



The Text, Context, and Message of the Bhagavad Gītā

1

Satinder Dhiman

Introduction

The Bhagavad Gītā contains timeless management lessons for contemporary organizations. It is a non-sectarian spiritual text with a universal message. It teaches truth regarding our essential nature which can be verified by everyone right here and now, in this very lifetime. Presenting its setting and the occasion, this introductory chapter explores the meaning and the key message of the Gītā to facilitate proper understanding of the text and its application. After recounting the universality of its message and its perennial appeal, it suggests primary application of some key concepts of the Gītā to management and leadership domain. It also explores the key themes and the essence of the Gītā's eighteen chapters.

Several modern leadership and management topics such as vision; motivation and empowerment; self-awareness, self-mastery, emotional maturity; anger management and stress management; meditation and psychological wellbeing; excellence in work; workplace spirituality; importance of ethical means in achieving righteous ends; attaining meaning and fulfillment at work; and serving a cause higher than oneself for the greater good are lucidly discussed in the Bhagavad Gītā. Likewise, we find that many contemporary leadership constructs such as authentic leadership, servant leadership, and values-based leadership, were already discussed in the Bhagavad Gītā thousands of years ago.

S. Dhiman (✉)
Woodbury University, Burbank, CA, USA
e-mail: satinder.dhiman@woodbury.edu

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1

The Perennial Appeal of the Bhagavad Gītā

The Bhagavad Gītā, the classic Hindu scripture par excellence, holds a special place in the world's sacred literature. Throughout the past centuries, it has wielded an enduring influence on the spirit of humankind and provided steady guidance for spiritual seekers of all types and climes. It embodies the highest philosophy of God-Realization (Rānāde, 1982). It's non-sectarian, non-dogmatic, and universal message speaks endearingly to people from all walks of life who are in search of abiding answers to the fundamental questions of life—philosophers, saints, scientists, artists, businesspeople, and laypersons.

It has been said that, “No other Sanskrit text approaches the Bhagavad Gītā in the influence it has exerted in the West” (See: van Buitenen, 1981, book back cover matter). It is well known that the transcendental philosophers such as Emerson and Thoreau were deeply influenced by its insights. A. L. Basham and other Sanskrit scholars agree that the significance of the Bhagavad Gītā in India is comparable to that of the New Testament in Western civilization (Bolle, 1979, p. 224). Noting its widespread appeal and popularity, Robert N. Minor, a modern exegetical commentator, states that the Bhagavad Gītā has become ‘*the most translated text after the Bible*’ (Minor, 1986, p. 5). Count Hermann Keyserling, a German philosopher, hailed it as ‘*perhaps the most beautiful work of the literature of the world*’ (cited in Durant, 1930, p. 6).

Over the centuries, many have expressed their sincere appreciation for its perennial charm. After reading the Gītā, Albert Einstein is reported to have said, “When I read the Bhagavad Gītā and reflect about how God created this universe everything else seems so superfluous”. J. Robert Oppenheimer, American physicist, read the Bhagavad Gītā in the original, and regarded it as one of the most influential books to shape his philosophy of life. Upon witnessing the world's first nuclear test in 1945, he later said it reminded him of verse 32 from Chap. 11 of the *Bhagavad Gītā*: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds” (cited in Giovannitti & Freed, 1965, p. 197).

In his masterly *Foreword* to the Winston Sargeant's translation of the Bhagavad Gītā, Huston Smith, the famous religious studies scholar, calls the Gītā “literally a pager-turner” and a “multivalent book” for “there is something in it that will reward every serious reader” (Smith, 2009, p. 9). According to the famous author of *The Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley, “The Gītā is one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries of Perennial Philosophy ever to have been made. Hence, it's enduring value, not only for Indians but for all mankind. The Bhagavad Gītā is perhaps the most systematic scriptural statement of the Perennial Philosophy” (cited in Prabhananda & Isherwood, 1975, p. 22). Henry David Thoreau has stated “in comparison to the Bhagavad Gītā our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.”

It is well known that Gandhi modeled his life upon the teachings of the Gītā (Betai, 2002). Gandhi “constantly referred to it as his ‘spiritual dictionary,’ ‘the mother who never let him down,’ or his ‘*kāmdhenū*,’ ‘the cow that grants all wishes’” (see: Dhiman, 2015; Gandhi, 1983, pp. 59, 60, 232, 233, 296–297; Jordens, cited in

Minor, 1986, p. 88). Gandhi writes, “When disappointment stares me in the face, and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavad Gītā. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā” (cited in Radhakrishnan, 1958, p. 10).

According to the great Indian commentator, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, “From a clear knowledge of the Bhagavad Gītā all the goals of human existence become fulfilled....Bhagavad Gītā is the manifest quintessence of all the teachings of the *Vedic* scriptures” (*yataḥ tadartha-vijñānē samasta-puruṣārtha-siddhiḥ ataḥ...tat idam gītā-śāstram samasta-vēdārtha-sārasaṅgraha-bhūtam*. See: Sastry, 1897/1995, pp. 4–6). For most Indian people, the Gītā is a scripture blessed with God’s Grace (*ek prasādik grantha*). The Lord Himself has declared it His very own Heart: “*Gītā meḥ hṛdyam Pārtha!*”

Text and Context of the Gītā

The Bhagavad Gītā is one of the world’s great scriptures. Meaning literally “Lord’s Song,” the Gītā unfolds as a dialog between Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the divine incarnation in human form, and his warrior-disciple, Arjuna, on the eve of a historic battle of cosmic proportions. Within the Indian religious-philosophical tradition, the Gītā forms a part of “the triple foundation” texts or *prasthāna-traya*, the other two texts being the Upaniṣads and the Brahma-Sūtrās. Although technically, it belongs to a class of literature called “*smṛti*,” “remembered” or “traditional texts,” it has the status in Hindu culture of “*śruti*,” “scripture” or “revelation” (Deutsch, 1968, p. 3). Śrī Śaṅkarācārya (ca. 788–820), the great Indian philosopher, lifted it up from the vast ocean of *Mahābhārata*, fixed its verse-content at seven hundred and wrote the oldest extant commentary on it. (Tapasyānanda, 2010, p. vii; Radhakrishnan, 1958, p. 15). There is a sort of consensus among scholars today that the text of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, as fixed by Śaṅkarācārya long ago at 700 verses, is a unitary text (Deutsch, 1968; Edgerton, 1944; Hill, 1928/1953; Krishna Warriar, 1983, p. ix; Minor, 1982, 1986; Swarupananda, 1909/1976; Zaehner, 1973).

The Gītā is not only one of the most translated book, it is also one of the most commented upon books of the world. Since the subject matter of the Gītā is highly subtle and profound, one often needs the help of various commentaries to understand its deeper import. Myriad commentaries by classical and contemporary authorities exist, and the sheer volume of those commentaries can be bewildering to a seeker. It is beyond the scope and intent of this chapter to evaluate various commentaries. However, it may not be amiss to list a few noteworthy English translations of the Gītā’s most famous commentator, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. Although translations by Swami Gambhirananda and Dr. A. G. Krishna Warriar present Śaṅkarā’s *bhāṣya* (commentary) in a contemporary English idiom, yet Alladi Mahadeva Sastry’s translation—even though, strictly speaking, it is not a complete translation of Śaṅkarā’s commentary—seems closer to the intent and purpose of the original. If you do not

mind some interpretive theosophical leanings, then this translation can convey the gist of Śaṅkarācārya's commentary in a simple, pure, and unvarnished way. Sastry usually gets to the essence of the original in the most direct way.

Unless otherwise stated, the translation of the verses of the *Gītā* quoted in this chapter are author's adaptations. All verses from the *Gītā* are listed in this format: 2.11—which refers to Chap. 2, verse 11. In order to retain some flavor of the original, the chapter presents some Sanskrit terms and phrases in transliteration, using diacritics according to the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) convention. A small bar drawn over a word (e.g., 'ā') indicates elongated sound: as 'ā' in the word 'park.'

Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā is embedded within the great Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata* (literally, Great War of India), which has been hailed as the *Fifth Veda* (O'More, *op. cit.* in van Buitenen, 1981, p. ix). The *Mahābhārata* contains 107,000 octameter couplets (and 1.8 million words)—seven times the length of Homer's *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* combined (Durant, 1954, p. 561). The setting of the *Gītā* is the austere battlefield of Kurukṣetra where the armies have been drawn between the Kauravas and Paṇḍavās. After the expiry of twelve years of exile, and subsequent one year's incognito living period (*ajñātavāsa*), the Paṇḍavās, according to the terms as agreed before, demanded half of their kingdom from Duryodhana. However, Duryodhana flatly refused to give back the land even as much as the size of the tip of a needle (let alone half the kingdom) without waging a war! As a result, the Paṇḍavās made the decision to engage in the battle according to the command of their esteemed mother, Kuntī. Thus the war between the Kauravas and the Paṇḍavās became inevitable and, consequently, both sides began preparation for it. According to the fixed time, the war began in Kurukṣetra (Rāmsukhdāsī, 2007).

The teachings of the *Gītā* take place right before the war begins.

The date and authorship of the *Gītā* is a hotly debated topic among Western and Indian scholars (Bolle, 1979; Deutsch, 1968; Edgerton, 1944; Gambhirananda, 1984; Hill, 1928/1953; Rānāde, 1982; Tapasyānanda, 2010; Zaehner, 1973). We shall not burden this chapter with a recounting of the divergent views; for, from the standpoint of this chapter, it is a futile exercise—'a veritable counting of the leaves in place of eating the mangoes after entering a mango garden.' In matters of the spirit, what matters is the content and the content of the text is real and meaningful! Concluding his insightful study on the *Gītā*, Eliot Deutsch, states that "this is indeed a teaching that has meaning and value for all times and places" (Deutsch, 1968, p. 190). According to the Indian tradition, the Bhagavad Gītā was composed about 3000 years before the present era (a little over 5000 years ago) and its authorship is attributed to the great sage, Veda Vyāsa (literally, the "arranger" of the Vedās).

The message of the *Gītā* fosters holistic development of human personality on all its dimensions (physical-psychological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual) by providing guidance about the three essential spiritual practices: "training the mind," "transforming the passions," and "guarding the heart." This conforms to the three-fold disciplines enunciated in various Indian wisdom texts—Path of Knowledge (*Jñānayoga*), the Path of Action (*Karmayoga*), and the Path of Devotion (*Bhaktiyoga*). Although some Western scholars believe that the *Gītā* is a loose

collection of thoughts of different schools, Madhusudana Saraswati, a preeminent commentator, divides the Gītā into three integral sections of six chapters, each section dealing successively with *Karmayoga*, *Bhaktiyoga*, and *Jñānayoga*, the first leading to the second and the second to the third (Gambhirananda, 1984, p. xxi).

Likewise, the Gītā expounds a three-fold path to self-realization: (1) the path of selfless action (*karma yoga*); (2) the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*); and (3) the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*). Some commentators believe that the 18 chapters of the Bhagavad Gītā cover three broad categories of themes: (1) the first six chapters, called *karma-shatkam*, deal with the concept of selfless actions as a path to liberation; (2) the next six chapters, called *bhakti-shatkam*, deal with the topic of devotion of the personal God as a path to liberation; and (3) the final six chapters, called *jñāna-shatkam*, deal with the path of self-knowledge as a means to spiritual liberation.

The three sections of the Gītā also conform to the three parts of the great Vedāntic statement (*mahāvākya*) ‘Thou Art That’ (*Tat Tvam Asi*). The first section discusses the “*Tvam*” (the Self); the second section discusses the “*Tat*” (the Ultimate Reality); and the last section discusses the “*Asi*” (which denotes the oneness of the Self and the Ultimate Reality). The great statement ‘Thou Art That’ (*Tat Tvam Asi*) categorically states that the true nature of individual self is the unchanging, limitless Awareness. The Gītā provides the practical methodology to realize this oneness of individual Self (*atmā*) and the Supreme Self (*Paramātmā*), right here and now.

Managing by the Gītā: Some Key Lessons

Old Text, New Context

Although traditionally interpreted as a religious-spiritual text, the Gītā contains timeless lessons for contemporary organizations. Peter Senge, one of the key management thinkers of our time, has quoted the Gītā in two of his celebrated books, namely, *Fifth Discipline* and *Presence*. Steve Jobs’ credo, “Actualize Yourself,” also seems to have its implicit roots in the Gītā.

The Gītā unfolds as an infallible guide for those higher order managers and leaders who *externally* live a life of full engagement in the world, while *internally* always remaining steadfastly anchored in the wisdom of their Higher Self. Its non-sectarian, universal message speaks endearingly to people from all walks of life who are in search of abiding answers to the fundamental questions of life.

The Gītā is universal in its message, comprehensive in its outlook, and concrete in its suggestions. It teaches truth about our essential Self which can be verified by everyone right here and now, in this very lifetime. It is a non-sectarian spiritual text with a universal message, completely free from narrow religious dogma. As Teitsworth (2014, pp. 3–4) has rightly observed:

There is no vengeful God in it, only a benign and loving principle, called Brahman, or the Absolute. It is replete with the finest spiritual advice tendered without compunction or guilt....There are no chosen or cursed souls, only more or less damaged and confused ones.

The game here is to rectify the damage and dispel the confusion with clear thinking and action....In learning from the Gītā, we have to find and express our own inner motivation.

It is important to remember that though in its ultimate bidding, the Gītā is essentially a manual for spiritual freedom (*mokṣa śāstra*)—as Śaṅkarācārya, its greatest commentator and exponent reminds us. However, in its practical aspect, it is also a great manual for living and not an esoteric treatise on spirituality. As A. Parthasarathy (cited in Waite, 2007, p. 519) has noted, “The Bhagavad Gītā is a technique, a skill for dynamic living, not a retirement plan.”

At what point of one’s life one should pursue the goal of *mokṣa* or self-realization? Many believe that spiritual quest is something to be pursued during the last phase of one’s life. Dispelling this popular notion, Gandhi (1983, p. 302) tells us in his autobiography that people had a “superstition” that self-realization could be attained only in the last stages of life. Those who deferred it until then attain not self-realization, but “a second and pitiable childhood living as a burden on this earth.”

In the following sections, we will present some key management and leadership lessons drawn from the teachings of the Gītā.

From Battlefield to Boardroom

It has been observed that the Bhagavad Gītā is as relevant in the board rooms of the twenty-first century as it was on the battlefield of ancient times (cited in Chatterjee, 2012, front flap matter). Within the compass of 18 dynamic chapters, it unfolds the whole spectacle of human drama full of challenges met, victories won, and freedom attained. It teaches us how to emerge from a state of utter apathy, gloom, sorrow and dejection to a state of perfect engagement, understanding, clarity, wisdom, renewed strength and triumph. The Bhagavad Gītā can be approached as a powerful tool for change management and as catalyst for organizational transformation. It teaches us how to harmonize the needs of the individual with the needs of the society, and by extension, how to harmonize the needs of employees and the organization. It employs an inside out leadership development approach based on self-knowledge and self-mastery, the two highly important areas for practicing true self-leadership. The Gītā is a non-sectarian spiritual text with a universal message.

The Setting: Doing the Right Thing

The Gītā starts with the classic management dilemma: What is the right thing to do? Although Arjuna had agreed to undertake the challenge of a just war, fully aware of the gravity and the implications of the situation, at the final hour when the battle was just about to begin, he realizes the terror of the situation—that in this war, he has to shot arrows at his close relatives and teachers. His warrior nature is overcome by faint heartedness and his mind becomes confused about his allotted duty (*kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ...dharmasaṃmūḍhacetāḥ: 2.7*). Arjuna beseeches

Śrī Kṛṣṇa to guide him about the best course of action (*yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṃ brūhi tan me: 2.7*) as he does not see any way out of this grief which was drying up his senses (*ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām: 2.8*).

Bennis (1994, p. 78), a preeminent leadership scholar has observed, “Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right.” While this may be bit of an oversimplification—*since both leaders and managers need to do things right as well as do the right thing*—doing the right thing remains the perennial leadership challenge. But doing the right thing presupposes knowing what right thing is in the first place. *This is exactly the point where the Gītā begins.* What is the highest right thing to do in any given situation? Surely, answer to this enigmatic question holds the keys to many management conundrums. And the Gītā is an extended Ode to the attainment of the ultimate, the highest good (*niśreyas*)—the knowledge of our oneness with the Ultimate Reality (*ātma-jñānam which is Brahma-ātma-aikyam*).

From Apathy to Engagement

The Gītā starts with temporary apathy (*na yotsya: 2.9*) on the part of its warrior hero, Arjuna, and ends with his promise for full engagement (*kariṣye vacanaṃ tava: 18.73*) in the fulfillment of his duty. Thus, Śrī Kṛṣṇa demonstrated leadership qualities in evolving and guiding Arjuna to successful engagement in the just war. The whole Gītā is dedicated to enlighten us, through the example of Arjuna, about how to fully engage in our duties efficiently, effectively and ethically while at the same time ensuring our highest goal, i.e., spiritual freedom (*niśreyas*). Through the practice of selfless work (*niṣkāma karma*) for the well-being of all beings (*sarvabhūtahite: 5.25*) and by developing steadfast wisdom, the Gītā teaches us how to discover the sacred in life while remaining fully engaged in the secular activities (Dhiman, 2013, p. 14).

Thus, the key lesson the Gītā teaches us is how to transition from the state of inertia to one of righteous action, from the state of alienation to a state of self-confidence in the ultimate victory of ethical action. By leading from within, Śrī Kṛṣṇa inspires the warrior hero Arjuna to engage in his rightful duty by cultivating mental equilibrium and objectivity to deal with any situation or crisis. The Gītā’s ideal is not indifference to the world but deep love and compassion born out of understanding the identity of oneself with all beings.

Ethics: The Very Foundation of Human Conduct

In the scheme of the Bhagavad Gītā, ethical conduct (*dharma*) furnishes the essential foundation for the quest for spiritual freedom. The scriptures do not cleanse the ethically impure. It is interesting to note that the very first letter of the first word of the first verse (*śloka*) of the Gītā—‘*dharmakṣetre*’ (1.1)—and the very last letter of the last word of the last *śloka* of the Gītā—‘*mama*’ (18.78)—virtually form the word ‘*dharma*.’ Hence, the *dharma* (lit., that which supports or sustains) is the province of the entire Gītā! The opening words of the Gītā (1.1) are: *dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre*.

Kuruḷḷe literally means “the field of actions.” And *dharmakḷḷe* means that basic principle that sustains everything. So, the *Gītā* is about the domain of our actions, actions guided by the law or principle that sustains everything within the cosmic sphere.

In the *Gītā*’s terminology, the performance of actions selflessly as a service or as an offering to the Supreme sustains the cosmic system. In turn, such actions purify the mind and make it a fit vessel for the reception of Self-Knowledge which alone is the true means to spiritual freedom. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the teacher Par Excellence in the *Gītā*, does not merely want to make us philosophically learned only but to help us realize the Truth *experientially*—not to merely *instruct* but to make us truly *wise* and *free*.

Thus, underscoring the role of ethics in life, the *Gītā* upholds a vital competency that is sorely needed in modern corporate world plagued by rampant financial frauds and inveterate moral ineptitude. It has been rightly observed that “ethics lies at the very heart of leadership” (Ciulla, 2004, p. xv). As Al Gini (cited in Ciulla, 2004, p. 43) has pointed out, “...without the witness of moral leadership, standards of ethics in business and organizational life neither emerge nor be sustained.” When leaders forget this vital point leadership regenerates into a narcissistic pursuit of self-aggrandizement to the detriment of the society. In the final reckoning, “the only true leadership is values-based leadership” (Toole, 2008, p. 4).

The spirituality of the *Gītā* is firmly rooted in the ethical values. There is no progress on the path of spirituality if there is no harmony and unity between our *vicāra* (thought process) and *ācāra* (conduct). Without ethical purity, the true message of the *Gītā* will elude us. Gandhi (cited in Iyer, 2012, p. 69) who made his life his message believed that one needs to observe five disciplines to arrive at the correct understanding of the interpretation of the *Gītā*:

But you must approach it with the five necessary equipments, *viz.*, *ahimsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *brahmacarya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *asteya* (non-stealing). Then and then only will you be able to reach a correct interpretation of it. And then you will read it to discover in it *ahimsā* and not *himsā*, as so many nowadays try to do.

These five disciplines are called *yamas* (abstentions) since they represent “moral restraints” or rules for living virtuously. These rules can be very effective in the workplace to create an atmosphere of amity and harmony. Practicing these abstentions, however, does not equal becoming “ineffectual” or allowing ourselves to be taken advantage of by others. Commenting on these five *yamas*, Prabhavananda and Isherwood (1953/1981, p. 141) have rightly noted, “We must think of ourselves as the servants of the mankind, and be ready to put ourselves at the disposal of those who need us. It does not mean, however, to lend ourselves to the evil purposes of others...The truly helpful man is like public trolley car, available to all who care to use it, but travelling, nevertheless, along a fix route to its destination.” The *Gītā* teaches that “be good, do good” is all that one needs to “be” and “do” to foster happiness in oneself and others.

Mind: Our Greatest Friend and Foe

The Gītā reminds us that an unruly mind is our greatest foe and a stable mind is our greatest friend. Hence the Gītā places great emphasis on self-restraint and mental discipline. It is a common knowledge that mental strength and determination are the keys to leadership success; for leaders who are mentally weak and wayward cannot achieve a durable organizational vision or mission.

One of the hallmarks of unrestrained mind is a life given to selfish desire, anger, and greed. The Buddha also warns his disciples of these three mental traps. All wisdom traditions of the world are in agreement on this point that self-centered desire is the source of all sorrow and evil. The Gītā calls desire, anger and greed as triple gates of hell. It clarifies that the (unsatisfied) desire is the cause of greed as well as anger. The reason the Gītā lays so much importance on curtailing the desires is because all evil proceeds from self-centered desires. A person who is selfish cannot serve others. Such a person becomes a bane to the society. Therefore, a leader must first conquer self-centered desire if he or she is to serve others.

These three traps are present in every dysfunctional organization manifested to the highest degree in its leaders. The Gītā warns about the unrestraint senses and mind, thusly: As a strong wind sweeps away a boat on the water, even one of the roaming senses on which the mind focuses can carry away a man's intelligence (2.67). Śrī Kṛṣṇa presents a precise taxonomy of the dangers of attachment leading to complete ruin: attachment breeds desire, and from desire (unfulfilled) ensues anger; anger clouds judgment and when judgment is beclouded, reasoning power is lost; and with the loss of reasoning one falls from one's status as human being (2.62–63).

A leader should, therefore, manage his anger well and should not let anger gain control over him. Mastering the emotion of anger is a not an easy task as many sages of past and present have reminded us. As Aristotle (quoted in Leonard, Miles, & Van der Kar, 1944, p. 203) has deftly noted, “Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way, that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.”

Many methods are recommended to control the anger, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Most people recommend the delay tactic—to not to respond at all in the heat of anger. That is effective only if one remembers to not forget this counsel of perfection at the onset of anger. Gītā says that to control anger, we need to pay attention to its root cause. Anger arises when someone stands in the way of our object of desire—from desire (unfulfilled) ensues anger. And attachment to things, ideas, and opinions lie at the root of desire. Basically, to control anger, we should first guard and calm our mind. If our mind remains in a state of calm then no negative emotions can arouse in it. To attain peace of mind, the easiest way is to let our mind dwell within our own inner nature rather than all the time hankering outside after the worldly objects.

We should also consider cultivating a daily practice of some form of meditation, since during meditation, mind becomes naturally calm and tranquil. One needs to be

patient with oneself as well as with others. Practicing loving-kindness and forgiveness toward all also help us develop understanding and tolerance. One of the most effective techniques to manage anger is to keep in mind the acronym ‘F.I.R.’ denoting frequency, intensity, and recovery (Paramārthānanda, 2008). To manage anger effectively, we have to patiently work on reducing the frequency of the anger, its intensity, as well as the recovery period.

Equanimity (*Samatā*): The Touchstone of Perfection in Wisdom

The Gītā regards ‘equanimity’ or ‘evenness of mind’ to be the *Yoga* (2:48). And the finest teaching on this topic is provided in the Gītā as follows:

*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya |
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṃ yoga ucyate || 2.48*

Abiding in equanimity, abandoning attachment, perform actions, O Arjuna, viewing with equanimous mind success and failure. Evenness of mind (*samatvaṃ*) is *Yoga*.

When we perform an action, we have certain expectations about its results. The actual results can be equal to our expectations, less than our expectations, more than our expectations, or totally opposite to our expectations. Whatever be the outcome, the Gītā teaches us to accept it gracefully by maintaining a state of evenness of mind (*samatā*) towards the results of our actions. By not fighting with “what is,” we conserve a lot of energy which can then be fruitfully applied in addressing the situation at hand.

Samatā (equanimity) is the “fulcrum” around which the entire teachings of the Gītā revolve. Wherever Śrī Kṛṣṇa has mentioned the highest peaks of the paths of action, knowledge, and devotion, He has very carefully interspersed ‘*samatā*’ in their consummation (2.48, 53, 57; 5.6, 18–20; 12.13–19; 14.24, 25; 18.10, 26). So, *samatā* is the crest-jewel of perfection (*siddhi*) in all the paths to God-Realization. All virtues obtain in the mind which has cultivated equanimity. Whatever the spiritual practice, if evenness of mind (*samatā*) is not there, the goal is still far away (Swāmī Rāmsukhdāsī, 2007). When our mind has become pure and our intellect ‘*sama*’—‘balanced and equanimous’—we have attained oneness with the highest principle of existence. Such is the supreme importance of *samatā*!

According to Swāmī Rāmsukhdāsī (2007), evenness of mind or equanimity (*samatā*) is the ‘acid-test’ of realization according to all three disciplines (*Karmayōg*, *Jñānayōg*, *Bhaktiyōg*). In the Bhagavad Gītā, the very first definition of *Yōg* (communion with Divine) is said to be ‘*samatā*’—‘*samatvaṃ yōgaḥ ucyate*’ (BG 2.48). Then in BG 6.23, we read ‘*dukha-sanjog-viyōg yōg sanjittam*’—That state is called *Yōga* which transcends the contact of sorrow. This is the “dexterity/skillfulness” in actions—‘*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*’ (BG 2.50). Swāmī Rāmsukhdāsī (2007) states that the verses 2.48 and 6.23 “define” what the *yoga* is according to the Gītā; and the verse 2.50 states the glory of *yoga*. So, *yoga*

according to the Gītā is *samatā*. (See: Dhiman, trans., *Kripāmayi Bhagavad Gītā*, Dhiman, 2014; *Sahaja Gītā*, Dhiman, 2013).

Too often, great decisions are marred by the manager's and leader's inability to see beyond the surface in a calm and collected manner. Managers and leaders can benefit greatly from this unique state of equanimity and objectivity in dealing with perennial leadership challenges without being disturbed by the pulls and pushes of personal likes and dislikes. *Samatā* is the best antidote to the agitations of the mind.

Empowering vs. Disempowering Work Culture

In order to understand human behavior better, the Gītā makes a special reference to the psychological make-up of individuals comprising three basic modes of nature—*sattva* (purity/goodness) that brings truth/harmony; *rajas* (movement/passion) that kindles action/activity, and *tamas* (ignorance/inertia) that leads to delusion/confusion. The key to follow this tripartite division of human nature is to understand that no individual has absolute *sattvic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic* qualities. Depending upon our inherited tendencies and current mode of living, several permutations and combinations are possible on this broad spectrum of these three psychological types. This knowledge fosters understanding, tolerance and patience. At the same time, it provides guidance to effect change based on fuller information and greater understanding.

In Chap. 16 of the Bhagavad Gītā, we find very practical guidance on building an empowering (*daivī*) work culture—characterized by fearlessness, purity, self-restraint, sacrifice, straightforwardness, non-violence, truthfulness, tranquility, gentleness, modesty, forgiveness, absence of fault-finding, greed, ostentatiousness, envy and pride. Leaders should strive to enshrine these qualities and should try to foster such an environment where these qualities can be nurtured. (16.1–3).

Similarly, the Gītā goes on to describe what may be called disempowering (*āsurī*) work culture—characterized by hypocrisy, arrogance, self-conceit, anger, harshness, and lack of sense of discrimination between real and unreal, duty and non-duty (16.4). Leaders are aware that a strong work ethic marked by empowering qualities goes a long way to achieve workplace excellence. It is to be noted that mere work ethic is not enough to attain in as much as a hard core criminal has also a very good work ethic. What is needed is a work ethic guided by ethics in work.

The deeper message here is that we should not pry on the faults of others; rather, we should improve our own shortcomings. A too critical, carping attitude towards our fellow-beings is a source of much unhappiness. “If you want peace of mind,” said Sri Sarada Devi, “do not find fault with others” (Cited in Swami Satprakashananda, 1977, p. 93). The importance of this observation also lies in the fact that this is the last recorded message of Sri Sarada Devi, the worthy consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the greatest Indian sage-saint of the Nineteenth century.

Swami Dayananda (cited in Prasad, 1999, p. 246) says that the purpose knowing about these values is not self-judgment or judgment of others. All kinds of people

make up this world. You want to change others so that you can be free, but it never works that way....People are what they are because they have their own backgrounds, and they cannot be otherwise. Thus, the Gītā teaches a higher level of accountability based on one's own innate duty (*swadharma*). The very *raison d'être* of the teachings of the Gītā was to re-awaken Arjuna to his sense of responsibility which he had temporarily lost due to delusion born of ignorance (*ajñānasam̐mohaḥ*: 18.72). The higher accountability is garnered by renouncing egoism (*amānitvam*: 13.7), cultivating humility, team work, dignity, sharing, co-operation, compassion, harmony, trust, sacrificing lower impulses for higher needs, seeing others in yourself and yourself in others (*sarvātmabhāva*), etc.

Selflessness Is the Best Thing You Can Do for Yourself!

Misplaced ego is the greatest enemy of workplace amity and harmony. Understanding the workings of the imposter ego and thereby rendering it ineffective is the first step on the path of wisdom. In the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā where Śrī Kṛṣṇa begins to describe the marks or means of True Knowledge (Gītā 13. 7–11), we see 'absence of self-pride' (13.7) listed as the very first mark. In the very next verse (13.8), Śrī Kṛṣṇa again states... 'and absence of egotism also' (*anahamkāra eva ca*). Please note the word 'also' after the word 'egotism.' Out of the 20 marks of True Knowledge listed in verses 13. 7–11, the word 'also' is appended only next to the absence of 'self-pride' (*anahamkāra*)! Something to ponder over very deeply!

As long as one is harboring a sense of distinction/superiority, regardless of any reason—justified or unjustified—one is still belaboring in vain, not much unlike the ox that turns the oil press going back and forth. When God is all there is (*Vāsudevaḥ Sarvam*: 7.19), where is the need for entertaining any feelings of distinction or superiority—no matter what the justification may be?

Those who are truly awake become awake to the fact that 'God is all there is'—including the ones who may not be yet awake, in their estimation! This knowledge fosters amity, understanding, and harmony in all settings and removes the conflict inherent in the 'game of one-up-ness' that plagues most human interaction. Likewise, we come to realize that most psychological and emotional stress is caused by our excessive self-centeredness.

Selfless service, the cardinal doctrine of the Gītā, has a great application in the realm of leadership. First and foremost, leadership is a responsibility—a call to serve—and not a position to wield power or influence. The power that is bestowed upon the leader by the followers is of the nature of trust and good faith. In other words, leadership is a fiduciary relationship. Viewed in this manner, the only reason a leader exists is to enable and empower the followers. Great leaders approach their work as a contribution, as a service, without any sense of entitlement whatsoever. "Like 'Guardians' of Plato's *Republic*," writes Al Gini (cited in Ciulla, 2004, p. 36), "leaders must see their office as a social responsibility, a trust, a duty, and not as a symbol of their personal identity, prestige, and lofty status."

Self-centeredness is a condition borne with a deeply ingrained sense of separateness, anchored in self-ignorance. Self-knowledge is freedom from self-ignorance; when self-ignorance transforms into Self-knowledge, our need to maintain our separateness is resolved into the fullness of our being. We no longer feel the gnawing sense of inadequacy, incompleteness, and insecurity. We have arrived at an unassailable stillness, blessed with the fullness of our essential nature. We have made peace with the universe.

Journey from Consumer to Contributor

The Gītā is a practical manual of living. It lays down the guidelines for leading a meaningful life—a life marked by goodness and contribution. Pablo Picasso put it succinctly: “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” What makes our life purposeful and meaningful? What is the essence of being good and doing good? What does it mean to grow in goodness? How can one grow from being a consumer to becoming a contributor? The Gītā holds the keys to all these existential questions.

The Gītā recommends to approach life as a network of mutual interdependencies in which everyone has to contribute their share. And the touchstone is not mere human welfare but well-being of all beings. Only then we can ensure the mutual maintenance of the universe. This understanding holds the key to a sustainable future for all.

The Gītā (18.5) recommends the threefold acts of sacrifice (*yajña*), charity (*dāna*), and austerity (*tapas*) and considers them as the “purifiers of the wise.” In order to grow spiritually, one has to convert one’s whole life into an offering to the Divine. This will inspire trust, faith and hope in those led.

Managers and Leaders Should Lead by Example

Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that those in leadership position should act responsibly since whatever standards or example the leader sets people in general will follow. Leaders’ actions do speak louder than their words. In essence, leaders are really brand-ambassadors of an organization. Humanity has yet to discover a more effective way to bring about change and to lead others than by setting the example. All great leaders lead by example. Gandhi inspired emulation not so much by his professed set of values and beliefs as by the exemplary nature of his life and conduct. *He made his life his message.* This virtue of “being the change” became Gandhian hallmark and his most precious legacy by which he is remembered the most. He was the rare soul who *preached what he practiced!*

The Making of Wise Managers and Leaders

According to the teachings of the Gītā, the wise managers and leaders act:

1. To set an example to the masses, so the unwary do not go astray (3.26);
2. For the unification of the world at large (*lokasaṃgraham*, 3.20, 3.25);
3. For the welfare of all beings (*sarvabhūtahite*, 5.25); and
4. For the purification of the self (*ātmasuddhaye*, 5.11).

All these four goals furnish an integral touchstone for leadership success in any setting. Leaders do their duty for duty's sake (cf. Kant's Duty Ethics), to set an example for others, to bring the communities together, for the well-being of all beings, and above all, for the purification of the mind and the heart. No higher teaching on the sublimity of a leader's work ethic and work ethics can be conceived.

There are at least four places where characteristics of an ideal sage are presented in the Gītā from different perspectives: BG 2.55–72; 12.13–20; 14.21–27; and 18.49–56. In addition, we also find reaffirmation of the same theme in selected verses of two other chapters: BG 13.7–11 and 16.1–3. For example, Chap. 12 (verses 13–20) describe the marks of a devotee (*bhakta*) which have a striking similarity to the qualities of a person who has transcended the sway of three modes of material nature—*guṇatīta* (14.21–27), which in turn bear a great similarity to the characteristics of a person steadfast in wisdom (*sthitaprajña*) as described in Chap. 2 (verses 55–72) as follows (Easwaran, cited in Fischer, 2002, p. xvii, author's adaptation):

That person is dear to me who is free from ill-will, friendly and compassionate; free from the sense of "I" and "mine;" equanimous in joy and sorrow, forgiving, ever-content, firm in faith with his mind ever united with Me; who has subdued his mind, senses, and body; and has surrendered heart and mind to Me....Not agitating the world, nor agitated by it, above the sway of delight, envy, desire, and fear; who regards equally friend and foe, praise and blame, pain and pleasure, free from selfish attachments; quiet, ever-content, in harmony everywhere, firm in faith—such a person is dear to Me.

It is noteworthy that almost all of these qualities of an ideal sage more or less focus on emotional maturity—the ability to manage emotional disturbances and reactions calmly. Cultivating these qualities is important for everyone both in personal and professional arena. For example, being friendly and compassionate and free from malice (12. 13: *adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa*), being free from attachment, fear, and anger (2.56, 4.10: *vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ*), and not being a source of annoyance to fellow-beings and not feeling vexed with the fellow-beings (12.15: *yasmān nodvijate loko lokān nodvijate ca yaḥ*)—all these are signs of emotional stability which is the key to harmony in personal and professional relationship.

This is a tall order of personal qualities for any leader to cultivate and requires years and years of dedication, commitment, and perseverance. These qualities represent the highest level of emotional maturity, self-awareness, and self-discipline, equanimity, and detachment that may appear to be unattainable by any leader

according to modern standards. Exemplary leaders like Gandhi act as “witness” of high moral leadership without whom the limits of higher human possibilities will neither be known nor sustained. In Easwaran’s estimation (cited in Fischer, 2002, p. xvii), who was present at one of the prayer meetings that Gandhi regularly held, Gandhi “fulfilled every condition that the Gītā lays down.”

In the ultimate analysis, management is not about changing outer conditions or others. More often than not, there is not much that we can do to change what is external to us. However, we have full control over our own conduct. “When we are no longer able to change a situation,” writes Frankl (1984, p. 116), “we are challenged to change ourselves.” And when we are able to do that, in due course of time, we are also able to change the situation, unexpectedly. This is the alchemy of all social change.

Authentic Leaders See Themselves as Work-in-Progress

This is what great leaders do—they see themselves as a work-in-progress, and they sculpt themselves to get progressively closer to their ideal form. And their impact on the world, as a result, grows exponentially. In a letter Mandela wrote from jail to his wife Winnie, he wrote, “Never forget that a saint is a sinner who keeps trying” (cited in Wadhwa, 2013).

What guidance does the Gītā provide in developing transformational leaders, leaders who lead from within and put service before self? The Gītā focuses on developing qualities of head and heart, entirely focusing on self-mastery. Before we can aspire to lead others well, we need to manage ourselves effectively. If leadership is an extension of who we are, then cultivation of self-discipline and self-mastery becomes our priority. The Gītā provides an extensive list of such qualities, some of which are stated below:

(1) Humility, (2) Unpretentiousness, (3) Non-violence (not causing any injury to anyone through one’s body, mind, and speech), (4) Forbearance, (5) Simplicity of body, mind, and speech, (6) To realize self-knowledge, approaching, serving, and following a teacher (one who is liberated-in-life), (7) Purity of body and mind, (8) Steadfastness of purpose, (9) Self-restraint, (10) Dispassion towards sense-objects, (11) Absence of egoism (absence of the sense that ‘I am body’), (12) Abandonment of worldly attachment, (13) Even-mindedness in favorable (desirable) and unfavorable (undesirable) circumstances, (14) Perceiving God everywhere and in everything (BG 13.7–11).

It is important to note that all these qualities are geared towards the service aspect of leadership—*preparing a leader in the service of others*. A leader who is arrogant and too self-absorbed cannot really lead an organization to success. The imposter ego of the leader will stand in the way of organizational goals. In his now classic book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins notes that compelling modesty is one of the two key competencies of what he calls level-5 leaders, the other being fierce professional will. In their study of 1423 leading companies, Jim Collins and his colleagues found the most successful leaders blend “extreme personal humility with intense professional will.” (Collins, 2001).

Journey from Self-Ignorance to Self-Knowledge

The Gītā teaches us that the fundamental human problem is the lack of self-knowledge and the resultant extroverted-ness of our search for happiness and the mistaken way we relate to the world. In all our quests, we approach people, objects, and situations through the prism of our likes and dislikes (*rāga-dvēṣa*) which leads to attachment or aversion. Attachment leads to sorrow and sorrow leads to delusion which in turn compounds our misery.

When the Self-knowledge (*ātam-jñāna*) dawns, we realize that whatever we have been seeking is already within us. It is in fact our own very nature or self. J. Krishnamurti once said, “Truth is a pathless land.” This is the historic statement that Krishnamurti made when he dissolved ‘The Order of the Star in the East’ that was founded in 1911 to proclaim the coming of the World Teacher. Krishnamurti was made Head of this Order. On August 3, 1929, the opening day of the annual Star Camp at Ommen, Holland, Krishnamurti dissolved the Order before 3000 members. This was the title of his speech. [The full speech can be found at: <http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/about-krishnamurti/dissolution-speech.php>].

This pithy, enigmatic quote *does not* really mean that there is no path to truth; rather it signifies that we are already the truth that we are seeking. Since there is no separation from the truth (Reality) to begin with, no path is really needed. Thus, Self-realization is a matter of “recognizing” what “Is,” a matter of attaining the ever-attained (*prāptasya-prāpti*) (See: Dayananda, 2009, p. 39). It is not a problem of “becoming;” it is a problem of “being.” It is a journey from “here” to “here.” Scott Teitsworth (2014, p. 11) puts it succinctly:

In Vedānta—the philosophical system of the Gītā and its close cousins, the Upanishads—everyone and all things are the Absolute in essence, and the seeker’s path such as it is, is to come to know this truth. It is a path that begins and ends right where we are.

The Gītā identifies *kāma*, a state of constant desiring and wanting, as life’s fundamental problem. This constant feeling of lack springs from a mistaken sense of inadequacy about one’s self. This leads to running constantly towards objects to fulfill the sense of incompleteness. The fascination for an object (*vishaya*) thinking that it can give security and happiness is called *shōbhana adhyāsa* in Vedāntā. The proper resolution of this problem is to be found in the understanding oneself, through self-inquiry and contemplation, to be the full and complete self (*ātman*). Such knowledge enables one to act in the world from a deep sense of peace and inward fulfillment.

Self-knowledge transforms our motivation and liberates us from the narrow confines of selfish action to the freedom of serving others. Through this re-discovery of our intrinsic freedom, we are also able to experience the calm bliss of the fullness of our Self and intuit the harmonious oneness of all existence. When the false divisions and distinctions based on our narrow personal likes and dislikes disappear, we are able to extend our benevolence without preference or prejudice in all directions and our very existence benefits the whole universe. Our existence then becomes an

offering to the Supreme, a celebration to the Whole. And our feet get firmly planted on the path that leads to peace, happiness, and liberation. The teachings of the Gītā gently guide us toward this *summum bonum* of all human quests and pursuits.

The Ultimate Recipe for Self-Management and Leadership

If leadership is an extension of who we are, then leaders first need to manage themselves before they can aspire to lead others. Underscoring the importance of self-leadership, the Bhagavad Gītā further stresses that an individual leader must uplift himself by his own self and he must not let himself be undermined when facing a crisis. Leaders must elevate themselves by their own self-efforts (*uddhared ātmanātmānaḥ*: 6.5) and this requires a deep understanding of the workings of the mind. For one who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends, but for one who has failed to control their mind, the mind will be the greatest enemy (*ātmaiva hy ātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ* 6.5). An untrained mind is very weak and unstable and cannot carry out any task, let alone lead. Arjuna told Śrī Kṛṣṇa that his mind was unsteady, restless, very powerful, and as difficult to control as the wind. Śrī Kṛṣṇa agreed that the mind is not easy to control, however, he said that it is possible to control the mind by constant practice and detachment or dispassion (*abhyāsenā...vairāgyeṇa ca*: 6.35).

Leaders need to employ their intellect effectively to direct their mind. In this regard, *Katha Upaniṣad* 1.3.3–4, another Indian wisdom text, likens the human body to a chariot (*ratha kalpanā*) to describe the position of individual Self (*ātmā*) *vis-à-vis* senses (*indriya*), mind (*manas*), and intellect (*buddhi*). Mind is the reins and the five senses are the horses. The objects perceived by the senses represent the chariot's path. The intellect is the driver and the Self as the passenger acts as the enjoyer or sufferer in the association of the mind and senses. Whereas an ordinary leader is constantly driven by the wayward mind and unruly desires for sense objects, a wise leader uses the power of intelligence to discern between what is pleasant (*preyas*) and what is right (*shreyas*).

In many respects, the Bhagavad Gītā is similar to the *Katha Upaniṣad*, the one from which some of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā are believed by many to have been drawn. Then the *Katha Upaniṣad* goes on to describe spiritual practice using a bow-arrow simile. A seeker of the Truth should take the sacred syllable Om (ॐ) told in Upaniṣads as bow, the seeker's Self purified by constant meditation as arrow, Supreme Reality as target; by pulling back the senses from their sense objects, with heedfulness, the seeker should become one with the Supreme Reality (Brahman) as the arrow in the mark (2.2.4). This is the great identity between the individual Self and the universal Self (*Brahma-ātma-aikyam*) spoken of in the Indian wisdom texts called Upaniṣads.

This is the final desideratum and the *summum bonum* of all human aspiration and quest.

Fulfilled Managers and Leaders: Master Keys to a Fulfilled Life

The key to life's fulfillment according to the Gītā lies in Self-realization through Self-knowledge. The realization that 'I am the Limitless Unchanging Pure Awareness that illumines senses, mind, ego, and the world' is Self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is the means as well as the end. Real fulfillment of human life lies in firmly establishing oneself in the Self (*ātmā*), our true nature (Dhiman, 2015, 2017). This Self is unchanging Pure Awareness that illumines/witnesses the states of waking, dream and deep sleep and all mental modes. And all the keys to Self-realization are presented in the very beginning of the Gītā (2.55–2.61) as follows: When one, finding contentment by the Self in the Self alone, completely casts off all selfish desires of the mind; neither agitated by the sorrow nor hankering after the sense pleasures; free from lust, fear, and anger; free from attachment; neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad; with senses subdued and mind ever absorbed in the Divine within—*such a person is truly wise*. The net result of cultivating these qualities is the peace, fulfillment and real happiness.

There is no bliss greater than the bliss experienced by the one who beholds the Self through the self and rejoices in the Self (*ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*: 2.55). This bliss is not dependent upon the senses or external objects, and, in this bliss, the intellect remains fully awake and alert. Established in such bliss, one never deviates from it, even amidst the greatest of the sorrows (6.22). To have attained this bliss is the touchstone (litmus test) of all spiritual practices—a sure proof of spiritual plenitude (6.20–26).

Śrī Kṛṣṇa started the teaching in the Gītā declaring that “the wise do not grieve” (2.11: *nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*) and concludes it with an assurance “do not grieve” (18.66, *mā śucaḥ*). So, if you want to overcome the sorrow, attain to the liberating wisdom of the Self. What is this liberating wisdom? Just this: perform your actions as an offering to the Supreme (*Īśvara-arpanabhāvanā*), performing your duties without the expectation of any reward, and, above all, surrendering to the Divine within.

A Western disciple, Elizabeth Usha Harding, once wrote a letter full of despair to Swami Gambhirānanda, the great Advaita Vedāntā scholar and translator. He replied: “I hope you realize that true peace can only come by surrendering to the Divine within us. The world will always go on in its own way. There can never be any permanent solution to problems created by human nature” (See: Harding, 2011). Shortly before his passing, Swami Gambhirānanda (cited in Harding, 2011) told one of his attendants: “I feel I'm nearing the house of death.” Then, quickly, he corrected himself and said, “No, I am not. There is no death for the Knower of Self (God).”

Essence of the 18 Chapters of the Gītā

(Partially adapted from Dhiman, trans., *Sahaḥja Gītā*. Print edition, Dhiman, 2013, pp. 175–178)

The Gītā consists of eighteen chapters comprising 700 verses. To facilitate understanding of the message of the Gītā, we present a brief summary of the subject-matter of each chapter. The word ‘*yogah*’ at the end of each chapter simply signals its topic or subject-matter. It reflects a skillful means of *integrating* oneself through a particular method as explained in a given chapter. In essence, each of the eighteen chapters of the Gītā presents a unique discipline or *yoga* of connecting with the Supreme.

Essence of the First Chapter (अर्जुनविषादयोगः *arjunaviṣādayogaḥ*) (47 verses)

The first chapter is titled as the *yoga* of Arjuna’s dejection or anguish, *arjunaviṣādayogaḥ*. Arjuna came to the war, knowing very well that he would have to fight with his own kith and kin. But when he actually saw his relatives, elders, teachers, and friends lined up on the other side, ready to fight, it brought about a confusion in his mind regarding duty and desire, reason and emotion. The intensity of Arjuna’s anguish created a deep dispassion in him which is a necessary condition for understanding the deeper truths of life. Essentially, Arjuna is archetypical of all of us struggling in the battle of life. Overpowered by the delusion born of ignorance, we get confused about our real duty and get caught up in this dilemma, “What should I do and what should I not do.” The force of such a dilemma brings us face to face with a spiritual guide—just as despairing Arjuna who sought guidance from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Being, the Lord in human form. The deeper message in this chapter is that the most challenging moments of our life hold the keys to our existential dilemmas. But we must seek a competent mentor who knows the alchemy of transforming moments of crises into opportunities of profound meaning and learning.

Essence of the Second Chapter (साङ्ख्ययोगः *sāṅkhyayogaḥ*) (72 verses)

The body is perishable and the Self (soul) which knows it is imperishable (2.13, 2.16, 2.18, 2.120). By giving importance to this discriminating reasoning (*viveka*) and diligently fulfilling one’s allotted duty, worries and sorrows come to an end. This chapter is generally considered as the summary of the entire Gītā. Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches all he has to teach in Chap. 2 and elaborates it in the remaining sixteen chapters. Accordingly, it presents all the *yogas* in a seed form—*Karma Yoga*, *Jñāna Yoga*, etc.—which are further developed in the later chapters. This chapter introduces an important touchstone of wisdom—equanimity of mind (*samatvam* 2.48) which is later presented as an acid test of perfection in all the *yogas* in the Gītā (2.48, 53, 57; 5.6, 18–20; 12.13–19; 14.24, 25; 18.10, 26). So, *samatā* is the crest-jewel of perfection (*siddhi*) in all the paths to God-realization. All virtues obtain in a mind

that has cultivated equanimity. Whatever the spiritual practice, if evenness of mind (*samatā*) is not attained, the goal is still far away.

Essence of the Third Chapter (कर्मयोगः *karmayogaḥ*) (43 verses)

Fulfilling one's duty selflessly for the well-being of others leads to liberation. Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains the essence of the path of action as the performance of one's prescribed duties *without* attachment to results. Desire-prompted actions and attachment to results of actions leads to bondage. Karma *yoga* is the *yoga* of "attitude" toward actions and their results: performance of actions as an offering to the Divine and acceptance of results as a Divine Grace. This attitude signifies *yoga*, union, with the Supreme through actions. This is the skillfulness (*kauśalam*) in actions and *yoga* in *karma*, *karmayogaḥ*.

Essence of the Fourth Chapter (ज्ञानकर्मसंन्यासयोगः *jñānakarmasāṅnyāsayaogaḥ*) (42 verses)

There are two ways to be free from the bondage of actions: Performing actions unselfishly as an offering by understanding the true essence of actions or by realizing (or attaining) the knowledge of the essential Reality (*tattva-jñāna*). This chapter also stresses the importance of learning the science of Self-knowledge from the wise ones (*jñāninasta*) who have realized the truth in their direct experience (*tattvadarśinaḥ* 4.32).

Essence of the Fifth Chapter (संन्यासयोगः *sāṅnyāsayaogaḥ*) (29 verses)

A person should not become happy or unhappy due to favorable or unfavorable circumstances. One who becomes happy or unhappy due to circumstances, cannot rise above the mundane world and experience the Bliss Supreme. This chapter explains what is action, what is inaction, who is the doer of action, and what is true renunciation. True renunciation is renunciation *in* action, not *of* actions. Renunciation in action occurs by renouncing the 'doer-ship'—the false sense that 'I am the doer.' This is the true *yoga* in the performance of actions.

Essence of the Sixth Chapter (आत्मसंयमयोगः *ātmasāmyamayogaḥ*) (47 verses)

This chapter presents the path of meditation (*dhyānayoga*) by which mastery of the mind might be gained. Resolving the mind in the Self (आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा *ātmasāṁstham manaḥ kṛtvā* 6.25) is the essence of meditation and is the best spiritual practice. The

wise see all things in God and God in all things (6.29–30). This chapter contains some of the most important verses about the path of knowledge (6.29–32) and the path of devotion (6.30, 6.47) and provides the most succinct definition of yoga as ‘dissociation from association with sorrow’ (6.23). Whatever be the spiritual practice, one should attain equanimity (*samatā*) of mind. Without equanimity of mind, a person cannot become completely free from the agitations of the mind (or the sway of the thoughts).

Essence of the Seventh Chapter (ज्ञानविज्ञानयोगः *jñānavijñānayogaḥ*) (30 verses)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains the nature of Absolute Reality and the illusory nature of *Māyā*, the creative Divine energy responsible for the appearance of the variegated world of name and form. God is all there is (वासुदेवः सर्वमितिः *vāsudevaḥ sarvaṃ iti* 7.19): to accept this and live a God-centered life is the best spiritual practice. The Gītā adds that such a wise person is very hard to come by (स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः *sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ* 7.19).

Essence of the Eighth Chapter (अक्षरब्रह्मयोगः *akṣarabrahmayogaḥ*) (28 verses)

The fate of an embodied soul is determined according to its state of mind at the time of death. Therefore, remembering God at all times, we should perform our allotted duties (सर्वेषुकालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च *sarveṣukāleṣu māmanusmara yudhya ca* 8.7). Only then shall we be able to remember God during our critical last moments. This is the desideratum of all spiritual life.

Essence of the Ninth Chapter (राजविद्याराजगुह्ययोगः *rājavidyārājaguhyaयोगः*) (34 verses)

The chapter presents the path or *yoga* of the most secret royal knowledge. The alchemy of this knowledge is presented as the highest devotion, thusly: Fix your mind on Me (the Lord), with Me as thy support (मन्मना भव...मत्परायणः *manmanā bhava... matparāyaṇaḥ* 9.34) and whatever you do, please do it as an offering to Me (यत्करोषि... तत्तमदर्पणम् *yatkaroshi... tatamadarpaṇam* 9.27). If you do so, it is assured that the Lord will take care of what you need to get and protect it too (योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् *yogakṣemam vahāmyaham* 9.22). According to Swami Ram Tirath ji, verse 9.22 is the watershed since it represents the *mid-point* of the Gītā. And hence its unique importance. It was once explained to this author that, in this context, *yogakṣemam* (योगक्षेमं) does not refer to the provision and protection of worldly things by the Lord. Rather, it means that to those ever united in thought with the Lord, the Lord ensures that what is needed for the spiritual progress of the seeker will be provided (योग) as well as protected (क्षेम). That is the true import of verse 9.22.

Essence of the Tenth Chapter (विभूतियोगः *vibhūtiyogaḥ*) (42 verses)

This chapter reveals that God is the primal source of all and everything in the universe. Wherever any uniqueness, special quality, beauty, prominence, brilliance, strength, etc., are observed in the world, considering them to have sprung from the Lord, one should constantly contemplate on the Lord alone.

Essence of the Eleventh Chapter (विश्वरूपदर्शनयोगः *viśvarūpadarśanayogaḥ*) (55 verses)

This chapter presents the vision of the Universal Form of the Lord. It explains how the Supreme Being pervades the entire cosmic creation. By regarding this universe verily as God's cosmic form, everyone can have a vision of God's universal form constantly. The last verse of this chapter is considered to be the quintessential verse summarizing the essential import of the entire Gītā: The one who does all actions for My sake, regards me as his Supreme Goal, who is devoted to Me, free from all attachments and free from malice towards all beings, comes to Me, O Arjuna! This verse also prepares the ground for the culminating chapter on the yoga of loving devotion to the Lord (*bhaktiyogaḥ*).

Essence of the Twelfth Chapter (भक्तियोगः *bhaktiyogaḥ*) (20 verses)

This chapter explains the exalted path of devotion or divine love. It states that a devotee, who fully surrenders himself to God, with his body, senses, mind, and intellect, is extremely dear to God (ज्तीव मे प्रियाः '*tīva me priyāḥ* 12.20). The Gītā regards the *yoga* of loving devotion/service to and relationship with the Lord as the highest form of *yoga*.

Essence of the Thirteenth Chapter (क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञविभागयोगः *kṣetrakṣetrajñavibhāgayogaḥ*) (34 verses)

This chapter presents twenty preparatory marks of knowledge. There is only One Supreme Reality (*Paramātama-tattva*) which pervades the entire universe. This Supreme Reality, which is the Light of all lights (ज्योतिषाम ज्योति *jyotiṣāma jyoti* 13.17) is to be known; knowing which one attains to immortality. Such a person has realized that the Divine resides equally in all and everything (13.27) and that the self in me is the Self in all. This chapter is considered to be the most important chapter from the standpoint of the path of knowledge, *jñāna yoga*.

Essence of the Fourteenth Chapter (गुणत्रयविभागयोगः *guṇatrayavibhāgayogaḥ*) (27 verses)

This chapter explains the three modes, *guṇas*, of material nature—*sattva* (purity), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (inertia)—how they bind and how can one transcend them. *Sattva* binds one through attachment to pleasure and knowledge, *rajas* to actions and their fruit, and *tamas* to apathy and sloth (14.6–9). To be free from the bondage of the threefold properties of material nature (*prakṛti*), one has to rise above the triad of the qualities of purity, passion, and inertia. One becomes free from these three modes through knowledge of, and unswerving devotion to, the Supreme.

Essence of the Fifteenth Chapter (पुरुषोत्तमयोगः *puruṣottamayogaḥ*) (20 verses)

The sole source and support of this universe, the infinitely Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*) is the One Lord only. All splendor, glory, and excellences belong to this Supreme Being, the inner essence of all. Knowing the Lord as the Self of all thusly, one should worship the Lord with exclusive and unswerving devotion. Knowing this, a person becomes wise and has accomplished all that has to be accomplished (बुद्धिमान्स्यात्कृतकृत्यश्च *buddhimānsyātkṛtakṛtyaśca* 15.20). The Gīta extolls the teaching revealed in this chapter to be the most profound scripture (गुह्यतमं शास्त्रम् *guhyaṭamaṁ śāstrama* 15.20). Ādī Śaṅkarācārya’s comment (cited in Sastry, 1897/1995, p. 412) regarding this is illuminating: ‘Though the whole of Gīta is called Science (Sastra) yet from the context it appears that the fifteenth discourse alone here is spoken as the Science, for the purpose of extolling it. In fact, the whole teaching of the Gīta-Sastra has been summed up in this discourse.’

Essence of the Sixteenth Chapter (दैवासुरसम्पद्विभागयोगः *daivāsurasampadvibhāgayogaḥ*) (24 verses)

In this chapter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa identifies the human traits in terms of divine and the demonic natures which can be understood as empowering and disempowering dispositions. He counsels that to attain the supreme destination one must give up the disempowering traits such as desire, anger, greed and cultivate favorable traits such as truthfulness, purity of mind, modesty, authenticity, fortitude, and compassion. To discriminate between right and wrong action, let discernment (*viveka*) and the injunctions of the scripture (*śāstra*) be our guides.

Essence of the Seventeenth Chapter (श्रद्धात्रयविभागयोगः *śraddhātrayavibhāgayogaḥ*) (28 verses)

The operative word in this chapter is *śraddhā* which is hard to translate. It is commonly translated as faith, but *śraddhā* is more than faith and includes an element of loving-devotion. In one of his discourses on the Gītā, Swāmī Akandānand jī Mahārāj explains that the word ‘*śraddhā*’ (*sad + dhārana*) signifies the capacity to embrace truth (सत्य को धारण करने की क्षमता). Śrī Kṛṣṇa enunciates the three divisions of faith, thoughts, and deeds corresponding to the three modes (*guṇas*). Whatever auspicious task one begins with loving-devotion, one should begin it by remembering God and by uttering His Holy Name. The chapter concludes with the explanation of ‘*Om tat sat,*’ the three-fold expression of *Brahman*, the Absolute Reality.

Essence of the Eighteenth Chapter (मोक्षसंन्यासयोगः *mokṣasamnyāsayogaḥ*) (78 verses)

This culminating chapter is the longest and sums up the entire teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā. Themes that are hinted in the previous chapters are brought full circle in this final chapter. Vedas are the essence of all scriptures; Upaniṣads are the essence of all Vedas; the Gita is the essence of Upaniṣads; and the essence of the Gītā lies in taking refuge in God (*Bhagavān ki śarnāgati*). One who takes refuge exclusively in the Lord, the Lord frees that person of all the sins.

Ajrūna conveys his understanding of the final message of the Gītā in the following concluding verse (18.73):

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत ।
स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥

*naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtir labdhā tvatprasādān mayācyuta ।
sthito'smi gatasandehaḥ kariṣye vacanam tava ॥*

Changeless One (Śrī Kṛṣṇa), by Thy Grace, my delusion has been dispelled and I have regained my memory (of my true Self). I now stand firmly established (in my *svarūpa*, my true nature), with my doubts all cleared, ready to do Thy bidding.

Every word here is worth its weight in the gold: with Thy Grace; my delusion is gone; I have regained remembrance (आत्म-स्मृति, *ātma-smṛti*); all my doubts have cleared; I am now firmly established in my essential nature; and ready to do the inner, Divine Command (हुकम, *hukam*). [In the spiritual realm, there is nothing to attain, or to relinquish; Just to understand the ever-attained]. What a complete picture of all that is essential in a spiritual quest and its culmination!

Concluding Remarks: The Ultimate Psychological Security System!

Building its stance on the unshakable Law of Karma, the Gītā provides the ultimate security package: “No doer of good ever ends in misery:” *na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścīd durgatiṃ tāta gacchati* (6.40). “When you do the *right thing*,” says Krishnamurti, “*right things* happen to you.” By teaching that good means lead to good ends and vice versa, the Gītā provides the greatest motivation to act ethically.

In keeping with the tradition of Indian philosophy, the Gītā starts with presenting the highest human goal to be reached first: Access the Inner treasure-house of Self-sufficiency: *ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ* (2.55), everything else will follow on its own accord. At the heart of the Gītā, there lies the conception of a sage of steady wisdom (*sthītaprajñā*) who has gone beyond the pair of opposites such as pleasure and pain, success and failure, virtue and vice. Steady in wisdom, the seer, *sthītaprajñā*, enjoys the constant bliss of the Self, regardless of the changing circumstances. The Gītā (2.55) defines *sthītaprajñā* as follows: “When a person completely casts away all the desires of the mind, *satisfied in the Self alone by the Self*, then that person is said to be one established in steady wisdom.” This wisdom (*prajñā*) has two aspects: fullness (*purāṇattvam*) of being and equanimity (*samatavam*) of the mind. Only when one has experienced the inner fullness can one be free from the servitude of the ever-growing desires. And only when one is able to approach the ups and downs of life with an equanimous mind can one free oneself from the sway of favorable and unfavorable experiences. This wisdom is the only security worth seeking and the sure-fire armor to human sorrow and suffering.

In sum, become an instrument of the Divine in all that you do (*nimittamātraṃ bhava*: 11.33). Let all your actions be an offering to the Divine (*brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi*: 5.10), performed *without* attachment, for the purification of the Self (*saṅgam tyaktvātmaśuddhaye*: 5.11), and for the well-being of all beings (*sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*: 5.25); and be a role model for the bringing of the world communities together and for maintenance of the world order (*lokasaṃgraham*: 3.20). Above all, accept the results of your actions with engaged equanimity, as a Grace of the Lord (*Ishvara-prasādabhāvanā*). Then your actions will never taint you.

The fundamental teaching of the Gītā can be summarized as follows: ‘the unreal has no existence and the real never ceases to be (2. 16); the soul is indestructible (*avināśi*), eternal (*nitya*), unborn (*aja*), undiminished (*avyaya*), all-pervasive (*sarva-gataḥ*), immovable (*achala*), ancient (*sanātana*), unmanifest (*avyakta*), unthinkable (*achintya*), and immutable (*avikṛya*). The soul is immortal and eternal; it is neither born nor does it die; it does not perish along with the body (2.20). Attain the Highest Knowledge, *brahma-vidya*, by which the One Imperishable Being is seen in all the beings, the undivided in the divided, *avibhaktaṃ vibhakteṣu* (18.20). This knowledge of the essential oneness of all existence (*sarvabhūteṣu yenaikaṃ*

bhāvam), the Gītā regards as the purest (*sāttvik*) knowledge: *taj jñānam viddhi sāttvikam* (18.20). Śrī Kṛṣṇa succinctly points out this fact in the Gītā 13.27:

*samaṁ sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhantaṁ parameśvaram |
vinaśyatsv avinaśyantaṁ yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati ||*

He alone truly sees who sees the Supreme Lord abiding equally as imperishable amidst the perishable.

Strive to know yourself as the unchanging, Limitless Awareness and be free. Once this realization becomes an *existential fact*, not just an *idea in the mind* but as a *living truth in the heart*, the goal has been realized. My Vedānta teacher used to reiterate: “With Self-knowledge, one can weather all existential storms aplomb and can swim in any ocean.” Living with this understanding, by the Divine Grace, one attains the communion of the individual Self with the Supreme Self, the *summum bonum* of human existence.

The Gita’s ideal is not indifference to the world but love and compassion born out of the identity of oneself with all beings (*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samaṁ paśyati* 6.32). This is the net result, the ultimate finding, of the teachings of the Gītā: to live equanimously and act selflessly in the full wakefulness of Self-knowledge. Then every step you take will bring you to the path that leads to wisdom, service, and freedom.

Know yourself, serve all, and surrender to the Divine within.

This is the timeless message of this manual for life, leadership, and liberation.

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