

Educational Teachings of Bhagavad Gita

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BACKGROUND

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most revered of Indian scriptures. Though it is much later than the Vedas, and does not constitute part of the revealed literature of the Hindus, it occupies a distinct and in some respects unrivaled place in Indian philosophical and religious literature. While it is almost conventional to view it as a separate text, it is in fact a part of the Mahabharata, and relays the teachings of Krishna to Arjuna. The occasion for these teachings was furnished by the Great War between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, who are also related to each other. As the battle is about to begin, Arjuna, one of the five Pandava princes, throws down his bow and arrow, and confesses his inability to kill his own cousins and kinsmen, as well as those revered teachers who had been the common tutors of the Kauravas and Pandavas. Krishna then delivers an oration, urging Arjuna to perform his duty, to be the warrior that he is, and it is these teachings that are encapsulated in the Bhagavad Gita, the Song of the Lord.

The teachings of the Gita have been the subject of much interpretation. The Gita counsels us to retain our equanimity, and says unequivocally that the sthitha-prajna, or the being preserved in wisdom, is moved to neither excessive joy nor excessive sorrow. Krishna is understood as recommending that we must fulfill our duties, but never with an eye to being rewarded for our activities; and that whatever travails the flesh may be heir to, the soul is always immortal. Thus, truly speaking, we do not have it within our power to kill anyone, nor can we be killed by anyone; and if Arjuna should imagine that he has such power, he has failed to understand the nature of the divine. The Gita lays out several paths to emancipation: for those inclined towards activity or service to humankind through works, there is karma yoga, just as those inclined towards devotion can practice bhakti yoga. The intellectually inclined can veer towards jnana yoga, the path of knowledge and intellectual discrimination. The eleventh chapter contains some of the most celebrated verses of the Gita. As these teachings have been delivered by Krishna, who however appears in human form, and that too as the humble charioteer of Arjuna, the

Pandava prince must be brought to the realization that he is in the presence of the Lord himself. Krishna consequently reveals to Arjuna his cosmic form, and Arjuna is dazzled by the vision of the Supreme Deity.

There are hundreds of commentaries on the Gita, and in modern times no great Hindu figure has failed to leave behind an interpretive work on this philosophical poem. The earliest and still most moving, of the commentaries is the twelfth-century work by Jnaneshvar, a Marathi poet-saint, called the Jnaneshvari. From the purely literary and devotional standpoint, this work is without comparison. In the late nineteenth century, the Gita was put to different use. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in his magisterial interpretation, the Gita-Rahasya, suggested that the Gita urges us to action. It is the devotionals of the Hindus that, Tilak was to argue, made them incapable of defending the country against foreign invaders. Krishna's injunction to Arjuna to take up arms and perform his duty as a warrior was taken literally by the armed revolutionaries who now declared the Gita to be their indispensable bedside companion. But Mahatma Gandhi, who was inclined to view the teachings of the Gita as an allegorical representation of the conflict between knowledge and ignorance (rather than good and evil, if I may add that caveat) within each person, insisted upon the centrality of the Gita's teaching that we must perform our duties without expecting the fruits of our labor. Gandhi called the Gita the 'Gospel of Selfless Action'. Among the modern commentaries, the most notable ones, besides those by Tilak and Gandhi, are by Aurobindo, Vinoba Bhave, Vivekananda, and Ramana Maharishi. There are numerous recitations of the Gita as well, and the Gita has drawn the attention of many prominent Western writers, such as T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and Christopher Isherwood.

There are many English translations of the Gita: perhaps the most readable of these is one by Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood, though the translations of Swami Nikhilananda, S. Radhakrishnan, and Barbara Stoller Miller are both scholarly and literary. Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita is a trifle too ponderous but still unmatched.

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most revered of Indian scriptures. Though it is much later than the Vedas, and does not constitute part of the revealed The Bhagavad-gita opens with blind King Dhritarashtra requesting his secretary, Sanjaya, to narrate the battle between his sons, the Kauravas, and their cousins, the Pandavas. Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, out of affection for His devotee, the Pandava prince Arjuna, has agreed to drive his chariot. As Arjuna takes up his bow and prepares to fight, he sees the sons of Dhritarashtra drawn in military array and requests infallible Krishna to draw his chariot between the two fighting forces. There in the midst of both armies, Arjuna's mind reels as he foresees the imminent death of his teacher, relatives, and friends. He throws down his bow and arrows and decides not to fight.

In Chapter One and in the beginning of Chapter Two, Arjuna presents his arguments for refusing to fight. Basically, he fears the sinful reactions of killing. But after Arjuna surrenders to Lord Krishna and requests the Lord to instruct him, the Lord begins countering Arjuna's objections. First, Krishna analytically explains that fighting in His service is transcendental and will bring no sinful reaction. Krishna also explains the Vedas' purpose as to gradually elevate souls to Krishna consciousness. Krishna thus encourages Arjuna to remain fixed in His service - fight - and ignore his mind's desires.

As Krishna's explanations why Arjuna should fight were only a summary, and since Krishna glorifies both 'buddhi-yoga', intelligence used in spiritual advancement of knowledge (2.45, 2.49-50), and 'karma', work (2.47-48, 2.50), Arjuna becomes confused and wishes to use Krishna's instruction to perform 'buddhi-yoga' as an excuse to retire the battlefield for a life of contemplation. Arjuna therefore opens Chapter Three asking Krishna why He is encouraging fighting if intelligence is better than fruitier work.

Krishna then explains 'karma-yoga', reaction-free devotional work, and clears up Arjuna's mistaken idea that all work is fruitive and leads to bondage. Krishna explains that Arjuna should fight, for avoiding sinful reactions though devotional work is better than attempting to escape reactions though renouncing work. Krishna also instructs Arjuna to fight to set the proper example of duty. Krishna therefore tells Arjuna to fight, but with knowledge and detachment (3.29-30), without falling victim to his own attractions and aversions.

Then, in answer to Arjuna's question on the cause of a soul's being impelled to improper action or neglect of duty, Krishna names the enemy: lust. He then recommends Arjuna to regulate his senses, become fixed in his pure

identity as a servant of Krishna, and thereby avoid lust's control. Then, with spiritual strength and deliberate intelligence, he should conquer that forceful enemy - lust.

Since in Chapter Three, Krishna has recommended that Arjuna fight in full knowledge of Him (3.30), the Lord, in Chapter Four, explain different aspects of transcendental knowledge. First Krishna explains attaining knowledge through the disciplic succession. Then after successively explaining His appearance and then His mission, the Lord explains His devotional service as the goal of (Krishna had already referred to the importance of performing 'yajna', sacrifice, in 3.9 Krishna next explains the soul's relationship with Him as eternal His part and parcel, which one must approach a bona fide spiritual master to learn. Chapter Four ends with Krishna glorifying transcendental knowledge and requesting Arjuna to arm himself with this knowledge - which burns all sinfull reactions to ashes - and fight!

After Arjuna has been impressed with the importance of both work (which requires activity) and seeking knowledge (which tends to be inactive), Arjuna is perplexed. His determination is confused, and he sees fighting and knowledge as contradic Therefore Arjuna opens Chapter Five by asking Krishna to definitively explain whether the renunciation of work (speculation, 'sankhya, jnana', inaction-in-knowledge) or work in devotion is superior. Krishna answers that one who is detached from his work's results is the one who is truly renounced. Such a person knows that while the body acts, he, the soul, actually does nothing. Arjuna should therefore, do his duty steadily act for the satisfaction of Krishna. Impartially viewing the external world, he ser (wherein Krishna explains practical points for a practitioner), Krishna explains 'dhyana- yoga' concluding that 'dhyana', or meditation upon Krishna, is meditation's final goal.

Krishna begins the Sixth Chapter by explaining that the neophyte yogi engages in fruitive sitting postures while the advanced yogi, the true 'sannyasi', works without attachment. Such a yogi liberates, not degrades, himself by his mind's activities. Carefully controlling his mind and engaging it body, and his self in Krishna's service, the yogi strictly practices 'dhyana- yoga' in a secluded place. Fixing his mind on the self and on Krishna, he attains transcendental happiness in the kingdom of God. Arjuna then points out the main difficulty in practicing yoga is controlling the mind. Krishna responds by saying that one can overcome the obstinate mind through constant practice and determination. In responding to Arjuna's about the fate of an unsuccessful yogi, Krishna answers that one unsuccessful in his practice will still take birth in a family of wise transcendentalists and automatically become attract yogic principles. Krishna finally states in

the last two verses of the chapter that the yogi is greater than the ascetic, the jnani and the karmi. And the greatest of all yogis is he who always thinks of Krishna and with great faith worships Him in loving service.

Knowing Krishna's instruction at the end of Chapter Six, one should initiate his practice of yoga from the point of concentrating of the mind upon Krishna. Chapter Seven thus opens with Krishna explaining knowledge of Himself and His opulent energies. Thus Arjuna can fully worship Krishna, as described at the end of Chapter Six, and think of Him with devotion as he fights.

Krishna first explains that as He is the Supreme Truth, everything in existence is a combination of His material and spiritual energies. He is the active principle within all and is all-pervasive through His diverse material and spiritual energies. Because the world's activities are conducted by the three modes of nature which emanate from Him, (Although Krishna is independent and above them) only those who surrender to Krishna can cross beyond these modes to know Him. Four kinds of impious souls never surrender to Krishna while four kinds of pious souls do surrender. Krishna also covers himself from the impersonalizes who are less intelligent, and from those who surrender to the demigods. But those who are truly pious, the undeluded, serve Krishna as the governor of the material manifestation, the demigods, and sacrifice, can know and understand Krishna - at the time of death.

Chapter Eight begins by Arjuna asking Krishna about Brahman, karma, the demigods, the material world, and knowing Krishna at the time of death. Krishna first briefly answers Arjuna's first five questions and then begins explaining in detail how to know Krishna at the time of death. Since one attains what one remembers at the time of death, if one remembers Krishna, one goes to Him. Krishna then explains how He can be constantly thought of as the transcendental person who knows everything, the oldest controller, the smallest, the maintainer. Thus by practicing yoga and remembering Krishna, Krishna explains, one will go to the eternal spiritual world and never again to return to this temporary, miserable material world. Then, after describing the different yogic ways in which one may leave this world, Krishna advises Arjuna not worry about other paths - either Vedic study, yoga, austere sacrifices, charity, jnana, or karma - for the results of these will all be obtained through performing devotional service. And in the end, such a yogi in devotion, reaches the supreme eternal abode.

After Krishna answered Arjuna's questions in Chapter Eight, He continues speaking, in Chapter Nine, the knowledge about Himself that He had begun explaining in Chapter Seven. Krishna thus prefaces Chapter Nine by

stating that the knowledge He'll now reveal is most confidential, for it is about His actual position, which only the non-envious and faithful can understand. Krishna continues explaining that although independent and aloof, He pervades, creates and annihilates the entire cosmos through His material energy. Those mahatmas who know Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead take shelter of Him and serve Him as the only enjoyer and the supreme object of worship.

Krishna then explains the fortunate position of such devotees: If one worships Krishna, Krishna cares, compensates for his deficiencies, and preserves his strengths. And all Krishna asks for is an offering of a leaf, a flower, or some water - if it is offered with devotion. Thus His devotee comes to Him. Even if a devotee unintentionally commits a horrendous act, he will be rectified, for Krishna promises that His devotee will never perish.

In Chapters Seven and Nine, Krishna has explained knowledge of His energies. In Chapter Ten, Krishna explains His opulences more specifically and thereby reveals Himself the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the source of all. Krishna also tells how His pure devotees know that He is the unborn Supreme Lord, the source of all sages, the source of the material and spiritual worlds, and the source of all qualities and attitudes. Thus pure and wise devotees worship Krishna, converse about Him, and with thoughts dwelling in Him, undeluded and free from sin, engage in His service. Out of compassion, Krishna within their hearts destroys any remaining ignorance.

After hearing of Krishna's opulences, Arjuna confirms Krishna as the Supreme Lord by quoting authorities and explains that only Krishna can truly know Himself. Krishna then tells of His divine manifestations within this world - as the Super-soul, the ocean, the Himalayas - which merely indicate His limitless opulences, for a single fragment of Krishna's energy pervades and supports this entire universe!

Arjuna, although acknowledging that Krishna in the two-armed form that he now sees before him is Supreme, still requests Krishna to reveal that all-pervading Universal Form that supports the Universe. Thus, in Chapter Eleven, Krishna proves Himself as the Supreme Lord and He establishes the criteria that anyone who claims to be God must also show a Universal Form. Krishna then reveals to Arjuna His wondrous effulgent, all-expansive form, and Arjuna sees all soldiers on both sides dying within it. Krishna explains His form as time, the destroyer of all world, and requests that Arjuna, knowing in advance the inevitable end of all the warriors, becomes his instrument. In answer to Arjuna's fearful prayers, Krishna first shows His

four-armed form before again returning to His original two-armed form. Krishna then states that his two-armed form can only be seen by pure devotees, and such pure devotees, working for Krishna, free from desiring fruitive activities, and who make Krishna the super goal of their lives, certainly come to him.

In Chapter Twelve, Arjuna, after witnessing Krishna's awesome Universal Form, wishes to clarify his own position as a devotee, the highest worshiper of the Supreme. He thus asks whether worshiping Krishna through devotional service or worshiping the impersonal is superior. Krishna immediately responds saying that one engaged in His personal service is the topmost. One should therefore engage in Krishna's service and fix his mind solely upon Krishna, and, if that cannot be done, one should follow the rules and regulations of 'bhakti-yoga', which purify one so he is later able to do so. Krishna then describes other processes that eventually lead to his pure devotional service.

Then qualities that endear a devotee to Krishna, which Krishna next mentions, such as equality in happiness and distress, independence from the ordinary course of activities, satisfaction, and the faithful following of the path of devotional service, are also part of the process of worshiping Krishna in devotional service.

Arjuna opens Chapter Thirteen by inquiring about the field of activities and the knower of that field. Krishna answers that the conditioned soul's body and that body's interactions within the material world are His limited field of activities. By understanding the difference between the body, the soul, and the Super-soul and by following the process of knowledge, the soul can transcend the good and the bad he meets, realize his eternal subordination to Krishna, and attain the supreme destination.

The Thirteenth Chapter clearly explained that by humbly developing knowledge one can become free from material entanglement. It is also explained that the living entity's entanglement within the material world due to his association with the modes of material nature (13. 20-22). Now, in Chapter Fourteen, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in detail, explains the three modes - goodness, passion and ignorance - those forces that bind and control all conditioned souls within this world. A soul can, however, transcend these modes through devotional service (All other processes are contaminated by the modes). Thus the limitations imposed by his field of activities can be overthrown and the soul can be elevated to the Brahman platform, the constitutional position of purity and happiness - a platform of which Krishna is the basis.

As one must be detached from the modes and their results in order to be attached to the service of the Lord, Krishna describes in Chapter Fifteen the process of freeing oneself from matter's grip. He begins by comparing the material world to a gigantic, upside-down banyan tree, invoking Arjuna to detach himself from it through surrender. Thus, the soul can end his transmigrations and return to Him in the spiritual world.

Although the foolish cannot understand that the soul transmigrates, quitting one body to obtain a new body based on his mind's desires, transcendentalists see this clearly. The foolish can learn to see properly by understanding that it is Krishna who is the splendor of the sun, moon, and fire, as the one keeping the planets in orbit and making vegetables succulent. They can see Krishna as the fire of digestion; as the Paramatma in everyone's heart; as the giver of remembrance, knowledge, and forgetfulness; and as the goal of the Vedas and the compiler of Vedanta. Krishna then reveals that knowing Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead and engaging in His service is the ultimate purpose of the Vedanta and the most confidential part of the Vedas.

In Chapter Fifteen, auspicious, elevating activities were described as part of the banyan tree. In Chapter Sixteen, after mentioning twenty-six godly qualities, Krishna explains the demoniac nature which degrades the soul through arrogant, ignorant, and conceited pursuits of sense gratification and power.

Krishna explains the demonic mentality as follows: The world is unreal and is produced only of sex desire. Taking shelter of lust, they think of sense gratification as the goal of life and scheme to illegally increase their wealth. While plotting to kill their 'competitor' enemies, they think themselves powerful and happy, and they, surrounded by their relatives, use sacrifices and charity only to further increase their happiness. Perplexed by illusory anxieties, bewildered by self-complacency, impudency, and wealth; and envying the Super-soul within their own bodies and within the bodies of others, demons blaspheme real religion. These mischievous, lowest amongst men are repeatedly cast by Krishna into demonic species to gradually sink to the most abominable forms of existence.

Krishna ends the chapter by explaining that because lust, anger and greed are the beginnings of demonic life; all sane men should therefore give them up and understand their duty through faithfully following the scriptures.

Krishna has concluded Chapter Sixteen by declaring that the ultimate difference between the divine and the demoniac is that the divine follow the scriptures while the demons do not. In the beginning of Chapter Seventeen, Arjuna inquires more about those who don't follow

scriptures, but who worship according to their imaginations. Krishna answers by describing how the combination of the modes of material nature that control a particular person will dictate a person's faith, worship, eating, sacrifices, charity and austerity. The chapter ends with Krishna explaining the syllables 'om tat sat' and how these syllables indicate that any sacrifice, austerity, or charity dictated by the modes and performed without devotional service is useless in this if the next. One should therefore directly take to Krishna's service in Krishna consciousness.

The entire Bhagavad-gita is concluded in seventeen chapters, and in the Eighteen Chapter, Krishna reviews the knowledge already presented. In this chapter Krishna concludes, as He has done throughout the Bhagavad-gita, that one should practice devotional service - Krishna consciousness.

Since Arjuna's basic desire to renounce his duty of fighting was fear of sinful reaction, Krishna explains true renunciation and how to transcend sinful reactions through

- (1) becoming renounced from the fruits of activities,
- (2) abiding by the order of the Super-soul,
- (3) worshipping the Lord through one's fruits of work by acting either as 'brahmana', 'ksatriya', 'vaisya', or 'sudra' according to one's mode of nature. (Each leads Arjuna to fight) Thus, one can achieve the self-realized position of 'brahma-bhuta' and that position, detached from all material things, one can practice pure devotional service.

Krishna can only be known through surrendering to him in devotional service, and by this direct process - free from karma or jnana, Arjuna should need not fear any sinful reactions. Under Krishna's protection, such a pure devotee will reach "Krishna-loka". Krishna instructs Arjuna that he should surrender to the Supreme Lord within his heart and thus attain peace in His supreme, eternal abode. The most confidential knowledge is then explained by Krishna: "Become My devotee, always think of me, act for me, worship me, and offer all homage unto Me. Surrender unto Me alone. Do not fear sinful reactions." After hearing the instructions of Sri Krishna, Arjuna is fixed and ready to fight. Sanjaya, after narrating this conversation to Dhritarashtra, ecstatically thinks of the wondrous two-armed form of Krishna and predicts victory for Arjuna, the supreme archer, for he is surrendered to Krishna, the master of all mystics.

"I was born in the darkest ignorance, and my spiritual master opened my eyes with the torch of knowledge. I offer my respectful obeisance's unto him."

Bhagavad-gita is also known as Gitopanishad. It is the essence of Vedic knowledge and one of the most important Upanishads in Vedic literature. Of course there are many commentaries in English on the Bhagavad-gita, and one may question the necessity for another one.

The spirit of Bhagavad-Gita is mentioned in Bhagavad-Gita itself. It is just like this: If we want to take a particular medicine, then we have to follow the directions written on the label. We cannot take the medicine according to our own whim or the direction of a friend. It must be taken according to the directions on the label or the directions given by a physician. Similarly, Bhagavad-Gita should be taken or accepted as it is directed by the speaker Himself. The speaker of Bhagavad-Gita is Lord Sri Krishna. He is mentioned on every page of Bhagavad-Gita as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Bahaman. Of course the word Bhagavan sometimes refers to any powerful person or any powerful demigod, and certainly here Bhagavan designates Lord Sri Krishna as a great personality, but at the same time we should know that Lord Sri Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as is confirmed by all great Acaryas (spiritual masters) like Shankaracarya, Ramanujacarya, Madhvacharya, Nimbarka Svami, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and many other authorities of Vedic knowledge in India. The Lord Himself also establishes Himself as the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the Bhagavad-gita, and He is accepted as such in the Brahma-samhita and all the Puranas, especially the Srimad-Bhagavatam, known as the Bhagavata Purana (krishnas tu bhagavan svayam). Therefore we should take Bhagavad-gita as it is directed by the Personality of Godhead Himself.

Here the Lord informs Arjuna that this system of yoga, the Bhagavad-Gita, was first spoken to the sun-god and the sun-god explained it to Manu, and Manu explained it to Ikshavaku, and in that way, by disciple succession, one speaker after another, this yoga system has been coming down. But in the course of time it has become lost. Consequently the Lord has to speak it again, this time to Arjuna on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra.

He tells Arjuna that He is relating this supreme secret to him because Arjuna is His devotee and His friend. The purport of this is that Bhagavad-Gita is a treatise which is especially meant for the devotee of the Lord. There are three classes of transcendentalists, namely the Jnani, the yogi and the bhakta, or the impersonalist, the meditator and the devotee. Here the Lord clearly tells Arjuna that He is making him the first receiver of a new parampara (disciplic succession) because the old succession was broken. It was the Lord's wish, therefore, to establish another parampara in the same line of thought that was coming down from the sun-god to others, and it was His

wish that His teaching be distributed anew by Arjuna. He wanted Arjuna to become the authority in understanding the Bhagavad-gita. So we see that Bhagavad-gita is instructed to Arjuna especially because Arjuna was a devotee of the Lord, a direct student of Krishna, and His intimate friend. Therefore Bhagavad-gita is best understood by a person who has qualities similar to Arjuna's. That is to say he must be a devotee in a direct relationship with the Lord. As soon as one becomes a devotee of the Lord, he also has a direct relationship with the Lord. That is a very elaborate subject matter, but briefly it can be stated that a devotee is in a relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead in one of five different ways:

1. One may be a devotee in a passive state;
2. One may be a devotee in an active state;
3. One may be a devotee as a friend;
4. One may be a devotee as a parent;
5. One may be a devotee as a conjugal lover.

Arjuna was in a relationship with the Lord as friend. Of course there is a gulf of difference between this friendship and the friendship found in the material world. This is transcendental friendship, which cannot be had by everyone. Of course everyone has a particular relationship with the Lord, and that relationship is evoked by the perfection of devotional service. But in the present status of our life, not only have we forgotten the Supreme Lord, but we have forgotten our eternal relationship with the Lord. Every living being, out of the many, many billions and trillions of living beings, has a particular relationship with the Lord eternally. That is called svarupa. By the process of devotional service, one can revive that svarupa, and that stage is called svarupa-siddhi—perfection of one's constitutional position. So Arjuna was a devotee, and he was in touch with the Supreme Lord in friendship.

“Arjuna said: You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the ultimate abode, the purest, the Absolute Truth. You are the eternal, transcendental, original person, the unborn, the greatest. All the great sages such as Narada, Asita, Devala, and Vyasa confirm this truth about You, and now You Yourself are declaring it to me. O Krishna, I totally accept as truth all that You have told me. Neither the demigods nor the demons, O Lord, can understand Your personality.”

After hearing Bhagavad-gita from the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Arjuna accepted Krishna as param brahma, the Supreme Brahman. Every living being

is Brahman, but the supreme living being, or the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is the Supreme Brahman. Param dhama means that He is the supreme rest or abode of everything; pavitram means that He is pure, untainted by material contamination; purusham means that He is the supreme enjoyer; sasvatam, original; divyam, transcendental; adi-devam, the Supreme Personality of Godhead; ajam, the unborn; and vibhum, the greatest.

Now one may think that because Krishna was the friend of Arjuna, Arjuna was telling Him all this by way of flattery, but Arjuna, just to drive out this kind of doubt from the minds of the readers of Bhagavad-gita, substantiates these praises in the next verse when he says that Krishna is accepted as the Supreme Personality of Godhead not only by himself but by authorities like Narada, Asita, Devala and Vyasadeva. These are great personalities who distribute the Vedic knowledge as it is accepted by all acaryas. Therefore Arjuna tells Krishna that he accepts whatever He says to be completely perfect. Sarvam etad rtam manye: “I accept everything you say to be true.” Arjuna also says that the personality of the Lord is very difficult to understand and that He cannot be known even by the great demigods. This means that the Lord cannot even be known by personalities greater than human beings. So how can a human being understand Lord Sri Krishna without becoming His devotee?

Therefore Bhagavad-Gita should be taken up in a spirit of devotion. One should not think that he is equal to Krishna, nor should he think that Krishna is an ordinary personality or even a very great personality. Lord Sri Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. So according to the statements of Bhagavad-Gita or the statements of Arjuna, the person who is trying to understand the Bhagavad-Gita, we should at least theoretically accept Sri Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and with that submissive spirit we can understand the Bhagavad-Gita. Unless one reads the Bhagavad-Gita in a submissive spirit, it is very difficult to understand Bhagavad-Gita, because it is a great mystery.

Just what is the Bhagavad-Gita? The purpose of Bhagavad-Gita is to deliver mankind from the nescience of material existence. Every man is in difficulty in so many ways, as Arjuna also was in difficulty in having to fight the Battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna surrendered unto Sri Krishna, and consequently this Bhagavad-Gita was spoken. Not only Arjuna, but every one of us is full of anxieties because of this material existence. Our very existence is in the atmosphere of nonexistence. Actually we are not meant to be threatened by nonexistence. Our existence is eternal. But somehow or other we are put into a sat. A sat refers to that which does not exist.

Out of so many human beings who are suffering, there are

a few who are actually inquiring about their position, as to what they are, why they are put into this awkward position and so on. Unless one is awakened to this position of questioning his suffering, unless he realizes that he doesn't want suffering but rather wants to make a solution to all suffering, then one is not to be considered a perfect human being. Humanity begins when this sort of inquiry is awakened in one's mind. In the Brahma-sutra this inquiry is called brahma jijnasa. Athato brahma jijnasa. Every activity of the human being is to be considered a failure unless he inquires about the nature of the Absolute. Therefore those who begin to question why they are suffering or where they came from and where they shall go after death are proper students for understanding Bhagavad-Gita. The sincere student should also have a firm respect for the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such a student was Arjuna.

Lord Krishna descends specifically to reestablish the real purpose of life when man forgets that purpose. Even then, out of many, many human beings who awaken, there may be one who actually enters the spirit of understanding his position, and for him this Bhagavad-Gita is spoken. Actually we are all swallowed by the tigress of nescience, but the Lord is very merciful upon living entities, especially human beings. To this end He spoke the Bhagavad-Gita, making His friend Arjuna his student.

Being an associate of Lord Krishna, Arjuna was above all ignorance, but Arjuna was put into ignorance on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra just to question Lord Krishna about the problems of life so that the Lord could explain them for the benefit of future generations of human beings and chalk out the plan of life. Then man could act accordingly and perfect the mission of human life.

The subject of the Bhagavad-gita entails the comprehension of five basic truths. First of all, the science of God is explained and then the constitutional position of the living entities, jivas. There is ishvara, which means the controller, and there are jivas, the living entities which are controlled. If a living entity says that he is not controlled but that he is free, then he is insane. The living being is controlled in every respect, at least in his conditioned life. So in the Bhagavad-gita the subject matter deals with the ishvara, the supreme controller, and the jivas, the controlled living entities. Prakriti (material nature) and time (the duration of existence of the whole universe or the manifestation of material nature) and karma (activity) are also discussed. The cosmic manifestation is full of different activities. All living entities are engaged in different activities. From Bhagavad-Gita we must learn what God is, what the living entities are, what prakriti is, what the cosmic manifestation is, how it is controlled by time, and what the activities of the living entities are.

Out of these five basic subject matters in Bhagavad-Gita it is established that the Supreme Godhead, or Krishna, or Brahman, or the supreme controller, or Paramatma—you may use whatever name you like—is the greatest of all. The living beings are in quality like the supreme controller. For instance, the Lord has control over the universal affairs of material nature, as will be explained in the later chapters of Bhagavad-Gita. Material nature is not independent. She is acting under the directions of the Supreme Lord. As Lord Krishna says,

MAYADHYAKSENA PRAKRITIH SUYATE SACARACARAM:

“This material nature is working under My direction.” When we see wonderful things happening in the cosmic nature, we should know that behind this cosmic manifestation there is a controller. Nothing could be manifested without being controlled. It is childish not to consider the controller. For instance, a child may think that an automobile is quite wonderful to be able to run without a horse or other animal pulling it, but a sane man knows the nature of the automobile's engineering arrangement. He always knows that behind the machinery there is a man, a driver. Similarly, the Supreme Lord is the driver under whose direction everything is working. Now the jivas, or the living entities, have been accepted by the Lord, as we will note in the later chapters, as His parts and parcels. A particle of gold is also gold, a drop of water from the ocean is also salty, and similarly we the living entities, being part and parcel of the supreme controller, ishvara, or Bhagavan, Lord Sri Krishna, have all the qualities of the Supreme Lord in minute quantity because we are minute ishvaras, subordinate ishvaras. We are trying to control nature, as presently we are trying to control space or planets, and this tendency to control is there because it is in Krishna. But although we have a tendency to lord it over material nature, we should know that we are not the supreme controller. This is explained in Bhagavad-Gita.

What is material nature? This is also explained in Gita as inferior prakriti, inferior nature. The living entity is explained as the superior prakriti. Prakriti is always under control, whether inferior or superior. Prakriti is female, and she is controlled by the Lord just as the activities of a wife are controlled by the husband. Prakriti is always subordinate, predominated by the Lord, who is the predominate. The living entities and material nature are both predominated, controlled by the Supreme Lord. According to the Gita, the living entities, although parts and parcels of the Supreme Lord, are to be considered Prakriti. This is clearly mentioned in the Seventh Chapter of Bhagavad-Gita. *Apareyam itas tv anyam prakritim viddhi me param/ jiva-bhutam:* “This material nature is My inferior prakriti, but beyond this is another prakriti—jiva-

bhutam, the living entity.”

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