

# 6 Bhagavad Gita

## 1. Identity in the Bhagavad Gita

### 1.1 Two levels of self

#### a) The superficial self (not ultimately important)

Features that change, are temporary, and are *not* ultimately valuable:

- Physical body (appearance, strength, health, age)
- Personality traits (shy/outgoing, funny/serious, etc.)
- Social roles (student, worker, parent, friend, citizen)
- Psychological states (moods, emotions, current desires)
- Abilities and achievements (intelligence, talents, career success, reputation)

These matter *conventionally* (for everyday life), but they are not your deepest identity. They are not what makes you *ultimately* valuable.

#### b) The true self / Atman (what is essential and ultimately valuable)

- Atman = your deepest self / inner consciousness / spiritual core.
- It is:
  - Unchanging beneath surface changes
  - Not reducible to body, emotions, or social role
  - Shared in nature with all beings (often linked to a universal spiritual reality)

#### Key idea:

What is ultimately important about you is not your status, achievements, or specific personality traits, but your deeper, spiritual self that is equal in value to the true self in others.

---

### 1.2 Conflict with ordinary views of identity and self-worth

Ordinary view:

- “Who I am” = my job, appearance, talents, relationships, successes.
- Self-worth based on:
  - How I compare to others

- Achievements, praise, reputation
- External markers of success

Gita-inspired view:

- True identity = Atman, not the bundle of changing features.
- True self-worth = unconditional, because:
  - Your Atman is intrinsically valuable
  - It does not depend on success, looks, talent, or social approval

### Implication:

Pursuit of spiritual insight involves **loss of the superficial self** (ego, fixation on image and status), not destruction of the Atman. You “lose” the ego-centered way of thinking about yourself.

---

## 2. Work as Meditation

### 2.1 Core idea

- “Work as meditation” = treating your ordinary activities (study, job, chores, etc.) as a meditative practice.
- This means:
  - Giving your full, undivided attention to what you are doing
  - Avoiding multitasking
  - Working with calm focus and concentration
  - Being fully present in the activity, moment by moment

You do not need a special setting (cave, monastery); *any* task can become a spiritual practice when done this way.

---

### 2.2 Working without distraction

To work as meditation, you must minimize distraction.

#### Two main obstacles (both caused by distraction):

##### 1. Split attention

- Your attention is divided between the task and something else:
  - Phone, messages, social media
  - Background worrying
  - Thinking about many tasks at once
- Result: you are never fully “in” the task; performance and enjoyment both drop.

##### 2. “Monkey mind”

- Mind jumping persistently from thought to thought:
  - Random memories
  - Imagined future scenarios
  - Self-criticism or fantasizing
- Even if you stay at your desk, your *mind* is not on the work.

Work as meditation = training attention to stay with the task, gently bringing it back each time it wanders.

---

## 2.3 Two common sources of distraction

The lecture highlights **two especially common causes** of distraction:

### 1. Worrying about the outcome

- Thinking constantly:
  - “What grade will I get?”
  - “Will I get the promotion?”
  - “What will people think of this?”
- This pulls your attention away from the work itself.
- Creates anxiety □ “split attention” and “monkey mind”.

### 2. Rushing

- Mind is focused on the next thing instead of the current task:
  - “I have to finish this *fast* so I can move on.”
  - Constant clock-checking, impatience.
- Attention is on *being done*, not on *doing*.
- Again, this fractures concentration and undermines both quality and enjoyment.

**To work as meditation, you must:**

- Let go (as far as possible) of worry about outcome.
  - Stop mentally racing ahead to the end of the task.
  - Simply give yourself to the present action.
- 

## 2.4 Three reasons to work in this way

The Gita (as presented in the course) gives **three main reasons** to treat work as meditation:

### 1. Step toward enlightenment / loss of ego-self

- Deep absorption in the task reduces self-centered thinking (“How am I doing?”, “What do I get?”).
- When you are fully engaged, you temporarily “forget yourself” in a good way.
- This “loss of self” (loss of ego, not Atman) is central to spiritual progress.

### 2. More enjoyable

- Focused work is often more satisfying:
  - Less anxiety and mental noise
  - More “flow” or immersion in the activity
- The extent to which you enjoy and find satisfaction in a task depends more on the **quality of your attention** than on the **type of activity**.

- Even boring or routine tasks can become more pleasant when done with full presence.

### 3. More effective

- Concentrated attention:
    - Improves accuracy, creativity, and speed
    - Reduces mistakes
  - Outcome anxiety and rushing usually *harm* performance.
  - So ironically, when you focus on the task instead of the result, you often get a *better* result.
- 

## 2.5 Quality of attention vs. kind of task

Key suggestion from lecture:

- What matters more for happiness and satisfaction is **how** you attend, not **what** you are doing.
  - Two tasks:
    - One “interesting” but done in a distracted, anxious way
    - One “boring” but done with calm, full attention
  - Gita-inspired view: the second may well be more satisfying and spiritually beneficial.
- 

## 3. Detachment from Outcome / Reward

### 3.1 Core recommendation

The Gita repeatedly recommends:

- **Act without attachment to the fruits (results) of action.**
  - Do your work, fulfill your responsibilities.
  - But do not:
    - \* Make your motivation depend on reward (money, praise, status, pleasure).
    - \* Be upset or crushed if you fail.

A key verse (paraphrased):

Not those who refrain from action, but those who work without expectation of reward attain the goal of meditation.

So the ideal is **not** inactivity, but **detached activity**.

---

### 3.2 What detachment from reward means

**Detachment does NOT mean:**

- Laziness
- Not caring whether your work is done well
- Ignoring moral responsibilities
- Emotional numbness

### Detachment DOES mean:

- You work because:
  - It is your duty (your role obligations: as student, friend, family member, citizen, etc.)
  - It serves others or contributes to something worthwhile
  - It is an expression of your deeper self, not your ego
- You are **not** primarily driven by:
  - Personal gain, prestige, or comparison with others
  - Fear of failure or desire for praise

You still aim to do a good job, but you do not cling to the outcome as the source of your self-worth.

---

### 3.3 Links to work as meditation

Detachment from outcome crucially supports work as meditation:

- If you're obsessed with rewards:
  - You keep thinking about success/failure □ distraction.
  - Anxiety about results takes over □ “monkey mind.”
- If you are detached from reward:
  - You can give full attention to the task itself.
  - You're less rushed (you're not frantically chasing the “next” thing).
  - You experience more presence, calm, and focus.

So:

- **Detachment from fruits of action** □ helps you **work without distraction** □ leads to **greater enjoyment, effectiveness, and spiritual progress.**
- 

### 3.4 Loss of selfishness and universal concern

Detachment from reward is also:

- A form of **loss of self** understood as loss of **selfishness**.
- You stop seeing your own well-being as the only or primary thing that matters.
- You act from:
  - Duty
  - Compassion
  - Commitment to a larger whole (family, community, all beings, or the divine)

This fits the Gita's message:

- True spiritual growth = moving beyond ego-centered identity and ego-centered motivation.
  - You maintain your **role obligations** (e.g., as a student, you still study; as a worker, you still work), but:
    - You do them not for ego or reward
    - You do them as part of your path to enlightenment.
-

### 3.5 Action vs. inaction

The reading emphasizes:

- The wise person:
  - Acts in the world
  - But is free from anxiety about results
  - “Even while acting, they really do nothing at all”
- Meaning:
  - Their ego is not the driving force.
  - Actions flow from knowledge and duty, not grasping desire.
  - Internally, they are at rest even while externally active.

This is the **ideal**:

Active in the world, fully engaged in work as meditation, yet inwardly detached from success, failure, praise, and blame.