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Chapter 1

Bhagavad Gita retold by Harry Bhalla



Monkey Temple, Benares, India, adapted from Library of Congress

About the author...

Harry Bhalla provides the following introduction to his summarized version of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

The *Gita* says: “Do your duty to the best of your ability without worrying about the results. A farmer has control over how he works his land, yet no control over the harvest. But, he cannot expect a harvest if he does not work his land.”

Perceive that God is present equally in all beings. Treat all beings equally.

The four goals of human life are:

Doing one’s duty;

Earning wealth;

Material and sensual enjoyment (with senses under control);

Attaining salvation.

The aim of the *Gita* doctrine is to lead one to tranquility, happiness and equanimity. No rituals are prescribed. The *Gita* says that the world needs different religions, cults and deities to meet the vastly different needs of individuals.¹

About the work...

The *Bhagavad Gita*² is a part of the *Mahabharata*. At the beginning of the *Gita*, Arjuna is confronted with the moral decision of regaining his kingdom knowing full well that friends, teachers, and relatives will lose their lives. Krishna, the incarnation of the god *Vishnu* and *Brahman*, disguises himself as Arjuna's charioteer and offers his guidance to Arjuna. Krishna's advice is based on the relation between the individual-self and *Atman* (the ultimate Self) and the relation between nature and *Brahman* (ultimate reality). Indeed, as Krishna explains, *Atman* is *Brahman*. Krishna further traces out the various paths to ultimate knowledge and the consequent realization of *Atman* for the individual. Different paths or *yogas* are shown to be appropriate for different psychological types—personalities predisposed to intellect, action, devotion, or meditation.

From the reading...

"I do not wish to kill my seniors, spiritual leaders, and relatives who are ready to kill us, even for the sovereignty of the three worlds, let alone for this earthly kingdom, O Krishna."

1. *Note:* In the reading selection, the numbers in parentheses are the chapter numbers and verse numbers respectively, of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

2. *Bhagavad Gita*. Summarized by Harry Bhalla. *Gita For Free* (www.gita4free.com).

Ideas of Interest from the *Bhagavad Gita*

1. How does Krishna justify the assertion, “The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead”?
2. In the present fight against Arjuna’s relatives, what reason does Krishna provide for the conclusion that Arjuna is actually a fortunate warrior?
3. According to Krishna, what is the proper attitude we should have while attending to our duty? How can fear of failure be an impediment to success?
4. According to Krishna, what are the two major stumbling blocks to self-realization? Why do you think that this is so?
5. How does Krishna explain why we sin in spite of our best efforts to avoid sin?
6. Compare the path of renunciation with the path of service. Which path, if any, is preferable?
7. Does the path of contemplation preclude a need for work? State supporting reasons for your conclusion.
8. Does it matter, according to Krishna, what gods one believes in? Would Krishna allow for belief in a jealous god who would cause harm to those who believe in other gods?
9. Krishna states, "I am death. . . I have already destroyed all these warriors. You are only an instrument, O Arjuna." Explain what he means.
10. Contrast divine and demonic people. Is the difference in character due only to *karma*? Is there any correlation between these contrasting types of people and the personality types outlined in accordance with the various paths or *yogas*?
11. Explain Krishna’s description of the modes of material nature.
12. Recount Krishna’s summary of how to attain self-realization by means of work, knowledge, devotion, and meditation.



Ruins in Delhi, Caleb Wright

The Reading Selection from *Bhagavad Gita*

Arjuna's Dilemma

Circa 3000 BC, cousins went to war over inheritance of a kingdom. Their armies were made up of relatives, teachers, and respected community leaders. Arjuna was a renowned warrior recognized as a master archer. His childhood friend Lord Krishna agreed to be Arjuna's charioteer.

Arjuna became bewildered upon seeing people he loved and respected ready to battle, and said: "I desire neither victory, nor pleasure or kingdom, O Krishna. What is the use of a kingdom, or enjoyment, or even life because all those for whom we desire kingdom, enjoyment, and pleasure are standing here for battle, ready to give up their lives?" (1.32-33)

"I do not wish to kill my seniors, spiritual leaders, and relatives who are ready

to kill us, even for the sovereignty of the three worlds, let alone for this earthly kingdom, O Krishna.” (1.34-35)

Transcendental Knowledge

“It would be better indeed, to live on alms in this world than to slay these noble personalities, because by killing them I would enjoy wealth and pleasure stained with their blood. (2.05) We do not know which alternative, to fight or to quit, is better for us. Further, we do not know whether we shall conquer them or they will conquer us. We should not even wish to live after killing our relatives.” (2.06)

Lord Krishna said: “You grieve for those who are not worthy of grief, and yet speak words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. (2.11) There was never a time when these monarchs, you or I did not exist, nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future. (2.12) The soul acquires another body after death. (2.13) The invisible Spirit is eternal. The visible physical body is transitory. (2.16) The Spirit pervades this entire universe and is indestructible. No one can destroy the imperishable Spirit. (2.17) The physical bodies of the eternal, immutable, and incomprehensible Spirit are perishable. Therefore, fight for your right as your duty, O Arjuna. (2.18) The Spirit is neither born nor does it die at any time. It does not come into being, or cease to exist. It is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. The Spirit is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. (2.19-20) Just as a person puts on new garments after discarding old ones, the living entity or the individual soul acquires a new body after casting away the old body.” (2.22)

“Even if you think that the physical body takes birth and dies perpetually, even then O Arjuna, you should not grieve like this. Death is certain for the one who is born, and birth is certain for the one who dies. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable but pray for the salvation of the departed soul.” (2.26-27).

From the reading...

“Only fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get an opportunity of an unsought war that is like an open door to heaven.”

“Considering also your duty as a warrior you should not waver like this. There is nothing more auspicious for a warrior than a righteous war. (2.31) Only fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get an opportunity of an unsought war that is like an open door to heaven.” (2.32) War fought to reestablish morality is considered righteous, not war fought for dominance.

“If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty, lose your reputation, and incur sin. (2.33) People will talk about your disgrace forever. To the honored, disgrace is worse than death. (2.34) You will go to heaven if killed in the line of duty, or you will enjoy kingdom on earth if victorious. Therefore, get up with determination to fight, O Arjuna. (2.37) Just do your duty to the best of your ability without becoming discouraged by the thought of the outcome which may be success or failure, gain or loss, victory or defeat. By doing your duty with this attitude, you will not incur sin or *Karmic* bondage.” (2.38)

“The resolute determination of Self-realization is not formed in the minds of those who are attached to pleasure and power, and whose judgment is obscured by ritualistic activities. (2.44) Become free from pairs of opposites, be ever balanced and unconcerned with the thought of acquisition and preservation. Rise above the three modes of Material Nature (goodness, passion and ignorance) and be Self-conscious, O Arjuna. (2.45) To a God-realized person scripture is as useless as a river in a flooded area. Scripture is only an aid to God-realization, not needed after one has realized God.” (2.46)

From the reading...

“An uncontrolled mind distracts the intellect as a storm sways a ship from its path.”

“You have control over doing your respective duty, but no control or claim over the result. Fear of failure, from being emotionally attached to the fruit of work, is the greatest impediment to success because it robs efficiency by constantly disturbing the equanimity of mind.” A farmer is responsible for working his land yet has no control over the harvest. But, if he does not work his land he cannot expect a harvest. “The boundary of one’s jurisdiction ends with the completion of one’s duty. Do your duty to the best of your ability, O Arjuna, with your mind attached to the Lord, abandon worry and attachment to the results. Remain calm in both success and failure. Such selfless service brings peace and equanimity of mind.” (2.48)

Lord Krishna further said: “The mind and intellect of a person become steady who is neither elated by getting desired results, nor perturbed by undesired results. (2.57) Restless senses, O Arjuna, forcibly carry away the mind of even a wise person striving for perfection. (2.60) One should fix one’s mind on God with loving contemplation after bringing the senses under control. One’s intellect becomes steady when one’s senses are under complete control.” (2.61)

“A disciplined person, enjoying sense objects with senses that are under control

and free from attachment and aversion, attains tranquility. (2.64) An uncontrolled mind distracts the intellect as a storm sways a ship from its path. (2.67) A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of desire, that enter the mind, like rivers into an ocean which is ever being filled but is not disturbed by the rivers, can alone achieve peace, not the one who strives to satisfy such desires.” (2.70)

Self-realization is to know one’s relationship with the Supreme Lord and His true transcendental nature. A Self-realized person does not need rituals to reach God.

Path of Service

Arjuna asked: “If You consider that acquiring transcendental knowledge is better than working, then why do You want me to engage in this horrible war, O Krishna?”

Lord Krishna said: “I have stated a twofold path of spiritual discipline in the past. The path of Self-knowledge for the contemplative ones, and the path of unselfish work for all others. (3.03) One does not attain freedom from bondage of *Karma* by merely abstaining from work. No one attains perfection by merely giving up work, because no one can remain inactive even for a moment. The forces of Nature drive everyone to action.” (3.04-05)

“People get confused and think that leading a life devoted to scriptural study, contemplation, and acquiring transcendental knowledge may be better for spiritual progress than doing one’s worldly duty. A God-realized person does not consider oneself the doer of any action, but only an instrument in the hands of the Divine for His use. Both metaphysical knowledge and selfless service are means to attain the Supreme Being. These two paths are not separate, but complimentary. O Arjuna, do your duty to the best of your ability as a service to God.” (3.09)

From the reading...

“After knowing the transcendental science, O Arjuna, you shall not again become deluded like this.”

Lord Krishna said: “There is nothing unattained that I should obtain, yet I engage in action. (3.22) For, if I do not engage in action relentlessly, O Arjuna, people would follow My path (example), in every way. These worlds would perish if I do not work, and I shall be the cause of confusion and destruction of all these people. (3.23-24) Do your duty and dedicate all work to God in a spiritual frame of mind; become free from ego, mental grief and the compulsion to satisfy all desires. (3.30)

Likes and dislikes are two major stumbling blocks, on the path to Self-realization.” (3.34) Control over attachment, and aversion, is needed to attain peace of mind and tranquility.

Arjuna said: “O Krishna, what impels one to commit sin as if forced against one’s will?” (3.36)

Lord Krishna said: "It is lust born of passion that becomes anger when unfulfilled. Lust is insatiable and is a great devil. Know it as an enemy. (3.37) The senses, the mind, and the intellect are said to be the abode of lust; with these it deludes a person by veiling Self-knowledge. (3.40) Therefore, O Arjuna, by controlling the senses first, control this devil of material desire that destroys Self-knowledge and Self-realization." (3.41)

"The senses are said to be superior to the body, the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind, transcendental knowledge is superior to the intellect, and the Self is superior to transcendental knowledge. (3.42) Thus, knowing the Self to be superior to the intellect, and controlling the mind by the intellect that is purified by spiritual practice, one must kill this mighty enemy, lust, O Arjuna." (3.43)

Path of Renunciation with Knowledge

Lord Krishna said: “Both you and I have taken many births. I remember them all, O Arjuna, but you do not. (4.05) Though I am eternal, immutable, and the Lord of all beings, yet I manifest Myself by controlling Material Nature using My own divine potential energy.”

“Whenever there is decline of *Dharma* (Righteousness) and predominance of *Adharma* (Unrighteousness), O Arjuna, then I manifest Myself. I appear from time to time for protecting the good, for transforming the wicked, and for reestablishing world order (*Dharma*).” (4.07-08)

“With whatever motive people worship Me, I fulfill their desires accordingly. People worship Me with different motives. (4.11) The one whose mind and senses are under control, and who understands that he cannot control the outcome of his actions, does not incur sin (*Karmic* reaction) by doing bodily action. (4.21) A renunciant who is content with whatever gain comes naturally by His will, who is unaffected by pairs of opposites, like victory and defeat, free from envy, equanimous in success and failure is not bound by *Karma*.” (4.22)

“People perform sacrifice in many different ways. The one, who considers everything as a manifestation, or an act of God, shall realize God. (4.24) Those who perform selfless service obtain the nectar of Self-knowledge as a result of

their sacrifice and attain the Supreme Being. Acquiring transcendental knowledge is superior to any material sacrifice such as giving charity. Purification of mind and intellect eventually leads to the dawn of transcendental knowledge and Self-realization, which is the sole purpose of any spiritual practice.” (4.33)



Ornate Royal Carriage, adapted from Library of Congress

“After knowing the transcendental science, O Arjuna, you shall not again become deluded like this. With this knowledge you shall see the entire creation within your own higher Self, and thus within Me. (4.35) Even if one is the most sinful of all sinners, one shall yet cross over the ocean of sin by the raft of Self-knowledge alone. (4.36) There is no purifier in this world like the true knowledge of the Supreme Being. One discovers this knowledge from within in due course, when one’s mind is cleansed of selfishness by selfless service. (4.38) The one who has faith in God, is sincere in selfless practice, and has control over the mind and senses, gains this transcendental knowledge. Having gained this knowledge, one quickly attains supreme peace and liberation.” (4.39)

Path of Renunciation

Arjuna asked: “O Krishna, You praise the path of transcendental knowledge, and

also the path of selfless service, which is better of the two?” (5.01)

Lord Krishna said: “The path of Self-knowledge and the path of selfless service both lead to the supreme goal. But, of the two, the path of selfless service is superior to the path of Self-knowledge, because it is easier to practice. (5.02) The wise see no difference between the renunciation of selfish activities, and the performance of one’s worldly duty without attachment to the result. Renunciation does not mean becoming a hermit. (5.04) Selfless service is the goal, and renunciation is the means.”

One is a true renunciant and enlightened who:

1. Does all work as an offering to God abandoning attachment to the results;
2. Enjoys sensual pleasures with mind and senses under control;
3. Sees one and the same Spirit in all beings. Looks at a learned person, an outcast, even an animal with equal eye, and can feel the pain and pleasure of others as one’s own;
4. Neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant, nor grieves on obtaining the unpleasant and is tranquil in pleasure and disappointment, in honor and disgrace;
5. Finds happiness with the Supreme Being, who rejoices the Supreme Being within, who is illuminated by Self-knowledge and remains ever steadfast with the Supreme Self;
6. Acts beyond personal selfish motives has neither attachment nor aversion for anything.
7. Has discovered the joy of spiritual knowledge, and whose mind is in union with God.

Such a person is not bound by *Karma* though engaged in work, and attains eternal bliss.

From the reading...

“Perceive the same Self (or spirit) abiding in every being, and all beings abiding in the Self.”

“The Lord neither creates the urge for action, nor the feeling of doership, nor the attachment to the result of action in people. The power of Material Nature does all this.” (5.14)

From the reading...

“Perceive the same Self (or spirit) abiding in every being, and all beings abiding in the Self.”

Path of Meditation

Lord Krishna said: “One does not become a renunciant by merely not lighting the fire, or by abstaining from work. (6.01) For the wise, who seek to attain equanimity of mind, selfless service is said to be the means. Equanimity leads to Self-realization. (6.02) One attains perfection by renouncing attachment to the fruit of work, and to selfish desire. (6.04) One can elevate or degrade oneself by one’s own mind. The mind becomes a friend to the one who has control over it, and an enemy to the one who is controlled by the mind.” (6.05-06)

“Perceive the same Self (or spirit) abiding in every being, and all beings abiding in the Self. (6.29) Those who see Me in everything and see everything in Me, are not separated from Me and I am not separated from them. (6.30) Undoubtedly, O Arjuna, the mind is restless and very difficult to control, but it can be subdued by sincere spiritual practice and by detachment.” (6.35)

Arjuna said: “The faithful one who deviates from the path of meditation due to an un-subdued mind—what is the destination of such a person, O Krishna? (6.37) Does he not perish like a dispersing cloud, O Krishna, having lost both heavenly and worldly pleasures, without support and bewildered on the path of Self-realization?” (6.38)

Lord Krishna said: “There is no destruction, O Arjuna, for the one who tries to attain perfection either here or hereafter. A transcendentalist is never put to grief, My dear friend. (6.40) The less evolved unsuccessful one is reborn in the house of the pious and prosperous after attaining heaven and living there for many years. The highly evolved unsuccessful one does not go to heaven, but is born in a spiritually advanced family. A birth like that is very difficult to obtain in this world. (6.41-2) There, one regains the knowledge acquired in the previous life, and strives again to achieve perfection, O Arjuna. (6.43) The most devoted of all is the one who lovingly remembers Me with faith, and whose mind is ever absorbed in Me.” (6.47)

Self-Knowledge and Enlightenment

Lord Krishna said: “O Arjuna, listen to how you shall know Me fully without any doubt, with your mind absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, and trying to reach Me.” (7.01)

“Material Nature or matter is My lower energy. My other higher energy is the Spirit by which this entire universe is sustained, O Arjuna. (7.05) Know that all creatures have evolved from this twofold energy; and the Supreme Spirit is the source of origin as well as dissolution of the entire universe. (7.06) There is nothing higher than the Supreme Being, O Arjuna. Everything in the universe is strung on the Supreme Being, like jewels strung on a necklace.” (7.07)

From the reading...

“Whosoever desires to worship whatever deity—using whatever name, form, and method—with faith, I make their faith steady in that deity.”

“Know that three modes of Material Nature—goodness, passion, and ignorance—also emanate from Me. I am not dependent on, or affected by, the modes of Material Nature; but the modes of Material Nature are dependent on Me. (7.12) Human beings are deluded by various aspects of these three modes of Material Nature; therefore, they do not understand Me, I am eternal and above these modes.” (7.13)

“This divine power (*Maya*) of Mine, consisting of three states of mind or matter, is very difficult to overcome. Only those who surrender unto Me easily cross over this *Maya*. (7.14) Four types of virtuous ones worship or seek Me, O Arjuna. They are:”

- the distressed,
- the seeker of Self-knowledge,
- the seeker of wealth, and
- the enlightened one who has experienced the Supreme Being. (7.16)

“The wise surrender to Me by realizing—after many births—that everything in the universe and the world is nothing but My manifestation. Such a great soul is very rare.” (7.19)

“Whosoever desires to worship whatever deity—using whatever name, form, and method—with faith, I make their faith steady in that deity. Endowed with steady

faith they worship that deity, and obtain their wishes through that deity. Those wishes are granted by Me.” (7.22)

The Eternal Spirit

Arjuna said: “O Krishna, who is the Eternal Being or the Spirit? What is the nature of the Eternal Being? What is *Karma*? Who are mortal beings? And who are Temporal Beings? Who is the Supreme Being, and how does He dwell in the body? How can You, the Supreme Being, be remembered at the time of death by those who have control over their minds, O Krishna?” (8.01-2)

Lord Krishna said: “The eternal and immutable Spirit of the Supreme Being is also called the Eternal Being or the Spirit. The inherent power of cognition and desire of the Eternal Being (Spirit) is called the nature of the Eternal Being. The creative power of the Eternal Being (Spirit) that causes manifestation of the living entity is called *Karma*. (8.03) Various expansions of the Supreme Being are called Temporal Beings. The Supreme Being also resides in the inner psyche of all beings as the Divine Controller. (8.04) Thought of whatever object that predominates during one’s lifetime, one remembers that object at the end of life and achieves it. (8.06) Therefore, always remember Me and do your duty. You shall certainly attain Me if your mind and intellect are ever focused on Me.” (8.07) You will remember your ultimate goal in life at the time of death. Do not just set your mind on The Supreme Being but set Him as your ultimate Goal.

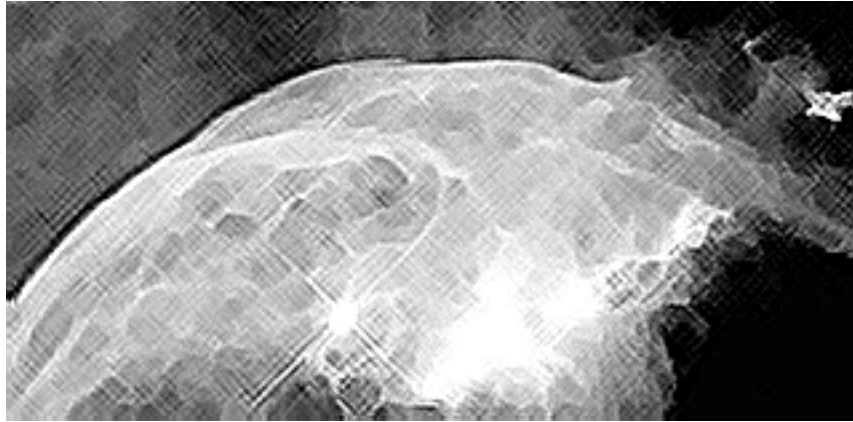
“I am easily attainable, O Arjuna, by that ever-steadfast devotee who always thinks of Me. (8.14) The dwellers of all the worlds up to and including heaven and the world of the creator are subject to the miseries of repeated birth and death. But, after attaining Me, O Arjuna, one does not take birth again.” (8.16)

Supreme Knowledge and the Big Mystery

Lord Krishna said: “I shall reveal to you, who do not disbelieve, the most profound secret transcendental knowledge together with transcendental experience. Having known this you will be freed from the miseries of worldly existence. (9.01) This Self-knowledge is the king of all knowledge, is the most secret, is very sacred, it can be perceived by instinct, conforms to righteousness (*Dharma*), is very easy to practice, and is timeless.” (9.02)

“This entire universe is an expansion of Mine. All beings depend on Me. I do not depend on them, and am not affected by them. (9.04) Perceive that all beings remain in Me—without any contact or without producing any effect—as the mighty

wind moving everywhere, eternally remains in space. (9.06) I create the entire multitude of beings again and again with the help of My Material Nature. These beings are under the control of the modes of Material Nature. (9.08) These acts of creation do not bind Me, O Arjuna, because I remain indifferent and unattached to those acts. (9.09) The divine kinetic energy (*Maya*) with the help of Material Nature creates all animate and inanimate objects under My supervision, and thus the creation keeps on going, O Arjuna.” (9.10)



An Expanding Bubble in Space, adapted from NASA

“I personally take care of both spiritual and material welfare of those ever-steadfast devotees who always remember and adore Me with single-minded contemplation. (9.22) O Arjuna, even those devotees who worship the deities with faith, they also really worship Me. (9.23) Whosoever offers Me a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water with devotion; I accept and eat the offering of devotion by the pure-hearted. (9.26) O Arjuna, whatever you do, eat, give, or sacrifice, do it as an offering to Me.” (9.27) A dedicated heart full of devotion is needed to obtain God’s grace, not rituals.

From the reading...

“O Arjuna, whatever you do, eat, give, or sacrifice, do it as an offering to Me.”

“The Self is present equally in all beings. There is no one hateful or dear to Me. But, those who worship Me with love and devotion are very close to Me, and I am also very close to them. (9.29) Even if the most sinful person resolves to worship Me with single-minded loving devotion, such a person must be regarded as a saint

because of making the right resolution. (9.30) O Arjuna, My devotee shall never perish or fall down.” (9.31) There is no unforgivable sin or sinner.

“Anybody can attain the Supreme Abode by just surrendering unto My will with loving devotion, O Arjuna. (9.32) Always think of Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, and bow down to Me. Thus uniting yourself with Me by setting Me as the supreme goal and the sole refuge, you shall certainly come to Me.” (9.34)

Manifestation of the Absolute

“Neither the celestial controllers, nor the great sages know My origin, because I am the origin of celestial controllers and great sages also. (10.02) One who knows Me as the unborn, without a beginning or an end, and the Supreme Lord of the universe, is considered wise among mortals, and becomes liberated from the bondage of *Karma*.” (10.03)

“Discrimination, Self-knowledge, non-delusion, forgiveness, truthfulness, control over mind and senses, tranquility, pleasure, birth, death, fear, fearlessness, nonviolence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame, disgrace, all these diverse qualities in human beings arise from Me alone. (10.04-05) I am the source of all. Everything originates from Me. Understanding this, the wise ones worship Me with love and devotion. (10.08). I give knowledge and understanding of the metaphysical science to those who are ever united with Me and lovingly adore Me, by which they come to Me.” (10.10)

Arjuna said: “O Krishna, I believe all that You have told me to be true. O Lord, neither the celestial controllers nor the demons comprehend Your glory. (10.14) O Creator and Lord of all beings, God of all celestial rulers, the Supreme person, and Lord of the universe, no one understands You. You alone know Yourself.” (10.15)

Lord Krishna said: “O Arjuna, now I shall explain to you My prominent divine manifestations, because My manifestations are endless.” (10.19) “There is no end to My divine manifestations, O Arjuna. Whatever is endowed with glory, brilliance, and power; know that to be the manifestation of a very small fraction of My splendor. (10.41) I continually support the entire universe by a small fraction of My divine energy.” (10.42)

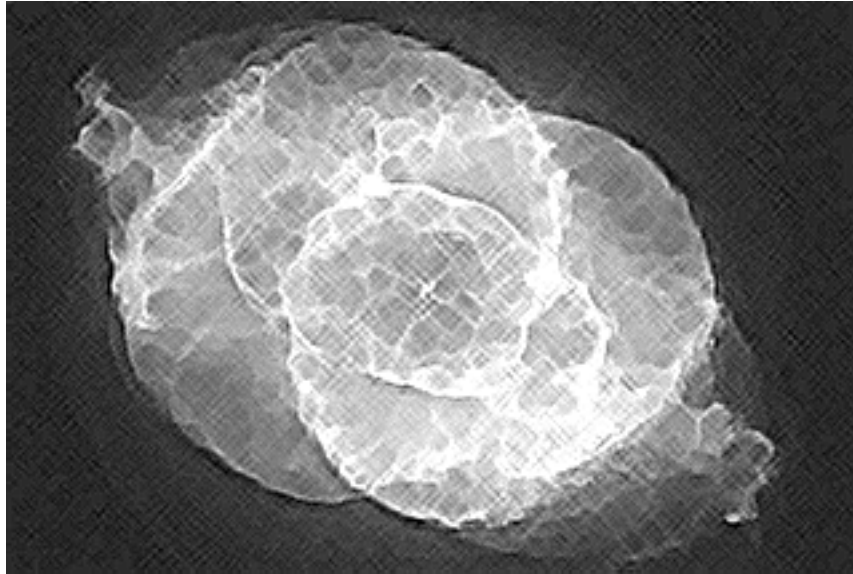
Vision of the Cosmic Form

Arjuna said: “O Lord, You are as You have said; yet I wish to see Your divine cosmic form, O Supreme Being. (11.03) O Lord, if You think it is possible for me

to see Your universal form, then, O Lord of the devotees, show me Your transcendental form.” (11.04)

Lord Krishna said: “O Arjuna, behold My hundreds and thousands of multifarious divine forms of different colors and shapes. Behold all the celestial beings, and many wonders never seen before. Also behold the entire creation animate, inanimate, and whatever else you like to see all at one place in My body. (11.05-07) You will not be able to see Me with your physical eye; therefore, I give you the divine eye to see My majestic power and glory.” (11.08)

Arjuna saw the entire universe, divided in many ways, but standing as all in One, and One in all in the transcendental body of Krishna, the Lord of celestial rulers. (11.13) Arjuna said: “I believe You are the Supreme Being to be realized. You are the ultimate resort of the universe. You are the Spirit, and protector of the eternal order. (11.18) O Lord, You pervade the entire space between heaven and earth in all directions. Seeing Your marvelous and terrible form, the three worlds tremble.” (11.20)



The Cat's Eye Nebula, adapted from NASA

Lord Krishna said: “I am death, the mighty destroyer of the world. I have come here to destroy all these people. Even without your participation in the war, all the warriors standing arrayed in the opposing army shall cease to exist. (11.32) Therefore, get up and attain glory. Conquer your enemies, and enjoy a prosperous kingdom. I have already destroyed all these warriors. You are only an instrument,

O Arjuna.” (11.33)

“O Arjuna, neither by study of scriptures, nor by austerity, nor by charity, nor by ritual, can I be seen in the form as you have seen Me. (11.53) However, through single minded devotion I can be seen in this form, can be known in essence, and also can be reached. (11.54) One who does his worldly duty for Me, to whom I am the supreme goal, who is my devotee, free from attachment and without enmity towards living beings, realizes Me.” (11.55)

Path of Devotion

Lord Krishna said: “Those ever steadfast devotees who worship with supreme faith by fixing their mind on a personal form of God, I consider them to be the best devotees. (12.02) Those who worship the unchangeable, the inexplicable, the invisible, the omnipresent, the inconceivable, the unchanging, the immovable, and the formless impersonal aspect of God; restraining all senses, even-minded under all circumstances, engaged in the welfare of all creatures, also attain God.” (12.03-04)

From the reading...

“I have already destroyed all these warriors. You are only an instrument, O Arjuna”

“Self-realization is more difficult for those who fix their minds on an impersonal, unmanifest, and formless Absolute because comprehension of the unmanifest by embodied beings is attained with difficulty.” (12.05)

“For those who worship the Supreme with unswerving devotion as their personal God, offer all actions to Me, intent on Me as the Supreme, and meditate on Me; I swiftly become their savior from the world that is an ocean of death and transmigration, O Arjuna.” (12.06-07) True devotion is intense love for God.

“Therefore, focus your mind on Me, and let your intellect dwell upon Me alone through meditation and contemplation. Thereafter you shall certainly attain Me. (12.08) If you are unable to focus your mind steadily on Me, then long to attain Me by practice of any spiritual discipline; such as a ritual, or deity worship that suits you. (12.09) If you are unable even to do any spiritual discipline, then be intent on performing your duty just for Me. You shall attain perfection by doing your prescribed duty for Me—without (selfish) attachment—just as an instrument to serve and please Me. (12.10) If you are unable to do your duty for Me, then just

surrender unto My will; renounce the attachment to, and the anxiety for, fruit of all work by learning to accept all results as God's grace, with equanimity." (12.11)

"Transcendental knowledge of the scriptures is better than mere ritualistic practice; meditation is better than scriptural knowledge; renunciation of selfish attachment to the fruit of work is better than meditation; peace immediately follows renunciation of selfish motives." (12.12)

"One who does not hate any creature, who is friendly and compassionate, free from the notion of 'I' and 'my,' even-minded in pleasure and disappointment, forgiving; ever content, who has subdued his mind, whose resolve is firm, whose mind and intellect are engaged on dwelling upon Me, who is devoted to Me, is dear to Me. (12.13-14) The one by whom others are not perturbed and who is not perturbed by others, who is free from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety, is also dear to Me. (12.15) One who is without desire, wise, impartial, and free from anxiety; who has renounced the doership in all undertakings; such a devotee is dear to Me. (12.16) The one who remains the same towards friend or foe, in honor or disgrace, in heat or cold, in pleasure or disappointment; who is free from attachment; who is indifferent to censure or praise; who is quiet, and content with whatever one has; unattached to a place, a country, or a house; equanimous, and full of devotion that person is dear to Me. (12.18-19) But those faithful devotees, who set Me as their supreme goal and follow—or just sincerely try to develop—the above-mentioned nectar of moral values are very dear to Me." (12.20)

Creation and the Creator

"O Arjuna, know Me to be the creator of all creation. The true understanding of both the creator and the creation is considered by Me to be transcendental knowledge. (13.02) The physical body with all its attributes including intellect, mind, sense organs, abilities, and all human emotions; steadfastness in acquiring knowledge of the Spirit, and seeing the omnipresent Supreme Being everywhere is said to be Self-knowledge. That which is contrary to this is ignorance." (13.09-11)

"The Supreme spirit is all pervading, and omnipresent. (13.13) He is the perceiver of all sense objects without physical sense organs; unattached, and yet the sustainer of all; devoid of the three modes of Material Nature, and yet the enjoyer of the modes of Material Nature by becoming a living entity. (13.14) He is inside as well as outside all beings, animate and inanimate. He is incomprehensible because of His subtlety. He resides in one's inner psyche as well as far away in the Supreme Abode. (13.15) He is undivided, and yet appears to exist as if divided in all beings. He is the object of knowledge, and appears as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of all beings. (13.16) Know that both the Material Nature and the Spiritual Being are without beginning. All manifestations and the three dispositions of

mind and matter, called modes, are born of Material Nature. Material Nature is said to be the cause of production of physical body and organs of perception and action. Spirit (or Consciousness) is said to be the cause of experiencing pleasure and disappointment.” (13.19-20)

“Spiritual Being enjoys three modes of Material Nature by associating with Material Nature. Attachment to the three modes of Material Nature is caused by previous *Karma*, which also causes birth of living entity in good and evil wombs. (13.21) The Spirit in the body is the witness, the guide, the supporter, the enjoyer, and the controller. (13.22) Whatever is born animate or inanimate, know them to be born from the union of Spirit and matter, O Arjuna.” (13.26)

“The one who sees the same eternal Supreme Lord dwelling as Spirit within all mortal beings truly sees. (13.27) When one beholds one and the same Lord existing equally in every being, one does not injure anybody, because one considers every thing as one’s own self; and thereupon attains Salvation. (13.28) The one who perceives that all work is done by the power of Material Nature truly understands, and thus does not consider oneself as the doer. (13.29) The moment one discovers diverse variety of beings and their different ideas abiding in One, and coming out from ‘That’ alone, one attains the Supreme Being. (13.30) Just as one sun illuminates the entire world, similarly, Spirit gives life to the entire creation, O Arjuna.”(13.33)

“They who perceive—with an eye of Self-knowledge—the difference between creation (or the body) and the Creator (or the Spirit) as well as know the technique of liberation (through Selfless service, Knowledge, Devotion or Meditation) of the living entity from the trap of divine illusory energy (*Maya*), attain the Supreme.” (13.34)

Three Modes of Material Nature

“My Material Nature is the womb of creation wherein I place the seed of Consciousness from which all beings are born, O Arjuna. (14.03) Goodness, passion, and ignorance—these three modes or ropes of Material Nature bind the eternal individual soul to the body, O Arjuna. (14.05) Of these, the mode of goodness is illuminating and good, because it is pure. The mode of goodness attaches the living entity to happiness and knowledge. The mode of passion is characterized by intense craving for sensual pleasure and greed, and is the source of material desire, attachment, and restlessness. The mode of passion binds the living entity to the fruit of work. (14.07) The mode of ignorance, the deluder of living entity, is born of inertia. It binds living entity to carelessness, laziness, and excessive sleep.” (14.08)

“When one perceives no doer other than the power of the Supreme Being in the form of the modes of Material Nature, and know That which is above and beyond these modes; then they attain *Nirvana* or Salvation.” (14.19)

Arjuna said: “What is the mark of those who have transcended the three modes of Material Nature, and what is their conduct? How does one transcend these three modes of Material Nature, O Lord Krishna?” (14.21)

Lord Krishna said: “One who neither hates the presence of enlightenment, activity, and delusion; nor desires for them when they are absent; who remains like a witness without being affected by the modes of Material Nature, and stays firmly attached to the Lord without wavering thinking that the modes of Material Nature only are operating.” (14.22-23)

“The one who depends on the Lord and is indifferent to pleasure and disappointment; to whom a clod, a stone, and gold are alike; to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike; who is of firm mind, who is calm in censure and in praise. The one who is indifferent to honor and disgrace; who is impartial to friend and foe, and who has renounced the sense of doership and ownership—is said to have transcended the modes of Material Nature.” (14.24-25)

“The one who offers service to Me with love and unswerving devotion transcends three modes of Material Nature, and becomes fit for Salvation (*Nirvana*).” (14.26)

The Supreme Being

“Those who are free from pride and delusion, who have conquered the evil of attachment, who are constantly dwelling on the Supreme Being with senses under control, who understand dualities of pleasure and disappointment. Such wise ones reach My Supreme Abode. (15.05) The individual soul in the body of living beings is the integral part of the universal Spirit, or Consciousness. The individual soul associates with the six sensory faculties of perception including the mind, and activates them.” (15.07)

From the reading...

“I am seated in the inner psyche of all beings.”

“Just as air takes aroma away from a flower; similarly, the individual soul takes the six sensory faculties from the physical body it casts off during death to a new physical body it acquires. (15.08) The living entity enjoys sensual pleasure using

six sensory faculties of hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell, and mind. The devotees striving for perfection behold the living entity abiding in their inner psyche as consciousness.”

“I am seated in the inner psyche of all beings. Memory, Self-knowledge, and the removal of doubt and wrong notions about God come from Me. I am verily that which is to be known by the study of all the *Vedas*. I am, indeed, the author as well as the student of the *Vedas*(Scriptures).” (15.15)

“There are two entities in the cosmos: The changeable Temporal Beings, and the unchangeable Eternal Being (the Spirit). All created beings are subject to change, but the Spirit does not change. (15.16) The Supreme Being (or the Absolute) is beyond both the Temporal Beings and the Eternal Beings. That Supreme Being is also called the Absolute Reality that sustains both the Temporal and the Eternal by pervading everything. (15.17) Because the Supreme Being is beyond both Temporal and Eternal Beings; therefore, He is known in this world and in the scriptures as the Supreme Being (Absolute Reality, Truth, Super-soul). (15.18) The wise who truly understand the Supreme Being, worship Him whole-heartedly. (15.19) Thus this most secret transcendental science of the Absolute has been explained by Me. Upon understanding this, one becomes enlightened, and all of one’s duties are accomplished, O Arjuna.”(15.20)



Golden Temple, adapted from Library of Congress

Divine and the Demonic Qualities

Lord Krishna said: “Fearlessness, purity of inner psyche, perseverance in devotion of Self-knowledge, charity, sense restraint, sacrifice, study of scriptures, austerity, honesty, nonviolence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, equanimity, abstaining from malicious talk, compassion for all creatures, freedom from greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, splendor, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, absence of malice, and absence of pride are some of the qualities of those endowed with divine virtues, O Arjuna.” (16.01-03)

“Basically, there are only two types of human beings in this world, the divine, and the demonic. (16.06) People of demonic nature do not know what to do and what not to do. They neither have purity nor good conduct nor truthfulness. (16.07) They think the world is unreal, without a substratum, without a God, and without an order. (16.08) Adhering to this wrong atheist view, these degraded souls—with small intellect and cruel deeds—are born as enemies for the destruction of the world. (16.09) Filled with insatiable desires, hypocrisy, pride, and arrogance; holding wrong views due to delusion; they act with impure motives. (16.10) Obsessed with endless anxiety lasting until death, considering sense gratification their highest aim, convinced that sensual pleasure is everything. (16.11) Bound by hundreds of ties of desire and enslaved by lust and anger; they strive to obtain wealth for the fulfillment of sensual pleasure.”

“They think: ‘I have gained this today, I shall fulfill this desire; I have this much wealth, and will have more wealth in the future. (16.13) That enemy has been slain by me, and I shall slay others also. I am the Lord. I am the enjoyer. I am successful, powerful, and happy. (16.14) I am rich and born in a noble family. No one is equal to me. I shall perform sacrifice, I shall give charity, and I shall rejoice.’ Thus deluded by ignorance, bewildered by many fancies, entangled in the net of delusion, and addicted to the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, they fall into foul hell. (16.16) Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with pride and intoxication of wealth; they perform religious services only in name, for show, and not according to scriptural injunction.” (16.17)

“These malicious people cling to egoism, power, arrogance, lust, and anger; and hate Me who dwells in their own bodies and those of others. (16.18) I hurl these haters, cruel, sinful, and mean people into cycles of rebirth in the wombs of demons again and again. (16.19) O Arjuna, entering the wombs of demons birth after birth, the deluded ones sink to the lowest hell without ever attaining Me” (until their minds change for the better, by the causeless mercy of the Lord). (16.20)

“Lust, anger, and greed are the three gates of hell leading to the downfall (or bondage) of an individual. Therefore, one must learn to give these up. (16.21) Speaking ill of others is a terrible sin, because, it pollutes the mind of the speaker without any beneficial effect. Perform your duty following scriptural injunction.”

(16.24).

Threefold Faith

Arjuna said: “What is the mode of devotion of those who perform spiritual practice with faith but without following scriptural injunction, O Krishna? Is it in the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance?” (17.01)

From the reading...

“One can become whatever one wants to be, if one constantly contemplates on the object of desire with faith.”

Lord Krishna said: “The natural faith of embodied beings is of three kinds: goodness, passion, and ignorance. Now hear about these from Me. (17.02) O Arjuna, the faith of each is in accordance with one’s own natural disposition that is governed by *Karmic* impressions. A person is known by faith. One can become whatever one wants to be, if one constantly contemplates on the object of desire with faith.” (17.03)

People in the mode of goodness:

- Like healthy, juicy foods;
- Undertake selfless work without attachment to results (austerity of deed);
- Worship celestial controlling forces (guardian angels, Devas or Gods);
- Speak inoffensively, in a pleasant, beneficial, and truthful manner (austerity of speech) (17.15);
- Study scriptures;
- Are gentle, equanimous, think pure thoughts, exercise self control (austerity of thought);
- Give charity as a matter of duty, to deserving candidates, without any expectation.

In the mode of passion, people:

- Like food that is extreme in taste (overly spicy, salty, or sweet);

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- Worship supernatural rulers and demons;
- Perform selfless service (austerity) for show, to gain respect, honor, or reverence that yields uncertain and temporary results (17.18);
- Give charity with expectation of something in return.
- People in the mode of ignorance:
- Enjoy unhealthy foods and drinks;
- Worship ghosts and spirits;
- Are hypocritical and egoistic;
- Perform austerity with self-torture, or for harming others;
- Give charity to the unworthy.

“Whatever is done without faith whether it is sacrifice, charity, austerity, or any other act is useless. It has no value here or hereafter, O Arjuna.” (17.28)



Village in Punjab, adapted from Library of Congress

Salvation through Renunciation

Arjuna said: “I wish to know the nature of renunciation and sacrifice, and the difference between the two, O Lord Krishna.” (18.01)

Lord Krishna said: “The sages define renunciation as abstaining from all work for personal profit. The wise define sacrifice as the sacrifice of, and the freedom from, selfish attachment to the fruit of all work. (18.02) Giving up one’s duty is not proper. The abandonment of obligatory work is due to delusion, and is declared to be in the mode of ignorance. (18.07) The embodied beings are unable to completely abstain from work; therefore, one who renounces the selfish attachment to the fruit of work is considered a renunciant.” (18.11)

The five causes, for the accomplishment of all actions are: (18.13-14)

- The physical body, the seat of *Karma*
- The modes of Material Nature, the doer;
- The eleven organs of perception and action, the instruments;
- Various bio-impulses, or life forces;
- The presiding controlling forces or deities of the eleven organs.

“Whatever action, whether right or wrong, one performs by thought, word, and deed; these are the five causes.” (18.15)

Threefold driving force to an action are:

- The subject;
- The object;
- The knowledge of the object.

Three components of action are: (18.18)

- The eleven organs (six sense organs: ear, skin, eye, tongue, nose, and the mind; and five organs of action: mouth, hand, leg, anus, and urethra);
- The act;
- The agent or the modes of Material Nature.

The four goals of human life designed for gradual and systematic growth of the individual and progress of society are (18.34):

- Doing one’s duty;

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- Earning wealth;
- Material and sensual enjoyment (with senses under control);
- Attaining salvation.

In the mode of goodness one:

- Possesses the knowledge by which one sees a single (undivided) immutable Reality in all beings;
- Performs obligatory duty without likes and dislikes, or attachment to the result;
- Enjoys sensual pleasure with senses under control
- Is free from attachment, non-egotistic, has resolve and enthusiasm, and is unperturbed in success or failure;
- Has intellect by which one understands the path of work and the path of renunciation, right and wrong action, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation;
- as the resolve by which one manipulates functions of the mind and senses for God-realization;
- Enjoys pleasure from spiritual practice resulting in cessation of all sorrows;
- Enjoys pleasure that comes by the grace of Self-knowledge.

In the mode of passion one:

- Sees different realities of various types among all beings as separate from one another;
- Abandons duty merely because it is difficult, or because of fear of bodily trouble; (18.08)
- Performs action with ego, selfish motives, and with too much effort;
- Is impassioned, attached to the fruit of his work, greedy, violent, impure, and is affected by joy and sorrow;
- Cannot distinguish between righteousness (*Dharma*) and unrighteousness (*Adharma*), and right and wrong action;
- Craves for the fruit of work, clings to duty, accumulating wealth and enjoyment with great attachment;
- Enjoys sensual pleasure without control over the senses.

In the mode of ignorance one:

- Has worthless knowledge by which one clings to one single effect (such as the body) as if that is everything;
- Abandons obligatory work due to delusion; (18.07)
- Undertakes action because of delusion; disregarding consequences, loss, or injury to others;
- Is undisciplined, vulgar, stubborn, wicked, malicious, lazy, depressed, and procrastinating;
- Accepts unrighteousness (*Adharma*) as righteousness (*Dharma*), has intellect which is covered by ignorance;
- Does not give up sleep, fear, grief, despair, and carelessness;
- Considers the body or oneself as the sole agent due to imperfect knowledge.

“There is no being, either on earth or among the celestial controllers in heaven, who can remain free from these three modes of Material Nature.” (18.40)

“Human labor is categorized as intellectuals, administrators (or protectors), businessmen, and unskilled workers based on the qualities inherent in people’s nature and their make up. (18.41) One can attain the highest perfection by devotion to one’s natural work. Listen to Me how one attains perfection while engaged in one’s natural work.” (18.45)

“One attains tranquility, freedom from bondage of *Karma*, and attains the Supreme Being by:”

- Renouncing selfish attachment to the fruit of work;
- Performing one’s natural duty, to the best of one’s ability, for the Supreme Being;
- Purifying the intellect by spiritual practice;
- Subduing the mind and senses with firm resolve;
- Giving up likes and dislikes;
- Enjoying solitude;
- Eating lightly;
- Controlling mind, speech, and organs of action;
- Taking refuge in detachment;
- Relinquishing egotism, violence, pride, lust, anger, and proprietorship;
- Becoming free from the notion of “I, me, and my.”

“Absorbed in the Supreme Being, the serene one neither grieves nor desires; becoming impartial to all beings, one obtains the highest devotional love for the Supreme Being. (18.54) By devotion one truly understands Me in essence and merges into Me. (18.55) Mentally offer all actions to Me and be devoted to Me. Be calm and always fix your mind on Me. (18.57)”

“If due to ego you think: ‘I shall not fight’; this resolve of yours is in vain. Your own nature will compel you to fight. (18.59) O Arjuna, you are controlled by your own nature-born *Karmic* impressions. Therefore, you shall do even against your will what you do not wish to do out of delusion.” (18.60)

“The Supreme Lord—as the controller abiding in the inner psyche of all beings—causes them to work out their *Karma*. We are puppets of our own *Karma*.” (18.61)

“Set aside all meritorious deeds and religious rituals, and just surrender completely to My will with firm faith and loving devotion. I shall liberate you from all sin, the bond of *Karma*. Do not grieve.” (18.66)

“This knowledge should never be spoken to one who is devoid of austerity, who is without devotion, who does not desire to listen, who speaks ill of Me, or does not believe in God.”

“The one who shall propagate this supreme secret philosophy, the transcendental knowledge of the *Gita*, amongst My devotees, shall be performing the highest devotional service to Me, and shall certainly come to Me. No other person shall do more pleasing service to Me, and no one on earth shall be dearer to Me. (18.68-69) I promise the study of this sacred dialogue of ours will be equivalent to worshipping Me with knowledge-sacrifice.” (18.70)

“Whoever hears this sacred dialogue with faith and without cavil becomes free from sin, and attains salvation.” (18.71)

“O Arjuna, did you listen to this with single-minded attention? Has your delusion born of ignorance been completely destroyed?” (18.72)

Arjuna said: “By Your grace my delusion is destroyed, I have gained Self-knowledge, my confusion with regard to the body and the Spirit is dispelled and I shall obey Your command.”; (18.73)

Epilogue—Lord Krishna’s Last Sermon

At the end of another long sermon comprising of more than one thousand verses, disciple Uddhava said: “O Lord Krishna, I think the pursuit of God as You narrated to Arjuna, and now to me, is very difficult indeed, for most people; because it entails control of unruly senses. Please tell me a short, simple, and easy way

to God-realization.” Lord Krishna upon Uddhava’s request gave the essentials of Self-realization as follows:

- Do your duty, to the best of your ability, for Me without worrying about the outcome.
- Remember Me at all times.
- Perceive that God is within every living being. Mentally bow down to all beings and treat all beings equally.
- Perceive through the activities of mind, senses, breathing, and emotions that the power of God is within you at all times, and is constantly doing all the work using you as a mere instrument and a trustee.

From the reading . . .

“There is no unforgivable sin or sinner.”



Jammu Temples at a Distance, adapted from Library of Congress

Topics Worth Investigating

1. What do you suppose is the rationale behind Krishna's declaration "Only fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get an opportunity of an unsought war that is like an open door to heaven"? Can you locate evidence that this same belief is a tenet of Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism?
2. Krishna relates, "The senses are said to be superior to the body, the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind, transcendental knowledge is superior to the intellect, and the Self is superior to transcendental knowledge." Explicate the use of the term "superior" in this passage. Is this sense of "superior" a non-naturalistic use of the word? Explain.

Does the found sense of "superior" illuminate the meaning of the phrase "[t]he mind becomes a friend to the one who has control over it"—as if there is something else that controls the mind?

3. On the one hand, an important tenet of the path of renunciation is, in Krishna's words, "Do all work as an offering to God abandoning attachment to the results." On the other hand, an important tenet of modern psychology is the visualization of results as an aid to improvement. Can these two ways of understanding actions be made logically consistent and practically helpful?
4. If all work were to be done, as the path of renunciation implies, "as an offering to God abandoning attachment to the results," then would it follow that no task is any more important than any other task? Would it also follow that we should not so much seek to help others for their own sake as we should seek to help others as an offering?
5. How are sacrifice and self-defeating behavior to be distinguished? Is the main difference in worship?
6. Explain as clearly as possible what Krishna means when he states, "O Arjuna, you are controlled by your own nature-born *Karmic* impressions." When Krishna continues with "We are puppets of our own *karma*," does this imply that we do not have free will?
7. As described in the *Gita*, what is self-realization and how is it attained?

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