

Third
Revised
&
Enlarged
Edition

Gita Acharan

A Practitioner's Perspective

K. Siva Prasad



The Gita Acharan is an ongoing work to reveal various facets of the Bhagavad Gita. It is serialised every Sunday in the Daily World newspaper and the same can be accessed at dailyworld.in. The same is also available at gitaacharan.blogspot.com and facebook.com/GitaAcharan

All these articles are made into podcasts by the author and the same are available on platforms like Anchor, YouTube, Spotify and Apple Podcasts. It can be accessed at anchor.fm/GitaAcharan.

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Preface

Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the song of the Lord, is a conversation between Lord Krishna and warrior Arjun on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The original Gita is in the Sanskrit language. Though all Indian languages are based on this, not many people are familiar with Sanskrit. Mere translation won't help us as some of the teachings need interpretation in the contemporary context. This compilation is for someone who is unfamiliar with Sanskrit but still wants to take benefit of the Gita in daily life. However, to have better comprehension and understanding some simple Sanskrit words are also used along with their meaning.

The Bhagavad Gita is both eternal and comprehensive. In the constantly changing physical world, an interpretation is needed from time to time to keep these teachings in the contemporary perspective. This compilation is an effort in this direction. Being comprehensive, the Gita covers all the possible paths to attain ultimate freedom which is moksha . Some of the paths are likely to appear contradictory but depending on one's personality one should choose their path. This compilation makes an effort to cover all the paths.

All the translations and interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita carry the biases of the interpreter. If the personalities of the practitioner and interpreter are different then both of them may find it difficult to sail through. This fact needs to be taken into account carefully. Efforts are made to eliminate this bias as far as possible.

When any teaching is converted into a book, it is likely to give a theoretical look. The point to be noted is that the Bhagavad Gita is not a philosophical treatise but an experiential guide. Hence, the teachings become clearer when one experiences them in life. So, constant two way internal communication is needed till we attain ultimate freedom.

This is a collection of the weekly articles published as Gita Acharan up to the eighth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. As there was a 300 word limit for the articles, the topics were to be wrapped up accordingly. No doubt that this word limit made each article crisp, but in the process, there was an overflow. That's why it is encouraged to read them slowly and preferably one chapter at a time. Since they came in the form of independent articles, one can pick up any to read randomly.

Acknowledgement

A casual conversation with Manish Tiwari, Editor-in-Chief of the Daily World newspaper led to this compilation. I would like to thank him for his constant encouragement, feedback and guidance. Jasvir is a dear friend and I would like to thank him for the discussions at the beginning of the series and the production of the podcast series. I would also like to thank another colleague in the civil service Sai Prasad who took out time to discuss and edit each article.

Such projects are never complete without support from the family. I always share the first draft with my wife Dr. Kamala, a dentist, who herself is on a spiritual path through her dedication to her profession. She is full of real life experiences because of her dental chair side stories. Her feedback was used to shape each article. The final draft is run through both my sons Kunal and Kautil. Their contribution gave the articles a perspective of youth and many articles were adjusted to incorporate the same.

I would also like to thank many friends who kept giving feedback for every article. Finally, I would like to thank publisher Harish Jain and his staff.

2. Contradictions in Life

Just as it is said, "All roads lead to Rome", all paths given in the Gita lead us to the Inner Self. Some of the paths appear to be in contrast with each other. However, this is like a circle where a journey on either side would take us to the same destination.

The Gita operates at various levels. Sometimes Krishna comes to the level of Arjuna and sometimes he comes as the Supersoul (*Paramatma*). This creates difficulties in comprehension at the initial stage as both these levels appear to be different.

Scientists faced similar difficulties while understanding light, at the beginning of the last century. Initially, it was proved that light is a wave and later it was realized that it also behaves like a particle. Both theories appear to be opposing each other. But light, with which we are so familiar, is a combination of apparent contradictions. Similar is life.

Once an elephant entered a village and a few blind men attempted to identify or understand

it. Depending on which part of the elephant they touched, they imagined what an elephant might be like. The one who touched trunk said that the elephant is like a long and rough creature. The one who touched the tusk said that this animal is hard as a rock. Another who touched the stomach said that it is huge and soft. And so their deductions went.

Different perceptions of one reality is the reason for all the differences we see in the world today. In reality, the elephant is none of these, but it is also all of these.

Our state of mind is no different from these individuals, with people, things and relationships being that enigmatic elephant. Partial understanding leads us to misery.

The Gita is essentially a journey from a partial understanding to a complete one.

Like in the 80-20 principle, even a few steps into this understanding can bring joy to life.

9. Identify Friend and Enemy

In the Gita, Lord Krishna says you yourself are your own friend and you yourself are your own foe. The following story of the trapped monkey illustrates it well.

Some nuts are kept in an earthen pot with a narrow mouth (*surahi*) in which the monkey's hand barely fits. The monkey inserts its hands by squeezing through the mouth of the pot and grabs a fist full of nuts. As the fist is full, its size goes up and so it can't come out of the pot. The monkey makes all sorts of efforts to get the closed fist out of the pot. It keeps thinking that someone has laid a trap for it and never realises that the trap is set by itself. No amount of explanation would convince the monkey to let go of these nuts, instead it would think that we are trying to grab its nuts.

From the outside, it looks quite simple that it has to drop a couple of nuts to loosen the fist so that its hand comes out. But realising this simple fact, when we are trapped is the challenge.

The closed fist is our foe and open fist is our friend and it's our choice to open or close, making us friend or foe to ourselves respectively.

In life, we encounter so many similar traps. Those nuts are nothing but I, My, Me and Mine; *Ahankaar* binds our hand to them. Gita repeatedly tells us, in so many ways, to let go of *Ahankaar* so that we are free of these traps, thus leading to ultimate freedom.

It is easier to get the realisation about these traps when we slow down rather than in a fast paced world with a lot of noise. The opportunity presented by COVID-19 is an ideal time to come to these realisations.

15. Equanimity

Samatva (equanimity) is a common thread that runs across the Gita. Lord Krishna highlights *Samatva-bhav*, *Samatva-drishhti* and *Samatva buddhi* at various places. *Samatva* is easy to understand but difficult to internalize. The degree of *Samatva* in us is an indicator of our progress in the spiritual journey.

In the physical realm, most societies have accepted *Samatva* as equality before law for all citizens. Krishna gives many examples of *Samatva* when he says, the wise see as equal, the prey and the predators; pleasure and pain; profit and loss etc.

The difficulty with humans is that we tend to identify with one or more artificial divisions based on culture, religion, caste, nationality, race and many more. The ability to overcome these divisions and to treat two different people equally, is the first step towards *Samatva*. This is naturally much deeper than exhibited behavior.

The next level of progression in *Samatva* is an ability to see two people close to us with *Samatva*. Examples include being happy for success of our childrens' friends especially when our own kids didn't do well, treating mother and mother in law equally, treating daughter and daughter in law equally etc.

The highest level of *Samatva* is the ability to equate others to ourselves. It is the ability to maintain *Samatva* when others get what we believe belongs to us, like a promotion, fame, credit, property etc. This comes when we can see others' weaknesses in us and our strengths in others.

Krishna advises us to see ourselves in others and others in us; and finally to see Krishna in everyone and everywhere. This is nothing but *Advaita*, which says there are no two.

The obstacle in attaining this highest form of *Samatva* is our mind, which is trained to divide. Instead of allowing it to dominate, we should be able to make it subservient.

18. *Sat* (Real) and *Asat* (Unreal)

Krishna says *Sat* (reality/permanence) never ceases to be and *Asat* (unreal/impermanence) has no existence. A *Gyani* is one who can distinguish between the two (2.16).

The rope and snake analogy is often quoted in many cultures to understand the intricacies of *Sat* and *Asat*. A man reached back home at dusk and found a snake coiled at the entrance to his home. But in reality it was a rope left by children, that looked like a snake in the semi-darkness. Here the rope signifies *Sat* and the snake, *Asat*. Until he realises *Sat* i.e. the rope, he is likely to adopt many strategies to handle *Asat* i.e. imagined snake. He could attack it with a stick (fight), run away (flight) or he may try to light a torch to check out the reality. The best strategies and skills would go in vain when our perception is that of *Asat*.

Asat derives its existence from *Sat*, just as the snake doesn't exist without the rope. Since *Asat* owes its existence to *Sat*, it can influence us like a

nightmare which can make our body react as if it were sweating in sleep.

A litmus test given by Krishna to identify *Asat* is; that ‘which didn’t exist in the past and wouldn’t be there in the future’. If we take the example of sensual pleasure, it wasn’t there before and wouldn’t be there after some time. The same is the case with pain and for that matter all polarities. The indication is that *Asat* exists in time whereas *Sat* is eternal.

The *Sat* is the inner self which is eternal and *Ahankaar* is *Asat* which sustains itself with the support of the inner self. The day we discover our Inner self (rope), the *Ahankaar* (snake) automatically disappears.

26. Rose Can never Become a Lotus

Krishna explains about *Swa-dharmam* (own nature) (2.31-2.37) and advises Arjun that as a Kshatriya he should not hesitate to fight(2.31) as it is his *Swa-dharmam*.

Krishna commences the Gita with ‘that’ which is eternal, unmanifested and pervades all. It is termed as *atma* for easy understanding. Then he talks about *Swa-dharmam*, which is one step before ‘that’ and subsequently comes to *Karma*.

The journey to realise the Inner self can be divided into three stages. The first stage is our present condition, the second is realizing *Swa-dharmam* and finally, reaching the Inner self. In reality, our present condition is a combination of our *Swa-dharmam*, experiences, knowledge, memories and assumptions gathered by our wavering mind. *Swa-dharmam* gets uncovered slowly when we free ourselves from our mental baggage.

Kshatriya is the combination of ‘ *Kshat* ‘ meaning ‘hurt’ and ‘ *trayate* ‘ meaning ‘to give protection’. *Kshatriya* is he who gives protection from hurt.

The best example is of a mother who shields the baby in the womb and protects the children till they are on their own. So she is the first *Kshatriya* we come across in our lives. She may be untrained and might not be experienced in childcare but it comes naturally to her. This trait is a glimpse of *Swa-dharmam*.

Once a rose was smitten by the majestic lotus flower and started nurturing the desire to be a lotus. But there is no way that a rose can become a lotus. The rose wanted to be different from what it is capable of and we have similar tendencies to try to be different from what we are, resulting in the despondency of the kind faced by Arjun. The rose can change its colour, size and shape, but will still remain a rose which is its *Swa-dharmam*.

34. Focus on *Karma* not *Karma-phal* (Fruits of Action)

In the iconic verse 2.47 of the Gita, Krishna says that we have the right to do *karma* (action) but have no right over the *karma-phal* (fruits of action). He further says that *karma-phal* shouldn't be the motivating factor for any of our actions and also that, in consequence, we should not lean towards *akarma* (inaction). This is the most quoted verse from the Gita, possibly because of the various dimensions of life that it looks at.

The easiest approach to this verse is to internalise it and start implementing it without getting deeper into its logic or attempting an analysis of its various facets. We should deepen our *shraddha* (trust) in Krishna and start practising it. Krishna indicates (7.21-7.22) that *shraddha* can do miracles and bringing the literal meaning of this verse into practice can itself take us to the pinnacle of *karma yoga*.

The next progression will be to understand that focussing on *karma-phal* of our actions will

make us lose sight of the *karma* itself and as a consequence, be denied of the *karma-phal* itself. A poorly executed *karma* (studying) by a student can never give the desired *karma-phal* (exam results). Krishna emphasises that we should only focus on doing our very best in any situation that we face.

Thirdly, *karma* happens in the present moment and *karma-phal* is always in the future, which is a combination of several possibilities. Krishna advises to always be in the present moment as we have a modicum of control only over the present but no control over the future or the past.

Whatever may be the approach or understanding, this verse has the potential to bring us *samatva* (equanimity) by helping us transcend the never ending waves of polarities.

37. *Vahi* (same) *Arjun Vahi Baan* (arrow)

Vahi Arjun Vahi Baan (Same Arjun Same Arrow), is often used to describe a situation when a successful/competent person fails to perform.

Arjun, as a warrior, never lost a war. During the latter part of his life, he lost a minor battle in which he was supposed to save some family members from a group of bandits. He explains this situation to his brother and says: “I don’t know what happened. I’m the same Arjun and these are the same arrows that had won the Kurukshetra war, but this time my arrows could neither find their target nor had power.” He explained that he had to run away and couldn’t protect the family.

Life’s experiences tell us that this can happen to any of us. Many a time, talented sportspersons just lose their form for sometime. An actor, singer simply fails. This is attributed to *Bhagya* (luck), bad time etc. and for sure nobody knows why. There is hardly any scientific explanation for the same except for conjectures and surmises.

In this context, while explaining about the relationship between *Karma* and *Karma-phal*, Krishna says (18.14) that ‘*Daivam*’ (contribution/will/blessings of Lord) is one of the factors that contributes to the fulfillment of *Karma*. *Daivam* is a kind of X factor and is unknown from a manifested (physical) world point of view. That’s the reason why Krishna says that you have right over *Karma*, but not over *Karma-phal*.

Techniques like palmistry, astrology and sun-signs are practiced, but none of them are *Daivam*. Similarly, there is no scientific theory based on which *Daivam* can be predicted.

Krishna says (11.33) we are *nimitta-maatra*, a small cog in the grand design of almighty. Failure won’t hurt us if we don’t let success bring *Ahankaar*, as both are influenced by *Daivam*.

49. *Sthith-pragna* (Stoic) is Internal Phenomenon

Krishna says (2.55), in response to Arjun's query, *sthith-pragna* (one with coherent intellect) is content with self. Interestingly, Krishna didn't respond to the second part of Arjun's query as to how a *sthith-pragna* speaks, sits and walks.

'Content with self' is purely an internal phenomenon and there is no way to measure it based on external behaviour. Maybe, in the given circumstances both an ignorant person and a *sthith-pragna* might speak the same words, might sit and walk in a similar manner. This complicates our understanding of *sthith-pragna* even more.

Krishna's life is the best example of a *sthith-pragna's* life. He was separated from his parents at birth. He was known as 'makhan thief'. His romance, dance and flute are legendary, but when he left Vrindavan he never came back seeking romance. He fought and killed when needed, but

avoided war at times and was hence known as *Ranchod-das* (who ran away from war). He showed many miracles and was a friend of friends. When it was time to marry, he married and maintained families, traced the *samantaka-mani* (valuable jewel) to ward off false accusations of theft and when it was time to give Gita *Gyan*, he gave it. He died like any ordinary person.

Firstly, there is no external pattern to his life, but the internal pattern is living moment by moment. Secondly, it's a life of joy and celebration inspite of difficult situations, which were *anitya* (transient) for him. Thirdly, as mentioned in 2.47, for him 'content with self' doesn't mean inaction, but it's *karma* (deed) sans *karta* (doer) and *karma-phal* (fruits of action).

Basically, it's living in the present moment without any burden of the past or any expectations from the future. The power is in the present moment and everything including planning and execution happen in the present.

70. Give Time a Chance

A fruit absorbs nutrients from its parent tree to grow and ripen. It then gets detached from the tree to start its own journey. The journey to freedom from the parent tree involves different actions to finally becoming a tree itself. An immature fruit, on the other hand, needs to be attached to the parent tree till it ripens.

A ripe fruit shouldn't lure the immature fruit to leave the tree, as it is not yet ready to start an independent journey. It would perish if it doesn't spend time to get the required nourishment from the parent tree. In a similar vein, Krishna advises (3.26) the wise man to not unsettle the ignorant, who is attached to actions.

This is an extension of what Krishna said (3.6) about individuals who forcefully control the organs of action, but whose mind still revolves around thoughts of sense objects. He calls them hypocrites who are deluding themselves and this would be no different to the state of an ignoramus

whose actions were forcibly stopped by a wise man.

In a class of a hundred students, each one understands the same lesson in a different manner depending on their character and state of mind. That's why, a *sanyasi* who realises the futility of motivated actions in life shouldn't encourage a *brahmachari* to desist from family life as the *brahmachari* can better learn the same futility by his own actions. There is no way other than this.

Krishna waited for the hunger to learn in Arjun to impart the Gita to him. Till then, Krishna let him keep doing worldly actions, go through pleasures and pains in life and waited for an opportune moment. Thus, learning happens when there is an inner hunger for it where each entity that we see and each life situation that we face can become a teacher.

82. We Reap what We Sow

The physical entities are governed by predictable behaviours and properties. Krishna gives insight into the relationship between the all powerful unmanifested and manifested when he says, “In whatever way people are devoted to Me, in that measure, I manifest Myself to them. All men, in every manner, pursue a path to Me.” (4.11)

This is firstly an assurance from the Lord that whatever path we pursue and however contradictory these paths may appear, all of them are paths to the unmanifested *paramatma*. Secondly, the Lord responds like a multi dimensional mirror that reflects and resonates our feelings, thoughts and actions. Thirdly, when we sow a seed, it takes time to attain its full potential of a tree and this time lag prevents us from fully understanding this principle of resonance of paramatma.

If we fill our lives with unconditional love and

shraddha (trust), love and *shraddha* are inevitably returned in due course making our lives joyful. If we sow anger, fear, hatred, cruelty or jealousy then the same will be served back making our lives miserable. There are countless examples of these and the point to be noted is that we miss the organic link between the two due to the time lag between the sowing and reaping.

This verse operates both at a subtle and gross level. While looking to realise our big dreams, we should never lose sight of small wins that help us realise the supreme consciousness at the experiential level.

Krishna further says that “Desiring success of their actions, men adore the *devatas*, as achievement accruing from an activity is readily attained” (4.12).

Devatas are nothing but glimpses of the Paramatma. We have to shed *ahankaar* to realise *Paramatma*, but it takes time. *Devatas* are the halfway point in the journey towards realising the *Paramatma* while we are still shedding *ahankaar*.

101. Emulating the Lotus Leaf

Every physical system, including life, takes different inputs and produces certain outputs. We constantly measure or judge our outputs like words and deeds. We also judge the deeds of others as well as different situations around us. In fact, in the evolutionary process, judging threats was very important for survival itself. However, the issue is in the absence of standards for judging deeds and we often depend on ignorance based perceptions and belief systems. We feel happy and satisfied whenever we encounter a deed done which conforms to our belief system.

In this connection, Krishna says, “He who is united by yoga, who has purified and conquered self, subdued his senses, who realises his Self as the self in all beings, is not tainted although acting” (5.7). This is an assurance from the Lord as to when our deeds are not tainted.

Krishna says *karmas* are not tainted when performed by someone who is purified i.e. free of

hatred and desires (5.3) and who has realised his self as the self in all beings. The point to be noted is that when one sees his self in all beings then there is no way that one performs tainted actions or crimes. On the contrary, all our actions are tainted, when performed through the lens of division of us and them.

When it comes to judging the situations around us, Krishna says that he who, dedicating his actions to *Brahman*, acts abandoning sangam (unity/attachment), is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf by water. (5.10)

When our deeds as well as those of others are dedicated to the Lord, there is no scope for division. The situations we then face will appear to be dramas and plays, where we play our part and Krishna compares this with the lotus leaf.

107. Meditation for Bliss

The pineal gland is a pea sized, pine cone shaped organ situated at the center of the brain, directly behind the middle of two eyebrows. Physiologically it produces neurotransmitters melatonin and serotonin that are responsible for the sleep cycles as well as moods, respectively. It is also known as the third eye as it contains photoreceptors like a normal eye.

All cultures have described it in various ways as the seat of the soul; responsible for spiritual enlightenment; a sixth sense which sees beyond what the five senses can see; a symbol of spiritual awakening; a connection between the physical and spiritual world. In the Indian context, the space between the eyebrows is called *Agya Chakra* and represents the pineal gland.

This background will help us understand Krishna's method to control senses and mind when he says, "Shutting out all thoughts of external

enjoyment, with the gaze fixed on the space between the eye-brows, equalizing the flow of the incoming and outgoing breath in the nostrils, and thus controlling the senses, mind, and intellect, the sage who becomes free from desire and fear, always lives in freedom” (5.27-28). This is a method or technique given by the Lord to Arjun to help him control his senses, mind and intellect.

Vigyaan Bhairav Tantra contains 112 such methods given by Lord Shiva and one such technique says, “Concentrate without thoughts on a point between the eyebrows. The Divine Energy breaks out and rises above to the crown of the head, immediately filling one completely with her ecstasy.”

Pain is an automatic tool to bring our attention to the injured areas and this helps us in survival. Similarly, it is bringing conscious attention to the area between the eyebrows to activate the pineal gland and this activation will fill us with internal ecstasy without the help of any senses.

109. A Sanyasi Renounces Karma-phal

Life presents many ups and downs and it's all about how we handle them. It is natural that when one is going through a rough phase, one gets frustrated and gets attracted towards renunciation of karmas as we are all under the illusionary belief that our *karmas* as well as those of others bring us happiness or misery. Arjun is also going through this dilemma and wants to renounce the *karma* of fighting the battle.

Krishna clarifies that he is a *sanyasi* (renunciant) and *yogi* who does his bounden duty without depending on the fruits of action (*karma-phal*); not the one without action (6.1).

More explanation about bounden duty is likely to bring more confusion because it's purely experiential. To learn how to swim, one has to dive into the water and similarly, one should face life to understand bounden duty; being joyful without the help of senses being the parameter to measure our progress like floating for swimming.

Similarly, a seed coat is expected to protect the embryo and in the right circumstances, it is also expected to give way to sprout. Though it looks natural to us, from the seed coat's point of view it's confusing- once to protect and later not to. Like in the case of the seed coat, performing a *karma* bestowed on us by the all powerful present moment, without the burden of the past and the expectations from the future, is the bounden duty.

Secondly, Krishna says that *sanyasi* is the one who dropped the *karma-phal* but not *karma*. This breaks the self fulfilling prophecy of 'no *karma* means no pain nor sin.' It qualifies each one of us to be a *sanyasi* without resorting to escapism. Whatever may be the circumstances, one is entitled to the joy of a *sanyasi* the moment one drops the expectation of fruits of action.

112. Beware of Enemy Within

After declaring that one is responsible for lifting up or degrading oneself (6.5), Krishna gives a path to discharge this responsibility when he says, “For him who has conquered his self, the self is his *bandhu* (friend/relative) but for him who has not conquered his self, the self verily hostile like the enemy” (6.6). The key is conquering self. The word ‘*atma*’ meaning ‘self’ appears twelve times (6.5, 6.6) in an ambiguous construction allowing multiple interpretations. But, for a practitioner, the context set in the following verses would give clarity regarding the core aspect of conquering ‘self’.

Krishna says, “For one who is self-controlled, the *Paramatma* (supersoul) is already reached, for he has attained tranquility. He is balanced in cold and heat, pleasure and pain (*seetoshna-sukhdukh*), as also in honour and dishonour (*maana-avamaana*)” (6.6). Essentially, it means transcending the everlasting polarities.

Arjun had won many battles that gave him pleasure. But in the battle of Kurukshetra, his teachers, friends and relatives were his opponents, and thus it brought him the fear and pain of losing his own people. Krishna immediately told him that when senses meet sense objects they create polarities of heat-cold, pleasure-pain which are transient and we should learn to tolerate them (2.14). Tolerating these transients is nothing but self control.

We get so affected by polarities of praise and criticism on a daily basis and there is no way to stop them. Hence, Krishna repeatedly emphasizes transcending them rather than identifying with them.

Our general understanding of success is getting what we want. But for Krishna, it is attaining the tranquility and self-control which is aligning with *Paramatma*. This yardstick can be used as a measure to check our progress on the spiritual path.

115. A Method of Meditation

Krishna says you are either your own best friend or your own worst enemy (6.6). To become one's own friend, he advised the path of equanimity towards the feelings of *sukh-dukha* (6.7), towards things like gold-stone (6.8) and towards people like friends-enemies (6.9) by controlling senses (6.8). Alternatively, Krishna suggests the path of meditation (6.10-6.15).

Krishna says to remain secluded, devoid of material possessions (6.10), sit in a clean place not so low or high (6.11), with mind-controlled, erect back and neck, without looking around (6.12-6.13), be quiet, without fear, remain concentrated (6.14) and by constantly seeking union with self one attains supreme peace (6.15).

Attaining *samatva* becomes difficult with the onslaught of sensory stimuli and thus seclusion gives temporary relief. The deeper meaning is that even if we seclude ourselves physically there is a chance that we keep mentally taking our

professions, situations and people along with us to meditation. This verse (6.10) states that we should be able to leave them behind and remain secluded. In the end, it's like Arjun attaining mental seclusion even amid the war.

As far as shedding material possessions is concerned, it's not donating all our physical possessions before going into meditation. It's about breaking our attachment with them to view them as things for use when needed and nothing more. It's about not making them part of 'I'.

Finally, Krishna advises shedding fear. Our fundamental fear is the fear of losing things or people which is nothing but the partial demise of 'I'. On the other hand, in meditation, we have to shed thoughts, the sense of ownership over things and remain secluded from people. Hence, Krishna cautions us to be aware of this aspect of fear on the path towards attaining an eternal meditative state which is *moksha*.

118. Change is the only Constant

Change is constant in the physical or manifested world of objects and the unmanifested or *atma* remains changeless. So, a mechanism is needed to bring coherence between these two worlds. Metaphorically, it's like the ball bearing mechanism between a stationary hub and a rotating wheel or like a gearbox handling two different speeds from the engine and wheels. Similarly, it's a mechanism of senses, mind (*manas* or *chitt*) and intellect (*buddhi*) between the changeless *atma* and the ever changing world of objects. Krishna gave a hierarchy that the senses are superior to sense objects, the mind is superior to the senses, and superior to the mind is the intellect. Superior even to the intellect is the self or *atma* (3.42).

The physical part of the senses automatically responds to changes in the physical world. The mind is a combination of the controller part of the senses along with memory and is expected to

handle every outside change brought to it by the physical part of the senses to keep us safe. The main issue is whether sensual stimuli control the mind or the intellect. It would be a reactionary life if dictated by stimuli and a life of awareness if guided by intellect.

That's why Krishna advises to start the practice of using the intellect gradually to let the mind be established in the self (6.25) and encourages practicing this with determination and enthusiasm (6.23). Contemporary literature also suggests that Ten Thousand hours of practice is needed to master any skill.

In the process, we need to abandon even *sankalp* (intention and planning) and restrain senses (6.24). Restraining senses is nothing but restraining the desire of getting sensual stimuli of our choice. Krishna assures that once we attain the supreme bliss of transcending senses, we will not be moved even by great sorrows (6.22).

120. Self in All; All in Self

Existence is the coherence of the manifested like our body and the un-manifested or *atma* (self). We perceive existence either through the manifested or through the un-manifested. We are familiar with the first one where we distinguish between people, situations and things as our senses are capable of perceiving only the manifested. We hardly recognise the un-manifested behind the manifested as it requires going beyond the senses.

For example, when we see a person we first see whether it's a man or a woman. Then we see how well one dresses and behaves; and how influential or wealthy one is. Subsequently, we recall the good and bad memories associated with them. Our behaviour depends on the judgements that we make based on these divisions.

In this regard, Krishna says that united with the self, he sees the self in all beings and all the beings in the self, he sees the same everywhere (6.29). This is the path of going beyond the five senses. Metaphorically, it is like digging a well

where the senses see sand, stones and gravel, while no water is seen at the beginning of the digging, but invariably water appears.

This verse gives a paradigm shift of looking at the un-manifested first and coming to the manifested subsequently. It's the realisation that behind every person or thing (manifested) the same un-manifested exists which Krishna said 'seeing the same everywhere'. It's like two fighting fruits of a tree realising that the same trunk feeds them and they are a part of one big tree. Then the entire thing becomes a drama played on the grand stage of the un-manifested.

Certainly, as indicated by Krishna earlier, this needs constant practice with determination to see the self in all beings and all the beings in the self.

122. Mantra of ‘It Is HIM’

Coming as *paramatma*, Krishna says that for he who perceives Me everywhere and sees all in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me (6.30). This verse is the foundation for *Bhakti Yoga* where practitioners perceive *paramatma* everywhere and in every situation.

The mantra of ‘IT IS HIM’ -IT being any person or a thing or a situation, can do miracles if we let it go deeper by repetition. Once we realise this, we will be able to see the *paramatma* whether that person is a friend or enemy; helping or hurting; praising or criticising; whether a thing is valuable like gold or worthless like stone; situations which are favourable or unfavourable; frightening or pleasant; moments of pleasure or pain; winning or losing; and the list goes on.

Krishna says in whatever way people are devoted to me, in that measure I manifest myself to them (4.11) and to me none is hateful and none is dear (9.29). This needs to be kept in mind to understand when Krishna says in an intriguing

way that I never lose sight of him who perceives Me everywhere. This implies that the measure of divisiveness in us indicates our distance from *paramatma*.

He further assures that he who, established in oneness, worships Me abiding in all beings, that *yogi* dwells in Me, whatever be his mode of living (6.31). It's about what we are but not about what we do or what we have.

The physical world is characterised by polarities of pleasure and pain. Irrespective of the mode of living like being rich or influential, we are still subject to pain polarities of anger, tension and frustration. That's why Krishna tells us to establish ourselves in oneness which will transcend us beyond polarities and divisiveness.

124. No Shortcut to Hard Work

Krishna talked about establishing in oneness whatever may be the mode of living to attain infinite bliss (6.31). There are three major issues faced by us to attain oneness. One is that it is called by different names in different cultures and to compound the complexity, the paths prescribed by these cultures appear to be opposing one another. Secondly, our mind is trained to divide which prevents attaining oneness. Thirdly, we tend to reject what we don't know and oneness is completely new terrain for us. Reflecting on these difficulties Arjun asks how to control the mind.

Krishna says, “No doubt, the mind is restless and difficult to control, but it can be controlled by practice (*abhyas*) and dispassion (*vairaagya*) (6.35). Take my word that *Yoga* is hard to attain by the ungoverned man but it can be attained by means of striving” (6.36). Krishna had earlier advised regular practice with the determination (6.23) to bring the restless mind under control (6.26).

Vairaagya is the polar opposite of *raag* or attachment. Life gives moments of both *raag* and *vairagya* on a daily basis but our mind practises only *raag* which is chasing desires. For example, we can get frustrated in a relationship and when it happens we blame our partner and look for a new relationship instead of realising that a relationship (*raag*) itself holds the potential for frustration (*vairaagya*). The practice of *vairaagya* is nothing but a deepening of the realisation that we can't attain joy from outside or from anyone. Our past experiences of *vairaagya* can help us sink in this realisation and be aware when they are repeated in the present moment.

Death is eternal, powerful and a master of equanimity. Many cultures use this to attain oneness by controlling the mind as it is the ultimate *vairaagya* we can imagine.

129. God Plays Dice

At the time of the creation of the universe, it was pure energy and matter formed subsequently. Scientifically, it is accepted that there were quantum fluctuations in terms of temperature, density and the ratio of matter-antimatter in the very early universe and there is no scientific reason for these variations. These fluctuations are responsible for the creation of matter and science agrees that God does play dice to create the diversity we see around us today.

In this regard, Krishna says that his lower nature (*prakriti*) is eightfold. Fire, earth, water, air and space are for the material world and *mann* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect) and *ahankaar* for the living entities (7.4). Fire stands for the energy which has been in existence since the beginning. Energy was converted into matter which has a solid state (earth), liquid state (water) and gaseous (air). Space is needed to hold all of them.

In the case of living entities, logic gates are needed for survival. *Mann* is the basic level of

thinking (system1 -quick and intuitive) and *buddhi* is the higher level of thinking (system2 -slow and reflective). *Ahankaar* is the final barrier we need to cross into *Paramatma's* higher nature. Krishna says that his higher nature is the 'life element' which supports the universe (7.5) like an invisible string holding gems (7.7).

Krishna says, "Very few out of thousands try to reach Me and out of such people hardly few know Me in essence" (7.3). Thus, crossing the barrier of *ahankaar* is a herculean task and the same is indicated here.

Another way to look at it is that we gathered a lot of dust knowingly or unknowingly during the evolutionary journey of 13.8 billion years. The first step is being aware of this dust which manifests as *ahankaar* and the second step is getting rid of it.

133. Shraddha Bestows

Existence is the coherence of manifested (man) and un-manifested (*paramatma*). Basic interactions happen at a man to man level with disregard to *paramatma*; Krishna termed this as the path of demons (7.15). The next level of interaction is between man and *paramatma*. This transition starts as one gets tired of chasing mirages or is vexed by misery.

In this regard, Krishna says these interactions or worship between man and *paramatma* are of four types. The first category of worshippers want to get rid of their difficulties, the second want to attain wealth, success or peace of mind, the third want to attain knowledge and the fourth are *Jnani* (wise) (7.16).

He says that the first three, who are otherwise deprived of wisdom, approach different forms (Gods) to fulfil their desires (7.20). This is like consulting the concerned doctor based on the ailments. He further says that when they worship

with *shraddha* (trust with commitment), He (Krishna) makes that *shraddha* unflinching (7.21) and their desires get fulfilled because of their *shraddha* (7.22) but these three paths give limited results (7.23).

Firstly, this appears to run contrary to ‘performing our *karma* without expecting the fruits of action (2.47)’ which is the fundamental attribute of the eternal state. Out of compassion, Krishna is helping us with the gradual transition from evil or darkness to the bright light of the eternal state which is desireless.

Secondly, he says that their *shraddha* fulfils their desires and He is behind that *shraddha*. This implies that our *shraddha* in relationships; towards God or towards work bestows due rewards to us. If we ever attained anything in the physical world it’s because of the presence of our *shraddha*. *Shraddha* is the same dedication even in adverse situations where we need to have patience and that’s why it is said ‘*shraddha* with *saburi* (patience)’.

137. Mantra of A to Z

Physical entities like us (manifested) are invariably affected by two delusions. The first one, *yoga-maya*, born out of three *gunas*, leads to *ahankaar* (*aham-karta* or I am doer) whereas ‘actions’ happen because of interactions between *gunas*. Second is the delusion brought by polarities of longing and aversion which leads to desires to possess things, people and feelings; and develop an aversion to others whereas it’s about witnessing ‘actions’ without longing or aversion. These two complement each other. While *ahankaar* justifies desires; desires, especially fulfilled ones, enhance *ahankaar*.

In this regard, Krishna says, “Those who strive for liberation from old age and death (*jara-marana-mokshaya*), taking *asritya* (refuge) in Me, they realise the *Brahma* (the whole/absolute), *Adhyatma* (spirituality/individual self) and *akhilam-karma* (all aspects of action) (7.29). Those who know Me as *Adhibhuta* (above elements), *Adhidaiva* (above God’s) and *Adhiyajna* (above

sacrifices) even at the time of death, they, steadfast in mind, know Me” (7.30).

Interestingly, Krishna brings death and old age immediately after delusions as these delusions instil fear in us like the fear of desires not getting fulfilled or *ahankaar* getting hurt (7.25 and 7.27). But death is the root fear which takes many forms of fear and overcoming this will help us transcend delusions, hence, many cultures use death as an instrument of *vairagya* (dispassion) to control the mind and overcome all fears. Krishna advises ‘*asritya*’ (refuge) which is taking refuge in *Paramatma* leading to understanding HIM in totality.

The state of ‘*asritya*’ is like a wise man who actively accepts all outcomes to be the LORD’s blessings to his prayers; his *mantra* being reading letters from A to Z and requesting the *paramatma* to assemble them in whichever manner the *Paramatma* sees fit -as whatever is needed and whatever happens, is embedded in these syllables.

140. What is Karma

‘What is *karma*’ is Arjun’s next question which is in response to Krishna’s assurance that one realises *akhilam-karma* (all aspects of *karma*, *akarma* and *vikarma*) when one strives for salvation by taking refuge in HIM (7.29). To this Krishna replies, “Detachment or sacrifice of cosmic energy capable of creation (*bhuta-bhava-udbhava-karo visargah*) is called *karma*” (8.3). This is a difficult explanation to comprehend and the interpretations complicate the issue rather than giving clarity. Usual interpretations of *karma* suggest it to be noble deeds, creation or *Yajna*, but all of them fail to satisfy what Krishna means.

While Krishna’s reply regarding ‘*karma*’ is at the level of ‘being’, we interpret it at the level of ‘doing’. That’s why our understanding that ‘what we do’ is ‘*karma*’ falls short, as different people keep doing different things at different times, whereas any definition should be valid for every point in time -be it past when humans didn’t exist, present or even future; and for every entity.

Krishna used the word '*visarga*' which is detachment or sacrifice. *Karma* is the detachment or diversion of the energy which is capable of creation. The closest example is the high voltage transmission line carrying large quantities of electricity (energy). When a part of it is diverted, that diversion is '*karma*' and *karma-phal* is energising the numerous electrical appliances.

If this analogy is applied to our existence, '*karma*' is drawing from infinite cosmic energy. Firstly, who draws the energy? Like the voltage difference, the difference in the three *gunas* held by various entities leads to the drawing of the energy through the cable of *shraddha*. While this happens automatically, out of delusion we attach ourselves to the process of '*visarga*' and presume ourselves to be *karta* which we are not. Secondly, once energy is drawn, none have any control over its consequences or *karma-phal* (2.47).

148. Wise use of Energy

Once upon a time, two sworn enemies prayed to GOD, who decided to bless them both and appeared before them separately. The first one wanted to know about the desires of the second one. However, the second one requested GOD to bless the first one first as GOD appeared there first. Then the first one asked GOD to give him double of what the second one seeks. The second one, blinded by enmity, prays that he should lose one eye so that the first one loses both eyes; lose a leg so that the other one loses both legs. This game of lose-lose continues when one invests one's energy in hatred and that is why Krishna earlier told us to renounce hatred but not Karma (5.3). Another learning from this story is that we should wisely invest our time and energy as these are limited at our level.

In this regard, Krishna says that there are two eternal paths which are, the bright path of no return and the dark path of returning again (8.23 & 8.26). The bright path is the path of channeling

most of our energy towards the internal journey to reach *Brahma* (8.24). The dark path is channeling our energy outside (playing lose-lose games) and one returns back (8.25). Krishna uses various names and attributes for these paths. While the dark path is like a pendulum swinging between the polarities of birth and death, the bright path is to reach the pivot of the pendulum which transcends polarities and is nothing but reaching *Brahma*-the Supreme.

Krishna says that once these paths are understood, none gets deluded (8.27). This is the balanced use of time. He further says, “He who knows the truth about the two paths gains merit far beyond any virtuous fruits (*punya-phalam*) assigned to *Vedas*, or in Sacrifices, or in Penances. That *yogi* reaches his Supreme Origin” (8.28).

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The author spent more than 25 years in the Civil Service which gave him an opportunity to interact with a number of people from various walks of life and to be in various situations, both pleasant and unpleasant. Born and brought up in Andhra Pradesh and working in Punjab, he got exposed to various cultures, languages and tendencies. Being an engineering graduate, he could blend science and spirituality.

A couple of years into service, he took up reading to supplement his daily experiences as a civil servant. He took a sabbatical to study Behavioural Economics which gave him insights into psychology and human behaviour.



This book contains 148 essays on the Bhagavad Gita. Each essay is independent containing interpretation of various aspects of the Gita and the seeker can pick any essay randomly.

The Bhagavad Gita deals at the roots of the issues we face in our daily lives whereas we tend to handle them at the level of the shoots. These include the transient nature of things, polarities and dualities of the physical world, performing actions without anticipation of fruits of action, being witness, shedding the sense of doership and many more. Essentially, it's about what we are than what we do and what we have.

This book is an attempt to make the Bhagavad Gita easy to understand with a contemporary scientific perspective. Once one is aware of it and puts it into practice, joy comes in every aspect of life.

