

A SUMMARY OF THE BHAGAVAD-GITA AS IT IS

The Bhagavad-gita opens with blind King Dhrtarastra requesting his secretary, Sanjaya, to narrate the battle between his sons, the Kauravas, and their cousins, the Pandavas. Lord Krsna, 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 Dhrtarastra drawn in military array and requests infallible Krsna 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 Krsna and requests the Lord to instruct him, the Lord begins countering Arjuna's objections. First, Krsna analytically explains that fighting in His service is transcendental and will bring no sinful reaction. Krsna also explains the Vedas' purpose as to gradually elevate souls to Krsna consciousness. Krsna thus encourages Arjuna to remain fixed in His service - fight - and ignore his mind's desires.

As Krsna's explanations why Arjuna should fight were only a summary, and since Krsna 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 Krsna's instruction to perform 'buddhi-yoga' as an excuse to retire the battlefield for a life of contemplation. Arjuna therefore opens Chapter Three asking Krsna why He is encouraging fighting if intelligence is better than fruitive work.

Krsna then explains 'karma-yoga', reaction-free devotional work, and clears up Arjuna's mistaken idea that all work is fruitive and leads to bondage. Krsna explains that Arjuna should fight, for avoiding sinful reactions though devotional work is better than attempting to escape reactions though renouncing work. Krsna also instructs Arjuna to fight to set the proper example of duty. Krsna 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, Krsna names the enemy: lust. He then recommends Arjuna to regulate his senses, become fixed in his pure identity as a servant of Krsna, and thereby avoid lust's control. Then, with spiritual strength and deliberate intelligence, he should conquer that forceful enemy - lust.

Since in Chapter Three, Krsna has recommended that Arjuna fight in full knowledge of Him (3.30), the Lord, in Chapter Four, explain different aspects of transcendental knowledge. First Krsna 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 (Krsna had already referred to the importance of performing 'yajna', sacrifice, in 3.9 Krsna next explains the soul's relationship with Him as eternal His part and parcel, which one must approach a bonafide spiritual master to learn. Chapter Four ends with Krsna glorifying transcendental knowledge and requesting Arjuna to arm himself with this knowledge - which burns all sinful 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 Krsna to definitively explain whether the renunciation of work (speculation, 'sankhya, jnana', inaction-in-knowledge) or work in devotion is superior. Krsna 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 Krsna. Impartially viewing the external world, he should reside in his body aloof from bodily activities. By fixing his consciousness on the Supreme and knowing that Krsna is the true enjoyer, the goal of sacrifice and austerity, and the Lord of all planets, he, the pure soul, will find true peace beyond this material world.

In the first five chapters, Krsna has explained 'buddhi-yoga', working with consciousness focused on Krsna without fruitive desires. The Lord has also explained 'sankhya', 'karma-yoga', and 'jnana-yoga' to obtain liberation and as steppingstones to Krsna consciousness. Now, at the end of the Fifth Chapter (5. 27-28) and continuing on to the Sixth Chapter (wherein Krsna explains practical points for a practitioner), Krsna explains 'dhyana- yoga' concluding that 'dhyana', or meditation upon Krsna, is meditation's final goal.

Krsna 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 Krsna's service, the yogi strictly practices 'dhyana- yoga' in a secluded place. Fixing his mind on the self and on Krsna, he attains transcendental happiness in the kingdom of God. Arjuna then points out the main difficulty in practicing yoga is controlling the mind. Krsna 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, Krsna answers that one unsuccessful in his practice will still take birth in a family of wise transcendentalists and automatically become attract yogic principles. Krsna 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 Krsna and with great faith worships Him in loving service.

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

Krsna 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 Krsna is independent and above them) only those who surrender to Krsna can cross beyond these modes to know Him. Four kinds of impious souls never surrender to Krsna while four kinds of pious souls do surrender. Krsna also covers Himself from the impersonalists, who are less intelligent, and from those who surrender to the demigods. But those who are truly pious, the undeluded, serve Krsna as the governor of the material manifestation, the demigods, and sacrifice, can know and understand Krsna - ev the time of death.

Chapter Eight begins by Arjuna asking Krsna about Brahman, karma, the demigods, the material world, and knowing Krsna at the time of death. Krsna first briefly answers Arjuna's first five questions and then begins explaining in detail how to know Krsna at the time of death. Since one attains what one remembers at the time of death, if one remembers Krsna, one goes to Him. Krsna 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 Krsna, Krsna 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, Krsna 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 Krsna 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. Krsna 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. Krsna continues explaining that although independent and aloof, He pervades, creates and annihilates the entire cosmos through His material energy. Those mahatmas who know Krsna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead take shelter of Him and serve Him as the only enjoyer and the supreme object of worship.

Krsna then explains the fortunate position of such devotees: If one worships Krsna, Krsna cares, compensates for his deficiencies, and preserves his strengths. And all Krsna 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 Krsna promises that His devotee will never perish.

In Chapters Seven and Nine, Krsna has explained knowledge of His energies. In Chapter Ten, Krsna explains His opulences more specifically and thereby reveals Himself the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the source of all. Krsna 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 Krsna, converse about Him, and with thoughts dwelling in Him, undeluded and free from sin, engage in His service. Out of compassion, Krsna within their hearts destroys any remaining ignorance.

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

Arjuna, although acknowledging that Krsna in the two-armed form that he now sees before him is Supreme, still requests Krsna to reveal that all-pervading Universal Form that supports the Universe. Thus, in Chapter Eleven, Krsna proves Himself as the Supreme Lord and He establishes the criteria that anyone who claims to be God must also show a Universal Form. Krsna then reveals to Arjuna His wondrous effulgent, all-expansive form, and Arjuna sees all soldiers on both sides dying within it. Krsna explains His form as time, the destroyer of all world, and requests that Arjuna, knowing in advance the inevitable death of all the warriors, become His instrument. In answer to Arjuna's fearful prayers, Krsna first shows His four-armed form before again returning to His original two-armed form. Krsna then states that his two-armed form can only be seen by pure devotees, and such pure devotees, working for Krsna, free from desiring fruitive activities, and who make Krsna the supreme goal of their lives, certainly come to Him.

In Chapter Twelve, Arjuna, after witnessing Krsna's awesome Universal Form, wishes to clarify his own position as a devotee, the highest worshiper of the Supreme. He thus asks whether worshipping Krsna through devotional service or worshipping the impersonal is superior. Krsna immediately responds saying that one engaged in His personal service is the topmost. One should therefore engage in Krsna's service and fix his mind solely upon Krsna, 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. Krsna then describes other processes that eventually lead to His pure devotional service.

Then qualities that endear a devotee to Kṛṣṇa, which Kṛṣṇa next mentions, such as equality in both 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 worshipping Kṛṣṇa in devotional service.

Arjuna opens Chapter Thirteen by inquiring about the field of activities and the knower of that field. Kṛṣṇa 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 Supersoul and by following the process of knowledge, the soul can transcend the good and the bad he meets, realize his eternal subordination to Kṛṣṇa, 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 Kṛṣṇa 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, Kṛṣṇa 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 Kṛṣṇa 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 Kṛṣṇa 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 Vedānta. Kṛṣṇa then reveals that knowing Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead and engaging in His service is the ultimate purpose of the Vedānta 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, Kṛṣṇa explains the demoniac nature which degrades the soul through arrogant, ignorant, and conceited pursuits of sense gratification and power.

Kṛṣṇa 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 Supersoul within their own bodies and within the bodies of others, demons blaspheme real religion. These mischievous, lowest amongst men are repeatedly cast by Kṛṣṇa into demonic species to gradually sink to the most abominable forms of existence.

Krsna 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.

Krsna 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. Krsna 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 Krsna 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 life the next. One should therefore directly take to Krsna's service in Krsna consciousness.

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

Since Arjuna's basic desire to renounce his duty of fighting was fear of sinful reaction, Krsna 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 Supersoul, and (3) worshipping the Lord through one's fruits of work by acting either as 'brahmana', 'ksatryia', '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.

Krsna 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 Krsna's protection, such a pure devotee will reach "Krsna-loka". Krsna 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 Krsna: "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 Krsna, Arjuna is fixed and ready to fight. Sanjaya, after narrating this conversation to Dhrtarastra, ecstatically thinks of the wondrous two-armed form of Krsna and predicts victory for Arjuna, the supreme archer, for he is surrendered to Krsna, the master of all mystics.