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# THE DOCTRINE OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

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## **PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, '**The Doctrine of the Bhagavad Gita**', comprises a discourse given by Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj during Sadhana Week in the year 1993.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

## THE DOCTRINE OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The chapters of the Bhagavad Gita may be said to indicate the progressive march of the spiritual seeker by graduated steps towards the achievement of the goal. What one sees in the beginning while looking at things with open eyes is a field of turmoil—a historical conflict and a difference between one thing and everything else.

We see the world in this manner. Everything is at sixes and sevens, everyone distrusts everyone else, everyone wishes to use and utilise everyone else, everyone is suspect about everything outside. Everyone has to guard oneself from every other person, though it is true that one cannot completely ignore the presence of this multitude of the variety of persons and things in the world. This is the picture of the field of battle.

Every moment of time we are facing such a situation. It is an inward battle, manifesting itself as an outward conflict; an irreconcilability within reveals itself as a physical irreconcilability and a practical difficulty. This is what is happening to us

every day from morning to night, from moment to moment. We have to be cautious and look around in all directions, noticing what is happening, how we can adjust and adapt ourselves to the movement of conditions around, which are not uniform always, but vary from day to day and sometimes several times even in a single day. We have to face this world of irreconcilability. Why should we face it? Because we are in it. We have entered the field willy-nilly and while we are in the field, we cannot absolve ourselves from the necessity to handle the situation in a requisite manner.

This is what they call the need to perform one's duty. Duty is what we are expected to do under a given condition; therefore, the colour and the contour and structure of duty also changes according to place, time and circumstance. What is duty in this place may not be duty in another place. What is duty at this time may not be duty at another time. What is duty under these prevailing conditions may not be duty under different conditions. *Desha, kala, paristhiti* (place, time and condition) decide the nature of what we are expected to do, so that we cannot have a textbook of the nature of duty anywhere in the world. We have to use our common sense, our feeling, and our understanding.

*Understanding* is the word that will be underlined when we move forward through the chapters of the Bhagavad Gita. The word *buddhi*, reason, is emphasised always.

We find that this world is often too much for us. The large army of people, the entire humanity, seems to be facing us, staring at us, and telling us that we should be cautious: Beware! Sometimes we look much smaller than the world, which is larger, like the Kaurava army which is larger than the Pandava group. The world which is objective in its nature occupies a larger area in space and time than our individuality, our personality. We seem to be singly facing the world, which is like a vast ocean in front of us.

While it is emphasised that we have to face the world, we will also feel that it is not an easy affair. How will one person that I am be able to confront the sea of humanity, this vast world of space and time? Yet we are told again and again to get up and gird up our loins for doing what is necessary. What is necessary? This requires not only a personal understanding within, but also guidance of a specific nature.

We may, in a mood of inadequate understanding of the circumstances prevailing, imagine that we can do something. There are people in the world



who feel that they can conquer the whole of nature, face humanity, rule the world, become kings and emperors, dictators. Such feelings some may have, but these are only types of initial enthusiasm.

The world has not come under the control of any dictator finally. It has thrown them all out by producing historical circumstances, political conditions, and social catastrophes. In this situation, where one is not sure of whether it is possible to do anything at all in this world, one can throw down one's arms: "I shall not take up my weapon of effort in any way when now I realise that I am not up to the mark in my relationship with this power of humanity, the world of nature. This is not for me." So goes the defeatist attitude, which overpowers a person after a while, though there was initially a feeling that one could do many things.

Spiritual seekers, who have in the beginning felt a spurt of aspiration, begin to feel now that they can renounce the world and work vigorously for attaining God in this birth itself. This is what Arjuna felt: "Let the Kauravas know who I am."

We can see in the discourses given by Arjuna on the Pandavas' side, described to us in the *Udyoga Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, prior to the commencement of the war: "What do they think they are? They do not

know the power of my Gandiva. Let me twang my bow and see that their hearts quail." All this was told in the preparatory discussions in an audience, but, when, actually, the confrontation was on hand with the magnitude of the forces in front, the assumed confidence and valour flew like mist before the sun and a totally different mood overpowered the very same person who said he will twang the bow and break the hearts of the enemies.

The field of confrontation judges us. We will know ourselves only when we are faced by the opposite party. When nobody is opposing us, we cannot know what we are. Even the power of God Himself cannot be seen unless we oppose God. There are people who opposed Vishnu, Narayana. Then only He manifested Himself as a ferocious man-lion, Narasimha, or as a Rama or Krishna.

When we are confronting the world, it shows its strength, and we also will show our strength only when we are confronted. When we are losing everything, we will put forth all our energy to save ourselves.

### The Divine and the Undivine Forces

There are two powers working in us — *daiiva* and *asura*, as the Bhagavad Gita mentions. The

weakness which tells us that it is not possible for us to face the world of objects arises on account of the undivine forces (*asura*) also operating in us, which tell us that we are puny little individuals, that we are nowhere before this large world. The astronomical universe terrifies us. We are one speck, atomic in size, like a particle on this small planet called earth, which is floating unrecognised in space in the midst of large galaxies, unthinkable in vast space and time complex. We are flabbergasted at the might of this universe. We feel defeated, humiliated by the very size of the world.

But another thing, the divine nature (*daiṛva*) in us, tells us that we can overcome the whole universe; we can reach the stars and make them our own. We can probe into the mysteries of nature, conquer it and harness it, utilise it for our purposes. The *daiṛva*, the divinity in us, tells us: "You are not a weakling. Get up and show your strength! Don't be a coward." The other one says, "You are a coward, a weakling, you cannot do anything."

The facing of the world, confronting the Kaurava forces, meeting the requirements of the large humanity, calls for a development of our personality in a new direction altogether. We require a strengthening inwardly, gradually, in the needed

measure to face the world, and it is necessary to face the world. We cannot run away from it. We are in it, steeped in it. What is the use of making complaints?

As threads are involved in the fabric of a cloth and one thread cannot say that it will run away from the cloth, none of us can say that he will run away from the world. Even Arjuna's complaint that he can flee and eat a beggar's meal in the forest is an unintelligent foolish person's attitude. Such a thing is not practicable in a world where we are inextricably involved in all things.

The duty, therefore, is not to run away from what we are confronting, but to develop enough energy in us to confront it. If we have to face the ocean, we have also to become an ocean. One ocean can meet another ocean, but the drop that we are cannot do that. We may feel that we are a drop in the midst of the sea of Kaurava forces, but we are also an ocean inside, of which the drop is a vital part. Towards that realisation, move forward. Act now! Bring forth to the surface of your awareness the power that is in you called understanding.

We are not outside the world and the world is not outside us. The Kaurava and the Pandava forces are two sides of the same coin. They come from the same Vyasa Bhagavan. They are descendants of

one person only. They are like two arms of a single individual. They are cousin brothers, belonging to one family. The Pandavas also are called *Kurus* sometimes, and the Kauravas also are called by the same name. Remember that they are descendants of Vyasa, who is the original progenitor of both sides. So also is there an origin of this world and also of our own selves, who look like individuals. We have a common parentage and a uniform heritage. This, on the one hand, is the light that will emanate from us by exercising our understanding, that the stuff of the world is also the stuff of our personality.

### **The World as an Integral Whole**

When we behold the world, a part of the world in us is beholding itself as if it is located outside in space and time. A part of the total makeup of the whole creation, call it the world or the universe, segregates itself in a perceptual process as the individual perceiver on the one hand and the world of perception on the other hand.

The qualities of nature operate on both sides: the world objectively is constituted of certain forces which are the constituents of the perceiving individual also. When a perception takes place through the sense organs, nature collides with

nature. Matter comes in contact with matter; *prakriti* meets itself, embraces itself as if it is divided into two parts in a similar manner as my two hands can clap together and feel a sensation of unity between them, notwithstanding the fact that the two hands are emanations of a single makeup of my personality physically and mentally.

Here is the little specific recipe for us, given to us in the Gita itself. The qualities of nature operate upon the qualities of nature. Sense organs which are constituted of the properties of *prakriti* come in contact with the objects which are also constituted of the very same properties of *prakriti*, which are known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, meaning harmony, distraction and inertia, respectively. We need not go into the meaning of all these words at present as I am only bringing this point as a kind of illustration that spiritual progress is something like the advance of the chapters of the Bhagavad Gita.

The advice given by Bhagavan Sri Krishna to the despondent individual Arjuna is to rise up to the occasion. In a military operation everyone has to rise up to the occasion and see that they succeed. Strength has to be infused into ourselves. We have to build up our personality. Energy should be infused into ourselves. We have to be morally, intellectually

and physically strong. This is the teaching that we have in the second and third chapters. "Apply your intelligence. Resort to the Yoga of understanding."

How much understanding have we? We have a contorted understanding. We always see things in a topsy-turvy manner. Right understanding is *buddhi yoga*, the understanding that properties of nature operate both inwardly and outwardly so that we are not seeing the world; rather the world is seeing itself. We are not confronting anybody else; the world is confronting itself for a total evolution to take place in an onward ascending march towards a recognition of itself.

The universe marches upward in an ascending spiral movement to find itself in itself, to know itself as itself, which is called the Self-realisation of the cosmos. We may call it God-realisation.

Yet we can feel a diffidence: "I understand what you are saying but the weakness of the heart does not leave me. Is it humanly possible on this earth to develop such a strength in me to face the whole world? I know what you are telling me. I have the potentiality to develop my strength enough to face the whole world. In spite of this advice to me, the understanding that I have generated in me still questions whether it is possible, or not."

There are higher powers which will be ready to bless us always. Nature is twofold, lower as well as higher, which will be told to us in several other chapters of the Gita. The lower nature makes us feel that we are weak and incapable. The higher nature sometimes gets submerged due to the clamouring sound made by the lower nature through the sense organs. Often many boisterous types of people shouting at the top of their voice can drown a wise word uttered by a good individual. Such things happen in our spiritual life. The soul will give us good advice but the clamour of the sense organs sometimes takes the upper hand and drowns the little voice of the soul. We feel disconcerted; we do not know whether we are capable of doing anything at all. Even the head of the family can sometimes get disgusted due to the noise that the members of the family make. This may happen to us as spiritual seekers.

### **The Incarnation of God**

Now, there is a guiding hand always; there is a leading angel sitting on our very shoulders. Every person is carrying within himself or herself a guiding power, a divinity. There is a divinity that is aware of what is happening. With millions of



eyes it looks at us and sees us and notices what is happening to us. Our hairs are counted. The number of our breaths is known and whatever we think, feel and do is reverberating through the cosmos. There is one who knows the most secret deeds of our private personality and the whispers that we do in the ears of people in the remotest corner of the world. The little whisper that we make in the remotest corner of the world reaches the heavens like a thunder. Therefore, do not be under the impression that you are unguarded.

“Why are you afraid? I am here with you. When you are in danger, I shall come.” The guiding hand of the Almighty is perpetually operating, not after some time, not tomorrow; it is just at this moment operating, whether we feel it or not. As it is well said, a sparrow cannot fall on your head without the will of the central power.

The fourth chapter of the Gita describes the operation of an *avatara*, the incarnation of God, in an assurance given to us, a promise made by God Himself: “I shall not desert you. My devotee cannot perish.” Our hearts should jump with joy by listening to such a promise. “My devotee cannot perish.” Are you a devotee? Then you will not perish; you will never be let down at any moment of time.

But be sure that you are a devotee. God has never deserted His devotees. "Proclaim, my dear friend, to everybody, through the newspapers, the radio and television that I shall not desert my devotees. I am there, ready at hand to protect them. I shall save them from the ocean of *samsara*."

When this assurance enters our heart, together with the understanding that we have developed as has been given to us in the previous chapters, we rise to some extent above the turmoil of life which was presented in the first chapter, and we have now developed a positive type of the spirit of renunciation, which is what we feel and find enunciated in the fifth chapter. Already we have renounced many things, even when we have taken to spiritual life, but that is an unintelligent type of renunciation. Just because we are away from our house for a long time, it does not necessarily mean that we have renounced our connection with the world.

### On Renunciation

Even if you have renounced the world, the taste for the world will not leave you easily. The world has been abandoned but the taste for the world has not gone. Though you have not eaten *halva* and drunk *kbeer* for three months, you know its taste. Can

you say the taste also has gone? It will not go. The beauty of life, the fragrance of things, the velvet-like comforts of life may not be there when you are living like a *sanyasin*, but does the *sanyasin* know that such things exist in the world? Even the knowledge that such palatable things exist is a negative deficit entry in the balance sheet of the spirit of renunciation.

There is no use saying that we have nothing. In some places, teachers of Yoga tell us that withdrawal of the sense organs from the objects does not mean closing the sense organs and plugging the holes of the apertures of perception. Really speaking, withdrawal of the sense organs means 'not being even aware that the objects exist at all as outside things'. That is real withdrawal. Being aware of something, and then shutting the eyes to it, is quite different from not being conscious of the externality of existences.

The earlier type of renunciation is immature. It is of a type of working knowledge that you have, not a qualified knowledge. The real renunciation is spiritual and not social, material or physical. You are not socially segregating yourself from anything materially or physically, which is actually what everyone does when one says he has renounced family circumstances, and the like.

Now, the instructions in the fifth chapter tell us that we are required to have another type of the spirit of renunciation which is purely spiritual in the sense that we have not even a taste for anything. "The pinnacle of *Vairagya*, or renunciation, is reached," says a great master, "when you consider that even the joy of *Brahmaloka* is like the taste of a dry straw." And what to speak of the joys of this world? These truths are all beyond our heads at present, but by intense practice and a hammering of these ideas again and again into the mind we will find that it is not only possible, it is an essential.

When this detachment of a wholly spiritual character takes possession of us, we become fit for direct confrontation of the reality of life. This is the preparation of the personality for the Yoga of meditation, as it is portrayed beautifully in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. What is this Yoga that we have in this crucial phase?

### The Great Spiritual Conquest

*Uddharedatmanatmanam natmanamavasadayet;  
Atmaiva hyatmano bandhuratmaiva ripuratmanah.  
Bandhuratma'tmanastasya yenatmaivatmana jitah;  
Anatmanastu satrutve vartetatmaiva satruvat.*

"One should exalt the self by the Self. One should not deprecate the Self, for the Self alone

is the friend of the self, and the Self alone is also the enemy of the self. The Self is the friend of him whose self has been conquered by the Self. Where the self remains unrestrained, the Self would behave as its enemy, as an external foe.”

The whole of the sixth chapter is here in these two verses. The Yoga of meditation is the art of the higher Self pulling up with tremendous force all that our lower self is. The self has to be raised by the Self. We have to raise our self by our Self. What does this mean?

The archetypal Self, the original Self, the heavenly Self, the divine Self, the Absolute Self that also we are, raises the puny self, the individual self, the physical self, the Mr. self or Mrs. self, the political self, etc. You may make a list of all the kinds of selves that you are—all transitional types of self, which is a conglomeration of what is known as the individual personal self. This has to be melted down, like a lump of ice, before the blazing sun of the knowledge of the higher Self. But where is the higher Self? How many kilometres away?

How much distance is there between waking and dream—how many miles, light years of distance between waking and dream? A tremendous distance indeed! From one world we have gone to another

world. There must be some distance, certainly. Yet, you will find that the distance is logically measurable but not physically calculable.

There is no physical distance between the higher Self and the lower self, between God and man. They are touching each other, not as two fingers meeting each other, but as the higher thought includes the lower thought, the higher knowledge transcends the lower knowledge, the higher education engulfs the lower education, the greater wisdom absorbs the lower wisdom. These are not physically or mathematically measurable in space; they are only measurements in understanding.

This higher Self, this God-driven Self which is our own Self, is our true friend, from which we can draw sustenance at any moment of time. It exudes veritable honey. But when the lower egoistic self asserts its independence and behaves not as a lower degree of the higher dimension of its own self, it will become its own enemy and thwart all its efforts. It is always well said, "To Thine own Self Be True."

Says the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, "If space itself were not the field of great joy, who would breathe?" If breath itself is not a joy, who would be wanting to live? The breath would burn your nostrils. The

*akasa*, space around us is also a field of joy only. That is why we want to enjoy it by looking at it and inhaling the breath emanating from it. Existence, accommodation, is itself the highest freedom and bliss.

Sometimes we say that man proposes while God disposes. This, because the self is opposed to the higher Self, it looks as if the higher Self is disposing of everything which one is proposing, but it will not behave thus if one is friendly with it. Who is the person of whom the higher Self is a friend? What kind of person can regard himself as the friend of the higher Self?

A particular kind of person that you *are*, alone, can regard yourself as the friend of the higher Self. Every kind of personalty that you are is not capable of being a friend of the Self. You cannot shake hands with a highly placed dignitary unless you are also placed on an equal pedestal in some way. You want to shake hands with the higher Self; for that, you have to develop certain qualities which are required for that purpose. What are those qualities? The conquering of the self: *atma jaya*.

This question arose sometime in the context of the *Udyoga Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, where Dhritarashtra raises a question before Sanjaya: "Can

I see that great messenger of the Pandavas who seems to be coming to meet us in our assembly? Can I have a vision of him?"

Sanjaya, the wise minister of Dhritarashtra, says, "You are asking me a question: whether you can see him. The *Akritatman* cannot behold the *Kritatman* that is Sri Krishna." The *Kritatman* is one who has totally subdued the self. The *Akritatman* is one who is a slave of the lower self. The person who is a slave of desires, befuddled in the midst of sensory attractions, cannot behold the great Being that is Krishna, who is a complete master of the self. The Eternal is irradiated through his Person.

The restraint of the sense organs is the means of subduing the self. Actually, the self that is to be subdued is nothing but the self of the sense longings. The sensory self is the self that is to be transmuted. We are now living in a world of sensations and the self that we are is ridden over by the potentialities of sense contacts, sense perceptions, sense desires. They have to be melted down into a liquefied menstuum of the power of the higher Self. "You must know that the One that is coming is All-in-all, and all your children, and all the henchmen behind them are nowhere behind this one Person," said Sanjaya to Dhritarashtra.



Many are the beauties and the powers and the joys of this world but the higher Self is standing singly by Itself. That one Being is greater than all the many things that are in this world. Therefore, Duryodhana made a mistake in choosing the army of Krishna, while Arjuna was wise enough to choose only one thing, who was Krishna. That One was greater than the multifold apparently strong soldiers of the army.

In the *Mundakopanishad* there is a similar analogy. Two birds are perching on a single tree, sitting on the same branch. There is a bird which is looking at the beautiful delicious fruits, but never eats them. The other one is very much engrossed in eating the delicious fruits—so much engaged in eating that it is not even aware that there is a friend sitting nearby. When the eating subsides, when the bird that is enjoying the delicious yield of this tree of life gets fed up with it and turns its gaze on the one who is silently witnessing only and not eating anything, its liberation takes place.

As long as Arjuna was looking at the army only, he was frightened. When he turned his eye to Krishna, energy entered him. Very active and virulent were the people whom he was facing in the front, known and unknown, kinsmen and enemies, put together.

When seeing them, there was agitation in the heart and a valorous attitude manifested itself to fight the forces and attack them. But then he looked at the charming blue Man sitting, doing nothing. And that Nothing indeed was doing everything. Man does many things; God does nothing. That One who does nothing actually does more things than the many things apparently done by people in this world.

All our activities throughout history fade into a valueless nothingness before the tremendous activity of God. Who can say that the sun in the sky does nothing at all? He does not speak or proclaim himself. He minds his business silently locating himself in the blue sky. That silent existence itself is sufficient to make everything alive in this world. We run about, but the sun does not run about in that manner, while causing everything to run.

This higher Self is single; it is we, ourselves, in one lower position of ourselves, who feel we are multifold. We have many kinds of business, many things to do, many relationships. We have all sorts of engagements in the level of our lower selves, but in the higher one, there is nothing for us to do. We have only *to be*. When you just feel satisfied merely by your existence in the form of the higher Self, you

have done everything; all the so-called needs for doing cease.

### Conclusion

From the seventh to the eleventh chapter of the Gita is an ascending order of the rise of the consciousness of reality gradually revealing itself by stages. In the beginning one feels like a distant thing, away from God; afterwards we appear to come closer, then inseparable, then identical. God becomes our own Self, as in the *Vishvarupa-darshana*, the Cosmic Form extolled in the eleventh chapter.

Then, the following chapters tell us how this knowledge is to be applied in our daily life, in our day-to-day practical affairs, so that the Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita is seen as a masterpiece of superb techniques by which one can blend together God and creation, the *here* and the *hereafter*. This life that we are living here is the very life that we are going to live transfigured in eternity. Here is before us the solacing message of the Bhagavad Gita, which everyone has to study with an in-depth understanding of its teaching. "Where the Absolute and the relative melt into each other, death becomes life, all is seen in the All, and there is ever prosperity, victory, happiness, and established polity."

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