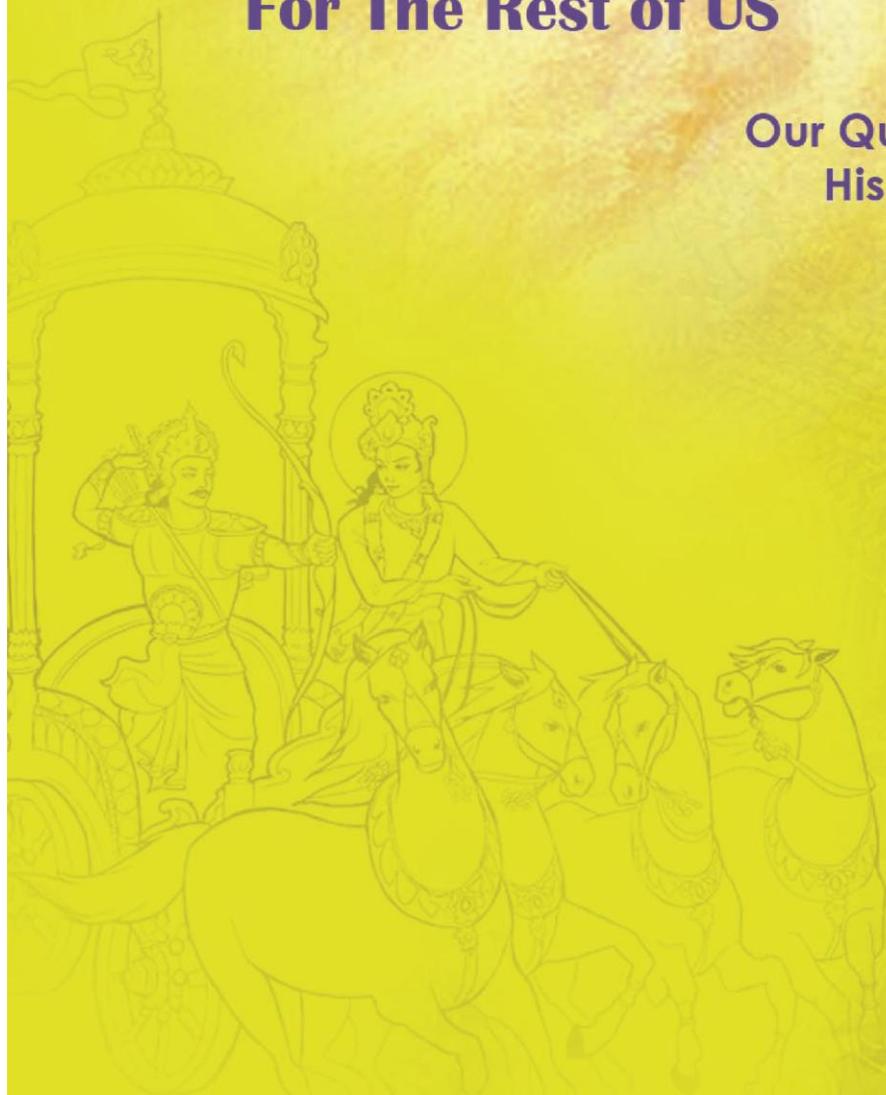


The Bhagavad Gita

For The Rest of US

**Our Questions,
His Answers**



Dr. Giridhar Boray

The Bhagavad Gita for the Rest of Us

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Foreword

The author is deeply indebted to many commentators and authors who have written or spoken extensively about the Bhagavad Gita based on the interpretation of 12th century ascetic, Sri Madhwacharya and latter day savants such as Sri Raghavendra Swamiji. The author has benefitted greatly by scholarly lectures (in the Indian language of Kannada) on the Gita by Sri Visweswara Thirtha Swamiji of Pejavar Mutt, Dr. Prabhanjnachar and Dr. Bannanje Govindacharya. The author respectfully acknowledges his initial tutelage on Sri Madhwacharya's school of thought from his father Late Prof. Krishnaswamy Rao.

The author acknowledges extensive review and comments by Mrs. Prabha Venkatesh which helped in improving the readability of a rather complex subject. The author gratefully acknowledges words of encouragement by Mr. Prasad Bhargava. Thanks to Mr. Raghavendra of Vagartha Printers for help in cover design and book formatting.

1. Introduction - Background and Battleground

Over centuries, the Bhagavad Gita has been considered an important spiritual guidebook and has influenced many thought leaders in human history. The Gita is a conversational poetry and is part of the great Indian epic 'Mahabharata', which is a story about the families of two brothers who inherit a kingdom from their father. These cousins are known as the 'Pandavas' and the 'Kauravas'. The Kaurava brothers are 100 in number and the Pandavas are 5. The Kauravas, not wanting to share the kingdom with their cousins invite them to a game of deuce. They use dubious means to defeat the Pandavas and annex their kingdom as a result of winning the bet. As per the rules of the bet, the Pandavas complete their stay outside the kingdom and come back to ask for their fair share of the kingdom so they can rule with dignity. The Kauravas refuse to honor the agreement and even deny the Pandavas a settlement of 5 villages so that they can live in peace. As the Kauravas refuse to budge an inch the Pandavas have no choice but to declare war on them to get back their fair share of the kingdom. During this period, The Lord who has incarnated as Krishna offers the cousins a choice between His army and Himself, but makes clear that He Himself would not be participating in the war. The Kauravas choose His army as Krishna would not be fighting, and the Pandavas are happy to just have Krishna on their side. Krishna takes on the role of charioteer to Arjuna's chariot (Arjuna is the middle brother among the five Pandavas).

Before the war starts, the two armies assemble on the battlefield, facing each other. At this point, Arjuna requests Krishna to place his chariot in the middle so he can get a full view of the warring forces. Since this is a war between cousins, Arjuna sees his cousins, uncles, grandfathers, great grandfathers, nephews, friends, classmates etc on both the sides. He is overcome with emotion and grief at the prospect of bloodshed among his family and friends for the sake of a kingdom. He declares his intention to renounce from fighting and let the Kauravas keep the kingdom, thus abdicating his responsibility as a prince and a warrior. It is at this stage that Krishna teaches him the 'Gita' which is structured as a series of questions from Arjuna and answers from Krishna. Krishna extols the virtues of performing one's duties regardless of the outcome and not getting attached to the action itself even when the work is difficult and unpleasant. As Krishna starts to talk to Arjuna on the virtues of doing one's work (in this case Arjuna needing to fight a rightful war), Arjuna asks a series of questions on the bigger issues of life, individual souls, the Lord Almighty, the universe, the circle of life etc, for which Krishna provide clear, unambiguous answers. He finally convinces Arjuna that his fears were unfounded and that he should fight to free the Kingdom from the Kauravas and provide a just and compassionate administration to his citizens.

At first it would appear that a battleground is hardly the place for someone to be preaching philosophy. However, many of the questions that we have in life are about choices we make, especially in challenging times. It is interesting to note that Sanskrit verses lend themselves to multiple meanings and in one interpretation, the battleground in The Gita is compared to the

human body (and mind), and the battle between Pandavas and the Kauravas is compared to the constant strife between good and evil thoughts that we encounter on a daily basis. The Gita is indeed a teaching for all of us with Arjuna acting as an example of an individual at cross roads desperately looking for guidance and support.

The Gita is one of the most widely read and commented upon spiritual works in human history. There are several excellent books on this topic in various languages. Given that the original work is in Sanskrit, most of the scholarly commentaries have been in Sanskrit or other Indian languages which are closer to Sanskrit. There are relatively few books in English on this topic. To read and comprehend many of them, one would need some training in Indian spiritual studies as many of them liberally use Sanskrit words albeit transliterated in English. It was felt that there is a need to present the key concepts of The Gita in plain English for everyday folks without using many Sanskrit words. Further, since The Gita itself is a conversational poem and is actually a series of sermons from the Lord to questions raised by prince Arjuna, it was felt that a Q&A format would be useful. This would be hugely helpful to many of us who have natural questions about the concepts in The Gita. These observations led to the development of this manuscript.

While there are many learned commentaries on the Gita written over the centuries, this author has been greatly influenced by the authoritative commentary and lucid explanations of difficult concepts by Sri Madhwacharya, the 12th century ascetic who propounded the philosophy of dualistic theism (concept of difference between the almighty Lord and individual souls at all times and places). Sri Madhwacharya's commentary has been further elaborated and summarized by later day savants such as Sri Raghavendra Swamy (17th century) and others. The key concepts appearing in this work are based on the works by these savants and many other derivative works by their followers.

The book is organized as a series of questions and answers in keeping with the spirit of the conversational poem that The Gita is. This book is not meant to be a translation of The Gita in its entirety. The Gita has 700 verses (hymns) organized into 18 chapters. The chapters in this book are organized largely based on topics rather the chapters numbered in the Gita so as to make it easy for the reader to pick and choose the topic of his/her interest.

The book chapters are organized as follows. The chapter 'Work is Worship' deals with issues related to performing one's chosen activities (or work or career), under all circumstances. Given that the genesis of The Bhagavad Gita is Prince Arjuna's attempted withdrawal from waging a rightful war and Krishna's sermon to Arjuna extolling the needs and virtues of performing one's duties, this chapter covers various questions one would have on the conduct of day to day activities. The chapter 'Mind Matters' covers various questions concerning the human mind, its voracious appetite and how to control one's mind. After all, for one to perform any activity it is important that the mind be in a settled state. The chapter titled 'The Universe – Five Fold Differences' provides a summary of the contents of the universe and the relationship among its constituents. The chapter 'Glory of God' attempts to summarize the principle attributes and characteristics of the Lord Almighty as enunciated in The Gita by the Lord Himself. The chapter titled 'Circle of Life' answers common questions on the cycle of life as experienced by living beings. The chapter 'Mother Nature' summarizes the constituents of nature that is an integral

component of the universe and how living beings interact with each other. The short chapter on 'Yoga, Meditation and Diet' summarizes some key concepts appearing in The Gita on these topics. The chapter on 'Final Frontier' is meant as a summary and a 'bottom line' on the various concepts covered in The Gita.

2. Work is Worship

The core concepts covered in this chapter are from the initial chapters of the Gita where Lord Krishna addresses critical questions raised by Arjuna who has decided to withdraw from the war. The first question that arises is ‘Why should anyone work at all (especially if the work is unpleasant)’? The Lord provides compelling arguments for one not to abstain from performing prescribed duties, however difficult or unpleasant they might be. The next question that arises is the definition of prescribed duties. How does one know the profession one needs to take on? Then we dig deeper into the constituents of any act and their classification, namely the act itself, the doer and the knowledge about the mechanics of the act. This chapter also addresses natural questions related to performing duties such as – is it possible for anyone not to do any work, how about souls who have achieved salvation, how about the Lord Himself etc. The next set of questions posed by Arjuna deal with potential alternatives for avoiding unpleasant work such as complete renunciation. How about following the path of knowledge as opposed to the path of labour? Is there a choice here? Note that the terms work, activity, duty, labour are all used to mean the same thing – the primary activity with which a person is associated in a life time.

2.1 Why Work at all?

Q: Why do we need to work, especially if it is unpleasant?

A: Everyone has a special place in this world and a special purpose in their life. People express themselves through their work which should be performed as a service to society. Even as we earn a living, we should dedicate the work to the Lord without any specific expectations on the outcome. Continuous, serial execution of naturally chosen activities over multiple life times in this manner ultimately leads one to get released from bondage and achieve eternal bliss through the express grace of the Lord. Work or labor is an integral part of the ‘cycle of life’ without which the world does not function.

Q: Different people seem to have different aptitudes and talents, and choose different professions. Who decides what will be one’s profession?

A: Everyone is born with a purpose in life. Each one of us has an innate nature and talent which largely determines the type of work or career that is best suited for us. The goal is to excel in our naturally ordained activity and serve society and the Lord to make our lives meaningful. In a broad sense, the categories of professions are classified as: Scholars, Administrators, Business professionals and Craftspeople.

Every one largely falls into one of these categories. Scholars would typically include people who normally pursue intellectual activities such as teaching, legal profession etc. Administrators include those who pursue Governance, military etc. Businessmen are those who focus on financial activities. Craftsmen are those who express their creativity with their hands etc. These classes are not hereditary but manifest based on one’s innate nature. No one group is superior to

another. Everyone regardless of their profession and abilities can and should work towards self realization by focusing on performing their stipulated duties to the best of their abilities. This should be done without expecting material returns and all the while focusing on the Lord. Further one should not abdicate his/her responsibilities if a particular task gets unpleasant or difficult. It should be noted that everyone has in their character, elements from the four identified categories but in different proportions. For example, one who is predisposed to pursuing scholarly pursuits such as teaching can also have administrative capabilities. Similarly, a business person may also have an intellectual bent of mind. Hence the categories are loose and broadly defined.

Q: Performing one's naturally chosen duties is mandatory for everyone. That said, what exactly constitutes these duties?

A: There are basically 4 categories of duties that are mandatory for everyone-

- Performing one's naturally chosen profession with sincerity and dedication
- Dedicating all activities to the Lord
- Helping the less fortunate in the society
- Observing discipline and self control in daily living

Q: What are the constituents or prerequisites of action?

A: To perform any activity, there are 3 prerequisites which are the essential components of any action. They are-

- Knowledge about the particular activity
- The act itself
- The person who is performing the action

For example, for a soldier to fight in a war the essential components are,

- the knowledge or training about fighting;
- the act of fighting itself and
- The soldier.

To understand what constitutes proper action, one needs to comprehend how the components of the action are structured.

Q: Since knowledge is identified as an essential component of any action, how is one to decide what is meant by proper or pertinent knowledge?

A: Knowledge is of 3 kinds-

- Satva or Superior knowledge
- Rajasa or Incomplete knowledge
- Tamasa or Wrong knowledge

Superior knowledge is when one is aware that an omnipotent, absolute Lord is present in all living beings (who are themselves varied and different). It is He who powers inert objects. Such knowledge will lead one to perform right actions.

Incomplete knowledge is when someone believes that the Lord who resides in different living beings and powers inert objects, has multiplicity and that He is not omnipotent and absolute. Incomplete knowledge leads to activities of no real or lasting value.

Wrong knowledge is when someone equates ordinary living beings and inert objects with the Lord, and believes in concepts not supported by experience or logic or scriptures. For example, equating ordinary souls who have naturally chosen activities with the Lord who has no such restriction is contrary to logic. Such knowledge leads one to perform wrongful acts with negative consequences.

Q: The second component of any action is the act itself. How can one know what is the right act to perform? In other words, how are the acts classified?

A: Activity is categorized three fold as follows:

- Superior Activity
- Ordinary Activity
- Negative Activity

Superior Activity is that which is performed for the right purpose and offered to the Lord without any attachment or expectation on the outcome.

Ordinary Activity is that which is performed egoistically with specific expectation on the outcome and often conducted with great effort. Even charitable activities when performed with great pomp and show are classified as ordinary activities. Such activities do not help a seeker on the path to salvation.

Negative Activity is that which is performed with delusion, without realizing the consequences, often performed beyond one's capacity and causing hurt or harm to others. Such an activity has negative effects.

Q: The last component of any act is the person doing the act or the 'doer'. What are the different types of doers?

A: There are again three classes of doers, namely, Superior doers, ordinary doers and inferior doers.

- Superior doers perform their naturally chosen activities with enthusiasm, with positive attitude, without ego and do not expect any specific outcome (except that of pleasing the Lord). They are not perturbed by perceived success or failure of their acts. Such doers are favorites of the Lord.
- Ordinary doers perform activities expecting recognition, and rewards and are often miserly in spending time and effort. They are also greatly influenced by the perceived success or failure of their acts.
- Inferior doers often approach work with laziness, contempt, without thinking of the Lord and are afraid of failure. Such doers never accomplish anything of lasting substance.

Q: With what intentions should one perform naturally chosen duties (work)?

A: In general, one should perform naturally chosen duties without expecting ordinary pleasures or objects. Only God has the ability to grant the fruits for labor performed. One should not aspire for worldly pleasures. However, it is perfectly acceptable to desire loftier goals such as God's grace and to seek knowledge, devotion and renunciation from worldly bonds.

Q: Is it possible for anyone to give up all activities?

A: No. Even breathing is an activity to stay alive. So, how one can give up all activities? The issue is the choice of voluntary activities where one needs to exercise sound judgment.

Q: Are the souls who have already attained eternal bliss, bound by any activities?

A: No, but they act out of choice.

Q: The Almighty God doesn't have any stipulated activities? But why does He still perform various activities?

A: It is His nature to perform activities, and incarnate Himself many times to serve as a role model to other souls. Else, no one will do any work and also will not have a way of distinguishing between doing right things, wrong things and not doing anything at all.

Q: If the goal of performing naturally chosen activities is to achieve everlasting salvation and not temporary worldly pleasure, why do the scriptures detail rituals meant for achieving temporary treasures?

A: For many people who are not in the path of performing naturally chosen duties but are wasting time on pursuing sensual pleasures, it will be difficult to change overnight to a mode of performing duties with loftier goals. For them, an intermediate path is to perform activities to appease various deities to achieve temporary treasures. Even these fruits are in fact granted by the Lord Himself although they appear to be routed via the other deities. Once a person develops the habit of performing these naturally chosen duties and rituals, it will be easier to move towards performing activities with focus on loftier goals.

Q: So how should one interpret the scriptures such as the Vedas?

A: Merely following the procedures indicated in the Vedas and performing various rituals with expectation of worldly pleasures or heavenly treasures in the afterlife only yields temporary results. One should not merely pluck flowers from a tree, but wait for the flower to blossom into a tasty fruit for longer lasting result. Similarly, performing activities indicated in the scriptures without any expectation on the outcome and dedicating all actions to the supreme Lord will put one on the road to eternal bliss.

Q: Even if one does not intend to commit sinful acts, what makes one do it often?

A: In one word, the answer is 'Desire'. Among the six enemies that constantly attack individual souls, desire is the most dangerous entity. The surest way to avoid repeatedly committing sinful acts is to control or conquer desire, which is easier said than done. Even learned people and those held in high esteem in the society are not immune to mundane desires, which often befall them. Desire is a quality that is never fully satiated. For example, desire for tasting of good food can be fulfilled by consuming such foods, but in a few days (or hours), that desire is back asking for more.

Q: What makes one forget any spiritual knowledge learned?

A: Desire (or lust) clouds a person's mind and prevents any spiritual knowledge from taking root. Just as fire is clouded by smoke, a mirror is blemished with dust and an embryo is held captive in the womb, desire similarly clouds and imprisons the mind. The three examples here refer to the extent of control by desire experienced by the three categories of people – noble souls, ordinary souls and evil souls. Smoke covering a fire can be easily warded off by blowing

wind, similar to the temporary loss of control over the mind experienced by noble souls. A mirror blemished by dust requires some effort for cleaning, similar to the plight of ordinary souls who are under the spell of desire. An embryo held captive in a womb cannot escape from the womb, signifying the extent of control desire has on an evil person's mind. In all these cases, controlling the mind by focusing on the Lord is the only way to rid the mind of corruption by desire (or lust).

Q: What happens if someone has been on a wrong path going after sensual objects, but somehow has developed devotion to God?

A: Once that person starts focusing on God, he/she will slowly be rid of bad habits and move towards a more pious life. Basically by focusing on God, one is able to replace negative thoughts in the mind with positive attributes. This helps settle the mind and move it towards more positive thoughts and activities which leads to a more fulfilling life.

Q: The Sanskrit word 'Karma' appears in many places in The Gita in different contexts. What is the meaning of this term?

A: As with many other Sanskrit words, 'Karma' has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. The most common meanings for 'karma' are as follow:

- Act or action. For example 'Karma Yoga' means 'Path of Action'
- Destiny or Fate which is actually 'Consequence of prior action(s)'. We often hear phrases such as 'good karma' which actually means 'pleasant consequence which is a result of good deeds previously performed'. Similarly for 'bad karma'
- Helping out those in need is an obligatory act just as paying taxes to the Government is ('kar' in Sanskrit also means taxes)

Q: What type of offerings does one need to make to please the Lord?

A: The Lord who owns the universe has no need for any offerings from anyone. Those desirous of pleasing the Lord make offerings in many ways:

- Some people meditate on the Lord as a form of offering -
- Some focus on working diligently in their naturally chosen profession, without any material expectation, with their mind focused on the Lord as their offering
- Some focus on controlling indulgence in sensual pleasures as their offering
- Some donate time and resources to charities
- Some focus on gaining spiritual knowledge and then spreading the same
- Some focus on breath control in order to help them minimize their eating (eat just enough to sustain the body)

In summary, activities that society recognizes as selfless endeavors performed with some element of sacrifice of pleasures are considered as offerings accepted by the Lord.

Q: How does one achieve eternal bliss and freedom from the cycle of births and deaths?

A: One should perform naturally chosen duties without expecting worldly fruits and simultaneously focus on the Lord through various means such as meditation, listening to Lord's glories etc. This leads one to a clear and pious mind which allows the percolation of pure, spiritual knowledge which ultimately leads one to the state of bliss. The one who achieves this is called 'Sthitha Prajna' or an 'equi poised person' or a 'calm person'.

Q: How does one identify such as ‘calm person’? Is it by the way he/she walks, talks, sits?

A: A person with pure mind devoid of any blemishes or desire for worldly objects is a ‘calm person’. The second question is rhetorical. The real question is why does such as ‘calm person’ need to do any activity as he/she is already on the way to attaining eternal bliss? It turns out that everyone, including those who have already attained eternal bliss is always performing some activity. The Lord Himself is continuously performing benevolent activities. That is in the nature of things.

2.2 Path of Knowledge v/s Path of Labour

Q: Which is superior: Karma Yoga (Path of Labour) or Jnana Yoga (Path of Knowledge)?

A: Both are required by a seeker who has to perform naturally chosen duties (Path of Labour) while having the requisite knowledge in performing the action (Path of Knowledge). Merely following the path of labour without proper knowledge may lead to temporary fruits at best. Similarly, merely acquiring knowledge (Path of Knowledge) without actually implementing the tasks (Path of Labour) will not help one achieve salvation. However the proportion of time traversed on the path of labour or the path of knowledge may be different for different individuals based on their innate nature. Thus, a Karma Yogi is someone who by nature is more inclined to be in the path of labour while Jnana Yogi is one who is more inclined to be in the path of knowledge.

Q: Why should one indulge in actions (labour) which may entail hurting others? An example would be a warrior fighting a war which could result in injury and death to opponents. Why not focus only on studies of scriptures, meditation and perform minimum activities required for survival?

A: There are broadly two ways to cross the ocean of life and reach deliverance. Those who are predisposed to intellectual pursuits often pursue professions such as teaching etc, and those who are inclined towards physical activities engage in professions such as armed forces etc. The former are ‘Jnana Yogis’ and the latter are ‘Karma Yogis’. Suffice it to say that Jnana Yogis also have to partake in Karma Yoga and Karma Yogis also have to partake in acquisition of knowledge. For soldiers, participating in a just war is a naturally chosen duty and their way to eternal glory is by carrying out their duties in a just way without getting attached to the activities. Such professionals cannot abdicate their naturally chosen work which at times might be unpleasant. Indeed they cannot take shelter solely in intellectual pursuits and hope to achieve salvation. In fact, the preferred way for such professionals would be to focus on their work and pursue intellectual studies when possible and at all times dedicate their work to God.

2.3 Knowledge Management

Q: How does one go about acquiring right spiritual knowledge and manage the knowledge so obtained?

A: Among all the objects that one can find in the universe, knowledge is the most important and useful treasure that helps one to cross the ocean of life and reach the ultimate goal of salvation.

- It is important to seek the right teacher and gain the teacher’s confidence in order to ensure error free learning
- Learning is a lifelong activity

- Mere acquisition of spiritual knowledge in and of itself is of no use, unless one puts the knowledge to proper use and leads a life with conviction based on the teachings learned
- The seeker also has an obligation to help spread the knowledge learned so that others in society can benefit from the same

2.4 Renunciation v/s Sacrifice

Q: What is the difference between ‘Renunciation’ (Sanyasa) and ‘Sacrifice’ (tyaga)? Which is superior? They appear similar.

A: Sanyasa or Renunciation is renouncing any activity that may result in temporary pleasures. For example, practicing fasting as a way to control excessive intake of food is a type of renunciation. Another example is controlling anger. Sacrifice or ‘tyaga’ refers to a situation where one does not per se renounce activities but performs those activities without expressly expecting any specific outcome (except the Grace of God). While both these are recommended approaches for a seeker, the latter is superior as one has to perform naturally chosen activities, but do so without expectation on outcome. An even better approach is a combination of the two, where a seeker performs naturally chosen activities, without expectation of outcome and at the same practices self control by means of renunciation.

The former is normally practiced by ascetics who have given up worldly life and the latter is the recommended path for most other people. In general, a seeker needs to incorporate both these aspects in all activities.

Q: Are there degrees of renunciation?

A: Renunciation is a generic word. There are 3 levels of renunciation, namely, superior, ordinary and inferior renunciation.

Superior Renunciation is when someone performs naturally chosen duties without expecting any material outcome. This is obviously the best kind and leads one to salvation.

Ordinary Renunciation is when someone avoids performing naturally chosen duties if they are unpleasant, harmful to others etc. (ex: a soldier not wanting to fight even a just war for fear of hurting the enemy). This type of renunciation does not help someone looking for salvation.

Inferior Renunciation is when someone refuses to perform naturally chosen duties for reasons such as laziness, ignorance etc. This leads to darkness and misery.

2.5 Takeaways

- ✓ Everyone born in this world has a purpose and a naturally chosen vocation
- ✓ No one should abdicate their responsibilities but should discharge them with diligence even if they are unpleasant
- ✓ Faithful discharge of responsibilities without expecting any outcome while focusing on the Lord will put one on a path towards eternal bliss
- ✓ Like the Lord, liberated souls continue to be active even though they have no specific task because it is their nature to do so. They act to set an example to other souls.

3. Mind Matters

In this chapter, questions covered are centered on various issues associated with the human mind. As everyone knows, the mind is the most complex sense organ and it often works in mysterious ways. It is said that The Gita is as much a psychological manual as it is a spiritual guide. It provides a comprehensive explanation for complex human behavior and more importantly equips one with the understanding of workings of the mind which eventually helps in developing counter strategies to manage mind matters. Gita clearly explains how the mind moulds our behavior and spells out specific ways to modulate the workings of the mind. The complex relationship between the mind, the intellect and the external sense organs are beautifully explained. Finally, the aspects of ‘memory’ an essential temporal component of the mind are explained.

3.1 Impact of Mind on Human Behaviour

Q: Why are the sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin) difficult to control?

A: All sense organs constantly crave for pleasure and are never fully satisfied. For example, the tongue is very difficult to control as it constantly craves for tasty food. As the body ages, most sense organs lose their effectiveness gradually (eye sight weakens, hearing weakens etc), but the tongue remains fully active till the very end. Even when someone is unable to digest food, the tongue still craves for taste. The only solution for keeping the tongue under control is via the mind which in turn can only be truly stabilized by intense practice and the grace of God. Likewise, the skin which is constantly craving for touch is also very difficult to control as it pervades the entire body. Even if someone is handicapped with loss of sensitivity on a limb, the skin in other parts of the body still craves for touch.

Q: How do sense organs lead one astray? Is there a method to the madness?

A: Excessive indulgence in sensual activities leads one to be shackled by the so called ‘six enemies’, namely lust, anger, greed, attachment, arrogance and jealousy. The typical procedure for the six enemies to control a human being is as follows:

- Mind comes in contact with sense pleasures by constant exposure
- Mind develops attachment to sense pleasures
- Attachment leads to desire to satiate the thirst
- Anger sets in when such desire is not fulfilled
- Anger clouds mind’s judgment
- Clouded mind is unable to differentiate between right and wrong things leading to errors in judgment
- Error in judgment leads to intellectual failure
- Intellectual failure leads to destruction

Q: How can one then avoid getting shackled by the ‘six enemies’ and get liberated?

A: The first step would be to immerse oneself in performing naturally chosen duties without expecting any gratification. (The analogy quoted is ‘detachment like drops of water on lotus flower’. Water drops can never stick on the petals of the lotus, and in the same way the mind should never get attached to any work or its outcome). In parallel, meditate on the Lord, which helps to calm the mind. A calm mind is a fertile platform for gathering noble thoughts which allows the mind to grasp spiritual studies. This leads to mental equanimity and a strong mind can withstand and repel the attack of the six enemies and move towards God.

3.2 Relationship between Sense Organs, Mind and Intellect

Q: How does desire arise in a person?

A: Sense organs such as eyes, ears etc, the mind and the intellect together determine the need and extent of desire in a person which often clouds the mind’s clarity of thought and leads a person astray.

Q: How does desire lead a person astray?

A: The addictive attribute called desire finds home in a person’s sense organs, mind and intellect. The external sense organs are the first entities which by way of perception creates desire in a person. For example: the desire to taste food upon seeing or smelling tasty food. Once a person yields to the desires of the sense organs, such desires takes root in the mind and gets stronger. Once this stage is reached, the intellect whose job it is to reason and rationalize issues develops the conviction that the particular desire is indeed worth pursuing and fulfilling. At this stage, it is too late to control the desire which would have taken over the person. Any obstacles in fulfilling these desires result in anger which causes one to commit undesirable and dangerous activities. So, it is better to handle desire at the first stage itself by minimizing or avoiding initial contact.

Q: How can one control or conquer desire?

A: The sensory organs (eyes, ears etc), the mind and the intellect are involved in the activities of perceiving, capturing, distilling and storing knowledge. The sensory organs, mind and intellect themselves are inert objects but are activated and controlled by various deities. The Almighty God is the controller of all deities. The deity who controls the intellect is superior to and more powerful than the deity who controls the mind which itself is superior to the deities who control the sense organs. Thus, to control the sense organs (which actually implement any activity desired by a person), it is necessary to control the intellect which can then control the mind. Since God is the controller of all in the universe the surest way to control desire is to focus the mind on God and perform one’s naturally chosen task without any mundane expectations. This helps one to control and conquer desire.

Q: What different practical ways can one follow in order to gain control over the sense organs so they do not lead one astray?

A: There are three ways that one can follow to help gain control over the sense organs. For maximum effect, one can simultaneously follow all three ways. Firstly, it is important to minimize or avoid indulgence in activities which feed the senses. For example, to gain control over excessive eating, one should resort to periodic fasting. Secondly, one should indulge in spiritual activities which prevent the mind from wanting to indulge in activities to please the sense organs. The third and most important way is to surrender completely to the Lord with full

confidence that He will help one overcome addiction to sensual pleasures. It goes without saying that a combination of these three ways will surely help one gain firm control over the sense organs.

3.3 Mind Control

Q: While it is easy to say that one should control the desire for sense objects, how can one do that in real life?

A: Slowly and in steps. The key to controlling the desire for sense pleasures is to control the mind. This is done by slowly withdrawing the mind from thinking about sense objects and replacing those thoughts with the focus on God. Scriptures give the example of a tortoise that can withdraw its four limbs and head into its shell with ease. Similarly, the learned ones are able to withdraw their five sense organs inwards (i.e., focus them within and not get attached or perturbed by external stimuli). Over time, one can experience self control and such a person ends up seeing God in all beings and in all things and will have surrendered to the Lord unconditionally.

Q: Mind is an extremely difficult entity to control as it is always wandering. How then can one focus continuously on God and meditate, as the mind will invariably stray towards extraneous thoughts:

A: While sense organs have limited scope, mind has an almost infinite area of coverage and is constantly wandering. But it can be controlled and moderated by sheer practice as evidenced by many great souls whom we have seen in human history. There are abundant examples in scriptures also. There is no short cut, but a sincere effort goes a long way.

Q: If someone is sincere in intentions, but is unable to control the wavering mind and hence unable meditate on the Lord and gather spiritual knowledge, what then happens to that person? Is that soul destined to fail?

A: No. Anyone with sincere intentions but unable to focus the mind will not experience negative consequences. Such souls will in future births be born in better circumstances with easier access to more spiritual education and knowledge and move towards activities leading to a more fulfilling life.

Q: How does one control the desire to eat delicious foods? Does fasting help?

A: No. Fasting only weakens sense organs and their ability to enjoy food, but does not itself help quench the desire for tasting food, which can only be controlled by the mind. So, it goes back to controlling the mind. Ultimately, it is only by the grace of God that one can hope to control the sense organs.

3.4 Memory Management

Q: What role does memory play in mind control?

A: A very important aspect of the mind is memory which has the capacity to store events from the past and recall them based on need. Memory is a capability that the Lord has given to living beings to help them in their conduct of daily life and their spiritual journey. The importance of memory in one's life cannot be overstated. One cannot even imagine how life would be if there

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