



Bhagavad Gita

A Short Summary in Acronyms

Based on *Bhagavad Gita As It Is* by
His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada



Bhagavad Gita

A simple and concise overview 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

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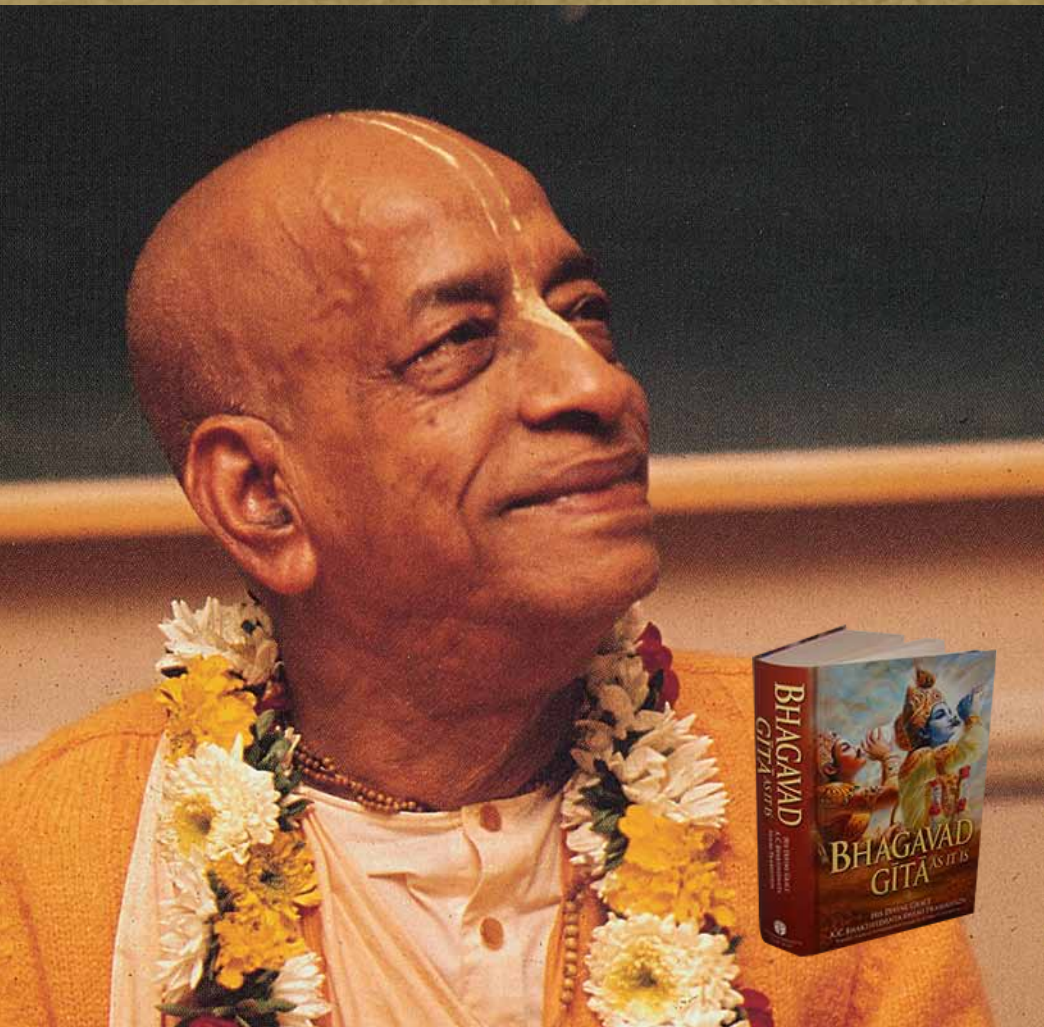
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Introduction

Eminent scholars, scientists and philosophers have recognised the profound wisdom that the Bhagavad-gita offers. Gandhi once commented, *"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. 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."*

What follows is a humble attempt to bring together some insights in the form of a short overview of the Bhagavad-gita. My aim is not to draw out every single philosophical point, but rather to highlight key concepts in each chapter. Hopefully this overview will assist readers in understanding the flow, context and practical application of these timeless spiritual teachings. It may also assist teachers of the Bhagavad-gita in their attempts to share this wisdom with others.

This small booklet is based on the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, translated by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. His translation has revolutionised modern thinking, and each purport elucidates the incredibly profound life lessons that Lord Krishna imparts to Arjuna. I hope this humble attempt to share some of that wisdom will inspire the reader to study Srila Prabhupada's full translation which can answer every question, remove every doubt, and ultimately bring one face-to-face with Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Above all, I undertook this exercise for my own spiritual growth, praying that someday I will genuinely live by these teachings.

Sutapa das



1- Observing the Armies on the Battlefield of Kuruksetra

The spiritual journey usually starts with a doubt. Over the years, 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 milestones of success that have become deeply ingrained within us. Could there be some deeper purpose to life? While this initial doubt can often bring great uncertainty and confusion, it can also bring us to the start of our spiritual journey. It is this very doubt that Arjuna expresses at the onset of this sacred conversation.

D Dhritarashtra & Duryodhana

O Ominous result

U Uncertainty

B Bewilderment

T Turning point

D - Dhritarashtra & Duryodhana (Verses 1-12) – Innumerable soldiers have assembled on the battlefield of Kurukshetra due to the obstinacy and deep-rooted material aspirations of these two characters, bent on usurping their cousins' kingdom. Sitting in his palace, King Dhritarashtra inquires about the latest events on the battlefield, while his son Duryodhana is busy firing up his army as it prepares for fratricidal war. Dhritarashtra is physically blind, but he and his son are also blinded by greed, envy and material desire. When the individual starts to think in terms of "I, me and mine", primarily interested in selfish gain and personal aggrandizement, then anxiety, frustration and disappointment are inevitable. Unfortunately, one who is materially entangled becomes oblivious to the ill-effects of his actions.

O - Ominous result (Verses 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. Those who stand on the side of purity and righteousness are always victorious, regardless of whether the worldly odds seem stacked against them. One who is a carrier of goodness is never overcome by evil.

U - Uncertainty (Verses 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 wants to take a final look at the armies. He orders Krishna, who assumes the role of his charioteer, to drive to the middle of the battlefield so he can satisfy his curiosity. To his credit,

despite the intensity of the situation, Arjuna takes time to reflect. Life may be crammed with 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.

B - Bewilderment (Verses 28-30) – Foreseeing the imminent suffering and death that is the inevitable consequence of war, Arjuna begins to analyse his predicament. At this stage, bereft of broader spiritual vision, his uncertainty intensifies and he becomes bewildered. When one lacks an understanding of his spiritual identity, his relationship with God, and the critical purpose behind this world, one inevitably becomes disturbed and frustrated by life's challenges.

T - Turning point (Verses 31-42) – Arjuna justifies his decision to retreat from fighting: 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, causing havoc for future generations. Thus, his mind overwhelmed by grief, Arjuna sets aside his weapons and resolves not to fight.

G – Guru (Verses 1-10) - Determined not to fight, but simultaneously torn and confused, Arjuna approaches Krishna. *"I am in dire need of guidance,"* he humbly submits, *"please enlighten me so I can mitigate my miserable condition."* Through Arjuna's example we learn the first fundamental step in spirituality; one must approach 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 discipline 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 pure inner consciousness. As the saying goes, *"One who accepts himself as a guru, accepts a fool for a disciple!"*

I - Identity (Verses 11-30) - Krishna begins by teaching Arjuna the most fundamental understanding of spiritual life; as the driver operates a car or as the bird lives in a cage, we, the spirit soul, are similarly utilising 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 soul, 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 eternal question of "who am I?" can set the soul free. It is an answer that is worth hearing again and again.

T - Two Duties (Verses 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, the 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 such *dharma* side-by-side. Many individuals neglect their *sanatana-dharma*, becoming too preoccupied with their *sva-dharma*. On the other extreme, individuals can prematurely reject their *sva-dharma* and falsely try to absorb themselves in *sanatana-dharma*. The most progressive path is to be fully alert to both duties, and in doing so lead a happy and balanced material and spiritual life.

A - Atmarama (Verses 54-72) - What is the result for someone who performs such duties with determination and enthusiasm? Such a person becomes 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 delight and transcendental consciousness.



3 - *Karma-yoga*

A tree produces many fruits, but 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 and strength, ready to serve the world again. The life and qualities of a tree give us profound insight into the art of living in this world while simultaneously remaining completely aloof. Chapter Three defines the practice of *karma-yoga* - the technique of achieving spiritual connection with God through our daily work. Describing the life of a true *karma-yogi*, the Bible also affirms, "*Be in the world but not of it.*"

- T** Tyaga (Renunciation)
- R** Rungs (on the Yoga Ladder)
- E** Exemplary
- E** Enemy of the soul

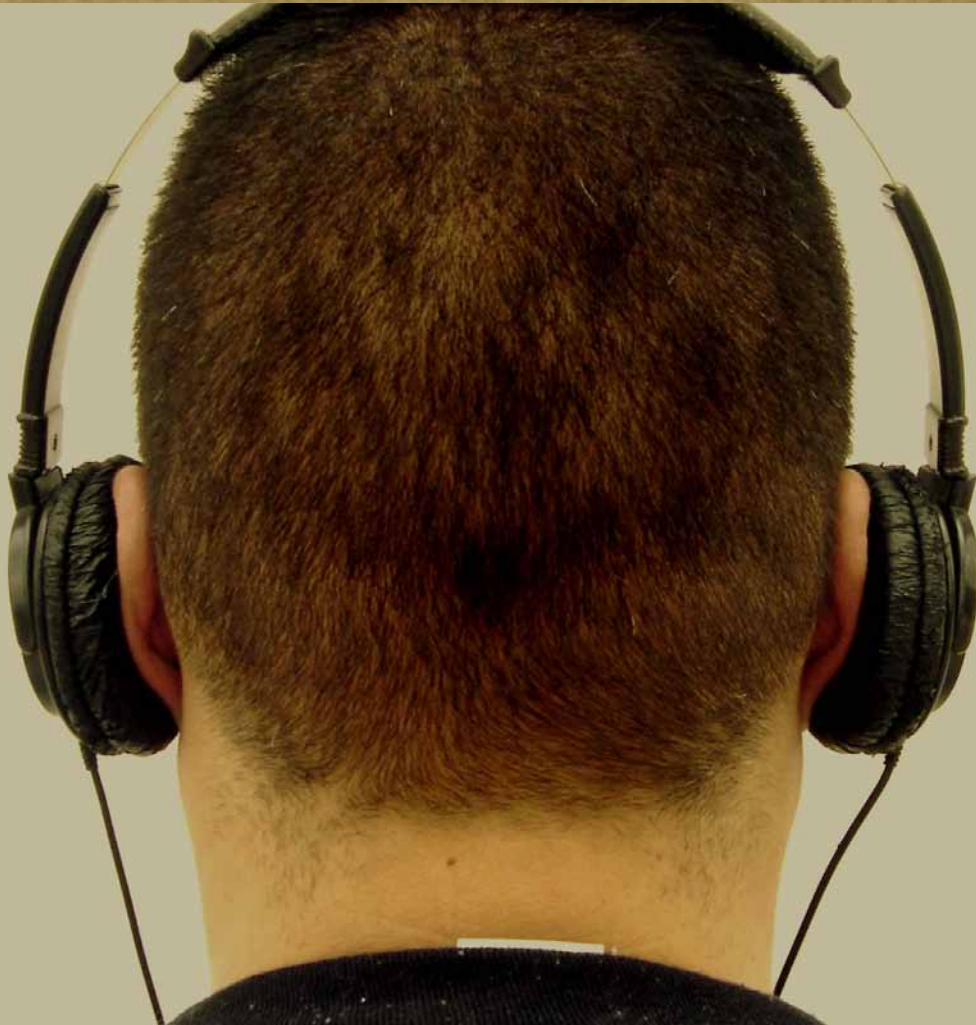
T – Tyaga (Renunciation) (Verses 1-9) – At first, Arjuna displays the typical confusion of an immature spiritualist. He thinks spirituality means retirement from active life and the adoption of asceticism in strict seclusion. Often, the easiest response in times of difficulty is one of escapism. Worldly life entails awkward dealings with money, possessions, people and career to name but a few. How can such a lifestyle be compatible with spiritual goals? Krishna explains that true renunciation does not entail a mere abandonment of worldly duties. True renunciation is to give up the mentality that one is the “controller” and “enjoyer” of all his deeds. Thus, by offering the results of one’s daily work (money, knowledge, influence etc.) to God, knowing God to be the ultimate enjoyer and controller, one achieves a real state of renunciation.

R – Rungs (on the Yoga Ladder) (Verses 10-16) – To work without any selfish motivation 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 understanding. On the lowest level an individual is solely interested in materialistic enjoyment and has no spiritual inclination. One stage higher is *karma-kanda*, where one still desires materialistic enjoyment but now tries to achieve it via religious observances. When one realises the futility of material enjoyment they progress to *sakama-karma-yoga*, where one begins to offer a portion of his results to God but still maintains some selfish motivation. At the next stage of *niskama-karma-yoga* one accepts whatever necessities he requires to maintain himself and offers everything else to God. Those who progress to

this level of spirituality break free from all karmic implication and become peaceful and liberated.

E – Exemplary (Verses 17-35) - Thus, *karma-yoga* is 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 of all selfish motivation? Krishna explains how perfected spiritualists continue working in the world for the sole purpose of setting the proper example for others to follow and be inspired by.

E – Enemy of the soul (Verses 36-43) - After hearing about this practical and logical process, the natural reaction is an enthusiastic resolve to dedicate oneself to it. But Arjuna 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 then explains 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 ceaselessly tries to enjoy in a self-centred way without proper regard for others. The way of lust impels one to seek immediate gratification and abandon activities that actually benefit them. In this way, lust cheats one of a progressive and happy life and offers only meagre, instantaneous and temporary gratification in return.



4 - Transcendental Knowledge

Spiritual knowledge is known as *sruti* – “that which is heard”. In bygone ages, people would hear such knowledge, remember it, assimilate it, and perfectly communicate it to the next person without any adulteration. Chapter Four is entitled “Transcendental Knowledge” for it is this 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*’.

- E** Eternal education
- A** Accurate Understanding
- R** Removing Reactions
- S** Sacrifice

E - Eternal education (Verses 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 guidelines are found in the ancient scriptures, which contain knowledge of divine origin, 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 ensure the smooth functioning of the universe.

A - Accurate Understanding (Verses 11-15) - Most people know something about religion, and something about God, but their understanding can often be quite hazy and confused. However, when transcendental knowledge is received through the eternal educational system one gains an accurate understanding. In three verses, Krishna 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 Eastern 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 is unfair and exploitative - Krishna outlines the true criteria and purpose of such classification.

R – Removing Reactions (Verses 16-24) - While transcendental knowledge helps one to clear up philosophical doubts, it 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 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 (Verses 25-42) - In order to acquire, understand and realise transcendental knowledge one must make a sacrifice. While material knowledge is dependent on calibre, spiritual knowledge is dependent upon character. Sacrifices help refine one’s character so they become eligible to achieve this knowledge. One of the biggest sacrifices is to relinquish one’s pride by humbly submitting oneself before the bona fide guru. By faithful service and sincere inquiry within such a relationship, the heart becomes fertile ground for spiritual knowledge to blossom.



5 - 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 Teilhard de Chardin 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 complexities, but there are also steps leading to a life of liberation, freedom and tranquillity.

- S** Stay in the world
- T** Three doers
- E** Equal Vision
- P** Peace

S - Stay in the world (Verses 1-12) - Arjuna is still confused. Despite Krishna's explanations in Chapter Three, Arjuna still considers work and renunciation to be mutually exclusive paths. Thus, Krishna elaborates on how an individual who works in a spiritual consciousness is automatically elevated to the platform of renunciation. If one engages in righteous work, offering the results to God, and all the while keeping alert to the ultimate goal, then such work becomes worship. For most people it would be premature and detrimental to sever themselves from worldly relationships and duties 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, one can stay in the world and still remain aloof from its influences.

T - Three doers (Verses 13-16) - While living in this world, however, one can easily assume the mentality that they are the director, the controller and the breadwinner. 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 tools 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) and then the ability to perform that activity comes from material nature, which arranges the necessary facilities. 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 (Verses 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 same spiritual quality. Thus, the spiritualist is not only free of racism, nationalism, ageism and sexism, but also "species-ism!"

P – Peace (Verse 29) - This chapter 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, our claims to proprietorship and attachments to various objects create fear, insecurity and conflict. Change is a constant theme in this world – our relationships are changing, the environment is changing, our possessions are changing, and our desires are also changing. 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.



6 - Dhyana-yoga

At the end of Chapter Five, Krishna briefly mentioned the system of *astanga-yoga* – the strict, regulated, focused regime of an ascetic yogi. In the present day, millions of people worldwide practice elements of this path, primarily as *hatha-yoga* and *pranayama*, which offers benefits for physical and emotional wellbeing. In this chapter, the path of *astanga-yoga* is explained in its entirety. Essentially, Krishna's purpose in discussing the "eight stage path" is simply to establish it's impracticality for the purpose of self-realisation and spiritual perfection. In an age surcharged with temptation and distraction, the easiest (and topmost) path of self-realisation is *bhakti-yoga*.

- E** Enemy or Friend?
- A** Astanga-yoga
- S** Success and failure
- Y** Yogi

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

A – Astanga-yoga (Verses 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 the ancient path as it 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. Despite mental and bodily distractions, the yogi would meditate in this way for many years, maintaining stillness and complete silence. Hearing about this strict discipline, Arjuna admits his amazement – “*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 practice and detachment.

S – Success and failure (Verses 37-45) - Hearing about the difficult *astanga-yoga* process raises a new concern for Arjuna. What happens if one faithfully takes to this 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 simultaneously squandered 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. If we don’t complete it in one lifetime, we carry on in the next life from the same point, and the individual thus evolves towards spiritual perfection.

Y – Yogi (Verses 46-47) - After summarising the arduous process of *dhyana* (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 easiest, most efficient and essential 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 Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama 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.



7 - 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 may value our gut feelings, we simultaneously utilise our intelligence and exercise discrimination. The same goes for spirituality. It is not simply a sentimental impulse or practice; it requires intelligent research and information gathering. It is an affair of the head and the heart. Einstein once stated that religion without philosophy was simply sentiment, and in more acute situations, downright fanaticism. In Chapter Seven, entitled "Knowledge of the Absolute", Krishna delineates certain philosophical truths to instil confidence and conviction in the process of *bhakti-yoga*.

H Hearing

E Everywhere

A Accept or Reject

D Demigods

H – Hearing (Verses 1-3) - Modern thinkers often posit a notion of proving everything empirically, 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 understand those things beyond your immediate perception? For example, if you wanted to find out what BBC1 was showing tonight, the most obvious approach would be to consult a TV guide. You could subsequently verify by actually watching the programmes. In other words, we can't depend on our sensory experience to provide all the answers. Accepting a "higher authority" opens up new opportunities to experience the truth directly. Krishna begins this chapter by stressing the absolute necessity of hearing from spiritual sources, to understand universal realities. This is known as the descending path of knowledge.

E – Everywhere (Verses 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 perfectly strung and arranged as a necklace, while the thread remains completely invisible. Similarly, God designs, creates and sustains the entire 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 further explains how He is 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.

A – Accept or Reject (Verses 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 life, and the four types of people who do accept God, albeit with different degrees of selfish intent. In conclusion, it's a rare soul in this world who is able to approach God free of ulterior motives, and enter into a selfless relationship of love. That level of spiritual purity, Krishna says, may take thousands of births!

D – Demigods (Verses 20-30) - Practically speaking, even a mere acceptance of God is a propitious achievement in this age. This acceptance, however, is not enough – one must gain an accurate and precise understanding. 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 His nature and personality. Towards the end of the chapter, Krishna establishes monotheism and distinguishes '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.



8 - 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, it is nevertheless a *real* situation that *nobody* wants to experience but that *everyone* has to face. The Bhagavad-gita outlines four such unavoidable predicaments: birth, disease, old age, and ultimately death. We often forget the inevitability of death, and thus, in Chapter Eight entitled "Attaining the Supreme", Krishna deals with this very subject.

- D** Doubts
- E** End of life
- A** Attaining the Supreme
- D** Devotion

D – Doubts (Verses 1-4) – Doubting is a function of intelligence and at no point in the Bhagavad-gita does Krishna reprimand Arjuna for asking so many questions. On the contrary, He encourages Arjuna to intelligently contemplate all His answers and subsequently make his own decisions. This chapter opens with Arjuna's doubts and questions on several spiritual concepts. Krishna concisely 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 essential inquiry.

E – End of life (Verses 5-8) - Imagine you are going to watch a movie and you meet someone who just saw it. *"You'll never guess what happens,"* they say... before they even finish that statement 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 simply spoils their "movie of life" in the here and now. For a spiritualist, however, "the end" is not a depressing thought since his concept of life and its purpose is much broader. For one who is born, death is certain, and for one who dies, birth is around the corner. Krishna explains how a person's thoughts at death sum up their consciousness and aspirations cultivated throughout life. Thus, one's state of mind at the time of death determines their next situation. For those who remember God at death, they reach the kingdom of God.

A – Attaining the Supreme (Verses 9-22) - The entire world is a temporary university specifically created to dispense life lessons. When one becomes frustrated by the pursuits of this world, they realise that happiness lies in another realm. As spiritual beings, life in a complex world of matter is an incompatible situation. While the material world is rubber-stamped as a constantly changing place of misery, the spiritual world is distinguished as being eternal and all-blissful. There are many painstaking ways in which different spiritualists conduct their lives in order to attain that supreme destination, and having attained it one never returns to this temporary realm again.

D – Devotion (Verses 23-28) – Since various spiritual practices are 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 topmost spiritual path. In an age of rampant materialism and temptation coupled with individual weakness and lack of spiritual aspiration, a highly practical and powerful spiritual process is required. Through *bhakti-yoga* anyone can experience an incredibly fulfilling spiritual connection in a very short time. If one is thus able to saturate their consciousness in God, they will be sure to attain the supreme destination regardless of all the technicalities and intricacies that other spiritual processes may stress.



9 - *The Most Confidential Knowledge*

Just as a pearl is hidden within a shell, or as a king travels surrounded by an entourage, the essence of the Bhagavad-gita is hidden in the middle of the conversation. In the Ninth Chapter, Krishna outlines the "king" of all knowledge and the most secret of all secrets. He explains the essence of the Bhagavad-gita, the perfection of spiritual practice, and the ultimate goal of life.

K Knowledge

I Inconceivable relationships

N Non-worship

G Glories of Bhakti

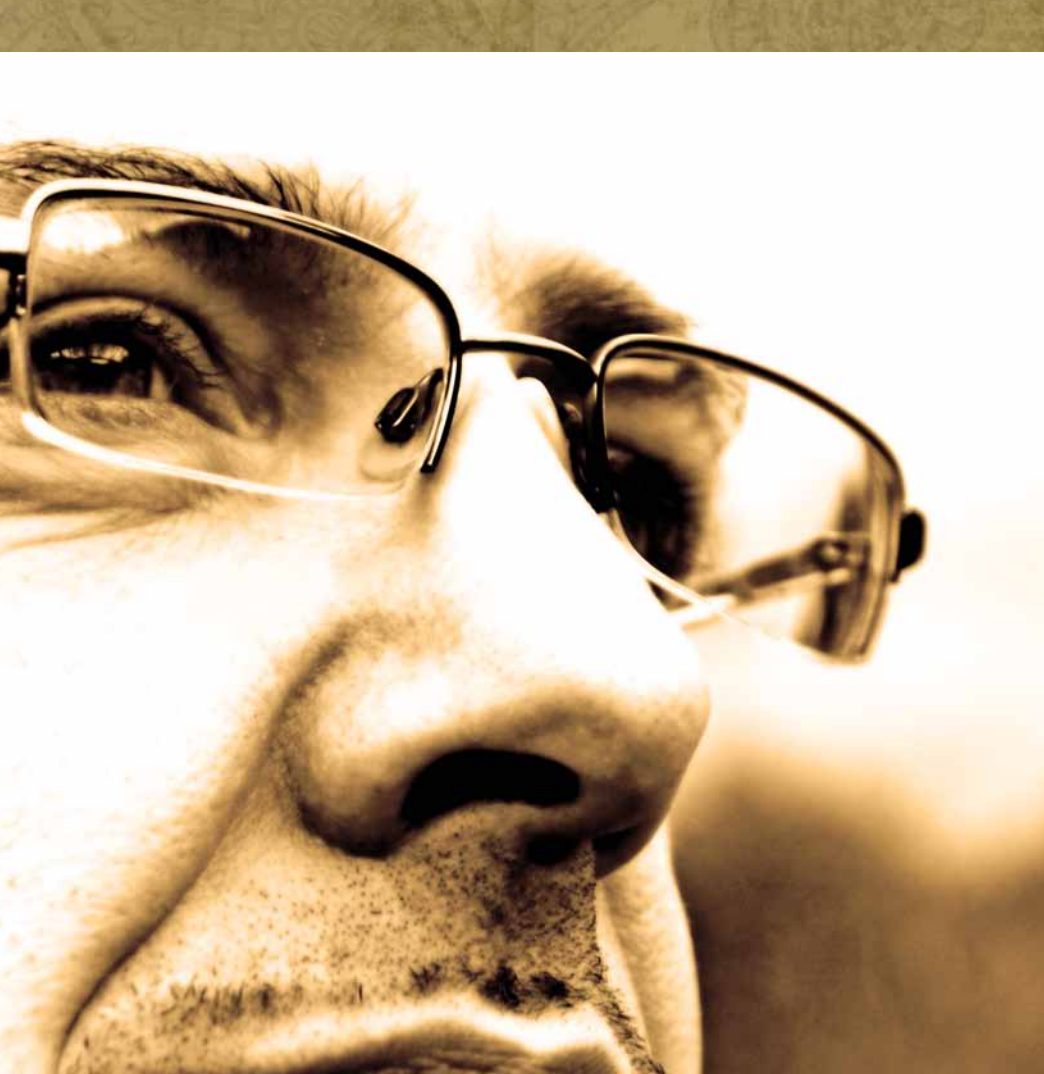
K – Knowledge (Verses 1-3) - Krishna explains that the knowledge He is about to impart is the most confidential, since it illuminates the true position and nature of the soul in relation to God. There is a notion that belief in God is intellectually immature or philosophically naive. However, logical and rational analysis of the complexity, design and intricate engineering of this creation, makes plain that there must be some conscious intelligence behind it. To categorically deny this suggests a stubborn, irrational and illogical predisposition toward atheism. Thus, Krishna explains that the knowledge He is about to impart 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.

I – Inconceivable relationships (Verses 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. However, since the qualities and characteristics of the Lord 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. While this knowledge gives an indication of the character, greatness and capacity of God, it also exposes our inability to comprehend such matters through mundane logic and reason.

N – Non-worship (Verses 11-25) - Even after Krishna explains the opulences and qualities of His personal form, there are many who

misunderstand the Supreme. Because Krishna appears in the “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, 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.

G – Glories of Bhakti (Verses 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, free of any tinge of selfish motivation. Krishna explains that such purity is characterised by constant spiritual absorption with mind, body and word, where one's entire life becomes a spiritual offering saturated with love and devotion. This is Krishna consciousness, and this is the essential teaching of the Bhagavad-gita - to always remember Krishna and never forget Him.



10 - 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 experience of His existence. *"Show me God,"* the sceptics posit, *"and then I'll believe in Him."* In Chapter Ten, Krishna explains how the spiritualist can simultaneously perceive God as the source of the creation and also see God within the creation. However, this requires more than an intellectual understanding. It actually calls for transformation of one's consciousness and revelation from within.

S Source of Everything

E Essence of Gita

E Everywhere

S – Source of Everything (Verses 1-7) - Modern science is founded upon the methodology of ascending knowledge, where one attempts to understand reality in its fullest extent by empirical research and experimentation. Krishna makes a simple but powerful rebuttal of such an 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 highly 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 (Verses 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 (Verses 12-42) - Arjuna is satisfied by Krishna's explanations and requests Him to elaborate further on His characteristics and qualities. In response, Krsna describes the most prominent among His limitless, all pervading opulence. By doing this He explains how one can 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 source of the opulence of these things - 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.



11 - The Universal Form

The Sanskrit word *rupa* means "form". One of the biggest theological debates among great thinkers has gone on 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 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 in this chapter after Krishna displays another of his innumerable forms known as the *vishva-rupa*, the universal form.

- R** Request
- U** Universal Form
- P** Prayers of Arjuna
- A** Armed Form

R – Request (Verses 1-4) - Arjuna requests to see the universal form. One may ask why he makes such a request since he can see Krishna and is completely satisfied (as confirmed in the previous chapter). Clearly Arjuna doesn't have any personal agenda in seeing the universal form, but he requests the vision for other reasons. Firstly, he wants to prove without doubt Krishna's position as the source of everything, and secondly set a standard for anyone in the future who claims to be God to show similar opulence. Unfortunately, our modern world is nevertheless plagued with so-called incarnations and God-men claiming to be the latest saviours of society by dint of the fact that they have mustered up some popularity or mastered a few magic tricks.

U – Universal Form (Verses 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) tell us something about the cause (the author) and in that sense the cause is 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. In that fearful vision of the universal form, Arjuna could see all living beings, all material objects, and the entirety of past, present and future.

P – Prayers of Arjuna (Verses 15-45) - Arjuna falteringly prays to the universal form, awed by the greatness of Krishna, and begs forgiveness for having previously treated Him with familiarity and friendship. Most religious traditions do not go beyond this majestic understanding of God – God who is the creator, the all-knowing and the infallible. It often leads to a fearful exchange with God, lacking intimacy, sweetness and personal relationship. Having seen enough, Arjuna anxiously requests Krsna to once again reveal His two-armed form so that he can again relish the intimacy of that interaction.

A – Armed Form (Verses 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 ritualistic worship of those who approach Him in awe and reverence.



12 - Devotional Service

Although Chapter Twelve is the shortest chapter in the Bhagavad-gita, it contains essential wisdom which warms the heart of the reader. Entitled "Devotional Service", this chapter discusses the path of devotion, the stages one may undergo to achieve it, and the qualities of the devotee who has perfected it. "God" essentially means "the supreme controller" – but in this chapter we gain insight into the more cherished aspects of God's personality and the disposition of the devotee who is fully in love with Him.

G Godhead

O Options

D Devotee's Disposition

G – Godhead (Verses 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 conversation, and one may question why. The essence of our being is to be happy (*anandamaya bhyasat*) and the essence of such happiness is experienced in loving relationships. For a relationship to exist there must be a subject, object and reciprocity, but impersonal notions of "oneness" kill all three and therefore cheat the individual of true happiness. Krishna explains that a personal approach to God through *bhakti-yoga* (devotional service) is more practical in the immediate term and more fulfilling in the long term. While those who tread the impersonal path of spirituality undoubtedly receive spiritual merit, their progress is piecemeal and a great deal more troublesome. 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 (verses 8-12) – Here, Krishna demonstrates His magnanimity and understanding. Having delineated the topmost practice of *bhakti-yoga*, He goes on to offer other options, recognising that some may find it difficult to immediately embrace a devotional path. Progressive steps towards such a devotional spirit include the practice of regulated spirituality, worship through one's daily work, and the cultivation of knowledge. The spiritual path is not all or nothing and one can begin their journey according to what is feasible and realistic.

D – Devotee's Disposition (Verses 13-20) - As one embarks on the spiritual journey, they begin to develop saintly qualities. Krishna concludes the chapter by elucidating the disposition of perfected devotees. They exhibit qualities such as tolerance, determination, satisfaction and equanimity of mind, and their purity of consciousness is clear to all. Devotees endowed with such endearing character traits conquer the heart of Krishna, who becomes bound by their spotless devotion. Such are the dealings within the transcendental realm – where even the unconquerable supreme controller becomes a captive of love.



13 - Nature, the Enjoyer, and Consciousness

The final six chapters focus on *jnana* - transcendental wisdom which helps one become detached from materialistic aspirations and simultaneously attached to Krishna. Chapter Thirteen covers topics previously discussed, but explores them in a more analytical way. Thus, wise readers can take advantage of the logical presentation made by Krishna to strengthen their conviction and deepen their understanding.

W Wise Questions

I Items of knowledge

S Soul & Supersoul

E Enjoyer

W – Wise Questions (Verses 1-7) - Arjuna asks Krishna to define six subjects: *prakṛti* (nature), *puruṣa* (the enjoyer), *kṣetra* (the field of activities), *kṣetra-jña* (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 enquiries create the opportunity for Krishna to offer answers to life's most profound mysteries. Krishna begins by defining *kṣetra* and the *kṣetra-jña*.

I – Items of knowledge (Verses 8-12) - These verses describe how the *kṣetra-jña* (spirit soul) can disentangle himself from the *kṣetra* (body) by cultivating *jñāna* (knowledge). Since true knowledge is revealed within the heart of a deserving person, the real method of acquiring knowledge is the cultivation of divine qualities, of which humility is foremost. Knowledge is not about information and memorisation, but rather about exemplary personal character and practical behaviour. One who nurtures a saintly disposition experiences a change of heart which disentangles the eternal soul from its deep rooted identification with the body – its temporary dress.

S – Soul & Supersoul (Verses 13-19) - Having described the *kṣetra*, *kṣetra-jña* and *jñānam*, Krishna now describes *jñeyam*, the object of knowledge. The purpose of knowledge is to realize the soul and the Supersoul, who are eternally individual but at the same time intimately connected. 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 within remains unknowable to them. However, those who approach the subject matter with the proper attitude, ready and willing to gain insight through the eyes of great teachers, can surely realise the Supersoul, the object of all knowledge.

E – Enjoyer (Verses 20-35) - The chapter concludes with descriptions of the final two terms – *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. The conditioned soul desires to control and enjoy matter (*prakṛti*) and it is this enjoying spirit that binds him to the material world. The Supersoul, however, is the actual enjoyer (*puruṣa*) and everything (material nature and the individual souls) is ultimately meant for His enjoyment. Just as pouring water over the root of a tree energizes the trunk, branches, and twigs, similarly, offering worship and service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead for his pleasure and satisfaction, automatically brings satisfaction to all living entities, including ourselves.



14 - The Three Modes of Material Nature

In Chapter Fourteen, Krishna introduces a very interesting model known as the "three modes of material nature". These three qualities permeate everything we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Our lifestyle, attitude and behaviours also fall under these modes. Through closer analysis, we can perceive how people are functioning in this world with a mistaken belief of free will, when in actuality they are impelled to act according to these influences. Therefore, unless one is able to transcend these modes of nature, they act to perpetually trap one in this material world.

- T** Three Modes
- R** Race for prominence
- A** Actions in the modes
- P** Pure Life

T – Three Modes (Verses 1-9) – “Mode” is a translation of the Sanskrit word *guna*, which literally means thread or rope. The three modes influence a person’s character, behaviour and approach to life. For example, if Goodness (*sattva*) predominates, one will aspire for (and generally achieve) long-term happiness even if one experiences temporary inconveniences. The person overtaken by Passion (*rajas*) frantically seeks immediate short-term gain and doesn’t expect much more out of life. On the other hand, the person dominated by Ignorance (*tamas*) rarely achieves happiness at all. In this way the material world is populated by living entities in different conditions of life.

R – Race for prominence (Verses 10-13) - The modes compete with one another for supremacy within an individual. In the cycle of a single day, different modes may achieve prominence at different times. In general, Goodness clarifies and pacifies the individual since it motivates joy, wisdom, altruism and kindness. Passion is said to confuse and provoke the individual, invoking qualities of greed, anger and frustration. Ignorance is said to obscure and impede one’s life, often resulting in over-sleep, indifference, laziness and inertia.

A – Actions in the modes (Verses 14-18) – Reincarnation is the process by which a soul receives a new material body on the basis of activities performed in the present body. Our activities are a result of the decisions we make, and our decisions are ultimately based on the modes which 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 go upward to the higher planets; those in Passion live on the earthly planets; and those in Ignorance go down to the hellish worlds.

P – Pure Life (Verses 19-27) - Through these various descriptions we can approximate what combination of the modes we are personally affected by. The chapter concludes by explaining the ideal state that ensures a successful human life and after-life. Although Goodness is said to be the most progressive of the three, it still implicates one in the law of karma. To become completely free of karmic reactions one must transcend even the mode of Goodness, and become situated on the spiritual platform. This is only possible by engaging in *bhakti-yoga* with unflinching determination, taking inspiration and support from those who have already transcended the three modes. Krishna explains the character of such perfected transcendentalists who enjoy nectar even in this life.



15 - *The Yoga of the Supreme Person*

Imagine someone checks into their holiday hotel room and then begins painting the walls, buying new furniture, refitting the bathroom and hanging up family pictures. It sounds ludicrous - you don't make arrangements for long-term comfort in a temporary residence. This world is likened to a hotel room within which people make complicated plans for security and enjoyment. In Chapter Fifteen Krishna uses a wonderful analogy to create detachment within the spiritualist and fuel his desire to re-enter his real home in the spiritual realm.

H Home or Hotel?

O On and On, Over and Over again

M Maintainer of body, mind, soul

E Essence in 3 verses

H – Home or Hotel? (Verses 1-5) – Just as a banyan tree has a reflection in 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. On the other hand, the reflected tree of the material world is complicated, intricate and completely topsy-turvy since the roots are upwards and the branches downwards. Bird-like individuals frantically search for juicy fruits on the reflected tree, but the substance which brings satisfaction seems to be lacking. 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 (Verses 6-11) - Krishna then gives a glimpse of the spiritual world, showing how its nature is perfect, complete and fully satisfying to all. Once having gone there, 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 life. At the time of death, through the subtle workings of reincarnation, one receives a body which is tailor-made to facilitate such desires. Man proposes, God disposes. Thus, different life situations are meant to teach us a simple lesson - we are looking for the right thing (happiness), but we are looking in the wrong places.

M – Maintainer of body, mind, soul (Verses 12-15) - One who is entangled within the reflected tree of material existence can develop

his Krishna consciousness by appreciating Krishna as the maintainer on all levels. Krishna maintains our gross physical body by arranging fundamental resources that provide the energy of life. He also maintains our subtle capacities by facilitating knowledge, remembrance and forgetfulness. And finally, perhaps 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.

E – Essence in 3 verses (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. These are different from infallible living entities (*aksara*) who never leave the spiritual realm due to their undeviated desire to be with the Lord. 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



16 - The Divine and Demoniac Natures

The dog is an unpredictable animal. Though widely acclaimed as man's best friend, the dog also has a reputation for brutal, unprovoked attacks. Such contradictory behaviour is a sign of our times. In previous ages, the distinction between divine and demoniac 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 demoniac coexist within the same individual! In Chapter Sixteen, Krishna describes the qualities of saintly persons and the weaknesses of the demoniac, systematically exposing attitudes and behaviours that destroy one's spirituality.

- D** Divine or Demoniac
- O** Opinions & Outlook of Demons
- G** Gates to hell

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

O – Opinions & Outlook of Demons (Verses 7-20) - To reassure Arjuna that he is of divine nature, Krishna distinguishes the activities, mentality and qualities of one who has demoniac propensities. Such miscreants 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 course of action to gradually uplift such individuals. Demoniatic 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 (verses 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 regulated lifestyle by which one can easily transform selfishness to selflessness, lust to love and quarrel into cooperation.



17 - The Divisions of Faith

In the previous chapter Krishna described two extremes; the divine and the demoniac. Day-to-day experience, however, reveals that we actually have many faces and are not necessarily one or the other. Life is generally not 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, believe and place value upon. Chapter Seventeen describes how a person's affiliation to a particular mode will determine the type of faith they have.

- F** Faith
- A** Austerities
- C** Charity
- E** Enjoyer of everything

F – Faith (Verses 1-7) – Although religious people are often referred to as “people of faith”, the reality is that everyone has faith. We all put faith in traffic lights, doctors, and even banks to name but a few - without faith you couldn’t function in this world! To have faith means to see opportunity, reward and value in something even though it may not be immediately experienced. Therefore, according to one’s faith one identifies objects of adoration and reverence and begins to worship them in different ways. In accordance to this, individuals adopt worldviews, lifestyles and character traits. Krishna begins a discussion of this by giving examples of diet and sacrifices.

A – Austerities (Verses 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 benefit. 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 (verses 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.

E – Enjoyer of everything (Verses 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 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. With this kind of transcendental aim all our activities become liberating instead of entangling.



18 - Conclusion — The Perfection of Renunciation

Chapter Eighteen is essentially a final summary of the Bhagavad-gita. After systematically outlining various spiritual truths, Krishna offers His *paramam vacah* – His supreme advice; one should take up *bhakti-yoga*, the most essential spiritual practice outlined in every chapter of this conversation. Thus, one is offered the opportunity of permanent happiness and fulfilment by the achievement of Krishna consciousness, 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 eternal friend.

S Summary of Karma-yoga

M Modes of nature

I Ideal Worker

L Love of God

E End Result

S - Summary of Karma-yoga (Verses 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 false ego with which we perform the activity, thinking ourselves the controller and enjoyer. In reality, 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 fruits of labour towards a transcendental goal, one can function in this world and simultaneously remain completely aloof.

M – Modes of nature (Verses 19-40) – Looking around us, the reality is that most people are deeply engrossed within this material world. Krishna pins this down to 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.

I – Ideal Worker (Verses 41-55) - So what is the solution? On one hand we are expected to be aloof and unattached workers but in reality we have a conditioned nature influenced by the modes, which implicates us in worldly life. Krishna therefore explains the system of *varnasrama*,

where one engages their inherent 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.

L – Love of God (Verses 56-66) - In conclusion, all the activities, practices and elements of spirituality, 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 (Verses 67-78) – Knowledge and understanding of the Bhagavad-gita is dependent upon one's consciousness. Only one who approaches these sacred teachings with proper mood and lifestyle 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.



Bhagavad-gita - The next step

*iti te jnanam akhyatam guhyad guhyataram maya
vimrsyaitad asesena yathecchasi tatha kuru*

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

The Bhagavad-gita is not simply a philosophical treatise, but rather a call to action. Anyone can experience the inner joy of Krishna Consciousness. However, this is only possible when we practically implement Krishna's teachings and spiritualise different aspects of our lifestyle. By incorporating four timeless spiritual practices into our daily routine we can become peaceful, happy and self-realised.

- A** Association
- B** Books
- C** Chanting
- D** Diet



Association

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 goes against the grain in such a bold way will be faced with temptations, doubts, 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 the best way to gain faith and become enthusiastic in one's spiritual endeavours.

Tip: Visit a local ISKCON temple on a regular basis, and take advantage of the classes, festivals and various opportunities for devotional service offered there. There you can meet friendly devotees of Krishna, who can answer questions and shed light on the practical aspects of spiritual life. If you live some distance from a temple, you can attend one of the Krishna groups that meet regularly in many districts of London and towns throughout the UK & Ireland. At these gatherings, you can enjoy uplifting chanting, a lively and informative talk and prasadam (sanctified vegetarian food).



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 us remain determined and confident in the 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 us from the sufferings of this oceanic world, and simultaneously carries us to the spiritual realm, face-to-face with Krishna. When Srila Prabhupada spoke into the 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 and made available to all.

Tip: Read the books translated and commented by Srila Prabhupada. Along with the well-known Bhagavad-gita there is the Srimad Bhagavatam, which describes Krishna's divine appearance within this world, as well as accounts of his many avatars. Srila Prabhupada also published the Caitanya Caritamrita, the biography and detailed teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Krishna's most recent incarnation. There are many smaller books with conversations, short articles and poems. 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.



Chanting

Five hundred years ago, Krishna incarnated as Caitanya Mahaprabhu and ushered in the modern age of mantra meditation by popularising the chanting of *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*. Krishna has actually invested His power and presence in these holy names, and therefore the names are non-different from God Himself. Thus, while chanting the mantra, we are directly associating with Krishna and being purified by such communion. Chanting is a prayer 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.

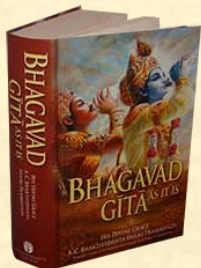
Tip: Recite the Hare Krishna mantra on a circle of 108 wooden beads. This is known as japa meditation. One time round the beads each day is for beginners, four times round as a daily minimum is for committed members, and sixteen ‘rounds’ are for those who have taken their lifetime vows. You can chant 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.



Diet

The Bhagavad-gita proclaims eating to be an extremely sacred activity when conducted with 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, 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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Helpful Websites

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"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 the 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

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