to Me.

I love all types of devotees, Arjuna, but the rarest of all is the Jnani, his great soul who takes refuge only in Me. I consider him to be my very Self.

I encourage the faith of all devotees, however they understand me. I give them what they pray for, even if it is a temporary desire. I know that Maya fools the devotees. It makes them pray for a little happiness when I am ready to give them unending bliss. They cannot help it. They forget as they travel from birth to birth that they have prayed to me many times for such things. Each new birth brings new desires.

But the Jnani is different, Arjuna. He prays for the end of all ignorance. He wants to realize Me as the Adhibhuta, the Adhidaiva, and the Adhiyajna. He struggles for the bliss of knowledge. He is eager to know Me even at the hour of his death.

Chapter 8: Brahman is forever

Arjuna said, “What were those strange words you just talked about? Please explain them Krishna. What is Adhibhuta? Was the other word Adhidaiva? I have never heard of them. When you talk about Brahman and Atman I am not sure what you mean. Also, please explain how a person can know you at the time of death. I have not heard that before.”

“Very Well, Arjuna, let us start with the word Brahman, said Krishna. “Brahman is the highest idea of existence. Brahman is forever, unchanging, existing at all times and everywhere. Now, when it seems to be part of an individual person, we call such a spark of creation Atman, Self, or Aadi-Atman, the superior self. Bhuta means creatures. Aadi-Bhuta is God in creation, as in the water, the fire, or the Earth. Daiva refers to the gods, the divine beings. Aadi-Daiva simply means the highest personality, the divine nature. Now do you understand the word Aadi? It means the highest, the Supreme, in anything.

If any person who is about to die remembers Me alone, he reaches Me after death. This is a fact, Arjuna. Whatever a person thinks about in his last moment that is the thought that has dominated his whole life that is where he begins his next life.

It is not easy to think only of Brahman, but that is what the Yogi tries to do. He meditates his whole life with the hope that when he dies he will be able to meditate. There is no more blessed death than that.

In meditation a person knows all the changes that are taking place in the body. He feels his senses shut down one by one. His mind becomes calm, and all his energy is gathered into his head. When he is ready to leave the body he hears the sacred sound of OM. Then, leaving behind the body, his soul reaches the highest perfection and is forever free.

Of course, only a person who has thought of Me every day of his life can hope to have Me on their mind during death,” added Krishna. “Tell me what happens to the others when they die”, said Arjuna.

“That depends on how you count the time, Arjuna!” Millions of Earth years are counted as a single Yuga; a thousand Yugas is but single day for Brahma. Another thousand Yugas are his night. Creatures are born countless times during Brahma’s day, and when the god of creation sleeps, their existence ends also, until the coming of another day. From Brahma’s point of view, no one ever dies really. They remain forever part of Brahma’s Universe.

A few souls escape the cycle of births. They go beyond this universe where there is no birth or death. They merge in Atman, in Brahman, and in Me. Those few souls, the Yogis, travel on a special journey after death. For them death is a time and place of light. They see the sun and the full moon lighting their way. They have no fear and so they do not return.

For those who will be reborn, death takes on a dark, misty appearance. They stumble over a dimly lit path. Seeing nothing better than this universe, which is a reflection of Brahman, they return.

So you see Arjuna, the fate of a dying man depends on many things. He must have light to see where he is going. To have light he must do good deeds all his life, without expecting rewards for the good he does.”

Chapter 9: The best kept secret in religion

“Arjuna”, said Krishna, “You have put forth no arguments to anything I have been telling you. I am pleased; for this shows what faith you have in my words. This makes me want to tell you the best kept secret in religion, the knowledge that frees you from all evil.”

“First, you notice that I have been referring to Myself as Brahman, the invisible spirit behind all beings. This is to show you how far removed I am from the ideas and activities of men. All creatures exist because of Brahman, but He does not exist because of them. Creatures come and go, they are stirred to life and its many activities, and then they are sent on their journey of death. None of this happens to Brahman. He is unattached. He sees all that happens in the world, but He is not in anyway changed by it.”

“Very few people understand Me as Brahman, the one who is unattached. They look at me as a human being with ambitions like their own. ‘Krishna’ is only a prince to them. That is why you see them fighting me, or arguing with me for this or that reason. What wisdom can I give to fools like that?”

“It is the great souls who benefit from my presence here on earth. They catch a glimpse of the Divine in Me. They worship Me, each in their own way. Some of them come to Me for advice, as you have, Arjuna. Others bow down to Me as a God. Some perform rituals in my name; some repeat My name as a holy mantra. Some honor Me as their divine Father or Mother. Some regard me as ‘OM’, or one of the holy Vedas in human form. It does not matter how you worship Me, Arjuna. I am all these things and more. I am your True Friend, or the very Goal of life, if you like.”

“The secret is to worship Me and to forget your little human self. Let me give you an example, Arjuna. There are some very religious men who have learnt the Vedas and who know how to perform the ancient rituals. They worship Me, but their intention is to enjoy the world of heaven when they die. They believe there will be many pleasures to enjoy in the heaven of the Gods, which is why they are so particular about following all the rules of their religion. Surely they go to the heaven they hope for, and they enjoy themselves there until their merits are used up. It is like a vacation, Arjuna! The good works they have done on earth are like the money saved up for their heavenly vacation. When the money is gone they have to return to earth and start working all over again. These good people come and go like that, life after life.”

“So different is my devotee who loves Me without any selfish desires. It does not matter what he chooses to call Me, or what religion he holds dear. It is his attitude that I notice. He does not ask Me for favors, either here on earth or on heaven. Yet, I am eager to provide for his comfort and security. The true devotee offers Me some small thing such as a fruit, a flower, or even just a little leaf or a bit of water. How eagerly I accept his offering, because his heart is pure. It is a loving heart that moves

Me, Arjuna. Whatever you do, whether it is a feast or a ritual, a gift to give, or some suffering to endure – do it for the love of Me. There is no better way to come close to Me, no easier way to satisfy every desire in your heart. This is the only way to be free of the endless job of doing good works to earn merits for heaven.”

“One more secret I must tell you, Arjuna. Merits don’t mean much to me. If a very sinful man suddenly turns his mind towards Me with the intention to become My devotee, I count him as already among the best of men. You should not judge a person by his past actions. If he is genuinely sorry for the evil he has done that person will soon do only good actions, and he will be peaceful ever after.”

“As I told you before, Arjuna, My devotee does not fail. By devotion to Me even women and men who are uneducated in the practice of religion are able to attain the highest goal. How easy it should be for those who are trained by holy men and the example of the saints.”

“Fix your mind on Me, Arjuna. Be devoted to Me. Sacrifice for My sake. Bow down to Me with all your heart. You will be part of Me and I will be part of you. That should be your goal.”

Chapter 10: The glory of god

Krishna said to Arjuna, “You seem so delighted when I talk about my divine nature. I will tell you things about Myself that even the Gods and the wise men do not know. How can any creature know me when I am the creator of all creatures? I am the one who created the Seven Great Rishis. These were the first divine creatures that in their turn created intelligent beings that had all the virtues they needed to live in this unpredictable world. Do you see, Arjuna, how all the lesser creatures evolved from this great power of mine? Devotees understand this spark of divinity in all creatures. They feel, that man must be closer to a god than to an animal. Men and women who worship Me are trying to express their own divine nature. Seeing this, I encourage them. I give them visions of greater things to come.”

“You certainly inspire divine feelings in me,” said Arjuna. “I have never felt so close to God as here on the battlefield listening to you. I do not doubt that you are as great as you say you are. What ignorance that I have thought of you merely as my cousin. Henceforth I will think of you as Purushottama, the Supreme Being. When you speak to me I will think of what a great favor you are doing to me. I will not call you ‘Krishna’, but rather ‘Bhagavan’, divine Lord. How can I begin to meditate on You, my Lord? What images, what forms, what symbols can I use to remind myself of your greatness?”

“Those images are endless, but I will give you a sample,” said the Lord. “First of all I am the Self in all beings. Remember that, No creature is born or lives or dies without Me knowing it. I am, of course, the greatest of the Gods, Vishnu who

preserves all life. In this solar system I am the sun. Among other heavenly bodies you can think of Me as the full moon.

“Looking at your own senses, Arjuna, you can worship Me as the all-knowing mind. Among all living creatures I am awareness. If you are thinking of the ancient stories of the gods and demons, you can think of Me as the most powerful character in the story. Mount Meru was the great mountain peak which was believed to be the center of the world. You can think of Me that way.

“Of bodies of water, I am the ocean. Of all sounds, I am ‘OM’. Among sacrifices I am japa, repetition of holy words. Of trees, I am the Ashvatta tree. Of the great sages I am Nârada who constantly sings the glory of God. Among the horses I am Uchchishravas, the divine horse that was a gift to the Gods. You know the stories well, Arjuna. There is a cow called Kâmadhenu and that gives all men what they desire. There is a heavenly elephant called Airavata, and a huge poisonous snake called Vasuki. I am all of these among the various creatures.

“Of forces that like to control nature, I am Yama the god of death. Of forces that cause change, I am Time itself. Of all men who fight with weapons, I am most surely Râma, the defender of Dharma. Among fishes, I am the mighty shark. Among rivers, I am the holy Gangâ. To those who debate, I am reason. Of letters, I am the letter ‘OM’. I am prosperity, fame, memory, and intelligence. Of seasons, I am the flowery season of spring. I am the hope of being lucky. Among those who do what is good, I am Goodness itself. Of secrets, I am the greatest secret, silence. In creation, I am the seed that is the source of every new life.”

“All things, whether they are moving or unmoving, reveal my glory, Arjuna. Whenever you see someone who is beautiful, strong, or successful -- you are seeing the glory of God in his creatures.

“There isn’t time to say more, Arjuna. Besides what good would it do? If I described all the wonders in the universe, it would be no more than a tiny fragment of My Glory.”

Chapter 11: An overwhelming vision

Arjuna said, “I am so grateful for all that you have taught me, my Lord. Now I believe that You are not a human being but the Creator of this whole universe. I wish I could see You in that all-powerful form. Do you think this is possible for me to see you as a Supreme Being? Please show me that form if you think I am worthy to see it.”

“Look at Me, Arjuna. I have many forms of many colors and shapes. Do you see the Gods appear before you? These are things you have never seen before. My body has now become this universe and everything in it -- but wait! You cannot see it with your ordinary human eyes. I will give your eyes the divine power. Now you will see all that I have told you.”

Sanjaya was sitting at a distant edge of the battlefield. He had been given the divine power to understand everything that happened on the field. He overheard the whole conversation between Arjuna and Krishna. He had been repeating every word of it to the blind king Dhritarāshtra. Now he saw the Lord assuming many forms with many eyes and mouths, and having many ornaments and weapons. Lord Krishna was taking on the splendor of the great god Vishnu. His garments flowed all over the sky. Garlands of flowers were everywhere about him. Sanjaya could hardly begin to describe the beauty of it. The blind king got excited and pressed him to give more details. “If there were suddenly a thousand suns in the sky at once, that might be something like what I am seeing now,” said Sanjaya. “The whole universe is visible in this vision of the Lord. Look how Arjuna is overcome by what he sees in front of him! He has lowered his head. He has raised his hands in prayer.”

“O my God,” said Arjuna, “Can what I am seeing be true? You are all the Gods and all beings. Wherever I look I see your arms and stomachs, mouths and eyes. There is no beginning and no end to You, Universal Lord! My eyes can hardly endure the intense light all around You. Your crown and Your weapons are dazzling. A burning fire comes out of Your mouth heating everything. There is no space, where you are not present. Seeing this, who would not be full of fear, O Great Lord? No wonder the saints praise You! Even the gods praise You! I can see them chanting holy mantras as they look up at Your many limbs and those terrifying tusks that protrude from Your mouth like torches burning up everything they touch.”

“O Lord, my heart is trembling! I can see all the Kauravas rushing into your open mouth. Some of them are stumbling as they fall of Your teeth where you crush them. In spite of this the others run ever faster towards their death! Like a flooding river they rush to their doom. Like moths near the flame they are flying into your burning mouth. You scoop them up as if You are licking your lips with tongues of fire. This is terrifying, O Lord of the Universe! Tell me what is happening. I do not understand this destruction.”

Lord Krishna, speaking in a voice that seemed to be coming from everywhere, said, “I am Time, the greatest destroyer of all things. For these warriors, the enemies of Dharma, Time is putting an end to life. Whether you fight or not, these warriors shall die. So arise and defeat them. Future generations shall praise you. You shall defeat Bhishma and Karna and many other great warriors. Do not fear, Arjuna. I am making you the outward cause of their defeat. All these brave men are already doomed by Me.”

Then Arjuna, overwhelmed with what he saw, began to tremble violently. He bowed low to the ground. His voice was choked with emotion. “O Great God, I bow to You as all the great souls bow to You, the God of gods. I am terror stricken, as all the demons are terrified when they see You. Never have I had such a vision as this. You are greater than Brahmā, Agni, Vāyu, or Yama. Again and again I bow down to You. Namaskār, namaskār a thousand times!”

“I have treated You like an equal, like a friend. I have joked with You, and even insulted You for the sake of a laugh. I have said ‘Hey Krishna’, or ‘Hey Yādava’. I beg You to forgive me, Lord. I did not know your greatness. There is no one equal to You. You deserve the reverence of the most worthy Guru! Therefore I bow down to You and ask for your forgiveness. Be kind to me as a father is to a son, as a friend is to his best friend, and as a lover is to his beloved. I count it to be a great privilege that You have shown me your Glory, Lord, but my mind is overwhelmed with fear. Be merciful to me. I wish I could see you as before, in the form of Krishna I loved and trusted.”

“It has been My Grace that you have seen this universal form, Arjuna, which was meant for you alone. Many men have studied the Vedas, or performed great sacrifices, and given away immense wealth, but they have not been granted this vision. It cannot be won by many rituals or by inflicting oneself with painful disciplines. Remember that it has been given to you alone, and for no reason known to men. Now then, throw off this fear. Be glad at heart, Arjuna. Look, I am the same friend as before.”

When Arjuna looked up he saw Krishna as a human being again. His hair was blowing in the morning breeze. A smile lit his face. Krishna’s hand reached gently to touch Arjuna’s shoulder.

“Thank you, my dear friend! All the terror has suddenly left me,” said Arjuna, with tears of joy glistening on his face.

“Do you want to know why I have allowed you to see this vision, Arjuna? As I just said, if you try to earn it by many holy deeds they would all be useless. The gods in heaven do not see Me as you have, although they would very much wish to. It is your single-minded devotion that has moved me, Arjuna! Those who love Me without concern for anything else, those are the ones that come to Me and receive My mercy.”

Chapter 12: The real devotee

Arjuna said, “Krishna, I have known some devotees of god who do not care for any forms or symbols. They say it is better to worship God as He really is, beyond all our human understanding. I would like to know your own opinion.”

Krishna answered, “I prefer the devotees who worship Me with a steady mind full of faith. Those who worship the Supreme Being as beyond form, unchangeable, unthinkable and if they can control their senses and love other human beings then they are also excellent devotees. The problem is that it is much more difficult for human beings to worship God without form or symbols. That is why I prefer that you think of Me as your Savior, as the Divine Person who will help you to overcome all of life’s

difficulties. If you want to come close to Me you must think of Me all the time. Train your mind to think of nothing else.”

“That sounds difficult,” said Arjuna. “Is there no other way to know You?”

“If your mind wanders on many things then you can practice worshipping Me at a regular time,” said Krishna.

“Even that is hard to do,” said Arjuna.

“Then you can do all your normal activities as an offering to Me. Think that your duties are being done for My sake. If even this is hard to remember, then just surrender your life to Me, Arjuna. Accept whatever happens to you, good or bad.”

“I prefer that you practice devotion with your mind, Arjuna. Do not thoughtlessly follow the rituals that others have taught you. Learn to meditate, if you can. Your goal should be to live your whole life without worry or fear or frustration. Then I count you as a real devotee.”

“Let me tell you how a real devotee behaves, Arjuna. The man who has put all his trust in Me is at peace in this world. He does not hate anyone, or try to get his way with others. He is kind and forgiving of other people’s faults.”

“He is not disturbed by every pain or pleasure that comes his way. He is happy with what he has. He is happy, most of all, to be devoted to Me. He does not complain about the evil in this world. No one can complain about him, either, because he minds his own business and he does not get angry with anyone.”

“He does not run after the glittering objects that the world offers. That makes his mind pure and peaceful. It also frees him to devote himself to unselfish activities and to be a very dependable person. Such a devotee is dear to Me.

“He is polite to his friends and also to his enemies. He does not care for praise or honors. He tends to be a quiet person, and he is not particular about where he lives.

“Those who accept these attitudes as their Dharma, and who have faith in Me, they are all very dear to Me, Arjuna.”

Chapter 13: The difference between body and soul

When the conversation about devotion had ended there was a pause of silence. Arjuna was thinking that he did not want to get back into the chariot too soon. Krishna had told him many things that he had never heard before, but there were other things he had often wondered about. “Please, Krishna, if you think there is time for it, I am hoping that you will give me a certain kind of knowledge,” said Arjuna. “I have learned many things in my life, but I never felt sure that I knew everything I ought to know. That was obvious to me when I had to make a difficult decision. I went to others for advice because I did not know the difference between one choice and another.

“Yes, there are some things you need to know before you can make a wise decision,” answered Krishna. “Let us start with the Kshetra and the Kshetrajna, which means the field and the knower of the field. When you say ‘I’, you often confuse these two. The field is this world, your body, your senses, your feelings and even your thoughts. But the knower of the field is your soul, Atman. Unless you know the difference between these two, you do not know yourself.

“It is your real self that urges you to become a better person, a man of virtue. What causes you to be humble, modest, or forgiving, Arjuna? Have you ever thought? It is not natural for a human being to give credit to someone other than himself, or to be silent about his own abilities, or to forget an injustice. Consider purity or self-control. The man who wishes only to enjoy his body and his senses will have little to do with those virtues. These ideas surely come from Atman, the knower of the field, your true self, Arjuna. When you see a person who can put aside desirable things, you know that Atman is his advisor. He does not live only to take care of his body, his house, his wife, and his children. He does not follow what the crowd does. Rather, he does what most people do not care to do at all: He sits quietly and prays to me. This is what I call knowledge, Arjuna. What is opposite to this, the easy path of pleasure is all ignorance.

“What you need to know, Arjuna, is God. You will not be satisfied knowing just this or that about the world. You want to see God everywhere, in everyone, behind this universe and also beyond it. God seems far, but he is very near to you. He seems lost in all the creatures, but he is the one supporting all of them. He is the Light of lights. Why shouldn’t all the creatures living in the darkness seek to know him? And yet, he is seated in the hearts of all.”

“Can we really know God?” said Arjuna, almost to himself. “Isn’t it hard enough to understand this world?”

“Think of it this way,” said Krishna. “The world, or nature, we call Prakriti. She is like the mother of all creatures. Out of her came all these bodies and senses. God is called Purusha, the father of the universe. He is the reason behind all the pleasure and pain. In this family called creation we want to understand both the mother and the father. If you ask me, ‘Can I know the father?’ I say yes. You can know Him by practicing your religion as I have already taught you. You were born of a mother and a father, and you want to know them both. You are the child of nature, and you are also the child of God. You want to exist everywhere, and in everything, as He does. You want to live forever, as He does.

“Do not doubt that God can be realized, Arjuna. Saints have discovered him. They tell us what their experience is like. Although the world is full of different beings, they see only one being, Brahman. He lives in the bodies, but he is not contaminated by disease, weakness or death. He is like space that is in and around all things but does not touch anything.

“Knowing this difference between the body and the soul is the most important knowledge, Arjuna. If you know this, and if you also know that you can be free from the limitations of Mother Nature, then you can realize God.”

Chapter 14: The Three Gunas

“Let me tell you another very special kind of knowledge,” said Krishna. “When creatures are born into this world they get attached to their bodies. Nature keeps them bound in cycles of birth and death. Souls are free, but they do not understand their freedom because of the three Gunas. Nature has three different qualities that are called Gunas. The three Gunas are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas.

“First let us look at Sattva, the Guna of light, purity and well-being. Having this Guna, human beings become attracted to happiness in the world. They want to know all about the world so that they can enjoy it fully.

“The Guna called Rajas has the quality of passion or intense desire for physical enjoyment. Under the influence of the Guna people become agitated and excited. They become very active so that they can satisfy their desires.

“Tamas is the Guna of ignorance. This Guna leads human beings into error. It makes them careless, sleepy, or lazy.

“So these are the three qualities that rule mankind. Usually one of them is dominant, Arjuna. You will find people, who are mostly Sattvik, and others who are predominantly Rajsik, and a few who would be called Tamsik. It is not hard to see which Guna controls a person. When you see a person who is brilliant, creative, thinks clearly, and is full of knowledge, that is a sign of Sattva. When you see a person who is greedy, active, restless, busy in too many things, and longing for results, that is the sign of Rajas. When you see a person who is dull, idle and irresponsible, that is the sign of Tamas.

“Your dominant Guna is very important, Arjuna. When you die it is your Guna that determines your next life. If you are Sattvik you will go to heaven and you will enjoy the results of many good deeds. If you are Rajsik you shall be born into this imperfect world and you will have to suffer the miseries and sorrows that you deserve. But if you are Tamsik your life will be beast-like and you will fall into great ignorance.

“So you can see, Arjuna that from Sattva comes wisdom, from Rajas comes greed, and from Tamas comes error and ignorance of the lowest kind. People who acquire Sattvik habits go upwards and improve as human beings. Raajasik people remain where they are life after life, not better or worse. Tamas is to be avoided because it drags a person down and degrades him.”

“Sattvik sounds like the best of the three Gunas,” said Arjuna. “Is the Sattvik person dear to you? Does he attain the highest goal and live forever in bliss?”

“Not exactly, Arjuna. You are describing a soul who has gone beyond all the three Gunas, a soul who rises above them all. Sattva helps a person to get closer to that goal, but even Sattva is not enough.

Let me explain it this way: When a Sattvik man does a good deed he enjoys the good results that come later. He would be a little disturbed if the results were not as he expected. He would wonder ‘Why didn’t good results come from the good I have done?’ But the man who rises above the Gunas is not disturbed no matter what happens. He knows that good will result in good, and he isn’t worried about it. If he is getting blamed he doesn’t worry. If he is in pain he doesn’t worry. He does not expect life to be agreeable to him. He does not do this or that activity just to get the attention he wants. To go beyond Sattva Guna means giving up personal happiness, reputation, and the appearance of intelligence. That person is so devoted to Me that he does not care for those things.

“God is greater than goodness, Arjuna. He is beyond all change. He is the only GOOD that never ends.”

Chapter 15: Beyond the Sun, the Moon, and the Fire

Lord Krishna said, “In our religious tradition there is the symbol of the Ashvatta tree. You have seen this tree with its roots hanging down from its branches. It looks upside down, what an interesting symbol this tree is! Let me tell you about it, Arjuna.

“The leaves of the tree are said to be the Vedas, because the verses of the Vedas are as numerous as the leaves. Many scholars say, ‘I know the Vedas’. They know what you would know of a tree if you saw only its leaves. To know the Vedas, The ancient lore of our people, you must see the whole tree.

“The different branches of this tree represent the three Gunas. High in the air is Sattva, and low to the ground is Tamas. All the Gunas are fed by the roots of the tree, which symbolize activities. The best branches produce tender buds that are the attractive objects of this world.

“Few people in the world understand this tree, which is the symbol of life itself. They don’t know where it came from, why it is here, or what will become of it. If they knew those things they would take an axe and cut into the very base of the tree, freeing themselves from its tangle of roots and branches.”

“An axe! Why cut the tree of life?” asked Arjuna.

“The axe is the symbol of detachment,” Krishna answered. “Sometimes, in order to achieve an important goal, you must cut through a lot of useless things that get in your way. Life goes on leading you into one silly activity after another. If you just drift along with it you will never find the time to seek Me. The axe is what you

need to dedicate your-self to Me. Swing it into the root of the tree and kill all your foolish desires in one blow.”

Arjuna looked doubtful as he listened to these words. Krishna paused, and then he continued again. “I am talking about taking a drastic step in your life, Arjuna. This world is full of fascinating objects that deceive you. How hard it is not to run after those things and get attached to them. It is not easy to ignore the promise of pleasure or the threat of pain, but that is just what the seeker of freedom must do. He must look away from this world and seek to reach My Abode which is not lit by the sun, the moon, nor by the fire.”

Again Arjuna was confused. He thought about the sun, the moon, and the fire. He decided that Krishna meant His Abode was far above and beyond anything in this world.

“I keep thinking,” said Arjuna slowly, “that the Lord of this universe is part of His creation. He becomes all the creatures. He hears through their ears and sees through their eyes. All these bodies are His bodies, and He enjoys this world through them.”

“That is true,” replied Krishna. “Now think of where the Lord goes when the creatures die....do you see? The foolish people do not think about that. They get very attached to this world and they do not want the soul to leave it.

“We think of God as the energy behind all forms of life. He is the sun, the moon, and the fire. He is the energy of plants that grow so abundantly. He is the energy in the human body, the beat of your heart, your breath, and even the fire in your stomach. He is the power of thought and memory. All this we have said before, Arjuna. But God is more than all this. He rises high above the glories of this universe.

“When a person worships Me as the Highest Being then he sees the world differently. He has a change of heart. He sees how very unimportant the duties of the world are. He wants only the knowledge of God. He seeks only the love of God. For such a person there are no duties, Arjuna. A person has achieved everything when he has known God.”

Chapter 16: Let Scriptures be the Guide

“Some people are born with the divine qualities of the gods,” said Krishna. “These qualities are fearlessness, purity of heart, and the steady seeking of true knowledge. Such people have many virtues, Arjuna. They are generous in making donations. They control their appetite for pleasure. They practice their religion by service, by study, and by following strict rules of behavior. Godly people are always honest and easy to understand. They prefer to be nonviolent, to tell the truth, and to control their anger. They give up foolish attachments. Their minds are

peaceful. They do not criticize others. They are kind and gentle. They do not boast about their own achievements. They show good manners in all situations. Godly people are strong in character, and yet they are ready to forgive others for weaknesses. They are strong in body and pure in body and mind. You will know these divine beings by the absence of hatred from their minds, and also by the absence of any feeling of superiority over others.

“Opposite to the divine nature in man is the demonic or beastly nature,” continued Krishna. “The demonic person is a show-off. He has an attitude of self-importance and a haughty tendency to think the worst of others. He is easily angry. He is harsh in his speech and manners. His behavior shows his lack of culture, for he is really an ignorant person.

“These two natures I call the divine and the demonic (demon-like). Fortunately you belong to the divine category, Arjuna. Let me describe the demonic temperament in more detail so you can thank God for your good upbringing.

“The demonic person does not know what to do or what not to do. His mind is polluted with wrong ideas. He says to himself: ‘there is no God, no moral law, and no truth in this world. All that matters is survival of the strongest from generation to generation.’ Because he is so narrow minded, the activities of the demonic person bring destruction into the world. He is filled with desires that cannot be fulfilled –like the desire to be very important and yet to act however he pleases, or the desire to appear highborn and yet to trample over the rights of others. His highest aim is for pleasure of the body. He thinks there is nothing else to aim for. Working and striving for success, he uses unjust methods to collect hoards of wealth for his own enjoyment. He keeps hoping that his problems will be solved, but passion, anger and greed bring him even tighter into their grip.

‘Look how much money I made today’, he says to himself. ‘I shall get what I want. All this I own; I will not let any of it go. I am rich. I have status. No one dares to oppose me. Now I can donate a little money to the community and they will think well of me.’ That is how the demonic person behaves. He imagines that others will admire him. He does not know that he is falling into a miserable condition. He becomes conceited, stubborn and addicted to pleasure and wealth. The good deeds he does are a worthless show, full of corruption.

“These evil people are the enemy of others and the enemy of themselves. These are the people who hate other people. I give them what they deserve, Arjuna. They are reborn into families even more wretched. This is the hell created by lust, anger and greed.

“Do not give in to these passions, Arjuna. Do not ignore the scriptures that tell you what is good. Do not act on impulse. Those who act in a fit of passion cannot achieve goodness or happiness. Before you act, consider what your religion tells you. Let the saints guide you. They will help you decide what you ought to do and what ought not to be done.”

Chapter 17: A Question of Faith

Arjuna had a question: “O Krishna, you said it is important to have faith in the scriptures and to act after considering them. What happens if a person has faith in the scriptures but he doesn’t do as they tell him to do? Would he be considered Sattvik, Rajsik or Tamsik?”

“First of all there are three types of faith,” said Krishna. “There is Sattvik, Rajsik, and Tamsik faith. If you want to know what Guna predominates in a person look at his faith. Some people worship the gods, and we say their faith is Sattvik. Others worship deities who behave not much better than human beings, full of revenge and selfishness. Such is the faith of the Rajsik people who are passionate. The Tamsik ones worship ghosts and evil spirits. They engage in violent rituals and torture themselves for the sake of looking religious. This is not correct faith, Arjuna. It is the way demons behave.”

“If you want to understand the three Gunas it would be good to look at some of the more obvious examples,” continued Krishna. “Let us all look at food, rituals, self-discipline, and gifts. Each of these is the three kinds, Sattvik, Rajsik, and Tamsik.”

“First let us all look at Sattvik food. It is the kind of food that gives a person energy, strength, and good health. Sattvik food makes a person feel cheerful. They are juicy, filling and good tasting.”

“Rajsik foods are bitter, sour, salty hot, too spicy or too dry. These foods are difficult to digest. They do not satisfy the appetite and they tend to encourage disease.”

“Tamsik food is stale, tasteless, spoiled or germ filled. It should be called garbage. It is not fit to be eaten.”

“When performing religious rituals Sattvik people follow the traditional rules. They do not expect any particular result, or ask for a favour from God. They believe that rituals are for the good of all men and so they concentrate on doing them well?”

“Rajsik people perform rituals for a selfish reason, having in mind some reward, or just to show others what they can do.”

“Rituals can be Tamsik also! First of all the traditions are ignored and the rules are forgotten. Then the guests are not fed and no gifts are given to them. Prayers are not said, or if they are said no one listens and no one believes that the ritual is a holy event.”

“Next here are several different kinds of self-discipline, Arjuna. There is discipline of the body, the speech and the mind. Each of these can be Sattvik, Rajsik, or Tamsik.”

“Discipline of the body does not mean injury or unnecessary suffering. It means controlling the body’s habits of cleanliness, good posture, moderation in sense of pleasure, and avoiding all violent behaviour. Service done for ones teachers or elders is also an important way to discipline the body.”

“Speech is another kind of self-discipline. It should be truthful, pleasant, and beneficial to others, never loud or agitated. Repeating prayers over and over is speech discipline.”

“Mental self-discipline is done by gentleness, silence and thinking pure and positive thoughts.”

“Now, if any of these disciplines is done steadily, with faith that they will produce some good result, but not with a selfish desire for a particular reward, it is a Sattvik discipline of body, speech or mind.”

“When a person disciplines himself with the idea that others will respect him, honour him with praise, or even show reverence to him by calling him a saintly man—that discipline is for show and it will not last too long. It is Rajsik.

“Discipline is Tamsik when a person will not give it up even though it is harmful to himself. A Tamsik person may even wish harm on others after he becomes powerful through self-discipline.”

“ With gits, Arjuna, we can see that a Saatvik person gives at the right time and in the right place to a deserving person. He does not expect that person to return the favor. He gives because it is his duty to give.

“A Rajsik person is always looking for profit, even when he gives gifts. Either he expects a favor for himself later, or he expects recognition from the public. Usually he finds it hard to part with his possessions or money even then.”

“A Tamsik gift is given at a wrong time and place to a person who doesn’t deserve it. Such gifts are wasted money that ends up in pockets of liars, chapters or fools. A gift given with insult is also of the lowest kind.”

“Now I see that even good activities can be Sattvik, Rajsik, or Tamsik,” said Arjuna. “Can I ever be sure I am doing my duty with the right attitude?”

Yes you can! Listen to this mantra: ‘OM TAT SAT this is the way the followers of Vedic religion focus their minds on the Sattvik attitude in everything they do. First, before any activity is begun, the devotee says ‘OM’. This is to remind us that an activity done with God in mind is holy. The word ‘TAT’ means that. We should not look for rewards for our activities, but we should do them for the sake of ‘That’, which is to please God. ‘SAT’ means the Real or Good. Let us hope that all our activities benefit someone, and that they lead us to Truth and happiness that is real.

“Now Arjuna, to answer your question: if you have faith and you dedicate your activities to the Lord, saying “OM TAT SAT”, you will become a Sattvik person even if you make mistakes now and then. But if you have no faith in what you are doing, the most perfect deeds you do will not count in this life or in the next life.”

“So that means it is important to have faith, to believe that the goodness of God will win out in the end, said Arjuna.

“Yes, that is Sattvik faith, added Krishna.

Chapter 18: Free from all Doubts

Arjuna said: “When you drove the chariot in front of Dronacharya and Bhishma I was ready to give up this war, Krishna. Now I see it all very differently, but I am still not sure about when to give up an activity. When will I stop fighting wars and become a Sanyasi, a man of peace with duties in the world?”

Lord Krishna said: “This is a difficult question you are asking, Arjuna. It will take me a while to explain the answer to you. Listen carefully.

“A sanyasi is a person who gives up activities that arise from desire. He avoids complicated commitments in the life such as marriage, raising a family, serving in government, or advancing in a professional career. There is another way to give up activities. It is called Tyaaga. A Tyaagi is a person who gets involved in duties but he does not look for selfish rewards.

“Now some people say sanyaasa is best, that a person should avoid all duties. Other say, “What about duties like helping poor or self-discipline? This should not be avoided.” What do you think, Arjuna? I think this idea of giving up activity is not a simple matter. You should not stop good activities like helping the poor, self-discipline and performing religious rituals. Not as long as they help you to be a better person. You should not expect rewards from these activities; however, you should not hope to be powerful, wealthy, or praised by others.

“To know when to give up activity, Arjuna, use the Gunas as a guide. A Tamsik person gives up actions that are his duty to perform. He is deluded by selfish ideas. This is not acceptable behaviour. A Rajsik person gives up activities because they are painful to perform, or because he is afraid of the difficulties he may have. He loses the benefit of such activities. A Sattvik person does his duties, seeing that it needs to be done. He gives up the attachment to activity which makes one nervous or worried about how it will turn out. Also, he does not expect rewards.

“The Sattvik person thinks things through and has no doubts about what he is doing. He does not dislike a disagreeable task. He does not prefer a pleasant task. He understands that no human being can give up all activities, but it is always possible to give up the craving for results.

“Sooner or later all activities must be given up, Arjuna, unless one wants to be born again and go through the same joys and miseries life after life. It is not easy to give up activity because along with the body, the senses and all the conditions that go in to an activity, there is ego. This is the voice inside of you that says ‘I am doing this activity’ this is a mistaken idea. You are not the cause of things happening, Arjuna.

You have only a small part to play in any activity. If you knew that, you would not be so worried about how things are going to turn out in the end.

There are three important things to consider before you give up any activity. The first thing to consider is your knowledge. If your knowledge is Sattvik you will see the oneness of all living things. You will see perfection and harmony in the universe. If your knowledge is Rajsik you will see the world as most people see it – full of many separate beings, each in conflict with the other. If your knowledge is Tamsik you will see one particular or trivial idea as all-important, even when it is not a reasonable idea.

“The second thing to consider is action itself. Sattvik acts are approved by society, and they can be done without selfishness. Rajsik acts take a lot of effort and they tempt the person who has selfish desires. Tamsik acts are carelessly started and turn out to be harmful.

The third thing to consider is your own ego that motivates you to act. If you are not worried with success or failure, and yet you are enthusiastic and dependable, that is Sattvik ego. A Rajsik person is passionate, greedy and selfish. He will get very upset if things do not turn out the way he wants. A Tamsik ego is stubborn in clinging to bad habits. He is undependable, vulgar, lazy and mean.

“Two other important things to think about before you give up an activity is your ability to reason, and your steadiness.”

“When a Sattvik person uses his reason he carefully considers the choices he may have. He thinks about right or wrong, freedom or slavery, courage or fear, getting involved or staying out of trouble. But a Rajsik person cannot reason clearly. He gets confused about what should be done and what should not be done. He misunderstands his duty. A Tamsik person, as you might guess, is totally in the dark. He thinks evil is good and crime is his duty.”

“The Sattvik person is steady because he disciplines himself. He wants to control his mind, his senses and his body. The Rajsik person is steady as long as he sees a reward ahead. The Tamsik person is not really steady, but he is stubborn. He will not give up sleep, fear or bad moods.”

“There is one more evaluation you can make of yourself, Arjuna. It is the matter of happiness. This knowledge of happiness will tell you how soon you will reach your highest goal.”

“When a person seeks happiness that is won after long effort, which brings an end to sorrow, which is bitter like poison at first, but sweet like nectar at the end – that is Sattvik happiness.

“Happiness which comes from the thrill of five senses enjoying sights, sounds touch, taste, or smell, which is very sweet like nectar at first, but later, becomes bitter and painful like poison – that is Rajsik happiness.”

“Happiness which is false in the beginning and false in the end, which comes from sleep, laziness and misunderstanding -- that is Tamsik happiness.”

“Using all this knowledge I have given you, Arjuna, you should be able to decide when to give up an activity. If the problem still troubles you, consider your caste duties and be true to your position in society.

“There are four castes: the Brahmanas (religious leaders), the Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), the Vaisyas (businessmen), and the Shudras (laborers). Each caste has its own duties. The duty of religious leaders is to be good examples of self-discipline and purity. They control their temper, acquire correct knowledge, and try to realize the highest truth. Warriors and rulers should be respectful, courageous and strong. They should be loyal to the right cause, and generous to the needy. Businessmen, whether they are farmers, tradesmen, or merchants, should work for productivity. Laborers should have the attitude of serving society’s needs.

“When every person does his duty, not only does the society benefit, but each person betters himself. Remember what I told you, it is better to do your duty than another person’s duty. That is because the world is full of imperfections. You will not find in it the perfect duty, free from any evil. It is no use changing duties. You will only get confused.

“When you practice the yoga’s I have taught you, when you learn perfect self-control, and when you no longer desire material rewards, then you are ready to be free from all duties. This stage will come after much practice. You will be no longer attracted to pleasant things. You will learn to live alone, to eat very little, and to meditate often. You will give up pride, ego, and other ideas of self-importance. You will love all people and you would be devoted to me. Then, by My grace, you will experience Me in your own self.

“It is possible to become one with me, Arjuna! Do your duty for My sake. All obstacles will be overcome. Do not ignore my advice, thinking that you know better. I know you very well Arjuna. You may say you do not want to fight this war but your mind will drag you into it because you are a fighter by nature.”

Suddenly Krishna paused. Arjuna was intently listening to his every word. The wind blew across the battlefield. The air was silent in spite of the vast army’s that were assembled there. “I have given you the very best knowledge that I have,” continued Krishna. “The choice is yours my friend. Act as you think best. I will tell you, I love you very dearly Arjuna. Fix your mind on me, be devoted to me, and give up the fruits of action for my sake, bow down to me. That is how you will come to me, I promise you; for you are dear to me, do not worry about duties anymore. Surrender to Me alone. Be inspired by my guiding word. Do not be troubled. I will release you from any guilt.”

As Arjuna bowed down, Krishna said: “Do not repeat what I have said to anyone who does not control himself, who is not a devotee of god, or who does not show respect for these teachings. Whoever is able to teach this high knowledge to My devotees shall come to me. That teacher performs the best service, and no one on earth is dearer to Me. The person who studies these teaching has worshiped me

through his studies. Even the one, who hears My words, if he has faith, will be freed from evil and reach heaven. What do you say Arjuna? Have you made up your mind?

Arjuna said: “I am no longer in doubt my lord. I will act according to your word.”

Then Sanjaya, who had been telling the blind king Dhritarashtra everything what happened, added his own thoughts: “This has been a wonderful conversation between lord Krishna and his disciple Arjuna. I am thrilled that I have heard it, O King! Whenever I recall this moment on the battlefield I will feel a great joy, and I will never forget the wonderful vision of the universe. I am sure that where ever Krishna, the lord of yoga, and Arjuna, the courageous warrior, are together in spirit, there will be prosperity, victory, greatness and stability.”

**Om tat-sat Shree Krishnaarpanamastu!
(I offer everything to Lord Shree Krishna)**