

# 6 Bhagavad Gita

## 1. Identity in the Bhagavad Gita

### 1.1 Two levels of self: Atman vs. superficial self

- Atman (true self)
  - Eternal, unchanging, pure consciousness.
  - Not created or destroyed by physical events (birth, death, success, failure, etc.).
  - Same in all beings; basis of deep unity between persons.
  - Ultimately valuable: realizing and identifying with Atman is the goal of spiritual life and enlightenment.
- Superficial self (ego-identity)
  - Includes:
    - \* Body, appearance, physical abilities.
    - \* Psychological traits: moods, emotions, personality.
    - \* Social roles: student, worker, parent, citizen.
    - \* Status: wealth, prestige, reputation, achievements.
    - \* Personal story: “what has happened to me,” my successes and failures.
  - These are changeable, temporary, and not ultimately important.
  - The Gita recommends “loss of self” at this level: weakening identification with the ego and its cravings.

### 1.2 What features of identity are ultimately valuable?

Ultimately valuable: - Your true nature as Atman (shared with all beings). - Qualities that express awareness of Atman: - Wisdom, self-knowledge, insight. - Compassion and concern for others. - Detachment from selfish craving. - Steady, focused mind.

Not ultimately valuable (though they may have practical importance): - External markers: - Wealth, career success, social class, fame, beauty, popularity. - Fluctuating internal states: - Pride, shame, insecurity about performance. - Emotional highs/lows tied to praise, blame, winning, losing. - Narrow self-concern: - Obsessive focus on “my” comfort, status, or advantage over others.

### 1.3 Tension with common views of identity and self-worth

- Common modern view:
  - Self-worth tied to personal achievements, unique traits, career, romantic success, etc.
- Gita’s view:
  - These are not what you truly are and not what ultimately matters.

- Real worth comes from your unchanging spiritual nature and your capacity to act without ego and selfishness.
  - This underlies the Gita's approach to:
    - Work as meditation (acting without ego).
    - Detachment from rewards (not basing worth on outcomes).
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## 2. Work as Meditation (Karma Yoga)

### 2.1 Core idea: work with full attention, as spiritual practice

- Work as meditation means:
  - Whatever you are doing (studying, working, cleaning, caregiving), you:
    - \* Give it your full attention.
    - \* Avoid multitasking and needless switching.
    - \* Act with focus, steadiness, and awareness.
- The work itself becomes a form of meditative practice:
  - You train the mind to be present, undistracted, and less ego-driven.

### 2.2 Two obstacles: ways distraction harms meditation-in-work

#### 1. Split attention

- Trying to do several things at once, or mentally being in two places:
  - Example: Writing an essay while constantly checking your phone.
- Result:
  - Lower quality work.
  - Less enjoyment, more stress.
  - Weakens the ability to lose oneself in the task.

#### 2. Monkey mind

- A restless mind that jumps quickly from thought to thought.
- Examples:
  - While working: "What's next? What if I fail? What will they think? What's for dinner?"
- Result:
  - Almost no sustained attention.
  - Shallow engagement; the mind does not settle.
  - Blocks the deep absorption that leads toward loss of ego and peace.

### 2.3 Two common sources of distraction

These two are especially emphasized:

#### 1. Worrying about the outcome

- Obsessing over:
  - Grades, promotions, praise, money, success vs. failure.
- This keeps your mind in the future and on your ego's status, not on the task.
- Anxiety about results splits attention and feeds the monkey mind.

#### 2. Rushing

- Doing tasks with the underlying attitude: "I just need to get this over with."

- Your attention is on the next thing, not on the present action.
- Leads to:
  - Sloppiness.
  - Stress and impatience.
  - Shallow engagement with the work.

Both of these: - Pull you away from the present moment. - Make work less meditative and less connected to spiritual growth.

## 2.4 Three reasons to work this way (work as meditation)

The Gita (and the lecture) highlight three main reasons to practice focused, undistracted work:

1. Step toward enlightenment / loss of self
  - When fully absorbed in an activity:
    - Ego-concerns (“How do I look?” “Will I win?”) temporarily fade.
    - Sense of separate self can loosen.
  - This “loss of self” (of the superficial, ego-self) is a key step toward:
    - Realizing Atman.
    - Experiencing unity and peace.
2. More enjoyable
  - Deep, focused engagement tends to produce:
    - Fulfillment, satisfaction, and even joy.
  - The quality of attention often matters more than what the activity is:
    - Even simple tasks can feel meaningful if done with full attention.
    - Pleasurable activities done in a distracted way can feel empty.
3. More effective
  - Focused, undistracted work:
    - Improves performance.
    - Reduces errors.
    - Shortens the time needed overall.
  - Even from a purely practical standpoint, single-tasking with full attention is superior.

## 2.5 Intriguing claim about enjoyment and attention

- The Gita-inspired view:  
How much we enjoy and find meaning in an activity depends more on how deeply we attend to it than on what the activity is.
- Implication:
  - You don’t always need different or more exciting tasks to be happier.
  - You may need to change how you relate to what you are already doing:
    - \* More presence.
    - \* Less distraction.
    - \* Less outcome-obsession.

### 3. Detachment from Outcome and Reward

#### 3.1 Core teaching: act, but let go of results

- Key idea:
  - You have control over your actions, not over the results.
  - Therefore:
    - \* Focus on doing your duty (or role obligations) as well as you can.
    - \* Do not tie your motivation or self-worth to success, reward, or praise.
- The Gita praises those who:
  - “Work without expectation of reward.”
  - Continue to act energetically, but are internally free from anxiety about outcomes.

#### 3.2 Not passivity, but a different motivation

Detachment does not mean: - Laziness, giving up, or not caring about quality. - Refusing to act or take responsibility.

Detachment does mean: - Still acting vigorously and skillfully. - But: - Not acting for personal gain alone. - Not being upset or crushed by failure. - Not being inflated by success.

Your motivation shifts from: - “What will I get out of this?”

to: - “What is the right thing to do in this role?”

- “How can I contribute to others’ well-being?”

#### 3.3 Loss of selfishness as a form of “loss of self”

- Another sense of “loss of self” in the Gita:
  - You gradually lose self-centeredness—concern only for your own comfort, success, and praise.
- Instead, you act:
  - From duty, compassion, justice, or devotion.
  - With an awareness that all beings share the same Atman.

This links: - Identity: You are not your ego or your success record. - Work as meditation: You practice focusing on the task, not your image. - Detachment: You stop letting outcomes define your worth.

#### 3.4 “Action in inaction” and “inaction in action” (from the reading)

- The reading says: the wise see action in inaction and inaction in action.
  - “Inaction in action”:
    - \* A person can be very active outwardly but inwardly still and unattached.
    - \* They act without anxiety about results and without selfish craving.
    - \* From the standpoint of bondage to karma, they are as if “not acting,” because their actions do not create new selfish attachments.
  - “Action in inaction”:
    - \* Even when physically still, a mind full of selfish planning, craving, or resentment is actively creating inner disturbance and bondage.
- The “wise”:

- Act with complete awareness.
- Have undertakings free from anxiety about results.
- Are “ever satisfied,” because their peace does not depend on success or failure.

### 3.5 Practical implications for exam-style understanding

Be able to explain and apply:

- What features of identity matter:
  - Atman and qualities that express it (wisdom, compassion, detachment) are ultimately valuable.
  - Body, status, achievements, and ego-stories are not ultimately valuable.
- How to approach work as meditation:
  - Full attention, no multitasking.
  - Recognize and combat:
    - \* Split attention.
    - \* Monkey mind.
  - Avoid:
    - \* Worrying about outcome.
    - \* Rushing.
  - Remember the three reasons:
    - \* Step toward enlightenment / loss of ego.
    - \* More enjoyable.
    - \* More effective.
- What detachment from reward/outcome means:
  - Work without expectation of reward.
  - Don't let success or failure determine your self-worth or peace of mind.
  - Maintain effort and care about doing your duty, but loosen attachment to results.
  - Understand this as a key aspect of losing the superficial self and selfishness.