

## The Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. It is narrated in the bhisma parva of the Maha Bharata and was subsequently recorded by Vyasa for the benefit of humanity. It comprises 701 verses in 18 chapters. The Mahabharata has given us many great values, but the two most significant ones are the Bhagavad Gita and Vishnu Sahasranama. Ironically, both of them are presented in the battlefield, the Bhagavad Gita being presented just before the onset of the war of Kurukshetra and the Vishnu Sahasranama, after the war. The Gita stands as a guiding manual for the daily conduct of life, spiritual upliftment and Self-realization.

We all have Kurukshetras within us. The battle of Mahabharata is raging within us! Our ignorance (avidyaa) is King Dhritarashtra! The individual soul is Arjuna! The In-Dweller dwelling in our heart is Lord Krishna, the charioteer! The body is our chariot! The senses (indriyaas) are the horses. Our ego, pride, greed, hypocrisy, lust, jealousy, likes & dislikes, etc. are our dire enemies! The secret of the tremendous appeal of the Bhagavad Gita is in the fact that it deals with a practical problem of everyday life, namely, how can a person do his duty in this society with righteousness. The society is itself so filled with flaws that each of us wonders whether what we do is right or wrong. The Gita helps us to solve this riddle and teaches us the right way to lead life.

Gita formulates the theory of the three paths (margas), namely, Knowledge (GYaana), Devotion (bhakti) and action (karma) and combines the three philosophies wonderfully, thus teaching us that action; devotion and knowledge should work in perfect harmony! By abiding by one's duties of life (or svadharma), one can attain the Absolute (or moksha) and the Gita teaches each of us, what is our dharma and how to adhere to it. That is the reason why our scriptures prescribe Bhagavad Gita as one of the five scriptures that should be practiced on a daily basis:

Bhagavad Gita is also hailed as brahma vidya (Knowledge of the Absolute), which is the highest knowledge that a spiritual aspirant seeks. Bhagavad Gita is also hailed as yoga shastra since it deals with the practice of the highest ideals in all walks of life.

(Actually each of the chapters of the Gita is named as a yoga - bhakti yoga, karma yoga, GYaana yoga).

The Gita teaches us to lead life without attachment, like a lotus-leaf, which remains in water, but does not wet its surface. The one who places all actions in the Eternal, abandoning attachment, is unaffected by sin. Attachment arises due to desires and is due to the lower qualities of the mind. Non-attachment is

born out of Sattva, which is a divine attribute. Practice of non-attachment is rigorous and the only attachment one should aspire to have is towards God or Atman.

A true aspirant is expected to possess the qualifications of viveka (discrimination between good & bad), vairagya (dispassion), sama (control of mind), dama (control of senses), uprati (not influenced by worldly attractions). Srimad Bhagavad Gita teaches us the theory and values of these qualifications and as a yoga shastra, teaches us the way to practice them in our path towards God-Realization. The Bhagavad Gita brings the greatest wisdom to human life. Some people feel that Gita should not be taught to children and if youngsters read it then they will become sannyasis. This is not so. The Gita has not asked us to renounce all activities and become a sannyasi. Even Arjuna, who directly heard it from the Lord himself never became a sannyasi. The purpose of the Gita is to teach the truths of the vedas to us in such a way that we can practice it.

The Gita aims to teach us lessons so that we can elevate our day to day life and activities. When we are born as humans, our aim should not be just to earn a living and exist in this world. Then we will be no different from animals. This is a total waste of human life. Using the human life for pursuits such as eating, sleeping and chasing sense objects is like bringing a talented painter such as Picasso or Rembrandt to paint the walls of a house!! We should understand that the human life is a gift to us. It is the only life form from which we can reach God. The Gita teaches us the value of Human life and it directs us to the ultimate goal of God realization. It teaches us how we must perform actions in such a way as to make them noble.

When we go to a market and buy some fruits, it might be dirty, covered with dust and mud. It may be lying out in the open. But we take the same fruits and wash them and then offer them in a temple or place them in an altar. When the priest gives it to us after offering to the Lord, the same fruits are accepted by us as Prasad. So what was just an ordinary fruit becomes sacred just by offering it to God. Similarly all our actions will become noble when we offer it to God.

Whenever we do anything, if we feel that we are offering it to God then our actions will not be selfish in nature. Even if we are performing the simplest of jobs, we should do it with full concentration and happiness. We all know that we are here to earn a living. We do not have an option to just leave the job and do nothing. When we know that the work is inevitable, why should we complain and do the work? When we have such a negative attitude then the work will not give any happiness while performing it. If we expect that when we do the work, somebody is going to praise us and after that nobody says anything, then it causes disappointment and hatred. We become unhappy after doing the

work also. So when we perform any action, in expectation of a result, then there is only agony while performing the action, because we are always worried about the result. Later when we do not get the expected result, once more there is agony and dissatisfaction. We should hence understand that happiness should be in performance of the action itself.

When a mother takes care of her child, she does not consider it as work. When we do something, which is a hobby, even though it might involve lot of efforts, we do not consider it as work and we enjoy doing it. Similarly, we should enjoy each and every action that we do and perform it as an offering to God. When we perform actions without any self-interest then it become yoga and what was work, becomes worship. This is one of the most important messages of the Bhagavad Gita.

We need to approach life with the right attitude. The world will appear to us only as we see it. The saint Ramdas wrote Ramayana and he used to read it to his students, as he wrote it. Unknown to anyone, Hanuman also used to sit among the students and listen to him. One day the saint was describing that Hanuman approached the Ashoka vana and saw the white flowers there". Hanuman appeared suddenly and said, "I did not see any white flowers, I saw red flowers" and he asked the saint to correct it. The saint Ramdas insisted that he had written rightly and they took the disagreement to Shri Raama so that he could say who was right. "Shrii Rama said that the flowers were indeed white, but since Hanuman's eyes were red with anger they appeared red to him." The world too appears to us as we see it. If we think that there is distrust and hatred in others then that is what we will see. If we show love and compassion for all beings and see friendliness everywhere, we will be happy. We need to cultivate the capacity to see God in all beings and then our attitude to every one will be good and our actions will be selfless.

Once a man went to a Zen master. He told him "Teach me the Zen philosophy". The master did not say anything. Instead he offered him tea. He gave him a cup and started pouring tea. Even after the cup got filled the master kept pouring it and the tea was spilling all over the place. The man said, "Master, the cup is full, How come you are trying to pour tea inside it?" The master said, "Just like the cup, your mind is full of unwanted thoughts. First empty that and come and then I shall teach you philosophy".

Similarly, our mind is filled with unwanted thoughts. There are all kinds of desires for various objects, hatred, anger, jealousy, greed etc. If you repeat the word gita gita then it sounds like tagi tagi. Tyaaga means giving up. The Gita teaches us to give up all our lower qualities like desire, anger, hatred, jealousy etc. When a farmer wants to plow his field, he needs to first remove all the weeds and put good soil in the field. Only then the seeds can be planted. Similarly we need to

take out the weeds of all the bad qualities. We are the best judges of what our negative qualities are. It is not possible to say that we can get rid of all the bad qualities overnight. We should make up our mind that we want to do this weeding process and try and remove these qualities one by one.

All of you might have heard the story of Gajendra. The elephant Gajendra was thirsty and wanted to drink water from a river. It knew that the crocodile was in the river, but it thought that it was stronger and hence would not be pulled by the crocodile. Even as it started drinking the water, the crocodile caught hold of it and would not let it go and the elephant tried to use its might and pull itself away. After some time, when the pain was unbearable, it turned to the Lord and screamed for help and the Lord also saved it.

We are all like the elephant and we are so filled by our arrogance and ego that we think, everything is under our control in this world. The desire for all objects in this world is like the thirst of the elephant and we go towards all the worldly objects, thinking that this crocodile will not be able to catch hold of us. But when we start getting attached to our possessions, they pull us more and more and cause us immeasurable pain. We are pained because we want to possess all the things that we cannot have. We are in pain because we are afraid that somebody might take it away from us. We are in pain when they are finally taken away from us. So this crocodile of attachment to our possessions, that has kept us in its hold, causes us so much pain before and during the time we possess an object and even after it is taken away. To get rid of this crocodile, we need to turn ourselves to God and seek His divine help.

The Lord says:

***sarva dharmaan parityajya maamekam sharanaM vrajaa  
aham tvaam sarva papebhyo mokshayishyaami maa shucham***

Abandoning dependence on all dharmas -right & wrong - take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins; do not grieve. In this Sloka the Lord says that we should surrender all our actions as well as ourselves to him completely and he will take care of us. So when we have total faith in the Lord, then we will have no fears, worries or doubts in our actions and we can have mental peace.

The last sloka of the 18th chapter is also called ekashlokii giitaa - i.e Bhagavad Gita in one verse and it says:

***yatra yogeshvaraH krishhNo yatra paartho dhanurdharaH  
tatra shriir vijayo bhuuthir, dhruvaa niithir mathir mama***

Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of Yoga & wherever is Arjuna, the supreme archer (the true & determined aspirant), there are prosperity, victory, glory and righteousness. This Sloka is said by Sanjaya to Dhritarashtra and is an answer to Dhritarashtra's question about the war. Sanjaya says indirectly that there is no doubt that the Pandavas will win the war.

The Gita can be compared to a Kalpataru or a wish fulfilling tree. Whatever we seek to learn, we can get it from the Gita. Each person who reads the Gita can understand it from a different level. It can give lessons to a beginner as well as a pundit. Based on the state of feelings, each person can understand the Gita depending on the stage that they have reached in the spiritual path. There is plenty of water in an ocean, but what you can bring away from it depends on the size of the vessel that you take. Similarly the messages will be vast but what we get from it depends on our capacity to absorb. The basic message of the Gita is the same and its purpose is to transform humanity to divinity. We should therefore not take such a book lightly. We should approach it with devotion and commitment and not only try to learn the teachings, but more importantly strive to practice it. Only then we can attain fulfillment in our lives.