

Introduction to the Bhagavad Gita

A Practical Guide to Spiritual Transformation

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the world's most read and ancient scriptures. It is a story of a conversation between a reluctant warrior and his charioteer, Arjuna and Krishna. What is revealed in this conversation is a universal yet practical wisdom that can speak to us even now. It answers the questions Who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose of life? and How do I live and act? It shows us how to convert our day-to-day life into a spiritual practice and a means of transformation.

Modern Spirituality

Mankind is entering a new era. The emphasis is on Truth consciousness rather than on material consciousness. Material prosperity is no longer granting the peace and stability which man needs so urgently. Man is becoming aware of something beyond matter. This "something" may be referred to as Truth, God, or Divine.

The Gita's Path

The Bhagavad Gita is for the seers that are here in the world now, who, due to lack of guidance and true teachers, do not know they are seers. What is a seer? It is one who is awakened. One who can experience the soul or being within. This Gita is their guide to the eternal path. It defines the goal and each step of the journey in practical terms. This new interpretation provides the technique for man to discover the path to perfection, to fully manifest the divine in their lives. Gita is not just a scripture but is a path of "integral" transformation. This unique interpretation does not compel man to surrender his intellect to any teacher or belief system. Rather this approach puts the emphasis on the use of intelligence, the discriminating intellect, as the first tool of this path. Self-inquiry and contemplation are the means that one integrates the understanding with the experience of one's own life; this is wisdom.

The Bhagavad Gita is not a religion or a system of beliefs. Study of the Gita enhances one's existing religious or spiritual practice, it is not a substitute for these. Rather it is something one can experience directly through one's own life. This interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita was revealed to Swami Sri Atmananda, who provides us with this unique and relevant interpretation of the Gita. This interpretation is a practical spirituality; a spirituality that can be lived day-to-day in a modern world. Yet this path is as ancient as man himself, it is the eternal wisdom, the eternal scripture.

The Battlefield

This interpretation treats the entire human system as a battlefield. The human system is defined to show how each component plays a role in our lives. This knowledge allows us to separate the soul in us from the rest of our system. Arjuna, a warrior represents the awakened seeker. Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer, and his spiritual guide represent the culmination of the Gita. The battle described in the Gita does not refer to a historical or mythological battle, but to a battle between the soul and man's lower nature. Hidden in the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna the process of transformation is described. One comes to understand that their true nature is something other than the body, mind, or intellect. When this distinction is understood then one can begin to separate, or detach, themselves from their lower nature, from

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the incessant demands and entanglement of the body, mind and intellect. Thus begins a process of living life in conformity with the truth. This is the first step of the journey.

Three Steps to the Goal

The goal of the Bhagavad Gita is to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine on earth. There are three steps to that goal. The first step is Self-realization; one becomes the individual Soul. The second step is God-realization; one becomes the universal Soul. And the third step is Manifestation; one manifests their realization in the world.

Three Stages in the Process

The goals of the Bhagavad Gita are attained through a process. This process has three stages. The first is understanding the Truth, second is knowing the Truth and the third is realizing the Truth in life, mind, and body. Each of us, through this process, transforms the world about us. This is the secret principle of the Gita.

1. Understanding

The Gita introduces one to the truth; that which lasts, which is, in fact, the eternal, unchangeable Soul. It is the most real and most intimate part of us, and thus the easiest to overlook. The problem we think we are the body, the mind, the intellect and we are constantly being distracted by outer life. It's a problem of misidentification and attachment. The way out is through intelligent discrimination and becoming detached. How to do this? First, understand the facts. The purpose of life is to know ourselves, our true nature, the Soul. When we live for just ourselves we are miserable, when we live for others we are happy. Desires are insatiable, they always demand more. Their happiness is temporary. The more one gives, the less selfish and attached to desires, fear and anger one becomes. When one knows the Soul, one experiences peace and fulfillment.

2. Experiencing

Understanding leads to experiencing. It is not an easy phase; to experience one must be ready to change. The more one experiences the Soul the more one is detached from the outer life and the desires have less of a hold on us. The more this change becomes possible, a transformation occurs. As an adolescent loses interest in the toys of childhood and the adult in the passions of adolescence, we too move on. When one surrenders to the process it becomes effortless, a natural process. We become calm. The more one experiences the Soul, the more calm one becomes. Calmness becomes a deep quiet, quiet leads to peace, and peace leads to bliss. At each stage we become naturally detached from our old lives, our desires and fears and more identified with our true nature. The more detached we become the less the outer world distracts us and the more and more we become identified with what we are experiencing, the Soul. Now we can begin to directly experience the understanding of the Gita in our lives. It all becomes clear.

3. Realizing

Eventually understanding and experiencing lead to realization. This is when the light descends. The understanding and experiencing combine to create this state of "seeing" the truth. This is when the wisdom manifests in our lives. We see what Gita has been telling us as real, something that has been part of our lives all along. This is

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wisdom directly experienced and practical. It is knowledge of the Soul and the mechanism of bondage.

The Final Step

When the seeker has realized the Truth he rises beyond his own individual nature, transcends the forces that drive the world which are his universal nature and becomes free from ignorance and bondage. One has become the universal Soul as a stable and continuous realization and now one descends to the world to manifest it. This is the process of manifesting the Truth in life. It is an extraordinary stage. This is the final step, an utterly natural state, without effort, grief, confusion or fear, a state of unimaginable delight. This is called the supreme Divine state.

Who is The Gita meant for?

The Gita is meant for every spiritual person with a sincere aspiration for the truth. Whether one thinks he is a seeker or a seer, it makes little difference. Ultimately the paramount goal of a person who has discovered himself to be spiritual is to be one with the Divine. The purpose life is to fulfill this aspiration. When all these are finally fulfilled, one experiences aspiration for the truth. This is the desire of the Soul, the purpose of creation. Every man and woman, whether they are aware of it or not, is Divine and every human soul has a mission to manifest that divinity.

Conclusion

The entry into the spiritual path is not an easy one for most of us. It starts by throwing our lives into turmoil and anguish. The tendency is very strong to run away but this would be an error. If we don't run away and if we stay the course, what arises is the aspiration to find out what is happening to us. This throws us into a quest for something... what that is, we do not fully know at this point. It is this quest that takes us to the next step in the journey.