

The Bhagavad Gita Study Guide

The Bhagavad Gita by Anonymity

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Bhagavad Gita Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Book 1, Bhagavadgita: Chapter 1, The Distress of Arjuna.....	5
Chapter 2, The Book of Doctrines.....	6
Chapter 3, Virtue in Work.....	7
Chapter 4, The Religion of Knowledge.....	8
Chapter 5, Religion by Renouncing Fruit of Works.....	9
Chapter 6, Religion by Self-Restraint.....	10
Chapter 7, Religion by Discernment.....	11
Chapter 8, Religion by Devotion to the One Supreme God.....	12
Chapter 9, Religion by the Kingly Knowledge & the Kingly Mystery.....	13
Chapter 10, Religion by the Heavenly Perfections.....	14
Chapter 11, The Manifesting of the One and the Manifold.....	15
Chapter 12, The Religion of Faith.....	16
Chapter 13, Religion by Separation of Matter & Spirit.....	17
Chapter 14, Religion by Separation from the Qualities.....	18
Chapter 15, Religion by Attaining the Supreme.....	19
Chapter 16, The Separateness of the Divine and the Undivine.....	20
Chapter 17, Religion by the Threefold Kinds of Faith.....	21
Religion by Deliverance and Renunciation.....	22
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	29
Style.....	31



Quotes..... 33
Topics for Discussion..... 34

Plot Summary

The Bhagavadgita is in some editions entitled Bhagavad Gita, due to difficulties of translation. While it has come to be presented on its own, at least to the English speaking world, it originally had a place within a greater work known as the Mahabarata. The work has been presented in the English language as either poetry or in prose. The version used to create this document is in poetic form.

The edition used for this summary is the Dover Thrift Edition of 1993. Readers should be aware that many versions of this world renowned work exist. Some editions include commentaries and pictures along with the text. One can acquire versions published by those serving the academic and public markets but can also get the editions put out by religious societies. The content has typically been maintained. Even so, there are ways to get assistance with interpretation or explanations of difficult parts or greater details with some editions, including those put out by a Krishna society. If the editor or translator is listed as a name beginning with "praha..." then you have found a religious publication. Due to the variation amongst versions, students should take special care in this case to accept some differences and to not exclusively rely upon the summary as a substitute for an edition of the book itself. This is most true in the case when the text is being used for a course.

The Bhagavadgita stems out of the Indian culture and the Hindu tradition. The religious scriptures of the Hindus that came before the Bhagavadgita were the Vedas. The Vedas and the Upanishads are the names of the most important Hindu religious texts.

Within the context of Hinduism, a vast and rather complex religion, one principle that operates is that the divine can manifest in and as people. Such personages may be an incarnated god or goddess or both if hermaphroditic. Others are not incarnations of deity but are recognized as being gurus or other adepts who have attained some height or other spiritual majesty discernible by others. It is best to understand that the writing comes from such a viewpoint.

Given the above, one will more readily understand why Krishna, one of the main characters in the story is seen in his god form. He continues to inhabit and to appear as a human being.

Krishna, as a manifestation of Vishnu, educates and soothes his friend. Vishnu is the aspect of the Sustaining power of the universe and of the Divine. This aspect of the Divine is said to have 10 incarnations, the 9th of which is Krishna. Law, order and peace are the deity's main areas of interest. As such, in the Bhagavadgita readers can assume that the purpose of war is to bring proper balance into the society, otherwise Lord Krishna would not involve himself. Many of his images show him having four arms. Arjuna, who is the human hero, is faced with a very difficult battle. Anything but heartless, Arjuna has many strong feelings all of which must be faced if he is to have the strength and courage for battle. Krishna helps his friend and companion through this, but it is not easy.



Book 1, Bhagavadgita: Chapter 1, The Distress of Arjuna

Book 1, Bhagavadgita: Chapter 1, The Distress of Arjuna Summary and Analysis

The poem is introduced by a scholarly editor. The form has been translated from Sanskrit and comes from poetry that has a tradition within Indian culture. This poem comes from one family story and is translated by an editor. Many names are mentioned. This is advantageous to genealogists or members of the tradition to whom these names hold special significance. The form is short lines. Rhyme and meter are the hardest challenges faced by those translating poetic verse.

The first entity referred to is a king or other very powerful man who is the audience. The next entity is the speaker. The audience requests that the other speak and tell of the events. The battlefield is described. The types of soldiers are presented. It becomes clear that some have noise makers. Readers are reminded that in reality there are many rules of war and of battle. In this case, the warriors are all on the field but refrain from fighting each other. Conch shells and trumpets are sounded.

Among the army of chariots, there is one chariot with a man named Arjuna, and the charioteer is Krishna. After the conch shells sound, Arjuna requests that Krishna take him forward, between the two military forces gathered together upon the giant field.

The next section is about Arjuna's feelings. He is upset, unhappy, and showing signs of unwillingness to engage his enemies in battle. He expresses natural sentiments and arguments commonly used to oppose killing and fighting. These are his kin: on both sides are cousins. Nothing good can come of their warfare against one another, he cries out to Krishna. He expresses this same resistance to direct combat for multiple pages of text. Every objection is perfectly rational. At the end of the chapter, the warrior sinks into his seat and drops his weapons, unwilling to make war.



Chapter 2, The Book of Doctrines

Chapter 2, The Book of Doctrines Summary and Analysis

Arjuna expresses his grief and refuses to engage the enemy. He is countered by his companion, Krishna. Krishna espouses a warrior's creed. However, Krishna quickly makes it clear that the mandatory viewpoint from which to face the circumstances before his friend is metaphysical and at the same time, follows regulations governed by his social role.

Arjuna is a Kshatriya, and is called a prince by Krishna. Since this is his role in society, he is duty bound to fight in the war. Krishna reminds his friend how fortunate this circumstance really is, and declares that for a man to abandon his social duties is to sin.

Krishna explains that there is no reason for him to grieve because of the nature of the eternal reality that exists without the boundaries of time. No one shall be destroyed, not even through their fighting and killing and as such, there is no reason for the events to trouble him.

Krishna also sets forth the doctrine that pain and pleasure are both transient sensory experiences that are best treated with indifference. The indifference is an acceptance that does not put inordinate value on either, nor views either as a source of suffering. Later he refers to this as a philosophical teaching and goes deeper.

Next, Krishna criticizes many priests and teaching about "fruits of works" and the gains of superior forms when reincarnating. He also speaks to Arjuna regarding the purity of action—put everything into that instead of using actions as means to alternative ends. He refers to morality, and sends a double message. He urges Arjuna to do right for its own sake, but later recommends equality or equanimity regarding whether an action is good or evil. It is the purity of the doing that is most emphasized. Krishna promotes meditation and right thinking: right thinking is better than right action, but right meditation leads to right action being some supreme form of both.

Krishna explains the power of meditation. Release from desires of the flesh is described as a goal for those who have not yet attained it, and as a great success for those who have. He indicates a known pattern of thoughts that can lead to destruction rooted in the nurturance of desire. He refers to Arjuna as a self-ruling man and espouses self-mastery as a great virtue.

Chapter 3, Virtue in Work

Chapter 3, Virtue in Work Summary and Analysis

Arjuna asks Krishna why he should fight, and how to know whether the path of meditation or action is superior for spiritual development.

During this time, Hindu readers well-versed in their religion may recognize the source of much of what Krishna is telling Arjuna. For those readers unfamiliar with Hinduism, some of the ideas may make only a strange kind of sense. Emotional stability, Krishna explains, comes as an externalization of serenity. This is in contrast to any false presentation of calm. Experiencing without undue mental suffering about anything, not as a result of having somehow shut down the mind, is another indicator.

Krishna provides some description of a self-governed man. Every effort that an individual makes to fulfill his or her proper duty in life will be doing what is best. It is better to try even if one fails than to abandon the task. It is still better to pursue this form of fulfillment than it is to be dissuaded by anything or anyone into other efforts.

Krishna explains how it is that the daily life of action and events is somehow one with the path to attainment involving meditation. One can minimize actions through meditation and isolation in a cave or a hill, but even then all this takes place in the world of action and generates an entire social role and method.

Arjuna then asks what sends any man to an evil path or a bad end. Krishna describes what is called "kama." It is a form of passion, but it is "born of darkness." The editor defines this term as a "destructive passion" in contrast to the live giving and nurturing forms of passion. Krishna speaks of passion as the dark smoke that hides the truth from view and distorts an individual's perception in other ways.

Krishna defines Brahma as the Creator, whereas Vishnu is the Preserver or Maintainer, and Shiva is the Destroyer. No life exists without all three operations coexisting. Brahma is the One from which all forms emerge, the unity that underlies all things.



Chapter 4, The Religion of Knowledge

Chapter 4, The Religion of Knowledge Summary and Analysis

Krishna reveals himself to be "the Lord." Now Krishna is speaking to Arjuna from his god form. He has made the transformation in a way that comes across as if he had been wearing a thick cape for a wrap and has now parted the front and thrown it back behind his arms exposing more of his form.

Krishna encapsulates the many teachings surrounding knowledge. The poetic verse in this section is quite impressive.

There is an impressive and dramatic quality to this chapter's writings. He covers so many ideas so succinctly, including a critique of asceticism among the scholarly religious devotees. He repeats that he advocates the recognition of emotions but also their limitations. The ascetics, Krishna reports, go too far with their forms of self-denial. While sacrifice and self-denial can be purifying, it can also turn into something unhelpful for the same reason that one does not ask water to run up hill.

Krishna completes his remarks by exhorting Arjuna to enter the battle. He has claimed that Truth is very much the master. Man achieves dominion by perceiving the Truth, and Krishna says that just as the Truth will allow Arjuna or any man to rule, Arjuna belongs to Krishna.



Chapter 5, Religion by Renouncing Fruit of Works

Chapter 5, Religion by Renouncing Fruit of Works Summary and Analysis

Early in this chapter, the anonymous author makes a point that may be puzzling—that the self that is most strongly associated with egotistic wishes is rather like a horse bucking against the path of life that an individual must take. Once this self is abandoned, the person, much like the peaceful horse freely moving along the same path, will achieve effortlessly and without a stubborn sense of self. The translator lists Krishna as having said, "Nought of myself do I do!" The yogic attitude is one not of helplessness but of selfless subsumption into the divine and life.

Brahma takes the center of significance during this chapter. Here again there is a clear cultural difference. Brahma is what the Hindu would call the Creator and the One who underlies and supports all creation, and that unifies all things both visible and unknown.

The main focus is to share another set of realizations. One is that the renunciations of the fruits of works mean that one works, not simply as a means to the end of compensation, but for the value of the experience itself. The other main spiritual development shared in this chapter about is dwelling in Brahma, the calm serene center, and how this includes the emotions being neither irrelevant nor in total control of the events of one's life.



Chapter 6, Religion by Self-Restraint

Chapter 6, Religion by Self-Restraint Summary and Analysis

Krishna delves into Yogis and further into renunciation for spiritual cultivation. He reports that the people who work without it being for the results—the material gain, for example, or the pain of the loss—are the ones who are the most advanced. He introduces terms which may be quite familiar to long practicing Hindus: Sanyasi and Yogi. These are two forms of renunciates. Krishna explains that when both are taken together as one Soul then a person would do rightful work and would do so without the performing of the action being strictly as a means to a different end. This includes the renunciation of the fruits of works and the commitment to right thinking and right action.

Many spend years in tremendous solitude to achieve the type of yogic serenity referred to, but ultimately it must be used and found in daily life, including today on the field of battle. Side effects of nurturing this inner serenity often enough through meditation, yoga and contemplation are listed as clutter that falls away from the person. The mind ceases to natter and nag the individual like restless predatory cats in zoos: bored, powerful, and a bit fussy.

Arjuna objects and tells Krishna that he thinks it would be as easy to tame the wind as to tame the heart of men to a state of peaceful equanimity. This is when one's dearest loved ones and total strangers and all in between are treated with the same level of love and affection. Either those intimate with one will be slighted severely, or the rest will be treated with what would commonly be perceived as a shocking depth and intensity of genuine care, generosity, and shows of affection.



Chapter 7, Religion by Discernment

Chapter 7, Religion by Discernment Summary and Analysis

Now Krishna begins to speak unabashedly regarding what comes to be known as personal devotion. The translator assures readers in his note that this is what Krishna actually told Arjuna and is not an error or misconception due to translation. He tells Arjuna to come to him, but when he refers to Me, he means his divine form rather than his purely mortal form.

The Truth, Krishna tells his comrade-at-arms, is accessible to all, but those who strive for it are most likely to succeed. The ones who succeed are themselves those who really know him. He expresses that he is all things, or rather, the source of all. He is the very Maker, and includes everything from the wombs from which babes spring forth to the trees, elements, and soil. He urges Arjuna to keep his mind fixed on 'the One' which, technically, is Brahma, rather than Vishnu or Shiva.

Krishna's monologue defines the forms and aspects of the Divine. He refers to the Lord of life, of all the gods and to the Lord of Sacrifice as he continues his exhortation to Prince Arjuna to take refuge in the Ultimate Reality through Krishna on this most difficult and challenging day.



Chapter 8, Religion by Devotion to the One Supreme God

Chapter 8, Religion by Devotion to the One Supreme God Summary and Analysis

Arjuna asks about these Lords, and asks Krishna how it shall be that he can go to the Supreme Being at the moment of death. Krishna explains that meditating upon the One and holding the entity to the heart allows and assures one of where the Soul will go at death. As such, one must bear in mind who and what one keeps close to heart, for wherever your head and heart are when you die, your Soul will tend to follow.

He explains to Arjuna the simplicity of devoted meditation and focused thought. While to strive for Truth is not terribly common, to do so increases the chances of winning. To be devoted and thinking of Me, he says, is very powerful and leads invariably to success.

Next he explains that whoever reaches Him this way, will be released from the wheel of rebirth. Krishna is focused on assuring Arjuna that in the event of their own and their opponents' deaths later today, there is a straightforward method of assuring union with the Divine. At this time, Krishna seems to be speaking mainly of Brahma who is known as 'the One' but is also meaning himself.



Chapter 9, Religion by the Kingly Knowledge & the Kingly Mystery

Chapter 9, Religion by the Kingly Knowledge & the Kingly Mystery Summary and Analysis

Krishna tells Arjuna that he will even share a deep secret teaching about how to be in intimate union with the Supreme Being, who he is unabashedly at times referring to as Me. Krishna describes "containment"—a metaphysical containment. All things that are real and true belongs to and may return into the Me that Krishna is referring to. He also acknowledges that it is possible to perceive the divine within much of sensory reality, through which those who seek the Truth are often able to find it. The Truth and Brahma, as the One, contains all things. This Me, is not in all things, but can be found in all things.

Next, Krishna explains to his companion that the Truth and the eternal form are somehow aloof and separate from these events. Krishna means there is this attitude of relationship to the very actions of oneself.

Later, Krishna identifies himself with all of the Scriptures of the Hindu religion. He lists the Vedas. He also refers to the universalization of practices and devotions. Through pure and total devotion even the differences between good and evil whither. This is not to be confused for a justification for evil but may bring great relief as it shows that purification through all actions is possible. Every offering or sacrifice is welcomed. No matter what the evil ways of a man, the moment that such a mortal turns to the Divine—the righteousness of that decision has a purifying effect upon that individual and helps to turn that being toward the inner peace and serenity. Krishna is educating his comrade on the very field itself so that he can face engaging in this fighting and bloodshed with a stable center and healthy mentality.



Chapter 10, Religion by the Heavenly Perfections

Chapter 10, Religion by the Heavenly Perfections Summary and Analysis

Krishna explains still more about the Truth of all matters. He provides yet more succinct encapsulations of the religious teachings so far presented to mankind through Hinduism. After he gives a relatively brief comment, the archer Prince Arjuna responds.

Arjuna first declares recognition that his driver has revealed himself to be speaking from the god form rather than "as the charioteer." This is "god as charioteer" not "charioteer as god." This is another part of what Krishna was explaining in the preceding chapters about how it is that all is contained by this Me, and can return to this Me, but that no things or lone fact can "contain" the Brahma. Arjuna explicitly declares this to Krishna—so now the Prince is talking to what monotheists would call God, even though it is coming through his friend.

Krishna hereby continues to assure Arjuna that He is here in his god form while at the same time it is rightly implied that even as such he will still drive the chariot throughout the battle. Krishna believes in his ability to inspire and to bolster up his friend so that they can with proper courage meet their enemies.



Chapter 11, The Manifesting of the One and the Manifold

Chapter 11, The Manifesting of the One and the Manifold Summary and Analysis

Arjuna's growing belief causes him to make a request. He specifically asks to see the complete and revealed form of the chariot's driver, Krishna. He admits with some understandable fear, that he only wishes to see this if the other judges correctly that Arjuna can 'handle' the vision of it.

Krishna obliges happily. However, there is some kind of limitation, whether intentional or not cannot be sure. Krishna states that his true form is hinted at in the guises of all things; the relatively innumerable forms of nature are clues as to his true form. Then he also claims that his present incarnation in the role of the charioteer is also suggestive of his true nature. He offers Arjuna the ability to look with "divine eyes."

In a narrative, the messenger who is recounting the events to a blind audience speaks. He tells the king to whom he is speaking that Arjuna most certainly did perceive the divine form, how all the forms became discernible in the one man. However, he was overwhelmed by the vision. Whether this came together in Arjuna's mind as a thought is not clear. Most likely, it was a true and drastic effect upon the mind of Arjuna.

Arjuna now addresses Krishna as the god directly, and describes his awe and also his raw terror. After some recitations and honorific speaking he requests from Vishnu the reason or necessity for such a ferocious vision and experience of the Divine.

Krishna exclaims that Time is the Destroyer. No one and nothing upon the battlefield will live without being killed by Time. Krishna urges Arjuna to not even see himself personally as the one who slays his enemies, but merely as an instrument of the Eternal in the actions of the day's events. He points out that they are all going to die anyway, because they have mortal forms and Time the Destroyer will annihilate them all; so do not worry about the fighting and the killing today, just go ahead and do it.

Arjuna prays profusely, and ardently asking for a familiar god form, and ultimately he prays to again see this mighty and familiar form in the guise of his kind friend. During his prayer he includes an apology if he became a bit too familiar as he was interacting with Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva in the manner of two friends together in a war chariot when he is the most incredibly powerful being in the Universe.

Arjuna's request is answered. Krishna is recognized as at once himself and in his god form. The charioteer shares with Arjuna that most people do not perceive his god form, or are not able to see Brahma in or through him that well.

Chapter 12, The Religion of Faith

Chapter 12, The Religion of Faith Summary and Analysis

The roles are restored. Arjuna, the warrior Prince bearing Hanuman upon his insignia, is conversing with his chariot's driver who is showing his god form. Arjuna asks how union with the divine is best achieved: as yet no one has attacked but the cause is imminent and the armies are assembled.

Krishna tells the archer that utter devotion is what results in greatest success and favoritism. Devotion is most effective; meditations, sacrifices, offerings and other manner of reverence and worship should be offered. To act with Me in mind, Krishna says, will be beloved by Him. Finally, He informs Arjuna again, that equanimity toward experiences and toward others leads, perhaps ironically, to favoritism or to greater success which gives rise to the appearance of favoritism. Due to the inequality of exertion among the practitioners and those who seek Him out, He appears to favor some.



Chapter 13, Religion by Separation of Matter & Spirit

Chapter 13, Religion by Separation of Matter & Spirit Summary and Analysis

Now Arjuna asks Krishna to tell him all about knowledge.

Krishna recounts many attributes of the ethical or morally virtuous life. There is balance among things. Nothing is taken too far. The individual creates or learns to find equilibrium within himself or herself. This is not to be confused with lifelessness or the dull sickness of over-caution and inaction. It is clear that part of the ethical life is what would be called character development. Another aspect is purely related to the person's behavior toward the Divine. For example: if someone with a reputation for being hot-tempered learns through meditation and contemplation how to cease and desist in the, then calmer behaviors can occur despite triggers. This is not meant to destroy anyone's defenses, but to enable people to be released from the unwarranted control of others and to protect them from the loss of control through the emotions.

The charioteer describes spirit as separate from matter in two main ways. One way is that of the unmanifest. The realms of "nothing" are part of the spiritual in contrast to the material. The other way that he describes and defines the Soul and spirit is to refer to it as that which is eternal.



Chapter 14, Religion by Separation from the Qualities

Chapter 14, Religion by Separation from the Qualities Summary and Analysis

It is clear to see where this conversation is going—interest in religion when under considerable pressure. At times the pressure may be social but for others matters of life and death tend to emphasize certain qualities of life, and for many, this drives them to religious questioning.

Krishna explains that from the divine form, He is the root of every life form's conception as they emerge from the spiritual into the material and changeable realm. He quickly refers to another traditional attribute of Hinduism. There are three modes of being, mainly expressed as qualities called and translated as Sattwas (called "goodness" by some, herein called "sootheastness"), Rajas (this is termed passion and seems to include the most rudimentary sensual desires but also the emotions and would not exclude passions pertaining to interests), and Tamas (ignorance—this can be innocent or not). Cultures and societies can make these worse or they can improve conditions over all. An individual life is very much influenced by which of those three qualities governs the life.

Devotion to the Truth and to the divine combined with the pursuit of equanimity are main means of spiritual advancement. Another is to learn to see what is happening in one's experiences. Last, to nurture the spiritual sense of aloofness from events without ceasing to live and act in life. This last remark is another form of Krishna telling Arjuna that when he kills enemies later today, he should not even see himself as doing it, but see that this is what is going on. This is in reality, the operations of godhead through the material nature. Time is the Destroyer and Shiva is for changing all things that are changeable. Brahma keeps it all One, Vishnu preserves things through the changes and Shiva destroys so that the world is not itself destroyed by Creation.



Chapter 15, Religion by Attaining the Supreme

Chapter 15, Religion by Attaining the Supreme Summary and Analysis

Krishna focuses his teaching on how the Supreme Being is approached or attained and recognized.

He explains there is the Ultimate which is beyond duality, beyond being and nonbeing, form and formless, beginning and end. There is the Divided and the Undivided. All that is divided springs forth from, transforms and returns to and is all the while part of the One. The Undivided is the source, holds together, is expressed as the processes through which transformations can be shown as chains of unity, and is the end to which all returns. The two coexist but perhaps only because this gives time and space and consciousness the ability to function as process. This can be that, because forms are created, destroyed, joined to one another like earth's minerals and Sunlight become plant leaves when watered. This can be that, just as rice when devoured by humans becomes in part excrement and in part living human flesh, then dissipates through human action into a state nearly as pure as the sunlight and water which were the bulk of the rice when it was formed. Likewise, from the Undivided comes the Divided and the two are interdependent and there is a force beyond this which is above both.

Ultimately, Krishna says that knowledge of Brahma is best. All manner of wisdom will spring forth from this. The unity grants unquestionable powers that stem from bliss and wisdom.



Chapter 16, The Separateness of the Divine and the Undivine

Chapter 16, The Separateness of the Divine and the Undivine Summary and Analysis

The difference between the divine and undivine is made clear. Both are defined in terms of qualities. There is some implication that behavior has to do with mindset. In this case it is not entirely clear whether there is a distinction between the spiritual and the mind at certain levels. The qualities of the divine are often easy to find as traits of a disposition. The patient, the mild, the forgiving, the devoted, the honest and those who speak and act truthfully are all showing signs of the divine influence.

In contrast, the undivine are characterized by their lack of knowledge of Me, according to Krishna. Further, they believe not in the order of the world and of life but are confused and think that the whole nature of life on Earth is "a House of Lust" and nothing more. Krishna explains that one major source of trouble for the undivine is often enough that either they believed active deceit or that they fell into or under some other form of deception: self-imposed or imposed from the outside. Krishna discourages excessive value be placed upon either the highest highs or the lowest lows except it be the bliss of knowing Brahma.

Lust, Wrath, and Greed are the three most prevalent and dangerous demons or methods that humans use to induce their own sufferings and to motivate them to evil deeds. These are the undivine. They have divine partners: Love coupled with desire. Under certain conditions they can become an alloy of the Soul, or lust can fade where only love remains. Love tempers lust and transforms it, but does not destroy the essence that nondualistically unites them. Wrath, likewise, has purification and justice and transformation for its divine partner. Knowledge destroys ignorance with or without anger, wrath when controlled by the divine, is righteous indignation, or the purifying fires, the forces that transform ignorance into knowledge at the right time. Greed is officially wanting or desiring more than what is needed.



Chapter 17, Religion by the Threefold Kinds of Faith

Chapter 17, Religion by the Threefold Kinds of Faith Summary and Analysis

Arjuna asks Krishna what happens to true believers who are functioning in each of the three modes, whose actions are governed mainly by the soothe, the passion, the ignorance? This occurs when people truly believe in their heart of hearts but break rules of the religion anyway.

Krishna says that people will either become "true," or "passion stained," or "dark." He explains that those ruled by "goodness" only worship true gods. Those controlled by passion, err and revere powerful spirits but not the true gods. Those governed by ignorance end up honoring evil spirits or ghosts.

Krishna explains that the motivations and feelings of those who perform rites and who make offerings influence on another level what goes on. Any sacrifice that is made for the sake of a good reputation is one of "Rajas"; as the motive is in part a symptom of the desire for power it is "stained" or noticeably influenced by the mode of passion. Sattwas is doing something because it is the right thing to do, and preferably with the proper feeling. It is very pure when it does occur. These three ways can also be known through the terms: worship, abstinence, and alms. Tamas is more like giving alms, Rajas like abstinence, possibly a worthwhile sacrifice of some kind, and Sattwas, the good or the soothe, is like worship in pure state.



Religion by Deliverance and Renunciation

Religion by Deliverance and Renunciation Summary and Analysis

Krishna explains a great deal more about how the three modes of living function.

Krishna explains how certain actions are more of one mode or another or combinations of two. Krishna explains that both love and hate are to at least some degree about Rajas. Those pleasures which are best, be they intellectual or sensual or romantic, are those that are long lasting. The one who is humble, not self-seeking, resolute and steadfast whether in good or evil events is acting in Sattwas. The one who acts from duty is acting from or in Sattwas when that is the true motive. The one who is greatly moved with the emotions of the events and who acts for gain or to ensure another's loss is working in Rajas. Krishna describes Tamas as being "dark," bad, and motivated by ignorance and erroneous thinking. When sincere believers act, their works are dark. If the blind man cannot be or is not healed, then to blame him for what he cannot see is wrong. However, it remains true that there is so much that he will not see due to his blindness. To pretend that he is not blind would also be to make a dreadful error. Any action based upon the blind man's nonexistent or meager "sight" would be one of Tamas.

Krishna has occasionally referred to Arjuna as the Slayer of Foes, or in some other manner made a remark affirming that he would go out and kill the enemy. By chapter's end Krishna has been victorious. His friend and comrade, the warrior Prince Arjuna is ready for and willing to go into battle! Duty is meant to reign supreme to the mortal's life. Today Arjuna's duty is to go to battle in the war "of cousins."

Krishna reminds Arjuna that there is "right" knowledge—knowledge of the truth rather than awareness of falsehoods with no regard for the truth. He says that there is the act, the actor, and the agent. Those three together form a deed. All of these final details lead to the correct assessment that Krishna has persuaded Arjuna to take heart, and to engage the enemy out of duty, which is in righteous action. The charioteer assures Arjuna that the events of the day will be alright and that he needs to fulfill his duty and keep love of the Divine in his awareness—the love of Krishna.



Characters

Krishna

Krishna is a form of the deity Vishnu, who is the Sustainer of the Universe. He is a main character in the Bhagavadgita. He is the 9th incarnation of Vishnu. Apparently, the Hindus have lists of how many incarnations of certain godforms there will be in a given timespan.

Krishna has sometimes been called the "blue god" and has also often been associated with love. However, within the context of the Bhagavadgita which is one of the earlier of Krishna's reknowned appearances, he is not blue at all, but rather "dark."

In the book he is an Indian man in a chariot. He is there to participate in a war. With him is an archer who is also a Prince, named Arjuna. Arjuna has a gigantic personal crisis; he is on the battlefield, the fighting is about to begin and he says to his companion Krishna that he will not fight. Krishna helps Arjuna to overcome this inappropriate resistance to the upcoming events of the day and provides a tremendous amount of spiritual education as an integral part of restoring the strong heart and valor of his companion.

Arjuna

Arjuna is a warrior Prince. He is an Indian man. The warriors and kings at the time of the story are called Kshatriya and are considered as one social class. At the start of the book he faces a terrible personal crisis. He is meant to be a leader amongst the soldiers on his side in a war, to head off into battle the very day of the story and he is overwhelmed by resistance and grief. He refuses.

His companion Krishna is with him in the chariot. As the two converse to manage this crisis, it grows apparent that Krishna is an incarnation of the god Vishnu rather than just a mortal companion. He is also an Indian.

Arjuna turns out to be a great hero. This is some consolation given that he has such a severe bout of doubt about going to battle the morning the book's narrative begins. He is apparently of lighter complexion than Krishna but no explanation for this is provided.

Hanuman

This was a folk hero also known as a god, or as the king of the monkeys. "Hanuman the monkey god" appears on the ensignia of Arjuna in the war. Within the context of time, Hanuman has not existed forever, but emerged within India a few hundred years before the story in the Bhagavadgita.



Hanuman was said to have an exceptional mother: she was some kind of celestial being but had fallen under the power of a curse, which caused her to live on the earth in a rather subdued and humbled form. His father was a normal mortal man.

He was involved in the politics and warfare between Rama and Ravana, neither of whom figure overtly in much of this tale, but Bharata, is a name tied to Arjuna. Hanuman helped save Bharata during his lifetime as an incarnation of the god Shiva.

He may have been named the monkey god due to a cleft of his upper lip or mouth and jaw but this is not certain. He is said to have been a celibate but to have somehow had a spiritual child or to have adopted a child.

Stanley Applebaum

The editor of the Dover edition, he has written two pages of helpful material provided in a form of a note before the text. His work provides some guidance to those unfamiliar with the book.

Sir Edwin Arnold

This gentleman was a scholar. His translation of the Bhagavadgita in English was published in 1899 in London, England. Unlike others who translated the text into prose form, this man put it into poetic verse because this is closer to the Sanskrit original.

Me, Brahma

While the Me, means every directly perceivable connection with the divine, Brahma is the name of one of three deity forms that make up a fundamental basis of Hinduism. Brahma, is the One of all being when perceived as an indivisible unity. This is the only aspect of God that has a social caste in India. The Brahmin are the priests. Brahma is of the utmost importance in this work as this is going to be the foundation from which Krishna and Arjuna face the demands of their day. The Creator is an accurate rendition of Brahma in English.

Vishnu

Vishnu is the Maintainer and Preserver of the universe. Krishna is known in Hindu philosophy & religion as the 9th incarnation of Vishnu. This was discovered due to the way that he behaved during the conversation that is shared during the Bhagavadgita. What he said caused Arjuna to see Him— Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva—there and through the dangers that awaited them.



Shiva

Shiva is the Destroyer of the Universe. In the book Krishna refers to Shiva solely as Time. However, he refers to Shiva in direct relation to the fact that they are facing the need to kill adults today upon the battlefield. Krishna urges Arjuna to not even think of himself as doing it, but to see that Time is the Destroyer and that everyone is going to die at some point regardless of their behavior today.

Adhiyajna

This is an Indian word that translates into the phrase: Lord of Sacrifice. It occurs in the 7th chapter of the book during a rather emphatic part of Krishna's discourse on religion. It shows how many different names that which can also be known as Brahma can be called.

Sanjaya

This is either the title or the name of one character. Sanjaya is not a character in the story. However, his role is that of the presenter. He is the messenger to the listening audience of one. He is listed as the one speaking on a few occasions during the book. There is no certainty whether this was an actual messenger or if this was a story teller or if this was a theatrical contrivance.

Dhritarashtra

This is the audience of the book's tale. He asks Sanjaya at the beginning what has occurred upon the battlefield. His messenger begins by describing the appearance of the fields with their officers and weapons and then describes the discussion of Arjuna and Krishna.



Objects/Places

conch

This is a shell used as a noise making device in war. It is used to deliver messages of fear to the enemy and of inspiration and direction to those in one's army. It comes up in the very first chapter of the book and appears later in the story.

bow

This well known weapon was used in the battle described in this epic tale. It is carried then dropped by Arjuna in the first chapter.

The invention of the chariot bearing archers was a significant and dangerous advancement of warcraft. Krishna and Arjuna are together in such a powerful device.

Brahman

This is a societal caste designed to fulfill a specific role. In Indian society, the religious people are held in great esteem. Therefore the Brahmin are viewed as the top of society, even though they are the priests rather than the politicians. Krishna is operating as one of these during much of this text.

Kshatriya

This is the next highest caste of the clearly ranked society of ancient India. Political leaders, kings and warriors are the people of this class. As Arjuna and Krishna are at war, both are functioning as members of this caste during the book.

Vaisya

This is another social class of India. While presented as lower in status, every group is a necessary part of the society. This group, rather than being about religion or politics, governs the economy: these are the business owners and organizers, the merchants and traders.

Sudra

As the laborers, Sudra are somehow at once the most humble yet absolutely vital to the entire system of Indian society. These are the ones who will make the products, will drive the transportation devices when traded items are distributed, and who will provide labor for retailers.



Lust

Chapter 16 includes this as one of three main causes of wrongdoing and evil amongst men. Krishna simply warns Arjuna away from it and lumps it in amongst the 'undivine'. Ignorance can emerge as an unfortunate side effect of this power. Lust is commonly associated with the sexual desires, but in fact it merely means the desire for any thing or nonthing without love or proper perspective and perhaps without a clear sense of purpose or usefulness behind the desire. Lust for power, or wealth, or a new car, or a gorgeous mate...all these are equally "lust."

Wrath

This is the second of what Krishna marks as one of the gravest spiritual challenge areas. All manner of actions can arise from anger. He describes the patient and mild mannered as the godly, but impatience to be a source of trouble. Forgiveness, and correction are two forces and behaviors that can cleanse people from anger. Krishna goes on about this in chapter 16 when he is differentiating between the divine and the undivine.

Greed

This is about desiring or longing for that which goes far beyond what is needed. In some cases this is simply the desire for more of anything. What is 'greedy' may be culturally influenced. Less than greed: for one it is having enough to eat, whereas for another it may include health coverage and plenty of utilities within a fine home or two.

Greed then, may be wanting an 8th pair of shoes, or another mate, or another crown, or a second car, or a small nation, or more territory for a state or nation. Such greed, Krishna tells Arjuna before the battle, is undivine and can be a source of much trouble for humanity. He makes this clear in Chapter 16.

chakra

This is a word for wheel. It is more indirectly referred to through mention of the deities. While no images are provided with some editions, it would not have been out of place for there to be chakras present. These wheels were in some cases weapons, most likely throwing weapons. It comes up since the deific images of Brahma, Vishnu and especially Shiva are apt to have chakras. This is also mentioned to clarify the matter because in the West 'chakra' is most often meant to describe areas along the human spinal column that seem to easily 'build up energy'.

flesh

During the book, in numerous chapters, the flesh means the body of an individual including both the passions and the appearance. While an important vehicle of the living Soul, Krishna expresses that the flesh should not be overrated. However, he also complains to his friend Arjuna that asceticism and extremes of self-denial are not necessarily much better than over indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh: sex, intoxications, food and all behaviors that generate 'endorphins' whether running marathons or violence can be viewed as indulgences of the flesh as they are based in heightening sensual experience in some manner.



Themes

Psychology of War & Warriors

This book takes an in depth look at the position of the warrior put in the position to battle. Unlike many sources that glamorize this subject matter, the unknown author has gone to great lengths to examine the mind of Arjuna. Despite the fact that the entire confrontation is an example of only one case there is little doubt that the extensive coverage of emotions and thoughts that relate to this matter can be applied in numerous other cases.

Arjuna is revealed to be resistant in the face of this battle. This goes against the image of the ever-enthusiastic blood thirsty warrior. He is in a situation in which he is free to speak his mind. He objects to the war. Every objection makes perfect sense.

Krishna devotes great energy to overcome Arjuna's reluctance to go into this war in which he will be killing his own relatives. He does not achieve this by avoiding his friend's objections, a fact which is also of great importance. Rather, Krishna overcomes the objections.

Krishna relies upon a particular spiritual perspective in order to be able to do this. From that vantage point, the charioteer espouses many things. Through doing so, an entire psychology emerges, one in which the possibility for engaging in the war that is before them becomes acceptable to Arjuna. In the end, Arjuna is mentally prepared for battle.

The wisdom found herein could be applied to every warrior. As such, the book can serve as a way of helping any warrior to either prepare for or to recover from combat. While it can do nothing directly physical, it can speed healing through addressing the emotional and mental aspects of the warrior's condition. If nothing else, anyone can see most of the psychological concerns of a warrior. Readers can also see them handled adroitly and with the respect and sincerity which they deserve in contrast to being ignored or glossed over.

Krishna's Divine Incarnation

According to Hindu tradition, Krishna is the 9th avatar, or incarnation of Vishnu on the Earth. Vishnu is called by many the god of "peace and order" and "the preserver."

Krishna is presented as both divine and human. Arjuna realizes that he must be divine due to the power of and the spiritual quality of what he shares with Arjuna. A definitive judgment is being made regarding this entity. He is a human being, a friend of Arjuna's. In fact, he is simply the charioteer. Obviously, this ensures that Arjuna is not alone in this circumstance. It is Arjuna who discovers that his friend Krishna is divine. The editor refers to Krishna as a discernible incarnation of Vishnu. How readers interpret the work with respect to this is apt to vary. Either this text shows through demonstration more



details about how it is that an avatar functions when manifest as a human or else it shows how the conscious state of enlightenment has been viewed by the Hindus as "divine incarnation."

Religion & Means of Progress

Another theme in this work is how to make spiritual progress with religious practice. It is for this reason, or so it seems, that Krishna covers a number of ways for aspirants to relate to religion in the book. He goes on to explain how each method works.

The book will come across differently to those already familiar with Hindu philosophy and theology than it will to those to whom this work is an introduction. Each chapter forms an address to some aspect of Hindu practice.

Krishna covers daily life and meditation, as well as the eternal and the invincible nature of all. Each chapter is named for a different means of attainment.

He provides some description of the divine as deity and as principles. He explains qualities and modes and how these function within people. He discusses meditation and he speaks of the effectiveness of devotion.

Style

Perspective

This book is written as part of a cultural tradition. Its form, therefore can be understood as coming from the Indian history of certain families. Part of the Mahabharata, it elucidates one of the main tenet's also of Krishna's teachings—that personal devotion is an effective method for disciples and other followers to use in striving for attainment.

The perspective is multi-leveled. Within the dialogic level it is presented as first person from the point-of-view of whoever is speaking. However, there is the next layer that contains the "frame" of the messenger and listening audience. From this aspect the entire conversation is a third person narrative. Then, this is invisibly contained by virtue of being presented as a story within which the discussion occurs.

The author of this work is anonymous. The perspective is one within which the culture is faced with war. In this case, the enemies are also relatives of one another; they are close enough that this cannot be avoided. It comes from a world with far less technology but much more than none.

The method of sharing this information is standard. The author was most likely behaving normally when putting together this song. It is not clear whether this was an invention, or a true-to-life tale, or pure story. It is not entirely clear whether this was using another kind of story as a device to discourse on religion or if rather the truth is that life threatening conditions can lend themselves to the religious "bent" even when nothing else will.

Tone

The tone is profound. The entire piece is one discourse that reaches into the very depths of the psychology and emotions pertaining to warfare. There is no simplistic glossing over the range of feelings that this involves. The challenges for the warrior are revealed and explained thoroughly. In many respects this may be viewed as having an instructive and somehow nurturing tone.

There is an air of the pronouncement throughout the work. This quality of great oration fits the book very well, especially since it has been couched in the language of the official messenger bringing word to a blind man regarding what has transpired.

The tone consists of a specific quality that emerges as a direct consequence of the tradition from within which it emerged. The translator and editor have both done what they can to preserve and possibly even to enhance this.

In this book there may or may not be a certain kind of distinction. Has the author supplied this as a form of erudition? The pronouncements are inspirational. However,



they are so complete during much of the work that education seems as much the author's intent.

It can be confusing for readers. The speech is impassioned, but who would not speak energetically under such conditions? Has Krishna transformed into the god form as it appears? Is the warrior Prince merely discovering for the first time that his charioteer is familiar with religion and has sound ideas on the subject? Does he discuss this solely to prepare his friend for battle or from a compelling sense of necessity?

Structure

The book is all of one piece. It is subdivided into chapters, each with a title. The contents are all poetry. This being the case, the chapters differ not only in what Krishna and Arjuna are discussing, but also in the structure of the poetry. The length and form of the lines of the poem are not consistent throughout the chapters in every way. However, they uniformly tend to be relatively short. The tradition from which the text springs forth involves one in which the "gita" is translated as "song." It is part of a larger work known as the MahaBharata, which is the epic tale of the Bharata family. It is significant that the Bharata's have an association with Hanuman the monkey god. In the history of Hinduism the small god Hanuman assisted in battles between beings named Rama and Ravana. The former is presented as a King and perhaps a lesser god, whereas the latter is called a "demon Lord" perhaps in part because he has stolen the former's wife.

The form of the text is that of a story being relayed by a professional messenger, who it might be expected must remember exactly and completely what was said and done. There are times when this being is referred to by the character whose role in the book is to be the listener. The majority of the tale is presented as a dialog.

It turns out that Krishna has a clear series of aspects of theology to cover with Arjuna. On the face of it, readers might wonder that the two should have such time and a clear head for the likes of this type of discussion but they do. What is clear is that the two have established friendship between them.



Quotes

"I am not seen by all; I am not known—Unborn and changeless—to the idle world," p. 37.

"Of many thousand mortals, one, perchance, Striveth for Truth; and of those few that strive—Nay, and rise high—one only—here and there—Knoweth Me, as I am, the very Truth," p. 35.

"I am the fresh taste of the water," p. 36.

"Worship me well, with hearts of love and faith, And find and hold me in the hour of death," p. 38.

"That man I love! Who, fixed in faith on Me,
Dotes upon none, scorns none; rejoices not,
And grieves not, letting good or evil hap" p. 67.

"ARJUNA. Now that I see come back, Janardana!
This friendly human frame, my mind can think
Calm thoughts once more; my heart beats still again!" p. 63.

"Be merciful and show,
The visage that I know," p. 62.

"The wise in spirit cleave to Me," p. 49.

"And murmuring OM, the sacred syllable—
Emblem of BRAHM-dies, meditating Me," p. 41.



Topics for Discussion

Has this book affected your own perception of Christ due to Krishna also claiming to be an incarnation of God?

Do you agree that ultimately, this discussion leads to Arjuna being mentally prepared for battle?

Do you agree with the difference between the divine and the undivine? Explain your answer.

Recount the divine qualities and those that are undivine.

Do you believe that there is any alternative other than for Krishna to encourage his friend so that Arjuna will have the heart for battle? If so, explain what the alternative might be.

What qualities do Sattwas, Rajas and Tamas indicate in English?

Agree or disagree with Krishna that Time is the Destroyer. Explain your answer.

Do you feel that Krishna provides a rather thorough summary of the metaphysical viewpoint during this book? Back up your answer.

Did you like this book? Explain your response.