

THE GITA

Memoirs of a Psychiatrist

a life changing scripture



VOLUME I

ARISE ARJUNA FOUNDATION

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VOLUME 1

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DEDICATION

With profound gratitude, I dedicate this book to:

The timeless wisdom of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and the unbroken lineage of Rishis, Munis, and Gurus who have preserved and passed down these sacred teachings for thousands of years, illuminating the path for seekers across generations.

My esteemed ***Guru, Gautam Ji*** of Vedanta USA, with whom my studies first began, and his ***Guru, Swami Parthasarathy***, Founder of the Vedanta Academy. Their guidance, along with the wisdom of many other Swamis and teachers, has deepened my understanding of the Gita.

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MEMOIRS OF A PSYCHIATRIST

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Full: Front

Album of South Indian paintings on paper. (15) GITOPADESHA.

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ARISE ARJUNA FOUNDATION

The Arise Arjuna Foundation was formed to disseminate the knowledge of the *Vedas* and other ancient texts to modern day Arjunas (everyone in today's modern day world), in the belief that the methodical application of this knowledge will improve the quality of individual lives and improve society. Just as the application of the cumulative knowledge of science and technology has improved material aspects of life, vedic knowledge gained by the scientific methods of observation and experimentation improves the quality of spiritual life and the experience and purpose of living in general.

This collected wisdom has been available and practiced by a small fraction of the population. It can become widely available in modern context to the benefit of many. People can practice this new-found knowledge while continuing to maintain their own religious beliefs, attending their own houses of worship, etc. Arise Arjuna Foundation does NOT try to change anybody's religious beliefs or following, only to gain a better understanding of the way we function in society and life, without religious implications.

Our lives are filled with what we should do, have or be, but there is a relatively little attention to why and how we live. The fundamental questions of life are unchanged throughout the ages. Basic processes of discovery were developed and handed down to us. The Arise Arjuna Foundation is committed to fostering widespread application of this knowledge.

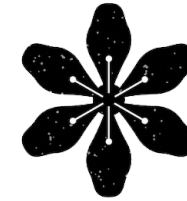
The Arise Arjuna Blog has various areas which might be of interest. One section consists of the teachings of ancient seers passed on to us through Vedanta, the Gita, Upanishads and other sacred writings. The contributors to this Blog will be using common daily language to make the teachings available to the maximum number of people. Another section consists of the spread of the Vedic civilization from ancient India to the rest of the world.

This Foundation is a Non-profit Organization. We do not seek any funds. The staff writers prefer to remain nameless and are only the messengers as they transmit, to the best of their ability, the gift left to humanity by our ancient Sages and Seers of the Truth: the sacred knowledge of how to conduct one's life and how to live as a human being.





INTRODUCTION



If you're holding this book in your hands, it means you—like me—want to understand the Bhagavad Gita more deeply. Even as I write this, I remain a student, always learning, always exploring. This book is an invitation for us to study together, to ask and answer questions, and to enrich our lives through the wisdom of the Gita. I assume you already have some familiarity with the Gita. Perhaps you know of its origins in ancient India, its influence on philosophy and literature across civilizations, and its impact on great thinkers from Greece to America. If so, you may choose to skip this chapter. But if you're curious to learn more—or to see the Gita in a new light—read on. By the end of this chapter, you may find yourself asking: What makes the Gita so great? That's precisely what the rest of this book will explore.

Why “Memoirs of a Psychiatrist”?

You may wonder why this book is titled “The Gita – Memoirs of a Psychiatrist” instead of Reflections of a Psychiatrist. The answer is simple: this journey began as a podcast where I shared my memoirs. At the time, I had no intention of discussing the Gita. My focus was on recounting my experiences as a psychiatrist specializing in hypnosis—particularly my work on criminal cases. I had helped law enforcement agencies, including the CIA, FBI, and Secret Service, solve cold cases involving murder. For years, my sons encouraged me to document my experiences in a book or podcast.

As I shared my stories, I eventually spoke about how the Gita entered my life. Its teachings profoundly transformed my perspective. When I applied its wisdom to my patients, I witnessed remarkable changes in their healing process. Over time, the Gita became central to my discussions, and I modified the podcast's title to reflect this shift. To my surprise, the podcast resonated with people across the world. At one point, I learned that *800,000 listeners from 160 countries were tuning in weekly*. Despite its anonymity, it reached far and wide. The Gita teaches us to act without attachment to recognition, fame, or profit. Following this principle, I never sought monetary gain from the podcast. This book exists because of the encouragement of friends and family who urged me to turn the podcast into a written work. As is customary in this tradition, I have chosen to keep my name out of it.

INTRODUCTION

Why “A Life-Changing Scripture”?

The Gita has profoundly changed my life, and I have heard the same from countless listeners. The wisdom contained within its verses is transformative. My goal in writing this book is to pass on these teachings to future generations, ensuring they continue to inspire and guide those who seek deeper understanding.

What You Need to Know About the Bhagavad Gita:

At its core, the Gita is a conversation between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna. Set on a battlefield, it delves into duty, self-doubt, the balance between mind and intellect, and the path to true wisdom. Its verses are layered with meaning, rich in symbolism, and timeless in their relevance.

1. The Gita has influenced some of history’s greatest minds.
2. Aldous Huxley called it “one of the most clear and comprehensive summaries of perennial philosophy ever revealed.”
3. J. Robert Oppenheimer, who studied Sanskrit to read the Gita in its original form, famously quoted it after witnessing the first atomic bomb test: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”
4. Albert Einstein reflected, “When I read the Bhagavad-Gita and think about how God created this universe, everything else seems so superfluous.”

The Gita’s impact extends beyond philosophy and science—it has shaped literature, film, and even modern storytelling. References to its themes can be found in *Avatar*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, and *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (a name strikingly similar to Bhagwan).

The Origins of the Gita

The Gita is a part of the *Mahabharata*, an epic composed by the sage Vyas over three thousand years ago—possibly even five thousand. Vyas observed a society obsessed with wealth, status, and hollow rituals. He saw people turning away from genuine wisdom, replacing it with transactional prayers and material pursuits. Disillusioned, he sought to revive the ancient teachings by embedding them within a grand epic. Within this vast tale, he included a moment of profound transformation: a warrior, standing at the threshold of battle, suddenly overcome with doubt. This is the Bhagavad Gita.

The Story of Arjuna and Krishna

Arjuna, a legendary warrior, returns from exile to reclaim his rightful kingdom from his corrupt cousins. His army stands ready; victory seems within reach. But as he surveys the battlefield, he falters. The opposing forces include his own family, his teachers, and those he once admired. Overcome with despair, he drops his bow and refuses to fight. In that moment of crisis, Krishna speaks to him—not just as a friend, but as the divine guide. He reveals the eternal truths of life, duty, and the self. His words, captured in the Gita, address not just Arjuna’s predicament, but the struggles we all face—questions of purpose, morality, and the nature of existence.

The Gita’s Global Influence

The Gita’s wisdom spread far beyond India. In Ancient Greece, Krishna’s name transformed into Kouros, the charioteer of the sun. His consort, Radha, became Radhos—later evolving into Rhode, the namesake of both the island of Rhodes and Rhode Island in the U.S. The Roman god Janus, with his two faces looking forward and back, shares striking similarities with India’s elephant-headed god, Ganesh. Even the name “Cyrus,” popular in Persia, traces its roots back to Krishna.

When the Gita was first translated into English in the 18th century, it was an instant success. Ralph Waldo Emerson declared, “It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us—nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence.” His friend Henry David Thoreau even claimed that Shakespeare, compared to the Gita, was “youthfully green.”

The Gita is a wellspring of wisdom, its depths still being explored. My hope is that this book serves as a gateway, igniting curiosity and inspiring deeper study.

Recommendations for Study

I strongly encourage readers to listen to the podcast to better understand this book.

You can access the **Memoirs of a Psychiatrist** episodes here:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4ODJvDE6tnej7LkgWVw804?si=eb30a410dca6426c>

Listen to the verse by verse explanation of the Gita by Gautam Ji of Vedanta USA.

Read the verses as a commentary in the book by Swami Parthasarthy, “Srimad Bhagavad Gita”. This is available in print format as well as online.

As tradition suggests, study these teachings early in the morning during Brahma Muhurta (4:00 AM – 6:00 AM). Take notes, reflect, and let the wisdom take root.

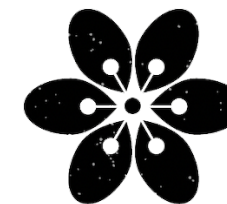
Additionally, you can reach us at: arisearjunathegita@gmail.com

Let us begin.



EPISODE 1

The Gita - Life Changing Scripture



There are moments in life that seem insignificant at first, but they end up changing everything. For me, this was one of those moments. As a retired psychiatrist, I had spent years working with complex psychiatric cases, and was content keeping myself busy with clinical work. I was never someone you'd call "religious". In fact, I always kept my distance from religion.. Raised in a religious family, I didn't hate it—just never understood it. I couldn't wrap my head around people going to temples, churches, or mosques, pleading for favors as if bargaining with God. It seemed absurd to stand before something so powerful, making deals. The idea that prayers could really sway the divine just didn't sit right with me. Sundays were mine. While others were immersed in prayers, I stayed home and watched football or sports. My wife, on the other hand, always had this quiet wisdom about her. She would often attend spiritual lectures or seminars. She knew me better than anyone else. We had known each other since we were 12—long enough for her to master reading me in ways even I couldn't. On a usual Sunday, she came home from yet another spiritual lecture.

This time, something was different. She looked right at me and said, "I need you to hear something."

I sighed. "Really? What's it about?"

She paused before answering. "Religion and spirituality."

I was ready to check out, and I instantly dismissed it. But, with all her kindness and understanding, she insisted for the first time. "Just this once, do it for me".

I reluctantly gave in and agreed to hear this young speaker the following Sunday. "But only once," I reminded her. That following Sunday, I dragged myself to the venue. I was expecting a dry, preachy talk. But from the moment the speaker, a young man named Gautam Ji began speaking, something shifted inside me. It was like an old, dirty car going through a carwash and emerging clean on the other side. I was wrapped in clarity. His words pierced through me. Concepts I'd struggled with for years, about life, purpose, and how we function, suddenly clicked. It wasn't just religion anymore; it was something far bigger. After his talk, I was hooked. "When can I hear you again?" I asked. To my surprise, he lectured almost daily. I started attending every lecture I could, in Manhattan, in New Jersey, wherever he was lecturing. His teachings, rooted in the Bhagavad Gita, kept pulling me back. Little did I know then just how widely the Gita had impacted people, far beyond what most realize.

1 - THE GITA - LIFE CHANGING SCRIPTURE

The Bhagavad Gita, or simply Gita, is considered as one of the greatest spiritual texts written. It is based on ancient Hindu teachings that transcend religion. It lays out principles of how to live a fulfilling and purposeful life. It expands on handling challenges, how to treat others, and finding peace within. The story of how the Gita became known to the world is fascinating in itself.

In 1784, when India was under British rule, Warren Hastings served as Governor General. The directive to him at the time was clear: convert as many people as possible in India to Christianity. The British were convinced the local traditions and beliefs were backward and they thought Christianity was the solution to “save” the people. During his time in India, Hastings met scholars who challenged him to explore the ancient texts before attempting to convert more people. Among these texts was the Bhagavad Gita, a part of the *Mahabharata*, written over 5,000 years ago. The Gita was essentially a summary of even older philosophical texts like the Upanishads and Vedanta. Curious, Hastings agreed, and what he discovered was something beyond his expectations.

Hastings was so moved by the teachings of the Gita that he wanted to make it accessible to the English-speaking world. He enlisted Charles Wilkins, a scholar living in India’s holy city of Benares, to translate it into English. In 1785, the world’s first English translation of the Bhagavad Gita was published under the title, *A Dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna*. The foreword of this book, written back then, still resonates today: “Long after the British flag no longer flies, the beauty of the Gita will continue to bring peace to all humanity”. Promoting the Gita was not favorable for Hastings. . The East India Company and British Parliament were furious, recalling Hastings and removing him from his role. He never held power again. Yet, the Gita had already started its journey across the world, being translated into languages like French, German, Italian, Russian, and more. Its message was universal, touching hearts everywhere. All over Europe, centers began opening such as, *The Centers for Studying Sanskrit*, and *The Centers for the Study of Asiatic Studies*.

Even in the United States, many luminaries were influenced by the Gita. Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most prominent American thinkers and philosophers, discovered Wilkins’ translation. At the time, Emerson was deeply questioning his role as a pastor, feeling troubled by the sacrament and Christian rituals. The Gita became a guiding light for him. He crossed the Atlantic to study it thoroughly in England, and when he returned, Emerson was transformed.

He, along with Henry David Thoreau and other significant figures like Walt Whitman and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Longfellow, Amos Bronson Alcott, Sarah Fuller and many others, became part of a larger spiritual movement. They didn’t reject their faith; instead, found the Gita’s wisdom to complement what they already believed. For them, the Gita wasn’t about worshiping a particular god or following strict religious practices. It was about embracing a way of life that promoted self-examination, respect for nature, and kindness toward others. The American poets then formed various groups which followed the dictates of The Gita. They also formed Vedic groups in the USA and named them ‘The Transcendentalist’, ‘The Concord Movement’ and ‘The New Thought Movement.’ If you examine their writing, you will see the heavy influence of

the Gita.. Emerson’s ‘Transcendentalist’ club opposed rituals and any dogmatic theology.

In 1845, Emerson wrote in his diary that he was reading the Gita and essays on the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* are older texts upon which the Gita was based. The Gita simplified what was in the *Vedas* and Upanishads. Emerson said, “I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad Gita. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.”

Henry David Thoreau, in Concord Mass, was also a student of the Gita. He wrote, “I would say to the readers of the scriptures that if they wish for a good book, read the Bhagavad Gita, translated by Charles Wilkins. It deserves to be read with reverence, even by Yankees. Besides the Bhagavad Gita, our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green. The Western world has not yet derived from the East all the light it is destined to derive thence.” He further wrote, “Whenever I have read any part of the *Vedas*, I have felt that some unearthly and unknown light illuminated me. And I can say this from personal experience; in the great teachings of the *Vedas*, there is no touch of sectarianism. It is of all ages, of all climes, and all nationalities, and it is the royal road for the attainment of great knowledge. When I am at it, I feel that I am under the spangled heavens of a summer night”.

Thoreau also wrote, “I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindus without being elevated as upon the table land of the Ghats. It has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges, and seems as superior to criticism as the Himalayan Mountains. Even at this late hour, unworn by time with a native and inherent dignity, it wears the English dress as indifferently as it wears the Sanskrit.” Intelligent, thoughtful men were profoundly impacted by this. I’ve only shared a very small smattering of various famous writings about the Gita. This sentiment was shared across many in American literature. The famed poet William Blake, painted a visual called “The Brahmins”. He depicted himself as a white man surrounded by Indian scholars of The Gita, all of whom he termed as Brahmins. Since he was from Boston and traveled to England, he was sometimes referred to as the Boston Brahmin, and felt that his work was deeply connected to these teachings. The Gita’s message of being centered around the idea of a ‘Brahmin’— someone emotionally steady and at peace— resonated deeply with him.

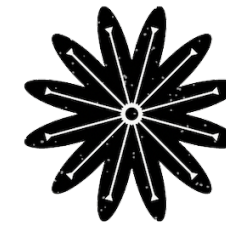
I know how difficult it can be to find inner calm, especially in today’s chaotic world. The Gita offers some basic principles that can help anyone lead a more balanced life. One concept that particularly moved me was the idea of focusing on what’s right, instead of on what you’re personally gaining. This eventually led to a sense of inner accomplishment and interestingly, the financial rewards followed naturally. The power in the Gita is not about following blind faith or rituals. It’s about understanding the bigger picture. When selfish desires are set aside, and the goal becomes doing the right thing, the rewards multiply in ways you never expect. Having gone through this transformation, I now find it difficult to imagine my life before I attended that first lecture by Gautam Ji. It’s strange how one small decision of dragging myself reluctantly to a lecture on a Sunday changed me so much. Today, I hope to carry forward this life-changing wisdom to others, in the same way it was shared with me.

The Bhagavad Gita is not a religious book confined to one culture or faith. It’s a guide. A guide to life, to living



EPISODE 2

The Basics You Need To Know



The teachings of the Gita, alongside Vedanta and Upanishads, have touched countless lives across the globe. This ancient wisdom offers insights that transcend religious boundaries, offering practical guidance for navigating life's complexities, relationships, and emotions. Its influence can be profound, as I have personally discovered, alongside my patients, friends, and family who have embraced these teachings. I owe my introduction to this world to Gautam Ji, a devoted student of Swami Parthasarathy. It was my wife Lalita, who first pointed me in his direction.

We shall explore the foundational aspects of the Gita, in this section. Many of you may already be familiar with some of these ideas, but they are crucial stepping stones before we go deeper into the Gita's teachings. At its core, the Gita is a guide for living well. It emphasizes the importance of understanding our true nature. After all, when you buy a new car, a mobile, or a television, an instruction manual accompanies it. Yet, when we are born, we enter this world without a clear guide, often navigating life through trial and error. The ancient wisdom posits that at birth, we are much like animals—driven by instinct. It is only as we mature, typically around the ages of 10 or 11, that we begin to truly develop into human beings. This transition is celebrated in various cultures. In Hindu tradition, it is marked by the *Janeu* ceremony, also known as *Upanayanam*. In this rite, a sacred thread is tied across the child's body, symbolizing their entry into adolescence and their responsibility to uphold virtues, discipline, and knowledge. Similar rites exist in other cultures, like *Bar Mitzvah* in the Jewish tradition, signifying the point at which a child begins to understand and engage with moral and ethical dimensions of life.

THE FIVE SENSES:

The Gita teaches us that we are composed of body and spirit. Our physical existence is understood through our five senses—sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste. Nature provides us with various sensory experiences, and when our senses engage with objects, we experience pleasure or discomfort. The more senses we engage simultaneously, the deeper our experience of pleasure becomes. For example, listening to a beautiful piece of music being performed can be profoundly moving. Interestingly, scriptures like the Gita and Vedanta also highlight that a woman, particularly in the role of a mother, provides an experience where all five senses are activated at once. This begins early in life when a child, in its mother's care, experiences sight through the familiar comfort of her face, sound through the soothing cadence of her voice, smell through her presence, taste through her milk, and touch through loving gestures. These integrated

2 - THE BASICS YOU NEED TO KNOW

sensory experiences cultivate a profound sense of joy.

FIVE ORGANS OF ACTION:

However, it is not just the senses that are noteworthy; the ancients also spoke of the five *Organs of Action*. These include the *hands and arms for grasping*, the *legs for movement*, the *digestive and excretory organs*, the *voice* for communication, and the *reproductive organs*. A baby instinctively cries when hungry, cold, or uncomfortable, signaling to its mother for help. As the child grows, its hands reach out to explore the world. In its early years, everything goes into its mouth, as that is the primary way the child connects with its environment, often to the exclusion of recognizing that not everything is meant to be tasted. As children toddle about, they crawl toward objects that captivate their interest and gradually learn to verbalize their needs for essentials like milk and water. Over time, they gain control over their bodily functions, and as they enter adolescence, their reproductive systems mature, intertwining with their developing minds.

THE MIND:

Even as the body grows, it is the *mind* that truly shapes one's experience—often working against us. The mind is really the villain of the story as it is perpetually driven by desires and fears, frequently pulling it towards what it wants. In Sanskrit, this duality of desire is known as *Raga* (wanting) and *Dvesha* (disliking). Like an unquenchable fire, the mind continuously demands more, consuming everything in its path as long as it is fed. The mind is the seat of all desires and emotions.

THE INTELLECT:

Above the mind lies the *intellect*, a facet of our being that is not present at birth but develops gradually, especially during our formative years. The intellect gains authority over both the mind and body, marking the transition from childhood to a morally competent human being. Various cultures celebrate this pivotal moment, recognizing an individual's ability to discern right from wrong. What distinguishes humans from other animals is our fully developed intellect. While other species may exhibit instinctive behaviors, they lack the moral reasoning that uniquely defines us. A tiger, for example, acts purely on instinct when it hunts, without moral consideration. In contrast, humans have the capacity to pause and reflect, weighing the consequences of choices before acting. A hunter for instance, holds the power to choose between pursuing an animal or allowing it to live—a choice often guided by their sense of ethics. As we continue this journey of understanding, it becomes clear that embracing our intellect is one of the Gita's core lessons. It forms the backbone of our moral framework and is essential for navigating life's complexities.

Building on this, let us explore the nature of desire and its intersection with the intellect. As our intellect begins to develop—typically in early adolescence—we experience the onset of reproductive instincts. This is a time when the body, mind, and intellect seem at odds, creating a storm of confusion. The Sanskrit term *Vasanas* refers to our subconscious tendencies or character traits shaped by past experiences. These *Vasanas* pull at the intellect and mind, driving us to pursue fleeting pleasures—whether it is food, power, beauty, or thrill. This is where the analogy of a chariot emerges, a concept explored in the Upanishads and echoed in the modern metaphor of a car.

Imagine a chariot: the body serves as the vehicle, the intellect as the charioteer, and the true self—the soul—is the passenger, often represented by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The five horses symbolize our senses, constantly seeking experiences in the world. When the reins are held firmly by our intellect, the senses remain in check. However, if the reins are slack, our desires run rampant, leaving us at the mercy of external influences.

It is essential to differentiate between intellect and intelligence. Intelligence involves the accumulation of knowledge through experiences and education, whereas intellect is the capacity for deeper moral reasoning—the ability to discern right from wrong. The Sanskrit terminology captures this distinction: *Sukshma Buddhi* refers to our subtle intellect, which grasps profound truths and spiritual awareness, while the gross intellect deals with practical aspects of daily life. Most of us spend our lives preoccupied with immediate, tangible matters, unaware of the broader spiritual perspectives awaiting our exploration. Even religious practices can become ritualistic, focused more on seeking favors than on seeking deeper connection or understanding.

Cultivating *Sukshma Buddhi*, or the subtle intellect is crucial as it serves as our conscience. It helps differentiate between right and wrong, often nudging us toward ethical choices, even when immediate gratification tempts us. Developing this inner awareness leads to a richer and more meaningful connection to life itself. Since our essence is tied to deeper sources of energy—what many call divinity—we must recognize that this energy exists not only within us but also in the world around us. Understanding this interconnectedness can illuminate our actions and guide us toward higher purposes beyond mere desire fulfillment.

The concept of *Atman*—a fundamental idea in Hinduism—refers to the universal Self, the eternal core of our being. After death, the *Atman* either transmigrates into a new life or attains Moksha—liberation—from the cycle of existence. *Atman*, our soul represents the spark of life within us. This energy is akin to AA batteries that energize gadgets. It connects us to *Brahman*—a larger force described as eternal, conscious, infinite and omnipresent. Recognizing our connection to something greater helps us grasp the continuity of life and the significance of our actions. As we navigate life's paths, we continue facing choices. We can be drawn to what seems pleasurable in the short term, or we can choose the more challenging road that leads to deeper fulfillment. While immediate cravings may push us toward indulgence—like my love for donuts—the real challenge lies in weighing these desires against long-term well-being.

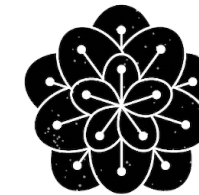
Gautam Ji, echoing the wisdom of Swami Parthasarathy, urges us to contemplate beyond appearances. If given a choice between two roads—one smooth and inviting, the other rocky and difficult—our instinct may lead us to choose the easier path. However, in the long run, it is often the challenging road that yields the greatest rewards.

This understanding becomes clearer as we recognize that taking care of both our physical and spiritual well-being shapes our lives for the better. Avoiding short-term pleasures can lead to long-term benefits. While we may initially resist good habits, they can eventually become our most cherished practices. In our next exploration, we will delve deeper into these themes and

3

EPISODE 3

More Important Concepts To Learn



When you realize your true Self, you become one with the *Atman* and *Brahman*. At that moment, separating the two becomes impossible. Looking at historical figures we often consider self realized—Buddha, Christ, or Muhammad— we notice that they all withdrew from worldly distractions to connect with themselves. They sought deep realization, and once they attained it, they emerged with knowledge they wanted to share with the world. There’s a saying that suggests we all live in a dream-like state, oblivious to true reality. It raises an interesting idea: what if, while dreaming, someone suddenly shook you awake and declared, “Hey! This is all just a dream; you have to wake up!” Chances are, you wouldn’t take them seriously. Isn’t it intriguing, how resistant we can be to questioning our realities?

As our journey unfolds, you may start to sense that a deeper truth exists. You might say, “I want to wake up!” The seeking for that essence is *Dharma*. The relentless chase of desires often leads us in circles. We move from one craving to the next, and even when we attain what we seek, the question lingers: “Now what?” Sometimes we lose interest, feel anxious about losing what we gained, or simply start chasing something new.

These endless cycles result in stress and negativity, far from the rewarding experience we hoped for. This brings us toward *Yoga*. When I mention yoga, many people think about physical poses like downward dog or warrior stance. The term *Yoga* comes from the Sanskrit root *Yuj*, meaning “to join” or “to unite.” In our context, it symbolizes the effort to unify ourselves with the *Atman*. *Yoga* is a collection of physical, mental, and spiritual practices that originated in ancient India to reconnect us with our inner *Atman*.

The Gita and Upanishads offer various pathways to achieve this union, all referred to as different types of Yoga. *Hatha Yoga*, for instance, is crucial for meditating effectively in peaceful settings like the Himalayas. Think of historic figures like Buddha, who retreated deep into nature to strip away worldly temptations and distractions. In that silence, *Hatha Yoga* becomes vital, helping stretch and strengthen the body to sit comfortably for extended periods.

3 - MORE IMPORTANT CONCEPTS TO LEARN

Ultimately, being a true *Yogi* means transcending the physical body. Even if you detach from external distractions, you cannot escape your body's needs. If you feel an itch or discomfort, the ultimate yogi learns to manage it so they can remain focused.

The journey of self-exploration is vast, like diving into an ocean of wisdom. At the heart of this exploration lies the ancient teachings of the Gita, which guide and illuminate our paths.

Previously, we explored what makes us human—our body, mind, intellect, and the energy which gives us life and consciousness. In Sanskrit, this energy is called *Atman*—the God within us. Without the *Atman*, we are merely lifeless bodies. The Upanishads remind us of our true nature with the phrase *Aham Brahmasmi*, meaning “I am Brahman.” *Brahman* is the Universal Consciousness, the omnipresent force that gives life to everything. The small part of *Brahman* within each of us is *Atman*.

I once heard a preacher explain the meaning of Namaste in a way that stayed with me. He said, “The divinity in me salutes the divinity in you.” It’s a greeting we often hear in yoga classes, but not everyone understands its true significance. It’s a beautiful reminder that we are all connected at a divine level.

Now, let’s explore an essential concept—*Dharma*. You may have come across references to *Dharma* in movies or books, but what does it truly mean?

People define *Dharma* in various ways, but I see it as the essence of something or someone. For example, what’s the *Dharma* of sugar? At its core, sugar is about sweetness. It may have other characteristics, but sweetness is its true nature. Similarly, each one of us has a *Dharma*—a fundamental purpose. While we may have multiple goals, one central question often lingers: Why are we here? I believe our highest *Dharma* is Self-Realization.

Self Realization is a shift in focus—from seeking answers outside to looking within. It’s the recognition of the *Atman*, the true Self, the source of our life and consciousness. A journey towards our innermost being.

This concept often gets misunderstood. I’m still learning about myself in this vast field. Those who have truly attained self realization rarely remain in contemporary society explaining things to us. They often retreat to solitude—perhaps meditating in the mountains—away from worldly distractions.

The Atman isn't something you can see, hear, smell, or touch. It is beyond intellect and perceptions. Instead, it is something to become one with. The Atman is beyond the Intellect and beyond perceptions. One cannot see, hear, smell, touch or taste the Atman. One cannot imagine the Atman. One can only become the Atman.

Imagine a river flowing into the ocean. Once it merges, you can no longer distinguish the river from the ocean—they are one and the same.

To unite with the *Atman*, the Gita outlines three primary paths:

Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge)
Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion)
Karma Yoga (the path of selfless action)

Now let’s explore religion. The word “religion” comes from the Latin re- (again) and ligation (to bind or tie). In essence, religion means re-tying or reconnecting ourselves with the *Atman*—with *Brahman*.

There are three types of people, categorized based on their Gunas—qualities or tendencies—that shape human nature:

Satvik - Pure, balanced, equanimous, serene
Rajasik - Active, goal-oriented, constantly seeking
Tamasik - Laid-back, sluggish, lethargic

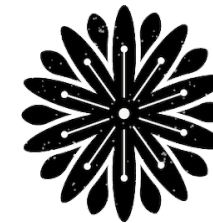
We all possess a mix of these Gunas in varying degrees, shifting throughout the day and life. Some days, I find myself lounging in bed, lacking ambition—a clear Tamasik state. Most of us operate primarily from Rajasik tendencies, chasing achievements and external validations. But in moments of stillness, we may experience Satvik clarity—perhaps early in the morning, when the world is quiet.

Have you ever noticed how we become more active as the sun rises? There is something magical about the early morning hours, between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. The world is calm, and it can be a perfect time for contemplation and study. Even casinos close for cleaning between these hours, aligning with the ancient wisdom that says, “Early to bed, early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise.” By 6 a.m., Rajasik qualities take over, shifting our focus toward productivity. Later, as the sun sets, Tamasic qualities dominate, drawing us toward rest. Life is a constant interplay of these Gunas—a balance that influences our thoughts, actions, and spiritual journey.



EPISODE 4

An Interview With Gautam Ji



I am including a transcript of my interview with my teacher Gautam Ji. It is obviously not a part of The Gita, but it is an integral part of learning. . Gautam Ji has been a foundational influence on my spiritual knowledge. He is a senior disciple of Swami Parthasarathy, a philosopher and teacher of Vedanta as well as the Upanishads. Swamiji's ashram is in Pune, India. Like Swami Parthasarathy, Shri Gautam comes from an accomplished and affluent family in India and has dedicated his life to studying, researching, and propagating Vedanta, the Upanishads, and the Gita.

Gautam Ji: The word *Vedanta* is actually an amalgamation of two words: *Veda* means “wisdom”, and *anta* means the “ultimate”. The literal meaning of that word is the “ultimate wisdom”, the highest knowledge, the culmination of knowledge. The reason we call it the ultimate wisdom is because it provides clear solutions to everything you want in life. A human being is looking for peace and happiness within, as well as looking for success and productivity in work. These desires are at the material level and ultimately, whether you know it or not, every human being unconsciously seeks the ultimate state of Self Realization. The ultimate abode of peace and happiness. So Vedanta provides the technique to achieve all these, that's why it's called the ultimate wisdom.

Question: Why was the Gita written when we already have the Upanishads and Vedanta?

Gautam Ji: The Upanishads were meant for people of that time—thousands of years ago—when intellect was very high.. They could grasp these very subtle and cryptic principles. Thousands of years later, the intellect deteriorated in humans. In fact in the Gita, as Lord Krishna is teaching the essence, he says that people have completely lost the understanding of the Upanishads. The knowledge had to be simplified and diluted in a way that the common person of that era could understand. . That is why the Gita was composed. To simplify the teachings of the Upanishads.

1200 years ago, a great saint named Shri Shankara realized that people didn't understand the Gita. This was around 800 AD. He wrote introductory texts like the *Bhaja Govindam* and *Atma-Bodha*. But as time passed, even that became difficult for the average person to understand.

In today's world, Swami Parthasarathy, now in his nineties understood that people no longer understand even those introductory texts. so he gathered the entire wisdom of Vedanta and the Gita in a simple, easy-to-understand book called the *Vedanta Treatise*.

4 - AN INTERVIEW WITH Gautam Ji

The Upanishads provide tremendous knowledge, but they are written in a way that the modern person can't understand. Periodically, these masters had to reintroduce this wisdom in a form that people of that age understand.

Question: When was the Gita composed? No one knows for certain when the Gita was composed. Some scholars suggest it was composed approximately in 3100 BCE. Whether that date is accurate or not remains uncertain. Why do we need to learn this wisdom?

Gautam Ji: That question is like asking “When I’m on a highway, why do I need to learn how to drive? Why do I need to be certified for a license before I get onto a road?” It is absurd that the world does not recognize that living itself is an art, a skill—a technique that must be learned. Take a simpler example: when we first got a smartphone, none of us knew how to use it. We had to read the manual. Similarly, if you buy a new appliance, say, a refrigerator with advanced features, you need the manual to understand how to operate it. Yet, when it comes to life itself, people assume no instruction is necessary. But life too is a skill that must be learned.

Jean-Paul Sartre, the great French philosopher, said “Everything has been figured out except how to live.” That is philosophy. There is a technique to living. Because nobody has learned it, you find a complete deterioration of human existence. At an individual level, there is stress, addiction, depression, and divorce. At a global level, there is terrorism, war, and greed—destroying both humanity and the world. The root of these problems is simple: people have not learned how to live.

Question: The Gita, Vedanta, and Upanishads are not dogmatic.. They do not dictate that one must follow a particular path or worship in a specific way. Instead, they provide fundamental principles for us to reflect upon and apply in our own way. Could you share some of these core principles?

Gautam Ji: First, there is a misunderstanding. People think that this is some sort of religion, or a cult. It is not. These are universal life principles. Just as we know that Newton discovered gravity. Newton was a Christian so does gravity apply only to Christians? Of course not.

Just as gravity is a physical principle, there are certain principles governing the mind—principles that affect stress, concentration, relationships, and life itself.

These apply to all human beings, regardless of culture. Just because these were first researched in the Himalayas thousands of years ago, does not make them exclusively Indian. They are universal. There were similar misconceptions with Yoga. When it first came to the US, everybody thought it was religious. Today, everyone recognizes it as a physical exercise.

Vedanta can be thought of as *yoga for the mind*. Even though people think it is religious, over time, as they learn and experience it, they will recognize that it simply teaches fundamental principles for life.

Question: So are there fundamental principles at the core of this, Gautam Ji?

Gautam Ji: Yes. When you talk about the principles, they are universal. The first and most crucial principle of Vedanta is this: *It is not the world that gives you peace or stress; it is how you relate to it.* This is a difficult, yet fundamental truth for anyone seeking happiness.

If I ask, “what gives you stress?” Most people blame their spouse, boss, traffic, weather, or neighbor. Everyone believes stress comes from external factors.

The first principle is: *it is not external; it is how you relate to it.* The world can never give you peace or happiness; it's how you relate to that which causes the stress. Nobody will ever say, “What is wrong with me that I am not able to relate to the world?” Everybody will say, “It's the world.” For example, one person smokes a cigarette and finds it pleasurable; another detests it. One person wants to divorce his wife, while another is desperate to marry the same woman.

It's not about cigarettes or the wife as an individual. Otherwise, both would cause stress to everyone. Therefore, it is not the world; it's how you relate to it. You must learn how to relate to the world instead of blaming the world for what it is.

Question: When it comes to work, business,, or home life, stress affects everyone. Why is that? Is it rooted in the same principle—how one relates to the outside world?

Gautam Ji: In work and business, the fundamental principle is:
Control your mind, and control your life.

Everybody believes their stress comes from the external world, but in reality, it comes from their own uncontrolled minds. When the mind goes out of control, problems arise. Vedanta helps you to develop an intellect capable of controlling your mind.

What is the source of stress?

1. The mind constantly worries about the past and becomes anxious about the future. This wavering into the past and future causes stress. Only a strong intellect can keep the mind in the present.
2. In a business, when the mind is not in control, desires turn into greed—for wealth, success, or power—which leads to stress. There is nothing wrong with ambition, but when it turns into greed, it becomes destructive. Many financial crises, bankruptcies, and global economic problems come from greed—a lack of control over the mind.

Question: Another common issue for all of us is relationships—relationships with spouses, siblings, family, and in-laws. Do you have any tips on how to handle them, Shri Gautam?

4 - AN INTERVIEW WITH Gautam Ji

Gautam Ji: In relationships, the problem is you don't use your intellect. It's how you make use of the relationship that matters.

Socrates was once asked, "Should I get married?" His response was, "By all means get married. If you get a good wife, you'll be happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." It doesn't matter who you marry; it's how you relate to that person. The first thing you must understand in relationships is that no two people are the same. The failure to understand this often leads to misunderstanding, making a mess out of a beautiful relationship.

You like Chinese food, but your wife likes Indian food. You can't say, "Why don't you like Chinese food?" She is who she is, and you are what you are. She might like the temperature two degrees warmer, while you prefer it two degrees cooler. So what do you do in situations like that? You must understand and give each other space.

She likes golf; you like tennis. There are millions of such differences. The problems arise in relationships when you expect the other person to behave according to your own expectations. Once you accept that they are different and let them live their lives, it becomes a beautiful relationship. The problem is usually rooted in your wrong expectation. Don't blame the person, the situation, or the environment. Instead, change yourself. Control your mind, and you control your life.

Question: What should a person do in terms of Vedanta or Gita; to reach that point? Does it simply happen by studying, listening, or reading? Or is there something more to do?

Gautam Ji: The problem is that your emotions are out of control. Having a desire to earn wealth is okay, but when it becomes greed, that's when the problem arises. Greed happens when the intellect—the capacity to think and reason—is weak, and the mind (which is driven by emotion) takes control.

A simple example is when you are driving, there are thousands of accidents around the world due to texting and driving. Because your mind craves to look at the phone. The intellect nudges you to focus your attention on the road, not phone. But if you disregard the intellect, and give in to the craving, you'll get into an accident.

The key is to strengthen your intellect. Strengthening the intellect comes through study and reflection on these higher values of life, as explained by Vedanta. The intellect is like a muscle—it needs exercise, and that exercise comes from study and contemplation.

Question: Another challenge many parents face is knowing how to raise their children. Any advice for them?

Gautam Ji: Parents don't know what to do with their kids because they themselves are children. How can two children raise each other? There's a flaw when they try. As Lincoln said, "There is only one way to make a child go the way you want, and that is to go that way yourself."

Einstein also said, "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it's the only means." The problem is parents don't live the life they want their children to live. They themselves are undisciplined and lack intellectual strength, yet they expect their children to behave differently. This approach will not work.

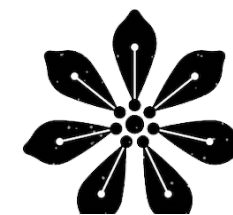
You must live your life as an example instead of constantly lecturing. Last week, someone came to me and said, "Please tell my mom, she texts me every half an hour and asks, 'Where are you? What are you doing?' I can't take it anymore." Some children have become frustrated to the point of violence, just to avoid dealing with their parents. Parents should work on themselves and not lecture unless the children want some advice. Don't constantly pester them with your "dos and don'ts".

Thank you, Gautam Ji, for sharing knowledge with all of us.



EPISODE 5 / THE GITA

Chapter 1 - An Introduction



Chapter One of the Gita tells us how it relates to our lives and how to navigate the challenges of living. Gautam Ji gave us an example in the previous chapter about driving on a highway. Before you drive on a highway, you need to learn how to drive. You can't simply get behind the wheel and expect to understand the rules or how to conduct yourself on the road.

Similarly, we need to get guidance in life—how to deal with stress, challenges, and the complexities of existence. We are not born with a manual that tells us how to live.

I am often asked: “As a psychiatrist, how do you reconcile your medical training in psychiatry with the teachings of the Gita? Is it easy to pair the two, or are there conflicts? How do you relate to the Gita in your practice? How do these two disciplines interact?”

To answer this, the Gita is deeply relevant to my work as a psychiatrist and physician. When you're a doctor—whether or not you are a psychiatrist—people come to you with problems. As a psychiatrist, these problems often involve life, relationships, stress, and emotional strain. And that is exactly what the Gita addresses.

Chapter one discusses how to deal with stress and struggle. Regarding its connection to my profession, I find that it enhances my understanding rather than conflicts with it. The Gita acts as a guide, much like a psychiatrist offering a manual for life.

To understand the Gita, one must grasp a few fundamentals concepts. The lowest level of a human being is the body. The level above the body is the mind, and above the mind is the intellect. The mind is driven by emotions—desires, fears, wants, and needs—but it doesn't consider consequences. It simply says “I want this.” These desires, known as *Vasanas* (unmanifest desires) in Sanskrit, can be for wealth, beauty, fame, or anything that stimulates the senses.

Our senses and mind work together, often leading us into trouble. The intellect is like a king, meant to rule over both mind and body. But more often than not, this king is asleep at the wheel—untrained, ineffective, and unaware of its own power. Meanwhile, the sense organs and the mind, driven by desires, run wild, leading us into trouble. Thousands of years ago, people recognized the concept of intellect, but today, we don't actively train it. Many people mistakenly believe that their emotions are who they are.

5 - AN INTRODUCTION

Even in medical school, the idea of Buddhi, the Sanskrit term for intellect, was absent. While “intellect may seem similar to intelligence, it is different. The layperson sees intellect as the ability to weigh decisions: “should I do this or that? “Is this right or wrong?”

There are two types of intellect:

Gross intellect - Deals with terrestrial things like physics, mathematics, business, and the world.

Subtle intellect - Engages with spiritual concepts and non-material ideas.

The difference between saying “I’m afraid” and “I’m feeling afraid” is in awareness. The first statement identifies completely with fear, while the second acknowledges it as an experience. The observer—the intellect—recognizes the emotion without becoming it. Someone who is lost in their emotions believes they are their fear, whereas someone using their intellect understands that fear is something they *feel*. The intellect then asks, *What are you afraid of? Should I actually be afraid? Is this real or not?* Or, as I like to put it: *Do you have a fear, or do you have a problem?* Fear is an emotional reaction, but a problem is an actual thing. The intellect should test emotions, question their validity, and determine whether they are justified.

Chapter One in the Gita serves as an introduction to a much larger spiritual text, the *Mahabharata*. *Maha* means “great” and *Bharata* was India’s original name before the British coined *India* (from the Indus River). The *Mahabharata* and the Gita were not written down at the time; they were recited and memorized.

The *Mahabharata* is far larger than Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined, and the Gita, nestled within it, consists of seven hundred verses. I am studying three volumes of the Gita, and that is just one part of the *Mahabharata*. While I won’t delve deeply into the *Mahabharata* here, understanding its context is crucial to grasping the Gita’s significance.

The exact date of the *Mahabharata*’s origin is unknown, but it was definitely written before 3,000 B.C.E., making it over 5,000 years old. At that time, kingdoms were ruled by monarchs. A princely family was unjustly stripped of its rightful throne through vicious, cruel, and illegal means by their own cousins. The conflict was between two families of cousins. The rightful rulers, the five Pandava brothers—*Pan* meaning five—were exiled and banished to the forest for 13 years. Their rivals, the Kauravas, were a larger group of a hundred cousins. The historical accuracy of the Gita remains uncertain, but even if the events were real, elements were likely added to enhance its symbolism, making it easier for people to understand its deeper meaning.

The five Pandava brothers represent our five senses, while the hundred Kauravas symbolize the hundreds of distractions and temptations in life. The battle between them is the internal struggle we all face. Ultimately, the Pandavas are victorious, but the journey is where the lessons lie.

When Arjuna comes to the battlefield, he drives his chariot out, and there are two armies. As Arjuna stands in his chariot, driven by Lord Krishna, between the two armies, he suddenly falters. His hands shake, his knees weaken, and his bow slips from his grasp. Overcome with emotion, he says, “*I cannot do this.*”

His hesitation isn’t out of fear; it is because the opposing army consists of his own family—his cousins, elders, and teachers. The idea of killing them, no matter how corrupt they are, paralyzes him. This moment is deeply symbolic. Like Arjuna, we go through life believing we are prepared, but when faced with real conflict, we hesitate. Our fears, doubts, and emotions take over. We succumb to our fears and anxieties.

At this moment, Lord Krishna begins his teachings on dealing with fear, which span the Gita’s eighteen chapters. This is why some scholars believe the Gita must be symbolic—real battles don’t pause for philosophical discussions. Yet, within this battlefield, mid war, Lord Krishna conducts what is essentially a therapy session, guiding Arjuna through his inner turmoil.

I remember speaking with a young eighteen year old who asked me, “What kind of religion is this? You’re telling me that Lord Krishna is instructing Arjuna to fight and go to war? How is this religion? Someone holy is telling another person to kill? That doesn’t sound like a religion.” But context matters. This was 5,000 years ago and it is not about violence for the sake of violence. Imagine a police officer who, when faced with a terrorist threatening innocent lives, says, “*I can’t shoot, even though I know that he is a terrorist.*” Lord Krishna reminds Arjuna of his duty, sworn duty to fight bad people. The Kauravas represent forces of greed, corruption, and destruction—oppressors who harm the innocent. Arjuna, as a warrior, has a responsibility to uphold justice.

That’s essentially how Chapter One begins. Many translations of the Gita skip this chapter because it mainly sets the stage, introducing the characters, such as who is on the Kaurava side, who is strong, who is on the Pandava side, and what their attributes are. However, there’s still profound insight even in these initial introductions.

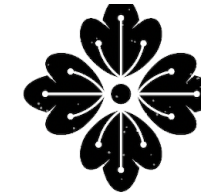
The Gita was written for the common person. As discussed earlier, the Upanishads and Vedanta were too abstract for most people to understand 5,000 years ago. However, before that, people had a deeper understanding of the Upanishads and Vedanta. Over time, the capacity for such understanding diminished, which is why the Gita was composed as a story, to convey these teachings through a story. Reading the Gita offers solace and insight, bringing clarity and understanding to those who seek it.

As I take this journey through the Gita with all of you, my hope is to share its profound wisdom. We will explore each chapter and uncover how these timeless teachings can offer guidance in our modern lives. Together, we will delve into the rich knowledge embedded in its verses.



EPISODE 6 / THE GITA

Chapter 1, Continued



The story begins with tension simmering on the battlefield, where two factions of a family prepare for war. This setting transports us to the world of the Gita, where the intricacies of human emotions and relationships take center stage. Chapter one is often overlooked in many translations, and tends to jump straight to chapter two. You may wonder: why would Vyasa, the great sage who composed the Gita, begin with such a chapter? At first glance, it appears to be a simple listing of warriors aligned with the Kauravas on one side and the Pandavas on the other. Many find this section tedious, feeling it lacks relevance to the essence of the Gita.

However, if you look closely, you'll uncover crucial insights hidden within. In this chapter, we'll explore themes like the ego, attachment, arrogance, and anger—all of which powerfully emerge from this introductory chapter. It's easy to dismiss this part as mere groundwork, but Vyasa crafted it intentionally, perhaps to frame the entire narrative as a compelling story.

The Upanishads and Vedanta stand as the highest expressions of spiritual wisdom. Yet, for many, engaging with these texts can feel like unraveling an intricate puzzle—challenging and often overwhelming. When British colonizers first came across them, they dismissed them as ramblings of a primitive civilization. In reality, these texts hold timeless and profound philosophies that continue to resonate across generations.

Recognizing that many people struggled to grasp these deeper concepts, Vyasa created a more relatable narrative in 3000 BCE. He chose to weave his teachings into a grand story. This epic unfolds the tale of two factions—the Pandavas, five brothers, and the Kauravas, one hundred cousins. The Pandavas fight for righteousness and justice. All negotiations and compromises have failed, and the two factions stand on the brink of war.

Central to our discussion is Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers. He is the brave warrior ready to accept his destiny, guided by his cousin Lord Krishna, who embodies wisdom. This dynamic reminds me of the film *Bagger Vance*, where the protagonist, played by Will Smith, serves not just as a caddy, but as a guide to the mindset needed for success. His character serves as a divine guide, much like Lord Krishna does for Arjuna.

The connection deepens when you realize that *Bagger Vance* derives from the word *Bhagwan*, meaning

God. Lord Krishna symbolizes Bhagwan, guiding Arjuna through the turmoil of the battlefield. When Arjuna faces his cousins in battle, he is gripped by panic and hesitates, exclaiming, “I can’t bear to kill my own family.” Here, Vyasa reveals rich symbolism, encapsulating the internal struggles we all face.

Arjuna has a reputation as the finest warrior, descending from a long line of warriors where cowardice was a dishonorable trait. The Japanese concept of *hara-kiri* (a ritual suicide by disembowelment with a sword that was formerly practiced by samurai as an honorable alternative to disgrace or execution) echoes this philosophy; warriors who could not face their duty would rather end their own lives than live in shame.

Yet, in this moment of crisis, even Arjuna, the epitome of bravery, finds himself torn apart by emotions and ultimately decides to drop his weapons.

This internal conflict vividly illustrates how even the most courageous falter when faced with the complexities of attachment and familial bonds. Vyasa, whose teachings have transcended thousands of years, captures these emotional dynamics with remarkable clarity, urging us to reflect deeply on our own lives.

There are seven hundred verses in the Gita, each rich in meaning, but challenging to navigate. In ancient times, preserving this wisdom was a meticulous process. Countless families were tasked with transmitting these teachings verbally, some memorizing the verses forwards and others backwards, ensuring nothing was lost over time.

I encourage you to seek out printed translations and interpretations to enrich your understanding. Swami Parthasarathy’s translation of the Gita is particularly insightful. He has published other works that serve as valuable resources for anyone wishing to explore this profound text further.

In our fast-paced lives, we get caught up in the pursuit of desires—whether for wealth, fame, or recognition. But once we achieve these, we find ourselves longing for more, perpetually striving, yet never satisfied.

The Gita teaches us that true contentment isn’t found in external accolades or possessions. Many people reach significant milestones, believing that happiness lies on the other side of their goals. “If I had a million dollars, I’d finally be happy.” Yet, once they reach that goal, they crave even more, creating an endless loop of dissatisfaction.

A student of Gautam Ji once shared a poignant realization. He had achieved his dream of living in a high-end Manhattan penthouse and accumulating wealth, yet he felt perpetually anxious, often recalling how, as a young man, he believed reaching this point would bring him lasting joy. This narrative resonates with many, highlighting the Gita’s teaching about the fleeting nature of happiness in the material world.

The Gita illuminates that lasting happiness comes from within, from understanding and embracing who we are beyond our possessions and accomplishments. My own journey through the Gita has transformed my life in ways I never anticipated. I sleep better, feel lighter, and am more productive, making clear decisions without the weight of anxiety.

Our minds often cloud our judgment with feelings of want and desire, but the intellect—our guiding force—is meant to lead. When we allow the intellect to govern our actions, we find clarity and purpose. It’s like the difference between drifting aimlessly and steering the ship of our lives with confidence and direction.

The battlefield symbolizes our internal struggle. Each of us contains both the Pandavas and Kauravas within. Every time we face temptation, whether greed, anger, or any other vice, we are engaging in combat. The Gita reveals this dance between good and bad, urging us to recognize our own battles and learn how to navigate them.

Caught in his turmoil, Arjuna is guided by Lord Krishna, his charioteer, who leads him through every moment and emotion. To truly understand this lesson, we must see Arjuna as a reflection of ourselves—at times, a strong and unwavering warrior, yet vulnerable in the face of inner conflict. His choice to confront his emotions reminds us of our own ability to rise above them. This is why our foundation, the *Arise Arjuna Foundation*, exists: to awaken the Arjuna within you and help you rise.

Emotions like attachment and anger can cloud our judgment, just as Drona’s overwhelming attachment to his son compromises his ability to make sound decisions. Arjuna’s struggle encapsulates a universal truth: attachment often blinds us. We magnify dangers and paralyze ourselves with fear.

Imagine walking into a supermarket overflowing with choices. Without attachment, you move with clarity, selecting only what truly serves you, free from overwhelming desires. Stripping away attachments simplifies our lives. Instead of being overwhelmed by choices, we learn to focus on what truly matters, navigating our paths without feeling weighed down by excess attachments.

Throughout chapter one, characters like Dhritarashtra, the king, symbolize the battles within our minds. His obsession with his sons, the Kauravas, represents our destructive tendencies, while the Pandavas embody the virtues we aspire to. Inside each of us lies this ongoing struggle between our darker impulses and the higher virtues we hope to embody.

The wisdom of the Gita teaches us that recognizing our patterns is essential. It urges us to detach from the lure of attachment, to curb the pull toward greed, lust, and jealousy—the negative qualities of the Kauravas—and cultivate kindness, generosity, and love.

Nurturing these virtues transforms our internal landscape and helps us understand ourselves.

6 - CHAPTER 1 CONTINUED

The Gita guides us toward self-awareness, teaching us to acknowledge our faults and not be dominated by them.

As Arjuna continues in turmoil, the essence of the lesson culminates in understanding our true nature. We are not our desires or our thoughts; we are *Atman*, the core essence that connects us all. The distinction between mental states, emotions, and the life force that enlivens us invites us to deepen our introspection.

We should not feel confined to our emotions and thoughts. The observer within us knows this, providing clarity amidst the chaos of daily life. This realization empowers us to shift from identifying solely with our emotions to embracing a greater understanding of our higher Self.

In conclusion, chapter one offers valuable lessons for navigating life's complexities. It lays the groundwork for the teachings of the Gita, inviting us to reflect on our attachments, egos, and the wisdom hidden within our internal battles.

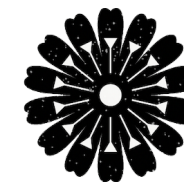
As we prepare to move into the subsequent chapters, take with you the knowledge that the Self is not synonymous with the mind. You are so much more than your emotions and fleeting challenges. Cultivating a deeper understanding of the *Atman* within will lead you to a more fulfilling life.

Let's look ahead, embracing the teachings that follow, carrying with us the hard-earned wisdom from this foundational chapter. Keep these lessons close to your heart, and prepare to uncover the beauty of what lies ahead as we journey deeper into the Gita.

6

EPISODE 7 / THE GITA

35 Qualities of A Spiritual Person 1 - 3



There comes a moment in life when you pause to reflect on what it means to be spiritual. It's like standing at the edge of a vast ocean, unsure whether to dive in or simply dip your toes. The teachings of the Gita offer a deep well of wisdom, inviting us to explore spirituality more fully.

The Gita speaks of the 35 qualities of a *bhakta* (devotee)—qualities that anyone can strive for, regardless of their background. At times, I've thought that these teachings might be meant only for monks or those living in distant temples. However, spirituality isn't just for those in saffron robes or sitting cross-legged on mountaintops; it's for all of us—whether we're dressed in office attire or casual clothes, navigating the routines of our everyday lives.

A friend of mine once mentioned how he appreciates practical advice—something he can incorporate into his daily life. Like him, many of us seek teachings that resonate, rather than abstract concepts. The 35 qualities outlined in the Gita provide that practicality. They don't prescribe rules or rituals but instead offer guidance on how to live more meaningfully.

As we explore these qualities, you might wonder, "What does spirituality have to do with my life? I have a job, bills to pay, and everyday responsibilities. Spirituality feels distant." I understand that sentiment all too well. When I first encountered these ideas, I thought, "How can this apply to me?" But spirituality is about recognizing the spirit within us. When we tap into that essence, our lives transform in unexpected ways.

Have you ever noticed how a sunny morning can lift your spirits? Similarly, focusing on just one quality from the Gita can create a ripple effect, improving other aspects of your life. Gautam Ji shared an analogy about water—how it seeks to find its own level. Like in chemistry class, where different beakers connect and the water levels equalize, nurturing one positive quality in ourselves helps us grow holistically. You may think, "But I'm just starting this journey, and some seem much further along." That's perfectly okay. Each one of us is on our own path; spirituality is not a race. The key is to focus on moving closer to a deeper understanding of ourselves.

What's the ultimate aim of spirituality? At its core, it's about Self-Realization—becoming your true essence, or *Atman*. As we engage in meditation, we aim to silence our thoughts and connect with our inner Self. However, when you first begin meditating, you may find your mind racing with to-do lists, past conversations, and worries about the future.

True meditation is the practice of quieting the mind, free of desires and thoughts of “I” or “mine.” It’s about simply being and connecting with your inner Self. Honestly, very few of us may achieve complete Self-Realization in this lifetime, but even the smallest step toward it can create profound changes in our lives. As I’ve experienced, spirituality is deeply intertwined with devotion, which in turn nurtures our emotions. Devotion does not mean that those who fast or pray in temples are spiritual. In fact, the 35 qualities we’ve discussed show that spiritual growth is possible for everyone.

Quality 1 of 35: The first quality is *Adrishta Sarva Bhuta Naam*, meaning “hating no being.” It’s interesting that this is the first quality listed. Why not somewhere further down the list?

When we reflect on this, we realize it’s not just about loving humans, but about extending compassion to all beings—animals, birds, and even the smallest creatures around us. Gautam Ji often asked a powerful question: “Do you love everybody?” Many would agree, but when asked, “Do you hate anyone?” suddenly a few names might come to mind.

It’s much easier to acknowledge who we don’t like than to profess universal love. This is where the Gita challenges us to confront our biases and examine our feelings.

When we think about why we like others, it’s often because they meet our needs or reflect our thoughts. If someone listens and agrees with us, we feel a fondness towards that person. Conversely, those who confront or disagree with us can easily become targets of our anger. Life experiences shape these tendencies, making us comfortable with some and uneasy with others.

I recall being drawn to someone because of their friendly demeanor. But sometimes, appearances can be deceiving. I may feel at ease with certain people while instinctively resisting others—often for reasons beyond conscious awareness. Here lies the beauty of overcoming personal biases. When we recognize that everyone is navigating their own journey, we become more understanding.

Gautam Ji shared a striking experience he had while jogging. He watched a bird feeding its chicks by catching a worm, grinding it to paste on the sidewalk. Rather than feeling disgust, he recognized the act as a natural behavior driven by survival. When my wife and I saw a cheetah taking down its prey on a safari in Africa, we didn’t feel anger, just awe. It was nature at work, not malice.

With humans, the complexity is deeper. People have their own triggers and experiences. Just because someone behaves in a way that seems hurtful doesn’t mean they intend harm. The Gita teaches us to observe without bitterness and to understand without judgment.

I’m reminded of my martial arts classes, where the instructor emphasized that defense doesn’t mean attacking someone for their wrongs. Instead, it’s about responding with respect, disarming threats without ill-will. This principle aligns beautifully with Vedantic teachings.

When I first learned the quality *Hate No Being* in Gautam Ji’s class many years ago, I was already a physician. As doctors, we’re taught to love all our patients equally.

When you’re a child and feel that a teacher prefers others over you, it’s hurtful. Even as adults, nobody likes to feel less than others.

As a physician, I had to learn to treat every patient the same. No patient should feel disliked or unwelcome. As a doctor, I had to genuinely like my patients—whatever qualities they brought with them. They share not only their medical but also their emotional experiences. In many ways, we’re like priests to them, offering them a safe space to confide without judgment.

When I went to Gautam Ji’s class and learned *Hate No Being*, I was already practicing this principle in my medical career. One particular memory stands out: there was a janitor in the hospital who cleaned the hallways. He didn’t have the most pleasant expression, and because of that, nobody interacted with him. But after hearing the lesson from Gautam Ji, I decided to make an effort. I smiled and greeted him for the first time. Though he didn’t smile or respond initially, it felt right. I continued greeting him, and over time, he began to smile back, eventually becoming friendly toward me. He even started giving me an elbow bump as a greeting, which was a small but meaningful change. This experience taught me that *Hate No Being* can transform how we relate to others. By overcoming our biases, we can create positive, lasting connections.

Quality 2 of 35: The second quality is *Maitri*, which means friendliness. When we cultivate an absence of hatred, it naturally leads to friendliness. Notice how one quality leads to another?

Consider this: when we let go of our likes and dislikes, everyone becomes more neutral and approachable. When we’re not burdened by our likes and dislikes, we begin to see the beauty in those around us.

In my early days at the podcast studio, I didn’t know anyone. But by staying curious and open, I quickly formed connections. I was able to build friendships simply because I had no hidden agendas. In life, it’s easy to get caught up in outward emotions, but friendliness can open doors to deeper relationships.

Quality 3 of 35: The third quality is *Karuna*, meaning compassion. Compassion should come from a sincere desire to connect. Not from guilt or pity, which are fleeting emotions. True compassion fosters lasting bonds.

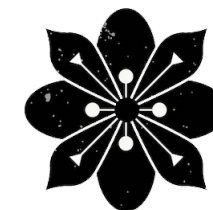
We’ve explored three profound qualities of a spiritual person: Hate No Being, friendliness, and compassion. The beauty of these teachings lies in their ability to encourage us to dig deeper into ourselves and lead more fulfilling lives.

As we continue to explore the 35 qualities, we will discover how they weave together to form a rich tapestry of spiritual existence. It’s not about perfection; it’s about progress. As we learn and apply these qualities, we uncover a deeper understanding of our shared humanity.



EPISODE 8 / THE GITA

35 Qualities of A Spiritual Person - 4 - 6



We will discuss three more qualities out of the thirty-five that paint the portrait of a true devotee, or *Bhakta*.

Quality 4 of 35: The fourth quality is known as *Nirmama*. It's a Sanskrit term that breaks down into *nir*, meaning “none” or “no,” and *mama*, meaning “I,” “mine,” or “mineness.” Essentially, *Nirmama* refers to a state of being free from possessiveness and the grip of “I-ness.” It's a deep concept, but let's unpack it.

To embody *Nirmama* means stepping away from the nagging sense of ownership. This does not mean giving up everything you own. Contrary to popular belief, Vedanta doesn't insist that one retreat to a mountain in saffron robes, renouncing all possessions. Many spiritually awakened individuals have led lives of wealth and power. They understood that it's perfectly fine to have things—so long as those things don't have you.

Consider this: possessiveness generates a constant fear of losing what we are possessive of. If you think something is truly yours—a car, a home, or even a loved one—a shadow of anxiety lingers. You start worrying about potential damage or disappointment. Think of something you cherish deeply—perhaps your favorite gadget, your cozy home, or your beloved pet. Have you ever found yourself fearing its loss or worrying about it not meeting your expectations?

Picture driving a brand-new Mercedes straight from the showroom. The thrill is undeniable, but the moment you hit the road, anxiety creeps in. You've just spent a fortune, and now every pothole feels like a disaster waiting to happen. Your heart races at the thought of scratches or dents. This attachment prevents you from fully enjoying the very thing you acquired.

Now, flip the scenario. Instead of owning that luxury car, imagine renting it—fully insured, worry-free. If you hit a pothole, your reaction would be quite different. You'd shrug it off and enjoy the ride, knowing the rental company has it covered.

It's a simple but profound difference: when you approach life without clinging to objects or outcomes, the weight of worry lifts. You stop fearing loss, and life becomes lighter.

If one could navigate life without attachment—without the fear of losing or the anxiety of people not catering to our desires—life would be much simpler.

Life is like a massive supermarket with 30–40 aisles: dairy, vegetables, meats, baked goods, children’s items, clothing, books, automobile accessories, pet food, lawn care—the list goes on. Imagine you are a vegetarian with no kids, no car, no pets, and no lawn. You only need vegetables and some bread. You don’t have to wander into the meat section, the kids’ aisle, or the greeting cards aisle. You simply go in, get what you need, and leave.

Attachments complicate life. The fewer attachments you have, the fewer things you need to cater to—making life that much simpler.

I once had a patient who was incredibly stressed about various aspects of her life. Each week, she would introduce something new into her world—a dog, a fish tank, goldfish in her outdoor pond—believing these acquisitions would bring her peace. Instead, they became new sources of anxiety. She worried about birds eating the goldfish, her dog being attacked, the fish in the tank not being fed on time. Over time, she simplified her life, reducing her responsibilities to just a handful of essential things. As a result, she became almost entirely free of stress. Using the supermarket analogy, she had narrowed her life to just a couple of aisles.

Quality 5 of 35: This next quality takes us a step deeper. *Nirahankara* is composed of *nir*, meaning “not having,” and *ahankara*, meaning “ego” or “pride.” *Nirahankara* refers to a state of being free from ego or an inflated sense of self-importance.

A true devotee sheds the weighty ego. When connected to their true Self, they break free from the limiting identities of “I” and “me.” The deeper this connection to the *Atman*—the higher Self—the less one is consumed by bodily concerns.

Think of it this way: If you are 20% connected to your true Self, then 80% of your focus is caught up in the physical world. But if you are 80% connected, then only 20% of you remains in the world. Achieving complete identification with the *Atman* means becoming 100% detached from wordly limitations.

Many misunderstand the importance of the body. The Gita emphasizes that the body is sacred—it is the chariot that carries the *Atman*, the real you. *Aham Brahmasmi—I am Brahman*—reminds us that while the body is temporary, the spirit is eternal. The Gita never advocates neglecting or starving the body; rather, it teaches us to care for it appropriately.

Consider Gautama Buddha’s early years of asceticism. When he first sought self-realization, he decided, *I will not depend on food. I will starve myself.* He nearly died in the process. A wise holy man advised him: *You cannot focus on spirituality or meditation if your body is starving. You must eat—not as a glutton, but enough for your body to function.*

The analogy given is that of a stringed instrument—a violin, sitar, or guitar. If the string is too tight, it snaps; if too loose, it produces no music. It must have the right amount of tension to

play beautifully.

Similarly, balance is key in caring for the body. Neither indulgence nor neglect is ideal. Just as a car needs maintenance—oil changes, air in the tires, fuel—so too does the body. After all, it is the vehicle carrying the *Atman*.

However, *ahankara* arises when one becomes overly attached to the body and mind. Most people focus only on maintaining their physical and mental well-being while ignoring the spirit.

Imagine a man who spends all his time polishing his cars. His vehicles look immaculate. His home is pristine. But he himself is unkempt—out of shape, unshaven, and disheveled. While he has cared for his material possessions, he has neglected his own being. Just as one must maintain the body, one must also look inward to nurture the spirit.

A practical way to practice *Nirahankara* is through anonymous giving. When offering charity, refrain from seeking recognition. Do not put your name on donations. True humility is found in selfless acts performed without the desire for praise.

Imagine life as a jigsaw puzzle where each piece matters. If even one is missing, the entire picture is incomplete. Similarly, in the grand orchestra of existence, each person plays a role. If one musician is out of tune, the harmony falters.

This realization is particularly valuable for those who struggle with feelings of inferiority. Some may think *I’m not as important as others.* But Ralph Waldo Emerson’s poem *Fable* beautifully captures this truth: in a conversation between a squirrel and a mountain, the squirrel says, “If I cannot carry forests on my back, neither can you crack a nut.” Each of us has a unique role to play. Instead of saying, *‘I am supreme’*, one should think, *‘I am not supreme—others can do things I cannot.’*

Then, we have the feeling of “*I alone exist.*” How does this feeling manifest? There’s an inherent expectation that only I exist, meaning others should cater to me. Imagine driving in a traffic jam—someone might yell, “Get out of my way!” This behavior reflects the thought, “I alone exist.” Similarly, if the weather is unbearably hot, instead of accepting it as it is, one might think, “I’m uncomfortable, therefore, I am not being catered to,” and start complaining as though they alone exist.

That is the feeling of ego. The third thought is, “*I am the doer.*” Instead of asking, “What enabled me to do this?” a person may think, “**I did this. Look at me, I am so great.**”

Think of any major invention or software breakthrough. Instead of beating your chest and saying, “I did it,” try to be humble. Ask yourself: “Who taught me everything I know? Who taught me to read, to write, to understand life?” Instead of claiming, “I did it,” recognize

the contributions of others. If you can cultivate this humility, that is spirituality.

Try to remain anonymous when doing good—whether giving a gift, donating to charity, or helping someone. If you avoid seeking recognition and do not attach your name to your good deeds, you take a step toward removing the ego and detaching from the need for praise.

Quality 6 of 35: *Sukh* represents pleasure or happiness, while *Dukh* denotes pain or displeasure. A true devotee remains balanced at all times, regardless of life's highs or lows.

The root of our happiness and suffering often lies in our desires—our *Raga*, attachments, and *Dvesha*, aversions. If we base our joy on external circumstances, we ride an emotional rollercoaster. Understanding that every high will eventually come down, and that every low period of depression will also end, and bring inner peace.

What causes pleasure and pain? Not external events like winning the lottery or achieving success. Pleasure and pain stem from our likes and dislikes—*Raga* and *Dvesha*. From an early age, we develop preferences. When we encounter something we like, we feel pleasure. When we encounter something we dislike, we experience displeasure. This reaction is self-created. The external world functions as it will—the economy rises and falls, the weather changes. If we attach our happiness to these fluctuations, we lose balance.

By analyzing our likes and dislikes, we become more balanced. A key measure of spirituality is stability—how steady we remain amid life's ups and downs. If your mood fluctuates daily or weekly, you must ask yourself, “What is wrong with me?” It's not your boss, your spouse, or your children—it's you.

What causes this instability? If you constantly dwell on past misfortunes or worry about the future, you disrupt your balance.

Imagine a cruel man who beats a dog and also beats you. Five years later, both you and the dog encounter him again. The dog, upon recognizing him, bites him. You too punch him. You have spent five years obsessing over revenge. “That man beat me—I will get back at him!” Five years of wasted mental energy! The dog, on the other hand, has not thought about him for a moment in those five years.

Find your balance. Do what you must, but don't obsess. If someone asks, “How are you?” and you say, “I'm fine”, but moments later, that same person criticizes you and your mood collapses, you have given them control over your peace.

Don't let others' words dictate your state of mind. You feel bad only when their words challenge your self-image. Instead of trying to control how others perceive you, remind yourself: “I am me. I have my own purpose. I am not here to cater to others' opinions.”

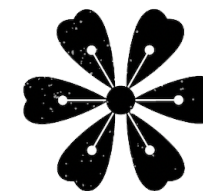
Your goal is to become closer to your Self, your *Atman* unaffected by external judgments. Balance means freedom from agitation—maintaining inner peace while fulfilling your responsibilities.

The more spiritually evolved you are, the less external events can disturb you. You can measure your growth by how little outside influences affect you. The ultimate stage of self-realization is perfection—where nothing disturbs your inner peace, and your focus remains solely on your internal Self.



EPISODE 9 / THE GITA

35 Qualities Of A Spiritual Person - 7 - 10



As we embark on this journey of exploring the 35 qualities of a Bhakta, or a spiritual person, it's vital to recognize the wisdom passed down by great minds like Gautam Ji and Swami Parthasarathy. These teachings illuminate what it means to be a true devotee.

Quality 7 of 35: "Forgiveness". When individuals are asked to define forgiveness, they often respond by stating, "It is when someone commits a wrongdoing, and I choose to let it go." However, this interpretation may not capture the full complexity of forgiveness. Frequently, forgiveness is reduced to the act of dismissing or overlooking harm, a perspective that seldom facilitates meaningful healing or deeper understanding.

A spiritually aware person realizes that when someone acts in a way that disturbs others, it's often driven by forces beyond their control. In the Gita, we refer to these forces as *Vasanas*. These are the innate tendencies or drives that shape our behaviors. Every human or animal creature carries these drives, and they're usually beyond our conscious control.

For example, when parents describe their twins, they might say one has a certain drive or desire while the other exhibits a completely different set. These qualities are part of what each child brings into the world at birth. Good *Vasanas* might become apparent early on, just as the less desirable ones do.

To illustrate this, I recall a safari experience my wife and I had in Africa. We watched a Cheetah chase down a deer in an adrenaline-pumping moment. It was as if nature was unfolding right before our eyes. The Cheetah caught the deer and, without hesitation, began to eat. Soon after, other animals like vultures and hyenas arrived to feast on the remains. At that moment, we felt a thrill witnessing raw nature, but had that been a human committing the same act, our reactions would be strikingly different. We would feel disgust, and anger, and perhaps demand punishment, saying this person needs to pay for their actions. Why the double standard? Because we recognize that a Cheetah acts out of instinct for survival, while humans are capable of making conscious choices.

Let me share another personal reflection. Picture holding a young child, perhaps your grandchild, who unexpectedly pees during a diaper change. Do you drop the child in shock? Or do you laugh it off, thinking, "It's fine; they didn't do it on purpose"? This understanding is really what forgiveness is about.

Forgiveness also requires us to look at the intentions behind actions. Take, for instance, the words of Jesus Christ during his crucifixion: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He recognized that those who wronged him were unaware of the true nature of their actions. This perspective highlights the essence of forgiveness.

Now, let’s explore small moments in our lives. Gautam Ji often shares this relatable example: Imagine you’re at a restaurant and the waiter makes a mistake with your order. Instead of getting upset or demanding a refund, what if you simply shrugged it off and enjoyed your meal? Choosing to forgive in these little situations can bolster your spiritual growth over time.

Quality 8 of 35: “Contentment”. As you grow spiritually and align with your true Self—your *Atman* or divine essence—you’ll notice a subtle shift: life’s small disturbances fade, and an inner satisfaction takes root.

Yet, the mind often resists this state. Just as you feel content, it whispers, “*What’s next?*” This restless pursuit is deeply ingrained, making contentment feel elusive.

The real test of spiritual growth is not material success but finding joy in the present moment. Consider the rise of “wealth therapists” in 2007, just before the economic crash. Many affluent individuals sought help not for depression or anxiety, but for *influenza*—a deep dissatisfaction despite immense wealth.

Similarly, lottery winners often report greater unhappiness post-win than before. This highlights the fragile nature of happiness tied to material gain.

Psychologically, small disparities in wealth are manageable, but vast gaps create resentment and unrest. You may believe that a grand mansion will fulfill you, yet discontent is often what follows.

The Gita teaches us to find joy in our present actions and embrace contentment where we are. True fulfillment comes from doing what we **ought** to do, not merely what serves personal gain.

Engaging in actions without attachment to outcomes fosters inner peace. The Gita states: “*He who does what he ought to do without depending on the fruit, he is a Sanyasi.*” A true devotee finds satisfaction in the act itself, without fixating on the result. Many believe that achieving the next thing will bring happiness. But the Gita offers a different approach: *Find contentment in your duty. Use your intellect, not your mind.*

The mind desires what it wants, while the intellect discerns what is truly needed. Ask yourself: What brings peace? What serves others without personal gain? True happiness lies in doing what you ought to do, without worrying about the outcome. If your action brings you joy, let that be enough. Whatever result follows, accept it without attachment. If things don’t go as planned, remember that contentment comes not from external success, but from the peace of knowing you acted in alignment with your higher Self.

By focusing on the present and acting from a place of wisdom rather than desire, you cultivate lasting contentment and a deeper connection to the divine.

Quality 9 of 35: “Yogi” The word Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word *Yuj* which means to join or to unite. Similarly, many religions share a common concept of unity, which is reflected in the etymology of the word “religion.” “Religion” comes from *re*, meaning again, and *ligate* meaning to tie, as in surgery.

Consider this: many religions share common threads aimed at reconnecting us with our fundamental essence. Whether we call it *Atman*, soul, or God, it represents the divine life like force within us. Our journey begins with acknowledging that we are not just our bodies or minds; we are *Atman*, the spirit that inspires us.

When we practice spiritual exercises, we strive to reconnect with that deeper reality. Imagine a river flowing into the ocean—a powerful image of oneness. As the river merges with the vast ocean, its distinction fades, just as our spirits unite with the greater whole.

The Gita teaches us that there are three paths that could lead to this union: *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, and *Jnana Yoga*.

Jnana, or knowledge, aligns with the wisdom gained from studying scriptures like the Gita. However, knowledge alone is not enough.

Bhakti Yoga emphasizes devotion. You can acquire knowledge, but without a heartfelt connection to the divine, it remains mere intellectual understanding. It is crucial to cultivate love and devotion toward a higher power.

Karma Yoga focuses on selfless action toward all beings, human and animal alike. By channeling your energy into unselfish deeds, you align yourself with your deepest intentions.

The true marker of a yogi is determination—an unwavering will to pursue one’s goals. It is not about performing rituals or begging for favors but about understanding and embodying your spiritual path through *Karma*, *Bhakti*, and *Jnana Yoga*.

The true test of spirituality, determining if you are a yogi, lies in your resolve. It is not merely about visiting temples, performing rituals, or asking God for favors. Spirituality is not about begging, such as going to a temple or church and pleading, “Please, God, let my daughter get married.” Such actions only increase selfish desires and distance you from your spiritual path.

Being spiritual means overcoming those desires through the practice of the three Yogas. Self-control, the final quality explored in this chapter, does not simply mean gritting your teeth and resisting temptations. It means staying true to your path without deviation

Life presents numerous distractions and desires, but a genuinely spiritual person remains focused on reconnecting with their true essence. This requires tapas, or discipline, traditionally exemplified by those who retreated to the Himalayas to meditate away from worldly chaos.

But can one embody this discipline while living a fully engaged life? Yes, though it is challenging. Meditation, for many, is not about shutting off thoughts but about managing them—allowing them to flow without attachment while maintaining focus on the path.

Quality 10 of 35: Self-Control. If asked, most people would define self-control as simply resisting urges. However, true self-control involves a conscious determination to return to unity with the self. It does not mean avoiding all worldly experiences but rather engaging with them without deviating from yoga.

For instance, if I want to eat something, I might refrain because I feel it indulges my senses. However, one can eat without lingering on the pleasure it brings. Eat it, acknowledge it, and then let it go. Many religions teach that when consuming food, one should say, “I am eating for God. God is eating. The Self is eating.” This practice helps block out thoughts of pleasure. A helpful approach is to acknowledge, “I am eating, but I am not lingering on how nice or good it was.” Simply eat, put it out of your mind, and move on.

Material and sensual attractions will always be present. Material desires include wealth, power, and fame, while sensual desires satisfy the sense organs. Interestingly, these temptations tend to intensify along the spiritual path. As one becomes more spiritual, material temptations often increase, almost as if one is being tested.

I began focusing on my duties without allowing my mind to wander, simply doing what I ought to do to the best of my ability. After working at a hospital for nearly twenty years, my boss, the hospital president, unexpectedly visited my office. He sat down and said, “You are doing a phenomenal job, but I would like you to take on more responsibilities.” I agreed, though his request involved additional administrative tasks. When I asked why, he replied, “You are capable. I see how you handle the other doctors; they hold you in high regard.”

He gave me a substantial raise without me even asking for it. But I quickly put that out of my mind and told myself, “I am not thinking about the reward. I am just going to do my job.” I attributed this to following the teachings of the Gita—performing my duty selflessly, without seeking personal gain, and allowing rewards to come naturally.

There are two stories that illustrate self-control and spiritual perseverance.

One is a tale my mother told me: The gods and demons were fighting over a bowl of nectar that granted immortality. To churn the nectar, they used a rope, pulling it back and forth.

First, horses and elephants emerged—symbols of wealth in ancient times. Then came beautiful women. My mother did not explain the symbolism, but I later understood: the gods represent the good tendencies within us, while the demons symbolize the bad which refers to our desires. The road to spiritual fulfillment requires overcoming these temptations.

As one progresses spiritually, the first temptation is material wealth. Why?

Because good work is recognized. If you do your duty without seeking rewards, success follows naturally. Your boss trusts you, customers are drawn to you, and people appreciate your sincerity. Spiritual individuals become more attractive, not because their looks change, but because their energy does. If you persist in overcoming negative tendencies, the ultimate reward—true spiritual fulfillment—emerges.

The second story is about Nachiketa from Eknath Easwaran’s Dialogue with Death, based on the Upanishads. Nachiketa troubled his father while he was taking care of their cows. Annoyed, his father told him to go to Yama, the Lord of Death. Taking the words literally, Nachiketa left and sat outside Yama’s abode, waiting patiently for years. When Yama finally met him, he offered Nachiketa wealth, power, and pleasures. Nachiketa refused all temptations, proving his devotion. In response, Yama imparted profound spiritual wisdom to him.

This story symbolizes how temptations test true seekers on the spiritual path. Overcoming them leads to higher wisdom.

Self-control means staying committed to the journey toward the Self, despite the increasing material and sensual attractions that arise. A true spiritual person does not let these distractions hinder their progress. This practice is called *Tapas*.

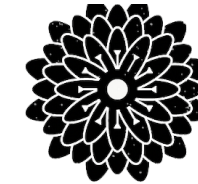
As the Gita teaches, meditation is essential. Many hermits isolated themselves in caves, avoiding distractions. There is even a documentary about a British teenager who left her family, traveled to India, and lived in a Himalayan cave for twelve years, meditating with unwavering dedication. She had no comforts, no food, only sheer commitment.

But must we leave everything behind to practice self-control? Not necessarily. The key is maintaining focus and discipline in our daily lives, resisting distractions, and dedicating ourselves to spiritual growth.

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EPISODE 10 / THE GITA

35 Qualities Of A Spiritual Person 11 - 14



Exploring spiritual qualities continues as we delve into the next few lessons from the Gita. These teachings, while profound, are also incredibly relatable to our daily lives, reminding us of our journey toward self-discovery and growth.

Quality 11 of 35: “Dhrida Nischay”

The quality of a spiritual person is known as *Dhrida Nischay*. *Nischay* means conviction, while *Dhrida* signifies firmness. When we talk about *Dhrida Nischay*, we refer to the idea of having a firm conviction in one’s spiritual path. It is an unwavering belief that guides a person through challenges.

Where does this firm conviction come from? Believing something simply because someone told you does not mean you understand it. If your beliefs are based solely on what others say, without personal inquiry, that is blind faith, which can lead to fanaticism. True conviction isn’t about following blindly; it involves deep questioning and arriving at personal understanding. As the Gita teaches, spirituality should be grounded in logic and reason. When conviction is formed through thoughtful questioning and reasoning, it becomes *Dhrida Nischay*.

Quality 12 of 35: Krishna mentions, “*With mind and intellect dedicated to Me.*” The word *Me* is capitalized because Krishna is referring to Himself as God. In the Gita, Krishna is a human being who has realized his *Self* and become divine. This concept may seem complex and requires explanation.

Throughout the universe exists *Brahman*, life, and consciousness. A small part of *Brahman* resides within each living entity. It is what enlivens, gives life to, that entity. In fact that part of *Brahman* (known as *Atman*) is life itself. One’s spiritual journey involves realizing and becoming one with the *Atman*—the true self. When a person attains this realization, they still possess a body, mind, and senses, but they are no longer identified with the ego. They have merged with the *Atman*, the spirit, the soul, the divine. Such a person no longer is no longer identifying himself/herself with their body, or their mind.

This means that when such a person speaks, it is no longer just an individual speaking—it is the divine expressing itself through them. They transcend personal desires and selfishness. Figures such as Jesus Christ, Buddha, and other enlightened beings throughout history exemplify this state.

“*With mind and intellect dedicated to Me*” means that when one’s mind and intellect are aligned with the *Atman*, Krishna refers to that as *Me*—the divine Self within the *Atman*. This may be difficult to grasp, but in essence, *Me* represents the *Self*.

When Krishna in the Gita says *Me*, He refers to the *Self*, the *Atman*, or *Brahman* within each person—the life force, consciousness. The mind experiences emotions, while the intellect engages in thought. True spirituality requires both feeling and thinking to be directed toward the higher *Self*. If one feels devotion without understanding, it becomes blind faith or superstition. Conversely, if one understands but lacks devotion, spirituality remains incomplete.

Additionally, humility is essential. The Gita, in its fourth chapter, describes three qualities of a student:

- 1. Surrender:** One must surrender the ego. Without surrender, learning becomes impossible because the ego insists, “*I already know everything*.” True learning begins with humility, acknowledging that there is more to understand.
- 2. Questioning:** Surrender alone is insufficient; one must also question. Blind acceptance leads to fanaticism. Through questioning, one arrives at logic and reason. However, questioning should not be argumentative—it should be a sincere pursuit of deeper understanding.
- 3. Service:** A student must cultivate an attitude of gratitude and service toward their teacher. Without this, ego persists. Selfishness obstructs learning, while selflessness fosters spiritual growth. Recognizing the lineage of knowledge—teacher to teacher, ultimately tracing back to the Gita—helps develop this gratitude.

Spiritual progress brings one closer to the *Atman* and therefore to *Brahman*. However, *Brahman* cannot be seen, heard, smelled, or imagined—it can only be *realized*. The scriptures affirm that you can only *become* the *Atman*.

Qualities 13 & 14 of 35: The Gita states: “*By whom the world is not agitated and who is not agitated by the world, who is freed from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety, he is dear to Me.*” Again, *Me* is capitalized, signifying the divine force, *Brahman*.

This verse highlights an essential aspect of spiritual maturity. Let’s examine its meaning.

“*He is dear to Me.*” Krishna is not saying, “*I like this person more than others.*” Instead, it means that such a person is closer to the divine force—the *Atman*, *Brahman*—and getting closer to *Self-Realization*.

Consider “*by whom the world is not agitated.*” A truly spiritual individual does not create disturbances. They do not impose demands, boast, or seek personal gain. A selfish person constantly demands, “*I want this, I need that,*” causing agitation around them. In contrast, a selfless person makes few demands, allowing peace to flourish.

The fourteenth, opposite quality is “*he who is not agitated by the world.*” A spiritual person does not depend on external circumstances for happiness and peace. They do not seek fulfillment in material possessions but instead turn inward. Like a calm lake amid a storm, they remain serene despite chaos around them.

Picture someone full of demands—it can be exhausting. A selfless person, on the other hand, brings peace to their surroundings. Such an individual asks: “*What can I do for you?*” with genuine kindness. This is *Nirahankara*—the absence of ego. Such a person neither agitates others nor is agitated by them.

This reminds me of an intriguing historical reference: the *gymnosophists* of ancient India. The first recorded use of this term, which you can find in sources like Wikipedia, describes Indian ascetics who practiced extreme simplicity.

Alexander the Great—who, despite his title, was not truly *great*—was taught by Aristotle, who in turn was a student of Plato. Historical accounts suggest that Plato himself traveled to India to learn from the *gymnosophists*. Their teachings mirror those of the Gita: non-attachment, vegetarianism, and deep philosophical inquiry.

Many Himalayan *sadhus* today live similarly. When they visit cities, people shower them with gold and wealth, but they have no need for it. Swami Rama, in his book *Living With the Himalayan Masters*, recounts how his guru had bags of gold stored in a cave—unused, irrelevant to him. These individuals are not agitated by the world, nor do they agitate it.

This brings us to the conclusion of this discourse. The Gita teaches that when one is free from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety, they move closer to their divine nature. Imagine being liberated from these emotional burdens—that state brings one nearer to *Self-Realization*.

Returning to the verse: “*By whom the world is not agitated, and who is not agitated by the world, he who is freed from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety, he is dear to Me.*” This means that spiritual evolution leads to inner peace, freedom from disturbances, and alignment with one’s true *Self*.

The emotions that this verse mentions deserve an explanation. Lord Krishna mentions joy, envy, fear, and anxiety. And He says we should not be agitated by the world. We should not agitate the world and we should be free of these emotions.

So let’s take each emotion one by one. “*Joy*” is what we experience when something that we have been desiring comes to fruition. We are desirous of a new car, for example. Once we get that car, we experience joy. However, that joy is usually short-lived.

Shortly after, as we drive the car around, we might see other people with bigger, better, shinier cars, and envy creeps in. . Not always, but often. That’s the other emotion that results from having a desire in the first place. We then become fearful that we might lose what we have achieved, obtained, or possess.

And finally, anxiety about not getting something else that we are looking to obtain in the future. Desire is such that as soon as it is fulfilled in one instance it immediately looks forward to getting something else. And there is anxiety that is generated that such a desire may not be fulfilled.

We must get rid of these emotions and be free from them in order to pursue our goals and for our spiritual advancement. We should strive to be free of these emotions.



EPISODE 11 / THE GITA

35 Qualities Of A Spiritual Person 15 - 19



As we dive deeper into the rich teachings of the Gita, particularly in Chapter 12, we explore what it means to be a bhakta, a devoted spiritual person. This chapter sheds light on the qualities that define such an individual. We will focus on qualities 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

Before jumping ahead, I want to circle back to qualities 13 and 14, which we touched upon previously: “*By whom the world is not agitated*” and “*who is not agitated by the world.*”

The idea of not being bothered by the world, as well as not stirring up trouble for others, has been on my mind. It’s interesting to consider which qualities resonate with different people. Everyone connects with different aspects of spirituality, and that’s perfectly natural. Simply going to a temple, church, or mosque and asking for things doesn’t lead to the peace of mind many seek. The Gita reminds us that to truly embody the spirit of a *bhakta*, we need to embrace these thirty-five qualities, understanding that it’s okay not to possess them all at once. Just focusing on one or two qualities that truly speak to you can pave the way for growth of the other qualities within you.

Let me share a little story. There was a time when I was working in a hospital and wasn’t particularly friendly with a maintenance worker there. He had a serious demeanor and never greeted anyone. I found myself avoiding him, not wanting to make contact, simply because he seemed indifferent. But after reflecting on the quality of hating no one, I decided to change my approach. I started saying “good morning” to him and even engaging in small talk. Remarkably, this simple act transformed our interactions—we went from strangers to sharing playful elbow nudges in the hallway!

Let’s talk about what it means to be a person who doesn’t agitate others. Typically, those who cause agitation are the ones demanding that others change to suit their needs. Picture this: you’re driving, and someone is honking to get you to go faster. They are imposing their needs on you, creating irritation instead of harmony. A true *bhakta* knows better than to manipulate others for their own agenda. Instead, they prioritize the well-being of those around them.

Similarly, being unbothered by the world means understanding that life is full of challenges. When you’re stuck in traffic, for instance, a true devotee maintains a calm demeanor, having allowed enough time to arrive at their destination rather than getting ruffled by the delay. After all, some things—like weather conditions—are simply out of our control.

Sometimes each one of us feel overwhelmed by life’s little challenges. At such times, imagine swimming in a pool as a child versus stepping into the ocean for the first time. The ocean comes with waves that can knock you off your feet. Anticipating obstacles in advance prepares us to deal with them more effectively.

Quality 15 of 35: “Desire is the root cause of all emotions.”

When you want something badly, you become anxious about getting it. Once you get it, you are overjoyed, only to then fear losing it. Desire fuels a cycle of emotions: first anxiety, then joy, then fear. Soon, envy creeps in—you compare what you have with others. You feel jealousy toward those who have more and arrogance toward those who have less.

In Sanskrit, there are six words that describe this emotional cycle:

- **Kama (desire/lust)**
- **Krodha (anger)**
- **Lobha (greed)**
- **Mada (ego)**
- **Moha (attachment)**
- **Matsarya (jealousy)**

If you have control over your desires, you free yourself from these emotions.

Quality 16 of 35: Anapeksha – Free from wants, expectations, and desires.

This quality serves as a benchmark for spirituality. A *bhakta* exists without wants or desires, focusing inwardly rather than on fleeting cravings. Our body, mind, and intellect often distract us with desires and emotions. Shifting our attention away from them toward the inner self brings peace.

Consider someone who has mastered the art of being free from wants. We all know the story of King Janaka from our scriptures who was Self-Realized. He was also incredibly wealthy yet remained detached from material desires. In contrast, there’s Sudama, a dear friend of Lord Krishna, who lived in poverty. Sudama’s wife urged him to seek help from Krishna. After traveling for days on foot, Sudama finally reached Krishna’s palace. Despite being greeted with warmth and generosity, all Sudama cared about was reconnecting with his friend. Upon returning home, he realized he had forgotten to ask Krishna for anything material. This story prompts us to reflect on our own perspective.

Quality 17 of 35: Shuchi – Clean, pure, and tidy.

Why is cleanliness such an important trait for a spiritual person? In many ways, it is foundational. Desires create a mess in our minds. If we cannot maintain a clean environment, how will we recognize and cleanse the internal disarray caused by our desires?

Keeping our space orderly enhances focus and brings peace. A friend once told me that in the Kumon learning program, cleanliness and organization are emphasized from the start. Children are taught to keep their materials neat, promoting a conducive learning environment.

Quality 18 of 35: Dakshah – Skillful, efficient, and dexterous.

The Gita teaches that a *bhakta* acts with promptness and efficiency. They approach tasks with dedication, viewing obligations as sacred, regardless of personal enjoyment. Their commitment fosters excellence, transforming duty into a cherished practice.

An illustrative tale from the *Mahabharata* involves Lord Krishna. During a grand celebration, while others focused on grandeur, Lord Krishna humbly took charge of arranging the guests’ footwear. Despite his divine stature, he demonstrated that even the smallest tasks can be done with care and skill.

Quality 19 of 35: “Being unconcerned.”

Being unconcerned doesn’t mean being indifferent—it means focusing on higher purposes. When a *bhakta* sets their sights on self-realization, everyday concerns become secondary.

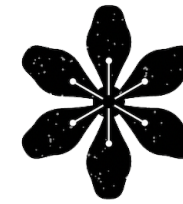
Picture this: I’m playing a game with my grandchildren. They are intensely focused on winning, but for me, it’s about bonding and teaching. My focus shifts from the outcome to the moment. Similarly, a *bhakta* values the journey over the destination.

A powerful realization came to me while reading Swami Parthasarathy’s book on symbolism in Hinduism. Gautam Jain explained many of these concepts to us, including the significance of Lord Ganesha. Most people, even those who are not Hindu, recognize Ganesha—the elephant-headed god with a large belly and multiple arms. Each of these features has deep meaning. One striking detail in Ganesha’s imagery is the small mouse or rat at his feet, gazing up at him with folded hands, seemingly in prayer. In front of the mouse is a plate of sweets—laddus, round Indian desserts. Mice love sweets, yet instead of eating them, this mouse looks toward Ganesha. This signifies that before acting on our desires, we must consult our inner wisdom.



EPISODE 12 / THE GITA

35 Qualities Of A Spiritual Person 20 - 27



Let's step into the wisdom of the ancient scriptures, particularly the Gita, a treasure trove of insights passed down by wise sages over the ages. These teachings have come to us through generations, first shared verbally and later written down in books. We stand on the shoulders of giants, and for that, I feel immense gratitude towards figures like Swami Parthasarathy and Gautam Ji. They've dedicated their lives to sharing this knowledge with us, urging us to carry it forward to others. That's why I'm here—to pass along the flame of this wisdom.

In our journey through *Chapter Twelve* of the Gita, we're exploring the qualities of a devoted person, or *Bhakta*. When we talk about a Bhakta, don't picture someone who simply visits temples and donates money just to feel good about themselves or to see their name in print. Being a true Bhakta is about something deeper. It's about understanding the essence of these qualities. If one out of these thirty-five qualities resonates with you, embrace it, nurture it, and, surprisingly, the others may begin to follow suit.

Quality 20 of 35: Is about being *Untroubled*. Life tends to toss us around with worries about the past and anxieties about the future. It's like we're on a rollercoaster of emotions, constantly racing from memories we can't change to fears about what's to come. The Gita offers us a guiding principle here: to focus on the present. It's a powerful technique. When you find yourself lost in regret or worry, simply bring your awareness back to the present moment.

The Bhakta is someone who is dedicated to reaching their true self without being burdened by what has already happened or by what might happen next. It's all about channeling your energy into the present moment and contributing positively to the world around you.

It's all too easy to get caught up in what we think or need. Our bodies crave comfort, a better climate, delicious food, and beautiful sights. Our minds long for love and care from others, and our intellects are always hungry for new information. But the real shift happens when our focus changes from "what can I get?" to "how can I help?"

When your attention is tied to the external world, you ride the highs and lows of what happens around you. When things go well, you're on top of the world. When they don't, you're moping around. However, if your focus is on that higher self, nothing from the outside can disturb your peace. That's what being untroubled looks like.

Quality 21 of 35: Renunciation of all undertaking. This doesn't imply that you should become a hermit in orange robes, distancing yourself from all responsibilities. Instead, it teaches you to let go of the feeling of "I did it." Imagine you've completed a project at work. Instead of shouting, "I achieved this!" it's about recognizing that you were part of something larger. Who else contributed? What insights did others bring to the table?

When you give credit to others, it lightens your load. You're no longer clutching at the need to be recognized; instead, you're appreciating the teamwork involved. It's tough at first because we're all conditioned to want our names in lights. But as you cultivate your spiritual side and practice humility, you start to realize the vastness of the contributions around you.

Quality 22, 23, 24 & 25 of 35: A *Bhakta* or a devotee **doesn't rejoice, hate, grieve, or desire.**

When your thoughts are tangled in desire, you're fixated on personal gain. You may find yourself asking, "What's in it for me?" But a true *Bhakta* shifts their thought process to, "I'm doing this because it's the right thing to do." If you receive something pleasant, don't dwell on it. If something doesn't work out, don't wallow in sadness. It's all about internal peace and aiming for self-realization, finding joy within regardless of the circumstances. If you are focused on your desires, you rejoice if things go your way, are depressed if they don't, you hate anything or anybody that comes in the way of your goal. You grieve because you are focused on the past. Your desires make you focus on the future.

Quality 26 of 35: This is about "renouncing the ideas of good and evil" as they relate to the external world. 'Good' refers to many things: positive qualities within yourself are often called 'good'. 'Evil' refers traditionally in the Gita to 'desires'. Gita tells us to renounce our desires - renounce 'evil'.

It's all too easy to tie our internal happiness to what happens externally. If something good occurs, we feel elated; if something goes wrong, we feel deflated. The *Bhakta* learns to stand firm, asserting, "I'm okay inside, no matter what happens." This isn't a natural state; it requires growth and development. As your intellect evolves, your independence from the ups and downs of outside events is enhanced. When you start recognizing that your higher self is what truly matters, that's when the journey of self-realization kicks off.

If your internal happiness depends upon external things, you are always thinking, "If such and such happens, then I'll be happy." If you don't rely on that external outcome, your internal happiness is not dependent on it. You should not be reliant on external outcomes. So, you are a renouncer of good and evil; whatever happens outside, you assert, "Internally, I'm okay." When you're already happy internally, you will not depend on an external source for that happiness.

You should be self-sufficient, and that does not come automatically; it must be developed as you develop your intellect. As your intellect develops, your self-sufficiency increases. Your bondage to the external world and its outcomes decreases. The minute you start to shift your focus on the higher, on the self, you are starting your journey to self-realization.

Quality 27 of 35: This is about being alike to friend and foe, honor and dishonor, heat and cold, and joy and sorrow.

You are alike to each one of these things. Each one of these refers to either the body, the mind, or the intellect. The body talks about heat and cold. You are alike because your body is under your control. A spiritual person finds that it doesn't matter if it's hot or cold. Your body says, "I wanted this temperature, not that temperature." Joy and sorrow refer to the mind, which represents the emotions that fluctuate. If your mind is in control, you don't experience joy or sorrow but remain constant. Honor and dishonor come from the intellect. The intellect says, "Wow, you gave me an honor." You feel good about it because the intellect is happy. If you are insulted, that's dishonor.

Here, the Gita is talking about the body, the mind, and the intellect. As one develops spiritually, one minimizes the influence of these. Thus, one becomes alike in all of these things. Alike to friend and foe: Who is a friend? Whoever fulfills your desire and caters to you is someone you feel is your friend. If they cater to you, you say, "Ah, he's a nice guy." Why? Because whatever you like, he's meeting that need. Someone who argues with you or wants things their way, not yours, you say, "I don't like you."

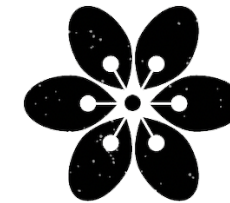
So, you are similar to friend and foe because you have no desires. In that case, everybody is your friend, and that is what this quality signifies.

A true spiritual person learns to remain unshaken by what happens around them. A friend is simply someone who meets your desires, while a foe challenges them. With the *Bhakta's* mindset, these distinctions fade away, as your desires lessen. That's what this twenty-seventh quality truly encapsulates.

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EPISODE 13 / THE GITA

35 Qualities Of A Spiritual Person 28- 35



As we explore the other qualities of a *bhakta* or a devotee, someone who sincerely seeks a spiritual path. We embark on a journey to understand what it truly means to live a fulfilled life.

Quality 28 of 35: “Free from attachment”. An attachment is when the person feels very close to and bound to an object that one is attached to. I have learned these concepts from over twenty years of listening to Gautam Ji lectures on a daily basis, so I know his words by heart, and I have to thank him for this. I am now passing these on to you as my duty- something that I ought to do.

As children, we attach ourselves to toys. I absolutely loved my comic books. Growing up in India, I found immense joy in reading comics from the U.S. At the time, I was convinced I would never part with them. Over the years, my favorite things changed—moving from comic books to bicycles, and then to more mature interests. As Gautam Ji mentioned, our attachments evolve as we do. This realization made me see how temporary attachments can be.

Many of us believe that once we form an attachment, it becomes a permanent part of our existence. However, as soon as something new and exciting comes along, our focus shifts, and past attachments fade.

Then comes the mind, filled with emotions—love, fondness, and sentimentality. The intellect, on the other hand, is tied to knowledge, which brings its own attachments: the pursuit of fame, praise, and even the fear of censure.

But how do we free ourselves from attachments? It’s not as simple as saying, “*I’m done with that.*” Forcing detachment often leads to frustration. Instead, the key is to find something higher to connect with. I believe most people understand this intuitively—when you replace a lesser attachment with a greater one, the lower one naturally falls away.

Ultimately, the goal is to shift focus toward spiritual seeking—connecting with the *Atman*, or the true Self. When that becomes your priority, all other attachments lose their hold.

Quality 29 of 35: “Censure & Praise” are equal. Censure refers to criticism—putting someone down—while praise is the opposite. People say, “*You’re the best! You’re amazing!*” A spiritual person, however, remains steady, acting out of conviction rather than seeking validation.

A true bhakta does what they ought to do, without being swayed by praise or criticism. They have a firm understanding of their purpose: *“This is my duty. This is what I must do. It doesn’t matter what others think of me.”*

Yet, in everyday life, we constantly seek approval. We want others to acknowledge our efforts: *“Wow, you’re doing a great job!”* And if we don’t receive that validation, we feel discouraged: *“I don’t want to continue because no one appreciates me.”*

A genuine spiritual seeker regards censure and praise as equal. This mindset allows them to move through life without feeling the need to defend themselves against every attack or chase every compliment. Instead, they remain focused on their duty.

Quality 30 of 35: “Mauni or being silent”. Silence does not mean merely refraining from speech. Some religious individuals take a vow of silence for a year, yet communicate through writing. That is not true silence.

Real silence refers to quieting the inner noise—the endless desires and distractions of the mind. Imagine needing to use the bathroom badly. At that moment, your mind is consumed by a single thought: *“I need to find a restroom.”* Nothing else matters. That is internal noise.

Or consider someone addicted to cigarettes. When they crave one, their mind is restless, distracted. But as soon as they take the first inhale, they feel relief. Because the noise of desire momentarily disappears.

Desires create mental noise, and their absence brings peace. The greater the desire, the louder the internal noise. By practicing silence—true silence—we gradually reduce our desires. However, physical silence alone is not enough; if the mind continues chasing the world, the practice is futile.

One way to cultivate inner silence is by strengthening the intellect. Reading, listening, and contemplating the wisdom of the Gita and of our forefathers helps us shift our focus toward higher knowledge.

As we embrace this idea, we recognize that true contentment comes from detaching from worldly desires. A spiritual person flourishes when they connect to something greater than themselves. If happiness is tied to possessions or status, one becomes enslaved by those attachments.

Quality 31 of 35: “Content with anything” or “Content with everything”. A spiritual person is content with everything they experience, finding satisfaction in all circumstances. This does not mean passively accepting life as it unfolds, but rather being at peace with one’s actions—doing what is right without obsessing over the outcome.

Think about it: What if we could live without constantly seeking approval or material satisfaction? When we act out of duty rather than expectation, we experience true fulfillment.

A bhakta achieves this by being attached only to their Self. When one is connected to something higher, the lower naturally falls away. Because it no longer holds value. *The pursuit of something greater—something spiritual—brings a deeper bliss than wealth, power, or fame.*

We see this in the concept of *wealth fatigue*. The more money one accumulates, the more it seems insufficient. However, when we seek higher knowledge, we ascend, even if only by one rung at a time. Every step up the spiritual ladder changes us.

Contentment also applies to our actions. Many of us perform tasks while fixated on the rewards: *“What will I get from this?”* The Gita teaches us to focus on the action itself, not the outcome.

If you are a doctor, your goal should be to heal people, not to maximize income. If you are a teacher, you should educate because it is your duty, not for recognition. If you are a parent, you should nurture your child without fixating on how they will turn out.

Each of us is born with *vasanas*—deep-seated tendencies that shape our destiny. A saint may raise a child with the utmost care, yet that child could still turn into a criminal. Likewise, someone from difficult circumstances may grow into a noble person. We cannot control outcomes; we can only do our duty.

Quality 32 of 35: Aniketha means *homeless*, having no abode. This does not mean being physically homeless. Even sages who live in Himalayan caves have a place they call home. *Aniketha* refers to non-attachment to possessions. Possessions themselves are not the issue—possessiveness is.

Imagine staying in a five-star hotel. You enjoy the amenities, but you are not attached to the room. If you spill coffee on the bed, you don’t stress over it; you simply call housekeeping for a fresh sheet. At home, however, you might be upset over the same spill. Why? Because of attachment. The same applies to material possessions. If you own a car and it hits a pothole, you feel distressed. If it were a rental, you wouldn’t react the same way. There’s no mental bondage when you aren’t attached. The same is true for relationships. If we are overly attached to people, we suffer when they behave differently than we expect. However, if we love without possessiveness, our relationships remain peaceful.

Possession is not the problem—our attachment to it is. True freedom comes when we learn to enjoy the world without being bound by it. (Being ‘bound’ to something means your attitude, your emotions, your very being fluctuates, depending on that something).

The extent to which you are attached to something determines the extent to which you are not spiritual. If you are truly spiritual, you are entirely free from attachment. When you are attached to something, you place it above yourself, making your happiness dependent on it.

Whether it is money or power, the principle remains the same—your happiness fluctuates with its increase or decrease. To enjoy money, you must spend it. You can possess all the wealth in the world, but unless you use it, it brings no joy. Money, in itself, holds no value; it must leave you for you to derive any enjoyment from it. The same applies to food—its pleasure is only experienced when consumed.

Janaka, a wealthy king, had everything, and Sudama, Krishna’s friend, had no possessions. Both were Self-Realized, content with life itself, happy, unattached to anything; not possessive of anything. Despite their contrasting circumstances, both were referred to as *Aniketan*, meaning “homeless.” Sudama was literally without possessions, but for King Janaka, the term applied differently—despite his immense wealth, he had no attachment to it. Both were considered *aniketan* because they remained unattached to their possessions.

Quality 33 of 35: “Steady mindedness”. Imagine a cluttered room filled with distractions—this is often how the mind functions. The Sanskrit words *Chanchala* and *Asthir* describe a restless and constantly moving mind. Most people experience this lack of focus, with thoughts jumping from one thing to another. In contrast, a spiritual person controls their mind, maintaining **one-pointedness** and focusing only on what truly matters. Others, however, remain directionless, pulled in multiple directions.

This steadiness can be cultivated through meditation, which trains the mind to remain centered—like a ship that stays on course despite turbulent storms.

Quality 34 of 35: “Shraddha” or “Faith”. *Shraddha* is more than just faith; it encompasses the ability to reflect, study, understand, absorb, and ultimately embody what you learn. It is a commitment to transforming yourself and living these values to their fullest.

The Bhagavad Gita teaches that these 35 qualities must be followed with unwavering *Shraddha*—the kind of faith and determination that drives you to embody these principles until you realize the Self.

You may start at level zero, with no knowledge of these qualities, or you may be at level one or two, where most people are. Regardless of your current stage, continuous effort will lead to spiritual growth. Every step forward brings a profound change in personality and transforms how you engage with life.

Quality 35 of 35: “Me as supreme”. The *Me* (with a capital “M”) refers to Lord Krishna as the *Atman*—the divine essence within. This quality signifies surrendering everything with complete devotion to the *Atman*, the eternal Self.

We are not just our names, bodies, or identities; we are the *Atman*. In this life, we inhabit one body, and in the next, we will take another. When we recognize the *Atman*—the *Brahman*—as supreme, we transcend these temporary identities and move toward ultimate realization.

For me, the first quality that resonated was *Hate No Being*. One cannot harbor hatred toward any living creature—not just humans, but also animals, birds, reptiles, and even insects.

A quality I actively work on is *not agitating others*. When I desire something, I remind myself that pursuing it might disturb someone else. I try to control that impulse, though I am not perfect. Still, I have made significant progress compared to where I once was.

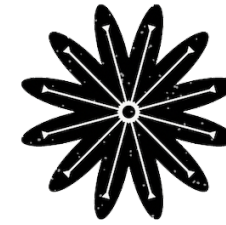
Another quality I strive for is *not being agitated by the world*. When someone fails to meet my expectations, I remind myself that people are often prisoners of their own *vasanas* (deep-seated tendencies). Instead of reacting with frustration, I try to understand them and remain unaffected.

As we have explored these 35 qualities of a devotee, you may have noticed that each one holds unique significance. Focus on the quality that speaks to you the most. Once you begin practicing one, the rest will naturally follow. Each quality reinforces the others, guiding you toward deeper spiritual growth.



EPISODE 14

Question and Answers 1



In this chapter, we will discuss questions that have been asked about the basics. Without clarity on the basics, much of this won't make sense, and it's easy to lose track of what we're talking about.

The first question we received was:

*“Since childhood, I have worshiped God or gods, visited temples, and had implicit faith in rituals—perhaps because I saw my elders doing the same. But **does God actually exist?** Or have we been following these practices simply because we were taught to?”*

Hindu philosophy begins with a profound declaration—a *Mahavakya*—that God is one. Many people misunderstand this, and at some point, someone will inevitably ask why Hinduism has so many gods. It's fascinating because, time and again, the Upanishads, Vedanta, and the Gita declare that there is only one God.

Does God exist? And why all these rituals?

The answer is that God does exist—but not in the form that you or I may have imagined. Growing up, we were taught to look to the sky and the clouds, thinking God and heaven exist somewhere above us. This is a misconception. The Gita and other scriptures state that God is everywhere, not just in the sky.

By now, we know that rockets have been launched into space, and no heavens have been found. There are no thrones, no pearly gates, and no fiery hell beneath the earth. This leads to another question: *What are heaven, hell, and sin?*

God exists but not as a person, as many of us imagine. The Gita refers to God as *Brahman*—an all-pervading presence that cannot be defined by shape, form, smell, or taste because it transcends all sensory perception. *Brahman* is something you become rather than something you see, touch, or feel.

Can you see oxygen in the air? You breathe it, but you cannot perceive it through your senses. Can you perceive carbon dioxide? Or sound waves? Or Wi-Fi signals? You can't see television waves, yet they exist. Similarly, on a much larger scale, *Brahman* is everywhere. That is God.

The next question is: ***Where is God within us?***

Not just Hinduism, but all religions believe that God exists within us. Christ said, “*My Father and I are one.*” Islamic teachings state that the greatest jihad is the conquest of oneself. Every religion has some version of this idea: God (*Brahman*), the soul (*Atman*), and the inner Self are one.

There is a force of energy in the universe—Life, Consciousness—and a fraction of that energy is within you. That is what makes you alive. This life force or energy extends to everything—trees, insects, even dinosaurs. That Life, that *Brahman*, is God. If God exists everywhere, then why do we go to temples and pray before deities? God is energy, consciousness—formless. But most of us need a tangible form to connect with. Just as a flag represents a country, a deity serves as a focal point for worship.

More evolved individuals—those who are Self-Realized, like sages in the Himalayas—do not need a form. They close their eyes, meditate, and merge with *Brahman*. Gautam Ji offers a useful analogy:

Imagine an advertisement that says, “Apple is hiring for both a clerk and a CEO.” If someone asks, “Should I apply for the clerk position or the CEO position?” the obvious response would be: “Apply for the clerk position—if you were qualified to be CEO, you wouldn’t have asked.”

Similarly, if you can pray to God without a form, you don’t need one. But if you need a form, then you aren’t at that level yet. That’s why churches and temples exist. Some people need that sacred space to focus; others can meditate in a cave.

Think of the spark of God within you as a ripple in the ocean. The wave can say, “I am part of this vast ocean,” just as we are part of *Brahman*. Within us, this divine essence is called *Atman*; when it exists as part of the whole, it is *Brahman*. As long as we are alive, the *Atman* makes us function—it enables us to see, walk, talk, and think.

When we die, what happens to the *Atman*? We often say that the soul leaves the body. In English, *Atman* is loosely translated as “soul,” but there are subtle differences. The Gita explains that *Atman* sheds its body, much like discarding old clothes, and takes on a new BODY. Why does the *Atman* return? Because of *Vasanas*—unmanifest desires. These are the seeds of thoughts and cravings, the forces that drive our desires. *Vasanas* accompany the *Atman* into the next life.

Most of us are born with *Vasanas* from past lives. Even identical twins, raised in the same environment, have different *Vasanas*—one might crave wealth, the other craves power or knowledge. These *Vasanas* determine our inclinations, shaping our lives across lifetimes. Typically, one predominant *Vasana* drives a person in each lifetime—perhaps an obsession with wealth in one life, then a pursuit of power in the next.

As long as *Vasanas* remain, the *Atman* continues the cycle of birth and rebirth. The moment *Vasanas* are exhausted, there is no longer a need to return. After death, the *Atman* moves toward *Brahman* but does not immediately merge with it — because it still carries *Vasanas*. The *Atman* is waiting for the next body. The *Atman* awaits another body, the next family it can be born into. That depends on what the entity has done in the previous life or lives, how good they have been as a person. It determines the state of life and where it is reborn, which depends on past actions (*Karma*).

For those who struggle with this concept, consider the case of *Edgar Cayce*, an American who lived in Virginia over a century ago. A devout Christian, Cayce nonetheless had profound insights into reincarnation. One notable book about him is “*Many Mansions: The Edgar Cayce Story on Reincarnation*” by Gina Cerminara.

A true story illustrates this: A wealthy businessman once consulted Edgar Cayce. Cayce told him that in a past life, he had been a pious monk, performing great karmic deeds. As a result, in this life, he had everything—good health, a loving family, and immense wealth. His current fortune was a continuation of his past merits. This does not do justice to Gina Cerminara’s book. It’s worth reading and I highly recommend it. Edgar Cayce’s life should be read and understood to truly understand the Gita.

This highlights a key lesson from the Gita: while *Karma* influences rebirth, *Vasanas* dictate our inner journey.

Imagine being born into an educated family that nurtures your dreams. Yet, if your dominant *Vasana* is wealth, you may resonate more with business than spirituality. Your rebirth aligns with your unresolved desires.

Let’s now understand what constitutes our body, mind, and intellect—the three core components. Many symbols in Hinduism incorporate the number three; this is true not only in Hinduism but in other religions as well. For example, ascetics mark their bodies with three stripes of ash, which may be vertical or horizontal depending on whether they are followers of Vishnu or Shiva. These three stripes often symbolize the body, mind, and intellect. The body is the most fundamental of the three. We have previously discussed the body, mind, and intellect, often abbreviated as BMI.

The body consists of five sense organs and five organs of action, making a total of ten. This is why demons like Ravana are depicted with ten heads. Beyond the body, we have the mind, which ranks above it. Consider the image of a chariot, with Krishna holding the reins tightly as five horses race forward. These five horses represent our five senses, and it is the intellect that must maintain firm control. The mind sits between the intellect and the senses, filled with desires, fears, anxieties, and emotions. The mind does not consider consequences—it simply seeks to align with the five sense organs and the five organs of action to fulfill its desires.

Unfortunately, in most people, the intellect is underdeveloped. Ideally, it should be nurtured from an early age, but especially in today’s world, this is rarely the case. In earlier times, people believed that at birth, a person’s intellect was weak, while the senses and mind were strong. In this state, one was not yet considered truly “born.” This belief gave rise to the idea of a “second birth” or a “coming of age.”

Throughout your childhood, early years, you go to temple or church, or you learn from your parents, or you learn from your teachers, and then slowly, slowly, you develop an intellect, and when that intellect is fully formed, that’s when you’re really born. It’s known as being “born again”.

14 - THE GITA - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS #1

The Bhagavad Gita does not impose rituals or commandments; rather, it encourages the use of intellect in decision-making. It does not advocate blindly following scriptures. Consider this scenario: if a woman, fleeing from armed attackers, seeks refuge in your home, would it be wise to reveal her hiding place? Using your intellect, you would likely choose to protect her, even if it means lying. The Gita does not simply say, “Do not kill” as an absolute rule. Instead, it teaches that circumstances matter. If a terrorist threatens innocent lives, your intellect may guide you to take decisive action, even if that means using violence to protect others.

A common misconception is that the Gita promotes war because it is set on a battlefield. In reality, it advocates for the use of intellect and respect for all living beings. Many Hindus adopt vegetarianism for this reason. Historically, figures like Plato and Jesus upheld similar principles, refraining from unnecessary killing, even for food. The Gita emphasizes that all life forms deserve respect. Consider the practices of Native Americans—when they hunted bison, they honored the animal by utilizing every part of it and never killing wastefully.

The Gita does not mandate *Ahimsa* at all costs (absolute non-violence or *peace*). It acknowledges that violence may sometimes be necessary for a higher purpose. The Gita instructs us to use intellect when deciding whether or not to take a life. If vegetables, grains, and fruits are available, there is no need to slaughter an animal. However, if one is stranded on an ice sheet in Alaska with no other food source, survival may necessitate eating fish.

Native Americans historically embodied this respect for nature. When they hunted bison, they killed only what was needed and offered prayers to honor the animal’s life. A similar practice is depicted in the film *Avatar*, where the characters acknowledge the life they take before consuming it. The core teaching of the Gita is this: whatever you do, use your intellect.

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EPISODE 15

Questions and Answers 2



Last time, we left off with questions and answers, discussing topics such as: Why do we go to a temple? Why do we pray in front of a figure or form? What happens to the *Atman* after death? What is the difference between the intellect and the *Atman*—or between the intellect, mind, and body? We also talked about respect for nature and how Native Americans were horrified by the settlers' actions—killing vast numbers of buffalo even though they only needed one or two for food.

The Gita does not prescribe specific actions; each situation is unique. The core idea is to do what is right, even when it means going against what others believe to be good or acceptable. The Gita does not say, “Do this” or “Don’t do this.” Instead, it urges us to use our intellect to determine what is right and wrong. Sometimes, what you believe to be right may conflict with others’ perspectives.

This reminds me of something *Rajiv Malhotra* has discussed regarding property rights. In Western culture, property is seen as something claimed by an individual, marked by boundaries, and defined through ownership. In contrast, Hindu scriptures ascribe rights to property itself—an interesting concept. As with Native American beliefs, each buffalo, bison, or herd of buffalo has its own right to exist. To kill them wantonly, without necessity, is to violate that right.

Consider today’s massive commercial fishing trawlers and the issue of overfishing. The Gita teaches: “Use your intellect to catch only as many fish as you need to feed yourself for today.” Do not kill fish needlessly. Do not exploit resources simply because they are available to you. Instead, approach nature with respect.

We also discussed the fathers of American and British literature who were influenced by the Gita. I once visited *Walden Pond*, where the American writer *Henry David Thoreau* lived in a tiny hut—about 10 feet by 10 feet. In winter, he endured the cold without a heater or an indoor bathroom, choosing a simple life in contrast to the modern comforts of Cambridge, where he had a house. He chose Walden Pond to connect deeply with nature, reflect on life, and contemplate. While there, he studied the Gita daily and wrote some of his best poetry.

Each of us consists of three parts: the body, mind, and intellect—ranked from the lowest to the highest. Every religion has three corresponding aspects and also has scriptures.

Intellect: Scriptures, knowledge, understanding.

Mind: Mythology, stories, bhakti, devotion, emotions.

Body: Rituals, *Karma*.

Scriptures provide the foundation of a religion and appeal to those who seek knowledge and understanding. The intellect is about curiosity, knowledge, and decision-making.

Secondly, each religion has a mythology component, with its own set of mythological stories.

In Hinduism, for example, there are heroes and demons. We recently celebrated Diwali, the festival of lights, which commemorates the victory of Ram, the King, over the ten-headed demon Ravana. People celebrate by lighting firecrackers, distributing sweets, and exchanging old clothes for new ones. Symbolically, this represents the shedding of negative emotions—jealousy, anger, hate, lust—and gaining control over the ten facets of negativity: the five sense organs and the five organs of action. The ten-headed Ravana symbolizes these uncontrolled desires and senses.

When Ram conquers Ravana, he becomes, in essence, a Self-Realized person. He sheds his old personality and adopts a new one, symbolized by the new clothes worn on Diwali. Everything that emerges from him is sweetness, which is why we distribute sweets. The night is illuminated with lights, signifying the enlightenment that dispels ignorance and darkness.

These mythological stories resonate differently with different people. Those who are emotionally driven (mind-oriented individuals) often find strength in narratives and symbolism rather than in intellectual analysis.

This mythology component is present in all major religions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and others. Each has stories about past events that convey moral and spiritual lessons. People who are more emotionally inclined connect with these stories more than with academic discussions or philosophical texts.

Devotion, or *bhakti*, arises from mind-oriented individuals—those who express their faith through songs, hymns, and heartfelt worship. They reach their inner selves and God through their devotion and emotions.

Then, there are those who are neither intellectually inclined nor emotionally driven but are more body-oriented. For them, religion prescribes specific rituals: reciting a certain number of Hail Marys, lighting candles, performing *pujas* and *Yajnas*, fasting for a certain number of days. These rituals provide a structured path for those who connect with faith through physical actions.

Heaven, Hell, Sin: Now, let's consider the concepts of heaven, hell, sin, and purgatory. Before we move forward, it's important to clarify these through a question-and-answer approach.

What is sin? Sin is the mental repercussion of an action one has taken. Internally, we each have a conscience that alerts us when we have done something wrong, creating inner turmoil. The greater the wrongdoing, the greater the disturbance in our minds. Sometimes, this feeling can persist for a lifetime, keeping us restless and uneasy. This mental disturbance is what we call sin.

It's important to recognize that any action you personally consider wrong will result in internal torment—this is sin. However, sin isn't limited to actions alone; it can also arise from thoughts. People often say, "I can't get this thought out of my head." That persistent mental anguish is a form of suffering caused by a thought, which can feel like a 'sin' in itself.

Thought, Desire, and Action: Let's shift to the concept of thought, desire, and action. The engine behind all desires is *vasanas*—unmanifest impressions from past experiences. These *vasanas* remain active even in deep sleep. When they surface, they first manifest as thoughts.

A thought, however, is not necessarily a desire. You may think of doing something you shouldn't, but if you dismiss the thought, it stops there. If you entertain it, however, one thought leads to another, forming a stream—a torrent that gains momentum.

As this stream grows, it solidifies into a desire. That desire then begins to haunt you. Over lifetimes, *vasanas* accumulate, growing stronger, making desires more compelling. Eventually, those desires push you into action.

What is the progression? ***Vasana > Thought > Desire > Action.***

When a desire emerges—"I want this"—it inevitably leads to action. Once you act, you evaluate the experience:

- *If it was pleasurable, you crave it again.*
- *If it was unsatisfying, you try again, hoping for a better outcome.*

Either way, action repeats. With each repetition, the *vasanas* deepen, reinforcing thoughts, fueling more desires, and triggering further actions. This cycle is perpetual, self-sustaining, and insatiable.

Ironically, the pleasure diminishes over time. The mind recalls the initial thrill and finds each subsequent experience lacking. It urges, "*I need to do it again, just one more time, to feel what I felt before.*" And so, the cycle continues—thought, desire, action, repetition.

Now, let's return to the concept of heaven and hell.

Imagine a habitual smoker on a four-hour flight. He smokes every two hours. For the first two hours, he's comfortable, enjoying the flight. But as the second hour passes, his mind starts whispering: *cigarette, cigarette, cigarette.*

By the third hour, the whisper turns into a scream. By the fourth, it's unbearable—his mind is consumed by a singular, obsessive craving.

This is the nature of desires—they are noisy. The *Bhagavad Gita* repeatedly speaks of this *noise*, this mental agitation caused by relentless cravings.

Now, imagine when the smoker finally gets to light up. At that moment, he sighs, "*I'm in heaven.*" Because for a brief instant, his mind is silent. The lack of desire grants him peace. This is the truth about heaven—it is not a physical place in the sky. **Heaven is the absence of thought, the absence of desire, the absence of noise.**

Hell, on the other hand, is not a burning pit but a state of mind. Scriptures describe hell as the mental torment of endless desires, unresolved guilt, and incessant agitation. When the mind is harassed by its own cravings, it is in hell.

Sin, in this context, is the internal consequence of an action that disrupts mental peace. The guilt, the regret, the turmoil—it all creates noise.

In our last session, we spoke about death—the moment when the *Atman* sheds the body but carries forward its *vasanas*. These *vasanas*, shaped by past *Karmas*, determine the conditions of the next birth. The *Atman*, waiting in transition, is drawn toward a new body and family aligned with its accumulated tendencies and karmic debts.

Thus, life is not a random event but a continuation of an unfinished journey, shaped by the thoughts, desires, and actions of the past.

The *Atman* carries its past life's *vasanas*—its tendencies and unresolved impressions—into the next birth. Alongside these, it also retains the skills and knowledge it has acquired, which explains why some children display extraordinary talents from an early age. However, while waiting to be reborn, the *Atman* is burdened by unresolved emotions, particularly guilt. This state of internal torment is what we understand as 'sin.'

Ancient scriptures describe this experience as a form of purgatory—a space between worlds where the *Atman* is neither in heaven nor hell, simply stuck. No amount of mental denial can erase guilt; the only way to avoid it is by not committing actions that would cause it in the first place.

It's crucial to recognize that *vasanas* are deeply ingrained patterns shaped over countless lifetimes. They cannot be erased overnight, but thoughts can be controlled. The moment a thought arises, you have a choice: either redirect it or entertain it. If indulged, it evolves into desire, leading to action, which in turn reinforces more *vasanas*—creating an endless cycle.

Many people live entirely in their minds, mistaking every thought for truth. They fail to realize that there is another dimension—the intellect—which can observe and guide these thoughts. True awareness means recognizing harmful thoughts as they emerge and refusing to engage with them. This conscious redirection prevents unnecessary desires and actions that lead to regret.

The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes mastering one's mind rather than being enslaved by it. Breaking free from this cycle isn't about suppressing emotions but cultivating awareness. Understanding this distinction is key to spiritual growth.

Rituals: Moving beyond thought, we come to the question: ***Do rituals matter? Should we go to temples and perform ceremonies?***

Sage Vyasa, who compiled the *Vedas*, originally introduced rituals as tools for mental purification. They were never meant to be the final goal. Rituals like pujas, *Yajnas*, and offerings were designed to foster humility, reduce selfishness, and cultivate gratitude. However, over time, people misunderstood their purpose—believing that simply performing rituals, rather than internal transformation, would bring them closer to divinity.

The Gita directly addresses this misconception. Lord Krishna says, *"I prescribed these rituals to prepare your mind for meditation and self-realization, not as a means to an end."* Rituals were intended to refine the self, but when performed mechanically—offering gold at temples in exchange for blessings, treating God like a merchant—they lose their value. If the Gita itself discourages blind ritualism, then clearly, rituals alone are not the path.

A parallel can be drawn with the ***Gnostic Gospels***, discovered in the 1940s. These ancient papyrus scrolls, written in Aramaic by Jesus' disciples, reveal that Jesus never instructed people to build churches or give offerings to religious figures—because such institutions did not even exist in his time. Instead, his teachings emphasized kindness, self-control, and selfless service—the very principles echoed in the Bhagavad Gita.

All Self-Realized beings—whether Lord Krishna, Buddha, or Jesus—converge on the same truth. Once awakened, distinctions dissolve. Their message remains unchanged across time and cultures: cultivate awareness, act with integrity, and recognize that rituals are a vehicle, not the destination.

Rituals and bargaining don't work. The Gita asserts not to do rituals - they aren't the destination. Rituals are sometimes the vehicle to get there. *Just* doing the rituals isn't enough.

Karma: Our present circumstances are shaped by past actions, just as today's choices determine our future. *Karma* is not instantaneous; it functions like a bank account. Deposits accumulate over time, just as karmic consequences unfold gradually.

People often question why seemingly immoral individuals appear to go unpunished. The answer is patience—*Karma* operates on a timeline beyond immediate perception. The life of **Edgar Cayce**, a devout Christian who initially rejected the concept of *Karma*, illustrates this. Over time, his spiritual experiences led him to acknowledge its reality, even at the cost of challenging his religious beliefs. His studies documented countless cases of karmic patterns repeating across lifetimes.

A useful analogy is **Snakes and Ladders**—a game originating in India to symbolize *Karma*. Good actions propel one forward (ladders), while bad actions cause setbacks (snakes). The journey is long, but every move shapes the outcome.

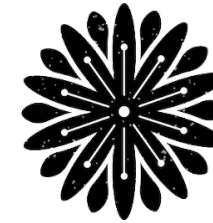
Like training a dog, where immediate rewards or consequences reinforce behavior, humans also experience karmic results. The only difference is that human *Karma* unfolds over lifetimes, making it harder to see the direct connection. But whether in this life or the next, *Karma* never fails.

The core message across all spiritual teachings is simple: **Be kind. Be self-aware. Act with integrity.** Rituals and bargains won't alter destiny—only conscious action will.



EPISODE 16 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 9 - 15



Most commentators, including the renowned Adi Shankaracharya (c. 400CE), begin their analyses from verse 11 onward. Interestingly, Shankaracharya even skips the earlier verses and chapters, choosing to focus on the deeper teachings.

In previous chapters, we examined the introductory portions of the Gita, particularly the first chapter and the opening verses of Chapter 2. These lines are crucial, as they set the stage for the larger discourse. Picture Arjuna, a celebrated warrior, standing on the battlefield, facing a monumental dilemma.

In the warrior's world 5,000 years ago, identity and duty were inseparable. A fighter was expected to uphold his role—turning away from battle was not an option. Now, in the great war of the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna found himself in an agonizing predicament: he was about to fight against his own cousins, friends, and family.

For years, Arjuna and his brothers had tried in vain to negotiate peace with their cousins, the Kauravas. Despite his best efforts, the Kauravas remained defiant, refusing any compromise. With no other recourse, war became inevitable—his duty demanded it.

Arjuna had spent 13 years in exile, preparing for this battle alongside his brothers. He was a warrior of unparalleled skill, undefeated in combat, unafraid of injury or death. Yet, as he stood there, facing those he had known his entire life, he was overcome not by fear but by sorrow and compassion.

To him, being labeled a coward was a fate worse than death. Yet, the thought of killing his own kin filled him with unbearable grief. This deep inner conflict laid the foundation for the profound questions that followed—questions about duty, life, and the very nature of death. Arjuna's plea was simple yet deeply human: *"I don't want to kill these people. I don't want them to die."*

Verse 9: Arjuna declares to Krishna, *"I will not fight,"* and then falls silent. The *Gita* begins with a discussion on death—what happens after death and the true nature of life. These are questions that many of us have pondered, especially those with a philosophical inclination.

Verse 10: Krishna, unfazed by Arjuna’s declaration, gazes at him with a hint of a smile and begins to impart wisdom in the following verses.

Verse 11: The teachings of the *Gita* begin: “*The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. You speak wise words, but you grieve for those who should not be grieved.*”

The Sanskrit word for “dead” is *gata-sūn*, which literally means “one whose breath has gone.” Instead of using the word “dead,” Krishna describes it as “the one whose breath has departed.” Similarly, *a-gata-sūn* means “alive,” but it translates literally to “one whose breath has not yet gone.”

Essentially, Lord Krishna is emphasizing the inevitability of death: *The wise grieve neither for the dead nor for the living*. But who are the wise? In Sanskrit, Lord Krishna refers to them as *pundits*—scholars, religious thinkers, and those enlightened about the truth and the nature of the self.

It is important to understand that we are all part of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. We have discussed this before, so I won’t go into detail here. The vast *Brahman* bestows a small spark of life to every being—humans, animals, plants, and trees. *Brahman* is omnipresent, existing everywhere.

Swami Sarvapriyananda, in his inimitable way, offers a beautiful metaphor to illustrate this concept.

He asks us to imagine ourselves as a tiny wave, a small ripple in the vast ocean, happily playing alongside other waves. At first, we feel proud, thinking, “*Wow, I’m amazing!*” But then, we notice a much bigger wave behind us and feel a pang of jealousy. “*Why are they so much bigger than me?*” Ahead, we see a smaller wave and feel a sense of superiority, thinking, “*I’m better than them.*”

But in reality, we are all just waves in the same ocean, made of the same water—manifestations of the vast and powerful *Brahman*.

As we near the shore, we see waves crashing against the rocks and turning into foam. Fear sets in: *What will happen to me?* But a wise Vedantic wave reassures us: “*When you crash against the rocks, you will simply merge back into the ocean, becoming seawater once again. In time, you will rise as another wave, and all the emotions that troubled you—jealousy, envy, anger, pride—will fade away. Because, deep down, you are not separate. You are just a small part of something infinitely greater.*”

This metaphor beautifully encapsulates the teachings of this chapter. Ultimately, we are the *Atman*, the true self within us. We are not merely our names or bodies. The body is a temporary vessel, allowing us to experience life. When it can no longer serve its purpose, the *Atman* sheds it and takes on a new one—just as we replace an old phone when it stops working.

Imagine you are on a call with a friend, and suddenly your phone dies. Your friend might say, “*I was just talking to them, but now I can’t hear them anymore.*” Why? Because the device that connected you has stopped working—not the essence of who you are.

Similarly, when the *Atman* transitions into a new body, it carries its experiences, memories, and subtle impressions. However, much of this may feel distant in the new life, making past experiences difficult to recall—just as switching to a new phone erases your contacts. You start fresh, yet faint traces of your past remain, lingering like shadows of what once was.

Why have spiritual teachings if we might forget our past? These teachings provide a pathway to alleviate the threefold sorrows that affect us all. This concept, written around 100 AD, is found in a Chinese translation, which states that it originated from Sanskrit texts dating back thousands of years.

The Chinese translation outlines the threefold sorrow:

1. **Sorrow caused by oneself** – This includes suffering from the body, mind, and intellect. The body experiences sorrow through illness, the mind suffers from emotional pain (such as unrequited love), and the intellect grieves over lost status or missed achievements (e.g., “I wasn’t elected chairman”).
2. **Sorrow caused by other beings** – Thousands of years ago, this referred to attacks from wild animals such as lions or tigers. In modern times, it could be conflicts with other people.
3. **Sorrow caused by nature** – This includes suffering from natural forces such as extreme heat, cold, hurricanes, and earthquakes.

Ancient wisdom tells us that worldly solutions to these struggles are often temporary or uncertain. For example, seeking medical treatment might cure an illness but does not eliminate future health concerns.

Verse 12: Krishna, who is Self-Realized—essentially the *Atman* speaking—says: “*Never indeed was I not, nor you, nor these rulers of men. Also, none of us will cease to be hereafter.*”

Instead of stating, “*I have always existed,*” he frames it as a negative: “*None of us will cease to exist.*” This means that existence is eternal—not in the form of the body, mind, or intellect, but as the *Atman*. The *Atman* gives life and never dies; it exists in the past, present, and future.

This is the core teaching of the *Gita*: we are the *Atman*.

As children, we say, “*I am a little boy*” or “*I am a little girl.*” As adults, we say, “*I am a young man*” or “*I am an old woman.*” Through all these changes, the body, mind, and intellect transform—but the one constant is the “I.” That unchanging essence is the *Atman*.

When we sleep, we may dream of being someone entirely different, only to wake up and return to ourselves. This reminds us that experiences—whether in dreams, wakefulness, or deep sleep—are temporary. The *Atman* remains steady, like a thread running through the fabric of life.

King Janaka, a ruler of immense wealth and power, once had a vivid dream in which he was destitute, wandering the streets in despair. When he awoke, he found himself back in his palace but was deeply troubled.

He questioned, “*Which is real? The dream in which I was a beggar, or this reality where I am a king?*”

None of his advisors could answer. Finally, the great sage Ashtavakra was summoned.

Ashtavakra told him, “*You are neither the beggar nor the king. You are the Self—with a capital S.*”

This is the essence of Vedanta: **we are not our external identities; we are the eternal Self.**

Verse 13: “*Just as the Atman within the body passes through childhood, youth, and old age, so does it pass into another body. Thus, the wise do not grieve.*”

This verse reiterates that the *Atman* is housed within the body and moves through different stages of life. Just as we discard worn-out clothes or replace a broken car, the *Atman* sheds a body when it can no longer serve its purpose and transitions into another. The wise do not mourn this natural process.

Verse 14: “*The sense contacts which cause heat and cold, pleasure and pain—they come and go; they are not permanent. Endure them.*”

Here, sensory experiences are referred to as *mātrās* (perceptions) and their objects as *sparsha* (sense contacts).

The eyes perceive colors and beauty.

The ears perceive sounds.

The intellect perceives honor and dishonor.

The mind experiences success and failure.

Lord Krishna urges us to endure these fleeting sensations with equanimity. Life is a series of ups and downs, and both pleasure and pain are temporary. The wise remain steady, knowing that all things—joys and sorrows alike—will pass.

Verse 15: “The man who is not disturbed by opposites—pleasure and pain, success and failure—remains balanced in every situation. He is serene and fit for immortality.”

Krishna emphasizes that a person who maintains equanimity amid life’s dualities is truly prepared for immortality—not in the sense of never dying, but in the pursuit of self-realization.

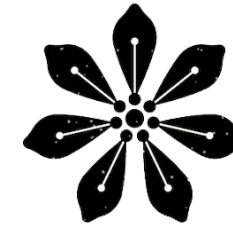
Immortality, in this context, does not mean escaping death but continuing the journey toward realizing the Self. As we near the conclusion of these reflections, it is important to recognize that the deeper philosophies of the Gita are gradually unfolding before us.

The next verse, **Verse 16**, is considered one of the most profound in the entire Gita.

१७

EPISODE 17 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verse 16



In a realm where deep wisdom intertwines with everyday experience, we are drawn to **Verse 16** of the Gita—one of its most philosophical and weighty teachings. This verse encapsulates a fundamental concept of the Gita, often referred to as *the philosophy of existence* or the essence of *is-ness*.

Verse 16: *“The unreal has no existence. The real never ceases to be. But the truth about both has been seen by the seers of truth.”*

At first glance, this may seem puzzling—perhaps even paradoxical. Yet, when we peel back the layers, a profound meaning emerges. During British rule in India, attempts were made to guide the people toward religions that promised enlightenment. The British encountered the Gita and the Upanishads, interpreting them as early attempts at logical reasoning. However, they failed to grasp the true depth of these teachings.

The Gita contains verses interwoven with *Granti*—knots of meaning that blend mantra and philosophy, carrying immense significance. On the surface, this verse appears simple, even self-evident, yet it holds a paradox that challenges our understanding.

A fascinating story surrounds the creation of the Gita. *Sage Vyasa*, its composer, sought Lord Ganesh as his scribe. Ganesh agreed but imposed a condition:

“I will write as long as you continue speaking. But if you stop, I will put my pen away.”

Vyasa, in turn, added his own condition:

“Before you write down anything I say, you must first understand it.”

Ganesh accepted.

This exchange is both symbolic and mythological—it signifies the need for deep comprehension. Vyasa is essentially telling us that before moving forward, we must seek to *understand* each verse rather than merely hearing it.

Now, let’s begin unraveling the ‘knot’ within this verse, which delves into the very essence of being and existence.

A simple analogy can help illustrate its meaning:

Imagine boiling a potato. When you remove it from the water, it is extremely hot. If you cut it, you warn, “*Be careful, it’s hot.*” But how did the potato become hot? It was placed in boiling water over a fire.

Is heat an inherent quality of the potato? No—it absorbed heat from the water.

But is heat an inherent quality of water? No—the water was heated by the pot.

And is heat an inherent quality of the pot? No—the pot, in turn, borrowed its heat from the fire.

This chain of borrowing illustrates a fundamental truth: the unreal has no independent existence, while the real—the source—always remains.

What borrowed the heat? The pot borrowed the heat, which then transferred to the water. The water became hot and then transferred the heat to the potato, which got hot as well.

When you take the pot off the fire, it cools down, the water cools down, and the potato cools down. Essentially, these things change. This is a profound philosophical idea that needs careful consideration. The potato got hot, and then it got cold; the same happened to the water and the pot.

But the fire remained hot throughout. From the moment it ‘existed,’ it was hot, and it remained hot. The ‘hotness’ is an inherent part of the fire.

What this suggests is that some things have an inherent quality. Fire has heat, and that heat is constant. Other things—like the pot, the water, and the potato—borrow the fire’s inherent quality temporarily. That’s the key. The heat in the fire is permanent; the heat in the potato is temporary and only lasts as long as the fire is present.

Does our existence come and go like the heat of the boiled potato, or is it permanent, like the heat of the fire? Can we be born, be alive, and ‘be,’ ‘exist,’ and die? If so, we are like the hot potato. Our existence comes when we are born and goes when we die.

This connects to a previous discussion where King Janaka wondered whether his dream was real—whether he was a beggar or a king. The wise Ashtavakra (a revered Vedic sage) told him, “You are neither the beggar nor the king. You are the ultimate *Atman*.”

In the scriptures, there’s an analogy of an arrow flying through the night and into an area where light shines through a window. The arrow flies through the lit area and then returns to the darkness. You don’t see the arrow in the dark; you only see it when it’s in the light, and then it moves back into the dark.

This doesn’t mean the arrow isn’t flying. You only see it when it’s in the light. Our life is like that arrow. *Atman* takes on a body, we come into being, we are created, we live for a short while, and then we are gone.

Our existence, as a human, is borrowed. When we die, we are nothing. If we are cremated, we turn to ashes; if we are buried, we become dust. So, what are we? We simply borrowed that existence, just like the hot potato that became hot when the fire was on and then cooled down, but the *Atman* remains.

We are alive and we exist because the material that makes us—our bodies, minds, and intellect—has ‘borrowed’ life, consciousness, and existence from a source (the *Atman*) that inherently possesses these qualities.

Everything in the universe is like us—like that hot potato. Everything, even the universe itself, comes into being and then is lost.

But the Upanishads declare that there is something with this intrinsic property, just as fire has heat. Our existence is borrowed. From where do we borrow it? ***We borrow it from Brahman. Brahman is eternal. Brahman always exists and possesses the intrinsic property of ‘being’—existence itself.***

We take it on, and as long as *Brahman* is within us, we are alive. We are born, created; we live, then we are destroyed.

The Gita describes three kinds of entities:

1. ***Intrinsic entities***—these always exist. This is *Brahman*, or *Sat*—pure being. It is existence (*sat*), pure consciousness (*chit*), and bliss (*anand*).
2. ***A-sat or Asat***—this refers to what is absolutely unreal. The real, *Sat*, is the intrinsic, and the unreal, *Asat*, can never happen—for instance, a square circle is impossible.
3. ***Mithya***—this is the category in between. *Sat*, *Brahman*, always exists; *Asat* is absolutely unreal. In between is *Mithya*, which refers to borrowed existence.

Mithya is a borrowed experience of existence, an appearance that is false. *Sat* always exists (as *Brahman*), while *Mithya* doesn’t truly exist but only appears to. For example, I am here now, and you are here.

What is this “is-ness”? Right now, I’m looking at this computer, and I say, “This is a computer.” In that “is-ness,” there are two things:

the computer, and my conscious awareness that it is a computer.

If you take all the components in the world—the computer, Lou, and so on—these things are impermanent. The only thing that remains permanent is the awareness that something exists. Even after I’m gone, even after the computer is gone, that awareness will continue. Why? Because awareness is part of *Brahman*, and *Brahman* is permanent.

We human beings borrow our existence from *Sat*, just like the potato borrowed its heat from the fire.

Adi Shankaracharya explained how we borrow existence. For example, a clay pot has a name, form, and function; it's round or colored, and you use it for pouring water. Name, form, and function are made of clay (*naam*, *roop*, *vyavahāra*). But the pot would not exist without the clay. If you don't have clay, you don't have the pot. Break the pot, and you have broken clay pieces. But the clay is still there. You see the broken pieces, but the clay remains. The pot doesn't exist, but the clay does.

Similarly, we exist because of *Brahman* within us—the life force within us.

Jewelry exists because of the underlying gold. We call it jewelry, but it's made of gold. Melt it down, and it becomes gold again.

So, the entire existence of the pot depends on the clay constituting it. Our entire existence depends on *Brahman* constituting us. If the clay disappears, the pot disappears. If *Brahman* were to disappear, we would disappear.

If *Brahman* were not around, everything—including the entire universe—would cease to exist. The scriptures tell us that *Brahman* sleeps for millions of years, then awakens for millions of years. When *Brahman* awakens, the entire universe explodes into being—like the Big Bang described in the Upanishads. Every change we observe in the world stems from borrowed existence. Whether we appear as ourselves or as someone else, what remains constant is *Brahman*—the essence that underlies everything.

Names and forms are mere appearances. Whatever intrinsically exists, whatever is the ground reality, *Brahman* is behind it all. In every experience, whether good or bad, there are two components: the object (called *Vishaya* in Sanskrit, or the subject matter) and the experience of “is-ness.” Even as objects come and go, the awareness of existence persists. Each transformation we undergo is a borrowed experience.

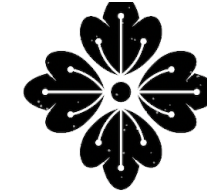
Brahman is what we borrow from in order to live. The end result keeps changing. It may look like Marilyn Monroe one time, and Tom Cruise another. But all of this, the existence without *Brahman*, would not be possible. They won't exist as Marilyn Monroe after their death. However, the part of them that was *Brahman* continues to exist. That part of *Brahman*, which gave life to the human being, is known as *Atman*. When the body is shed (when a person dies), the *Atman* either reunites with *Brahman* or takes on another body to return to earth. If it still carries desires, it is not ready to merge with *Brahman*. Desires demand fulfillment, so the *Atman* keeps returning to life in different bodies. Only when all desires (*vasanas*) are fulfilled can the *Atman* finally merge with *Brahman*.

I hope this exploration has sparked curiosity, not confusion. This verse from the Gita serves as a cornerstone for what lies ahead in future discussions. Scholars from all walks of life engage with these concepts, diving into the mysteries of consciousness and reality. The Gita repeats concepts. Bear with it— it's necessary. These concepts are not easy to understand.

१८

EPISODE 18 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 17 - 19



We transition into the essence of existence itself. Imagine this moment as the beginning of a captivating journey through the depths of our consciousness. Together, we embark on a thoughtful exploration of verses 17 through 19, which resonate with themes that echo throughout the chapters of wisdom.

The verses from 11 to 25 share a common thread. All of these verses emphasize the *Atman*— the energy within us, the consciousness that enlivens everything, the Life force that gives us life.

You might wonder, “Why such a lengthy discourse on just a few ideas?”

One recurring message in these 15 verses (11 through 25) is the teaching that the *Atman never dies*. This is exactly what we’ll explore together, uncovering the deeper meaning behind this repetition.

One of the fundamental truths presented here is the immortal nature of the *Atman*. This is significant; it lies at the heart of the second chapter’s teachings. The *Atman* is described as eternal, *Nitya* (eternal, or that which has no beginning and no end). While our bodies may perish, the essence of who we are—the Self—remains untouched. The mind, in some capacity, might fade after death, but the mind and the *vasanas* travel with the *Atman* into its next form.

The body is discarded when an entity’s desires or *vasanas* can no longer be fulfilled. At that point, the *Atman* takes a new body, as if shedding old clothes.

The Gita discusses how we think of ourselves at various stages of life, but one thing remains constant. Whether we are sleeping, waking, or dreaming, the *Atman*, or consciousness, is always there. Reflecting on this, the verse presents a fascinating notion: in all these states—sleeping, waking, dreaming—the constant presence is the *Atman*, the consciousness itself.

When awake, we might say, “I am engaged in conversation.” When dreaming, we may imagine ourselves as someone else, such as “I am Tom Cruise.”

In deep sleep, we know nothing. Yet, upon waking, we can say, “I know that I was fast asleep.” While in deep sleep, we are not engaged with the world, but upon waking, we recognize that we were completely unaware. That self-awareness—that consciousness—is the *Atman* surfacing through different phases.

Verse 16: Lord Krishna shares a powerful insight: the *Atman* **embodies all that is real in the universe, with everything else merely echoing this truth.** It may take time to digest, but think of an actor who wears various disguises. No matter the role they play, at their core, they remain the same person. The same is true for the *Atman*, which reflects in everything around us. This idea was elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Verse 17: This verse states that the *Atman* is indestructible. It pervades everything, and nothing can cause its destruction. While the *Atman* is eternal, everything else is perishable.

Verse 18: It explains that the body is temporary, whereas the *Atman* is eternal, indestructible, and immeasurable. Each verse carries profound meaning. The term *eternal* leads to complex discussions about time, space, and causality—three fundamental measures in both philosophy and science. This verse highlights the contrast between our fleeting physical forms and the everlasting *Atman*, emphasizing its immeasurable nature.

Exploring this further, the idea of *eternity* naturally invites questions about time, space, and existence itself. To understand eternity, we must first experience time—since time is only perceived through consciousness. The concept of time is tied to experience; one must undergo something before measuring its duration.

You have an experience. You measure time from that experience until the second experience, that is why the unit of time is known as a second. Similarly, the idea of *indestructibility* challenges our conventional understanding. Consider infinity—there are infinite forms of it, yet at the core of all things, we return to the *Atman*, the singular reality amid all that is transient. Destruction, time, and measurement are constructs of human perception. The truest reality is beyond them—it is the *Atman*, or *Brahman*.

Verse 19: “He who thinks the *Atman* is a slayer and a person who thinks *Atman* is slain, both are ignorant. *Atman* neither slays or is slain.”

This verse offers a thought-provoking insight into the nature of the *Atman*. It reminds us that those who see the *Atman* as either a killer or a victim misunderstand its essence. The *Atman* is beyond action; it is the silent observer that enables us to act.

Our actions stem from our thoughts, which originate from *vasanas*—unmanifest desires. This cycle is intricate because desires arise from thoughts. For example, if I have a desire for sweets, a fleeting thought about indulging can spiral into a stream of thoughts. The habitual nature of this process is significant, as *Sage Vyasa* emphasizes that repetition is essential for true understanding.

Ultimately, thoughts lead to desires, which in turn lead to actions. Suppose I know I should avoid sweets for health reasons, yet the thought of indulging lingers. That thought transforms into desire, and satisfying it might bring temporary pleasure—but also guilt. More importantly, fulfilling a desire often fuels further desires.

For instance, after eating a piece of chocolate, I might think, *That was amazing. The best chocolate I’ve ever had! And there were so many more in the shop... No, no, I shouldn’t go back there.* But by dwelling on it, I am reinforcing the desire.

This cycle is what’s known as *desire-ridden action*. Eventually, I convince myself, *maybe just one more. My sugar levels were fine at my last checkup, so I can have another!* The initial thought led to desire, which resulted in action—an action that, in turn, reignites desire, perpetuating the cycle.

What’s happening simultaneously? I’m fueling my *vasanas*, ensuring that when I die, these *vasanas* travel with me into the next body and mind. *Vasanas* are pre-existing tendencies, reinforced by my actions in this lifetime.

I used the example of eating, but this applies to every sense organ and every action—greed for money, power, fame, or pleasure. Each of these desires feeds into *vasanas*, and every action taken in response to them generates future desires.

Now, what happens if I have a strong craving for chocolate but resist indulging? Won’t the desire disappear?

Not necessarily. At this stage, the desire has already been enlivened. If I had stopped it when it was just a thought, it might have faded. But now that it has turned into a full-fledged desire, suppressing it only intensifies it.

I resist the craving, but the thought keeps returning—first in my waking state, then in my dreams, even in deep sleep. The desire multiplies simply because I didn’t fulfill it.

This is the cycle: *Vasanas* lead to thought, thought leads to desire, desire multiplies into more desires, and those desires drive action. That action, in turn, generates further desires—or, if suppressed, leaves unfulfilled cravings that still perpetuate the cycle.

And this isn’t just about indulgence—it applies to every aspect of life. Think about your daily routine, the workplace pressures that shape your actions.

Take a car factory, for example. If my primary motivation is to impress the general manager for a promotion, my focus is divided. Instead of immersing myself in the work, half my attention is spent wondering: *Is my boss noticing me? Why is he acknowledging someone else instead? Am I being overlooked?*

Imagine how much mental energy is drained by that fixation. The more I think about the reward, the less engaged I am in the actual work. As a result, my actions are not fully effective.

Now contrast that with someone who says, *I have a great job at this automobile factory. I’m contributing to a cleaner planet by producing electric cars. Every vehicle I help build reduces pollution—I’m part of something bigger.*

That shift in motivation changes everything. When I’m fully immersed in my work, something remarkable happens: my efforts shine through naturally. My focus and dedication become evident to those around me—my coworkers notice, my superiors take note. Recognition follows, not because I chased it, but because I was truly engaged in the work itself.

This highlights an essential lesson: our energy multiplies when we are free from distractions. The core of our efforts should be in doing our work for its own sake. True fulfillment comes from doing our best, not from seeking rewards or recognition. To achieve this clarity, we must rein in our minds. When a desire arises, it's crucial to halt it before it spirals out of control. Remember the chocolate example? If we don't manage our thoughts, we become trapped in an endless cycle of wanting—and it's the same, whether it's wealth, fame, or validation.

In every profession, whether firefighter or doctor, our motives shape our success. Are we pursuing our ambitions solely for personal gain, or is there a deeper desire to serve? Shifting our focus can lead to greater success, allowing recognition and material rewards to flow naturally instead of being something we chase.

Now, take a moment to reflect on how you navigate your daily life. While fulfilling desires may seem harmless, they create expectations. By focusing purely on performing well, we develop a sense of purpose. When we act with sincerity, rewards follow organically.

But it's just as important to monitor our emotions. Love, fear, happiness, and sadness all stem from the mind. The intellect, however, has the power to discern and choose wisely—it is our inner guide.

There are other benefits to this mindset: you don't feel drained because your fulfillment comes from the act itself, not from its outcome. The joy should be in what you do, not in the fruits of your labor—not in the future, not in the results, but in the present moment and the work itself.

This is why mastering the mind is essential. The mind will whisper, *I want money. I want power. I want fame.* You must arrest that thought immediately and remind yourself, *No, I am doing this for the right reasons.*

Consider a firefighter—why do they do their job? To become the Chief of the Fire Department and earn a bigger salary? Or because they genuinely want to save lives?

Or a doctor—do they see each patient as a human being in need of care, someone they truly want to help? Or do they see dollar signs? Ask yourself: *Why am I doing this?* If your motivation is genuine, your mind will align with that purpose.

And what happens then? Greater energy, fewer distractions, and greater success. Your dedication will be noticed—by your patients, your community, your colleagues. The mayor who sees the firefighter's selfless service, the hospital director who observes the doctor's care, the general manager who recognizes the car factory worker's commitment—all acknowledge the sincerity of the work.

And then, without forcing it, everything you once desired—recognition, success, respect, material rewards—comes to you naturally.

The first step is to master the mind and develop the intellect. When you conquer the mind, you conquer the world. Do not be ruled by it. Left unchecked, the mind will let desires run wild—there is no limit. As the scriptures say, the mind and its desires are like fire—never satisfied, endlessly consuming.

Desires work the same way—one after the next, an endless cycle. The mind exists to generate emotions and desires; that is its primary function. If left unchecked, it will run wild. Across different traditions, desires are often equated with forces of temptation—Satan, Shaitan, the devil, and so on.

Emotions—love, fear, hatred, jealousy, anxiety—all arise from the mind. The intellect, however, is the decision-making faculty. It determines what is right, what is wrong, what is acceptable, and what is not. The mind lacks this power; it simply reacts.

We must also be mindful of emotions like the need to love and be loved, to feel cared for, and to seek validation. These, too, originate in the mind, and we will explore them further. The mind is the seat of both emotions and desires.

Gautam Ji shared striking examples of attachment. Imagine you own a brand-new car. As you drive, you hit a pothole. Instantly, your heart sinks—you worry about the damage.

Now, imagine the same scenario, but the car is a rental. You hit the pothole, yet you remain unbothered. Instead, you might think, *Wow, these new shock absorbers are impressive!* and continue driving.

Or consider checking into a hotel. You don't stress over the bed, pillows, or television as you would if they were your own. If something isn't right, you simply call the front desk: *Send another pillow. Fix the TV.* You do not attach yourself to these things.

In essence, the Bhagavad Gita teaches: *Go through life as if everything around you is rented.*

This concept becomes more challenging when applied to human relationships. At higher levels of spiritual awareness, it is possible to release attachment even to your spouse, children, and family. As you grow spiritually, you naturally loosen your grip on these bonds—not out of indifference, but out of deeper understanding.

Ask yourself:

If you lose an expensive pen, how upset would you be?

What about a luxury watch? Your car? Your boat? Your house?

Suppose your insurance had lapsed and all your possessions were destroyed—how would you react?

And finally, what about your loved ones?

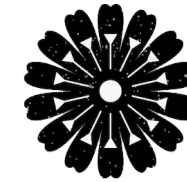
We cling to people and things because of attachment. But as we progress spiritually, we learn to let go. There comes a time when losing material possessions stings less, replaced by a sense of inner peace. This shift marks true spiritual growth.

It is not that grief disappears at higher levels of awareness. Loss will still affect you. But your reactions will soften. You will experience loss with grace. The emotional highs and lows that once controlled you will become steadier, allowing you to move through life with greater equanimity.



EPISODE 19 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 20 - 25



Reading the Gita is often compared to peeling an onion. With each layer removed, new depths of meaning emerge. Yet, unlike an onion, which eventually reveals a core, the Gita's teachings offer an endless expanse of philosophical inquiry. No matter how many times you return to its verses, there is always more to uncover. It's remarkable to think that the wisdom we are exploring has been passed down through thousands of generations, originating from the sages of old.

As we move from Chapter 1 into Chapter 2, we see how each chapter builds upon the last. The intricate net of teachings allows us to revisit earlier sections with a deeper understanding as our intellect evolves. It's much like returning to a beloved book—each reading brings new insights, illuminating details that once went unnoticed. The reason more is learned or understood each time we return to The Gita is because our intellect (buddhi) has grown. We are able to comprehend more.

A common question arises when discussing concepts like eternity or the nature of existence: *How do we even begin to grasp such ideas?* Topics like time and infinity can feel overwhelming, as if they belong to an entirely different realm of thought. But at its core, the Gita's teachings on the eternal nature of the *Atman*—our true self—are surprisingly simple. When stripped of complexity, they speak directly to something innate within us, offering clarity amidst the vastness of philosophical reflection.

Verse 20: "The Atman is not born, nor does it die. It will always 'be.' The Atman is unborn, eternal, and unchanging—changeless. It is not killed when the body is killed."

This verse speaks of the *Atman*, the Life Force within us that is eternal and unchanging. We're only scratching the surface of these teachings—there is immense depth in each aspect discussed. Our understanding grows only as our intellect strengthens.

When Krishna speaks of the *Atman*, he isn't merely referring to the events on the battlefield. While the Gita is set against the backdrop of war, its meaning extends far beyond physical combat. Picture this: two armies poised for battle, tension thick in the air. Arjuna hesitates, seeking wisdom before engaging, and Krishna responds with 700 verses that transcend physical strife—he speaks to the eternal conflict within us all.

This verse describes the *Atman* as neither born nor subject to death. It has never come into being and will never cease to exist. It is unborn, eternal, changeless, and ancient. What does that truly mean? Every word here holds immense significance. These verses lay the foundation for the chapters that follow, guiding us to understand who and what we are. These fundamental concepts are essential.

If the *Atman* is never born and never perishes, is it indestructible? Consider this analogy: a pot made of clay can be broken, but the clay itself remains unaffected. Likewise, the body changes, but the *Atman* remains untouched. This illustrates the distinction between form and essence.

It is difficult to grasp, and the Gita acknowledges this. The *Atman* is beyond the comprehension of the mind, beyond what the intellect can fathom. It cannot be perceived by the senses—neither seen, heard, nor spoken of in a way that truly captures its essence. *The only way to understand the Atman is to become the Atman.*

As we explore the themes of life and death, it becomes crucial to distinguish between the ever-changing physical body and the eternal aspect of our being. The Gita teaches that recognizing this distinction is key to living a more fulfilling life.

Gautam Ji and Swami Parthasarathy offer this example: morning exists, and when morning “dies,” afternoon is born; when afternoon fades, evening arises, followed by night. In this cycle of births and deaths, change is constant. But the *Atman* remains changeless. Since it is never born and never dies, it does not change. Everything else in the world, except for the *Atman*, is subject to change. This is an essential realization.

Eternal—imagine that. Every analogy has its limits; no single example can fully encapsulate it. But to say the *Atman* is eternal means it is all-pervading, present everywhere. Each of us is like a wave rising from the vast ocean of the *Atman*. We exist for a moment before disappearing, yet the ocean remains.

Picture this simple analogy: if we think of ourselves as waves, we rise and fall, but we are always part of the ocean. The waves may disappear, but the ocean endures. Likewise, we come and go, but the *Atman* within us remains forever.

The Gita further emphasizes that while everything around us changes—our bodies, thoughts, and experiences—the *Atman* remains constant. This unchanging essence often goes unnoticed in our chaotic, day-to-day lives.

In contemplating time and existence, we also confront the limitations of our understanding. To truly grasp the nature of the *Atman*, we must rise above earthly perceptions through deep contemplation and awareness. This realization invites us into a realm beyond our usual experiences.

Verse 21: “A person who knows that the *Atman* is indestructible, eternal, unborn, and immutable—how can that man slay anyone or cause anyone to be slain?”

This verse presents another insightful teaching, challenging our views on conflict and morality. If the *Atman*—the true self of each individual—cannot be destroyed, then what does it truly mean to harm another?

Krishna conveys this idea with a simple analogy. Imagine a pile of clay. If you shape it into a pot, the clay becomes the pot. If you destroy the pot, you break its form, but the clay still exists. The pot does not destroy the clay; it merely changes shape. Similarly, the *Atman* remains untouched, even if the body perishes.

Krishna reassures Arjuna that the *Atman* cannot be destroyed. In battle, if Arjuna kills an enemy soldier, he is not destroying the *Atman*—only the body. The *Atman* continues to exist eternally.

This leads to Arjuna’s inner conflict, which sparked this entire conversation. His dilemma is a common one. People often ask, “Isn’t the Gita a violent book? Doesn’t it justify killing?”

In the Gita, Krishna instructs Arjuna to fight. Some might question, “*What kind of god encourages war?*”

But context is essential. This story is over 5,000 years old. In that era, warriors were born into their duty. Their entire lineage followed the warrior tradition, and the greatest dishonor was to flee from battle. A warrior did not simply decide, “I no longer feel like fighting.” That was considered cowardice—an act that led to exile from society.

Arjuna himself had spent 13 years in exile, banished by his treacherous cousins, the Kauravas. He knew they were unfit rulers and that their tyranny was harming the kingdom. He attempted to negotiate, but the Kauravas refused, declaring, “We are stronger than you. We will not compromise.”

At this moment, Krishna tells Arjuna that fighting is his duty. It is not about personal vengeance; it is about protecting the kingdom from injustice. This battle becomes a metaphor for life itself—teaching us to fulfill our responsibilities, even when they are difficult. It also offers solace to those grieving the loss of loved ones, reminding them of the *Atman*’s eternal nature.

From **verse 11 to verse 25**, Krishna speaks in depth about the *Atman*, ensuring Arjuna—and all of us—understand its significance.

Verse 22: “Just as a man discards old clothes and puts on new ones, so too does the embodied self discard an old body and enter a new one.”

This is one of the most frequently quoted verses of the Gita. It speaks of *Atmatattva*—the nature of the self.

It reinforces that the *Atman* is beyond physical comprehension. Just as we change clothes, the body is shed, but the *Atman* remains. A common misconception is that the soul is like a cloud inside the body—an entity that leaves when we die. But that is not the case.

The *Atman* is all-pervading—it exists everywhere. There is not a single microspace where the *Atman* is absent. In truth, *we exist within the Atman*. When the body perishes, the *Atman* does not “leave” us. What departs is the mind, the intellect, and the *vasanas* (impressions from past actions), but the *Atman* remains unchanged, eternal as ever.

A human being consists of the physical body, known as the gross body, and the mind, through which we think, feel, experience emotions, fears, and desires. Above that is the intellect, which allows us to analyze: *Should I do this? Should I do that? Is this good or bad?* These three components—body, mind, and intellect—form our being.

The scriptures teach that we have three bodies: the causal body, subtle body, and gross body. All three function only because the *Atman* gives them life. The gross body is our physical body. The subtle body consists of the mind and intellect. The causal body holds the *vasanas*—the unmanifested desires, the inherent seeds of our personality.

At death, we discard the gross body like a set of worn-out clothes. The subtle body determines when the gross body is to be discarded. When the physical body is no longer sufficient to fulfill one's desires (*vasanas*), the subtle body decides it is time for a new body—this is what we call death. The mind and intellect remain intact, continuing into the next body along with the subtle body.

Deeper than the subtle body is the causal body, which holds the *vasanas*. *Vasanas* are the seeds of our personality—the unmanifest desires that shape our existence. *Vasanas* give rise to thoughts, thoughts lead to desires, and desires drive actions.

It is because of *vasanas* that we take birth again—to fulfill them. When we die, the *vasanas* accumulated from previous lives, combined with those from the current life, propel us into another birth. The only way to break this cycle is to rid ourselves of desires and *vasanas*—a key teaching of the Gita.

So, when do we die? Some people say, “*It’s all written in fate!*” But nothing is pre-written. There is no book in the heavens dictating our time of death. Others say, “*God determines when we die.*” But God does not determine it. God is *Atman*—*Brahman* does not dictate death.

Surprisingly, what determines our death is when our *vasanas* can no longer be fulfilled by the current body. The subtle body makes that decision.

When the body, mind, and intellect recognize: “*I have given up hope. My vasanas can no longer be fulfilled in this form,*” that is when death occurs.

So, as long as our *vasanas* are being fulfilled, the body continues. But when the subtle body and causal body decide that the *vasanas* can no longer be met, death takes place.

In summary, there are three bodies:

1. **The Gross Body** – The physical body.
2. **The Subtle Body** – The mind, intellect, thoughts, emotions, ideas, and desires.
3. **The Causal Body** – The *vasanas*, the seeds of personality, wrapped in layers of ignorance.

Together, the subtle and causal bodies move into the next life, continuing the cycle—unless one learns to dissolve *vasanas* and transcend rebirth.

How this happens is a whole other story. After one dies, the body falls off just like when you cut your hair or nails—it simply falls away. But the mind, intellect, and *vasanas* remain, and that is a whole other story.

Based on how many good deeds a person has done and the good *Karma* accumulated, they are given a choice of where they can be born again. They then say, “I’ll choose this family, this home.”

The causal and subtle bodies choose the next family. The *Atman* does not transmigrate; it does not move from one body to the next.

One important thing to note: the *Atman* is always present, pervading everything. Certain religions believe in the ‘soul,’ their equivalent of the *Atman*, but it is not the same. They claim that upon death, “the soul leaves the body and travels up to heaven.” However, the *Atman* is omnipresent, unmoving, and exists in every atom and every part of the universe. It exists within all things.

The subtle and causal bodies—which consist of the mind, intellect, and *vasanas*—must leave the gross physical body and be transferred to another body. This transference occurs within the medium of the all-pervading *Atman*. Although it may appear as though the *Atman* moves from one body to another during this process, it is actually the subtle and causal bodies that move. The *Atman* remains unchanged and uncontaminated.

Our individual characteristics are shaped by the mind, intellect, and *vasanas*, which make us appear distinct from one another. However, the *Atman* itself remains pure and unaffected by these qualities.

Verse 23: “Weapons do not cut it. Fire does not burn it. Water does not wet it. Wind does not dry it.”

Some may say this sounds childish—what does it mean? It actually illustrates that certain things are more subtle than others, and the *Atman* is the subtlest of all.

These verses emphasize the *Atman*’s subtle nature in comparison to gross elements. A way to measure subtlety versus grossness is by determining which of our senses can perceive an object. The *Atman* cannot be contacted by any of the senses; it can only be realized.

Our five sensory organs can perceive objects that exist within their respective realms of sensitivity. The five fundamental elements—space, air, fire, water, and earth—vary in subtlety, with space being the subtlest and earth the grossest.

During prayer, unless one has the ability to close their eyes and focus on nothingness, a physical anchor is often needed to direct the senses. For example, an idol sculpted from earth or stone can engage all five senses—it can be seen, smelled, tasted, touched, and heard. If you were to strike a metal spoon against a block of wood, stone, plastic or metal, the sound of each “element” is different—making it a tangible focal point for worship. Water can also be perceived by all five senses, while fire is perceived by fewer.

The assertion that weapons cannot harm the *Atman* signifies that weapons are gross, whereas the *Atman* is subtle, rendering it impervious to physical harm. Similarly, fire cannot burn the *Atman*, indicating that it is even subtler than fire. Water cannot wet it, as wetness requires pores or gaps for absorption—similar to how blotting paper absorbs ink. Since the *Atman* is omnipresent, it cannot be wet. Just as water cannot penetrate the smooth surface of glass, the *Atman* remains unaffected. It also cannot be dried, as drying requires evaporation, and the *Atman*, being all-pervading, is beyond such processes.

In essence, the *Atman* is indestructible and unharmed by any weapon, even modern nuclear bombs. No physical force can damage it.

Verse 24: “*This Atman cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted, nor dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, immovable, and ancient.*”

Different Swamis have analyzed these verses deeply. Verse 23 states that the *Atman* cannot be cleaved—implying that weapons like knives or swords cannot cut it.

Verse 24 expands on this, declaring that all elements cannot harm the *Atman*. It is indestructible—not even modern weapons can destroy it. Swami Vyasa may have included this verse to ensure that, while ancient weapons were swords and knives, the concept applied to all future weaponry as well.

The *Atman* is eternal—not merely in the sense of lasting a long time, but in the truest sense, beyond time itself. It was never born, never created, and will never be destroyed. It is all-pervading, existing beyond space and time.

The world changes every moment—nothing remains constant. What does not change is the *Atman*. It is motionless because it exists everywhere. The *Atman* never moves.

Verse 25: “*The Atman is unmanifest. It is inconceivable. It is unchangeable. Knowing this, you should not grieve.*”

This means that the true *You* is unmanifest. You are not an object of the senses—you cannot see, hear, taste, smell, or touch the *Atman*. You cannot even imagine or infer it. It is not an object, nor can it be conceptualized by thought.

This verse summarizes the *Atman*’s qualities and reminds Arjuna that he grieves for people he is about to kill, yet their *Atman* cannot die.

Our goal is to attain total peace—the Gita calls this *eternal bliss*. To achieve this, one major step is to constantly remind yourself that you are not the body, the mind, or the intellect. You are the *Atman*, and the *Atman* remains unbothered by anything that happens in the external world. Only then can you attain true peace.

Grasping these teachings requires us to step back and explore concepts that often go beyond immediate understanding. It’s a reminder to keep an open mind, as each verse serves as a stepping stone toward deeper wisdom. The Gita’s teachings have been preserved through generations, capturing timeless insights that remain relevant today.

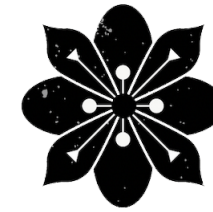
As we reflect on Arjuna’s struggles, we are encouraged to find clarity amidst doubt and embrace the teachings that liberate us from the cycles of existence.

The next time you face challenges in life, think back to these verses. They invite us to question, learn, and, most importantly, engage with the eternal *Atman* that resides within us all.

20

EPISODE 20 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 26 - 30



In this episode, we will discuss Verses 26–30. To recap, Verses 11–30 of Chapter 2 are known as *Sankhya* (numbers), which provide insight into the Self, or *Atman*.

The greater *Atman* that pervades everything and gives life to all living beings is known as *Brahman*. The portion within us, as human beings, is commonly referred to as *Atman*. Essentially, they are one and the same.

What’s fascinating about the *Atman* is that it is indestructible. It has no beginning or end—it simply exists. It is the part of us that remains unchanged amid life’s chaos. Understanding this concept is crucial because it plays a central role in the verses we’re discussing today. As I put this summary together, I realized how essential it is to grasp these principles, especially since we tend to perceive the world through the lens of time, birth, and death.

The *Bhagavad Gita* was written by Sage *Vyasa* centuries ago. He was more than just a writer—he was a visionary. He compiled the four *Vedas* and the Upanishads, delving deep into spiritual wisdom. Recognizing that the Upanishads were too complex for most people, he distilled their essence into the *Gita*, making these profound teachings more accessible.

Verse 26: Krishna tells Arjuna, “If you think that this Atman is constantly being born and dying, do not grieve.”

Some may find this difficult to accept, and that’s completely natural. Understanding death and rebirth is like peeling an onion—each layer reveals new insights. It’s crucial to digest these concepts thoroughly, as they shape how we perceive life, death, and morality. Krishna emphasizes that while the body perishes, the mind and intellect endure. Even after death, a person’s mental impressions and experiences persist, awaiting a new opportunity to manifest in another body.

In *Verse 22*, we discussed in detail what happens when a person dies—the mind and intellect (the *subtle body*) survive. This can be a challenging concept to grasp. Essentially, while the body dies—the mind and intellect remain intact. Along with them, the *vasanas* (deep-seated impressions and desires) continue. This *subtle body-vasanas* complex then resides with *Brahman*, waiting for the opportunity to be reborn.

When it takes on another body, this *mind-intellect-vasanas* complex carries two key elements:

1. *Vasanas*, which include all unfulfilled desires and past experiences from previous lives.

These desires, impressions, likes, dislikes, thoughts, and emotions shape one's *personality*, which remains consistent across lifetimes. The personality does not die; it simply takes on a new body. Interestingly, the person in the body has the same personality but on a different face, voice and body. The drives, the desires, the ambitions, etc., are the same.

As we go further, we'll see how this subtle body selects a new family to be born into. The gross body—the physical form—inherits genetic traits from its biological family, such as facial features. However, the mind and intellect come from past lives and are not necessarily linked to the parents.

A useful analogy is that of a builder constructing a house. The physical structure of the house represents the body, but it doesn't become a *home* until new occupants move in. They bring their own furniture, paintings, and décor from a previous house, giving it a unique character.

Similarly, while a child may physically resemble their parents—perhaps inheriting their father's nose or their mother's eyes—their *personality* remains unique, even among twins. Parents often notice stark differences in personality between their children, despite them being raised in the same environment.

This is because their *vasanas* are different. One twin may have an intense desire for sweets and struggle to control cravings, while the other may be obsessed with wealth and financial success. You can see these personality traits from a very early age.

A modern analogy would be a SIM card in a phone. When you insert a SIM card into a new phone, all the previous call logs, WhatsApp messages, and emails remain intact. The phone itself is new, but the SIM card carries everything from before.

Similarly, our mind and intellect carry forward our personality, desires, and past experiences. In addition to *vasanas*, this complex also carries past *Karma*—an essential concept to understand.

2. *Karma* refers to the consequences of actions—both good and bad—from previous lives. However, it's important to note that *Karma* is not limited to physical actions; it also includes thoughts and intentions.

A person who merely thinks about committing a crime and mentally plays out the act incurs karmic debt, just as if they had physically done it. In reality, *Karma* applies to the mind and intellect, not just the body.

Many psychiatrists argue that *a thought is not an action*—that fantasies have no consequences as long as they are not acted upon. Some even encourage people to indulge in fantasies, believing that as long as they remain in the mind, they do no harm.

This is a flawed perspective. The more a thought is entertained in the mind, the deeper it embeds itself into the subtle body. Over time, it becomes indistinguishable from an actual deed. In the next life, that karmic debt must be repaid.

In essence, thoughts are not harmless. They shape our *Karma* and influence what we carry into future lifetimes.

This is known as *Karma phala*, meaning the fruit of *Karma*. *Phala* means fruit. It accrues to the mind and intellect, not the body.

The mind and intellect pass from one experience to the next.

Verse 26: “Don't grieve. Even though you die, you will be reborn.” It's like a child who lets go of a balloon, and the balloon bursts. The child cries, grieving its loss, even when reassured that another balloon will be given.

Now, why did Sage Vyasa delve into this? I've often wondered about the purpose. Why did he start with this? Chapters one and two are about *Atman*. First, it's a deep subject because it's difficult to comprehend. Some parts become easier as you go along, while others grow more complex.

To grasp this, you need to:

1. Be impressed by what Sage Vyasa or Lord Krishna is saying. If one isn't inspired by a teacher, why continue learning? Sage Vyasa is impressing the audience.

2. Understand the basics before progressing. You must first know what *Atman* is, what the body is, what *Karma* is, what *Karma phala* is, and so on.

As we journey through these teachings, we must first absorb Vyasa's foundational ideas before attempting to fathom their deeper implications. Understanding *Atman*, the body, *Karma*, and *Karma phala* lays the groundwork for profound insights.

Verse 27: “If a person is born, that person's death is certain. And when that person dies, their birth is certain. Therefore, do not grieve on what is certain.” This highlights the inevitability of birth and death, reminding us that even the mightiest—like Alexander—are not exempt from this cycle. Life is fleeting; we cannot escape it. Yet, rebirth isn't random—our *Karma* dictates where we return. If you sow good seeds, you will likely find yourself in better circumstances. We rarely question the origins of our inherent traits, yet we should reflect on the actions that may have led us here.

Similarly, if a person dies, they will be born again—unless they have attained *Self-Realization*. People often ask, “How do I know I'll be reborn?” Yet, when they are reborn, they never wonder, “Where did this come from?” Instead, we should ask, “What did I do in my past life to cause this?” It's the same principle—cause and effect. Only upon reaching *Self-Realization* will one no longer be reborn. At that point, one becomes One with *Brahman*, forever in *Nirvana*.

Verse 28: “All beings are unmanifest in their origin, manifest in their middle, and unmanifest in their end.”

A famous poet once wrote:

“Life is like an arrow flying through the night. It passes through a campfire, Visible only for a moment before vanishing again into darkness.”

Life is like that. *The Gita* states that our existence is unmanifest before birth. We are seen in life, and then we disappear in death, only to return again.

Another analogy compares life to a crow's flight. It soars through the night, briefly illuminated by a campfire before vanishing once more. The crow's flight represents life; the campfire represents birth and death. We see life as it moves through birth and death, but not before or after. This imagery has resonated across generations, offering a poignant reflection on life's impermanence and mystery.

Verse 29: "Atman is a wonder."

Nobody truly knows *Atman*—it cannot be known. One can only stand in wonderment before it. This verse originates from the *Katha Upanishad*, written by Sage *Vyasa*. The *Upanishads* are dense, difficult texts that require deep contemplation. *Katha Upanishad* (Chapter 1, Section 2, Verse 7) states that very few follow the path of enlightenment. Most people engage in religion or spirituality, visiting temples or churches and performing rituals. However, few truly walk the path of *Self-Realization*.

The mind and intellect are constantly commenting on everything. They never fall silent. The mind observes and reacts: "*This one got up. That one is doing this. That one is doing that.*" It chatters incessantly. To meditate and reach *Self-Realization*, one must quiet the mind and intellect.

Verse 30: "The indweller in all bodies is ever indestructible."

Krishna emphasizes that the *Atman* is eternal and indestructible. There is no need to mourn the loss of a body. Just as an old phone can be replaced while the SIM card remains intact, life operates in the same way. The *Atman* exists in all beings—whether human, animal, or insect—reminding us of our shared essence.

This raises an interesting question: "***When we are reborn, do we always return as humans?***"

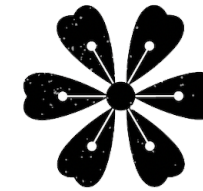
I recently saw a news segment about an eight-year-old girl who knows the *Bhagavad Gita* by heart. She can recite any *shloka* or verse verbatim, along with its meaning. She has known this since she first learned to speak.

Generally, the soul evolves upward. However, if a person lives like an animal, driven by *vasanas* (deep-seated tendencies), they may be reborn as an animal to fulfill those desires. I cannot confirm how true this is, but according to what I've heard, if someone harbors violent tendencies, they might return as a predator, such as a lion. It is not a matter of choice but of *Karma*. One's actions and *vasanas* determine where they are reborn.

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EPISODE 21

What is Atman? Who Am I?



There is a profound question that every human being grapples with: “*Who am I?*” This question often leads us to explore the concept of the *Atman*—a term deeply rooted in spiritual traditions yet frequently misunderstood.

Let me start with a story, since everyone loves stories.

Alexander of Greece was renowned for his conquests and vast empire. He was a student of *Aristotle*, a philosopher known for his wisdom and deep reflection. One day, while preparing to invade India, Alexander asked Aristotle, “*What can I bring back for you from India?*”

Aristotle replied, “*Look, you’ve given me enough gold, enough wealth, enough of everything from your conquests. What I would really like is for you to go to India and bring me back one of those Self-Realized human beings so they can teach me what I need to know.*”

Confidently, Alexander set off, promising his teacher he would return with a dozen such enlightened souls. His journey led him to Northern India, where he faced fierce resistance but eventually established a camp.

To find these Self-Realized individuals, he sent his general, Onesicritus, who was also his biographer. (You can find more information online under “Alexander and the Gymnosophists.”) Onesicritus was tasked with locating these enlightened beings, known as the Gymnosophists—philosophers who lived in harmony with nature, free from material possessions, clothed only by the sky, and content in their Self-Realization.

After much inquiry, the general was introduced to a wise man named *Dandi Swami* (whose name evolved into *Dandamis* as it traveled back to Greece). Approaching him with deep respect, Onesicritus offered immense wealth in exchange for accompanying him. However, he added a grim warning—refusing the offer would mean death.

Dandi Swami chuckled lightly, resting on his bed of leaves, and replied, “I have no need for your gold or silver. Such things would only burden me with the worry of where to hide them. Here, I find everything I desire, and my happiness surpasses all worldly joy. As for your threat, my body is just a body. If you cut off my head, I’ll come back to life in another body.”

This exchange highlights a key idea in understanding the *Atman*: our true Self exists beyond the body. Just as actors on a stage don't take the events in their roles personally, we too can view our lives as a play. The body plays its part but doesn't define our essence. We should go through life as if we are actors on a stage, knowing that whatever happens to our character is for the play; we don't take it personally. If we could, like Dandamis, realize that during our time on earth, the body undergoes various experiences, but those do not affect our true essence, we would be free.

When we accumulate material wealth, it doesn't travel with us into the next life. Similarly, we are not touched by the diseases or misfortunes we face since they do not follow us into the next life. This is a key point. The *Atman* takes on forms based on one's *vasanas*; it chooses its circumstances, including the family into which one is born and the gender of the individual.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* beautifully expresses, “*The knower of Brahman attains the highest.*” The essence here is that understanding the *Atman* doesn't require lengthy travels or intricate rituals; it lies within us, hidden by a veil of ignorance. In the Upanishad, it is said that the *Atman* is described as “*hidden in the sacred space of the secret cave.*”

People often interpret this in terms of anatomy, thinking of it as being located somewhere within the body. But how can we find this sacred space of the *Secret Cave*?

As an aside, during Hindu marriage ceremonies, it is customary for the bride and groom to look for, and find, twin stars in the sky, which are constantly revolving around each other. They are difficult to find in the night sky without a known point of reference to guide the eyes. The twin stars are known as *Arundhati Gyana* (a star in the *Ursa Major* constellation, also known as the dipper or *Saptarshi Mandala*). One of these stars remains in a corresponding orbit with a companion star called *Vashishtha*. In guiding the bride and groom, elders instruct them to look for the “*Arundhati*” star, using a known point as a reference. This star is subtle and faint among millions in the night sky, making it difficult to locate. We use a known point to find the unknown.

Similarly, the Upanishads suggest that in searching for the “Secret Cave” where the *Atman* resides, we must start from known points—in this case, the body, referred to as *Annamaya* (*Anna* = food, meaning “made of food”). Initially, people identify the *Atman* as the body, saying, “*I am the body.*” However, the body changes throughout life—from infancy to adulthood to old age. Since the *Atman* is unchanging, it cannot be the body.

The Upanishads provide further reasoning: you are the knower, and the body is what you know. To know something, there must be a subject (the knower) and an object (what is known). In this case, you are aware of the body, so the body cannot be the *Atman*. The real *you* is different from *Annamaya*.

What enlivens the body is known as *Prana*, the life force. The Upanishads guide us to the next level: considering *Pranamaya*, which refers to the energy that sustains us—breathing, thinking, emotions, and bodily functions. However, since we are aware of *Prana*, the *Atman* cannot be *Prana* either. Again, this suggests that we are the knower, while *Prana* is the known.

Going deeper, the Upanishads encourage us to examine subtler aspects of ourselves. Next is *Manomaya*, the domain of the mind, where memories and emotions reside. We often say, “*I feel happy*” or “*I feel sad*,” but since we can observe these emotions, we cannot be the mind itself.

If we go even deeper, the Upanishads lead us to *Vijnanamaya*, the level of intellect (*buddhi*), which governs reasoning and understanding. We think, analyze, and remember, but since we can observe these processes, we are not the intellect either. Even in deep sleep, when neither mind nor intellect is active, awareness persists.

At this stage, the Upanishads introduce *Anandamaya*, the realm of bliss. In deep, dreamless sleep, the body is still, the mind is absent, and intellect is at rest, yet a state of peaceful awareness remains. However, bliss itself is not the *Atman*.

None of these layers—the body, life force, mind, intellect, or bliss—are the *Atman*.

A compelling illustration from the Upanishads involves ten students attempting to cross a turbulent river. After a difficult journey, they reach the other side, and one student begins counting, “*One, two, three...*”—but only reaches nine. They panic, believing one of them is missing.

A passerby asks what's wrong. When they explain, he smiles and says, “*That's because you forgot to count yourself.*”

This story elegantly highlights the nature of the *Atman*. Each of us counts external aspects—body, mind, intellect, emotions—but we often forget to recognize the one doing the counting: the *Atman* itself.

intellect, emotions—but we often forget to recognize the one doing the counting: the *Atman* itself.

We say, “*I am the body, I am the mind, I am the intellect, I am Prana, I am bliss.*” But who is the *I* making these observations? It is the *Atman*—the true self beyond all layers of identity.

The *Kena Upanishad* explores this further, discussing how we seek *Brahman*, or the ultimate reality. But *Brahman* is not an object to be found—it is the very essence of the seeker. Knowledge is divided into the “known” and the “unknown,” but the *Atman* is neither. It is the *knower*.

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This concept crystallized for me when I compared it to sugar dissolving in water. When sugar is mixed into milk or water, it sweetens the liquid, yet it is no longer visible. Similarly, the *Atman* permeates the body, Prana, intellect, and bliss—it is present in all aspects of our being.

A wave in the ocean offers another analogy. When we analyze a wave, we realize it is nothing but seawater. The wave and the ocean are the same, but due to its distinct form, the wave perceives itself as separate. Likewise, we mistakenly see ourselves as separate from the *Atman*.

But just as a wave cannot exist apart from the ocean, we cannot exist apart from the *Atman*. The *Atman* is our consciousness, present in every layer of existence.

This leads to an essential question: *Who is the observer?*

When you feel fear or anger, ask yourself: *Who is witnessing these emotions?* This awareness helps us realize that we are not our thoughts or feelings—they happen to us, but we are the observer.

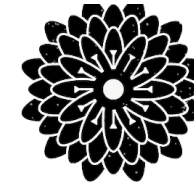
In Sanskrit, the *Atman* is referred to as *Sakshi*, meaning *witness*.

It is crucial to remember that you are not your emotions, your intellect, or even your sense of bliss. You are the *Atman*—the unchanging, ever-present witness of all experience.



EPISODE 22 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 31 - 37



The verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*, especially in Chapter 2, verses 31 to 37, reveal profound truths as Krishna, the divine teacher, guides Arjuna through the maze of duty and self-discovery. This moment is **not** merely about physical yoga; it delves into the *essence of yoga as a deep connection with oneself*.

These verses serve as a framework for understanding our unique paths. They invite us to unlock our inner intelligence, often referred to as *yoga buddhi*—the wisdom that helps us reconnect with our true selves. Think of yoga as a reunion with your spirit, and *yoga buddhi* as the ability to navigate back to that connection. From verse 31 onward, Krishna teaches us how to tune our minds toward self-realization, offering an attitude that nurtures our journey of self-discovery.

Verse 31: introduces the concept of duty (*Dharma*), a guiding force in our lives. Krishna emphasizes that we should not waver in performing our duties. But what does that truly mean? How do we know what our duty is? In Sanskrit, this is called *SwaDharma*—one’s personal duty or inherent nature.

The word *Dharma* has many meanings in Sanskrit and even appears in the English dictionary. While scholars debate its precise definition, one way to understand it is as *the fundamental nature of something*. For example, the nature of sugar is to be sweet—it’s *Dharma* is sweetness. Similarly, each of us is born with a personal *Dharma*. Our ultimate *Dharma* is to realize the *Atman*, our true self, yet most of us remain unaware of this deeper calling.

While Self-Realization is our highest *Dharma*, we often get lost in the complexities of life. Consider a person who dreams of becoming a doctor. He has a burning desire to heal others, to ease suffering, to provide medicine. But his father insists he become an accountant instead. Though he follows his father’s wishes and works as an accountant, his innate nature—his *SwaDharma*—remains unchanged. He continues to study herbal medicine in his spare time. When a client mentions a cold, he eagerly recommends remedies from his personal collection. That evening, he calls to check, “Did you take the herbs I gave you?” Because at his core, beyond titles and professions, he is a healer. His *SwaDharma* cannot be suppressed.

We see this in children. From an early age, they express desires that seem to carry over from a previous life—they say, *I want to be a musician, an artist, a doctor*, or something else entirely. This verse emphasizes that when it comes to your duty, your *SwaDharma*, you should not waver.

2 - THE BASICS YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Gita describes people as being classified into four categories, known as the four varnas:

Brahmins—priestly, intellectual, and knowledgeable individuals.

Kshatriyas—warriors and protectors.

Vaishyas—merchants and businesspeople.

Shudras—manual laborers and service provider

For example, if I were running a multimillion-dollar company and placed someone in the accounting department who had no background in finance but instead loved drawing and graphic design, I would eventually reassign them to the marketing division, where they would thrive. Each of us has our own *Dharma*, our natural inclination, which aligns with one of these four categories.

A person deeply drawn to martial arts cannot be confined to a desk and expected to become an intellectual. Similarly, someone with an intellectual drive cannot be forced into a warrior's role. This is what Krishna tells Arjuna—his *SwaDharma* is that of a warrior. Since childhood, he has been trained to fight, and now he faces a righteous war against evil forces. He should not waver.

Our duty exists on multiple levels. First and foremost, we have a responsibility to our own body—our temple—to keep it clean, healthy, and strong. Only then can we fulfill our duties to others: our family, children, grandchildren, community, society, nation, animals, and all living beings.

This responsibility follows a hierarchical order. It cannot be ignored. Our duty is to move with the grain of our *SwaDharma*, not against it. If we resist our true calling, it leads to frustration and imbalance—like the accountant who was meant to be a healer. Everyone has a duty, and when it is neglected, people notice and criticize. Yet, when it is fulfilled, it often goes unrecognized.

Consider the soldiers who fought in battle and died fulfilling their duty—most remain unknown. But when Arjuna hesitates to do his duty, it becomes significant. For a *Kshatriya*, there is no greater honor than fighting a righteous war. If one does not stand up against injustice, then what is worth fighting for?

In society, duty is essential. If responsibilities are abandoned, kingdoms and communities collapse. Some duties are appealing, while others are thankless. But regardless of whether they bring recognition or not, they must still be done.

Verse 32: “Happy are the Kshatriyas who get such a battle that comes, without being sought, as an open door to heaven.”

The rest of the verses are fairly self-explanatory, so I don't necessarily need to go through them in detail. However, this verse emphasizes that a warrior is fortunate to receive such a battle without seeking it, as it serves as an open door to heaven—meaning peace of mind.

An analogy: imagine I am a surgeon. There is a rare condition that I dream of operating on—one that requires a highly specialized surgery.

I study surgical techniques, read extensively, and practice relentlessly, hoping that one day I will have the opportunity to perform such a procedure. But no such patient ever appears.

Then, one day, a patient arrives who needs this very surgery. Imagine the boundless energy and joy the surgeon would feel—“*I've been waiting my whole life for this. Now, I finally get to use my skills to help someone.*”

This is what Krishna is telling Arjuna: *You wanted to be a warrior. You have trained for years. Now, you have the chance to fight a justified war—a moral battle against truly amoral people. What more could you ask for?*

Verse 33: “If you will not wage this righteous war, then, having abandoned your duty and fame, you will incur sin.”

If Arjuna refuses to fight, he will lose his *SwaDharma*—his duty. Most of this is self-explanatory, except for the word *sin*. What does *sin* actually mean?

We often misunderstand it, thinking of sin as simply doing something “bad.” But in this context, *sin* is a mental reaction—an agitation of the mind caused by an action we either performed or avoided.

Arjuna is considered the greatest warrior—fearless, highly skilled, and confident in victory. Yet, if he runs from battle, his mind will torment him not just for the rest of his life but even after death. That is *sin*—the relentless pricking of his conscience.

Even after his physical body perishes, his mind and intellect will carry this burden. The weight of his conscience will trouble him, denying him peace.

In Christian tradition, there is the concept of purgatory—a state of torment where the soul is burdened with guilt. The *fires of hell* represent this mental anguish. While waiting to be reborn, the mind is consumed by regret—“*Oh my God, I did this terrible thing.*”

This is the meaning of *incurring sin*—failing to be true to one's duty, to one's *SwaDharma*. It is going against the grain of one's own nature, doing something that unsettles the conscience.

Verse 34: “People will recount your perpetual dishonor. To the honored, dishonor is worse than death; it will remain in history.”

Here, Krishna appeals to Arjuna's human nature. Earlier, he spoke of the *Atman*—the eternal self that never dies—but Arjuna remained unconvinced. Now, Krishna shifts his approach. He speaks to Arjuna as a man, a warrior, a king.

“If you refuse to fight, history will remember you as the warrior who turned away. That will be your legacy.”

2 - THE BASICS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Verse 35: “The great chariot warriors will think that you have run away from battle out of fear. You, who were once highly respected as a great warrior, will be disrespected.”

Again, this is self-explanatory. Arjuna’s reputation is at stake.

Verse 36: “Your enemies will not only speak ill of you but will also insult you. Even those close to you will bear the disgrace. What could be worse than that?”

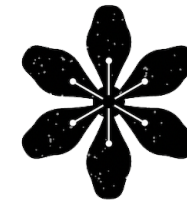
Verse 37: “Remember: if you are slain, you will attain heaven. If you are victorious, you will rule the earth as king. Therefore, arise and fight with determination.”

This verse speaks to the material consequences of Arjuna’s decision. Either way, he benefits—if he dies, he attains heaven; if he wins, he enjoys prosperity on earth.

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EPISODE 23 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 38 - 39



Arjuna, a warrior prince, faces a challenge unlike any he has encountered before. This story unfolds 5,000 years ago, in a time when being a warrior wasn't just a career—it was a sacred calling. Families passed down this duty through generations. Picture a lineage of warriors, each born into the role. When the time came to step onto the battlefield, the warrior saw it not just as an obligation but as destiny.

However, being a warrior wasn't always about fighting. Some chose a different path, embarking on pilgrimages to temples, seeking spiritual solace instead of engaging in war. They believed their duty led them away from the battlefield. This highlights an important point: duty can take different forms based on individual choices and beliefs.

But if you choose to fight—if you enter the battlefield and face the enemy—you cannot turn your back. Once you sign up, you are committed.

The great warrior Arjuna took up arms, prepared for the battle he had waited 13 years to fight. But when he stood face-to-face with those he knew and loved—his uncles, his cousins, his respected teachers—his resolve wavered. Arjuna wasn't afraid of dying; his heart ached at the thought of harming his own kin. In this moment of despair, Krishna, his cousin and charioteer, stepped in with profound wisdom.

Krishna revealed a crucial truth: ***our Atman is eternal. The Atman exists beyond the physical form.*** Yes, our bodies perish, but our essence—the real you—lives on. Krishna sought to ease Arjuna's heartache by shifting his perspective. Killing someone's body does not destroy their *Atman*. Krishna urged Arjuna to view the conflict differently.

Krishna told Arjuna, "We were all here before." This is where the Gita's teachings unfold. Vyasa, through Krishna, introduces fundamental concepts: the nature of the body, the mind, the intellect, and the *Atman*, which powers them all.

The root of Arjuna's fear is his ignorance of the eternal nature of existence. Krishna explains, "If you truly understood that the person you fear killing will not die—only his body will—you would feel at peace. So arise Arjuna, and fight. Do your *Dharma*."

Dharma, as we have discussed in previous sessions, refers to the inherent quality of something. The *Dharma* of sugar is sweetness. Similarly, the *Dharma* of a *Kshatriya* (a warrior) is to fight in a war. Krishna reminds Arjuna to fulfill his *Dharma* as a warrior and fight.

He emphasizes the importance of duty—acting in accordance with one’s responsibilities. Every person has a role, much like members of a sports team. Take football, for example: each player has a specific job. If a receiver drops the ball, it’s a problem, no matter how skilled the quarterback is. Similarly, every role in society matters.

A *Kshatriya*’s duty is to protect; a Brahmin’s duty is to guide as a priest or teacher; a merchant’s duty is to foster business and trade. These roles are interconnected, and everyone’s contribution is essential for the system to thrive.

Chapter 2 can broadly be divided into four topics:

1st topic: The first topic is Arjuna’s emotional turmoil—his confusion, fear, and grief. Arjuna represents each of us. The truth is, we have all felt like Arjuna at times. Just when life seems to be going splendidly, unexpected challenges can leave us feeling lost, despondent, confused, and sorrowful.

2nd topic: What should we do when that happens to us? Krishna says: work towards realizing your own Self. Work towards realizing your *Atman*—Self-Realization. Once you truly know yourself, nothing else needs to be known. Once you realize the *Self*, all sorrow, anxiety, and despair disappear.

3rd topic: So how do we get there? *Karma Yoga* is the path that moves us toward Self-Realization. Among the three components—body, mind, and intellect—the body is the lowest, and the intellect is the highest.

Karma Yoga emphasizes the importance of action (by the body).

Bhakti Yoga (devotion) emphasizes the importance of the mind.

Jnana Yoga (knowledge through studying scriptures) emphasizes the intellect.

Karma Yoga leads to *Upasana*, which is the development of a mental attitude—emotions of love toward fellow human beings, the community, all living beings, the world, and the environment. *Upasana* then leads to *Samadhi*, the closest step toward Self-Realization.

For example, in the United States, young people spend their summers volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, rolling up their sleeves to build houses for the poor. They physically engage in hard labor with no personal gain. This is an act of *Karma Yoga*, using the body to ascend toward a higher Self.

In the past, many people interpreted *Karma Yoga* as performing elaborate rituals—grand prayers, offerings at temples—believing these actions would bring them closer to God. However, Krishna, in the Gita, reshapes this idea. He teaches that it’s not about the rituals themselves but about the intention behind them—our actions and their true purpose.

A good analogy is pole vaulting. Athletes use a long pole to launch themselves over a high bar. The pole acts as a tool to reach new heights. However, once the athlete is airborne, they must let go of the pole to clear the bar. Similarly, *Karma Yoga* uses tools and rituals to guide us, but ultimately, we must transcend them to reach higher consciousness.

Likewise, if we focus solely on rituals—donations, community service—without genuine intent, we remain bound by our actions rather than liberated by them.

The goal is to move from desires to desirelessness—from action to freedom from the bondage of action.

4th topic: Arjuna asks, what happens after attaining Self-Realization? A Self-Realized person remains in the world but interacts with it differently—whether with people, situations, or experiences. Our duty is to move toward Self-Realization, but this journey begins only when we shift our focus inward. Along the way, the mind constantly asks, *What’s in it for me? What will I gain?* However, true *Karma Yoga* requires letting go of this mindset.

Whatever duty you perform, stop thinking about personal gain. Act anonymously—without attaching your name, seeking recognition, or considering rewards such as money, fame, or power. The body craves sense objects, the mind longs for emotions and love, and the intellect seeks praise, honor, and status. To progress, these attachments must be transcended. One must act not for personal benefit but simply because it is the right thing to do. Performing one’s duty with this selfless attitude is the essence of *Karma Yoga*.

Verse 38: Krishna says to Arjuna, “If to you pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat are the same, then you will not incur any sin.” This is significant because, after this, other religions also began discussing the concept of sin. However, people often interpret sin differently from what is meant here.

You will not incur sin if you perform your duty—your *Dharma*—in this case, preparing for battle, as long as you remain equanimous. Notice that Krishna addresses different aspects of being: pleasure and pain for the body, gain and loss for the mind, and victory and defeat for the intellect. When we act, our attitude should be one of equanimity, accepting both outcomes—success or failure, pleasure or pain—without attachment. You must be prepared to fulfill your duty without being fixated on the results.

Sin occurs when you engage in actions that you yourself believe to be wrong. Such actions create mental agitation, and your mind stores these disturbances as impressions. These stored agitations resurface whenever you recall those past actions, further disturbing your peace. In this way, *bad* actions increase mental agitation, while *good* actions reduce it.

You will not incur any sin if you perform your duty—your *Dharma*—in this case, preparing for battle, as long as you treat alike all the aspects Krishna mentions: pleasure and pain (for the body), gain and loss (for the mind), and victory and defeat (for the intellect).

If you experience neither agitation nor disturbance, then you have not sinned, meaning there is no mental agitation. Arjuna is expected to fulfill his obligatory duty, which in this case is to fight. When we perform an action, our attitude should be equanimous, treating both outcomes equally. In anything we do, there is always a possibility of pain, loss, and defeat, just as there is a possibility of victory, gain, and pleasure. However, we must accept both with the same attitude. You must be prepared to do your duty without being attached to the results.

For example, when treating a patient, a physician must accept that the patient may recover or may not. The patient may say, “*Doctor, you’re the best in the world,*” or he may say, “*You’re a lousy quack; you didn’t help me at all.*” Regardless, the doctor must focus on doing his job to the best of his ability without concern for praise or criticism.

Consider two men working in the same factory. The first man constantly looks around to see if his boss is watching. Every time the boss glances in his direction, he starts working diligently, not because he is committed to his work but because he wants to be noticed. His focus is on securing a promotion, a salary increase, or recognition. The second man, however, thinks, “*I am here to do my job, my Dharma, my duty. I will do it to the best of my ability, and rewards will come as they may.*” He keeps his head down and works without distraction. The boss may notice the first man more often, but he recognizes that the second man produces higher-quality work. Ultimately, it is the second man who earns the promotions and salary increases.

During a *Bhagavad Gita* class, a student who was a stockbroker raised his hand and asked, “*I run a stock market business; that’s my job. I make a lot of money, and I lose a lot of money. Where is my Dharma in that?*” The teacher responded, “*What is the purpose for which you use this money? If you are accumulating wealth just to buy a bigger yacht, a bigger house, or a more expensive car, then your actions are bound by desire. But if you make money and use the opportunity to fulfill your duty and help those less fortunate, then that is the right attitude.*”

“*You need to provide for your family, educate your children, and give them a good life. You have a responsibility toward your spouse; you must take care of them. You cannot say, ‘My wife and children are starving, but I am giving money to others.’ Your duty begins with your family, but that does not mean drowning them in luxury. Warren Buffett is an example of someone who says, ‘I have enormous wealth, but I live in a modest home.’ You should live in a way that aligns with your values and comfort, not extravagance.*”

In anything you do, there is always the possibility of pain, loss, and defeat, just as there is the possibility of gain, pleasure, and victory. Accept both with balance. More important than the result of your work is the act of performing your duty itself. If you maintain equanimity toward outcomes, your work will improve because your mind will not be distracted by the question, “*What’s in it for me?*” Before undertaking any task, resolve that you will be at peace with whatever result follows.

Verse 39: “*This is the wisdom of Sankhya taught to you. Now listen to the wisdom of Yoga.*” *It explains that there is a path by which you can free yourself from the bondage of action.*

Sankhya is a logical sequence of thought leading to an irrefutable conclusion. It follows a reasoning process that leaves no alternative but the truth. Until verse 39, Krishna presents *Sankhya* as wisdom—rational thought that leads to an undeniable conclusion. Now, he introduces the wisdom of *Yoga*, which is the path to uniting with the Self, enabling one to cast off the bondage of action.

Sat means pure existence, simply being there. **Chit** means pure knowledge, pure consciousness—it knows everything. **Anand** means bliss, which is the absence of sorrow and suffering.

These three combined together are called the *Atman*. Without understanding what *Sat* is—pure existence—we fear death. For a Self-Realized person, there is no fear of non-existence because they know they are always existing. They experience no confusion because they are filled with pure knowledge and pure consciousness. We seek freedom from our unhappiness because we don’t know *Ananda* (bliss). We are seeking our true Self and something subtler than what the world offers. The world gives us material things, but we seek something far subtler, and that is the very reason we are studying and listening to this.

You might ask, “Well, which part of it is the *Atman*, which part is *Sat*, and which part is *Chit*?” It’s all one; it’s all mixed together. You can’t separate it. It’s like salt and water mixed together in the ocean.

23 - CHAPTER 2 VERSES #38 - #39

We become bound to action because we have created *vasanas* (impressions). It's like a patient who has a disease but doesn't realize it and therefore doesn't seek treatment. That's even worse than someone who knows they are sick and visits a doctor asking to be cured. Similarly, if we don't recognize that our *vasanas* are driving us to desire actions, we become bound to this earth and must keep returning, life after life.

Not knowing the bonds that tie us to this world prevents us from breaking free unless we are aware of them and "treat" them. Our desires bind us to the material world.

Ideally, we should have no desire for anything; we should act because it is our duty—not driven by *vasanas*. Jesus and Buddha were Self-Realized beings. They had no *vasanas* or unfulfilled desires that would cause them to keep returning to this earth.

Good desires create good *vasanas*, but even these will still prevent us from attaining Self-Realization. Though these desires are positive, they still create a *vasana*—the desire to reach a goal. Good desires create good *vasanas* (good *Dharma*), while bad desires produce bad *vasanas*. However, if you have no desire for anything and simply act because it is your duty, without any *vasanas*, you will be free.

The Gita encourages us to step back, understand our motivations, and learn from Arjuna's journey. It's not just about finding peace within ourselves, but also about enriching our relationships with each other, our communities, and the world around us. Every step taken in righteousness brings not only personal fulfillment but also a ripple effect of positivity into the lives we touch.

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EPISODE 24

The Gita - Pearls of Wisdom



This episode, *Pearls of Wisdom*, is not from the Gita. I thought I should share some pearls that I've gathered—things that I found very helpful. There are many such pearls of wisdom that we will all encounter as we study the Upanishads, the Gita, Vedanta, and other scriptures and books.

Throughout our exploration of sacred texts like the Gita and the Upanishads, as well as various other teachings, we often stumble upon wisdom that resonates deeply. I like to think of these insights as “golf tips”—small, thoughtful phrases or ideas that give us a little nudge forward in our understanding.

The ancient wisdom speaks of two fundamental things that we humans seek: *Yoga* and *Kshema*. In Sanskrit, yoga (*yuj*) means to unite or acquire, while *Kshema* refers to preservation. Many spiritual teachers assert that our lives revolve around this cycle—***acquiring what we desire and then working to keep it safe.***

Now, what exactly are we trying to acquire? It's often for three aspects of our being: the body, the mind, and the intellect.

For the body: We chase after sensory objects—things we can see, taste, smell, hear, and touch. Take money, for example. Money itself can't be eaten, smelled, or visually appreciated. It doesn't taste good or sound pretty. So, what does it do? It buys you sensory objects to satisfy your senses directly; rather, it's a means to obtain those sensory experiences that we crave, like having a cozy, air-conditioned home. While we might argue about money being tied to security, the truth is, many who seek solitude—like the monks in the Himalayas—find peace away from possessions.

However, here's a truth we often overlook: money can't buy love. There's a famous Beatles song that echoes this sentiment, reminding us that those who seem to have it all might still feel a void without genuine affection.

For the mind: Affection is something we try to acquire, and once we have it, we yearn to enjoy it and fear losing it. Love—people who have a lot of money often say that what they really lack is love, someone to care for them, and show them affection.

For the intellect: Our intellect craves power, knowledge, and recognition. When we gain these, the instinct to hold onto them becomes strong.

But it's probably a combination of three things: acquiring, enjoying, and then fearing that you will lose it. Here's where Krishna offers a different perspective.

He encourages us to pursue spirituality wholeheartedly and to leave the acquisition and preservation of material things to Him. He promises us that if we truly pursue the spiritual path, He will acquire for us whatever material things we crave. Not only that, He says He will preserve these things for us, ensuring we won't lose them. While this might sound puzzling, many stories in spiritual texts reinforce this idea. Following a spiritual path sharpens our focus, helping us succeed in ways that often lead to wealth and acclaim.

For example, think of a factory worker dedicated to their job out of genuine care for others. Their commitment is noticed by management, leading to promotions and collective goodwill. Eventually, money and comfort seem to flock to such an individual, almost as if it's an unintended consequence of their goodwill.

Following the spiritual path sharpens your mind. As you do that, your mind doesn't wander much; it's focused on one path. Therefore, success comes easier, and you get more money, fame, and popularity. People love you more because you are easy to love. Others offer you positions of power for the same reason.

Money and sense objects run to you for that reason. You might even have to fight them off because now you don't even want them; they're a distraction from your path to spirituality.

There's a compelling tale about a small pot at the bottom of the ocean, filled with nectar that grants immortality. This nectar symbolizes Self Realization. The gods and demons fought over it, and various treasures emerged during their struggle. Yet, in the end, both parties desired the nectar, not the distractions that surfaced—wealth, beauty, or power. This symbolizes the inner struggle within each of us between good and bad qualities. We talked about desire-ridden actions, good actions versus bad actions. Each of us has good qualities, and even the worst individuals have them; nobody is perfect.

As you fight this inner struggle, when good things start showing themselves—wealth and fame begin to come to you—you will become popular, and others will be drawn to you in ways they weren't before, all because your goodness has started to show.

If you continue to reject all of that while it keeps coming, you are truly on the path to Self Realization and can attain the nectar. Krishna instructs you to focus on bringing out the good in yourself while reducing negative qualities such as jealousy, envy, hatred, greed, and anger. Conversely, good qualities include compassion, love, generosity, and helping others. If you examine what you seek to acquire to be happy, we mistakenly believe that acquisition leads to happiness. However, happiness is short-lived.

This cycle makes us spend our lives acquiring, worrying about whether we will lose what we've acquired, and feeling momentarily happy before returning to anxiety.

Each of us harbors both light and darkness within us. As we engage in this inner battle, our goodness and virtues start to shine through, attracting others to us. If we can resist the allure of material gains as they come, we inch closer to Self Realization and the nectar of true bliss.

Krishna teaches that we need to elevate our positive traits while working on reducing negative ones like envy and anger. Ultimately, we often mistakenly believe that acquiring more will bring sustained happiness, but this leads to a never-ending cycle of temporary joy and anxiety over what we might lose.

So, what truly brings us happiness? The first pearl of wisdom here is about understanding this cycle and striving to rise above it. It's about embracing self-awareness, recognizing how we get trapped in cravings and fears of loss. I recall a moment with my wife when she thought she lost her treasured diamond bracelet. That day was filled with anxiety for her. Yet, when she found it, the joy was quickly replaced by dread of losing it again.

This brings us to a deeper truth: real happiness lies in the absence of desire. Let's think about a simple analogy: hammering a nail and hitting your thumb—painful, right? When you put the hammer down, relief floods in. Happiness can be similar—it's about letting go of the constant chase for acquisition and recognizing the joy that comes with release.

Consider Alexander, the ancient Greek king, who sought out a Self Realized sage while exploring. His general found a simple sadhu living blissfully among leaves, untouched by material possessions. When offered wealth, the sage simply declared he was happier without it. This teaches us a powerful lesson: true happiness doesn't stem from what we own but arises from realizing we need very little to feel fulfilled.

We often mistakenly believe that our possessions or achievements will fill our souls with joy. But think of the fleeting pleasure of worldly success—faces in the mirror, or the temporary comfort after long-held cravings are momentarily satisfied.

I remember my childhood in India surrounded by smokers. Their immediate relief from cravings, whether for a cigarette or a cup of coffee, highlights a truth: sometimes, the satisfaction of a desire distracts us from understanding that there's a deeper contentment waiting beneath the surface.

This brings us to the second pearl: happiness comes from reducing or lessening our desires, not from fulfilling them. Happiness is found in the space where desires cease to cloud our true selves. In that simplicity lies our essence, which can shine through when less defined by worldly cravings.

24 - THE GITA - PEARLS OF WISDOMS

What does that mean? Have you ever seen a person absolutely craving a cigarette or a cup of coffee, or craving the sight of a loved one? A chain smoker steps out of a plane and puts a cigarette to his lips. He takes a drag and says he is in heaven! It's too soon for the nicotine to be absorbed and cause his happiness, but you may argue that! A coffee addict takes a long-awaited sip of coffee and says the same thing—he is in heaven! Surely the caffeine hasn't hit his brain yet—he barely ingested it. So why did they feel so happy as soon as they took a puff or a sip? Why? Because the desire was 'satisfied'. The screaming desire quieted down.

Another example: parents of a young man who was sent to war and thought he was missing in action are told their son was found and is now on a plane with 20 other young men landing soon at the airport. The parents, who thought he was missing or even dead, are so eager to see him that they cannot wait. They see a group of young men alighting from the plane. They think they saw their son. They are overjoyed! They find out soon that their son is still inside; but just the thought that this is their son was enough to make them overjoyed. Why? Because the desire was 'satisfied'. It quieted down.

Therefore, it's not necessarily the desire that needs to be fulfilled; it's the lack of desire that you think has been fulfilled, therefore out of your system, that causes you happiness. It's the desire that clouds your basic *Atman*, which is Sat, Chit, Anand—full total bliss. As long as you have desires clouding it, you cannot feel that happiness. When you take those desires out of it, then the pure bliss of the inner self shines through.

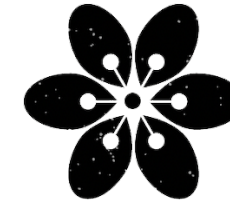
Summary:

The first pearl was acquisition, enjoyment, and fear of losing what you acquire. The second one was that happiness is in the lack of desire, not in fulfilling your desires. If you can contemplate on that, believe me, it will help you a lot in every way.

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EPISODE 25 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 Verses 40 - 44



We will reflect on the previous verse, **Verse 39**, where Lord Krishna encourages us to “cast off the bond of action.” It’s a term that hints at the desires we carry which is referred to as “*Vasanas*” in Sanskrit. Imagine these *Vasanas* as dormant engines within the mind, silently propelling us from one life to the next, even across reincarnations.

Let’s say you’re a musical prodigy. When you come back into this world, that natural ability to play music doesn’t just vanish. Instead, it’s part of your unique makeup, waiting to be rekindled and expressed. This means our desires and talents aren’t merely quirky flukes; they are echoes of our past.

There are two types of desires that twine through our actions: selfish and selfless. Picture a river. If it’s flowing only to serve its own purpose, it might eventually run dry and leave behind a barren landscape of sorrow. On the flip side, when actions stem from selflessness, they create lush valleys of joy for both the doer and the recipient.

This brings us to an essential truth: *If your actions are steeped in selfishness, everything you want or desire for yourself you’re likely to encounter sorrow. It’s almost like a guarantee.* You might not realize it at first, but selfish actions inevitably generate a cycle of unhappiness. However, here’s the crux: every action brings a consequence, and if you seek specific outcomes from your deeds, disappointment is often lurking around the corner.

Before **verse 39**, we were exploring the concept of **Sankhya Yoga**. *Sankhya Yoga* cleverly leads us to recognize that we are so much more than mere labels of identity; we are the everlasting *Atman* within. It’s kind of like learning that two plus two equals four. If we were raised believing that it equals five, breaking that misconception would take some convincing. But once you see it clearly, it becomes obvious. This analogy of learning this reconditioning of thought is precisely what the Gita aims to achieve. It nudges us towards understanding that we are the *Atman*, untethered from the temporary elements like our body and mind.

To illustrate, consider the idea of a car. Our body and mind are like cars, moving about often aimlessly. But what drives it? That's us, the driver within. In reality, we aren't even the driver; we are the fuel that fills the tank. The *Atman* simply exists, quietly providing energy, but it doesn't dictate the car's path. That could lead to various types of journeys, some peaceful, others destructive.

From verses 45 to 53, nine verses, Krishna is going to be talking about the same thing over and over again, slightly different in context. Why is that important? It's important because the Gita was written by a sage, Vyasa who also wrote the four *Vedas*: *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. The *Vedas* were manifold; they were first rhymes, then prayers, then rituals; and then in the last part of every Veda are the Upanishads. The Upanishads is a very high-flown philosophy, from which the Gita is taken to simplify it.

When Sage Vyasa wrote this, he said you have to do certain rituals. He called them *Karma Yoga*. *Karma* means doing things with your body, and yoga means using it to get together with the self. By the time the *Mahabharata* was written, people were so deluded; they had a delusion that if they did a certain ritual, then they got the *Karma*, and they said that's all I have to do.

He said that's wrong. He started saying that *Karma Yoga* is the actual performance of a deed that is selfless or unselfish, not selfish. Selfless, unselfish, he meant doing something for others, not for your own personal gain. If you're teaching somebody something, and you don't want the accolades or the rewards, then you're doing an unselfish deed. If you're doing it for a higher force, like God, then it's a selfless deed. He called it "Buddhi Yoga". Buddhi means knowledge. He says the knowledge of what you're doing and why you're doing it is what's important, not the action itself. He called that Buddhi Yoga.

Verse 40: "There is no loss of effort in the performance of Karma Yoga, nor is there a production of contrary result. There's no loss of effort, and there's no contrary result. Even very little of this discipline, which is Karma Yoga, protects a person from great fear".

Krishna tells us about the essence of *Karma Yoga*: there's "no loss of effort" in this practice. This means that even when results aren't immediately apparent, the effort you put in plays a vital role in your inner growth and purification. It's like a farmer tending to his crops through toiling days but facing drought. While the external result may vanish, the act of tilling the land nourishes the soil of the heart.

When we talk about "no contrary result," it means that engaging in selfless actions guarantees positive changes within us, like a warm glow spreading through. This doesn't mean life will be devoid of challenges; rather, your perspective shifts. As you immerse yourself in unselfish deeds, the fear of life's uncertainties gradually dissipates.

There's a famous tale of a wise philosopher who dedicated his mornings to helping anyone in need around his village without asking for anything in return. Such acts illuminate the path to inner happiness. It's a universal truth that while serving others often brings us more peace and joy than any self-serving act ever could. A good approach is to adopt a positive mindset. It doesn't mean putting on a forced smile or worrying about outcomes. Instead, it's about doing what you feel called to do without strings attached. With each small act of selflessness, the weight of anxiety and fear lightens, like the wise man who selflessly roamed the hills helping others.

Verse 41: "The intellect is resolute and one-pointed; many branched and endless, indeed, are the thoughts of the irresolute". What he's saying is that irresolute means a mind that doesn't think of the *Atman*, selfishly looks at themselves. "Bahu-Sakha" means many branches. The many branches mean there's no direction; it jumps from one to another. We encounter the concept of a focused intellect versus a scattered mind. A mind left unchecked resembles a playful monkey, leaping from branch to branch without direction. The resolute mind, on the other hand, remains fixated on a single aim, reaching greater understanding of the *Atman*.

To truly get to know this *Atman*, we rely on different methods:

1. We can study scriptures for guidance.
2. We can learn from others, gathering wisdom through experience and observation.
3. We can infer and draw conclusions based on our understanding of the world around us.

Ultimately, these insights help us distinguish the *Atman* from our fleeting thoughts and desires. Many chase after transient pleasures, failing to grasp the genuine essence of existence. Real growth comes from a commitment, not just to rituals, but to the purpose behind them. That's the mind of the irresolute, whereas if you think you become self-realized, your intellect is resolute and one-pointed.

How do we get knowledge?

1. The study of scriptures; you study what we're doing now. You study the scriptures, and it gives you your goal and destination, that's where we ought to go.
2. The second is known as "*Shabda Pramana*". *Shabda* means word, so we hear this word from other people. We've never seen atoms or molecules, but we don't know what they are, but we know that there are people who study them and who tell us that there are atoms and molecules. we believe him.
3. Our own experiences, "*Pratyaksha Pramana*". That means if we look at a flower and somebody tells you that roses are red, we actually look at the roses and say, "Yeah, okay, I believe it."
4. The inferential knowledge, which is "*Anumana Pramana*". If there's smoke, you see smoke and say, "Okay, I see smoke; therefore, there has to be fire there", you're inferring it.

5. The next one is “*Upamana*”, which is comparing the unknown versus the known. Let’s say you go in a rocket ship to the moon, pick up soil from the moon, and bring it back to NASA. Then over there, you compare that soil to Earth soil. You compare something that you don’t know with something that you know, and you say, “What’s the difference?”

6. The study of the cause and the effect of our actions. You understand the effect, study the effect, and see what the causes are. You wake up in the morning, look outside, and say, “Well, last night I went to bed and the ground was clear; now I see snow. What is the knowledge I get? It snowed last night”.

7. The absence of something. If there’s nothing there, you go to a planet, look around, and study it. You say, “There’s nothing growing here,” so you say, “There’s no life on this planet.” The knowledge gained through these seven ways is resolute; nothing can shake that because you’ve imbibed it correctly.

The real answer you need to be taught is the Atman, which is different from our body, mind, and intellect. Those who do not have this understanding have many branches, many goals, and attractions in the world. By studying this, your mind becomes resolute, and you can be fixated on learning about the *Atman*.

Verses, 42, 43, and 44: These are usually lumped together as one. They say, “***The unwise, using flowery speech, rejoice in the letter of the Vedas, saying, “There’s nothing else than this.”***”

Perhaps because of flowery speech, people look at the *Vedas*. They see beautifully written texts and think, “Wow, I love the *Vedas*. This is it. I don’t need to do anything else; I just need to say these verses, these prayers.” We know this from churches, mosques, and temples. People just go there and think if they do no charity, don’t help anybody else, and just recite prayers, then they’re fine.

Verse 43: “Those obsessed with desires, with heaven as the ultimate goal of birth and action. They prescribe many specific rites for the attainment of pleasure and power”. Again, they are obsessed with desires. They want to go to what they think is heaven, the ultimate goal of not being born again and again, and do the right action. They perform rites and rituals, thinking this is going to get them there.

Verse 44: “Those who are attached to pleasure and power, whose minds are drawn away by that flowery speech, have no determined intellect fixed in God consciousness”.

All of these are pretty self-explanatory. Religious practices are not meant for any gains; they’re not for pleasure, power, or wealth. I’m not knocking religious prayers or rituals; what I’m saying is that they should be used to get to a higher level, which is to become one with God, to be one with the *Atman*.

Dharmic people who follow *Dharma* do so in a proper attitude and actually get more out of this than somebody who follows it in an *Adharmic* way. We all have that drive to become one with the *Atman*. We are the river. Along the way, we find obstacles; we go around them. The river winds back and forth, but ultimately, it does get to the *Atman*, then to the ocean.

The religion, the prayers, going to a temple, the rituals you follow are all meant to give you the ability to achieve oneness with the Self, so that you push aside these distractions.

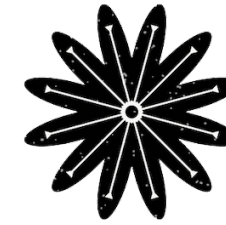
The *Vedas* are a way of getting to the ultimate truth. The example given is that this is like pole vaulting. To jump over the barrier, you would need the pole. Without the pole, without the *Vedas*, you can’t get there, but once you get to the top, in order to go over, you’ve got to let go of that pole. You have to let go of the *Vedas* and even let go of these studies and everything else to become Self-Realized. You can’t carry the *Vedas* with you.

Scriptures, logic, and experience, by studying this you get firm conviction, and you have to ultimately get to know that you are not the body, not the mind, not the intellect.

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EPISODE 26 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 verses 45 - 53



Verse 45: *“Be free of the pairs of opposites.”* Be free of the three gunas; remain forever in sattva, free from acquisition and preservation - established in the Self. By embracing a Sattvic state, we navigate life with balance, freeing ourselves from worries about acquiring and preserving wealth, relationships, and social status. In Sanskrit, ‘dwandwas’ or “pairs of opposites” refer to gain and loss, pain and pleasure. Many fear that following a spiritual path means losing worldly pleasures. However, residing in Sattva allows one to remain balanced both internally and externally, liberating oneself from the constant cycle of acquisition and preservation—whether it be wealth, health, position, or family. These concerns all fall into the same category. People often worry that engaging in spirituality will cause them to “lose” something in the material world. In reality, the exact opposite is true.

Verse 46: This challenges the old belief that *“For an enlightened Brahmana, the Vedas hold no purpose, just as a pond is of no use during a flood”*. When abundance surrounds us, the need for scripted knowledge diminishes. Consider your own experiences with joy. Have you ever noticed how the same object can evoke different feelings over time? One day, something brings joy; the next, it may not have the same effect. The reality is that happiness isn’t contained within that object—it lies within us.

Personal stories come to mind, like when my mother once questioned why I no longer enjoyed a particular dish she had made for me. *“But you always loved this!”* It illustrates how our tastes and preferences change as we grow, but the essence of joy must be sought within ourselves, not in external objects. Every individual must recognize that pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow do not reside in material things—they originate from our internal state.

As we gather insights from the Gita today, we see the importance of allowing happiness to arise within a quiet mind. When our thoughts settle and desires dissolve, inner peace takes center stage. Krishna’s guiding words resonate here: *as desires fade, tranquility unfolds*. It reminds me of my own attempts at meditation—how focusing on clearing my mind sometimes feels like an endless task. If I cling to my thoughts, meditation becomes impossible.

Verse 47: Krishna nudges us toward understanding that *“Your right is in the action only, not in the fruits of your action. Let not the fruit of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.”* This serves as a reminder to act with purpose, without fixation on potential outcomes. When we anchor ourselves in this mindset, we free ourselves from being bound by results.

Many may ask: why act if the results are uncertain? Inaction does not lead to spiritual growth. We remain trapped in the cycle of *Karma*. Simply put, our actions influence our spiritual evolution. We must continue to act. If our actions are selfish and driven by desire, we only accumulate more *vasanas*—unfulfilled impressions that lead to discontent.

The first step in *Karma Yoga* is understanding that our duty is to act selflessly, without attachment to rewards. At this stage, we are not yet immersed in *Sankhya Yoga*—the knowledge of the *Atman*—but we must have conviction that such an *Atman* exists. How do we reach this understanding? Krishna teaches that by practicing *Karma Yoga*—acting selflessly for the benefit of others—we gradually move toward Sankhya yoga. This devotion to selfless action leads us toward knowledge of the *Atman*, which in turn prepares us for meditation.

Think of a farmer nurturing his soil; despite his diligent work, he must rely on nature’s rhythm, which remains beyond his control. Krishna reassures us, encouraging selfless action and promising that the universe will take care of our needs. The essential message is clear: you must act. Do not become attached to the results of your actions. Free yourself from future bondage by letting go of desires, and do not become attached to them either.

This brings us to the concept of “*Karma Chakra*.” Chakra means cycle—the endless cycle of entering and exiting this world. Every action initiates a reaction, but the results are not always immediate. As we delve deeper, we recognize the cyclical nature of *Karma*—the constant pendulum swing between actions and their consequences. Just like placing an order on Amazon and awaiting delivery, our actions require time for their outcomes to unfold. The essence of this verse is clear: maintain focus on your actions and cultivate steadfastness.

Verse 48: “Steadfast in yoga, perform actions and renounce attachments.” Krishna introduces us to the power of neutrality in success and failure. This perception of sameness is key in yoga, where all outcomes are treated equally.

Raga and Dvesha—attachment and aversion—shape our experiences. From childhood, we are conditioned to seek what we like and avoid what we dislike. Parents often say, “You like this? Have more of it. You don’t like it? Don’t worry about it.” But as we mature, we realize that such distinctions can be limiting. Fostering preferences for certain outcomes creates attachments, which, in turn, bind us. True yoga calls for union with our essence—remaining steadfast, letting go of favoritism, and trusting that every experience, whether good or bad, serves a higher purpose.

The five guiding principles of *Karma Yoga* offer clarity:

***Samatva Buddhi*:** Cultivate equanimity. Recognize that joy and sorrow, gain and loss, are transient. Whatever you experience—pleasure or pain, success or failure—maintain the wisdom that it is impermanent. Act because it is your duty, not because you seek a particular outcome.

***SwaDharma Buddhi*:** Act in alignment with your duties and responsibilities, not personal preferences. Decisions should not be driven by likes and dislikes; they should be guided by *Dharma*—your moral duty. Just as the *Dharma* of sugar is sweetness, the *Dharma* of a person is to fulfill their responsibilities.

***Samarpan Buddhi*:** Dedicate your actions to a purpose beyond yourself. Instead of acting out of ego, act in service to others who truly deserve it. As you grow in this mindset, your dedication expands—to a higher purpose, to the Lord, or to the service of humanity.

***Asanga Buddhi*:** Release attachment to results. Accept outcomes as the will of nature. Perform righteous actions because they ought to be done, not for the sake of personal gain.

***Prasada Buddhi*:** Embrace all outcomes with gratitude, as divine offerings. This mindset prepares us for the transition toward Sankhya Yoga, a deeper understanding of the *Atman*.

By rooting each action in selflessness and intention, our spiritual journey unfolds—a path toward awakening, purity, and inner peace.

Verse 49: “Far inferior to the yoga of knowledge is action.” Seek refuge in knowledge; wretched are those whose motive is the fruit.” The yoga of knowledge, or *buddhi yoga*, is certainly not at the level of Sankhya yoga, but it is superior to ordinary action. Ordinary action is inferior to *buddhi yoga* or *Karma Yoga*. When we perform our actions with the right attitude, our minds become purer. A *Karma Yoga* attitude must embody sameness, adhere to the right *Dharma*, and be performed simply because it ought to be done.

Do the right action for the goal of the *Atman*, not for selfish reasons. Act without attachment to the results and accept the outcome, whatever it may be.

Verse 50: “United to knowledge, one sheds here both good and bad deeds. Therefore, devote yourself to yoga, for the right action is yoga.” Some of these verses may seem complex, but with reflection and contemplation, they reveal their deeper meaning. Ordinary actions are often driven by ego, pride, jealousy, and confusion.

This verse highlights the profound connection between knowledge and the deeds we perform. When we truly unite with wisdom, we begin to understand that both good and bad actions can be transcended, revealing a clearer path toward righteous living. Krishna encourages us to see yoga not just as a practice but as a way of being. Action itself can be a form of yoga, guiding us gently on the path of spirituality.

It’s important to recognize that our daily actions are often influenced by ego, pride, jealousy, and confusion. Consider a simple example: imagine tending to your lawn. If you mow it simply because it needs care, that is one thing. However, if your motivation shifts to making your lawn greener or more pristine than your neighbor’s, jealousy has taken root.

If you strive for the best lawn purely for recognition, that stems from ego. Confusion also plays a role, making us uncertain about our true motivations. The essence of this teaching is that *our actions should arise from a desire to serve something greater than ourselves, rather than being driven by personal pride or envy*. When we tie our happiness to the results of our efforts, we often experience frustration, disappointment, or anger when things do not unfold as we had hoped.

Someone once asked how a stockbroker, who constantly engages with money, could align their profession with spiritual devotion. It is easy to see the stock market as a form of gambling, where profit and risk intertwine. However, the true significance of one's work lies not in the stock market itself but in how the earnings are used. If the sole intention is to amass wealth for luxury, it limits spiritual growth. However, if one approaches financial success with a sense of responsibility and channels earnings toward helping others, then work becomes a path to spiritual enrichment. This introduces us to the Sanskrit term “Prasad,” which signifies acceptance with joy. When we learn to find peace in the outcomes of our actions, regardless of what they may be, we reduce our suffering. Ordinary actions often create bondage, akin to gutter water—murky and uninviting. In contrast, spiritual understanding is like nectar—pure and fulfilling. By embracing “Samatva” or equanimity, we learn not to place undue importance on the results of our efforts. Disappointments may arise, but they should not deter us from seeking a deeper connection with ourselves and the universe.

Consider this analogy: think of a prisoner in jail. This individual can either earn rewards through good behavior or risk returning to confinement due to misconduct. Similarly, our existence in this world can feel like a prison, where karmic actions dictate our freedom. Every good deed we perform serves to liberate us from these shackles. Rather than relying on luck or fate, it is our own righteousness that nurtures growth and opportunities. Just as a well-behaved prisoner may gain privileges such as gardening, a virtuous person in society attracts love, respect, and prosperity. In the broader sense, if we aspire to be exemplary citizens of this world, our ultimate goal is to attain *Mukti*, or liberation—freedom from the cycle of rebirth. This is the essence of the verse: to strive and act thoughtfully, to persist with dedication, and to recognize that while the journey may not always be smooth, it is undeniably worthwhile.

This verse serves as a reminder that while challenges are inevitable, our focus should remain on our efforts. Consistency and clarity of intention in our actions bring us closer to enlightenment and fulfillment, creating a life resonant with purpose and peace.

Verse 51: “The wise, who possess intellect and know the path to the Self, do not seek rewards for their actions. Liberated from the bond of birth, they attain a state beyond evil.” This verse describes those who, with clear intellect, understand the true path to the self. These individuals have reached a level of awareness where they no longer seek rewards for their actions. They have transcended the cycles of birth and death, attaining a state beyond what is commonly referred to as ‘evil.’ However, ‘evil’ here does not refer to a demonic figure or malevolent force. Instead, it signifies our desires and the subtle impressions known in Sanskrit as ‘*vasanas*.’ In the context of the Gita, evil represents cravings and deep-seated tendencies that shape our individuality.

What does it mean for the wise to be united in knowledge and to renounce the fruits of their actions? This idea aligns with the essence of *Karma Yoga*, suggesting that true liberation lies in understanding the nature of our actions without attachment to their outcomes. The wise are freed from the cycles of rebirth and transcend the impurities stemming from these *vasanas*. This journey is not merely about performing actions; it is about cultivating an awareness that goes beyond the physical realm and elevates us spiritually.

To illustrate this, the scriptures use an analogy involving children. Imagine children on a playground. When one child is teased and reacts emotionally, especially by crying, the other children may see this as an invitation to tease him further. It becomes a self-perpetuating cycle. The teachings of the Gita reveal that our experiences, shaped by what is called *Maya*—illusion or deceptive appearance—function in a similar way. *When we react to the distractions and temptations presented by Maya, it only strengthens their grip on us.*

We often tell children that the best way to handle teasing is to ignore it. By refusing to react, they deprive the teaser of the response they seek, often causing the teasing to stop. This principle extends to our encounters with life's challenges. *If we resist temptations and maintain equanimity, those temptations lose their power over us, and the number of temptations coming your way also decreases.*

The stories we grow up with are filled with lessons. One of the most famous tales in India is that of Ram from the Ramayana. For those unfamiliar, Ram was born a prince, destined to rule. However, a twist of fate, orchestrated by his stepmother through a long-promised boon, led to his exile in the forest for fourteen years instead of his coronation. Such a drastic turn of events could have led to despair or rebellion, but Ram's response was one of unwavering composure. Instead of reacting with anger or sorrow, he remained steady and serene. His equanimity is a poignant reminder of the deeper lesson within the story. Ram exemplified adherence to *Dharma*, or righteousness, regardless of external circumstances. His steadfastness inner peace despite external turmoil.

This narrative encourages us to focus on what is right rather than being swayed by fleeting emotions. Our duties should be performed with dedication, much like *upasana*, a form of ritual worship. In this way, even mundane actions become offerings imbued with joy and purpose.

Consider the first stage of our being as it is now: overwhelmed with desires and lost in uncertainty. By engaging in practices like *Buddhi yoga* or *Karma Yoga*, we gradually loosen the grip of these desires. As our attachments diminish, the allure of worldly pleasures fades. This marks the transition to the second stage, where the mind detaches from material distractions and seeks deeper understanding—a connection with the Self, or *Atman*. This shift signifies a crucial turning point. The third stage follows, bringing us into meditation and self-realization. When the scriptures mention detachment from both known and unknown influences, they refer to the need for a mind and intellect free from confusion and distractions. This clarity is what the term *Atma Moha* signifies, leading us to *Vairagya*—detachment or dispassion.

As we evolve and shed layers of delusion, clarity emerges, unclouded by attachments. To illustrate this, consider the experience of watching a movie. When deeply engrossed, you become one with the characters, losing awareness of your surroundings. But as the movie ends and the lights come on, reality returns, reminding you of where you truly are. This process mirrors the journey of understanding. Initially, we are lost in the ‘movie’ of the world. As we transition to the second stage, we recognize the transient nature of this reality. The world loses its grip on us; it begins to feel superficial, prompting us to seek deeper truths. This yearning leads us toward the *Atman*, the true essence of ourselves.

Verse 52: brings us to a pivotal point: **“The Vedas deal with the three Gunas.”** These Gunas represent the attributes or personality traits that influence our lives: Sattva (purity), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia). Krishna’s message to Arjuna here is crucial: **“Be free from the three Gunas. Do not let the pairs of opposites weigh you down.”**

Consider the opposites in our lives—honor and dishonor, pleasure and pain, gain and loss. Krishna invites Arjuna to transcend these dualities. He urges us to cultivate stability, enabling us to see everything with equanimity. This is no easy feat; it requires a conscious effort to rise above chaos and seek our true selves. Krishna advises, **“Be free from acquisition and preservation.”** *Yōga* refers to acquisition, while *Kshema* means protecting what has been acquired. He encourages us to be free from both and to establish ourselves in the Self.

The *Vedas*, ancient texts of knowledge, explore these three Gunas in depth. The term *Veda* itself signifies authentic knowledge, transcending mere facts or figures. The sages who recorded these truths were not merely scholars; they were seekers who devoted their lives to meditation and enlightenment. Their wisdom did not stem from classrooms but from profound contemplation in solitude.

Consider the laws of nature. They exist independently of human interpretation. Just as Newton did not create the law of gravity but merely uncovered it, the sages of the *Vedas* revealed truths that have always been embedded in reality. The vastness of the *Vedas* is evident in their structure: 80% covers rituals, known as *Karma Kanda* (sacrificial and ceremonial rites), 16% focuses on devotion through hymns, or *Upasanas* (worship), while only 4% is dedicated to spiritual wisdom—the very essence we are exploring now. This seemingly small portion holds immense value, offering profound insights into the nature of existence.

Some may fear that delving into spiritual texts necessitates renouncing worldly pleasures, potentially leading to a loss of wealth or status. However, the paradox is that embracing spirituality often brings greater abundance. Reflect on this: our existence frequently revolves around two fundamental drives—acquisition and preservation. We continuously strive for more, yet Krishna proposes an alternative: selfless action, or *Karma Yōga*. He assures us that when we act unselfishly, blessings far exceed our own efforts. This idea resonates across traditions, including Christianity. A friend well-versed in biblical scripture often reflects on this principle, emphasizing how spiritual paths lead to fulfillment.

Krishna teaches that while our actions yield various outcomes, they should not dictate our motivations. We must embrace the concept of **“acting without attachment.”** Whether we succeed or fail, what matters is that we act. By engaging in *Karma Yōga*—selfless action—we ultimately find inner peace.

A beautiful Sanskrit concept, *Atmavan Bhava*, means to enlighten oneself first. By embodying purity, everything else begins to align. **The three Gunas—Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva**—illustrate our mental states. Krishna urges us to transcend these dualities. By embracing a Sattvic state, we navigate life with balance, alleviating concerns about wealth, relationships, and social status.

Verse 53: **“When your intellect is perplexed by what has been heard, it shall stand immovable and steady in meditation, and you will attain unity with the Self.”** This verse suggests that when the intellect is overwhelmed by conflicting perceptions, true stillness can be found in meditation. The mind, often likened to a restless monkey jumping from one branch to another, requires discipline and focus. *Karma Yōga*, by tempering desires, helps regulate these distractions, while meditation refines concentration even further.

To illustrate meditation more vividly, consider the metaphor of a flame. Many spiritual traditions including several in Indonesia, use a flame to symbolize meditation. When a breeze blows, the flame flickers. Similarly, when thoughts and desires run rampant, meditation seems impossible. However, with persistent practice, the breeze calms, and the flame stabilizes, allowing for deep meditation and leading to self-realization. When the intellect experiences the stillness of silence, it invites us to delve deeper within ourselves.

In essence, the lessons within these verses, though challenging, lay the foundation for higher understanding. Each insight is crucial. Even if these discussions may not always seem exciting, they

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EPISODE 27 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 - Verses 54 - 59



The *Bhagavad Gita* offers a profound exploration of self-realization, with Chapter 2 standing out as a cornerstone of its teachings. This chapter, particularly **verses 54 through 59**, lays the foundation for understanding life's challenges, making it essential reading for spiritual seekers.

We often hear about Self-Realized individuals—those who possess an unwavering understanding of life—figures like the Buddha or Jesus Christ. Though I have come across stories of enlightened beings in the Himalayas, my personal encounters remain limited. For many who study the *Gita* and *Vedanta*, the true essence of Self-Realization can seem elusive.

Verse 54: Arjuna asks Krishna, “**What does a Self-Realized person look like? How does such a person speak, or sit, or walk?**”. In Sanskrit, such a person is called *sthitaprajna*—one whose wisdom remains steady, unshaken by external circumstances. But what makes this wisdom so unshakable? Moments of clarity come to all of us, yet under pressure, that clarity often fades.

For instance, I may remain composed when I misplace my Mont Blanc pen or a cherished watch. But when confronted with more significant struggles, like family conflicts, that same composure can quickly give way to frustration. A *sthitaprajna*, however, remains unperturbed even in life's greatest storms; their wisdom is not fleeting but deeply rooted, untouched by external turmoil.

Arjuna seeks to understand what it truly means to embody *sthitaprajna* when merged with higher awareness. He wants to know how such a person sits, walks, and speaks—not in a literal sense, but in terms of their inner essence, their solitude, their interactions with the world, and the way they express themselves. The *Gita*, written thousands of years ago, conveys its wisdom in deeply symbolic language, inviting careful contemplation. A person who has reached the point of enlightenment, or Self-Realization - how does a person conduct themselves through activities? through their personal conduct in life? How does he “speak” refers to all the Organs of Action. “Speech” symbolises one action.” Sit” refers to when a person is alone with themselves - hwo do they respond to their inner feelings and thoughts? “Work” refers to their relationship and their external world. How do they react to external events and environment.

Verse 55: Krishna responds: “**a person of steady wisdom is one who has cast off desires and finds contentment within**”. This teaching highlights a fundamental truth—when we turn inward and discover joy from within, that happiness surpasses anything the external world can offer. Erich Fromm famously stated, “Happiness is essentially the release of stress.” We often experience joy as the lifting of tension, but true happiness does not require prior suffering.

Consider a parent whose child, serving in the military, suddenly goes missing, leaving them in unbearable anxiety. The moment they reunite, relief washes over them, and joy emerges. Yet the *Gita* teaches that the highest form of happiness does not stem from relief but from an unshaken inner peace—one that does not rely on external circumstances. When we find contentment within ourselves, the need for external validation diminishes.

As we evolve, so do our desires. Think back to childhood, when we were fascinated by toys—marbles, comic books, or dolls. As we grew, our interests shifted to bicycles, friendships, and later, to money and status. If someone were to offer me those childhood toys now, I might appreciate the nostalgia but feel no desire to play with them. This transformation reveals an important truth: **the best way to detach from lower pursuits is to seek higher ones naturally**. Only by elevating our aspirations can we move beyond fleeting desires.

Moving towards Self-Realization requires shedding selfish desires. Krishna will later emphasize that we should engage with the world using our intellect. For example, a diabetic might crave sweets, but wisdom guides them to resist. **The key is to participate in life without clinging to it.**

Consider a tribal chief who treasures his beads and feathers. To someone with a more modern perspective, these items might seem trivial. Socrates once observed that the vast accumulation of possessions by humans often reveals how much we can actually live without.

To cultivate happiness, we must simplify our lives by releasing material attachments. The first step is *Shravana*—listening to teachings that reflect our true selves. This is the role of the *Gita*, offering reflections that help us recognize our innermost nature and understand *Brahman*.

As we listen and reflect on these insights, we begin to question. The next step is *Manana*—contemplation, where we engage deeply with what we’ve learned. Finally, there is *Nididhyasana*, true understanding, which leads to a state of awareness that, while easy to grasp, is challenging to sustain.

For much of our lives, we identify ourselves solely with our bodies and minds, forgetting our broader connection to the universe. But when we reassess our identity as part of a greater whole, our everyday concerns appear smaller by comparison.

Verse 56: Krishna describes the self-realized person: “**one whose mind is not shaken by sorrow or excessively elated by joy, free from desire, fear, and anger**”. Such a sage remains unruffled by emotional highs and lows. The lives of Jesus Christ and the Buddha exemplify this—neither reacted excessively to bad news or good news.

A self-realized individual experiences emotions but is not governed by them. Like Lord Ram, who gracefully accepted both the joy of being crowned and the sorrow of his exile, the enlightened remain balanced amidst life’s ups and downs.

Cultivating steady wisdom requires growth through a love for higher concepts. As we embark on this journey, lower desires will naturally diminish. When we fail to know ourselves, we may feel an empty void, seeking to fill it with worldly pleasures—ultimately leading to fleeting happiness.

This builds upon the earlier discussion about mastering opposites and maintaining calm in both loss and joy. The second lesson from the *Gita* is that to meditate effectively, one must relinquish desires; otherwise, closing one’s eyes only invites a torrent of wishes.

Verse 57: “**He is everywhere, but without attachment. He meets good and evil without rejoicing or hating**”. Krishna teaches that thoughts of the world lead to attachments, which can bind us. When desires go unfulfilled, they transform into frustration. These blocked desires breed anger, and fulfilled desires provoke a fear of loss. **This trio—desire, anger, and fear—forms the “Triple Gates of Hell.”**

When Arjuna seeks clarity on how a self-realized person interacts with the world, Krishna explains that such a person engages with their environment without attachment, unaffected by pleasure or pain. This sage acts wisely, participating in life but not drowning in it.

To illustrate, we might admire a yogi living high in the Himalayas, seemingly untouched by worldly distractions. Yet Krishna asserts that true wisdom lies in engaging with life while remaining unattached to it.

How can we achieve this? By recognizing our attachments—whether to possessions, relationships, or ambitions. The *Gita* advises that while we may be surrounded by material wealth, we must learn to appreciate without claiming ownership.

For example, consider driving a rental car. If you accidentally damage it, you might shrug it off, knowing the rental company will cover the cost. But if it were your own car, your heart would race with concern. The lesson here is that joy comes from appreciating the experience, not being burdened by ownership. Apply this logic to your relationships, as well as your ambitions.

When a delicious aroma wafts from the kitchen while I'm on a diet, my senses are immediately drawn toward the source. This reaction can hijack my intentions. A disciplined mind must counteract this urge, learning to resist cravings and pull back when necessary.

Understanding how our senses operate involves three key steps: *receiving stimuli, reacting, and responding*. *Vedanta* encourages us to rise above these instinctive responses, recognizing that deeper fulfillment lies beyond them.

Just as the intellect controls our sensory impulses, steady wisdom arises from knowing what truly matters. As we reflect on our nature, we can differentiate between fleeting desires and lasting joy.

Our continual growth depends on **remaining unattached while fully participating in life**. The *Gita* teaches liberation from external conditions that dictate our happiness. The tortoise metaphor emphasizes the importance of **retreating into introspection when faced with challenges**.

Past lessons resonate throughout the text: we must **avoid environments that entice us into temptation and recognize our personal weaknesses**. Surrounding ourselves with supportive communities, like Alcoholics Anonymous, can be essential, helping individuals overcome addiction through shared experiences.

Wealth is often misunderstood; it's simply a tool that loses its value when hoarded. Hindu mythology illustrates this through the figures of *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth, and *Kubera*, the god who represents the dangers of mishandling riches.

Rama Tirtha, a notable sage, observed that gold and iron only hold value when exchanged for necessities. We often lose sight of this fundamental truth.

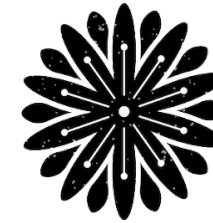
Verse 59: “The sense objects turn away from an abstinent person. But the desire for them does not turn away until you reach the state of Self-Realization”. The teaching in verse 59 reminds us that desires govern our engagement with sense objects. Without cravings, worldly distractions fade. But when we cultivate desires for deeper understanding, even past attractions lose their significance. Interestingly, when one abstains from sensual indulgences, those sense objects will come and tempt one.

In conclusion, the insights from these verses encourage us to seek higher truths, steering clear of entanglement in life's fleeting pleasures.

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EPISODE 28 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 - Verses 60 - 66



In the quiet corners of our minds, a constant battle rages between what we desire and what truly serves us. We dive into this age-old struggle as we explore *verses 60 to 66* from Chapter 2 of the Gita. These verses shed light on how our senses can lead our minds astray, ultimately affecting our decisions and even our very sense of self.

Verse 60: “The turbulent senses of even a wise man, while striving, indeed forcibly carry away his mind”. This imagery resembles a small boat tossed in a fearsome storm, unable to navigate. In this analogy, the ocean symbolizes the chaotic world around us, the boat signifies ourselves, the captain represents our intellect, and the stormy wind embodies our senses. After the senses carry away the mind, how the mind carries away the intellect. Essentially, at this point, without mind or intellect, a human being is functioning purely on the demands of their senses. We have seen many famous people in this situation, and how their lives are destroyed by this. The intellect must always firmly remain at the helm. It means that the mind gives in completely to the sense organs without any thought of consequences. The intellect should allow the sense organs, and the mind, to indulge in the sense objects in a controlled manner.

The scriptures are filled with cautionary tales about how various species succumb to their attractions, consider moths drawn to a flame, fish to bait, or deer that are attracted to sound, bees that are drawn to nectar: all die in the process. Don’t indulge, control yourself, and stay away from bad company (people who encourage you to indulge. Stay away from people who cause you to fall prey to your senses. Seek out those who uplift you.

We’re not isolated in the mountains or faraway villages; our surroundings bombard us with temptations. Everywhere we turn, glossy magazine ads, flashy TV commercials, and eye-catching billboards scream for our attention, painting everything as irresistibly appealing. The reality is that wherever our vulnerabilities lie, that’s where we tend to falter. Take a moment to think about it; commercials aren’t just showcasing one attraction, they hit us with a range of sensory delights. Picture that frosty glass of beer, or a mouthwatering plate of food, paired with stunning vacation destinations, all roped in to capture our interest. Social media amplifies this, cleverly tapping into our tastes and desires. Those senses of ours can carry away our minds faster than we can imagine.

According to Vedanta, our senses are meant for enjoyment, and let's be honest that complete detachment from them isn't feasible. We can't aim to live like hermits. Instead, our goal should be to use our intellect wisely, guiding our senses in a more balanced way.

Then there's us, humans, drawn to all five senses and more. Sometimes, we find ourselves attracted to those who speak with wisdom or sing beautifully. It's not about cutting everything out; it's about exercising control, steering clear of bad influences, and moderating our indulgences.

Identifying our weaknesses is key. Some may struggle with food, while others find it easier to resist those temptations but may be vulnerable to the allure of visual entertainments like TV series. You might care less for worldly attractions yet yearn for respect and recognition. We all have our soft spots. As we delve deeper into this verse, it's evident how unbridled senses can lead to poor choices.

Verse 61: "Having controlled them all he should sit focused on Me, as supreme. Therefore, his wisdom is established indeed whose senses are in control". With our senses in check, we can maintain focus on the Self or God. This self-discipline lays the groundwork for wisdom, **"the mind can take away the intellect"** is described very well in a poem that Swami Parthasarthy talks about, called *The Pond*. The hen and its little chick. The little chick wants to swim in a pond like the ducks and its ducklings. Mother hen cautions its chick and says, "you are not like the ducks and you will drown". When the mother hen goes away, the little chick thinks, why not? The mind of the chick is so intent in the desire to swim that it justifies its false confidence and convinces the hapless intellect, *"I can swim just like those ducklings can because I'm just like them"* and makes a mistake and drowns. We all have this situation where our mind justifies wrong actions, and when that happens, the mind holds the intellect hostage without us even knowing it — it's known as realization. (read "The Pond")

Only when you meditate, you achieve control over your senses and mind. When it comes to meditation, achieving control over our senses and minds is crucial. Attempting to meditate without this groundwork can leave your thoughts scattered and unfocused. The big question is, should meditation be our first goal, or do we need to establish control first? The answer is clear: **developing this control makes us increasingly ready for meditation.**

Being mindful about where we need control is essential. Is it food, perhaps alcohol, or some other specific allure? The scriptures depict women as significant temptations, but this applies to men too. Everyone grapples with their attractions. The crux is knowing where your vulnerabilities lie.

This brings us to a vital mantra of three essentials:

location, company, and time of day.

Location: think about it, an alcoholic finds themselves in a bar, the temptation is at its peak. In contrast, being around supportive friends can help mitigate those urges.

If certain places ignite temptation, it's best to steer clear of them. In India, there are gatherings called *Satsang* (Satsang derives from the Sanskrit words sat being, essence, or reality) and *sanga* (association) where people share uplifting speeches and spiritual wisdom, fostering a positive atmosphere.

Company: company matters too; surrounding yourself with encouraging friends aids in resisting harmful habits.

Time of the day: Let's not overlook the importance of timing. Scriptures introduce us to concepts like *Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas*, which are related to our states of being. *Tamas* stands for lethargy and idleness, which can influence how we think about aspects like food and charity. Navigating these principles will create a smoother journey. What the scriptures suggest is going to bed early. Perhaps you've heard the saying, *"Early to bed, early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise"*. It rings true. By sleeping early, you're slashing through a large chunk of that tamasic time. But these days, it seems many of us are sleeping through the peaceful, sattvic hours instead. Around that time, the temptation can be particularly enticing.

When we discuss the best time of the day, we often refer to an early morning window known as *Brahma Muhurta* (often called The Creator's Time). The Creator or *Brahma* is the ultimate knowledge and *Muhurta* means time period. Brahma Muhurta is the time period, perfect to perceive the ultimate knowledge. Brahma Muhurta time is the early morning period, which falls between roughly 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. This special time is thought to foster a tranquil mind, a peaceful setting. I remember when we were taught us to rise early; at first, it was a struggle. There's solid reasoning behind this early wake-up call. We know that specific hormones, such as endorphins, are released at that time, the hormones that promote well-being. It's during Brahma muhurta, when our thoughts are calm and focused, that we experience the most clarity while studying. It's striking how, once the sun rises, daily to-do list start flooding our mind.

From sunrise to sunset, our thoughts drift towards tasks and responsibilities. However, after sunset until about 4 a.m., we enter tamasic hours, the time when laziness creeps in, encouraging unhealthy habits like drinking, gorging on spicy foods, or simply flopping down on the couch to binge-watch shows.

After all, even those overcoming addiction may find their craving for a drink less overwhelming between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. Even casinos have to close for a couple of hours. The time that they close is during the Brahma Murtha because they say the least amount of people come down to gamble at that time. They're all sleeping or away from the casinos so even they recognize what is Brahma Muhurta. However, the same cannot be said for evenings when temptations are strong.

Verses 62 and 63, are known as the "Ladder of Fall."

Verse 62 and 63: “A man musing on objects develops attachment to them. From the attachment arises desire. From desire arises anger. From anger arises delusion. From delusion arises confusion of memory, loss of intellect, and from loss of intellect, he perishes”. This explains how a person’s thoughts on desirable objects can quickly turn into attachment and desires. Continuing down this path, we find ourselves lost in anger, delusion, confusion, memory suppression, and ultimately, a steep decline in our intellect.

As human beings, at our core, we possess profound bliss and happiness, yet we often forget this truth. Our thoughts get tangled in the external world, seeking fulfillment where it can never be found. If our intellect isn’t guiding our wayward thoughts, they can expand beyond measure, leading to misjudgments.

Consider a scenario: a man in an office becomes enamored by a colleague’s beauty. At first, he steals a glance, then he finds himself glancing back, and this initial curiosity blossoms into unwanted attachment. Attachment is a powerful force. It draws the mind back time and again, creating a preoccupation that eventually overshadows all boundaries. Delusion further complicates matters, urging him to ignore potential risks to his job, marriage, and personal well-being. We’ve all experienced similar situations at some point in our life. When you cannot have that object you become angry. Delusion refers to a false sense of how things may turn out. “Memory loss” — you forget what is “right” or “wrong”. What is “good” or “bad”. You forget your position, your obligation, your relationship to the world. Then lose your intellect.

Verse 63: “The attachment clouds judgment and we lose memories”. This doesn’t refer to forgetting; what it means is you lose your memory of where you are in your life, what your position is; you lose that and start doing crazy things. You make huge mistakes, and your life goes down the tube. This encapsulates the essence of the “Ladder of Fall.”

Verse 64: “The self-controlled man, free from likes and dislikes, moving about with senses under control, attains peace”. Moving about objects you do not have to stay away from sense subjects or move to the Himalayas. You have to remain in the world where these objects confront you. But do not indulge indiscriminately. Be vigilant — using your intellect — and indulge to an appropriate extent. Self control — becomes free from ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’. The emphasis here is on control—repeated for a reason. Life doesn’t require us to detach completely; instead, we learn to navigate the world where temptations will always be present. The key is moderation, allowing ourselves to indulge wisely.

Imagine a diabetic who has received advice to avoid sweets. At first, they refuse them completely, but as time passes and they demonstrate control, their doctor might allow an occasional treat. Here lies the crux: self-control is essential. Self-control means steering clear of blind pursuit of pleasure based on likes and dislikes. It’s common for many of us to cater to those likes while disregarding dislikes. I’m guilty of it with my grandchildren, “Oh, you love this? Have some! Not a fan? No problem, skip it.” The mind naturally gravitates toward instant gratification. This is a vital point to grasp. The things that deliver immediate pleasure are attractive, while those with delayed results often get pushed aside, even if they’re beneficial in the long run. Take exercise for example, as it is painful at first but rewarding as we settle into it. The challenge lies in muscling through those initial dislikes.

There are three key concepts we need to understand:

1. Likes and dislikes: Our actions should be guided by our intellect, which acts as a protective shell, rather than by fleeting personal preferences. But in reality, we often do the opposite. For example, I’m guilty of this with my grandchildren: “You like this? Have some more.”, “You don’t like it? That’s okay, you don’t have to eat it”. We reinforce preferences and avoid discomfort, rather than teaching ourselves or others to manage them. The mind naturally seeks instant gratification. It enjoys what is pleasurable right away and resists anything that requires effort but offers delayed rewards. Yet, because it is not immediately pleasant, the mind resists it. The key is to move beyond likes and dislikes, as the goal is to be free from their influences.

2. The intellect’s role in indulgence: The intellect determines how much indulgence is appropriate. This is straightforward — balance is necessary.

3. Lingering: Lingering on past experiences, especially pleasurable one, can be problematic. For example, if I have an amazing meal at a restaurant, I need to let go of my memory instead of dwelling on it. Why? Because lingering does two things:

It amplifies the experience. I build it up in my mind, setting unrealistic expectations. When I return, the reality may not measure up, leading to disappointment.

It fuels new desires. The more I think about it, the more I want to relive it, creating a cycle of craving and dissatisfaction.

The goal is to free ourselves from excessive desires, which disrupts inner peace. Lingering also prevents us from being present. If I keep thinking about that meal while working, my attention is divided. I neither fully enjoy my work nor perform it well. And when I do return to the restaurant, I may not enjoy the experience as much because I’ve built it too much. In short, lingering keeps us stuck in the past, disrupts the present, and fuels future cravings. It’s something to be mindful of and avoid.

Furthermore, we must avoid lingering in pleasant experiences from the past. If I visit a restaurant and thoroughly enjoy a meal, I need to keep that experience in context. If I obsess over how fantastic that meal was, I’m bound to feel disappointed next time. Lingering not only amplifies our desire but can take away from our present experiences. When my mind is consumed with memories of a fantastic meal, I’m not fully immersed in my current tasks, which inhibits my focus and performance at the moment.

Each of us possesses what is called *SwaDharma*, our unique set of qualities and purposes. Everyone's *Dharma* is crucial, and it's inherent in our being. When we align with our true self, we often encounter our '*SwaDharma*'. For example, if someone feels innately drawn toward music but is nudged toward another career path, they are likely to feel dissatisfaction. It's essential to recognize those intrinsic interests while also applying reason and moderation.

Verse 65: "When your mind is controlled by the intellect, you are at peace. In peace, all sorrows are destroyed". The tranquil mind will soon find steadiness. When guided by intellect, peace prevails. Without that guidance, we often find our emotions and desires controlling us.

A surgeon has operated many times doing a particularly complicated surgery. When he's not attached and his mind is not disturbed, he can perform the same surgery while speaking about his vacation or even whistling and humming. He can do it almost without even thinking about the surgery because he has done it thousands of times. Imagine that his loved one is on the table, his only child. His hands are shaking because he is nervous and sweating. People start to make conversation. He says, "Don't talk. I have to concentrate." He can do this blindfolded at other times. The reason is that his mind is agitated. If the intellect has complete control, then these disturbances don't happen. Swamiji gives the example of a man walking on a plank, a small plank nine inches wide. He can walk across it easily when the plank is on the ground. But put the same plank between two skyscrapers and ask, "Can you do it?". Now he can't because his mind is fearful. A strong intellect gives you both peace and prosperity, not just peace.

When your mind is peaceful, your intellect is peaceful. Your intellect can concentrate better without the distractions of the underlying mind. ***When you can concentrate better, you act better, think better, and you're able to achieve more.***

Take a moment to think about all the thoughts that clutter our minds: "Did they really mean it when they said that?" or "Why didn't things go as I planned?" These emotions disrupt our peace. A mind in turmoil can't think clearly, and without clarity, we can't act rationally. Stress, fundamentally, is a product of an uncontrolled mind.

Consider a seasoned surgeon accustomed to precision. His mind can wander while he operates wholly detached from worry. Contrast this with a situation where a loved one is on the operating table; an agitated mind can lead to mishaps. Achieving peace helps sharpen intellect and enhances concentration, leading to better judgment and action.

Verse 66: "There's neither knowledge nor meditation for the unsteady. To the unmeditated, there is no peace. Therefore, to the peaceless, how can there be happiness?"

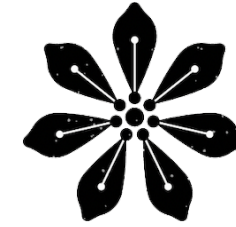
It is self-explanatory: where there is knowledge—knowledge of the Self and these concepts—you can control your senses, and thus, you can meditate. If you are unsteady, there is neither knowledge nor meditation. For those who lack meditation, there is no peace. As we discussed before, the mind is constantly agitated with thoughts. Without peace, how can there be happiness? True happiness can only arise when both the mind and intellect are at rest

This phrase underscores the integral relationship between knowledge, control of the senses, and the potential for meditation. Unsteadiness breeds agitation and chaos. Without peace within us, finding happiness becomes incredibly difficult.

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EPISODE 29 / THE GITA

Chapter 2 - Verses 67 - 72



Chapter 2, verses 67 to 72. Many people believe that the essence of the Gita truly emerges in Chapter 3, where practical advice starts to take shape, guiding us on how to move forward. Until now, we've been immersed in the basics, learning about the *Atman* and delving into the foundational aspects of this philosophical text. Now, we start to grasp what we need to do to advance on our own paths.

There's something special about diving into these chapters. Long ago, the Gita wasn't just read; it was sung, passed down orally from generation to generation. This isn't just a book; it's a tradition, a living experience shared among families. Every verse in the Gita carries a unique rhythm and sound. When studying under a guru, the first step is to sing each verse, allowing its essence to resonate. Yet, many of us aren't fluent in Sanskrit, which can make things a bit tricky. That's why it's so helpful to refer to English translations. Hearing someone explain it is one thing, but having a copy in front of you to refer back to all the differences.

I've explored several translations of the Gita, and I personally believe that Swami Parthasarathy's interpretation strikes the right chord. It's an authentic and approachable translation, and I encourage everyone to get a copy of Swami Parthasarathy's *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* as we delve deeper into the verses. My own exploration of these teachings has enriched my life in ways I never imagined. The insights we share are not just academic; they're intertwined with my own experiences, making this discussion even more meaningful.

Focusing on verses 67 through 72 of Chapter 2. This chapter revolves around Sankhya, or the Yoga of Knowledge. Yoga signifies a union, a way to come together. Sankhya Yoga emphasizes that understanding and knowledge are crucial steps toward realizing one's true self.

In contrast, Chapter 3 introduces *Karma Yôga*, or the Yoga of Action. *Karma* relates to our actions and the activities we engage in. It's intriguing to note that Arjuna's first question to Krishna in that chapter addresses the dilemma he faces: ***is it more important to acquire knowledge, or to engage in action?*** This sets the stage for an ongoing discussion about how we can effectively navigate our paths.

It's vital to recognize that true peace and self-realization stem from knowledge. Meditation is key to achieving this peace. From what I've learned, most people won't attain complete self-realization in one lifetime, but that's okay. Reflecting on my own journey, I find myself wishing I had begun embracing these teachings sooner. The further I go in my understanding; the sweeter life becomes.

We often find ourselves feeling happier and more peaceful as we delve deeper into these practices.

But why is this peace so profound? It's all about unravelling the chains of desire. These desires can create a whirlwind of thoughts and obsessions, leading to mental noise. *Karma Yoga* offers a pathway to untangle ourselves from these desires.

Self-mastery is crucial for happiness. Instead of being driven by external influences or desires, we must take control of our own being. These verses emphasize that it's essential to master our senses, as Krishna advises Arjuna. If we allow our senses to take over, our minds can spiral out of control, leading us on a chaotic path.

Picture this: when you sit down to meditate, your mind is often overwhelmed with a flood of desires and thoughts. It's as if you're trying to look calm while a relentless stream of ideas rushes through your brain. This whirlwind makes meditation feel impossible. Without meditation, achieving tranquility becomes exceedingly difficult. To find this inner peace, we need to quiet our desires or at the very least, lessen their noise. An important step moving forward is to avoid generating new desires. Every one of us enters this world with an inherited set of desires. Think of newborn twins growing up side by side; while they may seem similar, each will likely have distinct desires even at a young age. These desires stem from earlier lives, known as *vasanas*, shaping our inclinations and drives. There are certain vigorous desires we often encounter, the longing for power, wealth, fame, love, and other pleasures tied to our physical existence. Next up are emotional desires: attachments to family, friends, and loved ones. Finally, we have intellectual desires, which might involve seeking respect or recognition from others.

It's important to remember that these desires are ingrained in our being. They have followed us through lifetimes, constituting a huge part of our identity. They're tricky to shake off. While we can indulge them, Chapter 3 illustrates the importance of indulging wisely to avoid escalating these desires. We shouldn't create new desires on top of our existing ones. This is key as we move forward. While grappling with current desires is challenging, generating new ones can complicate our journey even more. Without meditation, we'll struggle to encounter authentic peace and calmness. True tranquility comes from a place within, an unshakable peace that automatically fosters happiness.

Verse 67: *“For the mind, which follows the roaming senses, carries away his intellect as the wind carries away a boat on water.”* This analogy is drawn from the Upanishads. Here, the ocean symbolizes our world, while the boat represents us. The captain is our intellect, and the strong winds illustrate the desires tugging at our minds. The compass guiding the captain is our knowledge and the wisdom we acquire along the way.

Looking back at *verse 60*, it mentions how powerful sense objects can entice the senses, leading the mind astray. **In verse 67**, we see how the mind can overshadow our intellect entirely. We can easily lose sight of what truly matters because our intellect may justify the choices our desires push us towards, even those that might harm us.

This pattern is not uncommon; many well-known figures have succumbed to their desires, acting against their better judgment. The desire may drive the mind and senses, while the intellect merely tags along.

The warning in *verse 67* is clear: don't let your intellect fall victim to the confusion created by your mind and senses. Otherwise, everything you've worked for may slip away.

Verse 68: *“Therefore, O Mahabaho (O mighty or the powerful one), his wisdom is established whose senses are completely restrained from the sense objects”.* This is a powerful image; a wise person is often likened to a turtle. When faced with potential harm, a turtle withdraws its limbs into its shell to protect itself, and here, the shell symbolizes the intellect that safeguards us from life's chaos.

The Gita often reinforces its messages by restating concepts in different ways, emphasizing the significance of self-control over indulgence. The pull toward sensual pleasures can lead us astray, and true mastery involves reigning in our sense organs. Recall the organs of action: our hands, legs, and voice box, among others. We can control our hands to avoid physical aggression and manage our bodily functions appropriately. However, our voices often lead us astray, saying things we shouldn't, while our sexual urges can lead to significant trouble. We often seek instant gratification, much like a child who prefers candy over a wholesome meal. The mind gravitates toward immediate pleasure, avoiding the effort needed to seek long-term joy that requires work.

As I reflect on these lessons, I think of how children behave. In many ways, children lack their own intellect until they mature. We, as caregivers and mentors, serve as their guiding intellects. Throughout history, individuals would undergo rituals marking their growth, signifying their readiness to take on this responsibility.

Verse 69: *“That which is night to all beings, there in the self-controlled one keeps awake. That in which beings are awake is night to the sage who sees”.* In simpler terms, the things most people chase don't yield the same joy for someone who has awakened spiritually. The experiences of the common person can contrast starkly with those of a self-realized individual.

A self-realized person dwells in a state of continuous bliss and understanding while the rest of the world remains trapped in their perceptions and reactions to experiences. This distinction is like comparing night to day. Self-Realized beings are in total bliss at all times. They do not wish to be bound to the superficial and temporary pleasures of the world. To them this is 'night' whereas to the rest of us, that is 'day'. Our body seeks sensory pleasure, our mind seeks emotions, our intellect seeks fame, respect. We humans are 'bound' to this. The Self-Realized are liberated from this.

Verse 70: *“As the waters enter the ocean, which fills from all sides and remains undisturbed. Likewise, he in whom all objects of enjoyment enter attains peace, not the desirer of objects”.* Picture rivers with unique personalities flowing into the vast, undisturbed ocean. You, like those rivers, may have your character, but in the grand scheme of things, we all merge into the greater whole.

When the water merges into the ocean, it doesn't disrupt the ocean's tranquility. As the water is pouring in, you don't see that the ocean is going up. This comes from the *Mundaka Upanishad*, this particular metaphor of rivers and oceans. Basically, it's telling us that you are the river, and you are ultimately going to merge with your *Atman*, which is going to merge with the *Brahman*. The ocean represents *Brahman*, the infinite source, while the desire-ridden individual continues to struggle with their cravings, unable to find peace.

Verse 71: "A person who abandons all desires while moving through life without yearning and without the sense of 'I' and 'mine' achieves true peace." Key points here are abandonment of desires and living without cravings.

Living in the world yet detached from outcomes is crucial; it's not about hiding away from temptations but rather understanding them. The notion of "I" and "mine" weighs us down, as if we were holding onto heavy stones. The reality is that our achievements are the result of support from countless others.

Every accomplishment stems from a web of experiences and teachings shared by those before us. When we say, "this is mine," we overlook the reality that most things we claim will remain long after we're gone.

Our attachment to the term "mine" distracts us from the ultimate truth. Even the pride we feel in our children, or our possessions, can detract from our peace. Glorifying ourselves on social media promotes that same disconnect.

Imagining ourselves as actors on a stage, we often forget that our roles, while important, are just part of a larger play. There's a deeper identity that connects us all.

Remember the saying, *Aham Brahmasmi*? It translates to *I am Brahman*, reminding us that we are part of this infinite reality. It's not just about being "me," but about recognizing our connection to a much vaster existence.

Verse 72: "This is the state of Brahman. Attaining which, none is deluded. Being established there in Brahman, even at the end of life, one attains oneness with Brahman". *Brahman* comes from the Sanskrit prefix "Brh." "Brh" means big, infinite. It concludes our exploration, stating that when one reaches this state, they are never misled. While resident in the knowledge of *Brahman*, even in the twilight of life, one shall attain unity with that vastness.

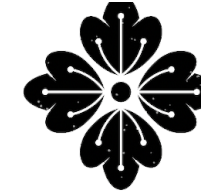
Brahman refers to the infinite existence, while *Atman* represents our individual essence. While we may see ourselves as separate from *Brahman*, we are ultimately inextricably linked, much like space in a pot to a space in which everything exists including the pot. Initially, we might confine ourselves to our own perceptions, but as our understanding broadens, we start realizing our connection to all.

Let's remember that each chapter opens a new door to wisdom. In our next chapter, we'll embark on Chapter 3, centering on *Karma Yōga*.

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EPISODE 30 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 1 - 7



Diving into Chapter 3, we explore the concept of *Karma Yoga*, often referred to as “the path of action.” This chapter guides us toward discovering our true selves through our actions.

It’s an interesting thought – the journey to becoming peaceful and blissful can lead to greater success in life. When our minds and intellect are settled, we find it much easier to focus on what we’re doing. This clarity doesn’t just boost our own productivity; it also makes a strong impression on those around us, like our employers and peers. The beauty of being at peace is that it allows us to accomplish so much more with less effort.

You might wonder how to reach this state of peace. Meditation is a powerful tool in this process, but let’s be honest: it’s pretty tough to settle your mind when it’s filled to the brim with racing thoughts. One significant way to clear those thoughts is to tackle our desires. We all have certain deep-rooted desires, sometimes they can seem unavoidable. Each of us should take a moment to ponder our greatest challenges in this area.

Take, for instance, the desire for a favorite treat. Just picture it – cookies! Some might find this desire easy to conquer, while others may struggle with stronger cravings for things like money, power, or status. If a particular desire feels too overwhelming, it’s often best to set it aside and focus on smaller, more manageable ones. Addressing these smaller desires first can lead to greater progress in our journey.

Verse 1: Arjuna asks Krishna, “If you consider knowledge, which is Sankhya Yoga, superior to action, then why do you ask me to engage in this terrible action of war”. This moment highlights a key theme in the Gita: understanding the balance between knowledge and action.

Imagine walking past a wise sage, perhaps a self-realized Buddha. You see him sitting cross-legged under a tree, completely at peace, while people quietly offer him food from a distance. You might think, “I could do that!” But contrast this with your own experience. While you might try to sit still beside him, your mind races with thoughts about tasks left undone, like raking leaves or tidying up. This inner dialogue pulls you away from reaching that meditative state.

Verse 2: Arjuna says, “*You are confusing me with your contradictory statements; therefore, tell me one thing. If I were to follow either Karma or knowledge, Krishna, tell me with certainty that one way with which I may obtain the highest*”. He feels torn by Krishna’s mixed messages and insists on clarity. As a soldier, he wants straightforward guidance on whether to pursue *Karma* (action) or knowledge.

Imagine attempting to find peace next to the sage, but your mind is screaming at you about unfinished chores. This leads us to a crucial point: to attain knowledge, one must first engage in action. However, it’s essential to approach this action with the intention of serving others, rather than simply fulfilling personal desires.

Verse 3: Krishna says to Arjuna that “*in this world, there are two-fold paths: as I have said before, the path of knowledge “for the Sankhya people, who are contemplative, and the path of action for the yogis*”. He suggests starting with *Karma Yoga*, action for the sake of others before eventually moving into a more contemplative state.

As we act selflessly, something interesting happens. Many of our desires begin to fade away, almost like they get burned up in the energy we expend. When we engage in actions without seeking recognition or rewards for ourselves, we foster a more peaceful and reflective mindset.

Verse 4: “*The state of enlightenment is also freedom from all action. If you abstain from action, that does not mean you are ‘actionless. Nor by mere renunciation do you attain perfection*”. In Sanskrit, this is expressed as *Naishkarmya*, meaning no action, no *Karma*. Think of it as being like a lighthouse that remains unshaken in the midst of a storm. While everything swirls around it, the lighthouse stands firm and still. A person who has achieved self-realization embodies this same calm amid the chaos of action occurring all around them.

However, until we reach that state of inner tranquility, we often find ourselves attached to the fruits of our actions. One might consider escaping to the mountains and doing nothing but let me share a story to illustrate a more insightful perspective.

A man traveled to the Himalayas seeking peace and found a Sadhu living in a hut near a gentle stream. When he approached the Sadhu to converse, he discovered that the Sadhu spoke fluent English and had lived abroad in America and England. The man was shocked and asked the Sadhu how he ended up there, far from his life of education and travel. The Sadhu revealed that he had given up everything, wealth, power, fame. Yet, despite this complete change, he told the man he was still unhappy and contemplating a return.

Here’s the crux you might find interesting: simply abandoning action or renouncing the material world doesn’t lead to true Self-Realization. One can’t merely pretend to be spiritually elevated by ditching responsibilities and expectations. To genuinely become Self-Realized, you must engage in actions that promote growth and understanding. Every one of us deals with desires, whether they involve family, career, or reputation. These desires often stem from what is known as “*Prakriti*,” the natural tendencies formed over lifetimes. They bring forth our deepest impulses, which we need to be mindful of.

Verse 5: Krishna tells us that “*none can remain inactive*” everyone is compelled to act due to the influences of Prakriti and its inherent qualities, known as Gunas. Whether we like it or not, desires will spur us into action. It’s crucial to learn how to stifle our darker impulses (*Tamas*) and encourage the positive ones (*Sattva*).

For instance, the period between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. is considered *Sattvic*. It’s when our bodies naturally produce the most endorphins and feel-good hormones. I personally found myself enjoying early mornings after struggling at first; now those hours feel like a gift.

Yet, here’s the catch: by 6 a.m., my mind starts buzzing with the day’s to-do list, and I can sense the rise of Rajas, an urge to move and be active. In some spiritual practices, the recommendations are to meditate in the early hours when Sattva prevails, followed by physical exercise during the Rajas time, and then turning to *Karma Yoga*, acting for the community. This verse stresses the importance of reducing time spent in Tamas, the laziness phase, which commonly occurs late at night. Staying up late leads to mindless activities that don’t serve our higher selves. Instead, focus on getting a good night’s rest, rising early to meditate, and starting your day mindfully.

Verse 6: Krishna says, “*he who, restraining the organs of action, sits mentally indulging in the same sense objects, he of deluded understanding is called a hypocrite*”. Krishna warns against the hypocrisy of those who control their actions but continue to indulge mentally in desires. He highlights that merely restraining our actions while indulging in thoughts leads to confusion and delusion.

Many people may outwardly express vows of renunciation, yet inwardly battle with their cravings. True progress involves not just suppressing desires but also learning to relinquish the mind’s lingering on those desires. In the Hindu tradition, many priests lead balanced lives with families; they’re encouraged to enjoy their familial roles while avoiding mental indulgence that can lead to inner turmoil. There are sages, known as “*Brahmacharis*”, who choose to remain single, having mastered their desires at an elevated level.

Verse 7: Krishna says, “*He who restrains the senses by the mind, engages his organs of action in the yoga of action without attachment, he excels*”. Krishna tells us that the one who can harness their senses, engaging in yoga of action without attachment, truly excels. This aligns with the earlier points about the necessity of action as we pursue self-realization.

A crucial takeaway is that it’s not the action itself that drives the growth of our desires, but rather our mental engagement with those actions. For example, let’s say you love chocolate cake. If you find yourself thinking “That cake was amazing!”, after indulging, you notice your desire for cake grows stronger. But if you savor the experience while reminding yourself it’s for nourishment, your desires remain in check.

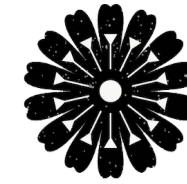
Ultimately, the Gita encourages us to savor life’s moments while also keeping our desires from dominating our thoughts. Here’s a personal touch: when I grew up in India, we had a beautiful custom of offering the first little morsels of food to a higher power before we ate. This practice reminded us that the food is not merely for our pleasure but for something greater, a method for minimizing our self-centered indulgence.

With all these insights, I hope this exploration doesn’t leave you feeling more confused. The intricacies of these teachings can sometimes overwhelm us, but constant reading & contemplating would help in progressing on a spiritual path.

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EPISODE 31 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 verses 8 - 9



Here we dive deeply into Chapter 3, where we will explore verses 8 and 9, a powerful examination of action, intention, and the profound significance of a concept known as *Yajna* (worship, sacrifice or offering).

In this episode we encounter the idea of *Yajna*, which serves as a critical focal point. Across India, ceremonies like *Havan* (offering substances to sacred fire to invoke blessings and fulfil desires) and *Puja* (ceremonial worship of Hindu deity including rituals and offerings) are prevalent; they echo the ancient practices from the period when the Gita was composed by *Sage Vyasa*. In his wisdom, Vyasa observed a trend that perturbed him deeply: people were engaging in these rituals without understanding their deeper significance. They viewed *Yajnas* as mere transactional exercises, hoping to receive divine favors from distant deities just for going through the motions. In contrast, the Gita sheds light on the meaning behind these practices, urging us to grasp the symbolic essence of each ritual.

Let's revisit the foundation we built up until the end of Chapter 2. Up to that point, Lord Krishna unfolded the concept of Sankhya Yoga, the yoga of wisdom, imparting essential knowledge about the *Atman*, the Self. This wisdom is crucial for navigating the complexities of life and ultimately grasping the deeper teachings of the Gita.

As Chapter 3 unfolds, a critical dialogue emerges where Arjuna, the protagonist, questions Krishna. Arjuna asks Lord Krishna, you told me all about this knowledge, Sankhya, and now you're telling me that I have to act. Why do I need to act? I don't need to act. Krishna says you have to act *all* the time. You're acting every second, not a second goes by where you're not acting.

Consider this: even in moments of stillness, such as when we sleep, our bodies are undergoing various processes, illustrating that inaction is a myth. At each instance, we are involved in a series of choices, whether it's choosing to sit, saying yes to a conversation, or deciding to take a walk. Therefore, Krishna emphasizes the importance of recognizing that even our choices not to act are actions in itself.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I remember a time when I visited a so-called enlightened Swami during my childhood. My family revered him for being completely motionless, believed to be devoid of action. Yet, when I observed him, he wasn't truly inactive, he was receiving food, his mouth staying in motion as his caretakers fed him. This moment serves as a reminder that action exists even when it seems absent.

Lord Krishna’s teachings lead to a critical understanding of *Karma*, or actions, encouraging us to direct our actions toward a higher purpose. Most of our daily actions are often driven by personal likes and dislikes; they revolve around self-interest. Yet, when we engage in actions driven by a noble motive elevating the greater good, peace flows in. This was **Verse 4** (recap) which says you have to act all the time.

In **Verse 5** (recap) of this chapter, Krishna emphasizes that our nature compels us to act according to our “Gunas” the three fundamental qualities of nature: “sattvic” (pure), “rajasic” (active), and “tamasic” (inert). As we indulge our desires, these desires breed more turbulence in our minds, ultimately leading us away from peace. The notion of “*vasanas*”, the subtle impressions from our past actions, comes into play here; the more we desire, the more we carry these impressions into our future lives.

By Verse 6 (recap), Krishna identifies the hypocrisy that arises when individuals may appear to stop acting physically yet continue to desire mentally. The real struggle lies within; simply ceasing physical actions doesn’t quell the innate longings that our minds harbor.

As we venture deeper, **Verse 7** (recap) advises how to manage the overwhelming desires that stem from prior lives. While we may not tame every powerful desire, Krishna distinguishes between significant cravings and incidental ones. He encourages us to indulge in the smaller desires—those fleeting ones, like wanting ice cream without letting them consume our minds. The Verses 4 through 7 were recap from previous discussions.

Verse 8: This verse brings clarity to the necessity of performing our obligatory actions, as action is deemed superior to inaction. Maintaining your body, for instance, requires exercise; the silent degeneration of muscles when immobilized in a cast speaks volumes about the need for continuous motion. A constantly moving stream is a source of freshwater, while stagnation leads to decay. Thus, activity is the essence of living.

Within this spectrum of action, we find two primary types: *Nitya Karma*, the regular duties we owe ourselves and others, and *Naimittika Karma*, the occasional special duties that arise out of circumstance. For example, each morning, our routine involves waking, working, and fulfilling our responsibilities. However, if we encounter someone in need, that’s where our *Naimittika Karma* comes in. It’s acting beyond our immediate duties.

When pondering what is right or wrong, one must turn inward, listening to their own conscience for guidance. The fabric of human duty intertwines us all, teachers owe their student knowledge, students owe respect, doctors have responsibilities toward patients, and it goes through every relationship.

Verse 9: The Gita conveys, **“this world is bound by action other than those performed for the sake of Yagna. Therefore, perform action for that sake freed from attachment”**. In ancient practices, fire sacrifices, known as *Yajna* or havan, exemplify this idea. The essence of a *Yajna* lies in dedicating one’s actions to a higher cause, transforming everyday tasks into acts of worship.

Visualize a traditional *Yajna*: a square fire pit surrounded by the community, where logs are placed and priests recite mantras to ignite a vibrant flame. There is a spirit of togetherness, as individuals contribute ingredients like rice or ghee (clarified butter), each “offering” becoming part of a collective endeavor that transcends individual desires.

As we navigate through these verses, let’s remember that every action, every thought, is an opportunity to connect with something greater. By becoming aware of our intentions and transforming our actions into “offerings”, we can create a life imbued with meaning, peace, and harmony. The journey is not just about what we do, it’s about how we do it, and for whom we do it.

Yajna represents a concept that extends beyond mere ritual; it encapsulates communal participation and the spirit of selflessness. Imagine a vibrant gathering where individuals come together, each contributing their share from a common pool filled with rich ghee, butter, and grains. Picture someone taking a ladle of this mixture and casting it into flames, igniting a brilliant surge of fire that dances upwards. This moment is electric with energy, and as the flames leap high, there’s a sense of enthusiasm and reverence. In this sacred act, prayers are offered, and as one person turns away, the priests continue this collective performance with the unwavering involvement of others who gather around.

A crowd of fifty or a hundred will feed the fire with their contributions of grain and butter. Each time a new offering is made to the fire, the flames flare up, rising for a moment before calming down again. This rhythmic cycle continues, and by the conclusion of the puja, the once vibrant flames will gradually fade, leaving behind only ash which is called *Vibhuti*. Thus, as a testament to this ritual, individuals dip their three fingers into the sacred ash and mark three stripes across their foreheads.

You’ve probably noticed people in India who carry these sacred markings, be it a single horizontal stripe or three vertical ones. The reasons behind these variations connect to the rich tapestry of religious identities within India, where such distinctions have often arisen from historical tensions among various sects of Hinduism. After adorning themselves with these stripes, the ritual draws to a close. Participants express their gratitude to the priests who have guided them through this ceremony and then make their way to a nearby temple, offering thanks to the divine.

However, there’s a profound lesson embedded within these festivities that often gets overlooked. Many might leave the ritual believing that their participation in the *Yajna* directly guarantees divine favors, such as securing a suitable marriage for their daughter or obtaining financial success. But this expectation is a misunderstanding of the essence of the *Yajna*. That’s where the wisdom of Sage *Vyasa*, the great sage who composed the Gita, comes into play. He emphasizes that the act of performing *Yajna* is fundamentally symbolic, encouraging individuals to act for a lofty purpose, rather than merely personal gain.

When undertaking any task, it is essential to do so not out of selfish desire but rather for the collective welfare. The first principle of *Yajna* is inclusivity. It's not meant to be an individual endeavor but a communal one where everyone contributes to the common cause. Participants donate from a shared pool of resources, represented by the grains and ghee, which symbolizes their unity in purpose.

In this collective action, one cannot behave like a lone soccer player insisting on scoring the goal for oneself. Imagine a player in a team shouting, "If you don't pass the ball to me, we won't win!" It simply doesn't work like that. The essence of this ritual lies in cooperation, where each person plays a role in contributing and sharing the rewards of their communal effort. When the fire surges, it's a representation of the organization acknowledging the contributions made, highlighting that this collective action benefits not just the individual but the whole community.

Additionally, there is a deeper significance to this act. As offerings are made to the fire, it symbolizes the burning away of one's personal desires, or *vasanas*. Whenever we engage in actions that serve a higher cause, two rewarding outcomes emerge: the cause receives support, and simultaneously, our individual attachments and longings start to dissipate. The flames serve as a metaphor for this transformative process. The ash that remains afterward signifies the sacrifices made in the spirit of collective goodwill.

After participating in such a ritual and marking oneself with the three stripes, individuals embark on a journey to the temple, symbolically declaring their commitment to collective growth and self-realization. The *Yajna* thus becomes not just an act to fulfill wishes but a journey toward personal betterment and societal contribution.

In a sense, this bears striking resemblance to the experience that many might relate to in Western culture, particularly within religious communities. Think about it: attending church every Sunday can sometimes lead people to believe that they've fulfilled their spiritual duties for the week. Yet, beyond that one day of attendance, they might not engage in any meaningful acts of kindness or service the rest of the week. Friends who practice Christianity often express sentiments similar to those in Hinduism that rituals can become robotic, lacking genuine engagement with the faith being practiced. They might leave church without even processing the message shared during the sermon, merely going through the motions.

In that context, prayer often devolves into a transactional exchange, with individuals fervently closing their eyes and imploring the divine for specific favors, like marriage for their child or a job promotion. Yet, this isn't in line with the teachings of wisdom imparted by Krishna in the Gita. Krishna reminds us that meaningful progress requires working together harmoniously with others. It's not just about one person's desires but about how we contribute to the larger collective.

We've touched on the notion that everyone has responsibilities to each other, teachers to students, parents to children, but we must act without dwelling on whether or not we receive gratitude in return. It's about fulfilling our duties selflessly, without counting accolades or financial rewards. The interesting part is that those who prioritize collective well-being will ultimately find personal prosperity on their path.

Consider this imagery: envision a supervisor at the top of a small hill, overlooking workers as they toil under the sun, breaking rocks and piling them up. They're tired and sweating, not particularly happy with their labor. If one worker struggles to lift a heavy load, a fellow worker steps in to offer help. This spirit of teamwork is observed by the supervisor. When the time comes for a break, guess who gets promoted? It's the one who selflessly helped others.

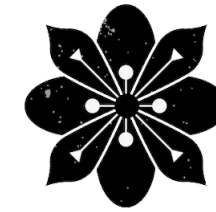
This scenario holds true in any organization. Those who show a willingness to contribute to their teams with genuine kindness often stand out and find success not just materially but also in terms of recognition and respect. Their generous actions create a ripple effect of goodwill, cementing their place as valuable members of the community.

In wrapping this up, the essence of *Yajna* is clear. It invites a deeper reflection on the interconnectedness of our actions and the power of collective engagement.

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EPISODE 32 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 10 - 13



We are continuing chapter 3, *verses 10 to 13* unfold a rich tapestry of thought that Krishna imparts to Arjuna. These verses delve into the essence of action, exploring how our deeds reverberate far beyond mere personal gain, continues the profound dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, shedding light on the nature of sacrifice, or *Yajna*, and how our actions should resonate with a greater purpose.

Verse 10: Krishna articulates a powerful concept: “*The Creator, having in the beginning created mankind together with Yajna (sacrifice), said, “By this shall you propagate, let this be the milk cow of your desired objects”.* This phrase has deep roots in the Upanishads, a collection of ancient philosophical texts that predate the Gita by centuries. Just as a cow can provide sustenance, the Creator is suggesting that through the act of sacrifice ‘*Yajna*’, we can cultivate our desires and aspirations. The term “*Kamadhenu*”, a mystical cow from whom any wish can be fulfilled, draws our attention to the boundless possibilities that arise from selfless action.(*Kama* - wish/ desires, *dhenu* - cow)

Krishna’s message here is profound: the act of creation isn’t just about bringing forth life; it is also intrinsically tied to *Yajna*. This sacrificial ethos calls us to work not solely for our own interests but for the benefit of the larger community. By engaging in *Yajna*, one not only garners material abundance but also nurtures a sense of inner peace. Think back to historical figures like *Mahatma Gandhi* and *Nelson Mandela*, who were so deeply committed to their nations’ welfare that they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to public service. Their tireless efforts exemplify the first benefit of *Yajna*: enhanced productivity rooted in a commitment to a higher ideal.

The second key insight is the transformative effect of identifying oneself with a cause greater than personal gain. When our motivations shift towards serving the community, our desires for trivial pursuits diminish dramatically. This selflessness allows an individual to endure hardships with grace, think of *Mandela* in prison, steadfastly focused on the broader ideal of justice rather than his personal suffering.

What is service? In the verse, it talks about doing service, doing *seva*. Service means you’re giving something without expecting anything in return.

Verse 11: Krishna states, *“Nourish the gods with this, and may these gods nourish you. Nourishing one another, you shall attain the supreme goal”*. These words echo a time when spiritual wisdom was transmitted orally, often condensed for memorization. The underlying message urges us to engage in mutual support and upliftment, essentially, that we should support one another in our spiritual journeys as well as in life. By doing so, we align our paths toward a higher spiritual goal.

Krishna’s teaching here illuminates the essence of *Jnana*, or divine knowledge. He wishes for us to transcend mundane concerns and focus our intentions on the divine. Yet, it’s easier said than done. People often find themselves distracted by daily life, and it can be challenging to keep the divine at the forefront of our thoughts. The sages recognized this dilemma and sought a solution: instead of forcing ourselves to constantly fixate on divinity, why not integrate the divine into the elements of our lives?

Thus, whenever we engage in something we care about, be it our education, work, or relationships instill a reminder of the divine in that sphere. For example, if financial success is our pursuit, we might visualize *Goddess Lakshmi*, the deity representing wealth and prosperity, encouraging us to act with integrity and purpose in our endeavors. This approach doesn’t negate the pursuit of success; rather, it enriches it, reminding us to seek not just personal gain but also to contribute positively to the world around us.

The metaphorical representation of gods serves as a tool for focus. It allows individuals to channel their aspirations through symbolism. When a student opens a textbook, he might look to the image of Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, for inspiration, reciting a small prayer to invoke her blessings. In doing so, he isn’t merely seeking personal success; he is beginning his studies with a mindset that respects and honors knowledge itself. Everybody knows that Ganesh in India is an elephant god with large ears, a trunk, multiple arms, and a mouse at his feet. Some people actually believe that if you look up in the sky far enough high in heaven, there is a god with an elephant head. This is not true. This was made for the uneducated people who didn’t know much about spirituality, just to give them something to think about. Each one of those things had a symbol.

When Krishna advises, *“Nourish the gods with this, and may those gods nourish you”*, he emphasizes reciprocity. By dedicating our efforts to deities that symbolize various aspects of life, wealth, success, knowledge, we align ourselves not just with those pursuits but also with the greater universe. Each act of devotion creates a cycle of support: as we nourish our higher ideals, those very ideals, in turn, respond by enriching our lives. At some point in the sixth chapter, Arjuna asked Krishna, *“Should I be praying to a god that has a form or should I be praying to the formless?”*

Recognize that even when you go to church, there’s a form. There’s Jesus on a cross, and you look at that and you pray to Jesus, or there’s Mother Mary. In various temples, Hindu temples have various deities.

Christ says, *“I am the father; the father in heaven, the kingdom of heaven is within you.”* Muhammad said that the greatest jihad is the conquest of your own self.

Verse 12: *“Verily the gods, nourished by your sacrifice, will give you the desired enjoyments, He who enjoys what is given by them without having offered to them, is indeed a thief”*. Initially, this might seem like an outlandish assertion. However, the beauty of these words lies in their deeper implications. They highlight an interconnectedness, our efforts and sacrifices nourish the divine, just as these divine energies reciprocate by nurturing our lives.

In essence, the Gita is not merely a text for philosophical contemplation; it acts as a practical guide for living harmoniously between us and the larger world. This timeless wisdom resonates through generations, ultimately leading us toward the supreme goal of Self-Realization.

In the grand tapestry of life, there are certain timeless truths that emerge, echoing across cultures and ages. The words we delve into speak of a deep understanding of giving and taking, particularly when we look to the divine. One profound sentiment unfolds around the idea that ‘he who enjoys what is given by the gods, without having made an offering to them, is indeed a thief’. This perspective conveys that when we seek blessings from the gods, perhaps through figures like Lakshmi or Ganesh—it’s essential to acknowledge that such gifts come with an expectation of reciprocity. If you only take without offering anything in return, you are considered a thief, a notion beautifully captured in this verse.

Verse 13: *“The righteous who eat the remnants of sacrifice are freed from all sin. But those sinners who cook for themselves eat sin.”* This may sound like the simple musings of a primitive civilization, yet it holds immense depth. The first line of verse 12 resonates with a core philosophy: the notion that when you dedicate yourself to higher pursuits, to your spiritual goals or for the greater good there’s a karmic balance where you receive success and fulfillment in return.

The stark contrast is drawn with the Tamasic person. We’ve already touched on what this means: individuals who, caught in lethargy, remain indifferent to the needs of others around them. They might be solely focused on their own desires, neglecting their families and communities. It’s the person who asks, “How can I benefit?” without considering the contributions or efforts of those who have come before. When Krishna refers to such a person as a thief, it’s a vivid illustration of the consequences of this self-centered approach.

This reminds me of a wise saying from Prophet Muhammad, *“The best among you are those who are best in repaying their debts”*. There is honor in giving back, and this idea resonates throughout various teachings and stories. One such illustration comes from the *Ramayana* (an ancient Sanskrit epic written by Sage Valmiki dated to thousands of BCE), where Rama, Sita, and Lakshman find themselves needing to cross a river. A *boAtman*, fully aware of Rama’s divine nature, is eager to ferry them across. Upon reaching the other side, Rama insists on offering the *boAtman* something in return—his ring. The *boAtman* humbly declines, stating that it would embarrass him to accept anything from a god. However, Rama, understanding the importance of reciprocity, ultimately bestows blessings upon him.

This interaction teaches us that whether we are speaking about bodily health, emotional connections, or the workings of the mind, there's a universal rule: when you receive something valuable, you must find a way to give back. It's akin to the law of *Karma*, indicating that at some point, you owe a debt for the gifts you've received.

Tamasic individuals often represent a segment of society that simply takes. Their mindset lacks the drive to produce or contribute. In contrast, when we explore the next part of *verse 13* which states, "***But those sinners who cook for themselves eat sin,***" we see a shift—this line introduces the imagery of cooking and eating. Picture a *Tamasic* person entering a kitchen, grabbing what belongs to someone else without a thought of sharing or giving back.

Now, consider *Rajasic* individuals. They are filled with passion and urgency, a common state for many of us in today's world. Picture them busily preparing meals, but with a crucial distinction: they only cook for themselves. While they are actively engaging in the act of cooking, their focus remains self-centered, leading to a sense of guilt for not considering others. Can you see it? The *Rajasic* person fills their plate but battles inner turmoil for neglecting the communal spirit of sharing.

On the other hand, we have the *Sattvic* person, the one who embodies true balance. They prepare food not just for themselves but for everyone around them. After serving others, they enjoy what is left without a twinge of guilt. Their mindset is peaceful and free of agitation, grounded in the understanding that they have performed their duty and contributed to the well-being of others.

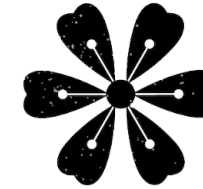
This brings me to an everyday example from my life—a time when my wife and I dined out with a few friends. When the server brought an appetizer that could only serve exactly four people, the scenario became intriguing. With four plates set before us, it was smooth sailing. But when a fifth person joined, I noticed different reactions: some rushed to grab, while my wife and I took a moment to ensure everyone was served first. We might discuss how to share, suggesting, "Let's cut it up so everyone can have a morsel". This approach reflects a life philosophy that goes beyond mere self-interest, emphasizing the importance of considering others and promoting communal joy.

In truth, when we lead our lives with the intention of offering to others first, it cultivates a mindset of abundance. If every now and then, we find ourselves without, we shouldn't feel disheartened; in the grander scheme, we will receive in due time.

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EPISODE 33 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 14 - 16



This chapter is a deep and thoughtful exploration of how to *complete the wheel* through *Yajna* (sacrifice) and return to the Self. We learn that acting for the benefit of something greater than ourselves—whether it be humanity, our community, our family, or even our workplace—leads to inner peace. Additionally, we discover the importance of *nourishing the gods* so that they, in turn, may nourish us.

Verse 14: “From food, beings are born. From rain, food is produced. From Yajna (sacrifice), rain arises, and Yajna is born of action.”

The word *Yajna* will appear frequently. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, when performing any action, rather than acting out of selfish motives, dedicate your efforts to something greater—your community, nature, the world, your fellow human beings, your workplace, or your family. Act for a purpose beyond yourself. Do what ought to be done, not just what you like or dislike, and do it for the greater good, following the principle of *Yajna*.

For a deeper understanding of *Yajna*, refer to the verses below, followed by detailed explanations of ***Verses 14, 15, and 16.***

Verse 15: “Know that action arises from Brahma, and Brahma arises from the Imperishable Brahman. Therefore, the all-pervading Brahman always resides in Yajna (sacrifice).”

Verse 16: “He who does not follow the wheel thus set in motion, living in sin and indulging in the senses, lives in vain.”

The essence of these teachings revolves around the idea that the universe operates in cycles, much like the workings of our own minds. Imagine this: when you dream, where does that dream come from? It arises from your own mind, shaped by your experiences and thoughts. Even though you are asleep, your mind is vividly active, spinning tales and scenarios that feel entirely real. If asked about the origin of that dream, you might instinctively say, “*It came from me.*” This realization holds a profound truth about our existence. ***Just as dreams emerge from another aspect of our consciousness, we, as human beings, arise from a universal consciousness known as Brahman—the absolute reality that encompasses all of existence.***

Brahman is the ultimate source of everything. It is *consciousness, existence, and bliss*—beautifully encapsulated in the Sanskrit phrase *Sat Chit Ananda*. From this all-encompassing consciousness, *Brahma* emerges, often referred to as the creator god in Hindu mythology. The cosmic process of creation is structured around three principal deities: *Brahma*, the creator; *Vishnu*, the preserver; and *Shiva*, the destroyer. Together, they are called *Dattatreya*. They represent a continuous cycle of creation, preservation, and dissolution—mirroring the natural rhythms of our lives and the universe itself. These “gods” are symbolic and mythological; they do not actually exist somewhere in the heavens.

When *Brahma* brought forth the universe and human life, action became the very first expression of creation. At first glance, stillness may seem like the absence of action. But in reality, we are *always* in motion. Even at rest, our bodies remain active—cells multiply, old cells shed, food is digested, and we breathe in and out. This ceaseless activity reminds us that *action* is not merely physical movement; even the decision to meditate or remain at peace is an action in itself.

However, the lesson here extends beyond action alone—it asks us to consider *why* and *how* we act. Most of our actions stem from personal preferences and desires, leading us in many directions based on what we like or dislike. Instead, the Gita encourages us to act in the spirit of *Yajna*—an offering, a sacrifice. This approach brings *rain*—a metaphor for prosperity and well-being. Acting with this selfless intent, as if we are part of a great orchestra, allows us to contribute to the greater good, creating harmony and abundance for all.

Using agriculture as a metaphor—since India was primarily an agrarian society at the time—the text illustrates that when we act with a spirit of sacrifice rather than selfish motives, we initiate a chain reaction. This collaboration brings *rain*, which nourishes the crops, sustaining life. But this rain is not just literal; it symbolizes the conditions necessary for abundance, where communities thrive together in mutual support rather than individual gain.

This reciprocity reinforces the interconnectedness of existence. Consider the classic example of an assembly line in a factory, where each worker plays a crucial role in producing a car. When everyone fulfills their responsibilities harmoniously, the result is a well-crafted product that benefits not only the workers but also the consumers. In the agricultural imagery of the text, *rain* serves as a metaphor for prosperity, sustaining both individuals and society. By fostering such an environment, we temper our own greed and desires, allowing our innate tendencies, or *Vasanas*, to lose their grip on us. When we act for the greater good, we gradually burn away these *Vasanas*.

As we unravel these connections, we arrive at the next vital insight, encapsulated in verse 15. Here, we learn that action arises from *Brahman*, the imperishable essence at the core of existence. To truly restore our connection with *Brahman*, we must engage in sacrifices that align with our higher purpose. We are not mere passengers on this earth, aimlessly chasing fleeting pleasures, but architects of our own destiny, striving to transcend our desires and illuminate our true purpose. ***Brahman created us as beings—we act, we seek to fulfill our desires, our Vasanas, but the ultimate goal of existence is to return to Brahman.***

This brings us to the message of verse 16, which speaks of the *Chakram* (wheel).

This wheel symbolizes the perpetual cycle of action and consequence. It serves as a reminder that if we lose sight of our higher purpose and focus solely on satisfying our senses, we risk leading a life devoid of meaning. It is like sailing a boat without acknowledging the shore—eventually, we drift into emptiness, directionless.

To better understand this concept, we can look at the tale of *The Wave and the Ocean*:

Swami Sarvapriyananda shares a fascinating analogy about a small wave born in the vast ocean. The wave takes great **pride** in itself—its crest, its size, its speed. This pride breeds **Ahankar (arrogance)**, leading the wave to look down on those smaller than itself. From this arrogance emerges **jealousy** and an insatiable desire to grow bigger and more powerful. But when these desires go unfulfilled, the wave becomes **angry**—for unfulfilled desires inevitably give rise to anger.

Throughout its journey from the deep ocean to the shore, the wave experiences a range of emotions. As it nears the shore, it sees the waves ahead crashing into the rocks, dissolving into spray and foam. Trembling, the little wave turns to a neighboring wave and asks, “*What is happening to those waves that crash into the rocks?*”

The neighboring wave replies, “*They are dying. They crash into the rocks, and they die. You will die too.*”

Our wave begins to sob. “*But I don’t want to die! I am beautiful, big, strong, rich, famous, and powerful. Can’t I live forever?*”

Just then, a Vedantic wave nearby speaks. “*You are just water—ocean water. He is water, she is water; we all are water. Every wave is water. Water is everywhere. The whole ocean is water. When you ‘die,’ your name, form, and actions disappear, but you remain as water.*”

Upon realizing this, the wave finds peace.

We should all see ourselves in the same way. You may think you are beautiful, famous, rich, or powerful, but these are just your **name, form, and actions—temporary and fleeting**. In the end, we will shed everything and return to our true essence: the free, infinite *Brahman*. We are all *Brahman*—nothing but *Brahman*.

This playful yet profound story reveals the essence of our journey. We are not merely individuals defined by our emotions, achievements, or identities but part of a vast, interconnected reality. Just as waves return to the ocean, our purpose is to recognize our true nature as *Brahman*. This understanding compels us to act not in isolation or self-interest but in harmony with others, restoring balance and nurturing our shared existence.

Each of these verses invites deep reflection, urging us to examine our motivations and actions. They rekindle our understanding of sacrifice, purpose, and our integral place in the universe. By embracing these timeless teachings, we can align our lives with a higher purpose, turning our actions into offerings and finding our way back to the ultimate reality—*Brahman*—rich with meaning and connection.

Exploring our existence often leads us down a winding path of profound realizations. Imagine yourself as a wave rising and falling, dancing with the ebb and flow of life. Then, it dawns on you: at your core, you are nothing but water—transient yet eternal. Water surrounds you, holds you, and defines you. From crest to depth, every part of you is interconnected with this fundamental essence. Even if you crash against the rocks, what you truly are—water—remains unchanged. Your name and form may fade, but the water persists, everlasting and unwavering.

When the wave truly recognizes this, a transformation occurs. Though still a wave, it finds peace, knowing it transcends its temporary identity. It understands that it is not separate but part of something vast and infinite.

Similarly, we must recognize our own identities and see ourselves as integral to *Brahman*, the universal essence. Within every cell of our being, life exists—not as a mystical soul floating within us but as a vibrant force permeating our very structure. This is the essence of *Brahman* and *Atman*, defining all existence in a tangible way.

To clarify, *Atman* is the essence within us, while *Brahman* is the universal spirit encompassing everything. Imagine an empty pot filled with air. Inside, we call it “pot space”; outside, we simply call it “space.” Both are air—the difference is only in perception. In the same way, *Atman* is the self within us, while *Brahman* is the infinite reality beyond us.

Many misunderstand *Atman*, believing it to be a wisp of smoke shaped like our body, floating away after death. This is incorrect. *Atman* is not separate from us; it is the life force **within** every cell, the very essence of existence.

Before creation, *Brahman* was all that existed—blank, undifferentiated, infinite. As a child, I often wondered about God. Was He truly above us in the sky? Beneath our feet? All around us? The idea of God seemed distant, unreachable. But through Hindu philosophy, I discovered that the many deities worshipped in Hinduism all point to a single truth: the ultimate reality of *Brahman*, present everywhere and in everything.

Ancient scriptures describe *Brahman* as infinite existence, consciousness, and bliss. It lacks nothing and simply is. It does not demand action from us; rather, it is the foundation of all things. At some point, *Brahman* contemplated existence and, through its will, brought forth the universe. From this contemplation arose Brahma, the creator, who in turn gave rise to us.

When *Brahman* (and the mythological Brahma) created us, it was an act driven by a desire for experience. Imagine *Brahman*, in its perfect state, feeling an emptiness—a yearning to feel and to know. As humans, we accumulate *vasanas*—deep-seated tendencies and attachments. Have you ever tasted something so delightful that you craved more? Think of your first encounter with chocolate—the joy it brought might have sparked a lifelong love for it. These preferences start small but gradually expand into desires for relationships, success, power, and recognition. Each layer adds complexity to our experiences and choices.

When life ends, our attachments—our *vasanas*—often follow us into the next life. We return to the earthly realm, continuously cycling through experiences, each lifetime adding new layers of *vasanas* to our existence. Time and again, we wrestle with dissatisfaction, longing to return to that original state of bliss—the state of being one with *Brahman*. Our journey is cyclical. It begins with *Brahman*, moves through various forms, and, as we evolve from lower beings to higher ones, we strive to reconnect with our original essence. To achieve this, ancient teachings suggest practicing *Yajna*—selfless action or sacrifice. By performing acts of goodwill toward others, nature, and the world at large, we bridge the gap back to our understanding of oneness with *Brahman*.

Many who have walked this path of Self-Realization describe a moment of profound clarity—like waves crashing against the shore, only to realize they are not separate from the ocean but part of it. Enlightened beings such as Christ, Buddha, and Krishna proclaimed their realization: *I am Atman*, *I am Brahman*. They spoke as conduits of *Brahman*, and through their words, we glimpse the vast reality they embodied.

For skeptics, these ideas might seem grand, even fantastical. But as I delved deeper into the study of reincarnation and the nuances of life’s cycles, a clearer perspective emerged. Many dismiss reincarnation without exploring the depth of knowledge surrounding it. It’s easy to reject something without understanding it. As a physician, I once questioned it myself. Yet, through exploration, I encountered undeniable truths that were impossible to refute.

This brings us back to the nature of our minds and dreams. One might believe they create their own dreams, but it is essential to recognize that dreaming is merely a function of the mind—distinct from our true selves. Many struggle to separate their consciousness from the workings of the mind, intertwining desires and fears with their sense of identity. As discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, our true essence—*Brahman*—exists apart from our fleeting *vasanas*. Our urges and attachments do not define us; they are simply activities of the mind.

Consider the story of the wave, which ultimately realizes *Aham Brahmasmi*—“I am *Brahman*.” It understands that its existence is not limited to being a single wave but is instead part of the vast ocean. In much the same way, we humans often define ourselves by our bodies, minds, or intellect—by our appearance, emotions, or achievements—while overlooking our deeper essence as *Atman* or *Brahman*.

To illustrate this further, compare the statements “I am angry” and “I feel angry.” The latter acknowledges anger as a temporary experience rather than an inherent part of one’s identity. Recognizing this distinction is crucial. But beyond that, an even deeper realization awaits: there exists an awareness beyond the one experiencing anger—a pure consciousness, untouched by emotion, simply present as life itself.

This idea is beautifully expressed in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, particularly in its sixth chapter, where a father imparts a profound truth to his son: *Before Brahman, there was no second. Brahman alone existed—pure, undifferentiated, and absolute.* The 6th Chapter of Chandogya Upanishad is one of the most famous and philosophically profound texts in the Upanishadic tradition. It presents a powerful conversation between Uddalaka Aruni, a sage, and his son, Svetaketu and it revolves around the essential oneness of the Self (*Atman*) and the ultimate reality (*Brahman*).

The *Upanishads*, much like poetry, convey profound truths through succinct teachings passed down orally for generations. They were not originally written down but memorized and spoken/sung, based on the belief that true knowledge is best preserved in the hearts and minds of those who receive it. Interestingly, the ancient sages believed that no written stone could endure the test of time as well as a shared truth embedded in culture.

As we continue exploring the nature of reality, we encounter three fundamental distinctions described in the *Upanishads*:

1. **Differences within a single body** – Your head is different from your foot.
2. **Differences within the same species** – There are many kinds of trees (evergreen vs. deciduous) and many kinds of humans (Chinese, Caucasian, etc.).
3. **Differences among living beings** – A whale is different from a wolf.

This leads to a crucial question: *What exists apart from Brahman?* Many ponder this, wondering whether fragments of *Brahman* reside in separate corners of existence. Yet, upon reflection, we see that any space we imagine still exists *within Brahman*. *Brahman* remains the singular essence, transcending all forms and appearances.

In the grand tapestry of existence, the illusion of duality fades, revealing a profound truth: *there is no separate entity apart from Brahman*. Imagine standing in a vast ocean where every wave, every ripple, and every droplet is an expression of the same water. Naturally, one must ask, *If everything is woven into the fabric of Brahman, where is the concept of “other” or “non-Brahman”?* (A profound and important question)

Many people contemplate the origins of the universe, wondering about the existence of other beings and elements that fill our world. To illustrate this, consider how we, as living beings, grow—**just as we grow hair and nails as extensions of ourselves, the universe emerges from Brahman**. A spider offers a striking analogy: it spins a web from within itself, an extension of its being. In the same way, *Brahman* manifests the universe from within Itself. However, in this analogy, *Brahman* is not the spider but the essence behind creation—the cosmic force at play.

Think about how trees sprout from the earth or how various plants and life forms arise from the soil. Just as hair and nails grow from our bodies, everything in the universe—every being and all life—originates from *Brahman*. This realization leads to a comforting conclusion: all of creation is intertwined with *Brahman*, and ultimately, everything will return to that singular source.

Within this exploration, we turn to a guiding truth from verse 16. It presents a fundamental observation about life: when we chase after desires and gratifications, feeding our senses without purpose, we become lost, experiencing a form of inner turmoil—what some may refer to as ‘sin’. Here, sin is not a moral failing but rather *mental agitation, a restless state that leads to further unhappiness*.

Instead, we are encouraged to focus on what truly matters: caring for others, supporting our communities, and respecting the environment. Giving back is more than just a noble act—it is a pathway to reconnecting with our true essence, with *Brahman*. While it is essential to care for ourselves and our families, we are also called to rise beyond mere self-interest. We are urged to do what ought to be done.

Consider another poignant idea: the act of nourishing the gods brings nourishment back to you. This reminds me of a classroom conversation with Gautam Ji, a thought-provoking moment when a student voiced a common concern. He described himself as the owner of the hedge fund, someone who felt trapped in the cycle of gambling on the market. His question resonated deeply: “How can I use what I earn in a way that benefits not only myself but also others?”

Gautam Ji response was enlightening. While it is perfectly acceptable to earn a good living, the real question lies in the intent behind those earnings. What do you plan to do with your wealth? If your focus is solely on personal indulgence—buying a larger yacht or a fancier house—you may find yourself adrift. In contrast, if some of your resources are used to uplift your community, your heart begins to align with a greater purpose, leading to genuine fulfillment.

Now, consider the theme of vacations. People often return from getaways bubbling with happiness, as though they have escaped their everyday stresses. But vacations often serve merely as temporary retreats from our perceived sources of stress. Once home, the usual pressures return like clockwork, revealing that true peace is not found outside of ourselves but within.

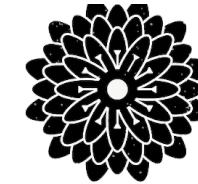
Think of how we feel when entering a temple or a church. The serene atmosphere offers a sense of peace, but that peace can quickly evaporate when we begin ruminating on daily challenges. It is not just the tranquility of the sacred space that soothes us; it is the mental quiet that comes from stepping away from our worries, from feeling momentarily safe. But if we linger too long, those worries inevitably resurface.

This notion of sacrifice and selflessness resonates deeply with the teachings of verses 14, 15, and 16. This mindset is essential for tapping into our true nature and, ultimately, returning to *Brahman*.

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EPISODE 34

What Exactly is Atman?



In this chapter, we delve into a topic that resonates deeply within the realms of philosophy and spirituality: **What exactly is Atman?** The discussion unfolds naturally, aiming to clarify and explore what *Atman* truly represents.

Recently, during a conversation with someone who had been following our discussions online, I encountered an interesting perspective on *Atman*.

This person asked, “*So basically, the Atman is inside you—like electricity flowing to a bulb, right?*”

I replied, “*Yes, in a way.*”

He then continued, “*So Atman does nothing, feels nothing, and is basically just electricity, right?*”

At that moment, I realized that this description didn’t sit right with me. I needed to explain that *Atman* is not merely electricity. Electricity has no consciousness. While *Atman* is like electricity in that it enlivens us and gives us life, it is much more than that. And that’s what I felt compelled to clarify.

Many people are confused by the nature of *Atman*. Does *Atman* act? Does it have feelings or desires? Does it guide the human in whom it resides, telling them what to do? Or is it simply a pure power source?

Previously, I described *Atman* as gasoline in a car. That’s not entirely accurate. Essentially, *Atman* is *within* us. It’s not like how it’s often depicted in books or movies—a human-shaped, smoke-like “soul” that leaves the body and flies up into the sky upon death! Our bodies are made up of trillions of cells—skin cells, brain cells, kidney cells—every part of the human body consists of cells. Each cell has *life* in it. It’s alive because of *Atman*. *Atman* is not the cell itself, but the life force within the cell that gives it life. Collectively, the cells that make up the human being are alive, and as a result, the human is alive, conscious, and aware. Consciousness (chit in sanskrit) is the key, and we will discuss this in greater depth today.

Atman has no decision-making power; it does not influence our actions. It doesn't tell us to do good or bad things. Our actions are shaped by our *vasanas*—our innate desires, which we are born with. These *vasanas* determine the kind of person we will be. If your *vasanas* are good, meaning you have a genuine desire to help others selflessly, you will likely be a good person.

However, if your *vasanas* are not good, and as a result, you become a cruel or unkind person, that reflects your inner nature. But the *Atman* doesn't dictate your actions—your *vasanas* do. The *Atman* doesn't demand anything from you; it is a silent witness (*Sakshi*).

Vedanta teaches that to return to *Brahman*, to our true Self, as mentioned in Verse 16 of Chapter 3 (which was covered in the last chapter), we must perform more selfless deeds. By doing so, we burn away our *vasanas*.

So, the question arises: *How do we return to Brahman?*

The first step is to learn about the self—our self with a small “s.” By understanding our small “s” self, we can then begin to seek the true Self, the *Atman*, the capital “S” Self. Once you recognize your *Atman*, you recognize *Brahman*. And when you understand *Brahman*, you become Self-realized.

Now, what is the difference between *Atman* and *Brahman*? It's essentially a matter of semantics—much like the difference between “pot-space” and “space.” The space inside a pot is called “pot-space.” The pot-space might think, “*I'm great because I'm the space inside this large pot, while the space inside that smaller pot is much smaller.*” But imagine that the pot breaks, and its pot-space merges with the vast space outside the pot. The pot-space might then realize, “*Wait, I'm part of this entire room*”—and then realize it's part of the whole universe. It's no longer confined to the pot; it's part of **all** space.

In this analogy, *Brahman* is the vast space, and *Atman* is the small space inside the pot. *Atman* and *Brahman* are really the same, but when *Atman* is within a human being, it's referred to as *Atman*.

I have an *Atman* that enlivens me. You have an *Atman*. All of us reading this have an *Atman*. The difference is that it's right there within us, but we don't recognize it.

It's like a movie where a person says, “I didn't know I was adopted. I want to find my birth mother.” And it turns out that the maid who's been taking care of him all along, pretending to be just a maid, is actually his birth mother. Similarly, we search everywhere asking, “How can I get back to God, to *Brahman*?” when, in reality, *Brahman* is right there within you as the *Atman*. Someone just has to introduce you to it. It's always been there, but we never knew it.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French philosopher, said: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

To simplify it further, it's as if *Brahman* said, “I want to have a human experience. I want to feel, I want to act,” and then presents itself as a human being.

But as humans, we grow tired of the rat race and start seeking a spiritual experience, when the truth is, we are that spiritual being having a human experience right now. We just want to reconnect with it.

Instead, we spend our lives chasing after sense objects, seeking pleasant emotions, nice feelings, and pleasures—whether it's the pleasures of the eyes, the tongue, the ears, the body, or even desires like money, fame, power, reputation, and love. These all come from the mind, the body, and the intellect, and they are like band-aids. They offer temporary relief—the money, the fame, etc.—but eventually, we become numb to them.

To experience true happiness, which is complete bliss *all the time* (ananda in sanskrit), you must be aware of your true Self—*Brahman*. Vedanta teaches that it's all you, with a capital “Y.” You are the *Atman*. You are *Brahman*. Get in touch with your inner true Self!

The Chandogya Upanishad says, *Tat Tvam Asi*, meaning *You are That*. This signifies that you are the *Atman*—*Brahman* (this is again from Chapter 6- a mahakavya or a profound declaration from the dialogue between sage Uddalaka and his son Svetaketu).

There are four Mahavakyas, which means *profound declarations*. One of them is *Aham Brahmasmi*, which means *I am Brahman*. Another is *Prajnanam Brahman*, and the fourth is *Aham Asmi Brahman*. *Know yourself*, know your *Atman*. When you become one with your *Atman*, you are *Brahman*, and you will understand everything.

So, what do we know about ourselves? We know that there is a waking state, a dream state, and a deep sleep state, however there is a fourth state too.

Waking State (1st State): In the waking state, I am awake and aware. I am the *knower*, the subject, while the world around me, including the person I'm speaking to, is the object. The world is the object, and I am the subject. This is the most gross level of experience.

Dream State (2nd State): The dream state is more subtle than the waking state. In this state, I am asleep and dreaming, and everything in the dream seems very real. While dreaming, the dream feels genuine, but when I wake up, the dream world disappears. This illustrates an important point in this philosophy: the dream world belongs to the mind. Similarly, the waking world must also belong to something beyond just physical reality. The dream state is more subtle and is referred to as the *sukshma* (subtle) world.

Deep Sleep State (3rd State): The deep sleep state, also called the *causal state*, is where our *vasanas* (impressions) are formed. In deep sleep, you are not consciously aware of anything, but when you wake up, you realize that you were indeed deeply asleep. While you may feel like you weren't *existing* at the time, you were, because upon waking, you can recall that you had deep sleep. Even though you were not consciously aware during the sleep, the awareness of the experience of deep sleep is still present.

Turiya (4th State): The fourth state is Turiya, also known as Bodhi or Samadhi. It is pure consciousness or *Atman*—awareness itself, which is also referred to as knowledge. This state transcends the body, mind, and intellect. The awareness in Turiya is not attached to the body or mind; it is the awareness behind everything. As seen in deep sleep. I am the Awareness observing the body, mind, and intellect. When I say, *I perceive, I see, I smell, I taste, I conceive, I remember*, I am referring to the consciousness that transcends the intellect, mind, and body. This awareness is what I truly am.

The Gita says there are three components: **the knower, the known, and the knowledge**—the three K's. The knower is me, the one who is awake. I am awake, and therefore I know. I use my instruments of knowledge, such as my eyes, ears, and mind, to learn different things and acquire knowledge. The objects of knowledge are the things in the world that need to be known, as well as the things beyond the world that need to be understood. Knowledge is what I gain once I comprehend these things.

Furthermore, Vedanta posits that existence (*sat* in Sanskrit) is fundamentally dependent on knowledge. For example, if one expresses the desire to visit a place like India, that place exists in the realm of knowledge. However, if knowledge is absent, does that place truly exist for the individual? This raises intriguing questions about perception and reality, branching into a philosophical discussion about existence. For instance, if I suggested a journey to a dream destination like the Bahamas, you might resonate with its beauty, even if you have never visited. In contrast, mentioning an undiscovered planet would render it non-existent in our conversation.

In a dream, objects exist only because you are dreaming. Once you wake up, the objects disappear. Similarly, what Vedanta teaches is that this whole world, all these objects, truly exist only because we are aware of them. This is a much deeper concept, but it's important to reflect on, because it is the *Atman* that is really aware of these things, making them exist. We exist because of the knowledge we have of this reality. It's a profound idea, but if you give it some thought, it will make sense. Just as in a dream, objects exist only because we are dreaming. The moment you wake up, the objects disappear.

Similarly, things cannot exist without awareness. If you don't have awareness of something, it doesn't exist. Knowledge cannot exist without a knower. Earlier, we said the existence of objects depends on knowledge. So, if I mention planet XYZ but know nothing about it, it doesn't exist.

Knowledge cannot exist without a knower. If there's no knower, you can't have knowledge. And the knower cannot be aware of, or have, this knowledge if there's no awareness or consciousness. That last part is crucial. The knower depends on consciousness and awareness to know. I can't know anything if I don't have awareness or consciousness. It's like how I can't see if my eyes aren't functioning, but I'm aware that I'm blind and can't see.

Reflecting on our prior discussions, recall the analogy we used about a hot potato. Imagine you have a potato that feels cold to the touch. You might think to yourself, "This potato needs to be boiled." So, you light a fire, place a pot on the stove, fill it with water, and soon enough, the world transforms. Initially, everything—the water, the pot, the potato—is cold. But as the fire heats the pot, the water warms up and begins to boil. Then, when you take the potato out of the pot, you can confidently say, "This potato is hot! It has heat!"

According to Vedanta, that heat is false heat because the potato doesn't have heat within itself. So, where did the potato get the heat from? It got it from the hot water. The water doesn't have heat in itself either. Where did the water get its heat from? From the pan. But the pan doesn't have heat either. Where did the pan get its heat from? All of these things have false heat, because after a while, the heat disappears. It has become cold again. But the fire, which is truly hot and gives its heat to all of these things, remains constantly hot. You cannot take the heat away from it. That's true heat.

The false heat of the potato is known as *Mithya* in Sanskrit. The true heat belongs to the fire.

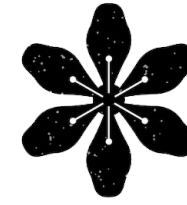
This consciousness, this awareness, is the real essence of what we call the *Atman*.

Vedanta encourages us to challenge our identification with the earthly aspects of existence—the body, the mind, and what we often perceive as the 'Self'. The mental chatter can often drown out the quieter, deeper awareness that defines who we are at our core. I'm glad you're exploring these ideas with me. Your engagement with this material can lead you down an enriching path of understanding. When we confront feelings of fear, for instance, instead of saying, "I am afraid," try embracing the awareness instead, recognizing, "I am aware that my body feels fear." This shift in perspective helps us see fear as something separate from our true self, allowing us to **disassociate** from it. As you continue your journey toward Self Realization, know that every moment of contemplation adds a layer of growth to your understanding.

34

EPISODE 35 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 17 - 24



It's essential to have a copy of the *Gita*, preferably in a language that resonates with you, so you can experience the text alongside our discussion. This isn't just a reading—it's an invitation to engage deeply with the words of Lord Krishna. Personally, I prefer *The Gita* as explained in the books by Swami Parthasarathy.

To recap our previous discussion, we left off at Chapter 3, Verse 16, where Lord Krishna introduces the concept of the *chakra*, often symbolized as the wheel of life. He urges us toward the path of sacrifice, emphasizing the need to set aside our fleeting desires and ego. It's about aligning ourselves with a greater purpose, one that transcends self-centered cravings. In his teachings, Krishna highlights that without sacrifice, the quest for *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, remains elusive. We exist as spiritual beings temporarily navigating this human experience, and to return to our spiritual essence, we must first release our insatiable desires, which can never truly satisfy us. It's a cycle: the more we chase our desires, the more they multiply, pulling us deeper into a void.

Conversely, when we engage in selfless service—where our actions are driven by a higher purpose—we begin to alleviate the burden of our endless wants. It's an intriguing dynamic: selfless service burns off your *vasanas* and brings you closer to *Brahman*. This shift also explains the lasting happiness found in those who dedicate themselves to a life of spiritual discipline. Yogis, who distance themselves from sensory distractions, often exude a joy that transcends the temporary pleasures of the material world.

When it comes to desires, you eventually reach a state of neutrality. Gautam Jain used to give the example of a person who loves chocolate ice cream. If that person were given ten scoops of chocolate ice cream every day, they would eventually grow to dislike it. Why? What changed? Their desires didn't decrease—their taste for chocolate ice cream did.

It is a well-known fact that the less contact one has with a sense object, the greater the pleasure when that object is finally experienced. The further you withdraw from sensory attachments, the more intense the pleasure becomes when you do engage with them.

In total bliss, yogis have no contact with sense objects at any time, yet they remain in complete bliss always. This is because they have fully mastered their desires. As a result, there are no thoughts or cravings in their minds. That complete silence is total bliss.

Verse 17: *“The man who rejoices in the Self, is satisfied in the Self, content in the Self—for him, nothing is to be done.”* Here, he speaks of someone who has achieved Self Realization. He refers to the Self with a capital *S* three times, signifying the body, the mind, and the intellect. This is a person who has realized the Self.

A Self Realized being lacks nothing and has no personal need to act—yet they still do. All Self Realized individuals engage in action. In contrast, we, who are not yet Self Realized, act because we have desires. Our underlying *vasanas* generate thoughts about sense objects. These thoughts multiply, fueling desires, which in turn compel us to act. A Self Realized person, having no *vasanas*, is free from thoughts and desires. Yet they continue to act—not for personal gain, but for the benefit of others.

Such an individual possesses everything and sees no reason to act out of personal want. It’s not that they avoid action altogether; rather, their motivations have transformed. Unlike most of us, who act out of longing, the Self Realized person operates from a place of inner contentment, free from selfish impulses. Krishna highlights satisfaction in three aspects: the mind, the body, and the intellect. For those who have attained Self Realization, desires become irrelevant. They continue to act, but their actions are selfless, aimed at the welfare of others.

This idea is beautifully illustrated in the lives of enlightened figures. Buddha devoted his existence to alleviating suffering. Krishna himself engaged in countless acts of service. Christ poured out his time and energy in service to others rather than retreating into solitude. Their lives show that true fulfillment lies not in withdrawal from the world, but in active participation in its upliftment.

Verse 18: *“There is no interest whatsoever in what is done or not done, nor does he depend on any being for any object.”*

This speaks to a profound level of detachment—an understanding that outcomes do not define our actions. A Self Realized person is not preoccupied with what is happening or not happening around them.

In contrast, those of us who are not Self Realized are constantly concerned with whether others have fulfilled their duties. We may think, *“I should be nice to someone because I might need their help later.”* But a Self Realized person needs nothing from anyone. If something must be done, they can do it themselves.

Verse 19: *“Therefore, without attachment, always perform the actions that should be done, for by acting without attachment, one reaches the Supreme.”*

This simple yet profound directive emphasizes intention over attachment. It urges us to act out of duty, free from personal gain or expectation. By doing so, we move closer to the Supreme while freeing ourselves from the constraints of ego-driven desires.

Do not cling to selfish goals, personal wants, or desires. Do not think, *“I will get this reward if I do that.”* Instead, act not because you like it or because it will bring you something good, but because it must be done. When you live by this principle, you not only progress toward the Supreme but also burn off your *vasanas*, ultimately finding greater happiness.

Verses 20 through 24 present a compelling case in which Krishna urges Arjuna to act. These verses provide insight into how individuals influence others, with Krishna himself serving as an example. Some may misinterpret Krishna’s message as a divine endorsement of violence, but context is key: Arjuna is a *Kshatriya*, a warrior born into a lineage of warriors, sworn to uphold his duty. Yet, for the first time in his highly decorated career, he has put down his weapons and refused to fight.

Krishna urges Arjuna to engage in battle—even against his own relatives. These adversaries, though family, are inflicting immense harm, their oppressive rule bringing widespread suffering. If a warrior like Arjuna does not confront them, who will? Krishna reminds him that it is his *Dharma*—his duty as a warrior—to challenge wrongdoers and restore balance. To persuade him, Krishna employs logic, personal appeal, fear, and even threats.

To draw a modern parallel, it is akin to law enforcement or special forces refusing to act against known terrorists simply because they are familiar with them. Their duty, like Arjuna’s, is to protect and serve, regardless of personal ties.

These verses highlight the power of role models and the responsibility that comes with leadership. Krishna makes it clear: Arjuna must fight.

Verse 20: *“Whatsoever the superior person does, that alone other people do. Whatever standard he sets, that standard the world follows”.* Lord Krishna asserts that people are influenced by the actions of their superiors, emphasizing the importance of devotion and leading by example. He also flatters Arjuna by reminding him of past traditions in which great respect was given to elders, urging him to honor these customs by fulfilling his duty. Krishna stresses that Arjuna’s actions will not only resolve the current crisis but also serve as a guiding light for future generations.

“Verily, by action alone, Janaka and others attained perfection. Even with an eye to the welfare of the world, you too should perform action.”

Janaka, a great king, dedicated himself to the well-being of his people. Through selfless service, he attained Self Realization. Though he possessed immense wealth and power, he did not hoard them for personal gain; instead, he used his resources for the benefit of others. His life serves as an example that spiritual realization is not about renouncing the world but about engaging in it with a sense of duty and detachment.

Verse 21: *“Whatever the superior person does, others follow. Whatever standards he sets, the world adopts.”*

Lord Krishna is using persuasion: *“You may not want to do it for yourself, but at least do it for the sake of others—those who follow you.”*

A well-known example of this principle appears in the *Ramayana* (which differs from the *Mahabharata*, another epic in Hindu mythology). When Ram, Sita, and Lakshman were exiled to the forest, they left behind their royal life and walked barefoot into the wilderness, as decreed by their stepmother, Kaikeyi, Bharat's mother. Upon hearing of this, Bharat was furious and set out to bring them back. Though he could have traveled by chariot, he chose to walk, following in the footsteps of his step brothers, whom he considered his own. Seeing this, a vast contingent, including elders and advisors, followed him on foot. However, his advisors cautioned him: *"You are young and can walk, but if you do, everyone else—including the elderly and women—will also walk. Why not take a carriage for their sake?"* Bharat agreed, saying, *"All right, for their sake, I will do it."*

This verse conveys the same idea: **If you won't do something for yourself, at least do it for the benefit of others.**

The Sanskrit saying *Yatha Raja, Tatha Praja* translates to *"As the king does, so does the populace."*

This applies to leadership at every level—whether as a father, president, king, senior member, or CEO. If you expect others to follow a certain standard, you must first embody it yourself. You can't arrive at work at noon and expect your employees to show up at 7 AM, working diligently. If the boss is lazy, the employees will think, *"If he doesn't do it, why should I?"* But if the boss is present at 7 AM, would anyone dare to be late?

This teaching reminds us that as we grow older and wiser, it is our responsibility to set an example for younger generations—cultivating qualities such as cleanliness, punctuality, efficiency, politeness, and respect. By fostering these virtues, we not only nurture inner spirituality and strengthen society but also contribute to outer prosperity.

In summary, this passage highlights the importance of action and the impact of setting a positive example for others, as demonstrated by King Janaka in the *Ramayana*.

Key points to remember:

1. Janaka attained Self Realization and perfection through actions dedicated to the welfare of his people. His example encourages others to act for the greater good of society.
2. The actions of leaders and role models significantly influence others. People look up to them and tend to follow their example.
3. The *Ramayana* illustrates this principle through Bharat's actions. He initially chose to walk because his brothers walked, and later, he opted to ride a carriage out of responsibility and consideration for those who followed him.
4. Cultivating qualities such as cleanliness, punctuality, efficiency, politeness, and respect sets a strong example for younger generations. These virtues not only foster inner spirituality but also contribute to societal well-being and prosperity.

Verse 22: *"There is nothing in the three worlds that I must do, nor anything unattained that I need to attain, yet I am always engaged in action."*

Lord Krishna is saying, *"I don't have to do anything, yet I still choose to act. Likewise, you should also fulfill your duty."* Krishna is a Self Realized being and a king, yet he willingly serves as Arjuna's charioteer, embracing humility despite his status. The "three worlds" refer to the heavens, the earth, and the netherworld. This could also symbolize the waking state, the dream state, and deep sleep.

After the climactic battles of the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, hosted a grand celebration to honor their victory. The event was filled with activity, with everyone assigned a specific role. Amidst this, Krishna chose a seemingly simple yet deeply significant task—he stepped outside to collect the slippers of arriving guests.

In that era, no one would dream of entering a house or palace with dusty footwear; it was customary to leave slippers at the door for cleanliness. Krishna, with great reverence, not only gathered the guests' slippers but also washed their feet as they arrived. This act was more than just a ritual; washing someone's feet was a profound gesture of respect. After long journeys, guests' feet would be sore and dirty, and Krishna, embodying selflessness, took it upon himself to care for them.

As Yudhishtira participated in a significant *havan* (sacred ritual) inside the palace, the priest suddenly declared that a Self Realized individual was needed for the ceremony. Realizing Krishna was outside, Yudhishtira suggested, *"Let's call Krishna."* When Krishna was invited to join, someone offered to wash his feet in return. In a beautiful display of humility and fluidity of roles, Krishna responded, *"Sure, if you wish to wash my feet, I'll gladly come."* With effortless grace, he shifted from the humble servant to the honored guest, demonstrating how one can embrace both humility and honor without attachment.

Krishna's philosophy is enlightening. He emphasizes that he has reached a state of fulfillment, with nothing left to attain. In his view, the entire universe—encompassing heaven, earth, and everything in between—is like an ocean. Adding a mere teaspoon of water to the ocean would make no noticeable difference. Similarly, he reveals that neither giving nor taking affects his essence. A Self Realized person, Krishna conveys, operates from this space of abundance.

Key points to remember:

1. Krishna, a Self Realized being and a king, leads by example by performing actions even though he has nothing to gain. He chooses to drive Arjuna's chariot and wash the guests' feet at a gathering, demonstrating humility and respect.
2. His actions show that even after attaining everything, he continues to serve others selflessly. This sets an example, emphasizing the importance of humility and selfless service.
3. The "three worlds" may refer to the heavens, earth, and netherworld, or to the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. Regardless of the interpretation, Krishna's actions demonstrate that Self Realized beings can engage in the world without attachment or personal desire.

Verse 23: *"If indeed I do not ever engage in action, unwearied, men would in every way follow my path."* He conveys a gentle urgency here. If he were to cease acting, he suggests, it would set a precedent; people might follow his example and stop acting as well. He wasn't just speaking in terms of responsibility but was addressing a deeper concern about the social duty that shapes our actions. This idea resonates, especially when considered in the historical context of his time, when there was a mutual anxiety about how individual actions could ripple through society.

Key points to remember:

1. Krishna emphasizes the importance of his actions by suggesting that if he does not act, others will follow his example and stop acting as well. This could lead to negative consequences for society. Krishna is using fear. In those days, thousands of years before the common era, there was a fear of doing something that would affect the population, a fear that others would get hurt. Here, Krishna is saying, "Arjuna if you don't do it, other people will stop acting. You need to do this"
2. The concept of fear is introduced as a motivation for action. Krishna is implying that Arjuna's actions have the potential to impact others, and he should consider this when making decisions.
3. The context of the time period, thousands of years before the common era, suggests that there was a strong concern for the well-being of society and the impact of individual actions on the population as a whole. Krishna's message here is that Self Realized beings should still engage in action for the benefit of others, even if they themselves do not need to act. Their actions can serve as an example for others to follow and can help to maintain the well-being of society.

Verse 24: Krishna says, *"These worlds would perish if I did not perform action. I would be the cause of the confusion of castes and would destroy these people."* This is a threat. It conveys not just personal responsibility but an almost cosmic significance to his actions. Without his engagement, there would be chaos, confusion of castes, and societal disorder. It's a powerful reflection on how interconnected our actions are and how one person's choice can influence an entire community.

Key points to remember:

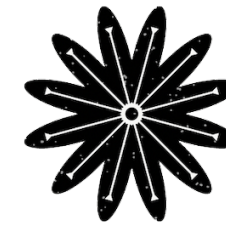
1. Krishna highlights the potential consequences if he does not perform action: the world could perish, and confusion would arise, leading to the destruction of people.
2. This serves as a threat or warning to Arjuna, emphasizing the importance of his actions and the responsibility he holds as a warrior and leader.
3. The message is that one's actions can have a significant impact on the world and society, and it is essential to consider the consequences when making decisions.

Overall, in *verses 21 to 24*, Krishna establishes the importance of selfless action, using himself as an example and highlighting the potential impact on society. Every verse matters, and we are embarking on a journey through them, with each stepping stone building upon the last.



EPISODE 36 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 25 - 28



Chapter 3 of the Gita, verses 25 to 28, talks about action, attachment, and Self Realization. Let's view them in a way that makes them accessible and relatable, weaving in anecdotes and drawing analogies that resonate with everyday life.

In the Gita, Krishna refers to himself as the *Lord*. He is speaking from the perspective of the *Atman*—the true Self that is One with the divine essence. This distinction is **crucial**. In various parts of the Gita, you'll find Krishna saying things like, "I am the Lord" or "You are dear to Me." The lowercase "me" often refers to his human form before he achieved Self Realization. When he refers to himself as "Me" with a capital "M," he is embodying the universal consciousness—the *Atman*.

To illustrate this idea, consider the life of Buddha. Before he became the enlightened one, he lived as a prince. He ventured into the forest seeking a deeper understanding and, through years of contemplation and discovery, achieved enlightenment. The transformation did not change his physical body; instead, he became one with his *Atman*, experiencing existence from a divine perspective while still living in a human form. This mirrors the journey of many spiritual seekers across different traditions. Think of someone like Christ; when he invites others by saying, "Come unto Me," he, too, is expressing this connection to the *Atman*.

An analogy that beautifully captures our spiritual quest is this: Imagine yourself as a river. Each river eventually merges with the ocean. This journey is long, spanning countless lifetimes, but with each twist and turn, the river flows toward a greater destination. You might be familiar with iconic rivers like the Mississippi or the Ganga. While flowing, if you were to ask the river its identity, it might proudly declare, "I am the Mississippi." However, as it meets the ocean and blends into a vast expanse of water, it loses that individual identity. If you then queried the same water, it might respond, "I am the ocean."

This transition symbolizes what Self Realization is about—the merging of the individual self with the universal *Atman*. Self Realized beings often express that they are one with God, echoing sentiments like, "The Father and I are one." Just think about sitting around a cozy bonfire; little sparks may pop off, dancing away as if they are separate entities. Yet, each spark is still a part of that fire. While they may temporarily float away, they came from the fire, and when they return, they are one with it again. It's the same with waves: thousands of waves, which are part of the ocean, finally merge with the vast ocean to become one.

Verse 25: “As the ignorant act while attached to action, so should the wise one act unattached, wishing for the welfare of the world.” This passage speaks volumes about the nature of our actions. Every action we take is often fueled by desire—a desire born from our state of being. Think about a moment when you’re savoring a cup of coffee; it all begins with a thought, progresses into a desire, and culminates in the action of brewing that perfect cup. This progression illustrates a larger pattern: our actions are often tinged with personal desires that can lead to anxiety about the outcomes.

We have already discussed that each one of us is doing something all day, every day. This is called ‘action.’ We are ‘acting’ every minute of the day. Many of our actions are automatic: we blink our eyes, rub them when we wake up, get out of bed, and stretch. These are all automatic actions. Further, there are actions motivated by our thoughts and desires. Krishna says that a person who acts out of desire for something is ignorant.

When you perform desire-ridden actions, you become anxious about the ‘fruit’ (the end results) because you’re focused on achieving a certain outcome. Therefore, your actions are contaminated by your desires; you fret, become anxious, or even angry at something that hinders your way to that result. This impedes your action and concentration. On the other hand, if you act for the welfare of the world (for others, for the community), you know that whatever you are doing, you are doing “because you ought to be doing it.” Your actions and concentration thus become laser-focused, as you are not worried about the end result. This leads to far more fruitful results.

Lord Krishna says, “As the ignorant act attached to action, so should the wise act unattached to any results, wishing the welfare of the world.” Krishna was Self Realized. He was constantly acting, but always for others, unattached to the outcomes. Krishna distinguishes the wise from the ignorant by highlighting their motivations. When we act from personal desire and attachment to results, we often find ourselves consumed by anxiety and distraction. On the other hand, when we shift our focus to the broader picture, choosing actions that benefit the world and acting from a sense of duty, our actions become not only clearer but also more effective. This redirection often leads to outcomes that are more fulfilling and beneficial, with no anxiety or distractions—and it also burns off your *vasanas*.

Here’s a powerful insight: before embarking on any action, take a moment to reflect on your motives. Ask yourself questions like, “***Why am I doing this? Is this for personal gain, or is there a greater good at play?***” By engaging in this introspection, we can train ourselves to act with purpose. Krishna, though SelfRealized, was constantly acting, always for others, and always unattached to the result.

Verse 26: “Let not the wise man unsettle the minds of the ignorant attached to action; acting united with the Self, let him render all actions attractive.” Krishna advises us not to unsettle those still attached to their actions. It’s tempting to share newly found wisdom with everyone around us, but we must remember that not everyone is ready for that shift in perception. If we approach someone who isn’t in the right frame of mind, we may inadvertently create confusion or discomfort. Instead, we should allow others to come to us when they are ready.

Spiritual journeys are unique, often resembling a progression through academic grades, from kindergarten to higher studies. Just as a kindergarten teacher breaks down complex concepts into simple, digestible bits, we too must sometimes start with the basics before moving to deeper teachings.

Verse 27: ‘Actions’, in all cases, are performed by the *gunas*, which are the nature of *Prakriti*. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks, “*I am the doer.*” *Prakriti* here refers to the inherent matter, or nature, which is also known as *vasanas*. From *Prakriti* come the *vasanas*; from *vasanas* come thoughts; and from thoughts come desires. Your *Prakriti* or *vasanas* make up the three *gunas*. The three *gunas* drive you to act, and you perform actions with your body, mind, or intellect.

Unfortunately, instead of saying, “*My body is doing this,*” we say, “*I am doing this,*” because we identify with our body. When your mind is thinking, feeling, fearing, or desiring, you say, “*I am feeling,*” “*I am thinking,*” “*I am desiring.*” When your intellect is planning, you say, “*I am planning.*”

The *Atman* (the true ‘I’) itself is free from action. We mistakenly identify with *Prakriti*, thinking we are the body, mind, or intellect, when we should be saying, “*I am the Atman.*” The *Atman* is without action. It allows your body to act, your mind to act, and your intellect to act, but it does not perform the actions. When a person becomes SelfRealized, they look back upon their actions, feelings, and thoughts as if observing someone else. They enter the observer position, known as the ‘Sakshi’ (witness) position. This is why, in Sanskrit, the *Atman* is referred to as the *Sakshi*.

Verse 28: “But He, with true insight into the distinctions of *gunas* and actions, knowing that the *gunas*, as senses, abide in the *gunas*, as objects, is not attached.” Here, we see the emphasis on understanding the interplay between the *gunas* and how they shape reality. A person who grasps this sees life as a rich tapestry woven from varying qualities—recognizing that everything in existence, including ourselves, is interconnected.

The analogy of clay and gold really encapsulates this idea. In their natural form, clay and gold have no form, no name; they are just clay or gold. But when you shape gold into an ornament or clay into a pot, you say, “*Oh, that’s a pot*” or “*That’s an ornament.*” Similarly, *Brahman*, without an object, has no form, no name other than ‘*Brahman*’, just like clay or gold. When it forms something, like a human being, that name given to the human being could be Leo or John or anything.

Reflecting on *Brahman*, we encounter a fascinating viewpoint. Adi Shankaracharya, a commentator on the *Upanishads*, famously stated, “*Brahman is actually useless.*” This might come off as shocking at first, especially when thinking about the divine nature. Yet, the thought emphasizes that *Brahman*, in its purest form, does not act or perform. It reaches into existence through the myriad forms it manifests.

There’s a book called ‘*The Book*’. It’s a small children’s book written about 100 years ago by a Christian author who writes in the Vedantic sense about God, *Brahman*. He says, “*Why did God have to make this?*” He states, “*God got bored. He was very powerful, but he couldn’t do anything. He decided that he wanted to have some excitement in his life.*” He decided to play hide and seek. To play hide and seek, you need somebody else. He said, “*I can’t do it by myself.*” Therefore, he created something else apart from him. That something else was called “*not God*” to play with him, and he said, “*Let’s play Hide and Seek.*” The thing is, God makes whatever he makes so well, according to this book, that “*not God*” forgot that he was made by God. In playing Hide and Seek, God hid so well that now “*not God*” can’t find where God is. And he spends the rest of his life looking for God.

You and I are *not God*. God created the universe and all of us—everything that is *not God*, made by God, now searching to return to Him. That’s what the book says. We are not divine, but we are creations of that same grand creator. God is the architect of the universe, the force behind every creature, from the largest elephants to the tiniest ants. Everything you see around you, every living being on this Earth, was brought into existence by God. The remarkable idea presented in this narrative is that all of us, as parts of this grand creation, are on a journey of rediscovery, striving to find our way back to that original source—to find God.

It’s also important to understand that the concept of God, or *Brahman*, is profound. *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, is unmoving and does not have active abilities or functions until it manifests in the physical form of a human being. This transformation allows *Brahman* to engage with the world through the use of the body, mind, and intellect. *Atman* brings life into us. It is responsible for our energy and vitality, enabling our body, mind, and intellect to function. However, how we navigate through life—the choices we make, the actions we take—is deeply influenced by our *vasanas*. These *vasanas* are the ingrained tendencies and qualities we carry from birth.

Vasanas can manifest in many forms. For example, someone with *Sattvic vasanas*, which are rooted in purity and goodness, will likely think and act with kindness and generosity. Their desires align with positive actions and thoughts. Conversely, an individual with darker tendencies, rooted in *Rajasic* or *Tamasic* qualities, may find themselves thinking and acting with cruelty and negativity. The beautiful aspect of this understanding is that God, or rather the divine essence, comprehends this intricate matrix of *vasanas* and *gunas*, the internal qualities or natures that define us. Rather than casting judgment, God sees these energies at play in everyone’s actions, allowing for compassion and forgiveness instead of resentment.

Let’s revisit a crucial point we discussed in previous conversations about the essence of true forgiveness. It’s not merely the act of saying “*I forgive you*” while still harboring feelings of bitterness or revenge beneath the surface. True forgiveness requires us to recognize that everyone is acting according to their unique *vasanas* and *gunas*. This wisdom fosters compassion rather than judgment.

In our exploration of *gunas*, we find three primary types: *Sattvic*, *Rajasic*, and *Tamasic*. Achieving a *Sattvic* state, which is aligned with purity and clarity, isn’t something that just happens; it demands conscious effort. The journey from *Tamasic*, characterized by lethargy or ignorance, to *Rajasic*, which is more active and restless, requires deliberate action. Progressing from *Rajasic* to *Sattvic* calls for even more vigor and intention.

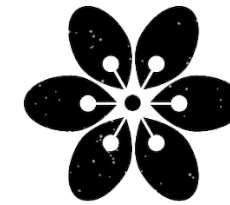
It’s interesting to note how easily we can slip into a *Tamasic* lifestyle. I distinctly remember my transition from high school to college. One day, while enjoying some delicious *Batata vadas*—a potato-based dish from India in the cafeteria—I jokingly remarked that I could devour a million of those delectable treats. A classmate, sharing an insightful perspective, pointed out that there truly is no limit to how much we can indulge in sleep and food. If we allow ourselves to be led by our base desires, we can easily cultivate a life of excess and laziness. Whether it’s the lure of sleeping all day, binge-watching television, or mindlessly scrolling on a computer, embracing a passive lifestyle is alarmingly simple.

On the other hand, striving for higher states of being is undeniably more challenging. Ascending from *Tamasic* to *Rajasic* requires effort and determination; then, transitioning from *Rajasic* to *Sattvic* demands even greater commitment. The reality is this: without sincere effort, we cannot expect growth or positive change. Just consider that the very act of engaging in this dialogue, whether you’re listening or watching, is a reflection of your willingness to learn and grow. And for me, having the opportunity to share these insights with you is a privilege that I deeply appreciate.

३७

EPISODE 37

What does God look like? Who is God?



This chapter delves into a topic that has been close to my heart for quite some time. It serves as the cornerstone of my spiritual journey, the very element that drew me into the depths of these teachings. Growing up in a Hindu family that embraced religious practices wholeheartedly, I was surrounded by rituals. My childhood was filled with visits to temples, participation in traditional prayers, and learning about mythology. My mother, a deeply spiritual woman, was especially devoted to these customs. She was well-versed in Hindu mythology, brimming with stories and insights, but often she could only scratch the surface when it came to explaining the deeper meanings behind these tales and rituals.

My education about God and spirituality primarily came from the women in my family, particularly my mother and aunts, as the men were usually preoccupied with their work. However, my schooling took place in India, a country that had been a British colony until the late 1940s. The schools I attended were mostly missionary institutions. Thus, my education included daily Christian prayers that began with the Lord's prayer, "Oh Father, who art in heaven." This blend of teachings created an interesting dynamic in my mind. On one hand, I absorbed Hindu beliefs and practices at home, while on the other, I was introduced to Christian ideals in school. Thankfully, these two belief systems never clashed with one another; instead, they coexisted peacefully in my heart.

As a child, I internalized the common perception that God was distant, existing high above the earth. *This notion made me feel separate from the divine.* I was taught that I had to adhere to God's will. God would guide me on my journey, leading me to the right path, but everything I did was ultimately a reflection of God's will. This idea left me puzzled. If I was meant to follow God's guidance, why would I face punishment for missteps? How could an all-merciful deity punish me if I veered off course?

In Christianity, there is a teaching about free will, which states that while God provides a path, the ultimate choice remains with the individual. The belief was that if I performed good deeds, I would be rewarded with heaven, while wrong actions would lead me to hell. Yet, I struggled to reconcile the idea of a benevolent God punishing those who faltered. It was a confusing internal struggle for me, especially as I matured and began to adopt a more scientific outlook. Gradually, I drifted away from my spiritual roots, moving away from rituals and prayers that no longer resonated with my scientific sensibilities.

That all changed when my wife encouraged me to go to a temple and listen to lectures by Shri Gautam Jain. It changed my life. It ignited an insatiable curiosity in me. Throughout this journey, I discovered various interpretations and understandings in sacred scriptures, particularly one critical question: What is God, and who is God? This exploration takes us into the realm of *Vedanta*.

Now, let's talk about *Vedanta*, which offers a refreshing perspective—no rigid rules or prescriptions exist. In today's version of Christianity, I see a marked distinction between the essence of Christ's teachings and how they've been presented in modern texts. My understanding has been enriched by the *Gnostic Gospels*, which reveal the teachings of Jesus and his disciples before the Church took a more structured approach. These documents emphasize ethical living and moral integrity, akin to the principles laid out in the *Gita* that advocate for acting in service to others.

One can think of the original teachings of Jesus Christ (as put forward in the *Gnostic Gospels*) in this light: "Whatever you do, do for the welfare of others." Does that resonate with what we discussed in the last episode? We often emphasize selflessness and acting without being driven by self-interest.

I stumbled upon a captivating BBC documentary about Jesus that suggested an intriguing possibility. It posited that Jesus spent time in India during the 14 missing years, learning from *Vedantic* teachers. After returning, he carried those teachings back to his people. The *Gnostic Gospels* echo many *Vedantic* principles. However, the narrative shifted dramatically 400 years later, primarily under the influence of Bishop Athanasius, who sought to reshape the teachings to benefit his agenda and the Church's interests.

In the early days of Christianity, the teachings did not impose strict rules, and no commandments outlined what one must or must not do. This parallels *Vedanta*, which also refrains from dictating absolutes but instead emphasizes the importance of developing discerning intellect. The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* guide us to cultivate the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. This is what Jesus also taught.

Of course, these texts (*Gnostic Gospels*, *Upanishads*, *Gita*, *Vedanta*) inherently suggest not causing harm—whether to animals or humans—as a core principle. However, they also recognize nuanced circumstances. For instance, if you find yourself confronted by a violent terrorist, the ethical choice might involve acting decisively to protect others, even if that means inflicting harm in the process. *Vedanta* does not condemn this.

The relationship between God and the divine can also get tangled in interpretation. For years, I had envisioned God as a man looking down upon us from above. *Vedanta* classifies God in more abstract terms. The Sanskrit words "sat," "chit," and "ananda" come to mind. Here, "sat" refers to existence, "chit" denotes consciousness or awareness, and "ananda" signifies bliss. "Sat-chit" refers to the essential nature of being both conscious and existent, as both knowing and being. Other significant Sanskrit words include "*Atman*" and "*Brahman*."

Consider this analogy: picture a pot, which has a distinct space within it. The space identifies itself as "pot space." However, once the pot is broken, that space expands, merging with a vast expanse of space that spans infinitely. This transformation illustrates that *Brahman* exists universally, while *Atman* represents the individual soul residing within each person. Today, I prefer referring to this concept as consciousness, as the term "God" often evokes outdated imagery of a distant deity for

In a similar manner, we as humans resemble that clay. We possess physical identities, whether it's Ram, John, or someone speaking another language, yet fundamentally, we are manifestations of *Brahman* or *Atman*. Without the essence of *Brahman*, there is no individual identity.

Vedanta articulates that we are all woven together by *Brahman*, creating a collective tapestry of existence. Each person and living being is distinct, possessing their own names, forms, and functions, but underneath it all, we are all manifestations of the same universal consciousness.

Each living being may appear unique, but without *Brahman*, none of us would exist. The analogy continues, suggesting humans share a connection similar to hair emerging from the scalp; it's dependent upon that scalp, just as we depend on *Brahman*. It's very deep, and I'm giving you only the most superficial level. The important concept here to convey is "Roop, Naam, Vyavahar," which means "appearance, name or form, and function." Without us, *Brahman* exists, but we cannot exist without *Brahman*.

I'm aware that I may sound repetitive, but it's vital to grasp this crucial concept. As human beings, we experience four states of existence. Most of us are only aware of three: the waking state, the dreaming state, and the deep sleep state. The fourth state, *Turiya*, discussed in the *Upanishads* and named by the philosopher *Shankaracharya*, remains tantalizingly uncovered yet profoundly significant. This exploration invites us to peel back layers, dive deeper into understanding, and discover the essence of our existence and our relationship with the divine. It's a journey worth embarking on, one that promises to unfold new insights about who we are and the nature of God itself.

The exploration of consciousness invites us into a realm that transcends simple understanding, delving into the deep philosophical teachings found within the ancient texts known as the *Upanishads*. These texts illustrate a profound truth: while we often refer to a so-called "fourth state," it's important to understand that this state is, in fact, the underpinning reality of all existence. It is not merely an additional layer to waking and dreaming, but rather the very essence that sustains every aspect of our experience. To think of it as a fourth state implies a sequence—first comes waking, then dreaming, and finally, deep sleep—but this is a misunderstanding. Without this fundamental state of *Brahman* or *Atman*, which is sometimes mistakenly labeled the fourth state by thinkers like *Shankaracharya*, none of our experiences would exist. In other words, without this foundational consciousness, we cannot wake, dream, or even sleep.

Now, let's consider what it means to exist in the waking state. In our daily lives, consciousness enables us to engage with the world around us. Imagine trying to enjoy a fragrant flower. Without the awareness that consciousness provides, the ability to smell would simply be absent. The act of hearing my wife's voice, for instance, can often be taken for granted. If I'm absorbed in thought or distraction, I might hear her calling my name, but without consciousness actively engaging with that sound, I might not register it at all. It's a bit like being in a crowded room: you can hear the noise, but until you focus, it's just background noise. In medicine, we learn how sound waves travel through our ears and into our brains, allowing us to interpret those sounds as meaningful. Yet, if our consciousness isn't tuned in, it's like having the volume turned down on an important conversation.

It's a stark reality to consider how often we might miss the moment entirely. This phenomenon isn't limited to adults; children experience it frequently. Picture a scenario where you ask a child to find your lost watch. They claim to have searched everywhere, yet the very object they are looking for is right in front of them. Their eyes might have seen it, but their minds weren't engaged with what their eyes were perceiving. This illustrates the close relationship between consciousness and the mind—our thoughts, sensations, and feelings rely heavily on that layer of awareness we often overlook.

We can also differentiate states of awareness: in the waking state, we find a subject (which is ourselves) and objects (everything else). Interestingly, the dream state, too, possesses this duality. In dreams, you are the dreamer, experiencing events where you chase after various dream objects, illustrating a similar connection between a subject and an object. It raises a thought-provoking question: when we dream of lost loved ones, are they truly reaching out to us? The answer is no. Such dreams are products of our own minds, mere echoes of our memories and feelings, not messages or interventions from the deceased. It's essential to clear away any superstitions and recognize that our dreams originate from within ourselves.

Then we arrive at the deep sleep state, which presents another layer of consciousness, one characterized by profound rest and a complete absence of awareness. In deep sleep, we often awaken refreshed but with little recall of the experience of being asleep. This absence of memory leaves us in a state where there is neither subject nor object present. In this silence, consciousness remains present, yet it exists without the distractions of worldly existence. How do we know consciousness was present? Because when we wake up, we say, "I was so fast asleep, I didn't know anything else."

Every individual possesses a unique consciousness. You may find it intriguing to think of it in terms of layers: there's your consciousness, my consciousness, and then there's the collective cosmic consciousness that forms the tapestry of existence. In Vedanta, this individual consciousness is often referred to as *Vyasti*, while the greater cosmic consciousness is termed *Samasti*. When we integrate ourselves into the larger whole, we touch upon a divine consciousness that transcends individuality, the essence often referred to as God or *Brahman* in Vedantic philosophy.

To picture this entire concept, one could envision a person residing in a house with drawn curtains, completely isolated from the outside world. As they open those curtains, they begin to engage with the external environment. This process of interaction throughout the day mimics our journey through consciousness: from awakening to dreaming, finally leading us back to a contemplative state where space and time recede. In our dream states, we might revisit our memories, sensations, and emotions, but these experiences are merely reflections of our waking life, shadows cast upon the walls of our mind. It's a huge cosmic consciousness that also includes all of the illusions, and that is called *Maya*.

When we discuss the significance of the dream state, it becomes apparent that while it encompasses more than mere visions, it also serves as a bridge between waking life and the potential of deep rest. This transition is crucial. Consciousness itself is desire-free in deep sleep—unlike in the waking realm, where cravings and longings manifest. The waking state is called the *Visva*, meaning the world or universe, and the dream state is called *Taijasa*, meaning endowed with light. In Buddhism, it means the fiery one, where they take the fire and go around in a circle. The dream state is given a lot of importance and has multiple names, such as *Prajnaghana*.

Consciousness has no desires. We have no desires in the deep sleep state, but those desires are generated in the deep sleep state because that's the cause of that state where your *vasanas* are born. It's also called *Sushupti*. In waking life, we navigate relationships and material desires, while dreams act as a reflection of our subconscious. Yet, in deep sleep, everything merges into a singular essence, drawing an analogy with planting a seed, where all forms of life contained within it, when nurtured, will blossom into a vibrant expression of existence.

There is an example that *Swami Chinmayananda* gave about a father taking his son to a movie. The young boy, from a northern village in the Himalayas, had never been to a movie before. The father had been once or twice. When asked by the son, the father says that there is a large projector and a big screen up there. "You will see people moving, singing, and dancing on the screen." When they arrived to watch the movie, it had already started. The son says, "Wow!" for the first few minutes. He is enthralled by what he sees on the screen. We are like that when we see the movie; we see everything around us in this world, but we don't see the *Brahman* on which this is projected.

This screen—how do we describe *Brahman* without making it an object, which is against the whole point? Yes, as *Shankaracharya* put it, "Useless." Without the underlying consciousness, this fourth state of *Turiya*, none of these things that follow are possible: smelling, feeling, understanding, remembering, loving.

As we traverse these states, as told in *Vedanta*, it's important to acknowledge how intimately they entwine with our lives. Imagine you're seated in deep meditation, exploring these realms of awareness. You might consider where God fits into these experiences. Is God nearest to us during our deep sleep? Is that state a vital part of who we are? Navigating through these questions can lead to deeper insights into the nature of existence and our interconnectedness.

In moments of reflection, we sometimes grapple with harsh truths, like loss, suffering, or the end of relationships. These experiences can weigh heavily on the heart, but they push us to seek understanding. The teachings found in texts like the *Gita* remind us that while we face existential pains, there is a path toward relief and joy, urging us to move closer to a state of everlasting bliss.

The essence of this pursuit often involves simplifying our desires and focusing our minds. Every little step toward this clarity can reveal substantial benefits over time, akin to the transformation that occurs when one commits to a physical workout; gains aren't visible instantly but appear with consistency and dedication.

So, as we engage with our consciousness and explore these teachings, it's vital to remain open and observant regarding the journey we all share. There are no immediate shortcuts to Self Realization, but taking our time and making mindful choices does pave the way to lasting change. Just like embarking on a fitness journey, one step at a time can bring us closer to the truth of who we are, enhancing our experience of life itself.

३८

EPISODE 38

Buddha, the Two Arrows of Suffering



The *Bhagavad Gita*, often simply referred to as the *Gita*, unveils a profound depth, characterized by its scientific essence. As we move beyond the foundational chapters we've already explored, we encounter ideas that resonate with concepts yet to be fully understood or articulated within modern science. Anyone can provide an overview of these teachings, but approaching them with the perspective of a psychiatrist offers a fascinating blend of scientific inquiry and spiritual wisdom.

I am a physician specializing in psychiatry, a field grounded in scientific rigor. As I delve into these scriptures, I often encounter concepts that seem absent from the scientific discourse we are accustomed to.

Looking ahead, we will discuss how the *Gita* touches on themes like **chaos theory**, **entropy**, and **cosmic formation**. It's intriguing how these ancient texts align with contemporary scientific ideas about the universe—how it was formed, how the Earth moves in its orbit, and how we function as human beings. But let's save that profound exploration for another session.

Today, our focus shifts to the teachings of the Buddha, particularly his poignant metaphor of the two arrows of suffering. This concept has captured my interest, and I believe it will resonate with many of you as well.

To set the stage, it's important to recognize that Buddha emerged from the same cultural roots as Hinduism; he was a born Hindu prince. In his spiritual quest for Self Realization, he critiqued various aspects of the Vedic traditions dominant during his time. One such critique targeted the caste system—a rigid social hierarchy that many, including Buddha, found unjust. This system was largely shaped by the priests of that era, who distorted the original teachings of scriptures, including the *Gita*, to serve their own interests.

The *Gita* does discuss the caste system, but not in the exploitative manner it later took on. The original intent was far removed from the way it was manipulated—where the hierarchy was structured to favor the priestly class, ensuring their privileged status across generations.

Buddha's teachings borrowed heavily from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Gita*, forming the foundation of Buddhism. In many ways, Hinduism and Buddhism can be seen as sibling philosophies—intricately connected yet distinct in their approaches.

Now, returning to the concept of suffering, let's explore how Buddha articulated human distress through the analogy of the two arrows. Before diving into that, it's worth reflecting on the broader nature of pain and suffering in our lives. Each of us, at some point, has experienced suffering—whether it's the discomfort of a paper cut, the ache of a headache, or the fatigue of the flu. Sometimes suffering is emotional, triggered by a hurtful comment, exclusion from a social gathering, the anguish of losing a job, or a tarnished reputation. This suffering manifests in our bodies, minds, and intellects.

It's important to emphasize this: suffering arises from these three dimensions—body, mind, and intellect. Our physical bodies are intricate systems equipped with pain receptors that alert us to injury. Interestingly, some internal organs, like the intestines, lack these pain fibers. A cut or burn on the intestines doesn't elicit pain in the same way a superficial wound would. Only when the intestines are unduly stretched or constricted do we perceive pain. In contrast, our skin, which is dotted with pain receptors, allows us to feel even the slightest scratch.

Yet pain is not merely a physical sensation; it extends to the emotional realm. Our minds interpret feelings of rejection or unreciprocated love, leading to emotional suffering. Then there is the intellect, which seeks respect, power, and recognition. When these desires go unfulfilled, we experience a different kind of suffering.

Here's a crucial insight: we are not defined by our suffering. When someone says, "I am so unhappy," it's worth questioning that statement. Are you truly unhappy? Is the real *you* unhappy? If I consider you as the essence of your *Atman*, your higher self, then that part remains untouched by sorrow.

Instead, it's our minds that feel discontent. You see, you have always been Lou, and that essence of you is unchanging. Last time, we talked about *Roop, Naam, Vyavahar*—name, form, and function. Right now, you recognize yourself as Lou by name. Even though you may declare yourself unhappy today, that emotional state is transient. Think about it: there were times in your past when you felt joy, and there will be moments in the future that bring you happiness too.

We may go through phases of unhappiness, but recognizing that it is our minds—not our true selves—that are affected can be liberating. The Buddha articulated this profoundly: when we dissect our suffering, we find that much of it stems from our minds' interpretations and reactions.

When we feel physical pain, we acknowledge it: "This hurts. I am aware that my body is in pain." *But the real turmoil arises when our minds start spinning stories around that pain—"Why me? Why now?"—creating deeper emotional distress that compounds our suffering.*

Recognizing this distinction is crucial. The worst problems you have did not exist before, and they won't exist in the future. They are absent in deep sleep. Even in the case of losing a loved one—when you are crying, hurting, and in pain—those emotions vanish when you are in deep, dreamless sleep. Upon waking, you may even dream of happy times with that person, feeling joy in that moment. But when you wake fully and think, *Ah, that was just a dream*, the pain returns.

Another thing to keep in mind is that both the world and you are constantly changing. The one constant is you—the *Atman*. You, the *Atman* (not the body, mind, or intellect), remain unchanged, but everything else around you shifts—your desires, your circumstances, even your emotions.

We must learn to acknowledge the first arrow of suffering without letting it control our lives. When hardships strike, embracing them as debts we have accrued can shift our perspective, freeing us from self-blame and anguish. Picture suffering as a transaction of sorts—a debt that must be settled. Once acknowledged, we can turn our focus toward healing and moving forward.

This idea may seem abstract, so let's consider an example. Suppose you want a certain thing from your spouse—say, spicier food. You are unhappy because she has changed her way of cooking, and now the food is not only less spicy but also tastes different. You complain about it for a long time.

Meanwhile, your spouse is also changing. Eventually, she decides that since you've been asking for spicier food, she will make everything spicier.

But by then, you've grown older, your tastes have changed, and you no longer like spicy food. You've gotten used to milder flavors. Now, you're unhappy again—this time because the food is too spicy!

This constant change—both in you and in those around you—perpetuates dissatisfaction, which in itself is a form of suffering. The world is constantly changing, and so are you.

Buddha taught that, in this lifetime, you are bound to be struck by at least the first arrow. For example, you may fall ill, require surgery, or experience hunger. *These hardships arise due to past actions—your Karma. You cannot change your Karma; you must bear the consequences.* However, once it is over, you can say, "My debt is paid." This perspective allows you to view suffering as something owed and settled, enabling you to look forward rather than dwell on the past. Based on your *Karma*, you will endure suffering, but once it has passed, you can move on.

The second arrow, however, is self-inflicted. The problem is that we often fail to recognize it for what it is. This second arrow is the prolonged suffering we create for ourselves because we do not process the first arrow properly. The first arrow brings unavoidable discomfort—it happens to you, and you cannot prevent it.

But instead of acknowledging it as a debt repaid, you might think, *I was cheated out of a lot of money, and now I am suffering.* However, perhaps in a past life, you caused someone similar harm. Now, the debt is settled. Instead of accepting this, you may dwell on it—blaming yourself or others, cursing your fate, losing sleep in worry. That is the second arrow, and it prolongs suffering.

Buddha explained that suffering manifests in three ways: through the body, the mind, and external circumstances. The second arrow is self-inflicted pain. Often, we become our own worst enemies, subjecting ourselves to guilt, self-pity, and blame—lingering on the past rather than focusing on the present.

Each person chases different desires in life, shaped by their *vasanas* (innate tendencies). Some long for beauty, seeking admiration, while others crave power, wealth, or prestige. Even those who seemingly have everything—good looks, achievements, riches—can succumb to despair, sometimes even taking their own lives.

Why does this happen? It is the burden of the second arrow. *The first arrow—the inevitable hardships of life—cannot be avoided. But the second arrow, the suffering we create through our thoughts and expectations, is what deepens our pain.*

Consider the role of the body. Take Stephen Hawking, for example. Despite severe physical limitations, he became one of the greatest theoretical physicists. His fulfillment did not stem from a healthy body but from an engaged mind and spirit. He demonstrated that happiness does not solely depend on physical well-being—a vibrant mind can lead to a meaningful life.

Conversely, many physically healthy individuals feel deeply unhappy, weighed down by their own thoughts. Their second arrow strikes harder as they cycle through emotional distress, failing to realize that their true suffering originates within. By understanding this, we gain insight into the nature of suffering and the pathways to freedom from it. Recognizing that we are not merely victims of circumstance allows us to reclaim control over our lives, fostering resilience and hope.

The complexities of the mind and body are central to human experience, especially in the context of suffering. Consider John Nash, famously depicted in *A Beautiful Mind*. Nash struggled with severe schizophrenia, a condition that profoundly affected his mental faculties. Yet he achieved extraordinary success, making groundbreaking contributions to mathematics. Then there is Stephen Hawking, who, despite his immense intellect, faced the challenge of a deteriorating body.

These two examples illustrate a crucial truth: whether we struggle with our bodies or our minds, or even if we possess many blessings, the key issue lies in how we respond to what we have or lack. This response determines the extent of our suffering—the so-called second arrow. The root of our emotional turmoil is not necessarily our circumstances but rather our perception of them.

Consciousness plays a vital role in shaping our existence. When we speak of the *Atman*—the true Self—we refer to that which animates our very being. This consciousness is what gives life to our minds; without it, experience itself would be meaningless. The essence of who we are is not our fleeting thoughts or emotions but the pure awareness that observes them.

I heard this from Swami Sarvapriyananda: Consciousness is like light. Sunlight shines on the ocean, illuminating its surface, allowing us to see the ocean because of the light. The ocean is wet, just as water in a river is wet. Yet when the sun shines on it, we can distinguish the ocean water from the river water—but the light itself remains untouched by wetness. Similarly, when sunlight falls upon a moving train, the train rushes forward, but the light remains stationary. The light does not move.

In the same way, though suffering takes place, consciousness remains a witness. It observes everything that happens, yet it is unaffected. We must remember: we are aware of the pain, but we are not in pain. This perspective takes practice; it is not easy.

Imagine detachment as a scale, with total detachment at 100. Even if you manage to detach by just 1, 2, or 5 points, you are that much better off than if you were to completely immerse yourself in suffering, saying, *I am in pain. I am suffering*. Instead, remind yourself: *I am aware of the pain, but I am not the pain. I am the witness to the pain in the body*.

In previous discussions, we explored the concept of *Turiya*—the fourth state of consciousness. This is the realm where suffering ceases, akin to the Self Realization experienced by enlightened beings like Jesus and Buddha. Even in extreme physical suffering—such as when nails were driven into Jesus' hands—he felt the pain, yet he approached it from a place of profound awareness, distinguishing himself from the physical experience.

The Sanskrit vocabulary surrounding suffering offers deep insight. There are two primary classifications: *Adhyātmika*, which refers to suffering produced by one's own actions, and *Ādhibhautika*, which represents pain inflicted by external sources.

For instance, imagine yourself meditating in a serene forest when a swarm of mosquitoes suddenly descends upon you. The irritation you feel is not born from your mind but from the tangible bites of these insects. In a more dire situation, consider encountering a tiger. If a tiger were to maul you, the pain would be unmistakably real.

Similarly, when nature's forces—such as storms or blizzards—disrupt your meditation, the discomfort is real and unavoidable. Yet individuals who have attained Self Realization can observe these sensations as something happening *to* their bodies rather than *to* themselves. The yogis in the Himalayas meditate year-round, whether in snowfall or -80°F temperatures, seemingly oblivious to the howling winds as they sit cross-legged in deep meditation.

One day, our son, who was attending business school in Boston, invited us to an ethics class. The professor posed a moral dilemma based on a real event:

A group of Harvard Business School professors had trained for years to scale Mount Everest. They had prepared themselves for the extreme conditions—learning to breathe rarefied air with little oxygen and enduring the hardships of mountain climbing.

Just short of the summit, they came across a sadhu (a saint) collapsed on the ice, wearing nothing but a loincloth. He appeared completely dehydrated and near death. Unlike the climbers, he had no oxygen mask, no warm clothing, not even slippers—he was barefoot on the ice.

The group faced a choice: should they stop to care for the sadhu, offering him warmth, water, and hot chocolate, or should they continue their ascent? They chose to keep climbing.

Upon reaching the summit, they began their descent. By the time they returned to where they had found the sadhu, he was gone.

The ethics class debated the morality of the climbers' decision. Their discussion revolved around the ethical implications of prioritizing their goal over the suffering of another human being.

I found the whole situation perplexing. These scholars, burdened by their own comforts, were struggling to comprehend a man who had seemingly transcended such concerns. The sadhu, walking through the harshest landscape with boundless spirit, presented a paradox. How do such individuals experience life without shying away from suffering as we typically do? Perhaps their minds and bodies function under the mastery of their consciousness.

And so, we return to the essence of the Buddha's first and second arrows. The first arrow symbolizes the unavoidable pain or challenges we encounter. The second arrow represents our emotional response to that pain—the suffering we inflict upon ourselves, which can intensify and prolong our distress. Recognizing this distinction is the key to true inner freedom.

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EPISODE 39

Matter and Consciousness



The Universe is composed of matter infused with consciousness. It operates with *intelligence*, though perhaps not in the way we typically imagine. We understand that our bodies would be significantly diminished without consciousness, but does a lump of coal possess awareness? How does it transform into a diamond? Why do trees wait until spring to grow leaves, even if a late winter is unusually warm? Explore the mechanics of our Universe and their relevance to our lives. Discover how the *Gita* foretold and explained concepts like the Big Bang Theory and Chaos Theory thousands of years before modern science identified them.

As we delve into the profound themes of the *Gita*, we encounter an opportunity for exploration and understanding—one that is both intellectually stimulating and deeply moving. This discussion promises to resonate in unexpected ways, particularly due to its unique perspective.

It is fascinating to consider how religion and science can intertwine, especially within the context of these scriptures. There was a time when I felt disconnected from religious practices; I distanced myself from rituals and temple visits, convinced that they lacked a scientific foundation. However, engaging with these texts has rekindled my appreciation for their underlying scientific wisdom. I know I am not alone in this experience—many of you may relate to these initial feelings of skepticism.

When we examine the spiritual and philosophical aspects of the *Gita*, we often notice a tension between these ideas and our scientific understanding of the world. Consider the *Gita*'s profound verses. In Verse 27, we are reminded: “*Actions, in all cases, are performed by the Gunas, which are qualities of nature (Prakriti). One deluded by egoism thinks, ‘I am the doer.’*” Verse 28 adds another layer of insight: “*He who has true understanding of the distinctions between the Gunas and actions knows that the senses, governed by the Gunas, engage with objects also governed by the Gunas, and thus, he remains unattached.*”

At first glance, these ideas may seem convoluted or even absurd in a modern context. During British colonial rule in India, these teachings were dismissed as mere babbling—perceived through a lens that deemed such civilizations primitive. Yet, as we dissect these concepts, a profound scientific understanding begins to emerge, where everything aligns beautifully. We come to realize that everything around us operates through the interplay of the *Gunas*, the fundamental components of nature.

It is essential to grasp this idea: the universe consists intrinsically of both matter and consciousness. Matter—like our very own bodies—exists as a lifeless form until consciousness (often viewed as the motivating force) breathes life into it. Matter requires *Atman*, consciousness, and *Purusha* to animate it. There are many names for this consciousness, yet no definitive way to describe what consciousness truly is.

A common misconception equates matter with consciousness. Let's break this down. Imagine someone mistakenly believing that a mountain or a rock possesses consciousness. You might raise an eyebrow at the idea—it seems ludicrous, right? However, if you think deeply, you'll realize that within that rock exists a world of constantly changing atoms and molecules. The transformation of coal into a diamond is nothing short of magical—a remarkable process of change over time, even while appearing motionless on the surface. Similarly, how does a tree, appearing lifeless in winter—brown and barren—suddenly burst into green leaves, flowers, and fruits in spring?

What does this imply? We are confronted with the reality that matter exists independently of consciousness. An individual lacking awareness may mistakenly attribute every action and thought to their own volition, claiming, “*I did this.*” In truth, it is the interplay of the *Gunas* that truly drives our actions and experiences, not even the consciousness that animates our being.

This perspective leads us to wonder: why does one person choose kindness while another engages in violence? The answer lies in the *Gunas* that have shaped a person's disposition over many lifetimes, coloring their nature and behavior in this life. The body, mind, and intellect we possess are akin to garments worn by the *Atman*—our true self. Imagine a scenario straight out of science fiction: what if these garments could act independently? You might find yourself perplexed, asking, “*How can my clothes do this?*”

In our case, the body, mind, and intellect come alive through consciousness. Yet, here's the paradox—they seem to operate autonomously. This concept can be difficult to grasp because we inherently associate responsibility with consciousness. Certainly, a part of the *Buddhi* (intellect) provides guidance. The idea of free will plays a role, but it is essential to nurture the intellect for it to flourish.

What we refer to as *Prakriti*—nature—comprises our material existence, including the entirety of the universe and celestial bodies such as Mars and the Moon. The scriptures introduce the term *Maya*, signifying illusion—a reminder of the delicate interplay between consciousness and matter. Ultimately, it is fascinating to consider that consciousness is responsible for the creation of the material world, only for it to eventually return to that very consciousness.

Every aspect of nature is influenced by three *Gunas*: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. These terms don't have direct translations, but let's break them down. Sattva embodies balance, goodness, and tranquility. Rajas represents activity and movement, while Tamas signifies inertia and stillness. Every form of matter has a tendency to be quiet and still—this is Tamas. Some may view Tamas negatively, but without it, we wouldn't be able to rest, relax, or even sleep.

One can explore inertia in terms of matter, but what about the innate drive present in all things? Consider a seemingly unchanging rock. Despite its stillness, it thrums with atomic activity. Over countless years, even a rock can transform into a diamond. The changes we see around us often stem from this fundamental drive to move—whether it's wood turning into carbon or the slow yet profound transformations unfolding in nature.

While many discussions around the *Gunas* focus on human behavior, it's important to note that Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas extend far beyond that. Most people refer only to human tendencies, but these qualities exist everywhere. When I wake up at 4 a.m., I contemplate, read, and think peacefully—this is a Sattvic state. As dawn approaches, my mind shifts toward tasks; movement sets in—Rajas takes over. By evening, when the sun sets, even if I want to study, my mind signals the need to unwind—I feel Tamasic. This cycle is not unique to humans; it plays out across the entire natural world.

The notion of Tamas—stillness, inertia, or dormancy—resonates not only in personal rhythms but also in the cycles of nature. Every individual experiences phases of Rajas (activity), Sattva (harmony), and Tamas (rest) throughout their life.

Picture this: if you're sitting here with me in the United States right now, you might look outside and see a winter landscape—trees standing bare, their branches a raw canvas of brown and gray. This stark image is a reminder of nature's rhythms, often overlooked.

Come April or May, signs of spring emerge, demonstrating the reliability of nature's cycles. It reminds me of the monsoon in India, which, year after year, arrives like clockwork in early June. Just as sailors like Vasco da Gama once navigated the winds, we, too, are guided by nature's rhythms.

But what governs these patterns? Growing up, I often heard that it was God's will. While there's some truth to that, my understanding has evolved. It's not a higher power flipping switches to control the seasons—it's a profound intelligence embedded in nature itself. This is the Sattvic quality of *Prakriti*, the innate order of nature.

When I began contemplating spring's arrival, I turned to science. The common explanation is that the sun's warmth signals trees to sprout leaves as temperatures rise. Many accept this as fact. But with global warming causing February days to reach 70°F, I wondered: why do the trees remain bare despite the warmth?

Nature, in its Sattvic wisdom, follows deeper rhythms beyond temperature shifts. It doesn't react impulsively to fleeting warmth. The Earth's orbit remains steady, dictating light patterns that guide seasonal change. Nature knows its own time.

March 21st, also known as the equinox, serves as a significant marker—the day when daylight hours grow longer, signaling nature to prepare for growth. Surprisingly, it is the length of the day, not temperature, that serves as the trees' guiding clock. This understanding reveals a meticulous design in nature, one that ancient texts and scriptures seemed to grasp intuitively long before modern science confirmed it. It is a profoundly orchestrated system—one we may not have recognized, but the *Gita* did. The scriptures knew it.

Now, this is where things become interesting. Matter remains motionless in a state of *Tamas*. When movement occurs, even occasionally, that is *Rajas*. It may appear random, yet what seems chaotic in the natural world is often underpinned by intricate planning and deep wisdom. This idea aligns with **Chaos Theory**, a concept that gained attention in recent years. If you're unfamiliar with it, Chaos Theory posits that beneath apparent disorder lies an underlying structure—patterns that exist, even if we don't yet perceive them. The formation of planets and celestial bodies follows this same logic and intelligence, which is *Sattva*. The *Sattva* of *Prakriti* is the intelligence with which everything is determined.

In human beings, *Sattva* manifests as honesty, kindness, and a sense of decency—thinking beyond oneself. But on the grander scale of the universe, *Sattva* dictates the logic and intelligence governing natural phenomena, such as the precise timing of a plant's growth.

Rather than defining intelligence as conscious thought, consider it as the ability to recognize and respond to natural patterns. A tree, for example, doesn't "decide" when to bloom—it simply follows an innate rhythm set by the sun's light. Even a rock transforming into a diamond undergoes a precise process, a silent yet sophisticated form of intelligence unfolding according to natural law.

An analogy that comes to mind is that of a grandfather clock or a cuckoo clock. You know the type, right? When you wind it up, you provide it with energy. You then close it, trusting that at the appointed time—perhaps noon—the cuckoo will emerge. The clock operates according to a pre-planned sequence of events, and without that initial winding, it remains dormant.

Isn't it remarkable how the interplay of different mechanisms leads to something as simple as the call of a cuckoo? This same principle extends to our universe. Every celestial body—planets, stars, galaxies—moves within an elegant structure defined by *Sattva*, the underlying intelligence of existence.

Understanding the roles of *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas* is crucial to grasping the balance of the cosmos. When these forces find equilibrium, the universe enters a state of *Laya*—a restful stillness akin to deep sleep, where consciousness fades into a calm void. In that state, opposites like light and dark exist in perfect harmony.

This parallels our own lives: when we sleep, we return to a seed state, a place of pure potential. In deep sleep, all aspects of our being are temporarily suspended, only to be restored upon waking.

Now, here's where it becomes truly fascinating. The scriptures describe a cosmic process in which the universe oscillates between two states: *Bindu* (a point) and *Nada* (sound or vibration). The universe contracts into a *Bindu*, only to later expand in a *Nada*—**the Big Bang**—giving birth to the celestial bodies we see today.

In this grand orchestration, no external force is dictating the cosmic dance. Planets rotate, following their paths not under a watchful eye but through the inherent intelligence of nature. Like the gears of a cuckoo clock, they move in accordance with fundamental principles that have governed them for eons.

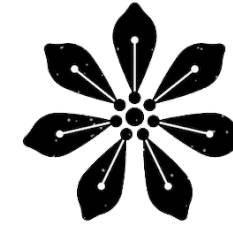
Before concluding, I find it essential to reflect on the wisdom found in the *Gita*, which lays the foundation for understanding the intricate connections between nature and spiritual teachings. The world is infused with profound cosmic principles that illuminate our journey.

Sharing this reminds me of conversations I've had with physician friends—brilliant doctors, deeply intelligent individuals—who initially struggled to grasp these concepts. They would ask, "What can I take away from this?" My point is that these ideas are not always easy to understand at first, but with patience and contemplation, their significance reveals itself. As I reflect on the essence of life and these teachings, I realize that there is a deeper truth beyond our everyday existence. There is an intricate design woven into the very fabric of reality—a tapestry that speaks of interconnectedness. It is a testament to the beauty of creation, a silent yet profound rhythm that underlies all things.



EPISODE 40 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 28 - 29



As we continue on this exploration of verses 28 and 29 from Chapter 3 of the *Gita*, let's take a step back and revisit where we left off. Our previous discussions paved the way for us to delve deep into the nature of matter and consciousness, two essential constituents of our universe.

In our shared experience during the previous chapter, we examined the imagery of Buddha and his profound teaching about the “two arrows of sorrow.” This insight leads us naturally into the contrast drawn in the next episode—between *Prakriti*, the material world, and *Purusha*, often understood as consciousness or the divine essence. This connection is vital, for while *Prakriti* represents the tangible world around us, *Purusha* is the lifeblood that animates it.

I have a vivid memory from my childhood that perfectly illustrates the concept of living existence in all forms. I remember someone once said that there's life in everything. I found this notion puzzling at the time. I vividly recall questioning my mother about it, looking skeptically at a stone beside me. I thought to myself, “How could there possibly be life in that?” To my surprise, she explained that life is often defined by movement. So, I countered with a solid point, “But a stone doesn't move at all!” Her gentle response was enlightening. She explained that the stone might not move like we do, but it is indeed in constant flux over time. For example, if left in the ground for millions of years, it gradually reshapes and evolves. She spoke of carbon, which transforms into a diamond under the right conditions, and mentioned how mountains themselves can change in size and form.

This little exchange opened my eyes to a deeper understanding: matter does possess an intrinsic consciousness, a hidden intelligence manifested through its movements. This intelligence, I came to realize, is fundamentally connected to *Purusha*, the life force that energizes all forms of *Prakriti*. We discussed how even planetary bodies are formed not by mere chaos but through profound logic and intelligence.

Though the Big Bang theory might paint a picture of chaos, as everything that once was compressed into a minuscule point (*Bindu*) and there is a *Nada* before erupting into the cosmos, it simultaneously suggests that each celestial body occupies its place for a reason. There's no orchestrator pulling strings; rather, we witness an intricate interplay of forces. For instance, look at how a lump of carbon naturally transforms into a diamond, without any oversight. Or consider the Cicada (an insect) that spends 17 years in a dormant state, only to emerge instinctively at exactly the right moment. What guides them through such an extended period?

This convolution opens up a path to the unending layers of intelligence present in nature. A fascinating scientific concept known as the Anthropic Principle emphasizes how the data we gather about the universe is inevitably influenced by our limited perspective. It's remarkable to think that our understanding of nature is often colored by our perceptions.

Long ago, the Sages taught that to truly understand this complexity, we should reflect on our own mental states: the quietness of deep sleep, the vividness of dreams, and our consciousness in waking hours. They articulated a framework of three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* embodies clarity, harmony, and virtuous qualities; *rajas* is characterized by activity and desire; and *tamas* represents inertia and lethargy.

Imagine this: for the planets, *sattva* translates to intelligence, *rajas* to their movements and activities, and *tamas* to periods of inactivity. This harmonious state of equilibrium, referred to as *Laya*, reminds us of deep sleep. In a cosmic sense, when the universe rests in *Laya*, it experiences *Pralaya*, a state of total inactivity and stillness.

Now, picture the universe awakening from this profound slumber, akin to the transition from deep sleep to fiery activity, leading us to the cosmic event known as the Big Bang. Herein lies another layer of understanding: the intelligence of *Prakriti* insists that we are not the ultimate doers of our actions. Although we may identify closely with our bodies, minds, and intellects, the true essence that propels our actions is the consciousness that underlies it all. This consciousness is akin to electricity powering a computer—it is indispensable for life to function but remains distinct from the physical form it animates.

This raises a compelling question that often arises among those who ponder the nature of consciousness: Why did it need to manifest at all? The prevailing theory suggests that consciousness emerged simply to experience existence, to engage with the very fabric of life. Scientists today warn us that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will do the same.

The crux of this teaching is that we are not the ultimate orchestrators of our actions. Understanding that a profound intelligence fuels our *Prakriti* helps us recognize that while we possess a measure of free will that allows us to influence our decisions, our inherent tendencies or *vasanas* shape the manner in which we act within this world.

In contemplating the complexity of our existence, we encounter a framework known as “*Tattva Bodha*,” which encapsulates the 24 components, or *tattvas*, of the material universe. These elements are categorized into several groups, the first being the five fundamental elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth, or “*Akash, Vayu, Agni, Jala, and Prithvi*” in Sanskrit.

Next, we have five sense objects that correspond to these elements: sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell. The five organs of perception allow us to experience these sensory inputs; notably, each organ links back to its corresponding element. For instance, the ability to hear, the ability to see, the ability to touch, the ability to smell, and the ability to taste.

Then, we have the five organs of action, which encompass speech, hands, legs, reproduction, and excretion. Finally, the last four components include the mind, intellect, memory, and ego—our inner landscape that shapes our thoughts and actions. So, we have five elements, five sense objects, five organs of perception, five organs of action, and four components, making a total of 24.

Let's take a moment to visualize these elements together. At the top of our list are the five elements—space, air, fire, water, and earth. Remember, space, or *Akash*, is the subtlest of them, while earth, or *Prithvi*, is the most tangible. Grasping this hierarchy is vital, especially as we engage in the sacred act of prayer.

In this interconnected web of existence, we can see how every element, thought, and action feeds into a greater understanding of our reality. With this knowledge, we not only recognize our place in the universe but also appreciate the profound intelligence that governs all that we perceive and experience.

In the realm of spiritual exploration, a curious journey begins with the act of prayer. When we contemplate prayer, we first encounter something that is tangible—something we can grasp with our imagination. Imagine, for a moment, trying to capture the essence of consciousness. What shape does it take? What color? What does it sound like? It's perplexing, isn't it? Consciousness is elusive; it doesn't conform to our sensory expectations. Picture this: if you were to close your eyes and attempt to clear your mind completely, pushing away all thoughts and distractions, how difficult would that be! A vacuum of thought can feel like a monumental task. This is where we often turn to more solid forms—something we can see, touch, or feel.

To aid in this, spiritual traditions have turned to physical representations, crafting idols from materials such as stone or clay. The purpose behind this practice is simple yet profound: through a tangible figure, we can direct our focus and energy, allowing our thoughts to settle upon something specific as we seek to connect with the divine. These idols, whether shaped from clay or carved from stone, serve as a focal point. It's not that we believe these shapes embody the divine accurately; rather, they provide a necessary anchor for our wandering minds.

Why choose materials like stone, clay, wood, or metal for these idols? Each of these substances connects us to the Earth, known as *Prithvi* in Sanskrit, grounding our spiritual practice in the physical world. When you tap a spoon against a piece of wood, a certain sound resonates, while a stone produces a very different noise, and metal yet another. Each material has its unique qualities in terms of sound, taste, and even texture. Imagine the sensation of running your fingers over a smooth piece of stone or the roughness of wood; each experience engages our senses in a distinct way.

As individuals deepen their spiritual practices, they may eventually turn away from these physical forms and approach the more abstract concept of fire. Fire represents a step toward the subtle because, while you can see its flickering dance and smell the soot it produces, you cannot directly touch its flames without getting burned, nor can you taste it. This act of setting aside idols in favor of fire reflects a maturation in the spiritual journey, a shift toward appreciating the subtler realms of existence.

Then, transcending even the elemental nature of fire, we encounter sound, the most abstract of all. This journey culminates in the vibration of ‘Om’, the sacred syllable revered as the most profound sound representing pure consciousness. Those who practice yoga often chant ‘Om’, letting its resonance fill the space and silence racing thoughts. It symbolizes a journey beyond the superficial realm of objects and forms, leading into a direct experience of the cosmos.

Now, let's break down this rich tapestry of experience. The elements we've discussed relate to what are known in Sanskrit as "*Vishaya*," the sensory experiences we engage with: sound, referred to as "*Shabda*"; touch, or "*Sparsha*"; sight, known as "*Rupa*" for form and color; taste, called "*Rasa*"; and smell, termed "*Gandha*." Each of these sensory experiences corresponds to one of the five elements that make up our physical world.

When we examine the organs of perception—the faculties through which we experience these sensations—we identify five key abilities: hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling. These senses connect us to the world around us. Alongside them, we find the organs of action, including our voice for speech, hands for manipulation, legs for movement, reproductive organs for the continuation of life, and excretory organs for waste elimination. Together, these elements paint a comprehensive picture of our interaction with reality, giving us a total of twenty distinct components.

Digging deeper, we then encounter the internal faculties, composed of *Mana* (the mind), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Chitta* (consciousness), and *Ahamkara* (ego). Here, *Chitta* embodies consciousness, which connects to our experience of memory.

At this point in the discussion, we realize that we've delved into 24 dimensions of existence, each possessing its own intelligence, acting independently, and responding to the ebb and flow of life. In spiritual texts, *Prakriti*, often depicted as a feminine force, is described metaphorically as a playful child interacting with her toys—those toys being the 24 elements of existence. The interplay between these elements reflects a vibrant, dynamic play, known as "*Prapancha*," a concept emphasizing the diversity of created forms. While *Prakriti*, the female, expands and explores, *Purusha*, the male principle, imparts consciousness, creating a dance of existence and awareness.

As we navigate through these concepts, we should clarify the four inner components: the mind, which encapsulates emotions, greed, fears, and desires; the intellect, capable of reasoning and understanding; memory, which archives our experiences; and ego, the self that often hinders pure perception. The observer, the "*Atman*," is what ultimately gives us awareness of our inner workings, allowing us to recognize thoughts and feelings as they arise. It's this "*Atman*" that observes and experiences the interplay of consciousness within us. *Atman* is purely a witness—*Sakshi*—it does not do anything; it purely observes and enlivens us.

Throughout this exploration of the 24 'Tattvas,' or elements of reality, we also find the influence of the three 'gunas'—qualities that shape our experience. Whether we find ourselves in a state of *sattva* (calm and peaceful), *rajas* (active and restless), or *tamas* (lazy and inert), these qualities influence how we interact with the world around us. It's essential to understand that we are not merely the sum of our actions; rather, we are the '*Atman*' that observes these actions taking place.

A metaphor might help clarify this: consider looking into a mirror. You see a reflection of yourself, but you don't mistake it for your true self. You know this is simply a reflection. Similarly, while we may believe ourselves to be the doers of actions, the deeper truth is that we are the observer—the *Atman*—gazing upon the actions of the body and mind. Swami Parthasarathy, in volume one of *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*, gives a beautiful example. He says that a person who is Self-Realized recognizes that the Self is beyond the body, the mind, the intellect, and their functioning, which all operate according to the person's own gunas. The Self-Realized person watches those as a person watching actions in a movie. He knows he is separate from the actors in the movie and their actions.

A child watching the same movie does not have that feeling of being separate. He or she is not objective. The child is scared of whatever is happening on the screen, and nobody can relieve their fear as long as they are watching the movie. We can only educate the child that he or she is separate from the actors and from the movie. Similarly, you and I have to educate ourselves and the world around us of this fact.

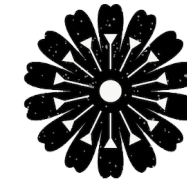
Verse 28: "But he with the true insight into the distinctions of Gunas, which are the qualities and actions, knowing that the gunas are senses abiding in Gunas as objects, is not attached to any of the actions." This verse touches upon understanding the 24 tattvas. It explains that those who possess insight into the distinctions of the gunas understand that they influence our actions and experiences. Yet, acknowledging this can lead to a certain detachment, a recognition that much of what we do stems from these elemental forces rather than purely from our will.

Verse 29: "Those deluded by the Gunas, qualities of Prakriti nature, are attached to the functions of the Guna. The one of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the dull-witted whose knowledge is imperfect." This verse gently reminds us not to disturb those who might feel bewildered by these complex ideas. Some may find this discourse too intricate, and it's best to approach such knowledge with patience. Ultimately, what's being conveyed is a profound truth: that a significant portion of our being or actions is a product of the 24 elements that constitute us.



EPISODE 41 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 30 - 32



It's essential to consider the complex relationship between our actions and our inner selves. Previously, we explored the twenty-four tattvas of matter, known as *Prakriti*, and the ultimate essence of *Purusha*. This topic, often closely tied to science, may have sparked curiosity in those unfamiliar with these terms. It is a realization that connects deeply with our quest for knowledge and understanding. Even now, I find myself reflecting on these concepts, which reveal layers of meaning and intricate connections that deserve our attention.

Verse 30: “Renouncing all actions in ‘Me’, with thoughts resting on the ‘Self’, free from hope and attachment, fight without mental fever.” Here, we encounter the core of *Karma Yōga*, or the yoga of actions, where Krishna imparts wisdom to Arjuna, a warrior caught on the precipice of battle. However, Krishna's teaching transcends the immediate context of war. He provides guidance that every person can apply in life. The directive is clear: whatever you pursue, do so without the anxiety that often accompanies our endeavors, referred to here as “mental fever.”

Breaking this down, Krishna emphasizes that *all actions should be dedicated to God*. Our aim should be to focus our thoughts on the ‘Self’ or *Atman* while performing our duties. He advises us to approach our tasks without the burden of expectations. This means engaging in our activities not with a calculation of personal gain, but with the mindset of selfless service.

Reflecting on this, I recognize that many of us, myself included, have particular tendencies that shape how we approach action. Personally, I thrive on the structure and busyness of life, often feeling restless when inactive. So, when I first encountered this teaching, it resonated deeply. It reminded me that when we perform actions, we create energy.

Consider those mornings when the thought of hitting the gym feels overwhelming, and laziness threatens to take over. Yet, with a simple shift—deciding to take a brisk walk instead—suddenly, that initial reluctance melts away. By the end of the walk, I find myself exhilarated, bursting with energy. It's remarkable how engaging in physical activity recharges us. The same applies to studying; there have been moments when I've dreaded opening a book, but upon starting, my curiosity ignites. It awakens a mental vigor that propels my learning forward.

This idea highlights that each action we take can generate energy. Ideal actions are twofold: first, they should invigorate and empower us, and second, they should channel that energy in a constructive direction.

To illustrate this further, Shri Gautam Jain gave an example of a bucket being filled with water from a faucet. As you turn on the faucet, energy flows into the bucket. However, if there are holes at the bottom, no matter how much water you pour in, it will keep leaking out, resulting in a perpetually empty bucket. In life, we often have our own “holes” through which our energy escapes.

Let’s discuss the dynamics involved in how we use this energy. Moving more, for example, strengthens the body, while inactivity leads to weakness. Our minds, when left unchecked, tend to spiral into a cycle of self-serving thoughts. Pondering past failures or fretting over future opportunities drains our energy, contrary to the spirit of selfless action that Krishna advocates.

Krishna’s message of surrendering the mind to a higher cause is significant. It calls us to channel our thoughts and actions toward something greater than our individual desires. This could be charity, a mission, or simply any lofty ideal that deflects the focus from our selfish impulses. When we let go of attachment to the outcomes and dedicate ourselves to these higher ideals, we are liberated from the weight of personal ambition.

Take, for instance, the example of a well-known cricketer in India. When he approaches a milestone—let’s say, nearing a century in runs—he consciously avoids looking at the scoreboard. Engaging only with the game as it unfolds helps him maintain composure and prevents him from succumbing to unnecessary pressure, thus reducing his chances of making errors in pursuit of the score.

This approach resonates with Krishna’s teaching: a focus on the journey rather than the destination. When we relinquish our ego-driven aspirations and act with purity of purpose, we find that energy amplifies. If you act selfishly, you dissipate energy, and if you act selflessly, you generate energy. Great historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela exemplify this selfless action. Their commitment to a cause greater than themselves resulted in a rippling effect of positive energy and transformative change.

When Mandela was imprisoned, he didn’t let his situation diminish his spirit. Instead, he asked the guards to teach him their language, demonstrating his desire to connect and understand, even in confinement. His actions inspired respect and even kindness from those who had imprisoned him. His selflessness didn’t just benefit him; it fostered a collective energy that influenced others positively, showcasing how such energy can stem from altruism.

Turning our attention back to the intellect, Krishna reminds us that maintaining focus on our higher ideals is crucial. The intellect must guide the mind back on track whenever it drifts into selfishness or distraction. By fostering this dedication, we cultivate significant power for action.

Here’s a recap of our discussion: **when the mind surrenders to a noble cause, when our actions are selfless, and when our intellect remains fixed on higher ideals, we create a powerful synergy that propels us forward in life.** This is not merely theoretical; it’s a practice that can yield tangible results.

Finally, it is essential to safeguard the energy we’ve generated. Krishna speaks clearly of the need to remain free from hope and attachment to results, which are likened to holes in our metaphorical bucket that allow energy to dissipate. *“Fight without mental fever”* or *“Jvara”* in Sanskrit suggests that emotional excitement tied to outcomes can sap our strength even while we act.

This *“mental fever”* often manifests when we allow ourselves to be weighed down by worries about what has occurred in the past or anxieties regarding what might happen in the future. We are easily swept away by thoughts of what we desire or fear, whether it’s success, wealth, fame, or approval. This emotional turbulence distracts us from the present moment and diminishes the effectiveness of our actions. So how does the mind lose focus and dissipate this energy? There are three ways or channels of dissipation; these are the three holes in the bucket that Shri Gautam Jain was talking about. Worries about the past, anxiety about the future (which is the biggest), and excitement about the past, present, and future. The *Jvara*, the fever of action, is the cause and effect. Whatever you are acting on now, the future will be the effect.

Verses 31: “Those men who constantly practice this teaching of the mind, full of Shraddha, and without unnecessary questions and objections, they too are liberated from actions.”

So when He says, *“liberated from actions,”* understand that He is referring to *Vasanas*. What are actions? Actions are what you do in order to fulfill your desires, which come from your *Vasanas*. The Gita teaches that ultimately, you cannot gain moksha, liberation, or become one with the Self as long as you have *Vasanas*, because then you will keep acting to fulfill them.

When He says *“liberated from actions,”* He is really referring to being liberated from your *Vasanas* or desires. He says that when you act in this way—constantly practicing this teaching of mine, full of Shraddha—Shraddha is a word in Sanskrit for which there is no direct English translation, but loosely, it means faith, devotion, and determination to reach the goal.

“And without unnecessary questions and objections” refers to the scriptures’ encouragement to ask questions, but not unnecessary ones or objections. That’s called caviling—arguing with the teacher for the sake of argument. Instead, ask questions, get your doubts fulfilled, have Shraddha and faith, and devote everything to Me, and then you will be liberated from action and your *Vasanas*.

You must constantly ask yourself, *“What am I doing with my life? Why am I doing whatever it is that I’m doing?”*

You accumulate *Vasanas*, which are the cause of all action, because of your egocentric and selfish actions. It becomes a vicious cycle. You do an action that is egocentric and selfish, fulfilling your desire, but it generates more desire. And that desire comes back. You act again, and it keeps going round and round, life after life, and those *Vasanas* get bigger and bigger. They compel you to keep acting to fulfill those desires. Those *Vasanas* are acquired by each one of us. You are never free to live apart from your *Vasanas* as you keep accumulating them. So be very careful, because you must get liberated from them.

You can indeed get liberated if you follow the *Karma Yōga* principle. Lord Krishna spoke about this earlier, saying, *“Do your action, but whatever you do, do without hope or attachment. Liberate yourself by dedicating it to a higher cause. You will get liberation from your Vasanas and from this world.”*

Verse 32: “those who find fault unreasonably with this teaching and do not practice it, diluted in all knowledge and senseless in themselves, know them to be ruined.”

Lord Krishna is not cursing anyone. This teaching is for those who stubbornly refuse to practice it. These individuals are portrayed as being lost in ignorance. The essence of this message isn't about placing a curse on anyone for their disbelief; rather, it's about acknowledging the consequences of their choices. Those who lack understanding will find themselves trapped in an endless cycle of desire and action, continually caught up in their own whirlpool of wants.

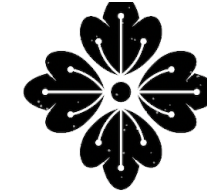
This brings to mind an important topic that can often lead to confusion—the habit of unnecessary questioning. There are individuals who might approach teachings like this with a spirit of defiance, eager to dissect and criticize rather than to understand. However, what can be much more fruitful is to embrace a genuine curiosity. Intelligent questioning can deepen our understanding and lead us closer to the essence of these teachings.

Even the wisest sages throughout history have underscored the importance of asking questions. They encouraged their students, regardless of their level of knowledge, to voice their inquiries freely. There's a significant difference between asking for the sake of argument and seeking wisdom with intent. It's about nurturing a dialogue that fosters growth and clarity.



EPISODE 42 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 33 - 35



In our previous discussion, we concluded our thoughts on verse 32 from Chapter 3 of the Gita. Now, we shall focus particularly on verses 33, 34, and 35. I must say, verse 33 holds a remarkable sense of calmness for me. Upon delving into it, reading it, and reflecting on its meaning, I found a profound peace that was hard to miss.

Too much complexity all at once can leave anyone feeling lost, so breaking it down is key. To catch everyone up, remember how we discussed the motivations behind our actions in the last chapter? I highlighted that whenever we engage in an activity, we usually have a goal in mind. However, if that result is rooted in self-interest, it's tied to our ego, or as it's termed in Sanskrit, "*Ahankar*."

Here's an intriguing observation: when our actions are primarily dictated by a selfish agenda, the effectiveness of those actions diminishes. What I didn't clarify then, and what is crucial to note now, is that there's a very specific relationship between your ego-driven purpose and how efficiently you perform an action. *The more your intention is centered around your ego, the less effective you tend to be.* To put it simply: high ego equals low effectiveness. On the flip side, if you manage to suppress that ego, bringing it down to a minimum, your potential for efficiency can soar to its highest levels, sometimes even reaching a perfect one hundred percent efficiency.

But how do you get to that place with no ego at all? We explored this concept in our earlier discussions. Essentially, you shift your focus to a higher ideal, a cause greater than just yourself. You work for this noble purpose, and while benefits might come your way, they shouldn't be your primary aim. You see, you are engaged because you've decided that you ought to contribute to something bigger, something more meaningful. The outcomes? They will follow in their own time, but fixing them in your gaze should not be your priority.

In *verses 33 through 35 in Chapter 3*, a very poignant question arises, especially as we shift gears into the latter part of this chapter: If the wisdom of the Gita is laid out so clearly, why do so many of us feel as though we haven't changed? Why do we find ourselves stuck in the same patterns? People might look at you and say, "You've been studying the Gita, but have you really changed?" And to some extent, that can feel true. We attend temples, mosques, and churches, putting in hours, yet we struggle to feel a genuine shift in ourselves.

Interestingly enough, I have not even once emphasized what many would assume is the core of spiritual practice: the rituals or donations you make to a place of worship.

The teachings of the Gita and the Upanishads are fundamentally scientific; they transcend the limitations of specific religious beliefs. They address deep, universal truths about our nature and our actions. So, it begs the question: If our understanding of these concepts is so clear, what prevents many from acting on them?

Verse 33: “Even a man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. He does what his own nature makes him do. All beings follow their nature, not just human beings, but every living creature does. What can restraint do?” Lord Krishna presents a thought here. Many individuals believe that by merely attempting to restrain their desires, they’ll be able to change themselves. But, he argues, if they resign themselves to indulgence in every craving, what chance do they really have of transformation?

We are often bound by our nature. Each being has an innate principle governing its actions, like a scorpion’s instinctive urge to sting. That nature, shaped over eons, cannot be easily altered. Humans, however, possess a slightly different dynamic. We have many lives before and after this present life. If I am a certain age today, whatever I have done so far has produced certain thoughts in my mind that are seeping down to my unconscious and laying down the groundwork for future *vasanas*, similar to how our thoughts create desires and desires result in actions. So, any action that we are doing is the direct result of our thoughts, which are driven by our *vasanas*. It’s a cyclic process.

Humans, however, possess a slightly different dynamic. Our past interactions and experiences influence our current state, and every thought we entertain has consequences, seeding desires that play out in our actions, creating a cycle of behavior. We discussed *Prakriti*—it’s the fabric of matter, composed of 24 components, embedded with unique *gunas* (qualities) that guide their behavior. Just as trees instinctively bloom when spring arrives, we too have intrinsic behaviors tied to our nature.

Lord Krishna’s message resonates clearly when he asks, “What can control or restraint do?” He emphasizes that neither we nor anyone else can reshape our *Prakriti*. This theme reminds me of a story—the parable of the frog and the scorpion. The scorpion asks the frog for a ride across a stream. Skeptical, the frog hesitates, realizing that the scorpion’s nature could very well lead to betrayal. However, the scorpion insists he won’t sting the frog, promises to uphold his word, and they set off together. Midway across the stream, the scorpion stings the frog. Similarly, a tiger sees a deer and wants to eat it, regardless of the fact that it has two fawns. Even if you were to remind a scorpion or a tiger of their detrimental actions, they would respond in kind: “That’s just how I am programmed.” Programming here refers to the inner practicality of ourselves.

Consider our own programming. Each of us carries within us a distinct *Prakriti*. It is pre-programmed by our past actions, and that programming profoundly influences our nature. Some individuals are driven by desires for wealth, others by relationships, and some by artistic talent. These desires can seemingly dictate our paths from a young age, suggesting hints about who we may become. Gifted individuals, often termed prodigies, may exhibit a unique grasp for music or mathematics, seemingly coded within their very essence.

This internal programming, coming from *vasanas*—our latent tendencies and experiences—manifests into our thoughts, translates into our desires, and consequently layers into our actions and behaviors. These behaviors define our *Dharma*, a concept that refers to our inherent nature. To put it simply, one might say that the *Dharma* of sugar is sweetness; remove that sweetness, and its essence is lost.

There’s a pathway to understand our *Prakriti* and how, even amidst our perceived limitations, growth is still possible. It all comes down to deeper insights and practices, which Krishna continues to beautifully elaborate on in the verses that follow.

The *Katho Upanishad* plays a significant role in guiding us through the maze of life’s decisions, presenting us with crucial concepts to ponder. One of the central distinctions it makes is between “*Shreya*” and “*Preya*.” *Preya* refers to actions that are appealing—it’s all about what we enjoy doing. On the other hand, *Shreya* is concerned with what we ought to do, what is beneficial or wise in the long run. This ancient wisdom intricately teaches us that while it’s tempting to chase after what feels good, we should, instead, focus on what we know is right for us.

This idea also links back to another paired set of concepts: “*Raga*” and “*Dweshha*.” *Raga* embodies our preferences and likes, the things that bring us joy. In contrast, *Dweshha* pertains to our aversions, the things we dislike or seek to avoid. Delving into these ideas, particularly in verse 35 of the *Katho Upanishad*, provides us with profound insights into our inner workings.

Verse 34: “*Raga (likes) and “Dweshha”(dislikes) for the sense objects reside in the senses: Nobody should come under the influence of Raga and Dweshha because they are one’s enemies.*” At our core, we hold a nature or essence referred to as “*Prakriti*.” The term “*Prakriti*” is rich with meaning; it includes “*riti*” (what was done or created) and “*Prak*” (from the past), indicating that this nature is shaped by the past. This underlying nature of ours also encompasses our *vasanas*, which are the deeply ingrained tendencies that often guide our behaviors.

On the other hand, we encounter the term “*Vikruti*,” which aligns with the distortion or corruption of our natural state, while “*Sanskriti*” refers to a positive transformation or an enhancement of our innate qualities. To illustrate these concepts, think of a delightful fruit salad crafted from bananas and apples, beautifully sliced and arranged in a bowl. This delightful presentation is your *Prakriti* in its untouched and fresh state. However, if left unattended, the bananas will inevitably brown and the apples will start to break down—this change represents *Vikruti*. Now, if I decide to elevate this dish by adding vibrant grapes and delicate flowers, I’m engaging in *Sanskriti*, which is about improving and refining what I already have.

While it’s essential to understand that we can’t completely alter our *Prakriti*, we do have the power to enhance it. For example, if aggression is a part of my inherent nature, I could use that raw energy to fuel something positive, like becoming a defender of justice or standing firm against wrongdoing. In this case, I’m sculpting my *Sanskriti* from my original *Prakriti*.

Think of a sturdy building. You cannot change the foundational structure; that’s set, it’s permanent. But just as a building can be styled and decorated, we can improve our presentation and how we express ourselves. Each of us is born with a unique combination of body, mind, and intellect that comprises our *Prakriti*. If we neglect to nurture these aspects, they can devolve into *Vikruti*.

It's up to us to cultivate our innate qualities into a refined state called *Samskriti*. If we choose to ignore our nature, there is a risk of it worsening over time. However, if we engage thoughtfully with our authentic selves, we can make positive changes, reducing unhealthy desires and attachments as we do so.

Krishna draws our attention to the concept of attachment and aversion, pointing out that “likes and dislikes” dwell within our senses. He cautions us against allowing them to take charge of our lives, labeling these feelings as our adversaries. In Sanskrit, they are referred to as “**Paripanthaka**,” which translates to “wayside bandits.” Metaphorically, likes and dislikes rob us of our concentration and clarity.

You can genuinely begin to identify your *prakriti* by reflecting on your preferences. From a young age, children display varying likes and dislikes that hint at their inherent nature. Our senses express these preferences and aversions in vivid ways.

While it is possible to suppress our likes and dislikes, it's important to know that you can't truly eliminate them; they are woven into the fabric of who we are. You can't get rid of them. For instance, parents may guide their children toward interests or activities they believe are more suitable, but this guidance doesn't erase the child's innate passions or inclinations. Even renowned figures like Krishna had their preferences; he had a special fondness for Arjuna, which reflects his own likes. But where do these likes and dislikes reside? They live in the sense organs. While you can manage your likes and dislikes, you must also fulfill your duty, doing what you ought to do regardless of whether you like it or not.

An interesting analogy compares our journey to that of an elephant making its way through the bustling streets of India. Despite the cacophony of barking dogs and the aroma of enticing street food, the elephant maintains its focus, not swayed by distractions. This is how we should approach our responsibilities, keeping our eyes on our duties while learning to navigate around our likes and dislikes.

Krishna emphasizes the importance of staying true to one's own *Dharma* or personal duty rather than getting swept up in someone else's. He drives home the message that there's more virtue in fulfilling your unique responsibilities, even to the point of risking failure, than thriving by mimicking another's path. Krishna insists that one should pursue their own *Dharma* (*SvaDharma*) rather than someone else's *paraDharma*. It is better to die following your own duty than to thrive in someone else's.

Verse 35: “Better is SvaDharma, though devoid of merit, than ParaDharma, well discharged. Better is death in SvaDharma than in ParaDharma, because ParaDharma is fraught with fear.”

Recognizing the difference between true responsibility and mere likes or dislikes can be a pivotal insight, opening the door to a richer understanding of our true selves. The *Katho Upanishad* guides us not merely to act on whims but to find our deeper motivations and align our actions with our inherent nature. This journey of self-discovery is an invaluable part of living a fulfilling life.

The pursuit of wealth can be an enticing venture, but it's important to understand that it isn't a fundamental aspect of human nature to relentlessly chase after money. Instead, we are influenced by something deeper: our *Prakriti*, which refers to our innate characteristics and tendencies, and *samskaras*, the intricate patterns of behavior shaped by our experiences over many lifetimes. These patterns often reside in the unconscious mind, guiding our actions and decisions in ways we're not readily aware of. This exploration leads us into the realms of the conscious and unconscious, where we can begin to dissect our motivations and inclinations.

In the *Katho Upanishad*, a profound discussion takes place around two concepts: *Shreya* and *Preya*. *Shreya* represents what is beneficial for us, what we know we ought to engage in, like exercising to maintain good health or tackling responsibilities. On the other hand, *Preya* embodies what we are drawn to and enjoy doing, like lounging in a hammock on a sunny day with a refreshing lemonade in hand. The challenge lies in allowing our intellect to guide our decisions: should we succumb to the pleasures of the moment or choose the path that leads to long-term well-being? It's extraordinarily tempting to give in to the urge to relax indefinitely, but we must recognize the need for discernment.

Consequently, we are faced with a choice: do we choose to sever ties with what feels pleasant but may not serve our best interests? It's akin to a skillful tightrope walk, balancing fleeting desires with the enduring benefits of discipline.

A well-known experiment in psychological circles, called the marshmallow test and conducted by Walter Mischel, illustrates this very point. In this experiment, children are presented with a marshmallow as a reward. They're given a simple yet profound ultimatum: if they can resist eating the marshmallow for just a couple of minutes while the experimenter steps out of the room, they will be rewarded with a second marshmallow upon the experimenter's return. The camera focuses intently on the little ones, capturing their turmoil as they face this dilemma. Some children can look away, striving to ignore the marshmallow's allure, while others are tempted and can't resist the glossy, sugary treat. Mischel followed these children into adulthood, examining the paths they took and their achievements. The experiment essentially underscores the significance of decision-making and self-control. Those who cultivated the ability to postpone gratification demonstrated more success in their lives. It's a reflection of how our choices shape our future. The other kids studiously looked away; they didn't look at the marshmallows. There is a Latin word for cutting, “Caedare,” from which the word ‘Caesar’ is derived. It means to cut your vision from what is tempting you, to look the other way. These little kids who later became successful in life would consistently just keep looking at the door to see if Dr. Walter was coming back.

It is an experiment that shows that those who have an inherent tendency from early childhood to postpone gratification succeed. That's the core point here: the ability to delay one's own gratification is key to success.

We talked about *Samskaras* or *Prakriti* being uncontrollable. They are deep down inside us, just like a tiger's nature to kill a deer or a scorpion's nature to bite. *Samskaras* are uncontrollable. However, on their way up towards a thought or desire, there's a small gap where you can change it. That is the conscious part, where consciousness asks, “Do I like it, or do I dislike it?” And that is where you can say, “I like it, but I'm not going to have it!”

So, you have to make a decision, like these kids, and say, “I’m not going to look at it!” The more you look at it, the more you indulge in it, the harder it becomes! In Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, it talks about consciousness and the subconscious. In Sanskrit, the word is “Vritti” for consciousness and “Samskara” for the unconscious. To make the connection clearer: you could think of the marshmallow as representing your *Raga* (attachment or desire). By recognizing the difference between *Shreya* (what you ought to do) and *Preya* (what you merely like), you’re presented with a moment of clarity and choice. The child who decides to wait for a better reward illustrates the commitment to postpone immediate gratification for a larger gain.

The fascinating element here is understanding that our *Samskaras*, those ingrained patterns we spoke of, are often uncontrollable. They emerge from deep-seated instincts, just as a tiger instinctively seeks to hunt or a scorpion its prey. However, as we navigate our thoughts and desires, there’s a fleeting moment of agency where we can consciously make a choice. This sliver of time allows us to respond to our impulses: “I see the marshmallow, I recognize my desire, but I choose to exercise restraint.”

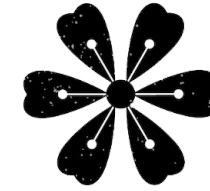
Once we pass that critical point of decision, the impulse may overpower our will. Thus, while our *Prakriti* remains largely unconscious, our *Raga* and *Dvesha*—the likes and dislikes—are conscious but still subject to our control. This concept challenges us to be aware of that moment, as it’s essential in determining our actions. As we gain insight into this process, it becomes increasingly clear that what we think influences our *Samskara* or *Prakriti*. Therefore, if thoughts about wealth and its acquisition dominate our mental landscape, they deepen our attachment and desire for those very things. While you may be conscious of your intentions—*Vritti*—, the unconscious tendencies driving them—*Samskara*— often remain outside your awareness. This is important: your thoughts, your wishes—these determine your *Vasanas*, your attachments.

Embracing the lessons from the marshmallow experiment is crucial. The key takeaway is how those who were able to avert their gaze from temptation managed their focus. They were not explicitly taught this behavior but seemingly understood instinctively what to do to avoid the allure of the marshmallow-like distractions in life.

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EPISODE 43 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 36 - 37



The thoughts we will explore today are sparked from a vital question posed by Arjuna, the warrior prince, during a time marked by imminent conflict. Today, we delve into the discussion surrounding verses 36 and 37 of Chapter 3, which throw light on the internal struggles we face when confronted with desires and moral dilemmas.

Verse 36: Arjuna asks a question for Krishna. He says, “*What is that force which propels a person to commit sin? What prompts a human being, as though he is propelled by a superior power, although he may not want to, as though somebody is forcing us to perform this sin?*” We have all experienced that at some time or the other; you say, “I don’t want to do this”, but there is an uncontrollable urge that you do it.

To fully grasp the depth of Arjuna’s concern, we should clarify what sin means in the context of the Gita. Many of us, influenced by various beliefs and cultural narratives, might think of sin merely as a list of wrongdoings—stealing, lying, or harming others. However, the Gita presents a more nuanced understanding. It teaches us that sin arises not solely from the action itself but from the turmoil in our minds that follows an action. For example, if I were to tell a lie for a noble cause, like protecting someone in danger, *and felt no guilt*, then, according to this wisdom, that action wouldn’t be sinful at all. The heart of the matter lies in how our actions affect our mental state.

Think of this: if the consequence of an action disturbs your peace of mind, that, my friend, is where sin resides. Take the example of a doctor faced with an emergency— a woman bursts into their office begging for help from a group of attackers. If the doctor lies to protect her, even though the act of lying might usually seem wrong, the intent and absence of mental disturbance negate any notion of sin. Herein lies an essential layer: *the disturbance of mind matters significantly more than the action if one does not carry the weight of guilt or anxiety after performing that action.*

The concept of desire emerges as a key player in our inner conflicts. Imagine the infant who cries out for comfort, a simple desire for food or affection. As life progresses, those primal desires evolve into more complicated yearnings, often leading us into turmoil. The Gita posits that desire, in itself, is a source of disturbance. The moment we wish for something, we place our peace of mind on the line. Maybe you’ve found yourself longing for a treat, your favorite dessert glaring at you from the fridge, knowing you shouldn’t indulge, yet feeling compelled to do so. Sin occurs when you are aware of what you’re doing, and the action disturbs your mind. A person who doesn’t know what he’s doing without knowing it, doesn’t feel any guilt, has no sin.

For instance, if I kill an innocent animal (or any living being for that matter) and I feel bad about it, my mind is disturbed- that's sin. But as I'm walking, I step on an ant, or a bug, or some other animal, maybe even a larger animal than a bug, but I don't know about it; it's in the dark. I have no sin about that at all.

The same applies to a soldier. If he doesn't feel guilty about what he's doing, he thinks he's doing it for the right reasons, and he kills another human being, he doesn't feel guilty—there's no sin over there. If you do something that you don't think you're doing wrong, it's not the action that causes the *Karma* to come to you; it is the thought process—your intention. When you have a conscious choice to do something and you do it, good or bad, that's when the *Karma* accrues to you.

All religions understand sin as, “doing something bad” (e.g., I stole something, I killed something, I told a lie). This is not true at all. The Gita does not specifically say this. If I tell a lie in the service of doing something good and I don't feel bad about it, I have not committed any sin.” There are no “commandments” in the Gita. It is not the action that is sin. If the action results in a disturbed mind, then you have committed a sin.

This brings us back to the heart of Arjuna's question: what propels us to act against our better judgment? This sense of compulsion can feel overwhelming, akin to being at the mercy of a force greater than us. Even in scenarios beyond minor indulgences, think of significant transgressions—a person, perhaps in a position of power or wealth, who engages in deceitful acts, seemingly at odds with their public persona. What is it that underlies those choices? The Gita posits that the culprits here are desire & anger, which are intimately intertwined. They spring from rajas, one of the three gunas or qualities that drive our behavior.

Think of rajas as the energy that propels us into action; it can be vibrant and dynamic but also tumultuous. When desire and anger activate this state of rajas, it creates a feedback loop that perpetuates further desires and anger, leading to a cycle of unrest. Imagine a moment of tranquil contemplation suddenly spiraling into restlessness as thoughts of want intrude. One minute you are peacefully seated, and the next, your mind is racing with the desire to check on a neighbor, leading to a distraction from your previous calm.

In our journey toward understanding these internal forces, let's consider deeper implications. The implications aren't just about minor slips, like devouring that chocolate bar despite knowing it's not the best choice for me being diabetic. They extend into how we navigate life, how our values can be compromised in the face of overwhelming desires. The pressure we sometimes feel, whether from our own expectations or societal standards, can lead us to make decisions that don't align with our true selves.

The moment often arrives when we find ourselves pulling up a chair, relaxing, and sharing a refreshing glass, perhaps lemonade or coffee. Something that brings a touch of pleasure. He enjoys it, I enjoy it. There's a simple pleasure in this shared experience. Yet, as we sip, a thought begins to bubble up within me. It evolves into a longing, then quickly shifts to that restless state, known as 'rajasic'. Here's the progression: I started in a calm, serene space, referred to as 'sattva', where my mind was tranquil and clear. But now, my peaceful contemplation has been overshadowed by a stirring desire for that beverage, mixed with an aversion to idleness and doing nothing. This intense craving has now taken control over my calm & composed state.

This brings us to an interesting function of our inner nature where three fundamental qualities, or 'gunas', in each of us exist—sattva, rajas, and tamas. These gunas are like layers or facets of our being. When one quality steps into the limelight, the others retreat into the shadows. As I sit in a sattvic mood, calm and composed, the qualities of rajas and tamas fade into the background. But as that restlessness from rajas emerges, the calming influence of sattva and the lethargy of tamas recede just as significantly.

Then, picture this: it's evening, the sun begins to set, and suddenly tamas arises. I'm enveloped in a wave of laziness, yearning to kick back, put my feet up, perhaps watch some television, enjoy a drink, or listen to soothing music. The thought of doing anything productive feels like an uphill battle. I don't want to engage in study or fix something that's broken. I simply crave the ease of doing nothing. When tamas takes the stage like this, what happens to rajas and sattva? They, too, fade away.

Verse 37: “it is desire, it is anger, born of the quality of rajas, all devouring, all sinful, know this rajas to be the enemy”. It has some Rajas in it, because Rajas are the parents of desire and anger. It's all devouring, all sinful. Know this to be the enemy here.

He is stating that desire and anger arise from the quality of rajas. We'll see later on how often Lord Krishna (or Vyasa who wrote this) refers to these as enemies. He talks about likes and dislikes and calls them roadside bandits. He speaks of desire and anger as enemies.

Krishna is talking to Arjuna, a warrior par excellence. So, he has to speak in terms of enemies. You'll see as this goes on that he asks, where do these enemies reside? “Where do they hide in your body, in your mind?” To a warrior, it's important to identify the enemy- just like in battle, you need to know where the enemy is hiding. Is he behind the mountain? Is he in the caves? You must take the battle to him.

Kama is desire, *Krodha* is anger means all-devouring like fire. Desire means all-devouring, voracious eater, like fire- nothing enough. You keep giving fire more and more fuel, and it will keep taking it and it could last for hundreds of years. So is desire which is never satisfied.

How do these qualities, raga (likes) and dwesha (dislikes) affect our lives? In verse 34, Krishna points out that they reside in our sensory organs, implying that to gain mastery over them, we must first gain control over our senses. This is where the challenge lies. The act of controlling one's desires can be simple, but the execution is often where it gets tricky. Take a moment to recognize how our senses influence our preferences: our eyes are drawn to appealing sights; our ears are attracted to pleasant sounds, and this stimulation can cascade into likes and dislikes.

For instance, think about your own preferences, perhaps you have a fondness for silence. If someone begins to make noise while you're trying to focus, immediately your mind races with the thought: “I don't like this.” Those likes and dislikes are automatic reactions. Yet, an important lesson lies in recognizing that this world is inherently filled with noise and distractions. That's the nature of life. Adapting to these distractions instead of letting them overpower you is a valuable skill, something we can work on regularly.

This notion of controlling desires reminds me of a fascinating experiment conducted by a psychologist, *Walter Mischel*. He invited children into a room and presented them with marshmallows, telling them they could eat one immediately or wait until he returned to receive a second one. Following these children over the years, he found that those who were able to resist the temptation of that marshmallow tended to be more successful later in life.

He derived what he called the principle of delaying gratification from this study.

While the rush of satisfying a desire is immediate, it is fleeting and often leaves one wanting more. Those children who successfully delayed their impulse to indulge had learned to navigate their actions by separating their minds from their immediate desires. They glanced at the marshmallow but didn't allow it to consume their thoughts. Instead, they redirected their attention toward the professor or their surroundings. Essentially, they conquered that initial impulse, a vital step in mastering desire.

If we think about other temptations in life, similar principles apply. For someone struggling with alcoholism, entering a bar is an unwise choice. For a gambler, entering a casino could lead to disaster. Even if someone craves chocolate, having it within easy reach can lead to surrendering to that temptation. It's about resisting that immediate impulse and making a deliberate decision to avoid what we don't want.

Shri Gautam Jain pointed out a shift in music over the years. Earlier, the melodies were often soothing and peaceful. Nowadays, many songs contain sensual content that tends to heighten rajas, igniting our desires and excitement rather than calming our minds. Have you noticed how quickly a catchy beat can get your heart racing? It's remarkable how exposure to sound can influence our state of mind.

When we dwell on our likes, these thoughts give rise to desires that can escalate quickly. Take a moment to reflect: perhaps you're just relaxing at home, and your mind wanders, mulling over the delicious food shown in commercials. Your mind triggers a craving, impacting your mood and igniting desires. The same can be said for our dislikes. If we continuously replay unflattering memories related to someone or something, we might find ourselves fostering feelings of anger or resentment. The cycle continues, transforming an initial annoyance into what feels like a full-blown vendetta, creating a perceived enemy out of someone who may not even warrant that disdain.

This applies to every desire, no matter how small it initially seems. If we let ourselves ponder on the urge to have a piece of chocolate, it swiftly evolves into a full-fledged plan: pop out to the store, or maybe even indulge in some impulsive late-night snacking. Such desires build momentum. What starts as a trickle of thought becomes a growing tide, a river of longing that can flood our minds. ***It's crucial to cut off those thoughts before they gather enough strength*** to sweep us away. Just like putting a distance between us and things we find tempting, we should practice restraining our minds from fixating on desires. Like a well-trained archer, one must always be aware of their target and adjust their aim.

It's essential to recognize that it's not just about tangible cravings like chocolate or fleeting pleasures; these concepts expand into feelings of envy or desire related to positions and people around us. Imagine sitting in the office, confronted by someone charismatic and charming while you're tethered to emotional loyalty elsewhere. If we engage our thoughts, even unintentionally, with temptation, it can lead us into a world of regret.

When I joined the field of psychiatry, one of my professors imparted what I thought was a dubious piece of advice. "Allow your patients to think what they will," he said, "Thoughts are merely thoughts." I respectfully disagree. It's erroneous to dismiss thoughts as trivial; they can become obsessions, morphing into desires that compel us to act in ways we might later regret.

The timeless wisdom of the Gita frames these subtleties by calling raga and dwesha as "roadside bandits" while denouncing desire and anger as adversaries. When Kama (desire) and Krodha (anger) rise, they overshadow our innate knowledge that resides in sattva, drawing us into the chaos of rajas. Knowledge is one thing; wisdom is another. While knowledge can stem from what we hear and learn, wisdom is the deeply rooted understanding that transforms knowledge into part of who we are—our Prakriti, our nature. In moments of weakness, when rajas takes over and clouds our judgment, our wisdom may momentarily vanish, leaving us regretting actions borne out of unbridled desire.

Every one of us has desires and aversions. It's simply human. The essence of Vedanta isn't about suppressing those feelings but about mastering them. The clarity comes from understanding that desires, while natural, should not hold us captive.

Here lies a pivotal realization: ***when we indulge our desires, the immediate rush of joy we feel is only fleeting.*** Savoring that piece of chocolate may bring a short-lived thrill, but true contentment is rarely found in transient pleasures. It's about cultivating a sense of balance, recognizing that while fulfilling desires is part of being human, it's crucial to also embrace restraint to navigate through life with compassion, awareness, and wisdom.

When we think about happiness, it's interesting to note how fleeting it often is. Imagine you just hit a monumental lottery prize, say a whopping \$1,000,000. The initial joy you feel might last for a moment, perhaps a few seconds, maybe even a minute of sheer euphoria. But soon enough, that high fades away, and you're left wondering what's next. This kind of joy is quite different from the happiness found in more enduring experiences, which we will explore further down the line. You might find yourself believing that once you attain that moment of happiness, everything will be fine. Yet, this isn't the case. Just like a fire that quickly consumes fuel, our desires are insatiable. They tend to say, "I want more!" Almost immediately, new desires pop up, taking the place of the old ones.

As we dive into this, think about the first thing that happens after you achieve what you desire, let's say, accumulating wealth. The nature of rajas, a certain quality of energy—compels you to look outward. Rather than turning your attention inward to appreciate what you have, you begin to compare yourself to others. You might check your bank account and think, "I've got this much, but look at that person, they have even more!" This comparison leads to **jealousy**. Suddenly, desire has morphed into **envy**. Alternatively, you might notice someone who has less than you, which can lead to an inflated **sense of pride**. You might think to yourself, "I have more, so I must be better."

Let's unravel that even more. When you are caught in this cycle of desire leading to jealousy, it doesn't stop there. The emotions become intertwined like a tangled string. **Anger** often emerges when your desires are thwarted when you can't quite grasp what you want. It's why we frequently hear about how anger and desire are inseparable, much like siblings who constantly bicker yet share the same room. In Sanskrit, we use terms like **Kama (desire), Krodha (anger), "Lobha" (greed), "Moha" (delusion), and "Matsarya" (envy)** to describe these feelings. When desire goes unmet, it often transforms into anger. When you possess something, a nagging feeling of wanting more often creeps in. We can also experience delusion when we convince ourselves that the abundance we have elevates us above others, leading to arrogance. Moreover, when we perceive that someone possesses more, jealousy arises, while envy sets in when we lament what others have that we lack. All these feelings can become a heavy burden, creating a cloud of negativity.

The philosophical underpinning from which many spiritual teachings arise doesn't advocate for the eradication of desires altogether. That would be quite unrealistic and frankly impossible. What it encourages instead is to enjoy your desires without allowing them to take the reins of your life. Picture it this way: no matter how much wealth you accumulate, the desire for more will always be lurking around. All religions have personified desires. In Christianity, we might refer to it as "Satan" or the Devil. Similarly, in other traditions, terms like "Shaitan", "Asura", "Rakshas", and "Mara" evoke the same notion—a recognition that desire lies at the root of much of our unhappiness. It's as if these desires have become our own personal foes.

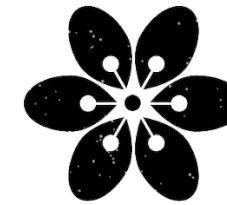
We've spoken of *Prakriti* before, which also signifies our innate likes and dislikes. *Prakriti* plays a crucial role in shaping our *Karma*, our actions shaped by these inherent preferences. Each one of us is born with certain inclinations. For instance, assume you have a pet. You could offer it a bowl of food, and while it may devour some, it will likely leave the rest. Animals, like us, have their tastes and dislikes, which they carry throughout their lives. This is a universal truth; every being, from dogs to insects, harbors such preferences. It's essential to recognize that these likes and dislikes become deeply ingrained, forming part of our character. When we depart this world, we carry these traits with us, only to rediscover them in our next lifetime.

The Gita implies that our likes and dislikes are akin to thieves, taking away from our ultimate purpose. They can rob us of our tranquility, diverting us from spiritual richness. As we continue to explore further teachings from the Gita, particularly what Krishna imparts to Arjuna, we will see the importance of acknowledging where these emotional adversaries reside within us, be it in our senses, mind, or intellect. Understanding how to combat these foes is pivotal.



EPISODE 44 / THE GITA

Chapter 3 Verses 38 - 43



Today we are at Chapter 3, starting with verse 38. It's important to connect the dots, so if you haven't read the previous verses, especially 36 and 37, it would be worthwhile to do so, as they lay essential groundwork for understanding what follows.

Verse 38: "Just as fire is enveloped by smoke, or just as a mirror is covered by dust, or just as an embryo is covered by the womb, in the same way, desire and anger cover the Atman." Krishna presents a compelling analogy: he states that just as fire is obscured by smoke, a mirror by dust, and an embryo by the womb, so too is our true Self, our *Atman*, hidden beneath layers of desire and anger. This assertion sparks deep reflection. Earlier, in the previous episodes, desire and anger were portrayed as formidable adversaries, described distinctly as *Kama* (desire) and *Krodha* (anger), not merely as separate entities but as a dual threat that needs to be conquered. Here, Krishna emphasizes that these two forces veil our innate essence, making it difficult to recognize our true Selves.

Let's explore Krishna's imagery. Imagine a campfire burning brightly amidst a forest. While the flames are clearly visible, a cloud of smoke surrounds them, creating a certain obscurity. Alternatively, think of discovering an old mirror in a dusty attic; its reflective surface holds untold beauty, yet layers of dust obscure the view. Lastly, envision a developing baby deep within its mother's womb, safely cocooned and hidden from sight. Each of these examples illustrates how *Kama* and *Krodha* cloud our perception of the *Atman*, our authentic Self.

Now, you might wonder why Krishna offers three different metaphors. Each analogy serves a specific purpose. In the current verse, we learn that desire and anger shroud the *Atman*, while the subsequent verse expands on how these emotions obscure one's wisdom and knowledge. This differentiation is crucial. Knowledge can often come across as superficial. For instance, many of us might listen to teachings like this one, gaining insights that float just on the surface of our understanding. It's a bit like lumber lying around at a construction site—it's there and can be useful, but until it's integrated into a structure, it doesn't serve its full purpose. Knowledge must penetrate deeper, becoming ingrained in us and absorbed into our very being.

Reflecting on the importance of this deeper understanding, consider how we nurture a tree. Simply sprinkling water on the surface isn't enough; for the roots to thrive, the water must be allowed to sink deep into the soil. Similarly, the wisdom and knowledge we gather from teachings need time and contemplation—time to become part of our essence.

Krishna goes on to delineate different types of desires that cover our *Atman*. He categorizes them into three: *Sattvic* desires, *Rajasic* desires, and *Tamasic* desires. Sattvic desires are akin to a delicate muslin cloth, light and pure, while rajasic desires resemble a heavy woolen blanket, more cumbersome and warmer. Lastly, tamasic desires can be compared to a thick, down-filled comforter that is heavy and suffocating.

Delving deeper, we consider how visible the *Atman* is through these varied coverings. With smoke enveloping a fire, despite the haze, the flame remains largely visible. It's akin to witnessing the light of one's spiritual essence even amidst turbulent emotions. Conversely, removing the smoke is relatively straightforward compared to wiping years of dust from a mirror or extracting an embryo, situations that demand different levels of effort and time. The challenge intensifies with rajasic desires; they blur our clarity. A mirror obscured by long-settled dust makes it hard to see one's true reflection. Much like the dust on that mirror, rajasic desires require considerable effort to clear away. It's not impossible, but it demands diligence and commitment.

In contrast, tamasic desires present a more profound dilemma because they often render the divinity within us completely invisible. Just like an embryo remains hidden from view in the womb, individuals engulfed in tamasic tendencies struggle to perceive or express their true selves. These individuals can be resistant to knowledge, much like a dormant seed that needs time, nurture, and the right conditions to germinate. In the past, I used this example whenever I've taken many people to Gautam ji's lecture. Somebody who is sattvic only needs to be taken once, and they'll say, "Oh, I liked the lecture." That person might then ask, "Where have I been all this time? I want to keep going."

Anybody who listens to this and keeps listening again and again is a sattvic person who says, "I can't get enough of these teachings." Then I graduated to listening to a guru talking at a higher level, discussing the Upanishads and so on. There's no harm in that. You keep looking for other gurus to learn from. But a rajasic person needs to be dragged once, twice, three times, and then maybe they'll come. A tamasic person, you take them to Gautam ji's lecture, and they'll fall asleep during the lecture and never want to come back.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I recall attending a lecture with others. Some people instantly connected with the teachings and felt motivated to delve deeper. They left inspired, eager to learn more. However, there were those who remained indifferent, reluctant to engage, perhaps even drifting off during discussions. Observing these varying levels of receptiveness was enlightening; not everyone responds the same way to wisdom.

Verse 39: "Oh, Arjuna, wisdom is covered by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, as insatiable fire." Krishna sheds light on how desires conceal wisdom. He likens desire to an everlasting fire, stating that it is *Dushpurena*, which translates to being insatiable like fire. This description paints a vivid picture of desire, always yearning, never fulfilled. The truth is, from our first breath to our last, incessant desire, masked as an enemy, clouds our judgment, our knowledge, and ultimately, our peace of mind.

What's critical here is that no amount of accumulated wisdom can offset the overpowering grip of desire and anger once they hijack our emotions. Even for the wisest individuals, those who seem to glide through life with clarity, a single weakness can overpower insight and knowledge. Take, for instance, the revered figure of Lord Shiva, sitting atop the Himalayas, immersed in rigorous meditation. Despite his strength, he too occasionally has succumbed to distractions when tempted.

Shifts in focus can happen even to the most enlightened. The scriptures narrate tales of sages who, despite their devotion and discipline, faltered when confronted with their desires. Whether the account is mythical or metaphorical, the lesson remains clear: everyone, no matter how enlightened, can bow to temptation if they are not vigilant. If you have a weakness, you'll succumb, and your *sattva* will go away.

In the Ramayana, there is a demon called Ravan. Ravan is a very accomplished demon; he has studied the scriptures, done a lot of penance, and meditation, and is a very well-reputed king of a great kingdom. He has one weakness, and that is for women. His sister comes to him and says, "*You know Ram, he has a beautiful wife, Sita,*" and then Ravan starts thinking about Sita. Ultimately, he goes and kidnaps her, takes her to his kingdom, and the whole Ramayana is all about Ram going to get Sita back and then ultimately destroying Ravan. But it is that one weakness that Ravan had that, in spite of all his meditation and penance, he had to succumb to this weakness.

This pattern presents itself repeatedly in various walks of life, be it in a corporate setting or elsewhere; we frequently observe leaders and influential figures succumb to their appetites, whether for power, possessions, or passions. **In verse 34**, Krishna calls desires+anger "*Parpanthi*" which means enemies. **In verses 37, 39, and 43**, Krishna calls desire + anger "*Shatru*" which is the enemy.

A wise person knows; he is smart. Even when he's overcome by his desires and anger, he knows that his *Kama* and *Krodha*, his desires and anger, are defeating him. As it's happening, he knows it. One feels that if I can only let this desire be fulfilled, I'll be satisfied. But it doesn't happen. It's constant. It's never over. This *kama* is the greatest enemy. You blame others for your weakness. You blame others for why you succumbed.

But how do you attack this greatest enemy? If you could get this enemy out, then you can meditate, and only then can you achieve the whole purpose of the Gita. This is still the third chapter. Krishna is telling you, "*Look, you've got to get rid of these things before you can start to meditate*" and get to the next stage, but you have to get rid of this enemy first. He talks to Arjuna about this enemy, saying you are a soldier. He describes a brilliant enemy having multiple locations. It doesn't hide; there is one battalion here, one battalion over there, one battalion somewhere else. He says this enemy has three locations: the first location is in our senses, the second location is in our mind, and the third location is in our intellect, which is *buddhi*.

The first location is in our senses as likes and dislikes. I like this; I don't like this. Each sense has its own likes and dislikes, not just in humans but in all animals. The second resides as emotions, "*Sankalpa*" (deciding to do something) and "*Vikalpa*" (to reject it), which are pros and cons. The third resides in *buddhi* which is intellect. When it goes into the *buddhi*, it justifies why I like this.

The first resides in the senses as *Kama* and *Krodha*, likes and dislikes. When the likes and dislikes go into the mind, you say you love it. Initially, you may just say you like it, but as it seeps deeper into the mind, the mind joins forces with those sense organs, which are just extensions of the mind, and says, "*I love it*" or "*I hate it*." This becomes much stronger now because it has transitioned from a like to an emotion or desire.

In the intellect, we justify and rationalize our anger, love, and hatred. It now resides in the intellect because we rationalize, saying, “*Well, you know, I love this blonde guy sitting in front of me. My husband is busy with his own work; this man shows me whatever it is that I need help with. You rationalize to say that I can justify through my intellect why it’s okay to like this tough, handsome guy who works with me, as opposed to my husband.*” Once it’s in your intellect, it becomes much harder. What Krishna says is that it’s easiest to control when they are in the senses. As discussed in the last chapter with the marshmallow example, if your eyes are looking at something, your senses are causing you to generate desires, stop looking. If your mind is thinking about something, stop thinking. Move your thoughts and your senses away from that sense object. It’s most difficult in the intellect. For example, in India, it is said that Lord Shiva used to drink *Bhang* once a year. *Bhang* is a concoction made by grinding the equivalent of Marijuana, a mix that gets you high. People often say, “*Well, Shiva did it, so it’s okay for me to do.*” That’s an example of “*justification.*” Many find themselves in big problems, which is when it has moved from likes to desire, then to the mind, and finally to the intellect.

The same applies to anger. When you dislike something, and you keep contemplating your dislikes, it converts to anger. The first expression is through the voice box. Remember we discussed the five organs of action: your hands, legs, voice box, organs of excretion, and reproductive organs. The first expression is through the voice box, so when you get angry, immediately control your voice box. Stop yourself from saying what you’re thinking before it escalates. Lord Krishna advises controlling your senses to destroy your desires because they tarnish your knowledge gained from books and teachers and destroy your wisdom, “*Vijnana.*” Knowledge becomes wisdom when it’s internalized; Krishna says control it.

Verse 40: “*The senses, mind, and intellect are said to be the seat of these desires, veiling wisdom through these, it deludes the embodied,*” meaning they mislead the Self, which is consumed by desires and anger. Anger hides in the senses, mind, and intellect, hiding your wisdom. It’s a repetition of what’s been previously discussed and highlights its importance.

On a tangible level, our bodies continually seek sensory gratification—sights, sounds, tastes, and textures. Many individuals might grapple with challenges relating to one or several of these senses, and if all five are in turmoil, it can pose an overwhelming challenge to our well-being. At the mental level, our attachments and emotional ties, be it to family, friends, or even ideas, complicate matters further. Desires manifest as intricate webs woven into our psyche.

And then comes the intellect, where insatiable curiosity can spiral into an obsession for acquiring knowledge. People may exclaim, “*I want to learn everything!*” yet hesitate to apply this knowledge in their practical lives, denying it room to mature into wisdom. Craving for knowledge is called “*Jigyasu.*”

To combat this inner turmoil, we must venture into what feels like enemy territory, asserting control over our senses while rising to a level of understanding that surpasses the distractions of the external world. It’s about aligning our intellect with the fleeting nature of the senses. The senses are the most apparent distractions; when we understand their temporary allure, we can ally our intellect to discern what truly serves our best interests. *Subtler than the sense organs is the mind, and subtler than the mind is the Buddhi, and subtler than the Buddhi is the Self.* Imagine if I become fixated on a shiny spoon and it attracts me immensely. As my senses engage with its appeal, visualizing it stirs a desire. But if I shut my eyes, the spoon loses its hold on me. The real control begins when our mind doesn’t react to the external stimulus, demonstrating that the senses cannot dominate our inner world if we choose not to let them.

The eyes (sense organs) are subtler than the spoon (sense objects). Beyond my eyes is my mind. Imagine I’m in a deep sleep. My mind is asleep. You open my eyes and show me the spoon, but the mind is still asleep. The sense object has no effect on me as my mind hasn’t engaged. So unless the mind is engaged in the interaction between sense object & sense organ, there is no effect. In this hierarchy, we find our true Self ‘*Atman*’ at the pinnacle, with the intellect just below it, as a critical player in this dance of control. While we may not directly access the height of the Self, we can certainly elevate our intellect, empowering it to guide our mind and senses toward clarity and discipline.

Verse 41: It brings forth an essential realization: “*Therefore, Arjuna, controlling first the senses indeed kills this sinful destroyer of knowledge and wisdom, which is desire.*” By first taking charge of our senses, we can confront the troubling grip of desire that undermines both knowledge and wisdom. Moving beyond this gross level of existence offers a more accessible pathway toward self-control.

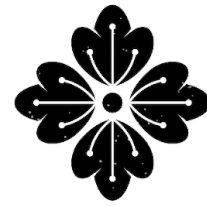
It is vital to remember that managing emotions is a further step along this journey. **Whenever you sense temptation rising, it’s crucial to exert effort in restraining your senses, especially your eyes.** Recall our earlier conversation about the marshmallow experiment, emphasizing the importance of what you choose to focus on. **Control your eyes, control your thoughts—don’t let your thoughts keep drifting toward the sense objects.** In addition, living a balanced life through proper exercise, adequate sleep, and mindful eating puts us in a position of authority over our basic instincts and desires. Each of these actions serves as a stepping stone toward mastery over our appetites, distractions, and impulses.

Verse 42: “*The senses are said to be great, greater than the senses is the mind, greater than the mind is the intellect, and greater than the intellect is the Atman.*” This verse affirms the relationship between our senses, mind, intellect, and ultimately, *Atman*. As we navigate this hierarchy, we recognize that the intellect shines as a beacon, guiding our decisions in a world full of sensory distractions and emotional turmoil. To conquer desires or cravings, we must venture inward, resisting the pulls of external stimuli. Negate all the justifications that the intellect comes up with.

Verse 43: “*Thus knowing that which is greater than the intellect, which is the Atman, and restraining the self by the self, kills the enemy in the form of desire, since it is hard to conquer.*” One must first make all attempts to follow the advice to work towards realizing the Self (becoming Self Realized). That may not be possible for us in this lifetime, but wherever one reaches it is better than not trying at all. The *Atman* is the highest, below it is the intellect, then the mind, then the senses. Second, restrain one’s senses. Use self-restraint. As you acquire this knowledge, self-restraint becomes easier. As you acquire self-restraint, getting knowledge becomes easier. So, these are the two pedals to a bicycle.s

We discover that by acknowledging and restraining the Self, we can delve deeper into our consciousness to face the formidable enemy of desire. It requires courage and persistence, as this nemesis can be particularly tricky to defeat. Today, we’ve traversed a lot of ground, discussing a wealth of ideas and insights. Understanding these concepts isn’t a one-time affair; it demands repetition, reflection, and continuous engagement. Take out a piece of paper and a pen, jot down your thoughts and personal reflections.

Allow this knowledge to penetrate your mind and heart until it effortlessly transforms into wisdom.



GLOSSARY



Atman: A basic concept in Hinduism, the universal self, identical with the eternal core of the personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attains release or moksha, from the bond of existence. In Sanskrit, the Atman is referred to as a “Sakshi”, meaning “witness.”

Asat: unreal.

Asuras: demons.

Adveshta: absence of hatred.

Ananta: ‘endless’ or ‘limitless’, also means ‘eternal’ or ‘infinity’

Adhyatmika: signifying suffering produced by one’s own actions.

Adi-Bhautika: representing pain inflicted by external sources.
Ahankara: ego.

Anantha: infinite, endless, eternal, limitless

Asanga Buddhi: not attached to the result of action.

Anapeksha: free from wants, expectations, desires.

Akarma: means in action or refraining from action.

Ashtanga Yoga: consisting of a series of poses executed in succession, combined with deep, controlled breathing. The framework, the guiding principles of Yama and Niyama include nonviolence (Ahimsa), truthfulness, refraining from stealing, mastering your senses, and avoiding excessive possessiveness.

Annamaya: Composed of food, contains food

Arjuna: A Pandavas prince who seeks counsel from Krishna in facing the Kauravas (his cousins) in battle.

Arundhati Gyana: a star in the Ursa major constellation, also known as the dipper or Saptarshi mandala.

Anumana Pramana: cause and effect relationship of known phenomena.

Atma-Moha: Self ignorance.

Ahimsa: non-violence.

Aham Brahm Asmi: translates to “I am Brahman”, (his phrase is made up of three words: Aham means man’s soul, Brahm means all- pervading consciousness, Asmi means the unification of the soul and Brahman).

Aniketha: homeless, having no abode, which isn't about literally being homeless. It's about not being possessive.

Asthir: referring to a restless and constantly moving mind. That's how our mind is.

Anandmaya: which is bliss, and in dreamless sleep there is no intellect, no mind, no body.

Ahuti: the kindling, offering an oblation to a deity. This is the essence of yajna.

Atmavan Bhava: the existence or being of one's self.

Adharma: signifies the opposite: crime, immorality, and wrongdoings.

Anandamaya: the bliss sheath.

A- Gatasu: Persons whose breath is still with them, living beings.

B

Brahman: described as a spirit that is eternal, conscious, infinite and omnipresent.

Bahu-sakha: many branches.

Bhutanam: all beings.

Brahma: the creator God.

Bindu: a point the scriptures describe a cosmic process: the universe oscillates from something called "Bindu" (a point) to "Nada (sound or vibration).

Bharat: Sanskrit, original name of India. The name is derived from the Hindu Puranas, which refers to the land that comprises India as Bharatvarsa and uses this term to distinguish it from other varsas or continents.

Buddhi: Sanskrit word means the Intellect (the power to reform and retain concepts, reasons, discern, judge, comprehend and understand).

Brahma Muhurta: often called The Creator's Time! The Creator or Brahma is the ultimate knowledge and Muhurta means time period. Brahma Muhurta is the time period, perfect to perceive the ultimate knowledge. Brahma muhurta time is the early morning period), which falls between roughly 3.30 a.m. and 5.30 am. This special time is thought to foster a tranquil mind, a peaceful setting.

Bhakta: a religious devotee or spiritual person.

Bhakti Yoga: yoga of devotion.

C

Chanchala: referring to a restless and constantly moving mind.

Chakram: This wheel symbolizes the continued cycle of action and consequence. That's how our mind is.

Casual state: that state in which the Vasanas are active. In Deep Sleep. That's when the vasanas are strong and essentially "cause" us to be! We are because of our vasanas. We would not "be" if we didn't have vasanas. The cause of our being is the existence of the vasanas.

Chandogya Upanishad: It is a Sanskrit text that has served as a core text for the Vedanta school of Hinduism. The name is derived from Sanskrit, Chanda meaning "poetic meter", and Upanishad, meaning "sitting at the foot".

Chandravanhis: the lunar dynasty.

Chitta: refers to memory, yet it can also signify existence. While 'Sat' refers to existence, 'Chitta' embodies consciousness, which connects to our experience of memory.

Chandokya Upanishad: one the four Upanishads.

D

Dakshah: being skillful, as an expert, to be dexterous and efficient.

Daan: The act of giving.

Dharma: the essence of something or somebody.

Drabhya Yajna: represents the most tangible form of sacrifice—the offering of wealth. In ancient terms, "Drabhya" referred to grains, but in our modern context, it signifies material wealth, which can take the form of cash or other valuables.

Dattatreya: The cosmic process of creation is structured around three principal deities: "Brahma", the creator; "Vishnu", the preserver; and "Shiva", the destroyer. Together, they are called Dattatreya. They embody a cycle that reflects the constant states of creation, maintenance, and dissolution inherent in our lives and the universe at large.

Dukh: unhappiness, sadness.

Dream state: the dream world belongs to the mind or subtle level.

Dhrida-nischay: Nischay means conviction, while Dhrida signifies firmness or determination.

Dushpurena a Nalenaca: which translates to being insatiable like fire.

Dweshha: dislikes.

E

Elements: the five fundamentals: space, air, fire, water, and earth, or “Akash, Vayu, Agni, Jala, and Prithvi” in Sanskrit.

G

Gata-sun: Sanskrit term which refers to those whose breath has left them.

Ghana: dense, deep, impenetrable.

Granthi: (blending knots of the mantras) something deep.

Ganesha: lord of success.

Gnanamaya: which is the buddhi or the intellect, which relates to reasoning and understanding.

Gymnosophist: member of ancient Hindu sect who wore very little clothing and were given to asceticism.

Gunas: which is our nature. Gunas, means quality, peculiarity, attribute, tendency or human tendencies. There are three Gunas.

Sattvic: is pure, balanced, and serene.

Rajasic: is active, goal-oriented, constantly seeking.

Tamasic: laid-back, indicative of laziness.

Gross intellect: gross intellect is concerned with things such as terrestrial, physics, mathematics, business, how to negotiate.

Gurukul: A type of education system in ancient India with shishya (students) living near or with the guru, in the same house. The guru-shishya tradition is a sacred relation which is the main goal of developing the gurukul.

H

Havan: offering substances to sacred fire to invoke blessings and fulfil desires.

Hita: beneficial.

I

Iksha: pertains to vision or sight.

Ishwar: can be interpreted as ‘the chief’ or ‘the Lord’, a consciousness that presides over all.

Intellect: our inner compass that tells us right from wrong, or sound decision-making ability.

Ikshvaku – king of the earth planet.

J

Jiva Atma: which is the Atma that goes along with the life force, keeps coming back with this.

Janeu: a sacred thread is tied across the body of the child, and it marks the entry in adolescence and gives the responsibility to live by certain virtues, discipline and knowledge) also known as the thread ceremony. Similar rites exist in other cultures, like “Bar Mitzvah” among the Jews, signifying that point when a child begins to understand and navigate moral and ethical dimensions of life.

Jnana: divine knowledge.

Jivas: a sacred term in Sanskrit that signifies the essence of all living beings, from the tiniest insect to a human and beyond.

Jigyasu- Craving for knowledge.

Jnana Yoga: studying the scriptures intellectually.

K

Karuna: compassion.

Kubera: lord of wealth.

Kauravas: the cousins of Pandavas. 100 sons of king Dhritarastra and wife Gandhari. Duryodhana, Dushasana, Vikarna, Chitrasena and Dussala a sister and a half-brother are the most popular.

Kin-karma and kin-akarma: referring to action and non-action.

Katho Upanishad: an ancient Sanskrit text that explores the nature of the Self, Brahman, and liberation.

Karma Phala: fruit of action.

Krishana: an avatar of Lord Vishnu. He guides Arjuna in the Gita.

Kartavya Bhavana: I am the doer.

Karma Yoga: Yoga of action.

Kshema: Kshema means preserving. For example: One acquires something (wealth) and after acquiring one wants not to lose that wealth; in other words, to preserve that wealth.

Kena Upanishads: Among the Upanishads it is one of the most analytical and metaphysical, its purpose being to lead the mind from the gross to the subtle, from effect to cause. Through a series of profound questions and answers, it seeks to locate the source of man’s being and to expand his self-consciousness until it has become identical with God-Consciousness.

Kamadhenu: a mystical cow from whom any wish can be fulfilled, draws our attention to the boundless possibilities that arise from selfless action.

Karma Kanda: rituals.

Kama: desire

Krodha: anger

L

Laxmi: Goddess of abundance.

Lobha: greed

Lakshman: Lord Ram’s brother.

M

Maitri: loving kindness, goodwill.

Manomaya: where memories and feelings reside (mind along with the five sensory organs).

Mithya: what you see is a relative reality and it is not the absolute truth. Mithya is a borrowed experience in existence & appearance, that is false. ‘Sat’ always exists, which is Brahman. Mithya doesn’t exist but appears to exist.

Mana: the mind.

Manana: is the deep state of thinking without joy or grief.

Murti: statue used to worship a god.

Mahavakyas: the great sayings of Upanishads or great declarations. Throughout ancient wisdom, there are four significant Mahavakayas.

Mauni: being silent. This doesn’t mean that you simply stop talking. Many adopt silence, yet their minds are still racing. The real silence we should seek within is calming the noisy desires that cloud our thoughts.

Mahabharat: a larger spiritual text of which the Gita is a part. It narrates the struggle between two groups of cousins in the Kurukshetra War and the fates of the Kaurava and the Pandava princes and their successors.

Maya: illusion, dream.

Mukti: forms of emancipation, enlightenment, liberation, and release from the cycle of life, death and rebirth

Moha: illusion

Mada: pride

Matsarya: envy represents the darker side of desire.

N

Naishkarmya: no action, no karma. Within this spectrum of action, we find two primary types: “Nitya Karma”, the regular duties we owe ourselves and others, and “Naimittika Karma”, the occasional special duties that arise out of circumstance.

Nada: sound or vibration. The scriptures describe a cosmic process: the universe oscillates from something called “Bindu” (a point) to “Nada (sound or vibration).

Namaste: means “The divinity in me salutes the divinity in you”.

Nirahankara: “Nir” still means not having, while “ahankara” refers to ego or pride. Nirahankara translates to having no ego or a diminished sense of self-importance.

Niyama: outlines personal responsibilities, encompassing cleanliness, contentment (being thankful for what you have), self-study (reflecting on one’s own thoughts and actions), and surrendering to a higher power, along with austerity, which refers to the disciplined lifestyle we’ve discussed.

Nididhyasana: You know what it is. You keep thinking of it once you reach there because it’s always easy to reach, but you keep slipping.

O

O Mahabaho (O mighty or the powerful armed one.

P

Pratyaksha Pramana: first hand evidence. The term “Prana” refers to the vital life energy that sustains us, keeping us alive and aware, regardless of our physical state. Pranayama teaches us how to control and enhance this energy. whatever your actions are accept the result as prasad

Prasad Buddhi: whatever your actions are, accept the result as prasad.

Prarabdha karma: are the part of Sanchit karma, a collection of past karmas, which are ready to be experienced through the present body.

Parampara: a Sanskrit term meaning tradition, ‘Para’ means higher and ‘apara’ means lower.

Prapancha: a concept emphasizing the diversity of created forms.

Preya: refers to actions that are appealing, essentially, it’s all about what we enjoy doing. On the other hand, ‘Shreya’ is concerned with what we ought to do, what is beneficial or wise in the long run.

Purusha: often understood as consciousness or the divine essence.

Prajnaghana: Nothing but intelligence.

Pandits: a religious scholar.

Pranamaya: which refers to the life force that gives us vitality.

Prakriti: represents nature in its raw form.

Paripantaha: which translates to “wayside bandits”, metaphorically, they rob us of our concentration and clarity.

Puja: ceremonial worship of Hindu deity including rituals and offerings.

Priyam: loving.

Prana: The term prana is most commonly used to describe the vital force in its totality, but within the context of the five divisions of pranic energy, it refers to all the ways in which we take in energy. Inhalation is by far the most important vehicle for absorbing prana, but prana is drawn from other energy sources as well. We also absorb energy from food and water; from the sights, sounds, and smells gathered through the sense organs; and from ideas and impressions communicated to the mind.

R

Raga: likes.

Rama Tirtha: A sage famous for saying “Iron and gold are good only for buying iron and gold”.

Ramayan: A Sanskrit epic, traditionally attributed to Valmiki, that concerns the banishment of Rama from his kingdom, the abduction of his wife Sita by a demon and her rescue, and Rama’s eventual restoration to the throne.

Religion: It is a set of beliefs, practices, and behaviours that relate to what people consider sacred, holy, or divine, comes from Latin ‘re’, which means again, and ‘ligation’. Ligation means to tie. Ligature, to bind together. Religion means re-ligate- Tie again. Our ‘self’ with ‘Atman’, ‘Brahman’.

Ram: A legendary prince of Ayodhya city in the kingdom of Kosala who is exiled and eventually crowned king amidst jubilation and celebration.

Roop, Naam, Vyavahar: which is “appearance, name or form and function”.

Rupam: beautiful, charming personality.

Rishi: A Vedic term for an accomplished and enlightened person.

Rishiksha: Lord of the senses.

S

Sukshma buddhi: It is a term that refers to the subtle body, which is made up of the mind, intellect, consciousness and ego. Sukshma means subtle.

Samatva Buddhi: the attitude of sameness.

Seva: doing service.

Sita: Ram’s wife.

Satsang: the company of good people who have good intentions and talk about good things.

Saraswati: Goddess of knowledge and communication.

Shiva: the destroyer God.

Samasti: while the greater cosmic consciousness is termed Samasti.

Sabda Pramana: reliable expert testimony.

Sanchit karma: the accumulation of one’s past karmas.

Sankhya: is a sequence of logical thought.

Suryavanshis – the solar dynasty.

Sadhu: a holy person.

Sukh: represents pleasure or happiness.

Svadharm: means inherent nature of things.

Subtle body: the thoughts and desires that we have.

Sarva: all.

Sanskaras: which refers to our innate characteristics and tendencies.

Shreya: is concerned with what we ought to do, what is beneficial or wise in the long run. Preya refers to actions that are appealing, essentially, it’s all about what we enjoy doing.

Sthit Prajna: steady wisdom, calm, composed, unruffled.

Sushupti: We have no desires in the deep sleep state, but those desires are generated in the deep sleep state because that’s the cause of that state were your vasanas are born.

Sanskriti: refers to a positive transformation or an enhancement of our innate qualities.

Shuchi: clean, pure, and tidy.

Shraddha: or “faith”. Shraddha means much more than just faith; it includes the capacity to reflect, study, understand, imbibe, and absorb what you learn into your personality until you transform yourself and live these values to go to the very end.

Sat Chit Anand: “Sat” means pure existence, just being there. “Chit” means pure knowledge, pure consciousness, and knows everything. “Anand” means bliss. Bliss is no sorrow, no suffering at all. These three combined together are called the “Atman”.

Sankhya Yoga – analytical approach of discerning reality through knowledge and understanding.

Sharvana: means hearing, that which is heard, learning, study, understanding the true meaning, fame, and reputation. Shravana does not mean just listening to the Vedantic sentences, but it means determining the true meaning of Vedanta contained in the Upanishads.

Shatru: enemy.

Sukh: pleasure, happiness.

Sankalpa: decide to do something.

Satyam: truthful. cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth

Samsara: cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth.

Sanskriti: refers to a positive transformation or an enhancement of our innate qualities.

Sanyasi: spiritual person or devotee.

Samadhi: the state in which individual and universal consciousness unite. It is a blissful form of total meditative absorption.

Sansara chakra: the chakra of coming and going in and out of this world.

Samarpana Buddhi: whatever action you’re doing; you’re doing it for someone else.

Samsara Buddhi: whatever you do, dedicate it to God.

T

Tat Tvam Asi: means “you are that”.

Taijasa: universe and the dream state is called Taijasa means endowed with light.

Tattva Bodha: which encapsulates the 24 components, or tattvas, of the material universe

Tapas: is austerity of body, speech and mind.

Turiya – the state beyond deep, dreamless sleep, in which the superconscious becomes overly active.

Taittiriya Upanishad: It was written around 6th century BC and is associated with Taittiriya recension of the Krishna Yajurveda.

Titha prajna: the steadfast wisdom.

U

Upamana: which is comparing the unknown versus the known

V

Vasanas: our subconscious tendencies or character traits that are the result of past experiences. Our desires. The waking stage is called the “Visva” which means the world.

Visva: The waking stage or the world.

Vijnanamaya: the buddhi, the intellect.

Vignyana: knowledge gained by your own experience.

Vyasti: In Vedanta, individuals’ consciousness is often referred to as Vyasti.

Vikruti: which aligns with the distortion or corruption of our natural state.

Vishayas: the sensory experiences we engage with: sound, referred to as “Shabda”; touch, or “Sparsha”; sight, known as “Rupa” for form and color; taste, called “Rasa”; and smell, termed “Gandha”. Each of these sensory experiences corresponds to one of the five elements that make up our physical world.

Vishnu: God of preservation.

Vikalpa: to reject it, which are pros and cons.

Vaku: links to speech.

Vivasvan: the Sun god.

Vyasa: Author of the Gita.

Vikarma: which encompasses actions that are deemed harmful, not just to ourselves but to society as a whole. It includes actions like lying, stealing, committing violence, or engaging in adultery.

Varnas: society into four distinct types or varnas based on inherent qualities, known as gunas. These are referred to as Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras.

Vishaya: in Sanskrit, the subject matter.

Vikruti: which aligns with the distortion or corruption of our natural state

Vyavahar: behavior.

Vedanta: It is an amalgam of two words, “Veda” means ‘wisdom’, and “anta” means the ‘ultimate’. The literal meaning of that word is the ‘ultimate wisdom’.

Vyavahar pratyahara: the ability to withstand temptations.

Vairagya: detachment or dispassion.

W

Waking state: I am awake, at the gross level.

Y

Yoga: comes from the Sanskrit word meaning “Yuj” to join or “Yoke”, a tool used to bind oxen together. In our context, it symbolizes our effort to unify ourselves with the Atman.

Yajna: worship, sacrifice or offering.

Yudhisthir: Yudhistir is the eldest among the five Pandava brothers.

Yatha Raja Tatha Praja: meaning the character of the people of the kingdom will be the same as the King.

Yukta: refers to a great soul who has achieved a bond with God.

Yoga Buddhi: more worldly, an attitude which will get us towards self-realization.

Yama or Yamraj: God of death.

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