

Over the passage of time, our friends, family, society and the media paint the perfect picture of 'success,' and we subsequently shape our lives in determined pursuance of it. At a certain point, however, we begin to doubt whether that 'perfect life' is achievable or will actually make us happy. We begin to question the materialistic goals, aspirations and measures of success that people unquestioningly follow. We wonder: *could there be some deeper purpose to life?* It is this very doubt that Arjuna expresses at the onset of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. In response, Krishna powerfully explains the science of spiritual happiness.



KRISHNA  
WISDOM

GITA LIFE: A SUMMARY OF THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

## Good Health



**24%**  
of those in good  
health reported  
being very  
happy

VS

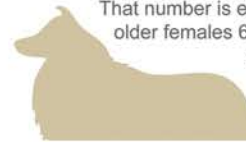
**8%**  
of those in  
poor health

## Children



**72%**  
said watching  
children or  
grandchildren  
succeed  
contributes to  
happiness

## Pets



**66%** say spending time  
with a pet contributes  
a lot to happiness.  
That number is even higher for  
older females 65+ (81%) and  
singles (76%)

## Relationships



**70%**  
of those who are  
married or in a  
relationship are  
the happiest

VS

**60%**  
of singles

## Income



**28%**  
of those with an  
income £125k+  
report being very  
happy

VS

**15%**  
of those  
with an  
income  
under £25k

Income and happiness are positively correlated, but having money does not guarantee happiness. Increased income becomes a resource which can be applied to meaningful areas of one's life.

# GITALIFE

A Summary of the Bhagavad-gita



Exploring the  
Science of  
**Spiritual**  
Happiness

# GITA LIFE

A summary of the Bhagavad-gita

by

Sutapa das

Based on *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* by

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

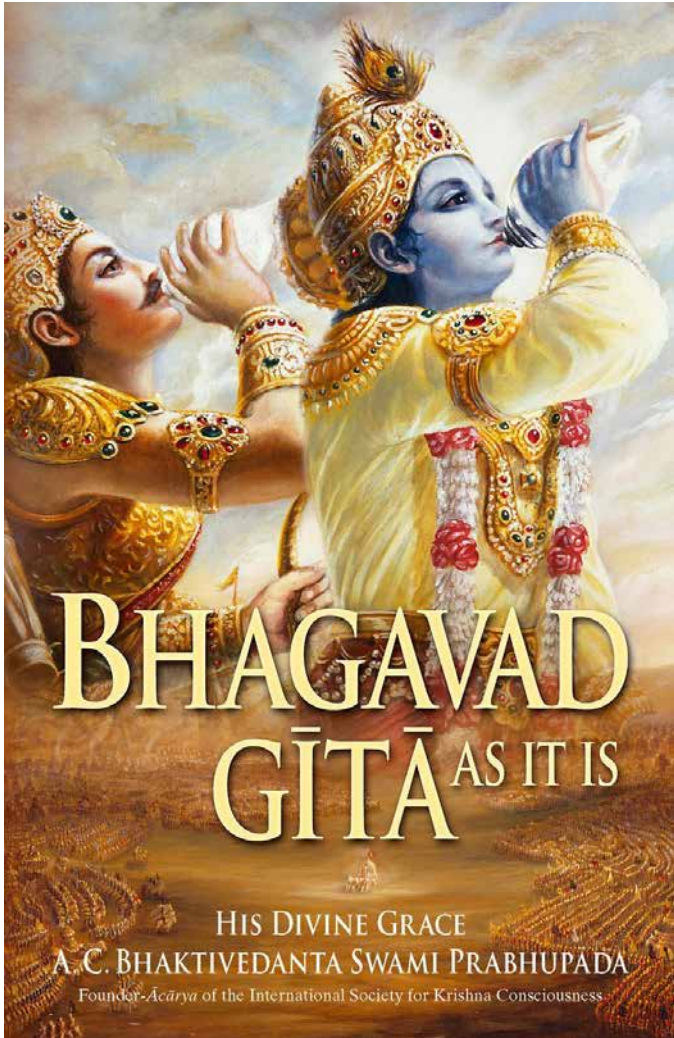
&

*Surrender Unto Me*, by

His Grace Bhurijana das



KRISHNA  
WISDOM



The Bhagavad-gita is a theological and philosophical classic. If we had to choose a single book to represent the spiritual and cultural traditions of India, we would certainly choose the Gita. In 700 beautiful verses it summarises the philosophical conclusions of the Vedas, the ancient scriptures written approximately 5000 years ago in the Sanskrit language.

The scope of the Bhagavad-gita is huge. It covers topics ranging from religion to relationships, science to sociology, leadership to lifestyle management. Indeed, the secrets to life, the universe and everything. In every generation, over thousands of years, it has provided unceasing inspiration to thinkers, leaders, and spiritualists alike.

'Gita Life' is a humble attempt to summarise the key insights of the Bhagavad-gita. The aim is not to draw out every single philosophical teaching, but rather to assist readers in understanding the flow, context and practical application of this timeless spiritual gem. It



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may also assist teachers of the Bhagavad-gita in their attempts to share this wisdom with others.

This small guide is based on the Bhagavad-gita As It Is by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada; a book which has transformed thousands of lives. His commentary expertly elucidates the profound life lessons that Lord Krishna imparts to Arjuna. Our sincere hope is that 'Gita Life' will inspire the reader to study Srila Prabhupada's full translation, which can answer every question, remove every doubt, and quickly bring one face-to-face with Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Sutapa das

Note: the numbers in the brackets (after each acronym) refer to the verse numbers in the actual Bhagavad-gita e.g. Guru (1-10) - this means verses 1 to 10 are all about the subject of 'guru'

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Over 5000 years ago, millions of soldiers had gathered at Kurukshetra (90 miles north of present-day Delhi) for what was billed as “the greatest battle ever.” Through a series of intrigues and conspiracies, the evil-minded Kauravas had usurped the throne of the Pandavas. Though born in the same family, the Kauravas (sons of Dhritarastra) and the Pandavas (sons of Pandu) were entirely different. The former were plagued by greed, selfishness and pride, whereas the saintly Pandavas were persons of the highest moral stature, dedicated to virtue, devotion and righteousness. They had explored various amicable means to settle their brotherly dispute, but the stubborn and greedy Kauravas were unwilling to budge an inch. Thus, military battle and a trial of arms was inevitable.

Arjuna, the talented and dynamic Pandava archer, readied himself for warfare. As tumultuous battle cries pervaded the air, Arjuna had a moment of doubt. He requested Krishna, the Supreme Person, who was acting as his driver, to steer the chariot to the middle of the battlefield. There, Arjuna saw the reality that stood

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before him – the imminent suffering and death that would overcome his family, friends, fellow countrymen and soldiers who had assembled on that battlefield. That sight triggered an existential crisis, and Arjuna desperately began questioning life, the universe and everything. A penetrating conversation with Krishna ensued, and the Bhagavad-gita (“song of God”) was born.

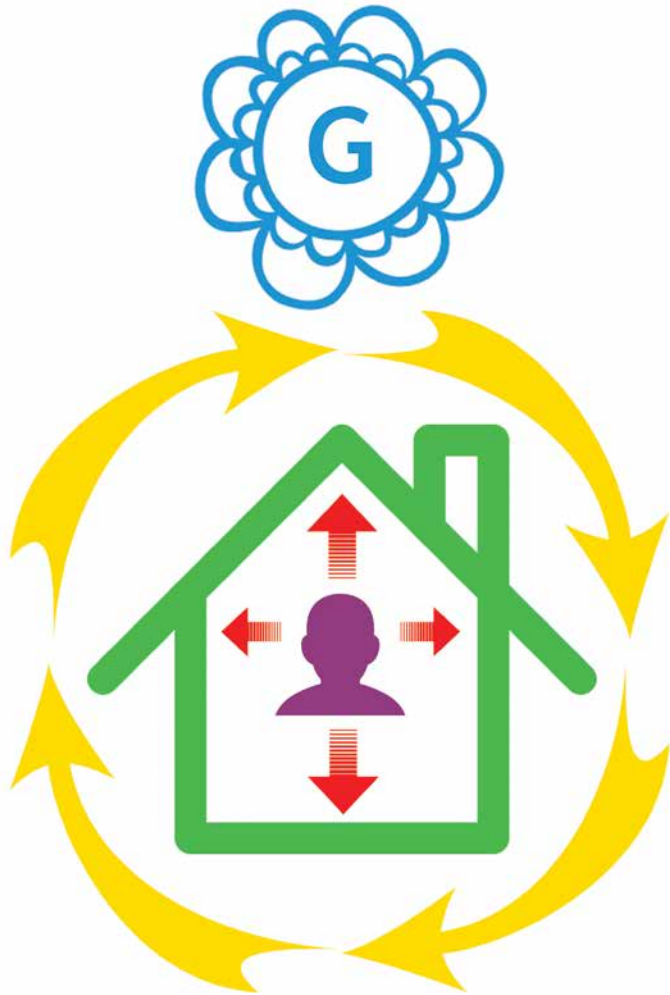
On one level, the Gita was spoken to convince and comfort Arjuna in his moment of weakness. Krishna, however, had a deeper purpose in mind. On our own ‘battlefield of life’ we go through situations, experiences, and moments of doubt, which lead us to question beyond the ‘routine of life.’ The Bhagavad-gita offers timeless answers to those perennial questions. We look up at the stars and wonder what lies beyond. *When did it all begin? What happens when I die? Why does love never seem to last? Why do bad things happen to people who are good and decent?* We often question our goals, and wonder where real happiness is to be found. We yearn for answers which elucidate the

deeper meaning behind our lives.

Ancient wisdom, eternally relevant. The Bhagavad-gita, then, is not just a spare wheel that we call upon in times of trouble, but rather the steering wheel which we tightly grip to guide the journey of our life. A journey which, we hope, will bring us to true happiness.

**“WHEN DOUBTS HAUNT ME, WHEN DISAPPOINTMENTS STARE ME IN THE FACE, AND I SEE NOT ONE RAY OF HOPE ON THE HORIZON, I TURN TO BHAGAVAD-GITA AND FIND A VERSE TO COMFORT ME; AND I IMMEDIATELY BEGIN TO SMILE IN THE MIDST OF OVERWHELMING SORROW. THOSE WHO MEDITATE ON THE GITA WILL DERIVE FRESH JOY AND NEW MEANINGS FROM IT EVERY DAY”**

**- MOHANDAS K GANDHI**



## 5 TOPICS

The Bhagavad-gita encompasses five major topics:

### 1. Who Am I? **Soul** (*atma*)

Our physical body is nothing more than a costume. We are spirit souls; the consciousness which animates the body. This life is merely one chapter of a much longer story.

### 2. Where am I? **Material World** (*prakrti*)

The world is a cosmic university, wired to make us think – “*is there a deeper meaning to life?*” Here we come to experience and enjoy life through material pursuits.

### 3. What am I doing here? **Activities** (*karma*)

The law of action and reaction is nature’s way to educate and evolve us. Good actions are rewarded, bad

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actions are punished and spiritual actions bring real happiness and ultimate freedom.

#### 4. How long am I here? **Time (kala)**

Our life, the universe and everything around us moves according to the wheel of time. Time brings death - an uncomfortable reality. We naturally seek eternity, since our real self is spiritual.

#### 5. Is there something beyond? **God (isvara)**

Our 'human journey' is an opportunity to reawaken our eternal relationship with God and return to the spiritual world, where every step is a dance and every word a song. Krishna explains how to do this through *yoga*, which literally means 'to link.'

In conclusion: As **souls** living in the **material world**, we are performing **activities** within the jurisdiction of **time**, though we actually belong in the spiritual world with **God**.

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# 01/D.O.U.B.T

## OBSERVING THE ARMIES ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF KURUKSETRA

The spiritual journey usually starts with a doubt. Over the passage of time, our friends, family, society and the media paint the perfect picture of 'success' and we subsequently shape our lives in determined pursuance of it. At a certain point, however, we begin to doubt whether that 'perfect life' is achievable or will actually make us happy. We begin to question the materialistic goals, aspirations and measures of success that people unquestioningly follow. We wonder: *could there be some deeper purpose to life?* While this initial doubt can sometimes bring uncertainty and confusion, it also brings us to the start of our spiritual journey. It is this very doubt that Arjuna expresses in Chapter One, at the onset of this sacred conversation.



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**D** **Dhritarastra & Duryodhana (1-12)** – Innumerable soldiers have assembled on the battlefield of Kurukshetra due to the selfish, deep-rooted aspirations of these two characters, hell-bent on usurping their cousins' kingdom. Sitting in his palace, King Dhritarastra inquires about the latest events on the battlefield, while his son Duryodhana is busy firing up his army as it prepares for fratricidal war. Dhritarastra is physically blind, but he and his son are also blinded by greed, envy and material desire. When one's mind-set revolves around 'I, me and mine' engrossed in thoughts of selfish gain and personal pleasure, then anxiety, frustration and disappointment are inevitable. Such materially entangled persons become oblivious to the ill-effects of their actions.

**O** **Ominous result (13-20)** - Despite Duryodhana's boastful words, the ominous result of this confrontation is made clear from the onset. Too many signs indicate his inevitable defeat at the hands of the Pandavas. Those who stand on the side of purity and integrity always emerge

victorious, regardless of whether the worldly odds are stacked against them. One who is a carrier of goodness is never overcome by evil.

**U** **Uncertainty (21-27)** - Despite knowing that he defends virtue, Arjuna is still uncertain about fighting his opponents, who are also his relatives. The chariots are readied, arrows are drawn, battle cries are sounded, but Arjuna is hesitant. He orders Krishna, who assumes the humble position of being his charioteer, to drive to the middle of the battlefield so he can take a final look at the armies. To his credit, despite the intensity of the situation, Arjuna takes time to reflect. Life may be crammed with weighty responsibilities and pressing issues, but attendance to such demands should not be at the expense of quality spiritual introspection. Unfortunately, the chronic disease of modern man is the excuse of 'no time' when it comes to such soul-searching.

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**B** **Bewilderment (28-30)** – Foreseeing the suffering and death that is the inevitable consequence of warfare, Arjuna’s mind is reeling. At this stage, bereft of broader spiritual vision, his uncertainty intensifies and he becomes completely bewildered, baffled as to what his next move should be. When one lacks an understanding of his spiritual identity, his relationship with God, and the fundamental purpose behind this world, one inevitably becomes disturbed and frustrated by life’s challenges.

**T** **Turning point (31-42)** – Arjuna justifies his decision to retreat from fighting with a variety of arguments: 1) It would be cruel and heartless to prematurely terminate the lives of so many soldiers; 2) Even an unrivalled kingdom would bring no happiness, since he’d be bereft of the company of his near and dear ones; 3) One would surely accrue bad karma as a result of such brutal violence; 4) The wholesale killing involved would destroy the family unit and social structure, wreaking havoc for future generations. His mind overwhelmed by grief, Arjuna

sets aside his weapons and resolves not to fight.

**“HE WHO ASKS A QUESTION IS A FOOL FOR FIVE MINUTES; HE WHO DOES NOT ASK A QUESTION REMAINS A FOOL FOREVER”**

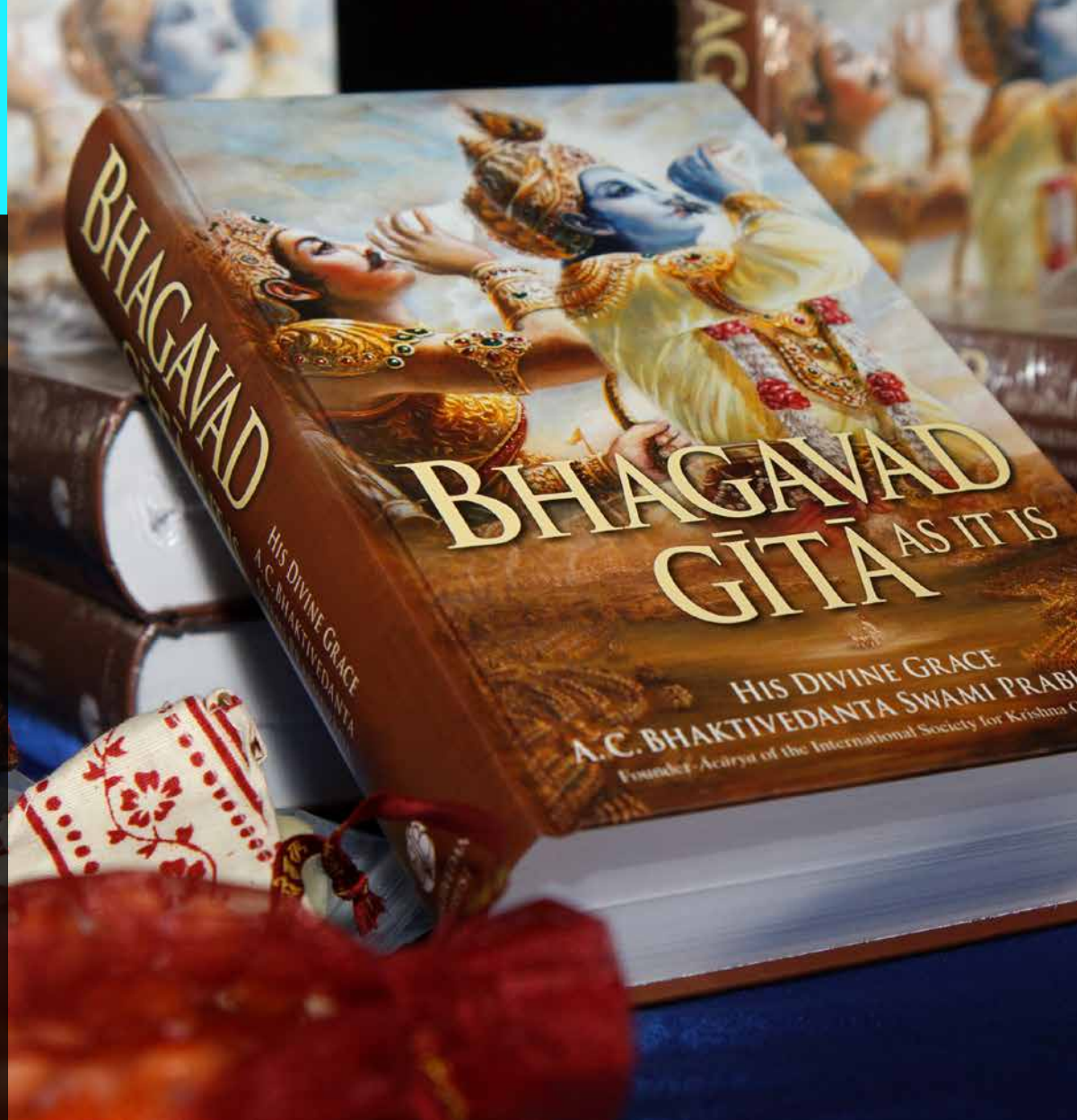
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# 02/G.I.T.A

## CONTENTS OF THE GITA SUMMARISED

Chapter Two is a succinct overview of the Gita's philosophy. Arjuna approaches Krishna in a mood of humility and desperation, inviting Krishna to present the most fundamental aspect of spiritual wisdom: the science of the self. Krishna then explains the practical application of such wisdom, and concludes by delineating the symptoms of one who has fully realised such truths. In this way Krishna summarises the spiritual journey from beginning to end. In one sense, however, there is no 'end' to the spiritual journey because this is the point at which real life begins.



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**G** **Guru (1-10)** - Determined not to fight, but simultaneously torn and confused, Arjuna approaches Krishna in desperation.

*"I am in dire need of guidance,"* he humbly submits, *"please enlighten me so I can mitigate my miserable condition."* Arjuna teaches us the first fundamental step in spirituality; seeking help from a guru who comes in an authentic lineage of teachers and who has mastered the spiritual art. Most things in life require guidance and instruction under a qualified teacher and the spiritual path is no different. One may argue that everything they require for their spirituality is contained within, and while this may be true, we still require help to reawaken that innate spiritual consciousness. As the saying goes, *"One who accepts himself as a guru, accepts a fool for a disciple!"*

**I** **Identity (11-30)** - Krishna begins by teaching Arjuna the most fundamental understanding of spiritual life; as the bird lives in a cage, and as the driver operates a car, we, the spirit soul, similarly inhabit, animate and utilise this body. Although living

within the body, we are simultaneously different from it, temporarily operating it to perform activities, fulfil our desires and interact with the world around us. Until we realise our true identity as spirit souls, we undergo the process of reincarnation, accepting unnatural material bodies and the subsequent sufferings and distresses of life in this material world. This is the first teaching that the guru imparts; knowledge of who we really are. While it may seem elementary and basic, such wisdom has seldom been understood and truly realised. This answer to the basic question of "who am I?" can set the soul free. It is an answer that is worth hearing again and again.

**T** **Two Duties (31-53)** - One may then ask how such knowledge practically affects our day-to-day life in the 'real' world. Krishna addresses this by delineating the two essential duties of the spirit soul. *Dharma* loosely translates as "duty" but in a deeper sense refers to intrinsic characteristics and qualities of something that cannot be avoided, neglected or negated under any circumstance. Firstly,

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the embodied soul has a *sva-dharma*, a worldly duty which consists of responsibilities towards family, friends and society. Secondly, the soul has a *sanatana-dharma*, an eternal spiritual duty which comprises of one's relationship with God, nature and all spirit souls. One must execute both *dharmas* side-by-side. Many individuals neglect their *sanatana-dharma*, becoming too preoccupied with their *sva-dharma*. On the other extreme, individuals may prematurely reject their *sva-dharma* and artificially attempt to absorb themselves in *sanatana-dharma*. The most progressive path is to be fully alert to both duties, and in doing so lead a balanced and progressive material and spiritual life.

**A** **Atmarama (54-72)** - What is the result for someone who performs such duties with determination and enthusiasm?

Such a person will become an *atmarama* - a spiritually realised soul who finds pleasure in the self. Krishna explains how the *atmarama* is unaffected by happiness or distress, gain or loss, honour or dishonour. Transcending the dualities of this world,

such a spiritualist rids himself of qualities such as fear, attachment, and anger, and remains absorbed in spiritual joy and transcendental consciousness.

**“WHEN I WAS 5 YEARS OLD, MY MOTHER TOLD ME THAT HAPPINESS WAS THE KEY TO LIFE. WHEN I WENT TO SCHOOL, THEY ASKED ME WHAT I WANTED TO BE WHEN I GREW UP. I WROTE DOWN ‘HAPPY’. THEY TOLD ME I DIDN’T UNDERSTAND THE ASSIGNMENT, AND I TOLD THEM THEY DIDN’T UNDERSTAND LIFE.”**

**- JOHN LENNON**

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# 03/T.R.E.E

## KARMA-YOGA

Though a tree produces many fruits, it selflessly offers them to others. All year round, the tree dutifully offers shade and shelter regardless of mistreatment by man or animal. Even when a tree is cut, it grows back with determination, strength and fresh vigour, ready to serve the world again. The life and qualities of a tree give us profound insight into the art of living and functioning in this world while simultaneously remaining completely aloof. In Krishna's words, this is known as *karma-yoga* - the technique of achieving spiritual connection with God through our daily work. In this way, Chapter Three echoes the famous Biblical wisdom: "Be in the world but not of it."



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**T** **Tyaga (Renunciation) (1-9)** – At first, Arjuna displays the typical confusion of an immature spiritualist. He thinks spirituality means retirement from active life and the adoption of monasticism in strict seclusion. Not surprising, since the easiest response in times of difficulty is one of escapism. Worldly life entails awkward dealings with money, possessions, people and career to name but a few. One may thus develop the notion that such a lifestyle is incompatible with spiritual goals. Krishna, however, explains that true renunciation does not entail a mere abandonment of external activities. True renunciation is to give up the mentality that one is the controller and enjoyer of all his deeds. By offering the results of one's daily work (money, knowledge, influence, and other such benefits) in service to God, knowing God to be the ultimate enjoyer and controller, one develops genuine renunciation.

**R** **Rungs (on the Yoga Ladder) (10-16)** – To work without any selfish motives whatsoever is undoubtedly an advanced stage of

spiritual realisation. Thus, Krishna explains how to progress to such a level. He describes a 'yoga ladder' with different rungs which represent progressively higher levels of spiritual advancement. On the lowest level an individual is solely interested in materialistic enjoyment and has no spiritual inclination. After experiencing frustration with such a lifestyle, one may progress onto the first rung known as *karma-kanda*. At this stage one still desires materialistic enjoyment but now tries to achieve it via religious observances. When one realises the futility of material enjoyment they come to the second rung, entitled *sakama-karma-yoga*, where one begins to offer a portion of his results to God but still maintains some selfish motivation. Further advancement of understanding moves the individual to the next rung, known as *niskama-karma-yoga*. Here, one accepts only what is necessary for personal and familial maintenance, and offers everything else to God. Those on this rung break free of all karmic implication in this world, and become peaceful and liberated.

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**E Exemplary (17-35)** - *Karma-yoga* is thus outlined as the practical process by which one overcomes his material attachments through working in the world. So what about one who has achieved perfection through *karma-yoga*? Do they need to continue working? Can they retire and simply meditate on God now that they are free from selfish motivation? Krishna explains how perfected spiritualists continue working in the world for the sole purpose of setting an inspirational example for others to follow. Being exemplary is one of the most effective teaching tools we have. As they say “example before precept, walk your talk, practice what you preach.” Genuine spiritualists embody the change they wish to see in the world.

**E Eternal enemy (36-43)** - After hearing about this practical and logical process, the natural reaction is an enthusiastic resolve to dedicate oneself to it. Arjuna, playing the part of the aspiring spiritualist, is extremely streetwise in this regard. He asks Krishna, *“In life, even though I know*

*the best course of action, what is it that impels me time and time again to act improperly and against my good intelligence?”* Krishna explains how the root cause of this phenomenon is the eternal enemy of the aspiring spiritualist - lust! The inherent quality of the soul is to love; to selflessly serve without any personal agenda. However, when the soul descends to this world that pure love perverts into lust, and one continuously tries to enjoy in a self-centred way without proper deliberation on the consequences. The way of lust impels one to seek immediate gratification and abandon activities that truly benefit them. In this way, lust cheats one of a progressive, successful and happy life and offers only meagre and temporary gratification in return. By tolerating the urges of lust and simultaneously strengthening one’s spiritual intelligence, one will be better situated to recognise, value and embrace the higher pursuits in life.

**“CREATE A LIFE THAT FEELS GOOD ON THE INSIDE.  
NOT JUST ONE THAT LOOKS GOOD ON THE OUTSIDE”**

**- UNKNOWN**

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## 04/E.A.R.S

### TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE

Spiritual knowledge is known as *sruti* – “that which is heard.” In bygone ages, people would hear such knowledge, immediately remember it, assimilate it, and perfectly communicate it to the next person with perfect clarity and accuracy. In this way the knowledge passed through many generations. Chapter Four is entitled “Transcendental Knowledge” for it is knowledge which outlines how one can establish their divine connection with God. The famous Vedic aphorism thus encourages, “Aim to see God through the ears rather than the eyes.”

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**E** **Eternal education (1-10)** - Just as every gadget comes with an instruction manual, this entire universe comes with guidelines which enlighten one about its purpose and function. Such knowledge is of divine origin and is imparted at the time of creation. Krishna explains how this eternal educational system was originally set up by Him. This system perpetuates in the universe through qualified and saintly persons, who impart spiritual knowledge to the masses in a dynamic, relevant and practical way. Thus, the material creation is essentially a university wherein we rediscover our relationship with God. As the creator and maintainer, Krishna periodically appears in the world to re-inject spirituality, remove materialistic influences and re-establish the smooth functioning of the universe.

**A** **Accurate Understanding (11-15)** - Most people know something about God and religion, but their conceptions can often be quite hazy and confused. When transcendental knowledge is received through the eternal educational

system one gains an accurate understanding. To demonstrate this, Krishna, in three verses, clears up three common misunderstandings of Eastern spirituality. Verse 11 addresses the misconception that all spiritual paths lead to the same destination – Krishna explains that while there is unity in diversity, there are also different gradations of spiritual elevation. Verse 12 addresses the misconception that Vedic scriptures talk of polytheism and the worship of many 'gods' - Krishna re-emphasises the monotheistic stance that there is only one God. Verse 13 addresses the concern that the caste system we see in India today is unfair and exploitative - Krishna underlines the true purpose and criteria of such social stratification.

**R** **Removing Reactions (16-24)** – In addition to clearing up philosophical doubts, transcendental knowledge also helps one to clear up their 'karmic bank balance.' Karma is a universal law of nature – for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. While bad karma is obviously undesirable, Krishna further explains that

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even good karma should be avoided since it also binds one to material existence. Beyond good and bad, are activities performed on the spiritual level, that is, action which yields no reaction and ultimately frees one from the anxieties and entanglements of this world. Such action is known as *akarma*.

**S** **Sacrifice (25-42)** - In order to acquire, understand and realise transcendental knowledge one should make a tangible sacrifice. While material knowledge is dependent on calibre, spiritual knowledge is dependent upon character. Sacrifices help refine one's character so they become suitable receptacles to hold this valuable wisdom. One of the biggest sacrifices is to relinquish our pride by humbly submitting oneself before an authentic guru. By faithful service and sincere inquiry within such a relationship, the heart becomes fertile ground for spiritual knowledge to blossom.

**“GOD GAVE US MOUTHS THAT CLOSE AND EARS THAT DON'T. THAT MUST TELL US SOMETHING!”**

**- UNKNOWN**

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# 05/S.T.E.P

## KARMA-YOGA ACTION IN KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

We are active beings, constantly making plans for the future. Our thoughts manifest in actions, repeated actions form habits, those habits make up our character, and that character determines our destiny. As Mark Twain famously commented, *"We are not human beings on a spiritual journey, but rather we are spiritual beings on a human journey."* Every journey starts with a step and in Chapter Five Krishna explains how to take steps in the right direction. There are steps leading to further entanglement in worldly difficulties, but there are also steps leading to a life of liberation, freedom and spiritual tranquillity. The choice is ours.

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**S** **Stay in the world (1-12)** - Arjuna is still confused. Despite Krishna's explanations in Chapter Three, Arjuna still considers dutiful work and renunciation to be mutually exclusive paths. Krishna thus explains how an individual who works in spiritual consciousness is automatically a renunciate. If one engages in respectable work, offering the results to God, and all the while remaining alert to the spiritual goal of life, then such work becomes worship. For most people it would be artificial and detrimental to completely sever themselves from worldly ties in pursuance of spiritual perfection. Thus, the path of *karma-yoga* offers a progressive means of spiritual development while simultaneously staying in the world. Just as a lotus leaf is surrounded by water but remains completely dry, a *karma-yogi* stays in the world but remains immune to material influence.

**T** **Three doers (13-16)** - While living in this world, however, one can easily adopt the mentality that they are the director, the controller and the boss. In reality, Krishna explains that

there are three doers in any activity; the individual soul, the Supersoul, and material nature. What to speak of controlling the results of our activities, we are barely in control of even the physical and mental faculties with which we perform those activities. The individual soul can only desire. That desire is then sanctioned by God (who resides within the heart as the Supersoul). Once sanctioned, material nature provides all the necessary facilities needed to perform the activity. Just as an infant lacks the ability to ride a bike but can still pretend to do so with the help of stabilisers, in this world, the individual soul is constantly supported by the Supersoul in the heart, who provides all the knowledge, inspiration and facilities to function.

**E** **Equal Vision (17-26)** - Since the Supersoul resides in every living being, the advanced spiritualist is able to see every life form, be it plant, animal, or human, as a temple of God. In this way, utmost respect is given to every living being. Different bodies with different qualities are produced according to one's past actions, yet each entity is of the

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same spiritual quality. Thus, the spiritualist is not only free of racism, nationalism, ageism and sexism, but also 'species-ism!'

**P** **Peace (Verse 29)** – Krishna continually emphasises the temporary nature of our stay in this world. We come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. In the interim, however, we claim proprietorship and develop attachments to various objects, causing us great anxiety and pain. To the extent that we develop a sense of detachment, understanding the Supreme Lord to be the proprietor and ourselves as simply caretakers, to that extent we can experience a sense of peace within. Interestingly, it is this inner peace that brings about global peace; a community of individuals who are free from attachment, greed, envy, and covetousness is what this world really needs.

**“TRY NOT TO BECOME A MAN OF SUCCESS, BUT  
RATHER A MAN OF VALUE”**

**- ALBERT EINSTEIN**

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## 06/E.A.S.Y

### DHYANA-YOGA

In the previous chapter, Krishna briefly mentioned the system of *astanga-yoga* – the strict and arduous regime of an ascetic yogi. In the present day, millions of people practice elements of this path (*hatha-yoga and pranayama*) to achieve physical and emotional wellbeing. In Chapter Six, the path of *astanga-yoga* is explained in its entirety. Krishna's purpose in discussing the 'eight-step path' is simply to establish its impracticality for the purpose of self-realisation and spiritual perfection. In an age surcharged with temptation, distraction, and spiritual weakness, the easiest (and most advanced) path of self-realisation is *bhakti-yoga*.



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**E** **Enemy or Friend? (1-9)** – During our sojourn in this temporary world we are perpetually accompanied by the ‘voice within.’ We have all experienced it - the devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other, each giving their advice to the confused person in-between. The mind is essentially that voice within; a storehouse of memories and experiences that presents options to the individual. An uncontrolled mind will agitate, misguide and entangle the soul within this world, forcing one to succumb to their lower nature of lust, anger and greed. The controlled mind, however, acts as a friend on the spiritual journey, helping one to make progressive and healthy choices which bring them closer to spiritual perfection. When one regulates and befriends the mind, one experiences tranquillity, peace and freedom from the duality of happiness and distress.

**A** **Astanga-yoga (10-36)** - One way to control the mind is through the process of *astanga-yoga* (which includes *dhyana-yoga*, the practice of meditation). Krishna explains how the

ancient path was practised in bygone ages. Living in seclusion, practising celibacy, and under strict regulations of eating and sleeping, the yogi would sit in a perfectly erect position, focusing his consciousness on the Supreme Soul within. Ignoring mental and bodily distraction, the yogi would unwaveringly meditate for many years, maintaining complete stillness, silence and focus. After hearing of this strict discipline, Arjuna frankly admits his inability to practice it – *“This practice seems impractical and unendurable!”* he exclaims, *“to discipline the mind is more difficult than controlling the wind!”* Krishna reasserts that disciplining the mind is essential and that it is possible through appropriate spiritual practice and discipline.

**S** **Success and failure (37-45)** - Hearing about the difficulty of *astanga-yoga* raises a fresh concern for Arjuna. What happens if one faithfully takes to the yogic process, but later falls away without perfecting his spiritual consciousness? The unsuccessful spiritualist is seemingly left in ‘no-man’s land,’ having failed to attain spiritual satisfaction and

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simultaneously wasted his opportunities for worldly pleasure. Krishna appeases all such fears by explaining that whoever takes up a genuine spiritual process is eternally benefited, even if they don't perfect it this time round. If we don't complete the spiritual journey in one lifetime, we carry on in the next life from the same point. In this way, the individual gradually evolves towards spiritual perfection.

**Y**ogi (46-47) - After summarising the arduous process of *dhyana-yoga* (meditation) and *astanga-yoga*, the chapter concludes with a ray of hope. Krishna reaffirms that the perfection and goal of all yoga systems is to help the individual become fully conscious of God at all times. While all yoga systems are certainly beneficial, the most advanced, efficient and easiest path is known as *bhakti-yoga* (the yoga of devotion). In this age, the primary practice of *bhakti-yoga* is mantra meditation - chanting the names of God (***Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare***). Through this process

any person, from any background, can attain spiritual perfection and experience all the benefits described in this chapter and elsewhere.

**“WE ARE SHAPED BY OUR THOUGHTS; WE BECOME WHAT WE THINK. WHEN THE MIND IS PURE, JOY FOLLOWS LIKE A SHADOW THAT NEVER LEAVES.”**

- BUDDHA

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# 07/H.E.A.D

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE ABSOLUTE

Whether it's your next holiday destination, the choice of university for your studies, or the restaurant for next week's birthday party, most things in life require some research. While we value our gut feelings, we simultaneously utilise our intelligence and exercise discrimination. The same goes for spirituality. It is not simply an emotional feeling or practice; it requires intelligent research and information gathering. It is an affair of the head and the heart. Einstein once stated that religious practice without philosophy was simply sentimental, and in more acute situations, downright fanatic. In Chapter Seven, entitled "Knowledge of the Absolute", we learn key philosophical truths which instil confidence and conviction in the path of devotion to Krishna.



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**H** **Hearing (1-3)** - Modern thinkers often talk of proving everything scientifically, and rejecting anything which cannot be directly perceived by our senses. While this may seem a logical, objective and rational approach, it does have inherent limitations. How do you discover that which lies beyond your immediate perception? For example, if you wanted identify your father, the most practical way would be to ask your mother. You could subsequently verify by a DNA test. If you wanted to find out what BBC1 was showing tonight, the obvious approach would be to consult a TV guide. You could subsequently verify by actually watching the programmes. In other words, it's childish and absurd to solely depend on our sensory experience to provide all the answers. Accepting a 'higher authority,' be it the mother or the TV guide, opens up opportunities to experience and understand things directly. Krishna begins this chapter by stressing the absolute necessity of hearing from spiritual sources, higher authorities, to grasp cosmic truths. This is known as the descending path of knowledge.

**E** **Everywhere (4-12)** - By hearing from authorised spiritual sources one can acquire profound knowledge of the divine. In answer to the common challenge "*Can you show me God?*" Krishna cites the analogy of pearls strung on a thread. The pearls are fixed in perfect pattern, arranged as a beautiful necklace, while the thread remains completely invisible. Similarly, God designs, creates and sustains the complex workings of the universe, yet remains invisible to the immature observer. The extreme intricacy and sophistication of the creation, however, naturally indicates the presence of higher intelligence. Krishna goes on to explain how He is also the essence of everything within the creation – the taste of water, the light of the sun and the ability in man. In this way, through the eyes of knowledge, one can learn to see God everywhere – as the source of creation, and also within the creation.

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**A** **Accept or Reject (13-19)** - If God can be perceived everywhere and His existence is so strikingly obvious, why is there still wholesale denial of Him? Resisting forceful compliance, Krishna endows each individual with the free will to 'fly their own plane' and decide where to repose their faith. He describes the four types of people who reject God due to their preoccupation in worldly pursuits, and the four types of people who do accept God, albeit with different degrees of selfish intent. In conclusion, only a rare soul is able to approach God without ulterior motive, and enter into a selfless relationship of love. That level of spiritual purity, Krishna says, may take thousands of births!

**D** **Demigods (20-30)** – Anyone who practices some form of worship or religiosity deserves credit. That said, one must go further and gain an accurate and precise understanding of God's identity. If you were to be operated on, you would insist the surgeon be well-versed in the details and intricacies of the process. It is, after all, a matter of life

and death. Similarly, to simply believe in God is not enough; one must understand the nature, identity and personality of God, since the vibrancy of one's spirituality depends on it. Towards the end of the chapter, Krishna clears up common misconceptions about the nature of God. He establishes monotheism and identifies 'demigods' as powerful entities in charge of universal affairs, who are in no way, shape or form equal to God. Such dangerous misconceptions are cleared up as they have the potential to impede the spirit of pure devotion.

**“PEOPLE ARE STRANGE. THEY ARE CONSTANTLY ANGERED BY TRIVIAL THINGS, BUT ON MAJOR MATTERS LIKE TOTALLY WASTING THEIR LIVES, THEY HARDLY SEEM TO NOTICE”**

**- CHARLES BUKOWSKI**

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# 08/D.E.A.D

## ATTAINING THE SUPREME

It is a sign of sanity and wisdom if one takes time to contemplate their death. During special festivals, Latin Americans hang skulls in their houses to remind themselves. Yogis in India meditate on the banks of the Ganges where open-pyre funerals are being conducted. Although many would consider it morbid to contemplate death, there is no doubt that it's an uncomfortable reality – nobody wants it, but everyone has to face it. The Bhagavad-gita outlines four such unavoidable predicaments: birth, disease, old age, and ultimately death. In Chapter Eight Krishna deals with the subject of death – how to prepare for it, what happens at that fateful moment, and what lies beyond.



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**D** **Doubts (1-4)** – Doubting is a function of intelligence, and at no point in the Bhagavad-gita does Krishna reprimand Arjuna for his numerous inquiries. Krishna welcomes the dialogue, and encourages Arjuna to consider His answers and make his own decisions. This chapter begins with Arjuna's queries on several spiritual concepts. Krishna answers seven of Arjuna's eight questions immediately, and then prepares to answer the final question - *"How can one attain a spiritual destination at the time of death?"* The rest of the chapter is solely dedicated to answering this crucial inquiry.

**E** **End of life (5-8)** - Imagine you're going to watch a movie and you meet someone who just saw it. *"You'll never guess what happens at the end..."* they say! Before they even finish that sentence you'll interject and stop them; after all, knowing the end spoils the whole film. Similarly, for those engaged in worldly pursuits, hearing about, contemplating and accepting 'the end' (death) is not the most inspiring reflection. It completely spoils their

'movie of life' in the here and now. For a spiritualist, however, thoughts of 'the end' bring neither fear nor depression, since their concept of life and its purpose is much broader. Krishna explains how a person's recollections at death sum up their consciousness and aspirations cultivated throughout life. Thus, one's state of mind at that fateful hour determines their next life situation. For those who remember God at death, they reach the kingdom of God.

**A** **Attaining the Supreme (9-22)** – Why should one desire entrance into the spiritual realm? Well, this material world is simply a temporary university designed to dispense life lessons. Experiencing the frustration and emptiness of material life, we begin looking for something beyond. C.S Lewis once said: *"If I find within myself a desire which no experience in this world can fulfil, I must conclude I was made of another world."* As spiritual beings, life in an artificial world of matter is an incompatible situation. While the material world is rubber-stamped as a constantly changing place of misery, the spiritual

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world is distinguished as an eternal, all-blissful abode. There are many painstaking ways in which spiritualists attempt to attain that supreme destination, and if they are indeed successful, they never return to this temporary world again.

**D** **Devotion (23-28)** – Since various spiritual practices have been discussed in this chapter, Krishna concludes by outlining the most effective process to attain the Supreme. *Bhakti-yoga*, the path of active service to God in a mood of devotion, is described as the most evolved spiritual path. In an age of rampant materialism and temptation, coupled with individual weakness and spiritual apathy, a highly practical and powerful spiritual process is required. Through *bhakti-yoga* anyone can experience a tangible spiritual connection very quickly. If one can consistently and progressively saturate their consciousness in Krishna, they can remember Him at the time of passing, and thus attain the supreme destination, regardless of all the technicalities and details that other spiritual processes

may stress.

“REMEMBERING THAT I’LL BE DEAD SOON IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL I’VE EVER ENCOUNTERED TO HELP ME MAKE THE BIG CHOICES IN LIFE. ALMOST EVERYTHING - ALL EXTERNAL EXPECTATIONS, ALL PRIDE, ALL FEAR OF EMBARRASSMENT OR FAILURE - THESE THINGS JUST FALL AWAY IN THE FACE OF DEATH, LEAVING ONLY WHAT IS TRULY IMPORTANT. REMEMBERING THAT YOU ARE GOING TO DIE IS THE BEST WAY I KNOW TO AVOID THE TRAP OF THINKING YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO LOSE. YOU ARE ALREADY NAKED. THERE IS NO REASON NOT TO FOLLOW YOUR HEART.”

- STEVE JOBS

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# 09/K.I.N.G

## THE MOST CONFIDENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

Just as pearls are hidden within a shell, or as a king is surrounded by an entourage, the essence of the Bhagavad-gita is nestled in the middle of the conversation – the Ninth Chapter. Here, Krishna outlines the ‘king’ of all knowledge and the most secret of all secrets. He explains the very essence of the Bhagavad-gita, the essence of spirituality and the very essence of our entire being.



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**K Knowledge (1-3)** - Krishna explains that the wisdom of this chapter is most confidential, since it illuminates the true position and function of the soul in relation to God. There is a notion that belief in God is intellectually immature or philosophically naive. Logical and rational analysis of the complexity, design and intricate engineering of this creation, however, makes plain that there must be some conscious intelligence behind it. To categorically deny this suggests a stubborn, irrational and illogical predisposition. Krishna thus explains that this knowledge is state-specific - one must be non-envious and faithful to understand it. Faith is not opposed to knowledge, but is actually a prerequisite for receiving it.

**Inconceivable relationships (4-10)** - An idea is conceived within the mind. A child is conceived within the womb. In other words, a concept is contained within something. Since the qualities and characteristics of the Lord, however, are unlimited, they cannot be contained within any boundaries, and

thus God's activities and relationships are deemed inconceivable. In this section, Krishna begins to impart knowledge of His inconceivable relationships with the universe and all living entities. This knowledge gives an indication of the unfathomable character, greatness and capacity of God, and thus exposes our inability to comprehend such matters through mundane logic and reason.

**N Non-worship (11-25)** - Even after Krishna explains the glories and qualities of His personal form, there are many who misunderstand the Supreme. Because Krishna appears in a 'humanlike' form, some deem Him an ordinary human being and believe a personal form of God to be an elementary and infantile concept. Others believe that God manifests innumerable forms represented by the various demigods, each of whom are worthy of worship. Others cannot perceive of anything beyond this universe, and therefore consider the cosmos to be the supreme object of worship. All such persons sidestep the worship of the Supreme Personality,

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whom one can see face-to-face and have a relationship with. While some claim that all paths lead to the same destination, Krishna highlights that He awards different results to a person's worship based on their motivation and understanding of that worship.

**G**lories of Bhakti (26-34) - In this way, Krishna establishes the personal form of God to be the highest and most complete manifestation of the Supreme. The greater something is, the higher the qualification to achieve it. To get into a good university you need higher grades. To buy a bigger house you need greater funds. Similarly, to approach God in the most intimate and personal way, one requires the greatest qualification – complete purity of consciousness, without any tinge of selfish motivation. Krishna explains that such purity is characterised by complete immersion of mind, body and words in selfless devotional service – hour after hour, day after day, year after year. This is Krishna consciousness, and this is the perfectional climax of the Bhagavad-gita.

**“THE GOOD LIFE IS ONE INSPIRED BY LOVE AND GUIDED BY KNOWLEDGE”**

**- BERTRAND RUSSEL**

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# 10/S.E.E

## THE OPULENCE OF THE ABSOLUTE

When discussing the subject of spirituality among different audiences, certain reservations invariably seem to surface. People complain that they cannot see God at work, that He is not manifest in person before their eyes, and that they have no direct perception of His existence. *"Show me God, and then I'll believe in Him,"* the sceptics posit. In Chapter Ten, Krishna again explains how the spiritualist can simultaneously perceive God as the source of the creation and also see God within the creation. This, however, requires more than an intellectual understanding. It actually calls for transformation of one's consciousness and purification of the senses.

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**S** **Source of Everything (1-7)** - Modern science is founded upon the methodology of ascending knowledge, where one attempts to understand the totality of reality by empirical research and experimentation. Krishna makes a simple but powerful rebuttal of this approach. He explains how something which has been created cannot understand its source independently. For example, if one wanted to ascertain the identity of their father using a purely experimental approach, it would be incredibly impractical and most likely inconclusive. However, if one accepted the testimony of their mother first, and subsequently experimented, such an approach would more likely be successful. In the same way, all material and spiritual creations have their source in Krishna, and one who approaches Him can get scientific insight into their identity and purpose. Later, Krishna will explain how such knowledge can actually be directly perceived.

**E** **Essence of Gita (8-11)** - These four verses contain the essence of the Bhagavad-gita and describe spirituality in its three essential stages. The first stage is entitled *sambhanda*, or knowledge of one's relationship with God and the universe. The second stage is the practice and application of such knowledge in one's daily life, technically known as *abhideya*. The third stage is the mature fruit of such practice, which is pure spiritual consciousness and unbounded love of God. This is known as *prayojana*. Thus, the Bhagavad-gita is actually a spiritual science since there is hypothesis (*sambandha*), experiment (*abhideya*) and observation / conclusion (*prayojana*). These four verses (8-11) give a roadmap of spirituality from beginning to end.

**E** **Everywhere (12-42)** - Arjuna is satisfied by Krishna's explanations and requests Him to elaborate further on His characteristics and qualities. In response, Krishna describes the most prominent among His limitless, all pervading opulences. By doing this He explains how one can

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actually think about Him, meditate on Him and see Him everywhere. It is not that Krishna is physically all the things He mentions, but rather that He is the very essence of them - their strength, fame, wealth, and so on. After naming 82 opulences, Krishna concludes by stating that these simply hint at His glory since He pervades and supports the entire universe with a mere fragment of His energy. In this way, only one equipped with eyes of knowledge and a heart of devotion, will see Krishna in all times, places and circumstances. Others, however, will miss the obvious. As Hellen Keller reminds us: *“worse than being blind, is to have sight but no vision.”*

**“ITS NOT WHAT YOU LOOK AT THAT MATTERS. ITS  
WHAT YOU SEE”**

**- HENRY DAVID THOREAU**

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# 11/R.U.P.A

## THE UNIVERSAL FORM

The Sanskrit word *rupa* means “form.” One of the most heated theological debates among great thinkers has raged for centuries; the question over whether God is personal or impersonal. Some argue that accepting a personal form of God amounts to anthropomorphic projection of our human qualities onto Him. Krishna, however, confirms in numerous passages of the Bhagavad-gita that He manifests in many ways, impersonally and personally. He also categorically states that the personal is the original form and the basis of the impersonal. This is further confirmed Chapter Eleven, after Krishna displays another of his innumerable forms known as the *visva-rupa*, the universal form.



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**R** **Request (1-4)** - Arjuna requests Krishna to reveal His universal form. *But what is his purpose in requesting such a vision, especially since he already accepts Krishna as the Supreme Truth (10.12)?* Arjuna doesn't have any personal agenda in seeing the universal form, but requests the vision for other reasons. Firstly, he wants to emphatically prove that Krishna is indeed the source of the entire creation. Furthermore, he establishes a criteria for any future candidates claiming to be God, to also manifest such a mystical feat. Unfortunately, our modern world is plagued with so-called incarnations and God-men claiming to be the latest saviours of society by dint of magical trickery, subtle powers, charismatic conduct, or simply popular vote.

**U** **Universal Form (5-14)** - Krishna grants Arjuna's request and shows His universal form. While God is the source of this universe, He is simultaneously the universe itself, in the sense that He is present within His own creation. For example, in my writings you can probably understand

something about me – the effect (writings) tells us something about the cause (the author) and in that sense the cause is very much present within the effect. Similarly, God is the source of the universe, but is simultaneously encompassing the universe – that is the universal form. It's not that God is the sum of the parts, but rather that everything is contained within God.

**P** **Prayers of Arjuna (15-45)** – Shocked and frightened, Arjuna offers prayers to the universal form, awed by the greatness of Krishna. He begs forgiveness for having previously treated Him with familiarity and friendship. Most religious traditions endorse this majestic understanding of God – God who is the infallible creator, controller and all-knowing authority. It often leads to a fearful exchange with God, lacking intimacy, sweetness and personal relationship. The God-fearing approach, however, is an elementary stage in our spiritual development. Having seen enough, Arjuna anxiously requests Krishna to once again reveal

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His two-armed form so that he can again relish the intimacy of that interaction.

**A** **Armed Form (46-55)** – Arjuna requests to see the *manusim-rupa*, the human-like form of Krishna, around whose neck is swinging a garland of flowers beautified with the moon-locket, whose two hands are adorned with the flute and jewelled ornaments, and whose graceful threefold-bending form attracts the minds of His devotees. Ancient Sanskrit texts describe Krishna as “*raso vai sah*” – the very embodiment of affectionate relationships, loving relish, and transcendental sweetness. God is a person who is full of colour, character and bliss. He knows how to have a good time and is much more interested in relishing the sweetness of pure love than the formal worship of those who approach Him in awe and reverence.

**“WHEN I READ THE BHAGAVAD-GITA AND REFLECT  
ABOUT HOW GOD CREATED THIS UNIVERSE  
EVERYTHING ELSE SEEMS SO SUPERFLUOUS”**

**- ALBERT EINSTEIN**

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# 12/G.O.D

## DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

Although the shortest chapter in the Bhagavad-gita, Chapter Twelve contains essential insights on devotional Service. Krishna discusses the path of devotion, the stages one may progress through to achieve it, and the qualities of the devotee who has perfected it. "God" is generally defined as "the supreme controller." In this chapter, however, we gain understanding of the more cherished aspects of God's personality, and the disposition of the devotee who is fully in love with Him.



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**G** **Godhead (1-7)** - In response to a question by Arjuna, Krishna again picks up the discussion of impersonalism. It seems to be a recurring theme in the text, and one may wonder why. Krishna explains that a personal approach to God through *bhakti-yoga* (devotional service) is not only powerful and practical, but more fruitful and satisfying. The very essence of our being is to seek happiness (*anandamaya bhyasat*), and happiness ultimately lies in relationships. For a relationship to exist there must be a subject, object and reciprocity. Impersonal notions of 'oneness,' however, kill all three and therefore cheat the individual of the true happiness we all seek. While those who tread the impersonal path of spirituality undoubtedly receive spiritual merit, the practice is troublesome, the progress is piecemeal, and the rewards are meagre. Thus, one reason Srila Prabhupada continually refers to Krishna as the 'Godhead' is to remind us that God is ultimately a person who must be approached as such.

**O** **Options (8-12)** – In these verses, Krishna demonstrates His magnanimity and flexibility. Having delineated the most evolved path of spirituality, He goes on to offer other options, recognising that some may be unable to immediately embrace a pure devotional path. Progressive steps towards such a devotional spirit include the practice of regulated spirituality, worship through one's daily work, offering of charity, and the cultivation of knowledge. The spiritual path is not all or nothing and one can begin their journey according to what is feasible, achievable and realistic.

**D** **Devotee's Disposition (13-20)** - Krishna concludes the chapter by describing the shining qualities of a devotee that endear him to everyone. As one develops purity of consciousness, traits such as tolerance, determination, satisfaction and equanimity of mind automatically manifest within one's character. (That said, conscientious spiritualists also endeavour to deliberately cultivate such qualities, as they support

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one's spirituality and help them progress faster.)  
Devotees endowed with such an attractive and spotless character conquer the heart of Krishna, who becomes bound by their devotion. Such are the dealings within the transcendental realm – where even the unconquerable supreme controller becomes a captive of love.

**“WE’RE NOT TRYING TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO BELIEVE IN GOD. THAT’S NURSERY SCHOOL, KIDS STUFF. WE’RE TRYING TO MOTIVATE THEM TO BECOME QUALIFIED TO PERCEIVE GOD”**

**- DEVAMRITA SWAMI**

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# 13/W.I.S.E

## NATURE, THE ENJOYER, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The final six chapters focus on “jnana” - transcendental wisdom which aids one’s detachment from the material world and subsequent attachment to Krishna. Chapter Thirteen covers topics previously discussed, but explores them in a more analytical way. Wise readers can take advantage of Krishna’s logical presentation to strengthen their conviction and deepen their understanding.



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**W** **Wise Questions (1-7)** - Arjuna asks Krishna to define six subjects: *prakṛti* (nature), *puruṣa* (the enjoyer), *kṣetra* (the field of activities), *kṣetrājña* (the knower of the field), *jñānam* (knowledge and the process of knowing), and *jñeyam* (the object of knowledge). These subjects are key constituents of Vedic philosophy and Krishna therefore spends the entire chapter defining and discussing them. Arjuna, although an established transcendentalist, plays the part of a materially entangled individual so he can pose questions for the benefit of humanity. His astute inquiries create the opportunity for Krishna to offer answers to life's most profound mysteries. Krishna begins by first defining *kṣetra* and the *kṣetrājña*.

**I** **Items of knowledge (8-12)** - These verses describe how the *kṣetrājña* (spirit soul) can disentangle himself from the *kṣetra* (body) by cultivating *jñāna* (knowledge). Since transcendental knowledge is revealed within the heart of a deserving person, the real method to acquire it is through the

cultivation of divine qualities, of which humility is foremost. Becoming wise is not simply a matter of information and memorisation, but intimately connected to personal character and practical behaviour. One who nurtures a saintly disposition experiences a change of heart, which invokes profound realisation, helping the eternal soul to relinquish its deep-rooted identification with the temporary body.

**S** **Soul & Supersoul (13-19)** - Having described the *kṣetra*, *kṣetrājña* and *jñānam*, Krishna now describes *jñeyam*, the object of knowledge. Knowledge is meant to help one directly perceive the soul and the Supersoul, who are eternally individual but intimately related. It is the prerogative of the soul to understand the Supersoul, but the Supersoul is sometimes described as '*avijñeyam*', or unknowable. *How to reconcile this?* Empirical researchers who try to fathom the Supreme using mundane logic and material sense perception are invariably baffled, and the Supersoul remains unknowable to them. Those who approach the subject matter with the proper

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attitude, however, ready and willing to gain insight through the eyes of spiritual preceptors, can surely be successful.

**E** **Enjoyer (20-35)** - The chapter concludes with descriptions of the final two subjects – *prakṛti* and *purusa*. The living entity's desire to control and enjoy matter (*prakṛti*) binds him to the material world. In reality the Supersoul is the only enjoyer (*purusa*) and everything (material nature and the individual souls) is meant for His enjoyment. This, however, does not leave us unhappy or unfulfilled. Pouring water over the root of a tree consequentially energises the trunk, branches, and twigs. Feeding the stomach invariably enlivens the senses and limbs of the entire body. Similarly, offering worship and service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead for His pleasure and satisfaction, automatically satisfies all living entities, including ourselves. We need not make any separate endeavour for enjoyment.

**“THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT DAYS IN YOUR LIFE ARE THE DAY YOU ARE BORN, AND THE DAY YOU FIND OUT WHY”**

**- MARK TWAIN**

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# 14/T.R.A.P

## THE THREE MODES OF MATERIAL NATURE

In Chapter Fourteen, Krishna introduces a very interesting subject known as the “three modes of material nature.” Three primary qualities permeate everything we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Our lifestyle, attitude and behaviours also fall under the domain and influence of these qualities (or ‘modes’), thus determining our sense of happiness and well-being in life. Through close analysis, we can perceive how people are functioning with a mistaken sense of free will, when in actuality they are being impelled and influenced by these three modes at every moment. Therefore, unless one is able to transcend these modes of nature, they imperceptibly trap one in this material world, life after life.



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**T** **Three Modes (1-9)** – ‘Mode’ is a translation of the Sanskrit word *guna*, which literally means ‘rope.’ The three modes influence a person’s character, behaviour and mentality, thus binding them to a certain quality of life. For example, if Goodness (*sattva*) predominates, one will aspire for (and generally achieve) long-term happiness even if one is subjected to temporary inconvenience. The person impelled by Passion (*rajas*) strives for instantaneous short-term gain and doesn’t expect much more out of life. Finally, the person dominated by Ignorance (*tamas*) rarely achieves happiness at all, having little sense of direction and drive in their life. In this way the material world is populated by living entities who are influenced by various configurations of these modes.

**R** **Race for prominence (10-13)** – Just as three primary colours are mixed to generate a variety of tones, combinations of the three modes can form an unlimited variety of individual personalities and psychologies. Furthermore, the modes continually compete with one another for

supremacy within an individual. Even within the cycle of a single day, different modes may achieve prominence at different times. As a general rule, Goodness clarifies and pacifies the individual, since it invokes satisfaction, wisdom, altruism and kindness. Passion is said to confuse and agitate the individual by provoking qualities like greed, anger and frustration. Ignorance is said to obscure and impede one’s life, symptomised by apathy, laziness and inertia.

**A** **Actions in the modes (14-18)** – Reincarnation is the process by which a soul receives a new material body on the basis of activities performed and consciousness cultivated in the present body. Our activities are a result of the decisions we make, and our decisions are ultimately based on the modes we are being influenced by. Thus, Krishna predicts the future destination of an individual based on the predominant mode in their life. In short, those situated in Goodness are promoted to higher planets, those in Passion remain on the earthly planets and those in Ignorance degrade themselves to the

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hellish worlds.

**P** **Pure Life (19-27)** - Through these various descriptions we can assess the combination of modes we are personally affected by.

Although Goodness is said to be the purest form of existence in this world, and in many ways beneficial for spiritual practice, it still implicates one in the law of karma. To completely rid oneself of karmic reactions, the spiritualist should use Goodness as a springboard to elevate themselves to the spiritual platform, known as pure goodness or *suddha-sattva*. This is possible by engaging in *bhakti-yoga* with unflinching determination, taking inspiration and support from those who have already transcended the three material modes. Krishna explains the shining character of such a perfected transcendentalist, who enjoys nectar even in this life.

**WE BECOME AVERAGE WHEN WE ARE TOO BUSY, TOO ARROGANT OR TOO COMFORTABLE TO KEEP LEARNING, GROWING, AND IMPROVING**

- UNKNOWN

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# 15/H.O.M.E

## THE YOGA OF THE SUPREME PERSON

Imagine a holidaymaker checks into their hotel room and then begins painting the walls, fitting new furniture, revamping the bathroom and hanging up family pictures. It sounds ludicrous – what's the value in making elaborate arrangements in a temporary residence? Funnily enough, most people do just this. The material world is likened to a hotel room within which living entities perpetually make complicated plans for security and enjoyment, only to be forcibly removed by the ruthless waves of time. In Chapter Fifteen, Krishna uses a wonderful analogy to help detach us from this temporary abode, and instead fuel our desire to re-enter our real home in the spiritual realm.



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**H** **Home or Hotel? (1-5)** – Just as a banyan tree has its reflection in the water, the spiritual world also has its reflection – the material world. While they may look similar from a distance, the spiritual world is where reality, substance and true satisfaction is found. The reflected tree of the material world, however, confuses and frustrates, appearing upside-down and the wrong-way-round in all respects, with nothing substantial to offer us. Bird-like living entities frantically search for juicy fruits on the reflected tree, but the substance which they yearn for remains ever elusive. Krishna urges the reader to cut down this illusory tree with the weapon of detachment and end the futile endeavours for permanent fulfilment in the temporary phantasmagoria.

**O** **On and On, Over and Over again (6-11)** - Krishna gives a glimpse of the spiritual world, showing how its nature is perfect, complete and fully satisfying to all. Once having re-entered it, one never returns to this world. Here in the material realm, an individual hops from tree to tree,

acquiring various material bodies based on the worldly desires they cultivate throughout their life. At the time of death, through the subtle laws of reincarnation, one receives a body which is tailor-made to facilitate their deep-seated desires. Man proposes, God disposes, and the embodied soul enters a new chapter of existence in the search for happiness.

**M** **Maintainer of body, mind, soul (12-15)** - One who is entangled within the reflected tree of material existence can develop his spiritual consciousness by appreciating Krishna as the maintainer on all levels. Krishna maintains our gross physical body by arranging fundamental necessities that provide the energy of life. He also maintains our subtle capacities by facilitating knowledge, remembrance and forgetfulness. Finally, and most importantly, Krishna maintains our spirituality by offering ways and means to achieve self-realisation and escape the dangerous cycle of repeated birth and death.

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**E** **Essence in 3 verses (16-18)** - Previously Krishna summarized the Bhagavad-gita in four verses, and now He again summarises the teachings in three verses. Fallible living entities (*ksara*) have dropped into the tree of material existence due to an independent desire to enjoy. Distinguished from them are the infallible living entities (*aksara*) who never leave the spiritual realm due to their uncompromised desire to be with Krishna. Beyond both entities is the Supreme Lord. Thus, in yet another passage, Krishna reinforces that the living entity never becomes God, since even liberated souls have their separate identity in the spiritual world

**“WE ARE ALL VISITORS TO THIS TIME, THIS PLACE.  
WE ARE JUST PASSING THROUGH. OUR PURPOSE HERE  
IS TO OBSERVE, TO LEARN, TO GROW, TO LOVE... AND  
THEN WE RETURN HOME”**

**- ABORIGINAL PROVERB**

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# 16/D.O.G

## THE DIVINE AND DEMONIC NATURES

Dogs are unpredictable. Though widely acclaimed as man's best friend, dogs are also notorious for brutal, unprovoked attacks. Such contradictory behaviour is a sign of our times. In previous ages, the distinction between divine and demonic people was very clear – they lived at a distance from each other and rarely mixed. In modern times, however, the dividing line has disappeared to the extent that the divine and demonic coexist within the same individual! In Chapter Sixteen, Krishna describes the qualities of the saintly and faults of the demonic, exposing attitudes and behaviours that destroy one's spirituality.

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**D** **Divine or Demoniatic (1-6)** - On the 'tree of the material world,' divine qualities are said to elevate us whereas demoniac qualities result in degradation. Such qualities are the result of nature and nurture. While we undoubtedly carry impressions from previous lives, our desire, determination and discipline in this life can significantly alter that nature. Krishna describes 26 divine qualities and the six major demoniac qualities.

**O** **Opinions & Outlook of Demons (7-20)** - To reassure Arjuna that he is of divine nature, Krishna distinguishes the activities, mentality and qualities of the demoniac section. Such living entities are cast into repeated births in undeveloped, lower species of life. While this may sound like the harsh and judgmental God of dogmatic religion, Krishna explains how such treatment is the most progressive and compassionate course of action to gradually uplift such individuals. Demoniac philosophy, mentality and activities generate immeasurable anxiety for the individual and cause

great disruption in the wider society. It is a case of hate the disease not the diseased.

**G** **Gates to hell (21-24)** - Krishna warns that lust, anger and greed are the three root qualities that lead one to hell. Such hellish planets are not eternal prisons for the errant soul, but places of reformation where stern lessons help one to realign their vision. For one who wants to avoid such shock treatment, the scriptures act as a guidebook for gradual purification and ultimate perfection. They recommend a spiritual lifestyle by which one can easily transform lust to love, anger to tolerance and greed to selflessness.

**“LIFE IS AN ECHO. WHAT YOU SEND OUT, COMES BACK. WHAT YOU SOW, YOUR REAP. WHAT YOU GIVE, YOU GET. WHAT YOU SEE IN OTHERS, EXISTS IN YOU. REMEMBER, LIFE IS AN ECHO”**

**- ZIG ZIGLAR**

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# 17/F.A.C.E

## THE DIVISIONS OF FAITH

In the previous chapter Krishna describes two extremes; the divine and the demoniac. Its clear, however, that each of us have many faces and are not necessarily one or the other. Life is never black or white, but usually different shades of grey. The faces that we present on a daily basis reveal something about our faith – the things we trust, pursue and place value upon. As they say, “What makes him tick?” Chapter Seventeen describes how a person’s affiliation to a particular mode will determine the type of faith they have.



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**F Faith (1-7)** – Although religious people are often referred to as ‘people of faith,’ the reality is that everyone has faith. Without putting faith in traffic lights, doctors, and banks, to name but a few, could we function in this world? To have faith means to see opportunity, reward and value in something even though it may not be immediately verifiable. Thus, according to one’s faith, one identifies objects of value and begins to engage with them in different ways. In accordance with this, individuals adopt worldviews, lifestyles and character traits. Krishna begins a discussion of this, by giving examples of diet and sacrifices.

**A Austerities (14-19)** – In order to achieve anything in this world, one must undergo some austerity. We sacrifice immediate pleasure and comfort for the purpose of long-term gain. People who place faith in different things, perform different austerities in life. Krishna explains beneficial austerities pertaining to the body, mind and words, and also the varying motivations with which

one may perform them.

**C Charity (20-22)** - The innate quality of the soul is to serve and thus we find a charitable disposition within everyone to a greater or lesser extent. According to one’s own faith, they make efforts to help others. Krishna discusses the different types of charity and explains that to truly benefit people, charity must be performed within certain parameters. Charity should be given out of duty, without expectation of return, at the proper time and place, and to a worthy person. The ultimate charity, however, is to help someone reawaken their spirituality - this will permanently solve all their problems.

**E Enjoyer of everything (23-28)** – Throughout this chapter Krishna discusses all His themes with reference to the modes of nature. It is essential to understand that all activities, even those performed in Goodness, will always yield karmic reactions to the performer and thus bind him to

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repeated existence in this world. But is there a way out? In Vedic hymns, God is defined as the supreme enjoyer by the three words “om tat sat.” Thus, if our sacrifices, penance, and austerities are dedicated to the Supreme, done for His pleasure and favour, then such activities yield permanent benefit and ultimate freedom. Such activities transcend the three modes of material nature and are liberating rather than entangling.

**“YOU WERE BORN ORIGINAL – DON’T DIE A COPY”**

**- UNKNOWN**

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# 18/S.M.I.L.E

## THE PERFECTION OF RENUNCIATION

Chapter Eighteen is a summary of the Gita. After systematically outlining various spiritual truths, Krishna offers His "*paramam vacah*" (supreme advice): one should take up *bhakti-yoga*, the most essential spiritual practice outlined in every chapter of this conversation, and thus develop their personal relationship with God. Thus, one is offered the opportunity of permanent happiness and fulfilment by the achievement of Krishna consciousness. This is considered the perfection of renunciation. In such consciousness, an individual can smile in the face of all situations and circumstances, confident that the smiling Krishna is his constant companion and best friend eternally.



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**S** **Summary of Karma-yoga (1-18)** - The Eighteenth chapter begins by addressing the 'frequently asked question' that seems to pop up again and again. *If working in this world seems to attract karmic reaction and implicates us in a web of worldly complexity, is it not safer that we give up work altogether?* Krishna disagrees and reiterates that activity is not bad per se. The root of entanglement is the materialistic mentality with which we act, thinking ourselves the controller and enjoyer. In reality, however, there are five causes which bring success to any activity – the individual soul, the body, the senses, the endeavour, and ultimately the Supersoul. Since we are only one of the five we should never have an over-valued estimation of ourselves. Thus, by working in a spirit of detachment, offering the results of labour towards a transcendental goal, one can function in this world and simultaneously remain completely aloof.

**M** **Modes of nature (19-40)** – Looking around us, the reality is that most people are deeply engrossed in material pursuit.

Krishna ascribes this to the influence of the modes of material nature, that entangle each person according to their individual mentality. He explains how the modes influence our knowledge, our actions, our understanding, our determination and ultimately our sense of happiness.

**Ideal Worker (41-55)** - So what is the solution? On one hand we're expected to be dutiful and detached workers, but in reality we have a psycho-physical nature influenced by the modes, which implicates us in worldly life. In this section, Krishna explains how one can engage their nature in different types of work. Four divisions are outlined – the *brahmana* (intelligent class), *ksatriya* (martial class), *vaisya* (mercantile class) and *sudra* (labourer class). One need not artificially imitate another man's duty, but rather embrace what is natural and inborn. By engaging our nature and discharging work in a spirit of God consciousness, we purify ourselves of material propensities and live a happy and peaceful life.

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**L** **Love of God (56-66)** - All the activities and practices recommended in the Bhagavad-gita are ultimately aimed at achieving pure love of God. The highest realisation in transcendental knowledge is to re-establish one's eternal loving relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Srila Prabhupada wonderfully sums this up in his purport to 18.65: "The most confidential part of knowledge is that one should become a pure devotee of Krishna and always think of Him and act for Him. One should not become an official meditator. Life should be so moulded that one will always have the chance to think of Krishna. One should always act in such a way that all his daily activities are in connection with Krishna. He should arrange his life in such a way that throughout the twenty four hours he cannot help but think of Krishna. And the Lord's promise is that anyone who is in such pure Krishna consciousness will certainly return to the abode of Krishna, where he will be engaged in the association of Krishna face to face."

**E** **End Result (67-78)** – Knowledge and understanding of the Bhagavad-gita is dependent upon one's consciousness. Only one who approaches these sacred teachings with the proper mood, lifestyle and sincere application will be able to fully comprehend the deep and profound meanings. By hearing and studying this conversation with such favourable temperament, one perceives the spiritual dimension as a tangible reality and his life becomes exciting and wondrous at every step. Thus, to share this wisdom with society at large constitutes the greatest welfare work in the entire universe.

**“TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL BE MORE DISAPPOINTED BY THE THINGS THAT YOU DIDN'T DO THAN BY THE ONES YOU DID DO. SO THROW OFF THE BOWLINES. SAIL AWAY FROM THE SAFE HARBOR. CATCH THE TRADE WINDS IN YOUR SAILS. EXPLORE. DREAM. DISCOVER.”**

- MARK TWAIN

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## LIVING A GITA LIFE

*Thus I have explained to you knowledge still more confidential. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do. (Bhagavad-gita 18.63)*

The Bhagavad-gita is not simply a philosophical treatise, but rather a call to action. We are meant to read it, learnt it and ultimately live it. The profound wisdom that Krishna imparts is something that everyone can experience as a tangible reality. However, this is only possible when we practically implement the teachings and spiritualise different aspects of our daily life. By incorporating four timeless spiritual practices into our lifestyle we can quickly become peaceful, happy and self-realised.

**A - ASSOCIATION**

**B - BOOKS**

**C - CHANTING**

**D - DIET**

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**A**SSOCIATION - We all need friends. On the journey of life there are twists and turns, ditches and dead ends, obstacles and opposition. But as John Lennon sang "I get by with a little help from my friends." Those who embark on the spiritual journey are brave indeed. They strive for purity in a world of degradation, they embrace simplicity amongst rampant materialism, and they cultivate selflessness in an atmosphere charged with exploitation. Anyone who boldly goes against the grain will face temptation, doubt, ridicule and moments of weakness. Without the encouragement, support and good advice of spiritual friends how can one continue? Srila Prabhupada established ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) to give people the chance to develop relationships with devotees of Krishna. This is one of the most effective ways to gain faith and become enthusiastic in spiritual life.

**Tip:** Try to visit a local ISKCON temple on a regular basis, and take advantage of the classes, festivals and various opportunities for devotional service. If you live far away from a temple, you can attend one of the Krishna groups

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*that meet regularly in many districts of London and the Home Counties. At these gatherings, you can enjoy uplifting chanting, a lively and informative talk and prasadam (sanctified vegetarian food).*

**B** **BOOKS** - Krishna explains that there is nothing in this world as sublime as transcendental knowledge. Firstly, knowledge is compared to a sword which cuts down our doubts and helps one remain determined and confident in their spiritual quest. Secondly, knowledge is likened to a lamp which warns us of the obstacles and impediments that we may encounter in our lives. Thirdly, knowledge is compared to a boat which protects one from the sufferings of this oceanic world, and simultaneously carries one to the spiritual realm, face-to-face with Krishna. When Srila Prabhupada spoke into a dictaphone and translated the timeless wisdom of the Vedas, Lord Krishna and the great teachers spoke through him. That spiritual sound was then transformed into the printed word, which, when read and assimilated, can once again manifest the full potency of the original sound.

**Tip:** *Read the books translated by Srila Prabhupada. Along with the well-known Bhagavad-gita there is also the Srimad Bhagavatam. Its 18,000 verses continue*

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*the philosophical teachings of the Gita, and also describe Krishna's divine appearance and avatars. Srila Prabhupada also published the Caitanya Caritamrita, the biography and detailed teachings of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Krishna's most recent incarnation. There are also the important works of Srila Rupa Goswami, medieval disciple of Shri Chaitanya, such as Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu and Upadeshamrita. It's best to read daily, either a certain number of pages or for a certain amount of time. We can make a thorough study, noting interesting or difficult passages, or we can simply read our way through, confident of our spiritual purification.*

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**C** **CHANTING** - Five hundred years ago, Krishna incarnated as Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and ushered in a spiritual revolution by freely initiating everyone – regardless of race, religion, or social status – into the chanting of the most effective mantra of all, the Hare Krishna mantra. Since God is all-powerful and all-merciful, He has kindly made it very easy for us to chant His names, and He has also invested all His powers in them. Thus, the vibrated names of God and God Himself are identical. This means that when we chant the holy names of Krishna we are directly associating with Him and simultaneously being purified by such communion. Chanting is a prayer to Krishna that means *“O energy of the Lord (Hare), O all-attractive Lord (Krishna), O supreme enjoyer (Rama), please engage me in Your service.”* This chanting is exactly like the genuine cry of a child for its mother’s presence. Mother Hara helps the devotee achieve the Lord Father’s grace, and the Lord reveals Himself to the devotee who chants this mantra sincerely.

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**Tip:** *Recite the Hare Krishna mantra on a circle of 108 wooden beads. This is known as japa meditation. One time round the beads each day is for beginners, four times round as a daily minimum is for more committed practitioners, and sixteen 'rounds' are for those who have taken (or are planning to take) their lifetime vows. You can chant these holy names of the Lord anywhere and at any time, but the early morning hours are deemed ideal. While you're chanting, simply fix your mind on hearing the sound of the mantra. When you talk, it's natural for you to listen to your voice, and during meditation, direct this natural attentiveness to hearing the mantra. The quality of your meditation will depend on how well you do this.*

**D** **DIET** - The Bhagavad-gita proclaims eating to be an extremely sacred activity when conducted with due care, attention and spiritual consciousness. If we place an iron rod in a fire, soon the rod becomes red hot and acts just like fire. In the same way, food prepared for and offered to Krishna with love and devotion becomes completely spiritualised. Such food is called Krishna *prasadam*, which means "the mercy of Lord Krishna." Eating *prasadam* is a fundamental practice of *bhakti-yoga*. In other forms of yoga one must artificially repress the senses, but the *bhakti-yogi* can engage his or her senses in a variety of pleasing spiritual activities.

**Tip:** *It is recommended that one offer all their food to Krishna before eating. From the purchase of the ingredients, to the cooking, then the offering and finally the eating, every step can be an act of love which brings one closer to God. The process starts with selecting ingredients, ideally those which are vegetarian, natural and fresh. In preparing food, cleanliness, attention to detail and devotion are the main principles. After cooking,*

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*arrange portions of the food on special dinner-ware kept especially for Krishna. The easiest way to offer food is simply to pray, "My dear Lord Krishna, please accept this humble offering". There are also special mantras which can be chanted to invoke a devotional consciousness. Then you can accept that sanctified food and share it with others!*

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# GET INVOLVED

## TAKE A COURSE

Invest valuable time in the study of precious scripture: Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, Sri Isopanisad & more. [courses@krishnatemple.com](mailto:courses@krishnatemple.com)

## VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

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## HELPFUL WEBSITES

Main website of Bhaktivedanta Manor

[www.krishnatemple.com](http://www.krishnatemple.com)

ISKCON around the world

[www.krishna.com](http://www.krishna.com)

Sutapa das Blog

[www.tattva.co.uk](http://www.tattva.co.uk)



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