



Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita – Helen Hamilton

Introduction

The Bhagavad Gita may seem like a historical event, but it really represents every seeker's struggle to overcome the mind. Bhagavad Gita is a great work as it is practical, simple and helpful. Don't be discouraged by any names or words you do not know in this great scripture as it will not stop you from enjoying the teaching and making use of it. It is best to read or listen to the Gita several times (with a gap of a few weeks, months or years in between).

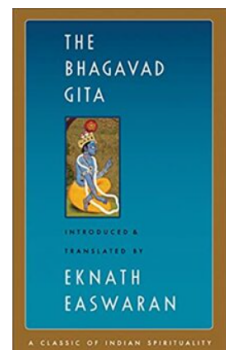
We will study chapter by chapter and you may find it helpful to read the notes in this document for the chapter you are about to read in the Gita itself (and perhaps the notes here again afterwards). It is my recommendation that you revisit chapters you feel aligned with or are fascinated with.

Translation/Version of the Bhagavad Gita used

This is the edition I have and it has wonderful introductions on each chapter also. It is not necessary to get the same version (unless you want to). You can find it on Amazon and most major bookstores:

The Bhagavad Gita (A Classic of Indian Spirituality) – by Eknath Easwaran [link](#)

There is also a very good unabridged audiobook version available on Audible and Apple Books.



Chapter 1 The War Within

Arjuna is caught between wanting to win the battle for his brother and family who are the rightful heirs to the throne, but to do so will mean he has to fight and kill his revered uncles, cousins, teachers etc. For his biggest struggle ever, Arjuna turns to Krishna for help with what to do. Vyasa, the author, in the Gita describes this war within as represented by external battle. The real battle is inside us and is the effort to overcome our lower nature. It represents the spiritual crisis that we all find ourselves in at some point.

We have all had some situation that feels impossible to deal with from the egoic sense of self and this is Arjuna's. We may not be able to identify with such a battle for the throne but we can identify with Arjuna as he struggles between what he feels he has to do, what feels right in that moment and what he wants to do. It is usually only in such times that we find ourselves committing to the pathway of awakening. Whatever brings us to this point can be thanked even though it is usually deeply unpleasant and often very painful. Can any of us really say we would be so committed to this awakening journey without such pain and suffering pushing us? Eventually, we do not need this suffering to propel us onwards but initially we all seem to.

It is important to note that Krishna is always speaking as the Self and not as a someone or a separate person. When he says "Me" and "Mine" he means to be of the Self/Noumenon.

Chapter 2 Self-Realisation

Here, Krishna shows Arjuna the real Self that never dies to try to bring him out of his immediate thought patterns and inspire him to follow the great path. Krishna begins to show Arjuna that the way out of suffering is by recognising what he really is. He begins to paint a picture for Arjuna who at this point does not really remember much of any spiritual work done in past lifetimes.

Krishna instructs Arjuna to try to become alike in pain and pleasure, failure and success which allows us to go beyond the mind. It is our thoughts about an event or the outcome of an action that defines it as a success or failure. As we begin to unhook actions from desired results, we can feel the same peace no matter what the outcome. Krishna tells Arjuna that he is responsible for the action but never the outcome of that action and so in effect he can forget about success and failure because these will be dependent on him waiting for some future moment.

One person's success is another's failure anyway. Success in any activity or endeavour is defined by getting the desired result and failure is getting what we did not want as the outcome. Can we really know what success and failure is then when they are still tied to desires and the judgements of "good" and "bad"? Without these motivating factors behind our actions we will find peace and equanimity no matter what outcomes we get. Naturally also we will begin to experience abundance in all the ways it is possible. Our mind wants to take a momentary snapshot of the outcome of an action and decide whether it is good or bad. All further actions then depend on this first value judgement and from there the error in our thinking compounds.

Notice here that Arjuna's problem of whether to fight or not is based on two things that he is convinced are real:

1. That he is a separate being, separate to those who he would fight and
2. Having to make the choice as a separate being as to whether to fight in the battle or not.

This suffering is enough to make Arjuna ask to be Krishna's student and this is a pivotal point where he realises he cannot move forward as a separate being. Notice that usually we would try to solve the problem and not find the root of the problem! How often do we stop to ask if the assumed problem is real rather than trying to find a desired outcome to the problem?

Krishna also advises him on a practical level about his "dharma" as a warrior. He tells Arjuna that even some effort towards self-realisation will never be wasted. At this point Krishna knows that Arjuna doubts his own ability to wake up to the Truth. "Nothing is ever lost" he tells Arjuna to

inspire him to try to achieve what feels impossible to Arjuna at this point. How compassionate is the Gita then; even at this point it is beginning to address our deepest fears and self-doubts about our awakening. It is beginning to plant the seed that awakening MUST happen and all effort and practice towards it is cumulative and never wasted. Even practice done incorrectly from the correct intention will work for us!

Arjuna then is inspired to ask what this awakening looks like and how to recognise an awakened being. Krishna tells Arjuna to move amongst the world of the senses free from attachment (I want this thing) or aversion (I do not want this). Again, Krishna points that the source of our suffering is never the actual object itself (such as an external person we have some challenges with or a subtle inner object such as thoughts and emotions) but rather what we think about it. Consider how differently you think and feel about shame and peace. Our mind would say we think positively about peace because it feels good and we resist shame because it feels unpleasant in our body. We can come to realise that peace is only peace because we do not resist it and in fact welcome it. Shame only feels deeply unpleasant because we push it away and resist it.

Nothing is ever what we think it is and our experience of that thing is shaped largely by what we think of it. Pleasure and pain, good and bad, wanted and not wanted can be seen to be functions of our thoughts and that they do not exist outside of our mind. Pleasure and pain can be seen to be results of deep acceptance or habitual resistance of what is. This can only be deeply accepted when we realise that things do not exist independently of the Self and therefore they ARE the Self. It is not (or ever has been) shame but is emptiness appearing as shame. It is not peace either that we feel but rather the emptiness showing up as this frequency that our body happens to like.

We have become so enamoured by the word labels we put on things that we have a whole selection of thoughts about those labels! We have forgotten how to experience the object itself without any conceptualisation going on at the same time. This is what Krishna is urging Arjuna to begin to do and it is the beginning of the description of selfless service or karma yoga. This theme is continued into the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Selfless Service

Let's begin our study of this chapter by noticing that Arjuna goes back to wanting to know what to DO right now even with Krishna's wisdom there to guide him. He is lost in the idea that he is a "doer". This exemplifies how pervasive illusion is and even with Krishna there, Arjuna cannot overcome this immediately and this has been our own experience too. Again, the Gita is helping us to overcome our own feeling of unworthiness with its compassionate example of how convincing the illusion is for the student. If Arjuna cannot keep his mind focused on the real subject he wants Krishna to advise him about (how to wake up to Truth) in the middle of a battlefield, with all potential combatants waiting as he and Krishna have this powerful conversation, then there is certainly hope for the rest of us who cannot always keep attention where we want it and go back frequently to believing ourselves to be a separate being. If even Arjuna cannot stay focused as he is instructed and consoled by the great teacher that Krishna is, we need not feel so bad about our own wandering focus when trying to realise the Truth in amongst raising a family, paying the bills and going to work.

Krishna now deepens his explanation of Selfless service (Karma Yoga). It is to work for the wellbeing of all beings rather than just one being as this perpetuates our ideas of being a separate being. Any actions taken for the good of one body and mind only IS illusion and can never lead to peace, joy and awakening. Consider we try to do our spiritual practice so that "I can reach enlightenment". Can that ever actually happen? Here, Krishna is advising Arjuna to forget "selfish desires" that only bear fruit for himself and to begin to think more like the Self of all beings to ensure he reaches his goal.

Krishna mentions the path of wisdom but does not offer it to Arjuna as he is motivated by action as a warrior and will be more able to access the path of selfless service.

Selfless service is explained as a more available path to Self-realisation for Arjuna because he is action oriented. This is opposed to the usual way we do things which is for our own benefit. We become attached to doing things that make us feel better and avoid what makes us feel worse. Notice here that selfless service is not an avoidance or negation of our own self, as our own self is part of the all. It is not a self-rejection or false humility, but a deep understanding that there really is only One of us in action. We can choose actions that are good for us and everybody and we can do this even if we do not know what that outcome would look like. Simply to intend this action to benefit all is enough here. No person can know the outcome that is best for all, but we do not have to; simply the intention is enough and the action gets done from this highest place. This eliminates the separation thinking of “I win or you win” which perpetuates our suffering as a separate being. Krishna is giving Arjuna a relatively easy way to move towards freedom from suffering. He asks him only to continue to do as he has done but to dedicate that action and its results to the good of all beings and at this point Arjuna can accept this.

Arjuna asks what power binds us to illusion and Krishna answers that it is anger and selfish desires. Notice “selfish” here means that which benefits only one (or two, several) individuals and not the whole. Consider this in terms of how we hold onto the desire for “my awakening”.

Krishna explains that those who are awakened no longer seek joy and happiness from what they do in the world. Having found the source of everything to be inside themselves they are always happy and so do not need any particular outcome from any action. Krishna says “the wise work without thought for themselves” and this does not mean self-rejection or negation but without thinking of the needs or wants of the imaginary separate being. Automatically then, an awakened being is always performing karma yoga or selfless service.

Chapter 4 Wisdom in action

In this chapter we can see the wisdom that Krishna tries to impart cannot be received still because Arjuna is thinking of Krishna as being a being incarnated with a finite lifespan etc. Arjuna does not remember his past lives as yet and he can only think of Krishna as his friend, charioteer or a prince and he cannot understand why Krishna would say he has manifested over and over to re-establish dharma. Krishna is an Avatar who is an incarnation of Vishnu and has special power to bring wisdom back to common knowledge. He speaks of himself in this chapter as the creator, which is not a particular being like Brahma but more of a continuous movement into form from formless; an energy of creation that is ongoing and continuous. Each one of us is Brahma in form, creation occurring continuously. Krishna speaks as the Self, as the everywhere-ness and as yet Arjuna cannot fully hear this.

Here, we see that even the most powerful teacher cannot fully penetrate the mind of the devotee/student and this is normal. The teaching does not need the mind of the student to understand because the Eternal Self is waking up anyway in the background just by hearing this teaching again and again. This is a subtle but powerful point the Gita makes several times and can give us all hope that with enough repetition we will also assimilate this teaching and begin to embody it spontaneously. The Gita subtly points to the fact there are at least 2 levels of Satsang going on at any one time. There is a verbal conversation going on between Arjuna and Krishna and there is a powerful energy transmission which is allowing the Presence to come to the forefront for Arjuna. We can notice how Arjuna relaxes over the duration of the conversation, and is able to ask to be Krishna’s student too. As the dialogue continues Arjuna is even able to voice his doubts and begins to ask intelligent questions and moves on from the “what should I do?” that originally brought him to this Satsang. Consider if you have ever felt more confused after a Satsang than before! This is because the mind is trying to make sense of the information and it really cannot. Relaxing into this we can just allow the confusion and the inevitable progress that IS being made even though it does not show up as mental clarity perhaps ever!

In terms of spiritual instruction, Arjuna is urged to act in freedom, with detachment to the outcome of the action. We come to the concept of sacrifice in this chapter for the first time and it is interesting to look at the root of the word “sacrifice”. “Sacrifice” has roots in Latin and later French

and quite literally means “to make sacred”. Anything that we offer in sacrifice to Krishna (the One Being) is literally made sacred. So, if I feel fear and offer it to Krishna it is made sacred, whole and back into peace. If I feel fear in the hopes that I feel it and it will go, it cannot ever leave fully. Allowing all that we do and say to be made sacred we begin to experience more peace. If I feel the fear in my body with no attachment to if it leaves or stays it will have been “made sacred” and transmutes back into peace. If I feel the fear so that it leaves me and I feel better then I cannot have that because I am doing it just for me (the separate being).

Sacrifice comes in many forms but is aimed at dissolving the separate sense of self which usually only has two motives; to stop feeling bad or to start to feel better. If we look honestly at why we do anything as a separate being it will be because we are sure it will make us feel better when we do it. Krishna urges Arjuna to perform all his actions in selfless service because this selfless service leads to wisdom and the path of karma yoga (selfless service) and of wisdom (jnana yoga) is the same. We could say that by serving others as the Self we are wisdom in action. The wisdom of knowing there is only One of us here leads to act with the good of all beings in mind. As we move in this way it is mirrored back to us in our own life as other beings are able to act more selflessly also to and for us. The beautiful marriage here of wisdom and action is in my opinion what the Gita describes in splendid detail. As we have said before, the Gita is not a theoretical work at all but a powerful and practical handbook. Action can either lead us deeper into illusion or further into freedom depending on why we do it.

As the chapter continues, Krishna tells Arjuna to “cut through these doubts with the sword of spiritual wisdom”. If we look at our own struggles, we can all sympathise with Arjuna here, for who hasn't felt that desperate desire for freedom tinged with the pain of self-doubt? Krishna speaks about doubt and encourages Arjuna to push through them and investigate them. He recommends wisdom (seeing what we really are) as the greatest and quickest way to freedom. Again, this is a direct reference to the power of the Self and the inability of the mind to get in the way, slow down or block liberation occurring. The greatest doubt of all is that there is something that can stop or block this awakening for us (such as our mind or our resistance) but Krishna is the embodiment of infinite compassion and offers Arjuna kindness in his direct wisdom, he cuts through this doubt effectively saying “wisdom (the Self) conquers all”.

The Gita is revolutionary because it does not recommend action OR wisdom but shows us they are the same. It shows us how to live this awakening in a very practical way and that really we all follow all three paths at the same time (bhakti, jnana and karma yoga). Devotion (bhakti) to the wisdom of Truth (jnana) is really wisdom in action (karma yoga).

The Gita also suggests that even someone deeply affected by tamas (a sinner) can be liberated too in this lifetime. Krishna says even a sinner can awaken and this is revolutionary! It shows the power of wisdom! This perspective is offered to subtly but powerfully show the power of the Self to overcome all illusion as and when it really wants to. Traditionally, we may be encouraged to work towards more rajasic and then sattvic actions, thoughts and speech on the gradual path to awakening and then to push for freedom and live beyond the reach of the gunas. Here, Krishna directly challenges this perspective and says that anyone can attain liberation if their intention and desire is strong enough to allow them to make everything sacred, an offering to Him.

Chapter 5 Renounce and rejoice

This chapter explains what is meant by the term “renunciation”. Instead of our perhaps traditional view of someone leaving their family, job and life and living in seclusion in a very basic way (such as a stereotypical renunciate/Sannyasin perhaps begging for food or living in an ashram, forest or cave) we see the real renunciation is of thoughts, which is the highest renunciation. Many of us will give up our material possession but we still hold on to the ideas of “me” and “mine”. Paradoxically, one who is willing to give up their thoughts doesn't have to give up anything else! Again, the Gita describes that the simplest and yet the most powerful form of renunciation is to work and move around in the world from a place of offering everything to Krishna and therefore it is not done for the good of a separate being.

How do we renounce then? We have to be willing to see that any thought that is based on the idea of a separate self is not going to lead to freedom and must be forsaken, forgotten or renounced. This is 99.9% of our thinking process and also includes any actions that spring from the idea of a separate self. We do not have to go through every single thought and renounce it but rather to begin to see that all of our mind's chatter is based on the idea that "I am a separate person and I need to figure out what to do or not do, to get what I want". When we begin to see the general tendencies and themes of our thought process we will naturally begin to renounce them as we will see that these thoughts are simply ineffective. It is important to note that to renounce something does not mean to push it away or make it wrong but rather to give up believing it and simply let that thought exist until it doesn't. True renunciation involves no rejection and is a passive process.

Krishna warns that even abundance and success in the world will not fulfil us if we have no knowledge of our real nature. Here we can see that the path of selfless service/action, the path of wisdom and that of renunciation are the same! Those who have followed any of these paths fully succeed in them all and experience inner freedom AND outer abundance.

The "state" of Samadhi is described at the end of the chapter where the sense of duality is gone (usually temporarily at first) and then it eventually becomes permanent which is true liberation/awakening/freedom. In many scriptures there are various types of Samadhi and these can even differ in definition from text to text so let's not give so much importance to Samadhi other than the recognition it is that state beyond, before and inside the sense of duality. Simply put you are the infinite Self/Krishna already but you will also always feel like a someone moving around in their life. In the highest seeing these apparent two ways to experience ourselves are not really two but two different appearances of the same thing. Our most intimate and mundane human experiences become as sacred as our deepest meditation and in fact are not seen as any different. This chapter title is pointing to the fact that renunciation (the state of not-knowing anything) and joy are really one and the same. Those who renounce, rejoice!

Chapter 6 The practice of meditation

This chapter explains the simplicity of meditation in addition to karma yoga (action). Here, Krishna explains what a true yogi is (one who has mastered yoga) and that they see the Self in all beings. The picture of an awakened being or yogi is described here so that Arjuna can see where he is heading towards. Intuitively, Krishna senses that Arjuna's mind is beginning to open and he can speak more directly with Arjuna.

Meditation is making the mind (attention) one pointed, to concentrate it on the Self. When our mind wanders it wastes energy as we begin to think about the objects of perception that we think are there. Ultimately, we will come to see there are no separate phenomena that have arisen out of the Noumenon but until we see this we will waste time and energy thinking about the phenomena that we think exist. We will find ourselves thinking about what actions to take to fix situations with other beings in our lives, not realising they are not separate to us. Until the deep wisdom cuts through our tendency to imagine "other" beings and things, we are urged to keep bringing attention back to the Real, thereby disempowering our fascination with imaginary objects. When the mind comes to stillness, meditation is mastered and we have seen that there is nothing to think about! The mind then rests.

Arjuna worries he will not be able to do this and complete the meditation. He asks what happens if he starts but cannot finish. Krishna puts his doubts at rest by assuring him no effort towards awakening is ever lost or wasted. Krishna talks about the will being the key – we can either use it for our benefit or against it. The will is another way to describe determination and desire for awakening and it is something that can be cultivated. In fact, our will is always being cultivated towards something and we simply need to be conscious of what habits we are cultivating. Do those habits lead to liberation or are they going to lead us deeper into illusion?

Krishna says that only regular practice and detachment is needed for success. He has already pointed to the fact that we are not responsible for the outcome of our actions and can act without

expectation of the result. Perhaps then we can now see that our spiritual practice is the best thing to renounce the results of! When we do spiritual work for the love of Truth then we can see immediate results and we make our practice sacred. When we do spiritual practice to try to get somewhere (to awakening) then we have to keep trying to get somewhere but never quite arriving.

A few important points from this chapter:

1. Krishna saying “Beholding the Self, by means of the Self” is so very important, for it suggests that only the Self can recognise the Self. This destroys the conviction in being a separate being as we realise that because we can SEE the Self, we must already BE (looking from) the Self. If we were not already the Self we would not be able to recognise it or meditate on it. Peace and joy are the outcome then. Contemplation on this point alone will bring ultimate freedom.
2. What does Krishna mean by “control the senses”? This could be mistaken to mean that we must do something with our senses but it is really pointing to something deeper. We must be clear that what we think we see, taste, hear etc is not what we actually experience. We are always experiencing the Self with our senses and never the object that the mind thinks is there. When we see no objects at all we have “unified our consciousness” and see only the Self.
3. What does Krishna mean when he says “with their consciousness unified”? We can say that it means we have focused attention in that moment on the only thing that exists - the One Self. Mind is no longer wasting energy thinking about two-ness or duality, imagining objects that seem to exist outside of the Self. When this is realised the mind is stilled but it is not a forced thing but rather a deep knowing that there are no objects to think about. The words phenomenon and object are seen to be synonyms for the Self/Noumenon.

Chapter 7 Wisdom from realisation

This chapter contains the essence of realisation which is to be able to live as the Self in our everyday lives. Krishna is described as the creator of the world and this means he is being spoken about in his nature as Purusha (unmanifest) and Prakriti (manifest). Krishna creates the world for joy and play. The ability to see the magnificent in the mundane is true realisation of the Self.

“Maya” is now generally meant to mean illusion but its root means to create – implying creation itself IS the illusion; that the world IS the illusion. In this chapter we begin to understand the power of devotion (which is really love) to allow us to move beyond illusion. When the longing for Truth is powerful enough it will overcome the appealing and seductive effects of the mind and Maya. Devotion later becomes an all-important theme of the Gita – getting to know Krishna is able to save us from all suffering. We are urged to “take refuge in Me” (Krishna/Self).

Krishna says those beings who wish to know Krishna fully are already in possession of wisdom (it takes wisdom to see what Krishna really is and to want that) and these beings may be regarded as his very own Self. This is a key point the Gita makes - that to want to know Krishna is the SAME as being him! To want to know the Self is alike to being it! This gives us a huge key as to how to shortcut the path out of suffering. Krishna also says that desire to know him and faith in him will be unified by him. This means that as we desire to know Reality, this desire will become all-encompassing and eventually the only desire left. When that happens then we begin to live as the Self/Reality. Again, the Gita points to simplicity of the pathway and that the only thing that takes the time is to get to the point where all we want is Krishna because we realise everything “else” that we want will come out of that deep and clear seeing of what is true.

Krishna says “Through lack of understanding people believe that I, the unmanifest, have entered into some form. They fail to realise my true nature which transcends birth and death.” Here, Krishna again points to the myth of creation, the myth that forms exist and that we enter into a body and then have to leave it upon death of the body. It points to the fact we tend to look for Truth in

form and not in the formless nature of the Real Self which is beyond birth, life and death. This quote points to the illusionary idea that forms exist independently from the Self/Krishna and that the unmanifest Self/Krishna can enter or exit a form. It also highlights that we may still be thinking the unmanifest Awareness/Self can undergo some kind of change to become a form; this is the essence of duality and illusion and is the beginning of suffering. Krishna is trying to get Arjuna to see that nothing at all has ever happened to us and that the manifestation is an illusion.

Krishna also says "There is no-one who knows me completely". This refers to the fact that no separate being can ever know the Self/Krishna/Reality. We hold into the idea that when we recognise the Self we are looking at it as our separate self. We really believe that our mind can perceive the Infinite Being/Krishna and this is simply untrue. Here again, Krishna points to the fact that only the Ultimate Reality can see the Ultimate Reality. Krishna says that those who see Him everywhere will be conscious of him at the time of death anyway. When we know that everything we see, feel and experience is really Krishna in disguise (let's remember that creation of forms never really occurred and is the myth of maya) then we will see and know Krishna at the time of death whatever we are experiencing.

Chapter 8 The Eternal Godhead

This chapter talks about what happens to the soul after death, how to die consciously and more subjects. Krishna speaks of these subjects to Arjuna to help him overcome his doubts. Arjuna is still worried that he will try to attain awakening and not complete this task in this lifetime. Speaking of these subjects also helps to lessen fear in Arjuna and will help him become more open and receptive to the spiritual instruction Krishna is giving.

Krishna describes himself as God Immanent (existing or operating inside form) and God Transcendent (beyond and independent of form). This is in effect saying that form and formless are the same and if we can really understand this then all fear of death will vanish for us. If our body is not really what it seems but is only an appearance in the Infinite Unmanifest (just like the water in a mirage appears to be there but really isn't) then our body was never really born and will not die. The body is seen to have then appeared and disappeared. The whole idea of birth, life and death then can become simply a shifting of appearance; at first we are invisible only and then we also have a visible "body" appearance, later we return to only the invisible. If there really is no body born or dying then we need feel no difference between having a physical body and not; we need not fear any such change as death because it is only a change of appearance and not an actual change.

Krishna says that whatever the content of the mind is going to be at the time of physical death determines where the soul goes afterwards. If we believe ourselves to be some gross (the body) or subtle form (a separate being) we will go to a vibrational realm of the same vibration as the thoughts we had at death. If we have seen ourselves to be the Self/Krishna/Reality we will "merge" into the formless Reality. Then Krishna urges Arjuna to realise the real nature of his being now so that it is automatically the content of his thoughts upon death. To do this work now before the body is ready to disappear is best so that it is clearly seen and known with certainty and we will not be trying to remember Krishna as the time comes close to the death experience.

In this chapter Krishna describes how we can consciously "die" by leaving the body in a certain way and at will. This is spoken of to help Arjuna overcome his fear of death and the unknown. Krishna says that prana/life force must be made to move upwards and leave the body by the top of the head. This is only the same as the yogi experiences in deep meditation/samadhi. Our life force concentrates in the chakra system wherever we put most focus and so if we are focused upon awakening then naturally the crown chakra will be where our attention goes most often. (It is not so important to fully understand this section (unless you want to) because it will become clearer upon awakening anyway).

Reference is made to not returning to the earth again and it must be noted that this is only a forced return due to karmic patterns. We need not be reborn but we may choose to in order to contribute and help others! Knowing we cannot be caught in duality again we may choose to incarnate again

for the joy of it, or to help others still asleep to Truth. The reincarnation that everyone seems to want to avoid, along with the forgetting that we are not only this body, is usually driven by unconscious or conscious desires that we have not yet fulfilled or transcended. As a separate being we feel unsafe because we feel we will cease to exist when the body dies. This generates a desire to feel safe which we try to fulfil in many ways. We may try to find someone who makes us feel safer, try to gather enough resources around us to make us feel more secure, we may try to control other beings, reach a career position of authority and many other ways. All these ways will ultimately fail to satisfy this fear because we are not actually ever unsafe. No attempts to feel safe through some external factor can help us if we feel our very existence is in peril.

We will also be driven to reincarnate through desires to feel loved, valued, worthwhile and others. These desires are driven by the sense we are not loveable in our own selves just as we are. When we perceive ourselves through our mind's ideas, we will always feel less than whole and attempt to rectify any issues by trying to feel better. Again, this can never succeed because we are not unworthy or unlovable at all. Trying to satisfy all these desires only leads to an endless cycle of birth and death. We can finally transcend these desires as we realise the Self that we are (see Krishna clearly) because we will no longer be able to believe anything negative about ourselves and the cycle is broken. Then our reincarnation is a choice consciously.

Krishna makes a cryptic statement here in this chapter: "This Supreme Lord who pervades all existence, the true self of all creatures may be realised through undivided love". In this brilliant spiritual teaching, Krishna points Arjuna again to the fact that only the Undivided Love can recognise the Truth. In effect Krishna says that only when we are devoted to the Undivided Self can we actually see it! Only Krishna can recognise Krishna; a seeker will only see objects or phenomena and cannot see the real Self of all.

Chapter 9 The Royal Path

Let's begin by reminding ourselves that Krishna is speaking as the Totality/Noumenon and not a separate being, teacher, charioteer or otherwise. It is important to read this chapter from this place.

This chapter deals with the subject of desire and takes us to the end point of all desires. Arjuna has desires (just as we all do) and he doubts whether he can have this devotion for the Undivided Love. Arjuna doubts that he can be strong enough to put aside all other desires and focus on the Truth long enough to realise it. Krishna helps us to see that no matter what we think we want, we are really desiring to know Him. When we want something external (such as a car, new job or life partner) or internal (such as peace, joy or bliss) we are really wanting Krishna even though we may not know it. We are all seeking Krishna whether we think we want a better job, a happier marriage, awakening or anything else. Everything we can experience, have, do or be is really Krishna in disguise and so if we understand this then we will know all desires are really the desire to know God/Krishna.

This chapter develops the theme of different pathways to self-realisation further as Krishna urges the development of selfless love (also called devotion or Bhakti) for Krishna. He states that this will ensure the safety and freedom of the seeker. Krishna urges that Bhakti/devotion is only leading to freedom when it is for the One Being/Noumenon and not for an object or an idea of what we think we are (or anything else). Here again Krishna is urging Arjuna towards the undivided Love. We must know and have love for the Universal Self that is all substances and the insubstantial. Krishna urges that we make everything we do an offering to him so that we remember the Noumenon in a kind of ongoing meditation. Immediately upon doing this we are free from karma and suffering. We can notice here that Bhakti yoga (or the path of devotion to Truth) is seen to be the same as Karma yoga and Jnana yoga. Basically, anyone has real love for the Oneness and worships that more than the duality of "me and mine" will always attain liberation. This is the royal path and the most direct.

Chapter 10 Divine Splendour

In this chapter Krishna steps up the instruction to Arjuna and reveals what the infinite being really is, that it is the source of all manifestation and it is not diminished at all in this. It is the ultimate Reality which transcends duality but includes it all (the opposites). Arjuna is opening up and becoming more receptive and curious as to who Krishna really is.

Krishna goes on to describe himself as the highest in all ways he manifests to show the excellence and magnificence of the real Self. He describes himself as Arjuna's innermost Self and in many other ways as the best/biggest and most amazing of each category described. In all of manifestation, Krishna is the highest and best of anything we could experience. He describes all of this to Arjuna in order to begin to paint a picture of what Reality actually is and this picture in words becomes an actual experience later for Arjuna in the next chapter. We can think of this chapter as setting the scene for a deeper realisation later. We need not focus too much on this section (unless you want to). A few important things described that you may know are when Krishna says he is the Atman, he is the Gayatri and the Om (best of all mantras), he is knowledge of the Self (best of all knowledge). Krishna here is telling us to strive for this highest aspect in all we do as an expression of our infinite Self.

Krishna is majestic and yet is always deeply practical in his instruction. He urges Arjuna to forget all this if it is not useful and simply to remember "I Am". Arjuna is now beginning to see that he has not really seen Krishna for who he really is and says "Indeed only you know your real nature" and again this is another reference to the fact that only the infinite can see the infinite. Arjuna is now open and curious and asking much higher questions. This reflects our own journey to awakening as we begin to realise our questions and insights are evolving over time. The beginning of wisdom occurs when we start to realise we have not been perceiving Reality. To know we are experiencing an illusion is to begin to come out of it and see clearly, for when we are truly caught in illusion, we will not know it! We will be certain that we are seeing things clearly.

Chapter 11 The Cosmic Vision

Krishna gives Arjuna an experience of his cosmic Self as he knows this is the next step to help Arjuna understand who he is. As Arjuna comes to understand and see who Krishna is, he is understanding Self too. Arjuna falls into a kind of temporary Samadhi after feeling fear (he does not remember that Krishna and he have lived many lives before together). This chapter continues the opening that is occurring with Arjuna and his curiosity emerging and he is less and less concerned with what he should do. The experience of what Krishna really is helps Arjuna increase his devotion to the Truth. We can see this in our own awakening too; when we have an insight, some deeper experience of peace, joy, bliss or simply manage to go through some experience without feeling any negative emotion our devotion automatically increases. Any new, deeper understanding fuels our fire of devotion even more. The more peace we have the more we are determined to do whatever it takes to live in constant and effortless peace. Krishna gives Arjuna a helping hand in developing his devotion with this awe inspiring vision of Himself in his universal form.

Arjuna is afraid because he is facing the unknown now. He thought he knew who Krishna is (and who the Self is) and he is confronted with the unknown and becomes scared (like all of us feel at first). Notice that Arjuna feels deep peace, bliss of Samadhi AND fear at the same time. An important step for us all because this is moving beyond the duality of "fear OR peace" etc. Again through this experience Krishna is pointing Arjuna towards the end of duality and is showing him that it is possible to feel peace at all times even though he is scared. Peace comes from the knowledge of what we really are and if we know the Truth the peace will be constant no matter what else our body is feeling in that moment.

Arjuna begins to really see what Krishna/Self is and begins to try to describe it. He comes to understand that he has spoken to Krishna as if he was a separate being as so feels moved to express that. In a moment of humility, Arjuna realises he has never really met Krishna before and realises just who has been standing before him. He quickly apologises in case he has ever

offended Krishna by speaking to him with less than reverence or from not listening to him fully. This shows that whilst Arjuna's awakening is progressing quickly he has still not fully seen that Krishna/Self/an awakened being can never be offended because they have no mental projections left of their own Self to defend. It is a good sign that Arjuna is awake enough now to realise how much he has not previously realised about Krishna! To know that we do not know is the beginning of wisdom.

Krishna says "Arjuna, through my grace you have been united with me and received this vision of my radiant, universal form without beginning or end which no-one else has ever seen". Krishna here again alludes to the fact again that only the Self can see the Self. He points out that only willingness and desire (devotion) can make this occur and never through following rituals or reading scriptures etc. He acknowledges Arjuna's opening here and even calls him brave/heroic because he celebrates Arjuna feeling fear but still opening to the Truth. During the experience, Arjuna was terrified and this represents the fear that our egoic sense of Self has about the real Self/Krishna. Ego tends to think of the power of the Self as if it were forceful and dangerous and so fears it like a naughty child would fear a wrathful parent. Despite this, Arjuna still manages to stay open enough to experience this beautiful revelation of Krishna's Divine nature which is praise worthy indeed.

Chapter 12 The Way Of Love

Here we shift focus and intensity now into a deeper understanding of devotion. The theme of love or devotion as the most important aspect has been broached before but now Krishna becomes much more direct. Love or devotion is the most powerful and THE most certain way to awakening. We are all experts at devotion already! We are devoted to mind first of all, then to other things like science, religion, philosophy etc. We may also have many worldly devotions like TV programmes, certain foods we love, people etc. Devotion is not a new thing to us and we are already experts. We are simply shifting the focus to the devotion to Truth (the mystery of it) rather than a concept of Truth. Devotion to knowledge of the One being is the highest devotion that Krishna urges Arjuna to recognise he already has.

Krishna recognises that devotion to the formlessness and emptiness may be challenging for us at first (or even impossible) so we practice our devotion on one of the forms of the Infinite, such as the Buddha, Christ, a particular teacher or teaching we love, a meditation technique etc. As we perfect this devotion, we eventually no longer need an object (someone) of devotion and find we are devoted to That which has no form but is all forms. This is the end point of the path of devotion and also a beginning point! Devotion intensifies as we near the goal of our journey; the realisation that Krishna is everywhere becomes all consuming and our mind finds peace as we realise there is nothing other than Krishna – including the devotee searching for Him! This is an end of seeking but also represents a beginning of discovery of all the ways Krishna/the Self can show up as an infinite number of forms or appearances. The end of fear, anger and loneliness is the beginning of awe, wonder and joy of existence itself.

Because he knows Arjuna will be worried that his devotion is not yet strong enough, Krishna recommends cultivating devotion by regular practice of meditation and selfless service/surrender. In this way he reassures Arjuna that he can do it. When Krishna says "Still your mind in Me" he means that mind becomes still when we experience the One/Noumenon because there is nothing else to think about. The more we tune in through meditation, the more the mind comes to prefer this stillness and this really is devotion in action. Meditation can be said to be devotion in action.

Chapter 13 The Field and The Knower

The field here is the body/mind and is an object and the Knower of the field is the Self/Krishna/Noumenon. The Gita regards matter and mind as one substance or "prakriti". The Gita suggests that one of the biggest things to know is the difference between the field (body/mind) and the Knower (Self). Most of us have it backwards and think the body, mind and emotions are us. Coming to understand that we are the Knower of the field and that we are never affected by

anything that happens in manifestation is the height of wisdom. Nothing that happens in the field can affect the Knower and it's a massive achievement to realise that. Krishna explains to Arjuna that the Knower of the field is formless, changeless and timeless. It is our belief that we can be hurt, changed or grow old and die that is the cause of our suffering and this chapter addresses these points in detail.

When describing the awakened being's nature, Krishna says "Their devotion to Me is undivided, enjoying solitude and not following the crowd, they seek only Me. This is true Knowledge, to seek the Self as the true end of wisdom always. To seek anything else is ignorance." For me, this is one of the most important sections in the whole Gita.

Let's look at what Krishna means here and why it is so important:

- "Their devotion to Me is undivided" points to the fact that an awakened being sees Krishna everywhere they go and everywhere they look. Even if everyone else sees an object and would give it a name (such as fear, table, brother, bliss etc) the awakened being knows those names are Krishna's names and they have no doubt what it really is. This is important because it shows the pivotal point of awakening is when the power of what we know to be true overrides the mind's tendency to label and categorise imaginary objects as good, bad, wanted and not wanted. All this has ceased in the awakened being.
- "Enjoying solitude and not following the crowd" points to when our devotion is undivided and we know that all there is, is Krishna/Self. We are truly alone then and free because we know there is no "self" and no "others". I feel the word "crowd" refers to the multiplicity of duality; the one, two and many of infinite creation. When we are living in freedom we are not swayed by others as they are seen to be our very own Self.
- "This is true Knowledge, to seek the Self as the true end of wisdom always." What is the end of wisdom? Could it be where we even forget the concepts of duality and non-duality? Where we live without any rigid concepts or reference points?
- Lastly, Krishna says "To seek anything else is ignorance". He is saying to Arjuna that if we still feel there is anything "else" or "other" than the self we will seek it and this is the core ignorance and illusion. The ideas of "me" and "other" is where we fall into suffering. This whole quote reinforces all that has been said so far in the Gita and we could study these few lines alone and wake up out of all illusion!

We hear from Krishna also a detailed and beautiful description of the Self/Krishna/Knower here – the undivided Self. Again, Krishna paints a beautiful picture with his words now that Arjuna is even more receptive and open to further his devotion and speed his seeing.

Chapter 14 The Forces Of Evolution

This chapter goes into more detail about the nature of illusion so that Arjuna can understand why he has been caught in it. Understanding why we have been caught in suffering helps us to come out of it. Krishna begins to talk about the manifestation in terms of the three gunas/energies which affect our lives until we have realised the Self and gone beyond all karma.

Here is a very brief description of the gunas:

- Sattva: goodness, light, purity, harmony, balance (highest)
- Rajas: passion (anger, hatred, greed, ambition and desire)
- Tamas: inertia, darkness, sloth and ignorance (lowest) Sliding backwards or standing still.

All three gunas will be present in our lives and we must go beyond them all to wake up fully. This means we stop identifying with these energies as the doer of actions, or even to identify as the Self

(a concept here). These gunas are how we identify with the body. There is no doer and we could say that all actions are all the actions of the guna.

Everything is “outside” of the Self (does not exist separate to it) and therefore must not be identified with, including thoughts, desires, even manifestation itself and the gunas. Then we know the Self/Krishna/Brahman. By fixing the heart of devotion on Krishna or in meditation we are immediately free of the gunas in that moment. We all identify with the gunas as we feel we are making progress in our awakening as we move towards more sattva (and less tamas and rajas). In truth, there is no progress in awakening as such in the way that we think. We see it as soon as we see it. Becoming more sattvic in our thoughts, words and actions does not cause awakening and really is like clearing away some clouds that seem to block the sun (which was always there).

When there are a lot of tamas in our life we will find we do not perhaps even want to overcome illusion, we will probably not even be aware we are caught in a trap of thoughts and even if we are then we wouldn't be able to find a way out of it due to our scattered focus.

When we are ruled by the guna of rajas we may do a lot of activity toward spiritual awakening but still find ourselves frustrated or even worse, sinking deeper into the illusion that there is something we can do to reach awakening. This idea is so pervasive that we offer lots of action to try to counteract the illusion. This never works though because it reinforces the idea that we are the “doer” of actions.

When we are governed mostly by sattva we will lead a life that is focused on our inner journey and is less about material possessions and outer achievements. Still here though we may fall into the trap of identifying as the seeker, the one who is journeying or even the one who surrenders etc. This can be the worst kind of illusion because we really may feel we are doing all that is necessary for awakening to occur but Truth simply cannot reveal Itself to us whilst we are holding on strongly to any identity. The mode of being that got us to this point in our awakening now becomes the very thing we need to release in order for Krishna/Self to reveal Itself to us, as us!

Chapter 15 The Supreme Self

In this chapter we see Krishna again stepping up the intensity and directness of the instruction to Arjuna. Krishna says here that he is beyond formless (Atman) and all form and he is the mystery. This is the highest freedom, beyond all definition and opposites and totally free. When we come to feel that form and formless are the same One being and that Krishna can appear as both form and formless effortlessly, we are free. We are also reminded that Krishna is inside each form too and not just beyond. He is the prana or life force.

Those who are awakened see the Self/Krishna moving as manifestation, as the gunas, as the separate being. Those who are still lost in illusion see separate beings, gunas or manifestation of matter. Krishna says “I am that Supreme Self” that is beyond spirit and matter and yet is inclusive of both. That is the mystery that is the Noumenon – neither form nor formless and yet showing up as both.

Krishna speaks of illusion as a tree with strong roots in the world. He says “Cut down this strong rooted tree with the sharp axe of detachment. Then, find the path which does not come back again. Seek That – the first cause from which the universe came long ago.” Here we see Krishna speaking of the wisdom of detachment as the “sharp axe” that can bring us out of illusion but what does detachment mean and why is it so powerful and effective? What are we detached from? The Gita here repeats its theme of moving away from selfish desires (desires of a separate being) and being free right now. Wisdom knows that selfish desires will only bring more pain and suffering as they reinforce the sense of a separate being.

“All the scriptures lead to Me. I am their author and their wisdom.” Krishna reveals Himself even more here and shows Himself as the Truth behind every scripture and the author. No matter which

teacher we think we are following it is really always Krishna/Self/Noumenon who is the teacher and the student!

Chapter 16 Two Paths

This chapter suggests that we are either moving towards freedom or away from it, sinking lower into the illusion. The descriptions that follow help Arjuna to know which qualities he should cultivate and those to be avoided. This chapter is showing us how to ensure we are on the higher path.

Here, Krishna describes the “good qualities” that help us move towards awakening. He also describes the equally powerful “demonic qualities” that lead us astray. Any form of arrogance/self-importance is from the lower path and will find themselves in hell. It should be noted that hell is not a physical place and demonic energies are not actual demons but simply lower tamasic vibrations, thoughts and actions that can only compound upon themselves and the person spirals downwards into more and more hellish experiences. Hell can be described as how most of us are living as human beings! Lost, feeling alone and unable to climb out of this place.

Krishna says these beings are born again and again to try to work out of this but the choice is always there to choose another path. He reminds Arjuna he is not of this lower path but is already on the higher path.

This chapter epitomises the battle inside us between the higher and lower tendencies. These higher or Divine qualities lead us out of suffering and the demonic qualities lead us further into suffering. As we begin to understand this we may begin to feel hopeful or even excited as we come to realise that our spiritual destiny is always in our hands. It is not a question of whether awakening will happen then but only when! All we can ever do in any moment is to make sure our habits, speech, actions and spiritual practice are of this Divine nature and everything else will take care of itself, awakening will happen spontaneously at the right time.

Krishna lovingly describes these two sets of qualities so that Arjuna can have no doubt or fear about his spiritual destiny. It is such an act of compassion from Krishna. We need never worry about which qualities we have – we would not be interested in the Gita if we were ruled by these demonic qualities. Remember, it is not the goal to perfect these Divine qualities but only to want to! Intention and willingness is the way and is all conquering.

Chapter 17 The Power Of Faith

Krishna talks about the importance of Shraddha (faith, what we hold to be important) as a way to make sure we find freedom in this lifetime. Whatever we spend a lot of time thinking about will show us what we value. If we find ourselves interested in the Bhagavad Gita it is almost certain that we are well on the way to liberation anyway and it is that Truth of our Being attracting us to this powerful scripture anyway.

This chapter also helps to illustrate a point that we may miss if we are not careful. Krishna alludes to the reason for doing our spiritual practice as being more important than the amount of practice and this is significant to understand. This again suggests the intention or desires is the most important factor; more important than anything else in awakening. It is possible then for us to do some spiritual practice imperfectly and still get the best results from it because our intention is sattvic or good. The opposite is true also – that we could perform the practice perfectly and get little to no results because the intention was to use that power to gain control over others for example. This is the power of faith.

Sattvic faith leads one to liberation. Krishna says that only an act or practice done without faith will not move us towards awakening. Spiritual practice done for some self-centred reason or even just out of routine is not going to bring us closer to our goal and is unreal. Spiritual practice can be done for spiritual growth (sattvic practice), for personal gain (rajastic practice) or to try to gain power or

control over others (tamasic practice). Krishna talks about what sattvic, rajasic or tamasic practice looks like so we can be clear.

Krishna says “Our faith conforms to our nature, Arjuna. Human nature is made of faith. A person IS what his Shraddha is”. This leads us to a key point here – can we act outside of our faith or Shraddha? If our faith is very pure and our whole existence is oriented around awakening, can we do anything that would lead us further away from the path and the Truth? Once our interest and passion is for the Truth of awakening then even if we participate in some actions, words or thoughts that are not loving or based on compassion we will find that even this becomes a learning experience for us. At this point, everything that happens will be used as part of our awakening journey and is never just some bad thing that happened to us. We will learn much faster what is true and untrue because we are using everything that comes to us as a learning experience. Awakening is then totally assured because we will spiral upwards in energy based on good habits and actions.

Krishna speaks about self-discipline and points to sattvic self-discipline as the highest. “Discipline” and “disciple” have their roots in the same latin word “discere” or to learn. Here we see another reference to the fact that as simple a thing as our habits can lead us to awakening. Simply put, we are our habits and these habits alone can make or break our awakening. I feel this is something the Gita says many times in many ways.

At the end of this chapter, Krishna says “Om Tat Sat” and suggests it as a means to live by. It means “only the Good/True really exists”. This phrase is powerfully transformative when used in good faith by those who love Krishna/the Self. Here again, Krishna gives Arjuna a short but powerful way to ensure his liberation if he cannot remember anything else. Krishna again displays his loving, compassionate heart.

Chapter 18 Freedom And Renunciation

This final chapter covers many subjects and also brings together the whole theme of the Gita. This chapter serves as a reminder from Krishna of the key point he has made throughout the previous chapters about renunciation of thoughts being the highest joy AND the greatest freedom.

When speaking about renunciation Arjuna wants to know if he has to move away from his family and normal life to pursue this pathway and wake up but Krishna does not recommend this path. He points to an active life in the world and giving up selfish thoughts and motives. Again, Krishna steers Arjuna down the easiest path for him and this is also the same path we are all on. We all have our place in the world and as we move from day to day we see the thoughts or karmic patterns come up. Each time we see some thoughts we do our best to renounce them (again the intention is the most important thing) and so we are all like Arjuna, doing the best we can each day. Krishna says freedom comes from renunciation of thoughts and beliefs and we will be free. He continues to explain to Arjuna that work is part of his own duty. Krishna says that to “Take refuge in the Lord within whole heartedly” will assure Arjuna’s freedom. Taking refuge in the Lord means to devote ourselves wholly to the Undivided Love that Krishna really is. Again, here in this last chapter Krishna gives Arjuna one simple point to hold onto if he were to forget everything else.

Krishna says it is better for Arjuna to do his own work/duty because he can attain liberation that way. He is alluding to the fact that everyone’s path is perfect for their own awakening. Everyone’s life is tailor made for their successful awakening because everything that is happening for them is showing them thoughts to renounce. Life is beautiful when lived from that knowing.

Krishna says that what seems good at first is not always good in the end. What seems difficult or bad at first is not always bad. He is pointing here to the “pain” or struggle of developing spiritual discipline and overcoming resistance to form new habits which propel us to awakening. This chapter ends with a beautiful description of the awakened state. Krishna urges Arjuna to not decide about the battle until he has taken refuge in Krishna’s being. He answers Arjuna’s first question

(from Chapter 1) at the end of the Gita here by telling him not to try to decide as an imaginary separate being. As the Self the right path will become clear.

Finally, Krishna reminds Arjuna that he loves him and that he will find his way. Krishna says that such teachings should not be shared with anyone not ready to hear. Krishna asks Arjuna if he has understood all that he has said and can follow his instructions and Arjuna agrees he can. Even if this knowledge does not bear fruit immediately, Krishna knows that he has done what is needed for now. He has planted the seeds of Knowledge and Wisdom that will soon grow into mighty oak trees and a whole forest.

Jai Sri Krishna and his great disciple Arjuna! Jai Vyasa for the wisdom in this Gita!

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