

Summary Notes

The Perennial Philosophy:

1. there is an infinite, changeless reality beneath the world of change
2. this same reality lies at the core of every human personality
3. the purpose of life is to discover this reality experientially: that is, to realize God while here on earth.

“Scholars can debate the point forever, but when the Gita is practiced, I think, it becomes clear that the struggle the Gita is concerned with is the struggle for self-mastery.”

Dharma:

- “The word dharma means many things, but its underlying sense is “that which supports,” from the root dhri, to support, hold up, or bear. Generally, dharma implies support from within: the essence of a thing, its virtue, that which makes it what it is.... On a larger scale, dharma means the essential order of things, an integrity and harmony in the universe and the affairs of life that cannot be disturbed without courting chaos. Thus it means rightness, justice, goodness, purpose rather than chance.”
- “There is an ancient Sanskrit epigram, Ahimsa paramo dharma: the highest dharma is ahimsa, nonviolence, universal love for all living creatures; for every kind of violence is a violation of dharma, the fundamental law of the unity of life.”

Karma:

- “The law of karma states simply that every event is both a cause and an effect. Every act has consequences of a similar kind, which in turn have further consequences and so on; and every act, every karma, is also the consequence of some previous karma.”
- “The law of karma states unequivocally that though we cannot see the connections, we can be sure that everything that happens to us, good and bad, originated once in something we did or thought. We ourselves are responsible for what happens to us, whether or not we can understand how. It follows that we can change what happens to us by changing ourselves; we can take our destiny into our own hands.”

“When the senses contact sense objects, a person experiences cold or heat, pleasure or pain. These experiences are fleeting; they come and go. Bear them patiently, Arjuna. Those who

are not affected by these changes, who are the same in pleasure and pain, are truly wise and fit for immortality.”

“Sankhya describes thoughts as packets of potential energy, which grow more and more solid when favorable conditions are present and obstacles are removed. They become desires, then habits, then ways of living with physical consequences. Those consequences may look no more like thoughts than an oak tree looks like an acorn, but the Gita says they are just as intimately related. Just as a seed can grow into only one kind of tree, thoughts can produce effects only of the same nature. Kindness to others, to take just one example, favors a nervous system that is kind to itself.”

“Reshape yourself through the power of your will; never let yourself be degraded by self-will. The will is the only friend of the Self, and the will is the only enemy of the Self.”

“Those who are compulsively attached to the results of action cannot really enjoy what they do; they get downcast when things do not work out and cling more desperately when they do. So the Gita classifies the karma of attachment as pleasant at first, but “bitter as poison in the end” (18:38), because of the painful bondage of conditioning.”

“You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work. You should never engage in action for the sake of reward, nor should you long for inaction. Perform work in this world, Arjuna, as a man established within himself – without selfish attachments, and alike in success and defeat. For yoga is perfect evenness of mind.”

“The disunited mind is far from wise; how can it meditate? How be at peace? When you know no peace, how can you know joy?”

“The wise, ever satisfied, have abandoned all external supports. Their security is unaffected by the results of their action; even while acting, they really do nothing at all.”

“But those who are temperate in eating and sleeping, work and recreation, will come to the end of sorrow through meditation.”

“When meditation is mastered, the mind is unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place. In the still mind, in the depths of meditation, the Self reveals itself. Beholding the Self by means of the Self, an aspirant knows the joy and peace of complete

fulfillment. Having attained that abiding joy beyond the senses, revealed in the stilled mind, he never swerves from the eternal truth. He desires nothing else, and cannot be shaken by the heaviest burden of sorrow.”

“Better indeed is knowledge than mechanical practice. Better than knowledge is meditation. But better still is surrender of attachment to results, because there follows immediate peace.”

“Pleasure from the senses seems like nectar at first, but it is bitter as poison in the end. This is the kind of happiness that comes to the rajasic.”

“It is better to perform one’s own duties imperfectly than to master the duties of another. By fulfilling the obligations he is born with, a person never comes to grief.”