



Learning From The Scriptures Gita Verses That Nourish And Nurture



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About the Author...

Dr. Ramya Ranganathan is an Electronics engineer from IIT Madras and holds a PGDM (MBA) from IIM Ahmedabad. She worked in the corporate world with blue chip companies like ICICI, Infosys and Citibank, before she embarked on a quest to learn how she could help people (and herself) flourish better at work. Ramya has a Doctorate in Management from the London Business School and is currently a faculty of Organizational Behaviour at IIM Bangalore. Her personal passion is to help people find joy and meaning through their work. Ramya is also a poetess and you can read her poems at : www.sharingmypoems.blogspot.in. Ramya also teaches courses and classes on the topic of training our minds so that we can manage our inner worlds better. You can access a free series of mini-video lectures on this topic at <http://craftingourlives.com/managing-our-inner-worlds/>

Reflecting on the last 10 years of my life's journey, I see a multi-colored collage of joy, exhilaration and love. I also see moments of challenges, tears, frustrations, and disappointments.

I do not want to undermine the presence of one in favor of the other, but just acknowledge that both the highs and the lows of life have contributed in their own unique ways towards my growth and evolution. My experiences of love, joy, and connection have been instrumental in fuelling me to search for ways to embrace and befriend the surge of life energy that is waiting to flow through me. At the same time, it is only by facing various difficulties that I have gradually been able to recognize, acknowledge, and let go of fears and thought patterns that were binding me from within.

As I continue to be enchanted by the magic of the vibrant life-force-energy that pulls me to live and as I continue to be bombarded by challenging situations that trigger further peeling away of fears and assumptions, I want to pause and acknowledge my heartfelt gratitude for both the joys and difficulties in my life.

My Journey With The 'Gita'

Over the last ten years, I have been blessed to receive guidance, inspiration, and understanding about life from several sources. My learning has come from people, life experiences, schools of philosophy and spirituality, new-age wisdom books, Holy Masters, and from Ancient scriptures (Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian). I have a particular fondness however for the 'Bhagavad Gita' because it is the first formal source of learning that nourished me at a time when I was obsessively searching for a better understanding of life and what I then understood to be the unchosen phenomenon of 'living'.

My journey with the 'Gita' started in 2004 when I spent a month at an ashram learning Yoga and getting trained as a yoga teacher. We had classes from morning till night that covered all the four aspects of Yoga-Karma Yoga (developing skill in action), Bhakti Yoga (opening our heart-connection to all of existence), Gyana Yoga (understanding life and creation from a theoretical basis), and Raja Yoga (a systematic path to channel physical and mental energy towards spiritual goals).

The ashram atmosphere and curriculum was an ideal cocoon for me to learn new information, new yogic practices, and open up my heart. On the last day of the course when we asked one of our teachers how we could continue the study of the scriptures to which we had been introduced, he told us that an easy place to start would be the Bhagavad Gita. There started my journey with the Gita, a book that has been a north star guiding me during confusion and acting as a buffer cushion when I have been broken and distraught. I elaborate below on two of my favorite verses from the Gita and acknowledge how they have nurtured and nourished me in my everyday living and working.

My Learnings In Choosing My Career

Sreyansva-dharmovigunah
Para-dharmatsvanusthitat
Sva-dharmenidhanamsreyah
Para-dharmobhayavahah

My understanding of this verse (Chapter 3, verse 35) is that it is far better to follow one's own path or calling (even though that path might be fraught with difficulties and challenges), than follow another's path. In 2003, I took a bold decision to leave my career in

the technical field of a corporate organization (I had a degree in electronics engineering from IIT Madras and an MBA from IIM Ahmedabad and was working in the technology and process re-engineering division of a well known bank at that time).

My work was reputable and lucrative and the bank had provided me with lavish accommodation in a sea facing apartment in the heart of Mumbai. Despite all this, my spirit felt caged and I found my work uninspiring. I would weep silently at my desk when no one was watching and at times visit the washroom and cry my heart out. I recognized that the work I was doing was not meant for me and was not nurturing my spirit. I had a powerful conviction that there was something else I had to be doing on this planet. The only problem was that I did not know what that was.

Eventually I quit my job and decided to study the relationship between people and their work. I joined a Doctoral program and there began my wonderful journey studying psychology and philosophy. In the daytime I would attend classes in psychology and organizational behaviour and in the evenings read books on philosophy and the meaning of work and existence. It was during these years that the Gita became my favorite textbook. I also enrolled in Sanskrit classes just to get a better understanding of the Gita.

It was during this time that this particular verse on 'swadharma' started growing on me. Having experienced a definite shift in my energy after switching fields, I realized that I was on the right track. I started reading more about how people can discover their 'calling(s)' and flourish by

operating out of their own inner essence or element. I experimented with almost every exercise I came across in the field of trying to figure out one's own 'purpose' in life. As I made progress in my own experiments of aligning my work with my inner nature or 'swadharma' I noticed that my 'work' was gradually becoming the highpoint of my existence. My 'work' started infusing my life with joy and meaning, and became a pillar around which I could build my sense of identity and purpose.

Gradually it dawned on me that there is no one 'path' for everyone and that each of us comes into this planet with our own unique blueprint and kitty of strengths and passions. It is an act of self-caring and compassion to start looking within to gain a better understanding of our own blueprint. It is also an act of honoring our creator when we decide to accept and acknowledge the unique gifts each one of us have been given, and put them to use. Most importantly, it is an opportunity to experience a sense of connectedness with all of creation when we can allow our inner potential to surface, enabling us to touch and inspire others as well.

Today, a key portion of my own life's work consists of designing and teaching courses that help people discover their own calling. I also help participants become aware of and work through mental blocks and limiting beliefs that might prevent them from opening up to the idea that each one of us has a unique life purpose. I try to help people break out of their comfort zones of conformity that compel them to work at jobs and careers where they imitate or mimic other people's paths.

Learning About My Best Friend: My Mind

Bandhur tm tmanastasya
Yen tmaiv tman jitahō
An tmanastu atrutve
Vartet tmaiva atru-vat

The meaning of this verse (chapter 6 verse 6) as I understand it is that our mind has the potential to be both-one's best friend as well as one's worst enemy. If we manage our mind or train our mind well, then it can become a great source of strength, inspiration and joy. At the same time, an untrained or unmanaged mind can literally wreak havoc on our sense of peace and wellbeing and on our entire life itself.

Initially I had understood this verse to mean that no matter what happens in our outer world, if we can bring a sense of peace and contentment in our inner world, we will be happy. Indeed this was the attitude with which I practiced meditation (my way of training the mind). I started reaping the benefits of this form of mind-training and I believed that I had understood the meaning of this verse. However, over the years I have begun to see even deeper implications of this verse. A best friend can not only calm us and make us feel good no matter what the situation but she can also inspire us to set and achieve higher targets in our work and our lives.

I learnt from my research in organizational behavior how 'goal-setting' is a practical way to train the mind to be this kind of a 'best friend'. Again, a best friend is not just one who inspires us to act but one who helps us see the world in a more positive light and spot valuable opportunities, which we might not have noticed. I learnt from my research in positive psychology how there are proven techniques to train the mind to start seeing the world through an optimistic lens and also train it to scan the world for positives rather than negatives (Tetris effect).

A best friend also makes us rethink our interpretations of events and examine if we could view the same events and incidents from multiple perspectives. Indeed there exist forms of meditation that help us train our mind so that it becomes easier for us to examine our own interpretations and assumptions before speeding up our mental ladders of inferences and jump to conclusions.

There are times when we find it difficult to make sense of the world and events around us. A good friend could help by sharing inputs and ideas that give the events a proper perspective. Similarly, our brain does not make sense of information that comes in through the senses in an absolute manner. Rather, it filters the information that comes in (bounded awareness) and then gives it a meaning based on existing mental models that pre-exist in our brains. Mental models are created from our past experiences but they are frames in our mind that influence the way we make sense of what is unfolding around and within us in the present moment. These mental models can be helpful or unhelpful. We can work on our minds to let go of nonfunctional mental models and construct new and helpful ones that serve us better.

Conclusion

I work on my mind every day-at work as well as in non-work contexts, in self as well as relationship contexts, in material as well as spiritual contexts. I work on my mind to train it and to befriend it. I have learnt that it works best for me to work gently and gradually with the mind, and not to push it too hard. I have also learnt that when my mind works in ways that are not helpful to me (which it often does), it serves me better to see the mind itself as a victim of social conditioning than as a problematic force. This way I can work on my own mind with compassion and allow it to evolve at a pace that works for me.

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