

INTRODUCTION

The Gita is a doctrine of universal truth. Its message is universal, sublime, and non-sectarian although it is a part of the scriptural trinity of Sanātana Dharma, commonly known as Hinduism. The Gita is very easy to understand in any language for a mature mind. A repeated reading with faith will reveal all the sublime ideas contained in it. A few abstruse statements are interspersed here and there, but they have no direct bearing on practical issues or the central theme of Gita. The Gita deals with the most sacred metaphysical science. It imparts the knowledge of the Self and answers two universal questions: Who am I, and how can I lead a happy and peaceful life in this world of dualities? It is a book of yoga, the moral and spiritual growth for mankind, based on the cardinal principles of the Hindu religion. The Bhagavad-Gita is the essence of Hinduism and a part of Mahābhārata. It teaches the non-sectarian universal spiritual philosophy on the metaphysical science of the highest Reality. The Gita gives a non-fearbased knowledge of the higher Self. It's a book of wisdom that inspired Thoreau, Emerson, Einstein, Gandhi and many others. A repeated study with faith purifies our psyche and guides us to face the challenges of modern living leading to inner peace and happiness.

Our bhagavad-gita with commentary is non-sectarian and includes parallel verses from 26 scriptures of hinduism, as well as from the Bible, Dhammapada, Koran, and teachings of world scholars, saints, and sages.

The message of the Gita came to humanity because of Arjuna's unwillingness to do his duty as a warrior because fighting involved destruction and killing. Nonviolence or Ahimsa is one of the most fundamental tenets of Hinduism. All lives, human or non-human, are sacred. This immortal discourse between the Supreme Lord, Krishna, and His devotee-friend, Arjuna, occurs not in a temple, a secluded forest, or on a mountain top but on a battlefield on the eve of a war and is recorded in the great epic, Mahābhārata. In the Gita Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to get up and fight. This may create a misunderstanding of the principles of Ahimsa if the background of the war of Mahābhārata is not kept in mind. Therefore, a brief historical description is in order.

In ancient times there was a king who had two sons, Dhritarāshtra and Pāndu. The former was born blind; therefore, Pāndu inherited the kingdom. Pāndu had five sons. They were called the Pāndavas. Dhritarāshtra had one hundred sons. They were called the Kauravas. Duryodhana was the eldest of the Kauravas.

After the death of king Pāndu, the eldest son of Pāndu became the lawful King. Duryodhana was a very jealous person. He also wanted the kingdom. The kingdom was divided into two halves between the Pāndavas and the Kauravas. Duryodhana was not satisfied with his share of the kingdom. He wanted the entire kingdom for himself. He unsuccessfully planned several foul plots to kill the Pāndavas and take away their kingdom. He unlawfully took possession of the entire kingdom of the Pāndavas and refused to give back even an acre of land without a war. All mediation by Lord Krishna and others failed. The big war of Mahābhārata was thus inevitable. The Pāndavas were unwilling participants. They had only two choices: Fight for their right as a matter of duty or run away from war and accept defeat in the name of peace and nonviolence. Arjuna, one of the five Pāndava brothers, faced the dilemma in the battlefield whether to fight or run away from war for the sake of peace.

Arjuna's dilemma is, in reality, the universal dilemma. All human beings face dilemmas, big and small, in their everyday life when performing their duties. Arjuna's dilemma was a big one. He had to make a choice between fighting the war and killing his most revered guru who was on the other side, very dear friends, close relatives, and many innocent warriors; or running away from the battlefield for the sake of preserving the peace and nonviolence. The entire seven hundred verses of the Gita are a discourse between Lord Krishna and the confused Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra near New Delhi, India, about 3,100 years BCE. This discourse was narrated to the blind king, Dhritarāshtra, by his charioteer, Sanjaya, as an eyewitness war report.

The main objective of the Gita is to help people — struggling in the darkness of ignorance — cross the ocean of transmigration and reach the spiritual shore of liberation while living and working in society. The central teaching of the Gita is the attainment of freedom or happiness from the bondage of life by doing one's

duty. Always remember the glory and greatness of the Creator and do your duty to the best of your ability without being attached to or affected by the results, even if that duty may at times demand unavoidable violence. Some people neglect or give up their duty in life for the sake of a spiritual life while others excuse themselves from spiritual practices because they believe that they have no time.

The Lord's message is to sanctify the entire living process itself. Whatever a person does or thinks, ought to be done for the glory and satisfaction of the Maker. Not too much effort or cost is necessary for this process. Do your duty as a service to the Lord and humanity, and see God alone in everything in a spiritual frame of mind. This spiritual state of mind can be gradually attained with personal discipline, austerity, penance, good conduct, selfless service, meditation, worship, prayer, rituals, and study of scriptures. The company of holy persons, pilgrimage, yogic practices, chanting of the holy names of God, and Self-inquiry also helps to purify the body, mind, and intellect. One must learn to give up lust, anger, greed, and establish mastery over the mind and five senses (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell) by the purified intellect. One should always remember that all works are done by the energy of nature and that one is not the doer but only an instrument. One must strive for excellence in all undertakings but maintain equanimity in success and failure, gain and loss, and pain and pleasure.

The ignorance of metaphysical knowledge is humanity's greatest predicament. A scripture, being the voice of transcendence, cannot be translated. Language is incapable and translations are defective to clearly impart the knowledge of the Absolute. In this rendering, an attempt has been made to keep the style as close as possible to the original Sanskrit poetry and yet make it easy to read and understand. An attempt has been made to improve the clarity by adding words or phrases, within parentheses, in the English translation of the verses. One hundred and thirty-three (133) key verses are printed in **red or bold** for the convenience of beginners. We suggest all our readers to ponder, contemplate, and act upon these verses. The beginners and the busy executives should first read and understand the meaning of these key verses before delving deep into the bottomless ocean of transcendental knowledge of the Gita.

According to the scriptures, no sin, however heinous, can affect one who reads, ponders, and practices the teachings of Gita any more than water affects the lotus leaf. The Lord Himself resides where Gita is kept, read, chanted, or taught. One who reads, ponders, and practices the teachings of Gita with faith and devotion will attain Moksha (or Nirvana) by the grace of God.

The war of Mahābhārata had begun after all negotiations by Lord Krishna and others to avoid it failed. Sage Vyasa, the author of Mahābhārata, wanted to give the blind King (Dhritarāshtra) the boon of eyesight so that the King could see the horrors of the war for which he was responsible. But the King refused the offer. He did not want to see the horrors of the war; but preferred to get the war report through his charioteer, Sanjaya. Sage Vyasa granted the power of clairvoyance and clairvision to Sanjaya. With this power Sanjaya could see, hear, and recall the events of the past, present, and future. He was able to give an instant replay of the eye-witness war report to the blind King sitting in the palace.

Bhishma, the mightiest man and the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava's army, is disabled by Arjuna and dying on the battleground on the tenth day of the eighteen-day war. Upon hearing this bad news from Sanjaya, the blind King loses all hope for victory by his sons. Now the King wants to know the details of the war from the beginning, including how the mightiest man, the commander-in-chief of his superior army — who had a boon of dying at his own will — was defeated in the battlefield. The teaching of the Gita begins with the inquiry of the blind King, after Sanjaya described how Bhishma was defeated.

This book is dedicated to all the gurus whose blessings, grace, and teachings have been invaluable. It is offered to the greatest Guru, Lord Krishna, with love and devotion. May the Lord accept it, and bless those who repeatedly read this with peace, happiness, and the true knowledge of the Self.