



The Gita For The Beginners

As you all are aware, The Bhagavad Gita ('The Gita' for short) is the essence of Upanishadic Teachings told for the welfare of humanity by Sri Krishna. Arjuna acted as the medium through which the Lord made available these pearls of wisdom to the whole world generation after generation.

The very fact that the Gita is still relevant today points to two interesting facts:

1. There must be some great Truth contained in it, and,
2. Unfortunately we still need the Gita, for most of us are yet to assimilate its essence in their life!

Historically speaking, Sri Krishna told The Gita to Arjuna at the beginning of the War of Mahabharata, or The War of Kurukshetra as it is known. The period can be put at 3200 BCE. Later Vyasa Rishi compiled these immortal words of 'perennial philosophy' into 700 verses grouped in eighteen chapters. Along with the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Brahma Sutras, the Gita is adored as the most important scripture of ancient India. We should not call it Hindu scripture because at the time of its birth there was no Hinduism, no Islam, no Christianity, no Buddhism, no Jainism, and no Sikhism! Therefore, it can be truly said to have universal relevance.

Metaphysically, the 'Song of God' is written in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna and his friend and disciple Arjuna. This Krishna is the Divine One, the 'Lord who abides within the heart of all beings'. He represents the basic Indian religious concept that all existence is a manifestation of God, and that God exists in all beings as the innermost Self. In every heart Sri Krishna is hidden, and when the veil of ignorance is withdrawn, we hear the very voice of God. In the Gita Sri Krishna openly declares Himself to be one with Brahman, the Infinite Self. Thus Sri Krishna as the historical personage has but a secondary importance.

And Arjuna, the disciple is typically human, being neither saint nor a sinner, but a struggling soul seeking to escape from grief and sorrow. He is a man of action, a fighter - a man living in the world, but confused as to his duty and true meaning and goal in life. Like many of us he is eager to find a way to peace and freedom.

What does the Gita contain?

According to swami Ranganathananda: "The Gita summarizes the essential teachings of Vedanta and presents them in a popular manner. That is why it has become the scripture of the vast masses in India (and now also abroad!). When we study the Gita, we are not merely studying Upanishadic philosophy, but also the ethical implications of that philosophy."

It provides ethical guidance with reference to our everyday life. And lastly, the Gita for the first time introduces the concept of four Yogas, to name - Jnana, Dhyana, Karma, and Bhakti to realize higher truth in our life.

The Gita: Chapter I

The conflict between righteous Pandavas and non-righteous Kauravas reached the point of no return. The injustice done to the five Pandavas and their lone wife Draupadi by the Kaurava prince Duryodhana crossed all limits of toleration. Lord

Krishna who was always on the side of Dharma - righteousness - pleaded with the King Dhritarashtra and his son Duryodhana to avoid the war at any cost. The statesman Krishna advocated peace by encouraging the Kauravas to grant the Pandavas their legitimate right over half of the kingdom of Hastinapur.

But, no! The war of Mahabharata (or Kurukshetra) was destined to follow.

It is such a dramatic setting that we get as a start to The Gita. The brave warrior Arjuna with Lord Krishna as his charioteer are standing between the two arrayed armies ready to start the battle. Duryodhana on one side and Krishna-Arjuna on the other! However, King Dhritarashtra, father of Kauravas, was blind and hence unable to witness the actual war. Therefore, by the grace of the Lord, special power to visualize the warfront was conferred on his minister Sanjaya.

The Gita opens with the first verse when King Dhritarashtra inquires of Sanjaya: "O Sanjaya, having assembled in the battlefield, what did my sons and the sons of Pandu do?"

It is obvious that two armies assemble to fight! But King Dhritarashtra had a faint hope and wish that the war should be averted. For he knew on whatever side Sri Krishna was that side was sure to win. But such reason and wisdom was covered by his infatuation and love for Duryodhana. As with any worldly father King Dhritarashtra was also attached to his sons, and hence even though he knew they were wrong in denying Pandavas their legitimate right, he could not resist the temptation of siding with "my sons" even though wrong!

To the inquiry by King Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya describes the situation on the battleground. The two armies were arrayed opposite one another. On the Kaurava side there were Bhishma, Guru Drona, Krupacharya, Karna and many more brave and powerful generals, and on the side of Pandavas were Sri Krishna, Arjuna, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Drupad, and others.

Duryodhana, boasting of his superiority in numbers (out of 1.8 million soldiers 1.1 millions were on Kaurava side and 0.7 million were on the side of Pandavas), predicted easy defeat and fall of Pandava army.

Here Arjuna and his brothers had also come well prepared for the war and its consequences. No one comes to the battlefield for fun and compromises. For only when all avenues fail the war is declared. Thus Arjuna was well aware that he has come to kill/defeat his cousin brothers and relatives, and win his legitimate right to half the kingdom.

But, now occurs the episode where Arjuna, the great and brave warrior, finds himself suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling of mental depression, grief, and fear, for he realizes that he has to fight with his close relatives - brothers, uncles, and Teachers - present as his enemies. Arjuna is greatly disturbed about the outcome of the war; destruction and death that was sure to follow. He thought it 'prudent' to retire to forest rather than kill his own near and dear ones.

Trembling with nervousness and anxiety, unable to lift his mighty bow - *Gandiva* - he pleads to escape from the consequences of the war. His emotions of love for the near ones, his concepts of duty and Dharma, all appear to be confusing to himself. He is unable to determine the correct approach in this piquant situation of grave urgency and emergency. And as such, Arjuna lays down his arms to retire at the back of his chariot.

Superficially to us, Arjuna's dejection, depression, confusion, and fear to engage in the war may appear justified. For, we also would say the same things in a similar situation. Out of fear and cowardice such thoughts arise, but Arjuna like us tries to justify his turning away from the war. He appears to be possessed with pity and kindness for his relatives! He tries to paint the horrific picture of bloodshed, death and destruction. Moreover, Arjuna also tries to paint the ill effects of such destruction on the purity of widowed women. The victorious would taint the purity of women folk and thus impure races would come into existence. Escaping the war and turning to the life of *sanyasa* can avert this further decline of Dharma and culture, he says.

Therefore, he appeals to Sri Krishna, "O Keshava, even for sovereignty of the three worlds, I do not want to kill Kauravas and my relatives, though they may kill me. Then how can there be any desire for this kingdom on the earth?" (Chapter 1, verse 35).

Chapter II

Just when we would expect Sri Krishna to sympathize with Arjuna on his sorrowful state of mind full of "kindness and pity for others", Lord Krishna knowingly laughs at the behavior of Arjuna saying: "Arjuna, how has this infatuation overtaken you at this odd hour? Yield not to unmanliness, ill does it become to you. Shaking off this paltry faint-heartedness arise, O scorcher of your enemies." (Ch. 2, verse 2, 3)

Thus Lord Krishna gives a dose of tonic to his beloved friend and disciple. These right words of courage, duty, and most importantly strength were essential for Arjuna to come to his senses. But still Arjuna relents, and pleads: "How shall I fight Bhishma Pitamaha and my Guru Drona with arrows? They are both objects of reverence, O Madhava. It is better to live on alms without slaying these noble elders, because even after killing them we shall only enjoy blood-stained pleasures in the form of wealth and sense-enjoyment." (Ch. 2, verses 4 and 5)

But seeing no response from Sri Krishna, Arjuna now understands that without Sri Krishna's help and advice he cannot solve this dilemma! Therefore, he says: "I am a victim of faint-heartedness and my mind is puzzled with regard to duty. Therefore O Lord, please tell me what is good for me. I am your disciple, pray instruct me for I have taken refuge in you." (Ch. 2, verse 7).

Thus, praying to the Lord, Arjuna again kept silent saying 'I will not fight'. How and what Sri Krishna tells Arjuna now is very important because from here starts the real Gita.

Sri Krishna says, "O Arjuna, you grieve over those who should not be grieved for, and yet speak like the learned Pundit! Wise men do not sorrow over the dead or the living." (2/verse 11)

Why does the Lord say not to feel sorry for the men - dead or alive? In our daily life we are elated when our near and dear ones excel in some endeavor or gain success in some field of activity, competition, or achievement. This all pleases us while their failure makes us unhappy. Similarly, new arrival in the family is celebrated with jubilation and parties, while death in the family is mourned as a sad blow and irreparable loss. Similar emotions filled the heart of Arjuna, and this appears to be normal to us. We may not be able to fathom the metaphysics behind the teachings of Sri Krishna.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to understand why the Lord laughed at seemingly sensible arguments of Arjuna; and, moreover, most importantly we should try to understand the reasons put forth by Sri Krishna in favor of his arguments to justify that the grief of Arjuna was misplaced and ill founded.

The verses 12 to 30 of chapter second, therefore, form the theoretical basis of the Gita. They give us the highest philosophical truths about our true nature. These verses, if understood correctly, lead us to highest knowledge, and free us from anxiety, stress, and depression so much prevalent in today's society. It is equally important to understand one more thing. Even if you at present do not understand the deep metaphysical truths contained in the exposition of the subject in the Gita (and Upanishads as well), do not lose heart. Just accept them as Truth on the basis of faith. Gradually, with proper reasoning, spiritual practices, and the Grace of the Lord everyone is sure to have glimpse of this Truth contained in the gem-like words of Sri Krishna.

The reason why Sri Krishna tells Arjuna not to grieve for Kauravas is that no one can be killed, for everyone is immortal souls and not the body! The verse 12 says, "There was never a time when I was not or when you or these kings were not, nor is it a fact that hereafter we shall cease to be." It is difficult to accept and understand this verse, for it seems very obvious that when I die I shall cease to be, I will be no more! But the Lord says 'you shall never die!' You are immortal. How to reconcile these two opposing interpretations?

The illumination comes when we listen carefully to the words of Sri Krishna. He says what perishes is the body, and not the Self - Atman - which is the substratum of the reality of body. We are not the body mind complexes, but our true nature is eternal and imperishable Reality that is beyond body-mind compendium. It is all pervading, pure, blissful, and transcendental Consciousness, which the Upanishad call as Atman. And how can this deathless, birthless, ever lasting Atman can ever be annihilated, destroyed or killed! It is not affected in the least by the changes in the body and the mind.

In verses 14 and 15 Sri Krishna further says: " O Partha, the contacts between the senses and their sense objects, which give rise to feeling of heat and cold, of pleasure and pain, etc., are transitory and fleeting; therefore, O Arjuna, ignore them." And, "To the wise men, men of knowledge, pain and pleasure are alike, and the one who is not tormented by such contacts becomes eligible for immortality."

The mortal body has no real existence, or we may say that it has just phenomenal or relative existence, but the Real Inside this apparent worldly existence is the Atman, which never ceases to be, i.e. it is ever present -eternal. The reality of these two aspects is perceived by the wise man - rishis or seers of the Truth.

Further emphasizing the same truth Sri Krishna repeats, "The atman is imperishable, and it pervades the whole universe. It cannot be destroyed nor can anyone be destroyed by it. Weapons, heat, water, and wind all are helpless to cut it, burn it, drown it, or dry it. '*Tat Tvam Asi*', Thou Art That! Know that you are that Atman, O Arjuna.

To reinforce his teachings Sri Krishna describes the Nature of Atman. "As we discard old torn out garments and adore new ones so also this Atman leaves (gives up) old worn out body and takes up new bodies!" 2/22

How does the body become old or torn out? Our body has weaknesses in the form of six enemies - *shad ripus* - in the form of *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (infatuation), *mada* (pride), and *matsar* (jealousy). Due to attacks of these enemies our body constantly gets injured and worn out. Moreover, the eight snares bind it further; these are shame, hatred, fear, pride of one's caste, race etc. They erode our body-mind complex from within leading to its weakness and death. Not only this, our behavior also determines our health; non-righteous behavior weakens while righteous behavior strengthens us.

Non-righteous behavior makes us prone to be destroyed easily, and Kauravas were engaged in *adharma*, non-righteous behavior, they became weak and deluded from knowledge of Atman. As Pandavas were pure and righteous, they thereby became powerful and strong. The Lord always helps those who follow the right path.

There fore, whether Arjuna attacked them with his sharp arrows or not the weakened Kauravas were sure of doom and destruction. Hence the Lord says, "You can not kill anyone, nor can you save anyone. So do not grieve, know your true nature as Atman and with equanimity follow your Kshatriya duty to fight the war."

What will happen if Arjuna deviates from his duty? He would lose his reputation and invite undying infamy on himself. There is nothing more devastating than to incur infamy; it is worse than death. For centuries to come people would call Arjuna a coward who they would say had fled from the battlefield out of fear of death. 'Your enemies would speak many unbecoming words, which would put you to immense distress for the rest of life,' says Sri Krishna.

But, while performing your duty with full determination and concentration Arjuna would be either victorious and enjoy the legitimate rights as the king of this earth, or if you die on the battlefield what better death as a Kshatriya could he expect. Heaven would be your kingdom then!

Now Sri Krishna for the first time introduces the concept of Karma Yoga to prove his point. In the verse 39, He says, "O Arjuna, this attitude of mind has been presented to you from the point of Jnana or Samkhya Yoga; now hear the same as presented from the point of Karma Yoga or Yoga of selfless action. Equipped with attitude of mind you will be able to shake off completely the shackles of karma." 2/39

Arjuna was confused about the true nature of duty, karma, and action. Therefore, Sri Krishna tells him about the nature of karma and its effects, utility and limitations. The important point to note is that Sri Krishna emphasizes the fact that whether one follows path of knowledge or path of selfless action, the end result is the same. And what is the result? The person becomes a Yogi; he gains true knowledge of Self or Atman. In other words, what Sri Krishna is trying to convey to us is that our every effort by way of philosophical reasoning or way of activities (and we shall in chapter XII by way of devotion) is to attain to the statehood of Yoga. Thus the Gita is spoken of as Yoga Shastra -Treatise on Yoga - that imparts certain qualities to the aspirant who becomes fit to gain mastery over his mind and senses. This equanimity of mind is necessary to face the challenges in the life as well as for the progress on the royal path of Self-realization.

Thus, for the first time in the history of spirituality Lord Krishna opens up four paths for the humanity to seek highest Truth. These four paths are called Yoga -

to join our lower self to higher Self. To realize identity of Jiva (individual soul) and Shiva (Universal Soul) is Yoga. Even a small glimpse of this Truth makes person fearless. The path of disinterested action, of selfless work, makes intellect one pointed and subdues the ego. It makes the aspirant realize that desires in this world or higher worlds are not the goal in life. Rising above pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, etc., the person who keeping the mind completely under control tries to get established in Eternal Existence absolutely unconcerned about supply of want is true Yogi. Preservation of wealth and craving for name and fame etc. are of least concern for such a Yogi.

Then comes the most famous and oft-quoted verse: "Arjuna, your right is to work only, but never to the fruit thereof. Let not the fruit of action be your object (aim), nor let your attachment lead to inaction." 2/47 Further the Lord adds, "Arjuna, perform your duties dwelling in Yoga, relinquishing attachment, and indifferent to success and failure; equanimity is called Yoga." 2/48.

Karma Yoga is elaborated in the fifth part of this series. Hearing the word Yoga, Yogi, equanimity etc. Arjuna now puts a very relevant question to Sri Krishna. He asks: "Krishna, what is the mark of a God-realized soul, stable of mind, and established in samadhi - perfect tranquility of mind? How does such a person of stable mind (stoic, sthitaprajna) speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?" 2/54

In short, Arjuna wants to know the characteristics of a Yogi established in highest state of realization. The word used is sthitaprajna - one who is established in firm knowledge. As an answer, now Sri Krishna explains the features of a stoic person of knowledge: "Arjuna, when one thoroughly abandons all cravings of the mind and is satisfied in the self through the joy of Self, then that person is called stable of mind." 2/55

In whom all the hankering after sense pleasure has disappeared, and one who is free from passion, fear, and anger such a person is called stable of mind. One whose mind does not react to good or evil, one who is unattached to the outcome is said to have stable mind. And giving one example the Lord says, "Like a tortoise, which draws in its limbs from all directions, the man of stable mind withdraws his senses from the sense objects." 2/58

Yet the sthitaprajna state is not the supreme state, because although external sense objects cease for him and he does not enjoy with his senses, yet taste or desire for them might persist in his mind. This desire to relish mentally must disappear, and this occurs only when one experiences the Supreme Atman.

Therefore, Lord Krishna warns that just to forcibly break oneself from external sense cravings is not enough; one must control the mind to erase all the desires of sense pleasure as well. The freedom should be in thought, words, and deeds!

"As the waters of different rivers enter the ocean, which though full on all sides remains undisturbed, likewise in whom all enjoyments merge themselves without disturbing his mental state, he attains peace. And not one who externally or internally hankers after such sense enjoyments." 2/70

The senses are very powerful and turbulent by nature, and they forcibly carry away the mind of even a wise man practising self-control. Therefore, by controlling the senses one should sit for meditation devoting his whole mind and heart completely to the Highest Truth.

Thus, in the Upanishad sung by the Lord, the science of Brahman, the scripture on Yoga, the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna ends the second chapter entitled "Samkhya Yoga" (the Yoga of Knowledge).

It is a question of priority and emphasis on the basis of which the great thinkers saw Advaita Vedanta, Vishishtha Advaita (qualified monism), or Dvaita Vedanta (duality) as the principal teaching of the Gita. Thus, Acharya Shankara propounded the theory of that the Gita teaches nothing but pure Advaita, and the only course left to us to access higher knowledge is renunciation and Jnana. On the other hand, Acharya Ramanuja and Madhva emphasized the path of devotion, and separateness of individual soul - Jiva - and higher Soul Paramatman.

Similarly, although all the four paths are mentioned in the Gita, some emphasize Jnana, while others lay stress on karma or devotion and surrender (bhakti). Modern thinkers like Tilak and Vinobha Bhave saw Karma Yoga as the main teaching of the Gita that surely inspired many people during Indian Independence Movement.

Therefore, it is very important to understand at whose holy feet one learns the teachings of this great scripture. Depending upon inclination and preferences of the Teacher the aspirants may derive differing meanings from the same verses. This does not, however, in any way dampen the spirit of the Gita. It continues to inspire thousands of people and would continue to do so in future as well. It is up to us to come to the level where at least a single verse becomes fully applicable in our life, and we experience the truth therein.

Chapter III: Karma yoga

The third chapter entitled "Karma Yoga" contains 43 verses. It opens up with an interesting question by Arjuna. He is perturbed to listen to the two currents to seek higher knowledge in life, one the path of knowledge, and the other, the path of selfless action. Arjuna feels that Sri Krishna is suggesting him to follow the path of knowledge, the better of the two.

Therefore, intrigued Arjuna asks, "O Keshava, if you consider knowledge as superior to actions, why then do you urge me to engage in this dreadful action (of fighting war)?" Arjuna further clarifies, "Krishna, you are puzzling my mind, therefore, tell me definitely the one discipline by which I may obtain the highest good!" 3/1-2

Still in the heart of the heart, Arjuna felt that Sri Krishna would relent and accept the plea of Arjuna to the ways of renunciation so that he could escape from involvement in the war. Sensing the weakness and perplexity in the mind of his disciple to escape from the difficult duty that involved hard decisions and unpalatable actions, Sri Krishna answers, "Man does not attain freedom from action without entering upon action, nor does he reach perfection (enlightenment) merely by renunciation of action." "The very birth as human drives the soul to action by nature-born qualities. Surely none can remain inactive even for a moment." 3/4-5

Just by outward restraint of senses or giving up of sense activities the man just deludes his intellect and becomes a hypocrite. On the other hand, one who engages in selfless actions, truly understanding the Yoga of Action, actually gets clarity and concentration of mind that is known as purification of mind. This purified mind clears the reason and allows the aspirant to intuitively realize higher truth.

"Therefore, O Arjuna, you perform your allotted duty; for action is superior to inaction. Desisting from action, you cannot even maintain your body." 3/8

Only those karmas bound the man in their shackle as are performed with the desire to gain something out of them. On the other hand, when one performs the work as yajna - sacrifice - dedicating all the fruits and results to the Lord, then in fact he becomes free from attachment and turns towards the path of Yoga. Therefore, 'O Arjuna, perform the allotted duty most efficiently and only in the spirit of sacrifice unto Me'.

In the subsequent verses of third chapter (verses 9 to 15) the Lord explains the necessity for an average person to go through the 'wheel of creation' for becoming selfless bit by bit. Sri Krishna posits two kinds of people, one virtuous and the other sinful. It is also explained how the 'journey of evolution' takes the person to final destiny. Thus, it is expected of every person to give something he possesses to others, e.g. his food to others. He should not enjoy without offering some part of his wealth to God as an act of sacrifice.

Thus, every person is bound by individual and collective obligations, which we call as duties. He cannot avoid them without harming himself and the society. Then is there no escape from the tortuous wheel of samsara? How can one rise above this grinding wheel of birth, duty and death! To this Sri Krishna says, "O Arjuna, he who takes delight in the Self alone and is gratified with the Self, and is contented in the Self that person has no duty." "That great person has no use whatsoever for things done, nor for things not done; nor has he selfish dependence of any kind on any creature." 3/17-18

Then why work? The question repeatedly haunts us. Why should we not take non-attachment as freedom from duty/work? The reasons the Lord gives are:

1. Doing work without attachment leads to Supreme Goal, for efficiency in work itself is Yoga.
2. Having an eye to maintenance of world order, too, one should take to action,
3. Whatsoever a great man does that very thing other men also do, whatever standard he sets up the generality of them follow the same. 3/21
4. Arjuna, as the unwise act with attachment, so should the wise men seeking maintenance of world order act without attachment. 3/25

In this insistence on duty, one should not confuse others, nor is there any need to force our thoughts on others. It is not proper to unsettle the mind of ignorant attached to action; what is required is efficient performance of our duty surrendering to the wishes of the Lord. To become better instrument through which the Lord would work! Therefore, the Lord advises Arjuna to dedicate all his actions to me with mind fixed on Me (the Self of all -Paramatman), freed from egoism and cured of mental weaknesses.

Then Arjuna asks, "O Krishna, impelled by what, does this human being commit sin even involuntarily, as though driven by force?" 3/36

And the Lord answers, "All beings follow their nature, even the wise man behaves in conformity with his nature. The three *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* - in themselves are responsible for all actions including thoughts and desires. Therefore, just restraining the senses is not enough. It is necessary to follow our own nature and duty, which is an easy way to subdue the mind. Although it may appear that the others are well placed and are free from anxiety and worries, it may not be suitable for you!

Moreover, as every flame is enveloped by smoke, so also knowledge is covered smoke of desires. This insatiable desire - *vasana* - is the great enemy of man. "The senses, the mind, and the intellect are said to be its seat; enveloping knowledge through these, the desire deludes the person." Therefore, the Lord forcefully and clearly says, "O Arjuna, first control the senses and kill this wicked desire, which obscures Jnana (knowledge). The order of control should be senses, mind, and then intellect, thereby making way to transcend them to reach the Highest Self.

The essence of Karma Yoga is the creation of this ability through non-attachment of overcoming desires. This process is known as purification of mind.

Chapter IV

This chapter throws light on the meaning of Karma Yoga and expounds the inter link between Jnana and Karma. Thus the chapter is titled as "Jnana-Karma-Sannyasa Yoga". It is obvious that the Lord wants us to reach Him through whatever philosophical denomination one may subscribe!

Whether you want to acquire Knowledge, make it Yoga, if you want to renounce karma, make it Yoga. If you want to acquire something make it Yoga, if you want to renounce something make it a Yoga. If you are dejected convert the emotion into Yoga, if you are elated, make it Yoga!

The Lord gradually takes his disciple to higher orbit of knowledge by two means:

- 1) By repeating what has already been said in the earlier three chapters, and
- 2) By adding new concepts and explanations of Yoga to reach the Higher Self.

This chapter also explains the meaning and necessity of Avatar - Incarnation.

Thus, in the beginning the Lord says,

"I taught this immortal Yoga to Sun-god (Vivashwan), he conveyed it to Manu, and Manu in turn imparted this knowledge to his son - Ikshwaku."

"Thus this Yoga is very ancient and is known to great sages including Royal sages - Rajarshis. In the flux of time, however, it remained in dark for sometime. Today I am telling you, O Arjuna, the same old Yoga - eternal and immortal - because you are my devotee and friend."

Now, Arjuna, who up till now thought Krishna to be an ordinary mortal human being, is puzzled to know what the Lord told him! Therefore, surprised, he says, "O Krishna, you are recently born, while Sun-god and Manu are very ancient. How, then, am I to understand that you taught the Yoga at the beginning of creation!"

To this the lord calmly replies, "O Arjuna, You and I have taken many births, but while you forgot all the past lives, I remember them and know them all."

And for the first time the Lord reveals His true nature to us through Arjuna, saying, "Though unborn and immortal, and also the Lord of all beings - Paramatman- I manifest Myself through my own Yoga Maya (Divine Potency - Shakti)." And one of the greatest verses of the Gita, which is the basis of all Hindu thoughts, is now said, "Arjuna, whenever there is decline of dharma - righteousness - and unrighteousness (adharma) is on the rise, then I incarnate Myself". [Ch. 4/verse 7] For what?

"For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evil-doers, and for re-establishing Dharma on a firm footing, I am born from age to age, in every age."
[Ch. 4/verse 8]

Theory of incarnation of God

We have already seen that Lord Krishna has introduced the concept of Divine Incarnation. Under certain circumstances, of declining Dharma (and every age will have such a phase of decline) God incarnates Himself under the power of His Yoga Maya to guide the virtuous - sadhakas -- to realize higher consciousness.

One might be confused at the difficulty of explaining the formless Reality - Brahman - taking form as a Divine Incarnation. How can formless take form? And if this were true, why and how can It remain formless? This contradiction is the most important stumbling block in our understanding of Vedanta philosophy. To overcome this dilemma, based on their direct experience of the Reality the seers of the Truth - rishis - who were philosophers as well (e.g. Kapila Muni) interpreted and expounded the Gita on three main lines, viz. 1) Dualism, 2) Qualified Monism, and 3) Advaita Monism.

All the three currents are included under the heading of Vedanta. While dualism accepts separateness of God and individual soul (Shiva and Jiva, Narayana and Nara), according to qualified monism this entire universe is modification of One all pervading Principle - Brahma, Self, Atman.

Lastly, the Advaita Vedanta (chiefly of Shankara) proclaims that there is only one Reality in the form of Absolute Consciousness, which was never modified, is not modified now, and will never be modified in future. This eternal never changing reality without form or attribute only apparently appears as this world of multiplicity (Maya or Illusory).

One can interpret the Gita on the basis of all three concepts! As we are still attached to our body and mind, and this world appears real to us, we may take 'qualified monism' as our starting point. It is better to think oneself as a spark of that Divine potentially capable of transcendental journey to know and experience the Absolute through Yoga. Let us, as a sadhaka, elevate ourselves to the level of Arjuna so that we may also understand and realize what Sri Krishna has to say, teach, and preach.

It must be made very clear that Sri Krishna of the Gita is the Highest Reality (Paramatman), which has embodied itself as an avatara to give impetus to our efforts to seek higher goals in life. Sri Krishna is Highest Consciousness to which every aspirant should strive to reach. In this process our own consciousness transcends the limitations of body and senses, and we become one with Reality, Sri Krishna of the Gita.

According to the aptitude and qualifications people are divided into various categories and any one of them if follows his/her path of duty rightly reaches to the knowledge of God. The Lord emphasizes that as He has no craving for the fruit of actions don't contaminate Him.

Those who perform actions with this firm belief and expertise also reach nearer Self. Hence, O Arjuna, so do you also perform your duty as demanded of you.

To know that the life and teachings of an avatara is divine is to become free. The attraction between the seeker and the sought is like a magnet and the iron needle. As sadhaka approaches God, so does God get attracted to the aspirant!

But it may be difficult to understand which is right action, which action is inaction, and which action is prohibited action? Hence the Lord explains the series of actions, which lead to right knowledge.

The wise men do not indulge in worldly actions, which the ignorant think to be correct. Thus, hankering after wealth and fame, engaging in the pleasures of senses and mind should in fact be seen as inaction, and hence shunned. While yoga, meditation, and actions enjoined by scriptures, although appear as inaction, in fact are right actions that lead to supreme knowledge.

Secondly when a person is totally satisfied with minimum and necessary actions alone and is not attached to the outcome also does not incur sin. While engaged in work, he who does not crave, who is free from all pairs of opposites like love and hate, pleasure and pain etc., such a man is true Karma Yogi.

One who sees the same Brahman in the performer of action, the instrument of action, and the object of action, such a Yogi has gained true wisdom. The actions may be sacrifices (yajna), meditation, yoga, swadhyaya (self study) involving austerities, tapas, and concentration of mind, or the action may be fighting a war. The same rule and results would ensue.

Chapter V

The fifth chapter again opens up with Arjuna putting the same question to Krishna: O Lord, You extol Samkhya Yoga (Yoga of Knowledge) and then the Yoga of Action. Pray tell me which of the two is decidedly better."

To this the Lord replies, "Arjuna, Both the Yoga lead to Supreme Bliss. Of the two, however, the Yoga of Action, being easier to practice, is superior to the Yoga of Knowledge."

Moreover, a karma Yogi can also be equated with a sannyasin, because in the process of selfless action the aspirant overcomes the pairs of opposites like love and hate, pleasure and pain, and also becomes free from jealousy and desires. Thus he also becomes the 'renouncer', a sannyasin. While living in the world he is not of the world.

Therefore, a person of true knowledge does not differentiate between the two yogas; for a firmly established yogi of any path gets the same result of God Realization. Additionally, even the sannyasin following the path of knowledge initially has to cross the barrier of actions, and thus yoga of action is a prerequisite for every spiritual aspirant.

Karma Yoga is indeed very effective in purification of mind and controlling the senses. In the process the karmas -actions - of the Yogi gradually fall off. This attitude of non-attachment and offering the fruits of actions to the Lord saves the Karma Yogi from the cycle of repeated birth and death. He becomes a wise man and there comes a stage when his vision becomes equanimous, seeing same Lord in a high caste Brahmin, a low caste chandala, or in an elephant and a cow!

Therefore, O Arjuna, get merged in the right actions with right attitude. In due course, even though you are engaged in actions, these actions would not bind you. There would be no difference between you and a sannyasin!

Chapter VI

Chapter 6th contains 47 verses and is titled as "Yoga of Self Control". Continuing the discussion from the previous chapter, the Lord says, "He who does his duty without expecting fruit of action is a Jnana Yogi as well as karma Yogi. He is not sannyasin who has renounced externally (by wearing ochre robe) but internally his mind is full of desires.

Similarly one cannot be labeled a Yogi who has just given up actions but has become a lazy fellow." Ch. 6/1. In next few verses Sri Krishna tries to convince Arjuna to become a true Yogi by instilling virtues like dispassion, equanimity, and meditation. This all is possible, and indeed desirable of Arjuna (and people like us), only through the practice of Karma Yoga. The outcome is equally glorious and god realization is the blessed end of both on the path of Jnana and Karma.

The Lord explains the means and methods to become a Yogi. "When a man ceases to have any attachment either for objects of senses or for actions, and has renounced all thoughts of the world, he is said to have attained Yoga." ch. 6/4

For this one should discriminate between right and wrong and lift oneself up. One should not degrade oneself by thinking oneself to be weak; for one's own self is one's best friend in strength, and in weak and low thoughts one's enemy.

One's own self is one's friend when lower self (senses, mind and body) is conquered; but becomes enemy when lower self rules the mind and intellect. How to achieve this? Sri Krishna advises, 'by meditation and control of mind'. The Lord also gives certain instructions for doing meditation. (It is not necessary that we should follow the same instructions. Those who want to meditate should seek instructions from a qualified living Guru.)

The Lord says, "Sit on a mat with grass, deerskin, and a cotton coverings. Sit straight; spine and back should be erect. Concentrate on the tip of the nose in this posture and meditate on the bliss of Supreme Being, i.e. Atman. The aspirant should follow brahmacharya (sexual abstinence) and should be fearless. He should not fast nor should he eat too much. It applies to sleep and other routine daily activities. They should be simple and without torture to body or mind.

Restraining the restless and fidgety mind from all those objects after which it runs, he should repeatedly concentrate it on God. Ch. 6/26

What is the result? The aspirant is raised to the level of a Yogi and he enjoys the perfect peace of mind and body. He realizes the Truth of One God (The Self) in all beings, and sees all beings in the Self.

Now it is Arjuna's turn to ask, "O Krishna, it all is well said, but this mind is restless like the monkey and as difficult to control as the wind. What should one do?"

To this Lord Krishna responds, "O Arjuna, indeed the mind is very difficult to bring under control. But with repeated practice (of meditation and other spiritual disciplines) and by dispassion it is possible to control the mind." Therefore, O Arjuna, remain unattached to the outcome of your actions and try to focus the mind on ME.

Then Arjuna, as if on our behalf puts very practical query to the Lord. "O Madhava, please tell me what is the fate of those who 'though endowed with faith in You, have not been able to subdue their passions, and whose minds are therefore diverted from the path of Yoga - failing to achieve perfection in Yoga (God Realization).'"

Does such a person who has partially striven to realize You perish like a torn cloud deprived of both - Your Grace and worldly enjoyment?

Reassuring though the merciful Lord answers, "Dear Arjuna, there is no fall for him, neither here or hereafter. For, none who works for realization of Self meets with an evil destiny." (Ch. 6/40) Such a soul who has fallen from Yoga, having enjoyed the higher worlds, takes birth in the house of pious and wealthy men, or a man of dispassion is born into the hut of a great Yogi, to continue his spiritual austerities and practices. He strives with greater vigour supported by meritorious deeds of the past lives.

The Yogi is superior to ascetic, jnani, and the person involved in karma with motives; therefore, O Partha, you become a Yogi. (End of ch. 6.)

Chapter VII

This chapter contains 30 verses and deals with the concepts of manifest and non-manifest Brahman. In the first verse, the Lord is gracious enough to volunteer His Real Nature. He wants to impart the knowledge of both Absolute Brahman without attributes and qualifications - nirguna Brahman; as well as Brahman with attributes and form - saguna Brahman. The lord says, "I shall impart that knowledge having known which nothing else remains to be known in this world." Further he says to Arjuna, "O dear, out of thousands aspirants a rare soul strives to realize Me, and amongst these an occasional Yogi knows Me in Reality."

First the Lord explains the basis of saguna Brahman, manifest as universe. The eight fold qualifications, - viz. earth, water, air, fire, ether, mind, intellect, and ego - are the constituent parts of this manifest world. But there is a higher reality as Absolute Consciousness (which the Lord calls as ME), which is the only sentient Being and the substratum of all these eight fold qualifications.

The entire manifest universe is born out of combination of Prakriti and Purusha. In fact, there can be nothing; all qualifications would be superfluous, if Absolute Consciousness is not behind them. 'Like the continuous thread of consciousness I run through the garland of these eightfold attributes.'

"I am the 'wateriness' of water, the light of sun and the moon, I am the basis of sacred syllable Om in Vedas, I am the purity in life, and austerities of the Yogis. Know Me as the eternal seed of all beings. I am intelligence of the intelligent,

power of the mighty, and virtuous desires in all. Thus the whole universe is sustained because of My Power."

Then, why such differences as sorrow and hatred, terror and destruction? Love and compassion, happiness and joy!

The Lord answers, "The Prakriti or Nature consists of three gunas -constituent parts - named sattva, rajas, and tamas. The qualities of goodness, purity, and revelation is related to sattva, principle of actions and passion is rajas, and tamas is the principle of inertia, delusion and ignorance.

The three gunas sattva rajas and tamas emanate from the Principle of Pure Consciousness, but they never affect IT. These three modes of nature in various permutations and combinations delude whole of mankind and keep them away from realization their True Self. The only way to overcome this ignorance is to join (unite) with the Lord by taking recourse to refuge (surrender, worship), Jnana, karma, or such Yoga.

Four types of men worship God, and all the four are virtuous.

1) The seeker of worldly objects and joy (prays: God please give me this, give that. I am poor; I need your blessings and grace.)

2) The Sufferer (In distress: Ill health, calamity, financial loss, danger to life, property, etc. Prays for cure, and protection etc.)

3) Seeker of Knowledge, curious to know the real nature of God, World, and self. (Does not ask for any material gains, but wants to know the Nature of Self. Thus prays for the knowledge.)

4) The man of wisdom - Yogi. (Wise man: Seeks only God's Grace and devotion. Does not hanker after anything. Wants to love God for the sake of love. Surrenders himself to the Highest Principle, for the yogi has understood Its Pure Nature. Man of perfected Knowledge!)

Of course, the best amongst these e four bhaktas (worshippers) is the last one, man of wisdom. The Lord says, 'The Yogi is one with me, but such a great soul is rare indeed.' Secondly, says the Lord, 'Because of ignorance born out of desires, people worship various gods. However, knowingly, I stabilize the faiths of such devotees in their respective beliefs. They do not worship the Ultimate Truth (ME) because some of their desires are yet to be fulfilled. I have no objection to such worship, but know Arjuna, even the fruits of such misguided worship are granted by me!'

However, such gains are temporary; after enjoying them such men have to take birth again and again in this cycle of samsara. Only in the last birth one understands the meaning of true worship and devotion (surrender to ME as Supreme Truth). Having thus renounced the sense pleasures, and realized My true nature then the devotee escapes the painful cycles of birth and death.

Therefore, O Arjuna, remember I am not ordinary god; My real nature is Infinite Bliss-Knowledge-Consciousness. I embody Myself as Final Truth for you all. Veiled by Maya Shakti, I am not known to all and do not manifest my true nature to all. Hence ignorant do not recognize Me as 'the unborn and imperishable Supreme Spirit.

"They, who have taken refuge in Me, strive for final liberation to know Me as the Brahman, the infinite. They alone understand my manifold manifest and non-manifest nature and forms: a) *Adhibhuta* (related to matter -material form), b) *Adhidaiva* (related to incarnations and divine forms), c) *Adhiyajna* (non-manifest ultimate Reality -the Brahman).

Chapter VIII

In the last verse of chapter VII Lord Krishna had introduced three new words - *adhibhuta*, *adhidaiva*, and *adhiyajna* - which were new to Arjuna. Therefore, at the beginning of chapter VIII Arjuna inquires of Krishna, "O Lord, please tell me what is Brahman, What is adhyatma, and what is karma? Also let me know what is called adhibhuta, adhidaiva, and adhiyajna." Arjuna also wants to know how at the time of death a person of steadfast mind is to realize Highest Truth.

To these questions, the Lord replies that the Supreme indestructible or imperishable Principle of Consciousness is Brahman, while individual self is called adhyatma. The conditions and compulsions, which bring forth the existence of beings is called karma.

The name and form, which are sure to perish, are called adhibhuta, while what remains after name and form are removed is Brahman known as adhidaiva in those manifest forms. And lastly, the Lord Himself dwells as adhiyajna in every heart as the inner witness.

And very important and apparently simple solution to realize the God is given in the verse 5, when the Lord says, "He who departs from the body, thinking of me alone, even at the time of death, attains My State; there is no doubt about it."

This may appear too simplistic. We may say, "OK, I shall remember Him at the time of death. What is so difficult about it! It is a very easy way to Liberation!"

But this is not so simple as it appears. Because, one thinks of only those thoughts in which one's life is immersed. A lawyer would remember court cases, a doctor his success and failure in medical profession, a businessman is sure to be mentally busy in his accounts of loss and profit! An ordinary worldly man, like most of us are, would invariably be afraid of death and would think of security of his wife (spouse) and children. Insurance and taxes; car and bungalow, marriage and births, success and failure all crowd his/her mind at the time of final departure. God would be the last thing in his mind at that time of grief and fear.

What is the solution?

Thinking of whatever object one leaves the body at the time of death, that and that alone he attains, being over-absorbed in its thought. Generally, at the time of death, one is haunted by the thought of that object or tendency alone that has mostly engaged his mind during his lifetime. And as a rule, it is the predominating thought of this moment that determines his future destiny.

"Therefore, O Arjuna," says the Lord, "Think of Me at all times and fight. With mind and reason thus surrendered to Me, you will doubtless come to Me." ch. 8/7.

This is achieved by practice of Yoga, meditation, and contemplation right from the early age! This is very important; one must take to spiritual disciplines from the

very young age itself when the mind is pure and not affected by delusory effect of lust and greed. Celibacy, truthfulness, non-injuring others, non-covetousness, non-jealousy simplicity and similar virtues should be inculcated in our character to seek realization of higher Self, the Supreme Truth.

"Such souls, who have attained highest perfection, having come to me are no more subjected to rebirth, which is the abode of sorrow and is of transitory nature."

All those who do not reach the final Destiny of knowing Me, even though religious and virtuous, have to come back to earth again and again to attain Final Liberation. Thus, charity, selfless work, and austerities are the means to the ends, and not end in themselves. This is because they are still in the field of Prakriti; it is the transcendental journey beyond the three-fold nature of Prakriti - viz. sattva rajas, and tamas, that leads the sadhaka to get established in the Highest Truth.

People with selfless motives, non-attachment and desire for total renunciation come to Me. while people of actions with motives to get something go to heaven and higher worlds. After spending their gains they have to born again on the earth to complete the forward journey.

Chapter IX

The chapter IX is an important stage in the elucidation of the perennial philosophy of eternity of Atman, as well as identity of Atman and Paramatman. In this chapter the Lord elaborates subtlety and nuances of Vedantic thought that goes to prove that all the stages from the realization of "God with Form" (Sakara Brahman) to the final stage of realization of "Eternal and Formless Consciousness" (Nirguna Brahman) are true.

Thus, Sri Krishna calls this knowledge as very sacred, and only the persons with sincerity, perseverance, sense-control, contemplation, and mediation can fathom its deep meaning. Therefore, it sometimes may appear as 'secret knowledge', accessible only to a few, but the true meaning should be taken as 'sacred knowledge'. Everybody is potentially equipped with the means to acquire the same.

In the first verse, the Lord says, "To you, O Arjuna, who are devoid of crookedness, I shall now unfold the knowledge of Nirguna Brahman and Sakara Brahman, knowing which you will be free from the evil of worldly existence." The lord continues: this is a sovereign science, sacred to its core, divine in its appeal, and beneficial to all. It is holy and should be guarded as a treasure. It is an excellent way to fulfill one's goal in life; it gives immense joy, and is attended by virtue lasting forever.

What is required is unshakable faith and honesty of purpose! That One Self permeates this whole world, as water in the ice. Although the ice has various forms its essence is none other than water, similarly this multifarious world of name and form has that Supreme Consciousness as the only substratum as their basis. He is the essence in them all.

Thus, those who cherish the manifest power forgetting the Supreme Self as the essence suffer from ignorance, like the person who is pleased only with counting the mango trees without tasting a single mango! The Maya Power of the Lord deludes people by not allowing them to realize the Truth of Self responsible for illumining the whole world. Purusha is the only sentient being, which is the

supervisor and sustainer of whole creation, both animate and inanimate. Not knowing this truth, people are caught in the dreadful wheel of samsara!

Most of us are deluded by the external world, and thus, thinking ourselves to be 'body-mind' complex we are engaged in worldly pursuit of gold and lust. Most of us live on vain hopes, perform futile actions, and boast of fruitless knowledge under the spell of nature, which is outwardly attractive but demonic and delusive at the core.

Fools we are, that we do not know the Supreme nature of Atman and thus, think low of even such great souls as Sri Krishna taking Him to be just ordinary human being. In fact, such rare souls as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Sri Ramakrishna etc. are the perfected embodiment of that Supreme Consciousness that incarnates on this earth to show us the path of true religion.

Lord Krishna here tries to tell Arjuna this great truth that God Incarnate and Absolute Consciousness both are true only when "God with form" is worshipped in its true spirit. It should be emphasized that conditions of renunciation, discrimination, and love for highest truth are indispensable for any kind of spiritual practice so as to reach and experience the state of Yoga and know the real nature of Atman.

Various forms of God are but the purer forms of manifest Reality, while as ordinary souls we have potentiality to express the divinity within us. In the state of divine achievement only we can experience the truth of God. Yoga means to attempt by one all means to reach and acquire that state.

After having introduced two paths, viz. of knowledge and of selfless action, now the Lord introduces the third and most simple path of devotion for the benefit of humanity. Thus the Lord says, "Constantly chanting my name and glories, striving to attain Me, and bowing again and again to Me, those devotees of firm resolve, even united with Me through meditation worship Me single-minded devotion." 9/14

Jnana Yogis betake themselves to Him through their offering of knowledge, worshipping God in His absolute and formless aspect as their very self. Still others worship the Lord in His universal form in many ways, taking Him to be diverse in diverse celestial forms (gods). But Sri Krishna is kind enough to reassure such devotees as well, "Arjuna, even those devotees who worship other gods in fact worship Me only, but such devotees are ignorant about this fact." 9/23

"Whosoever offers Me with love a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water I appear in person before that disinterested devotee of purified intellect, and delightfully partake of that article offered by him with love." 9/26

The Lord assures such kind and compassionate treatment towards all, including women, sinners, and low caste people. He assures to look after us in all our difficulties and distress, if we follow the path shown by Him and surrender to His wishes.

Chapter X

In the X chapter, the Lord sings the glory of those special beings that are best and most blessed with His Divine manifestation. After having told Arjuna about His True Nature as all pervading Consciousness and the basis of all that exists, Lord goes on to tell where to find Him most visibly in the manifest world.

In fact every virtue or vice, like discrimination, wisdom, sanity, forgiveness, truth, control over body and mind, joy and sorrow, evolution and dissolution, fear and fearlessness, violence and non-violence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame and disrepute, - these all diverse feelings of creatures emanate from the Lord alone.

To these wonderful utterances of the Lord, Arjuna says, "You are the Supreme Eternal, the Ultimate Resort, the Greatest Purifier; all seers speak of you as the eternal divine Person, the Prime Deity, unborn and all-pervading. Likewise speak the celestial sage Narada, the sage Vyasa, and others, and so do You Yourself proclaim this to me."

"Therefore, please tell me O master of Yoga, how am I to know You through meditation? And in what particular forms, O Lord, are You to be meditated upon by me?" 10/18

To this Sri Krishna answers, "I am the self seated in the heart of all beings. I am Vishnu among the sons of Aditi, the sun amongst all the luminaries, and the moon amongst the stars. I am the most glorious of Gods amongst all the gods, Indra. I am Shankara, Kubera, and Brahaspati. I am mind among the senses, life force (consciousness) in all living beings; I am the ocean among the water reservoirs, OM among all the words, and Himalayas in the immovable. Among the trees I am the most sacred Ashwattha, among sages I am Narada, among Pandavas I am you, Arjuna, among animals I am the lion, among the demons I am Prahlada, and among philosophers I am Kapila Muni..."

Thus, Lord Krishna goes on specifying in each kind of being, both living and non-living, where He is best and most manifest. Meditating upon these divine manifestations the Lord helps us to understand His glories better and better.

To conclude the Lord says, "Every such creature as is glorious, brilliant, or powerful, know that to be a manifestation of a spark of My effulgence." 10/41

Thus ends the tenth chapter of Yoga of Divine Glories.

Chapter XI

Chapter XI is one I like very much. Having conceptually understood that the Supreme Lord as Universal Consciousness is the basis of the 'divinity of each soul', Arjuna had desire to see the Lord in His Universal Glory. To this request Sri Krishna reveals Himself in the most glorious awe-inspiring (and in fact terrifying, if one may say so) universal form. There Arjuna sees multifarious forms, all in one diverse colors, and different shapes. There he sees various gods and sages, Vedas and the Rudras, there he sees entire creation both animate and inanimate in the single body of the Lord.

Sanjay was also blessed with the power to view scenes on the battleground so that he might describe the war to Dhritarashtra, and hence he also saw the grandeur of the universal form of the Almighty. Sanjay described it thus, "Arjuna saw the supreme deity possessing many mouths and eyes, presenting many wonderful sights, decked with many divine ornaments, wielding many uplifted divine weapons, wearing divine garlands and clothes, besmeared all over with divine sandal pastes, full of all wonders, infinite and having faces on all sides."

"The splendour and glory of the mighty Lord was comparable to effulgence of thousand suns bursting forth all at once in the heaven!" XI/10-11-12

Then Arjuna full of devotion and wonder, his hair standing on end, bowed his head to the Divine Lord and with joined palms praised Sri Krishna thus, "Lord, I see in your body all gods and multitude of different beings, Brahma perched on his lotus seat, so also Shiva and all rishis and celestial serpents in their full glory. I do not perceive your beginning, middle or end..." The praise by Arjuna is worth reading daily. It elevates the mind to the glory of Lord. "You are the Supreme indestructible, worthy of being realized; you are the ultimate resort of this universe, you are the protector of Dharma, I consider you to be the eternal, imperishable, perfect Being."

"The moon and the Sun are your eyes, your mouth blazes forth with eternal divine Fire, and this universe is scorched by your divine radiance. You fill the space between the heaven and earth. The hosts of god are entering and emanating from your mouth, some with folded hands, some full of devotion, and some wonderstruck. At times your form appears alarming and full of terror for me understand fully, and therefore, O lord, I request you to appear in your most beautiful form with four arms holding conch, chakra, mace, and lotus respectively."

The Lord replies, "O Arjuna, have no fear. I have taken this form to annihilate the non-righteous. Look, I have already killed Bhishma, and Karna, Drona and Jayadratha, and all other Kauravas, you just have to become my instrument/medium (nimitta) for what is already determined and accomplished. Now be ready for the war, for if you die in your duty heaven will be your abode, and if you win the whole earth will be your kingdom!"

In fact this chapter is very lengthy (55 verses) but I have shortened it quite a bit. Two points must be borne in the mind, 1) THAT the Lord reveals himself to his true devotee in some form or the other, and 2) whatever we do is in fact already accomplished as per His wishes. Therefore, surrendering to his wish, I should carry out one's duty with due humility and perfection. One should engage in all righteous actions, seeing Him everywhere, both in creation and destruction, life and death, victory and defeat, joy and sorrow.

The last verse of chapter XI can be taken as condensed Gita, where Sri Krishna says, "Arjuna, he who works for My sake, depends on Me, is devoted to Me, has no attachment, and is free from malice towards all beings, reaches ME." 11/55

Chapter XIII

This chapter contains 34 verses. It tries to highlight the fact that individual soul contained in human body (Jiva) is in fact limited expression of Universal Soul. We can interchange word 'consciousness' and 'soul' without harming the meaning in the least. In this chapter the Lord defines what is true knowledge and what is ignorance.

True knower in all beings is one unitary Consciousness and rest all is matter; in fact matter including the mind and thoughts appear sentient because they are illumined by the Spirit. This knowledge of Purusha (Atman) and Prakriti (Nature) is true knowledge. It is not enough to theoretically agree with what is written in the Gita, it is mandatory that we practice spiritual disciplines to actually experience the Truth therein. We must be able to perceive the unity of all beings, as expressing the same unitary consciousness, and then we can say, "I know".

This universal solidarity as experienced in deep samadhi/meditation is real Yoga. The process is called sadhana, the performer is sadhaka, and the object of realization (God) is sadhya. The sadhya here is Lord Krishna, it can however,

assume any divine form according to one's station in life as regards place and time. One may also realize the Formless Truth. The net result is the same; the sadhaka, sadhana, and the sadhya all become one. Then the person is said to have established in knowledge.

Unity of Atman and Paramatman is what Vedanta considers to be the true knowledge. In Vedas, Upanishads and Brahma Sutras this point is emphasized and elaborated. The individual self is ordinarily bound, for it considers itself formed of matter in the form of body-mind complex. The five subtle elements (Akash, Vayu, Agni, Jal, and Prithvi), the ego, the ten organs and the mind, and five sense organs of actions all combine to form the individual self. It is full of desires, aversion, pleasure, pain, and the body consciousness. This all is categorized as 'the field' of Jiva.

Then the Lord goes on to elaborate the process of evolution that leads the Jiva to the realization of his true nature, Atman, distinct from the body and the mind. Verses 7 to 11 are important from this point of view. The Lord says, "Absence of pride, freedom from hypocrisy, non-violence, forgiveness, straightforwardness, service of the preceptor, purity of mind and the body, steadfastness, self-control (7); dispassion towards the sense objects, absence of egoism, withdrawing the mind from the thoughts of pain and evil, birth and death, age and disease, (8); absence of attachment, absence of self-identification with son, wife, home, etc., balance of mind in both favorable and unfavorable circumstances (9); and fixity in self-knowledge, observing everywhere object of true knowledge (God), all this leads to true knowledge. What is contrary to this is called ignorance.

All beings animate or inanimate are born or proceed from the unity of matter and spirit. Then, who by the eye of wisdom perceive the difference between the matter and the Knower of the matter, and negate matter as evolving nature, reach the Supreme Person.

Chapter XIV

Chapter XIV contains 27 verses. One can say that this chapter highlights Samkhya philosophy about evolution of manifest world. The Lord tells how His power - Prakriti - although insentient, is illumined by His sentience to apparently create multifarious universe. Thus, in the third verse Sri Krishna says, "My Prakriti (Nature) in her primordial undeveloped state is the womb of all creatures; in that I place the seed of consciousness. The birth of all beings follows from this combination of matter and Spirit." 14/3

This Prakriti has three constituent gunas (elements we may roughly translate as) namely, sattva, rajas, and tamas. Combinations of these gunas in various proportions tie the individual soul to the worldly objects, and delude him to think that he is body-mind complex. Further, depending on the predominance or preponderance of a particular guna, the individual soul manifests different qualities in his/her nature.

"Of these sattva being immaculate, is illumining and flawless; it binds the soul through self-identification with happiness and wisdom." (6) "Rajas, which is of the nature of passion, as born of cupidity and attachment, binds the soul through attachment for action and their fruits." (7) And lastly, "Tamas deludes all embodied beings, as born of ignorance; and it binds through error, sloth, and inertia (laziness)." (8).

Every soul has inherent predominance of one or more gunas, and the

combination changes with time and place giving rise to different natural reactions at different time and in different place. Sometimes sattva prevails making the person happy and elated, pure and selfless, while when rajas rules, suppressing sattva and tamas, with passion and action as the dominant natural tendency. Tamas leads to lethargy, delusion, and vices.

Food, spiritual practices, company one keeps, and impressions from the past life are responsible for particular set up of gunas in an individual. Higher Self affects the gunas, but It is not affected by the se gunas. Spiritual disciplines like devotion, worship, study of scriptures, japa, association with saints and sadhus, etc., all help the person to become more sattvik, the desirable and favorable state of mind. Under its influence the reason is sharpened and becomes pure. All spiritual disciplines are intended to make the aspirant more and more sattvik so that he may take the Royal road to Self-realization. But it is not enough, for to reach the Highest State of Realization of Brahman, one has to transcend even sattva!

To this Arjuna says, "What are the marks of him who has risen above the three gunas, and how does he conduct himself? And how, Lord, does he rise above the three gunas?" 14/21

The answers to these questions are more or less similar to the characteristics of as stoic minded person, sthitaprajna, as elaborated in the second chapter. In very brief, I would recount the same. The lord says, "Arjuna, he who feels no aversion for light, activity, or stupor (i.e. sees sameness in all three gunas), who acts as the pure witness to the activities of gunas, he who takes sorrow and joy alike, considers clod of earth, stone, and gold as equal in value, views censure and praise, honor and ignominy, friend and foe alike, he is said to be above three gunas." And the way to reach above three gunas is through worship, surrender, and devotion to Him, for 'I am the abode of the imperishable Brahman, of immortality, of everlasting virtue, and unending bliss'.

Chapter XV

Chapter XV contains only twenty verses, but is considered as one of the most instructive chapters of the Gita. Here the Lord further clarifies his true nature, and tells us why He is called Supreme Person -Purushottama. The creation is compared with a huge Ashwattha Tree without beginning and end. Its roots are upwards in the primal Being; its stem is the creator God, and its leaves the Vedas. The branches of this tree represent the different creatures nourished by the three gunas (sattva, rajas, and tamas) and having sense-enjoyments as their tender leaves. The ego and latent desires that bind the soul also spread in all regions, higher as well as lower.

Thus, this huge tree, which overpowers and binds every soul, must be confronted by every sadhaka to seek liberation. How? By cutting it down by the formidable weapon of dispassion. "Those non-deluded ones, who are free from pride and infatuation, who have conquered the vice of attachment and who dwell constantly in God, whose desires have completely disappeared (freed from all pairs of opposites) such then attain that imperishable supreme state." What is that place? Where is it? "Having reached which, men do not return that is the supreme state; neither the sun, nor moon, nor fire can illumine it." 15/6

Then the Lord repeats the necessity of constant absorption in His thought, contemplation, and meditation, and a beautiful statement is now made: "It is I who am installed in hearts of all. Memory, wisdom, and ratiocinative faculty also

emanate from Me. it is I whom the four Vedas seek to know; nay, it is I who am the author of the Vedas as well as the knower of the Vedas." 15/15

Sri Krishna talks of two kinds of entities, one perishable and the other imperishable; the bodies of all beings are perishable, while the Jeevatman or soul within is said to be imperishable. Further, the Lord distinguishes between two imperishable, individual soul (Still within the spell of Maya) and Paramatman (Ultimate Self) whom Sri Krishna represents. The Universal Soul or Imperishable Lord or Perfect Person interpenetrates the three worlds and beyond, sustains them all, but remains untainted by anything therein.

(Such difference between Jeevatman and Paramatman points to qualified monism philosophy. But no one but can speak or write other than this philosophy, for this is the highest expressible thought possible. Even Advaita Vedanta or Pure Monism has to expound its precepts in the similar language. Therefore, while Shankara extracted pure Advaita meaning from the Gita, others were happy to declare dualistic trends in it.)

Chapter XVI

Chapter XVI deals with the division between divine and demoniacal properties or qualities in a human nature. The lord repeats the qualifications like fearlessness, purity, self-control, charity, devotion, equanimity, kindness towards all creatures, forgiveness, fortitude etc., etc., these are all the marks of one who is naturally endowed with divine qualities. And what are the contrary or demoniacal properties? Hypocrisy, arrogance, pride, anger, harshness, and ignorance these are the marks of the one who is born with demoniacal propensities.

Divine virtues are regarded as conducive to liberations, while evil tendencies lead to bondage and downfall. The world would always have both types of men. Most of us do not know what is right activity and where to stop; therefore, we do not possess purity, or good conduct, or truth. We delude ourselves by taking falsehood as truth, and unreal as real, and lead to personal as well as collective destruction, chaos, and sorrow. Most of us are given to sensuous pleasure alone, believing that the highest and limit of joy consists only in this. When our crude hedonistic expectations are thwarted we give way to anger and unlawful conduct to hold power, privilege, and wealth.

'Passion, anger, and greed, these three constitute the triple gate to hell leading to damnation of soul. Therefore, one should shake off all these three,' says the Lord. "Let the scripture be your authority in determining what ought to be done, and what ought not to be done. Knowing this, you should do here only such actions as is sanctioned by the scriptural ordinance." 16/24

Chapter XVII

In this chapter the Lord describes what is right faith, charity, penance, and sacrifices, and also tells us which are the better religious and social activities that one should seek to perform. He says, just as there are three kinds of men, sattvik, rajasik, and tamasik, on the similar lines one can differentiate or group faith, charity, disciplines, austerities, etc. in these three types. For instance, "Men of sattvik disposition worship the gods, those of rajasik disposition worship, yakshas and lower gods, and even demons. While persons of tamasik nature worship spirits and ghosts." 17/4

It is not always virtuous or religious when people perform austere penances or

torment their bodies against the injunctions of scriptures or out of hypocrisy and egoism. They do not progress on the path of god realization. There is also the question of food; some food is sattvik, other is rajasik, and lastly there is food for tamasik people to enjoy. The food which promotes longevity, intelligence, strength and happiness and which is simple, sweet and bland is sattvik food. Rajasik people enjoy acid, bitter, hot pungent food, which might cause pain or illness, while stale, putrid and/or polluted food comes under the category of tamasik disposition.

Sacrifices and penances performed as per the scriptural injunctions and with selfless motive are sattvik, while performed for personal or family or any gains are rajasik, and when ignorant and inefficient people perform these without faith and without proper procedure are said to be tamasik. Austerities of the body are worship of gods, elders and wise, purity and continence, when the speech is non-offensive, truthful, and agreeable it is called austerities of speech, and cheerfulness, serenity, habit of meditation, and self control are the austerities of the mind.

'Om Tat Sat' is declared to be the threefold designation of the Absolute. 'Om' is primal word, 'Tat' is pronounced with the idea that everything belongs to Him (Tat), and the divine name 'Sat' is employed in the sense of truth, goodness, and praiseworthy act. Our all activities including spiritual disciplines should conform to this principle of 'Om Tat Sat', and should be all sattvik.

Chapter XVIII

The most elaborate last chapter consists of 78 verses. It summarizes the whole Gita for the benefit of Arjuna and the whole mankind. Again this chapter starts with Arjuna asking the difference between Sannyasa (Yoga of Renunciation) and Tyaga (Yoga of work without attachment), as if to revise and give finality to what he had already understood.

Jnana yogi and Advaita Vedantins believed that all kinds of actions are contrary to knowledge, and therefore, must be renounced. Thus, forest retreat (sannyasa) was given the higher honor and respect as the means to seek higher knowledge. To counter this pathological trend, Sri Krishna opened up new vistas for common people who live in the world and are householder devotees.

Sri Krishna partly agrees with the upholders of total renunciation when he says that sattvik acts of penance, gift, sacrifice, and austerities should not be given up. Selfless actions without consideration of the outcome are the best way to purify heart, intellect, and mind.

A question naturally comes to mind. All people are engaged in various activities. Some are well placed as priests in a temple/mosque/church, others hold power and position in factories, institutes, and offices, many labor hard in mills and industries in hot sun, still others have to do menial work of cleaning drainage, garbage and sewage disposal, etc. then it might come to our mind that some work is degrading while other is uplifting. Is it so? No, says the Lord! 'Better is one's duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well executed. He, who performs the duty enjoined by his own nature, does not incur sin.' 18/47

"Arjuna, one should not abandon one's duty which attaches to him from his very birth, even though defective. All undertakings, indeed, are tainted with some blemish or the other, just as fire is clouded by smoke." 18/48

Thus, Lord indirectly prompts Arjuna (and us also) to fight war. And also says in

the verse 59, "If, prompted by egoism, you think 'I will not fight', this determination of yours is vain; nature will compel you to fight." As the last parting gift, Sri Krishna reassures Arjuna, thus, "Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me and bow to Me; so shall you without doubt reach Me. This I truly promise to you; for you are dear to Me." 18/65 And further, "Surrendering all duties to Me, seek refuge in Me alone. I shall absolve you of all sins, grieve not." 18/66

And then as the last gesture of magnanimity, the Lord inquires, "Has this been heard by you with one-pointed mind, O son of Kunti? Has your delusion, born of ignorance, been destroyed? 18/72 and truly, the illumined soul of Arjuna bursts forth with revealed truth, "O Krishna, my delusion is destroyed and, through Your Grace, I have gained knowledge and memory of my true Self. I stand freed from doubts; I shall, therefore, carry out your bidding." 18/73

Lastly, Sanjaya concludes the Gita by telling his opinion to the King Dhritarashtra, "Thus I heard the marvelous and thrilling conversation between Sri Krishna and the high souled Arjuna." (74) "O King, recollecting again and again, this wonderful and sacred dialogue, I rejoice over again and again. (76) "Wherever is Sri Krishna, the Lord of Yoga, and wherever is Arjuna, the wielder of the Gandiva Bow, assured are there prosperity, victory, glory, and righteousness; this my conviction."