

6 Bhagavad Gita

1. The Bhagavad Gita on Identity: What Is (and Isn't) Ultimately Valuable

A. Two “selves”: superficial self vs. Atman

1. Superficial self (not ultimately valuable)
 - Body: appearance, health, strength
 - Personality traits: shyness, extroversion, preferences
 - Social roles: student, worker, friend, parent
 - Social markers: wealth, status, reputation, success/failure
 - Passing mental states: emotions, worries, ambitions, fears
 - The Gita treats these as changeable, temporary, and ultimately not what you most truly are.
2. Atman (true self) (ultimately valuable)
 - The inner, unchanging self or consciousness.
 - Deeper than body and personality; not affected by success/failure, praise/blame.
 - Ultimately identical with, or deeply connected to, the divine or universal reality.
 - Enlightenment = realizing and identifying with this deeper self, not with the superficial layers.

B. Loss of self: what is lost and what is preserved

- The Gita advocates “loss of self” in the sense of:
 - Letting go of attachment to the superficial self (ego, image, status, personal story).
 - Letting go of self-centeredness: concern only with one’s own advantage.
- It does not mean:
 - Destroying awareness or becoming nothing.
 - It means shifting identity toward the Atman and away from ego and selfishness.

C. Implications for identity and self-worth

- Common view: “Who I am” = talents, career, accomplishments, social image.
- Gita’s view:
 - These are not ultimately what gives you worth.
 - Your true worth comes from your deeper nature (Atman), which is:
 - * Equal in everyone
 - * Unharmed by external success/failure
 - Therefore:
 - * Your exam results, job status, looks, and popularity do not touch the core value of who you are.

- * You can act vigorously in the world, but without tying your identity and self-worth to outcomes.

For the exam: be ready to explain - The difference between superficial self and Atman. - Why external features (status, success, etc.) are not ultimately valuable. - How "loss of self" can be compatible with a deep, valuable self (Atman).

2. Work as Meditation

A. What is "work as meditation"?

Central idea: Whatever you are doing, do it with full, undivided attention, as a kind of meditation.

- Give one task your full focus.
- Avoid multi-tasking; avoid mental drifting.
- Each action is done with complete awareness and presence.
- This applies to:
 - "Spiritual" activities (prayer, formal meditation)
 - Ordinary tasks (studying, washing dishes, answering emails)

So "work as meditation" = turn your daily activities into a spiritual practice of focused attention and loss of ego.

B. Two main obstacles: split attention and monkey mind

1. Split attention

- Your attention is divided between:
 - The task itself
 - Other things: phone, music, side conversations, background worries
- Results:
 - Superficial involvement
 - Lower effectiveness
 - Less satisfaction/enjoyment

2. Monkey mind

- The mind jumps restlessly from thought to thought, like a monkey from branch to branch:
 - "What if I fail?"
 - "What's next on my to-do list?"
 - "I'm bored, I want something else."
 - Even when your body stays with the task, your mind is elsewhere.
 - Blocks the deep absorption needed for "work as meditation".
-

C. Two common sources of distraction

The lecture highlights two especially important causes of distraction:

1. Worrying about the outcome

- Thoughts like:
 - “Will I get an A?”
 - “Will my boss be impressed?”
 - “Will this make me look smart/successful?”
 - This leads to:
 - Anxiety and stress
 - Constant mental checking of future scenarios
 - Loss of full attention to what you’re actually doing now
 - Connects directly to attachment to results (discussed more below).
2. Rushing
- Mindset: “I have to get this over with as fast as possible to move on to the next thing.”
 - Effects:
 - You never really “arrive” in the present task; you’re always mentally in the future.
 - Increased errors, shallow work.
 - No space for the calm, steady attention required for meditative work.

Key point: Worrying about outcomes and rushing both:

- Create split attention and monkey mind.
- Prevent the deep, unified attention that turns work into meditation.

D. Why work this way? Three main reasons

The course emphasizes three reasons to approach work as meditation:

1. Step toward enlightenment / loss of self
 - Focusing fully on the task dissolves the ego temporarily:
 - Less time thinking “How am I doing?” “What does this say about me?”
 - More time just doing the action itself.
 - This supports:
 - Loss of attachment to superficial self.
 - Experiencing a more spacious, less self-centered awareness.
 - Over time, this is seen as a path toward spiritual realization (of the Atman).
2. More enjoyable
 - Deep absorption can make even simple tasks satisfying:
 - Cooking, cleaning, studying become more pleasant when fully attended to.
 - The Gita-friendly idea: How you attend to an activity matters more for happiness than what the activity is.
 - A boring task with deep attention can be more fulfilling than an exciting task done with distraction.
 - Enjoyment comes from:
 - Flow-like states
 - Calm, stable mind rather than restless monkey mind.
3. More effective
 - Focused attention:
 - Reduces mistakes.
 - Increases quality and speed of learning.
 - Improves performance at work or study.

- Non-attachment to results can reduce anxiety, freeing cognitive resources to do the task well.
- So work-as-meditation is not only spiritually valuable, but also practically efficient.

For the exam: be ready to - Define “work as meditation.” - Explain split attention and monkey mind. - Identify the two common sources of distraction (worrying about outcome; rushing) and how they interfere. - State and briefly explain the three reasons for working this way (enlightenment, enjoyment, effectiveness).

3. Detachment from Outcome and Reward

A. Core idea: act without attachment to results

The Gita strongly recommends:

- Do your work / fulfill your duties, but do not be attached to the fruits (results) of your actions.
 - Perform the action with care and attention.
 - Let go of:
 - * Craving for success, praise, money, status.
 - * Fear of failure, criticism, loss.

Key elements:

1. Work without expectation of reward
 - Do not make reward (grades, money, status) your main motive.
 - Instead:
 - Act out of duty, conscience, love, or commitment to what is right.
 - The Gita claims: those who work without expecting reward reach the true goal of meditation.
 2. Not upset by failure
 - If things go badly:
 - You recognize that outcomes are not fully under your control.
 - You do not let failure damage your sense of self-worth.
 - Emotional stability:
 - No wild swings between elation at success and despair at failure.
 3. Security unaffected by results
 - The wise are inwardly secure because their identity rests on the Atman, not on external outcomes.
 - So they can keep acting energetically without being psychologically enslaved to results.
-

B. How this relates to “loss of self”

Detachment from results = another aspect of loss of self:

1. Loss of selfishness
 - If you are not focused on what you personally gain or lose, you can:
 - Care more about others' well-being.

- Serve a larger good (family, community, humanity, the divine).
 - Actions become less self-centered and more oriented toward duty and compassion.
2. Less ego-involvement
- You are less concerned with:
 - “What does this say about me?”
 - “Am I winning or losing compared to others?”
 - More focus on the quality of action itself rather than on what it does for “me”.
-

C. Detachment vs. laziness or inaction

Important clarification:

- Detachment from outcome does NOT mean:
 - Doing nothing.
 - Doing things carelessly.
 - Being indifferent about whether others are harmed or helped.
- The Gita’s ideal:
 - Energetic, responsible action + inner detachment from results.
 - You still:
 - * Study hard.
 - * Do your job.
 - * Fulfill your role obligations (e.g., as student, worker, friend, citizen).
 - But:
 - * You do not rest your identity or happiness on how the results turn out.

The text even suggests that those who act without attachment to reward achieve the true goal of meditation, more than those who simply withdraw from action.

D. Role obligations and right action

- Everyone has role obligations: duties linked to one’s position (student, child, employee, etc.).
- In the Gita’s framework:
 - You should perform your role duties sincerely and competently.
 - The focus is on doing the right thing in your role, not on maximizing personal gain.

So the ideal person: - Acts according to duty (dharma) and compassion. - Works with full, meditative attention. - Is not driven by reward or paralyzed by fear of failure.

E. Connection to work as meditation

Detachment from outcome supports work as meditation in several ways:

1. Reduces worry about the outcome
 - Less mental energy spent on “What will happen?”
 - More mental space for calm, focused attention on the task.

2. Reduces rushing

- If you are less fixated on finishing and “getting” the reward, you can:
 - Be fully present with the current step of the work.
 - Move at a steady, thoughtful pace.

3. Deepens loss of self

- When you are not working for “my reward,” you:
 - Identify less with the ego.
 - Experience work as something done through you, rather than for you as a separate, grasping self.

For the exam: be ready to - Explain what it means to be detached from outcome/reward. - Describe how this differs from laziness or indifference. - Connect detachment from results to: - Loss of selfishness - Work as meditation - The Gita’s view of role obligations and spiritual progress.