

Summary Study of Bhagavad-gita As It Is

Part 1

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Summary Study of Bhagavad-gita As It Is

Part 1

An Overview — What is Bhagavad-gita? Why is it Important? How to Understand it? Historical Background

A Message Transcending Time and Place

Bhagavad-gita, comprised of 700 Sanskrit verses, is India's single most important literary and philosophical contribution. It stands unrivalled as a timeless classic; its message just as valid and relevant today as 5,000 years ago when it was first spoken and recorded.

Sometimes called *Gitopanishad* (as the essence of the 108 *Upanishads*), *Bhagavad-gita* is regarded as the most important book of the Vedic literature, the vast body of ancient knowledge which is the foundation of Vedic culture, philosophy and spirituality.

Bhagavad-gita gives a glimpse into India's historical past in the glory days of Vedic civilization, but while archeologists and anthropologists dig and sift earth for bones and artifacts of that period, the spiritual substance of the Vedic age continues to live on in the immortal words of *Bhagavad-gita* and in the lives of persons who follow its meaning.

Great thinkers of the Western world have studied *Bhagavad-gita*—the American transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the Russian writer Tolstoy, Goethe, Carl Jung, Albert Einstein, Dr. Albert Schweizer, Hermann Hesse, Rudolph Steiner, Aldous Huxley... to name a few.

“When I read the *Bhagavad-gita* and reflect about how God created this universe, everything else seems so superfluous.”—
Albert Einstein

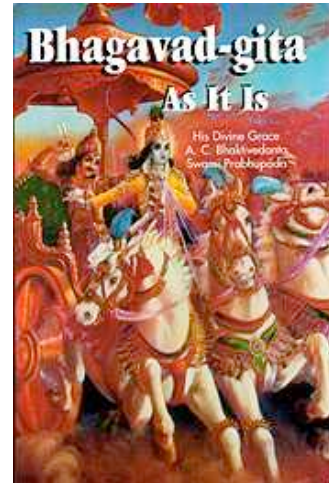
“The *Bhagavad-gita* is the most systematic statement of spiritual evolution of endowing value to mankind. It is one of the most clear and comprehensive summaries of perennial philosophy ever revealed; hence its enduring value is subject not only to India but to all of humanity.”—Aldous Huxley

Bhagavad-gita As It Is—the Definitive Edition

More commentaries have been written on the *Bhagavad-gita* than upon any other philosophical or religious text in history. This edition, *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (“**Srila Prabhupada**”), is unique because the author is a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, a life-long devotee and teacher of the science of spiritual self realization along the principles of the *Gita*. [For more information, see “Biological Sketch of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada” at http://www.bhaktivedantas.com/ART_WSP/who.html.]

He has translated directly from Sanskrit verse to English prose in a flowing, highly readable style, and his extensive purports explain the meanings of the verses in the context of the dialogue in which they were spoken. This edition also features 56 full-colour illustrations, an introduction, verse index, glossary, guide to pronunciation, and general index.

Srila Prabhupada is the author of numerous translations, commentaries, summary studies and original works on Vedic literature, and his books are highly respected by the international academic community for their authoritativeness, depth and clarity, and they are used as standard texts in many colleges and universities in Europe, North America and India. [For more information, see “Reviews by Scholars” at http://www.bhaktivedantas.com/ART_WSP/reviews.html]



How to Approach the Gita?

Vedic spiritual philosophy is not theoretical. It aims to transform consciousness and perception by practice. Intellectual power alone, without sincere eagerness to understand Truth, has always been considered, in Vedic culture, ineffectual. The traditional Vedic system is to approach a qualified spiritual master, render him service, inquire from him and submit to the discipline or process under the direction of the spiritual master.

The best way to hear the message of *Bhagavad-gita* is to take the position of Arjuna, who turns to Krishna and says:

“Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of weakness. In this condition I am asking You to tell me clearly what is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me.”—*Bhagavad-gita* 2.7

Even if we are not disciples but reading it out of interest, we will get much more out of studying *Bhagavad-gita* if we approach it with open mind and critical introspection, as a cautious sympathizer, leaving aside, for the moment, any academic or personal prejudices.

“In order to approach a creation as sublime as the *Bhagavad-gita* with full understanding, it is necessary to attune our soul to it.”—Rudolph Steiner

“Only unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master are all the imports of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed.”—*Svetashvatara Upanishad* 6.38

What is Bhagavad-gita?

The “Author + ity” of *Bhagavad-gita*

It was Vedavyasa (“**Vyasa**”, sometimes also called “Vyasadēv”) who put the Vedic knowledge into writing some 5,000 years ago at the onset of the present Age of Kali. After compiling the 4 *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and *Vedānta Sūtra*, Vyasa compiled the *Purānas* and *Mahābhārata*, and recorded *Bhagavad-gīta* as a chapter in the *Mahābhārata*, a great historical epic.

Most of the Vedic literature is a record of what the great authorities of religion have spoken about the Supreme Personality of Godhead—His names, His features and qualities, His associates, His pastimes and place. This is called **smṛiti**, or scriptures compiled by persons under divine direction. But *Bhagavad-gīta* is the record of what the Supreme Lord Himself has spoken. It is called **śruti**.

Dialogue Between Master and Student

Bhagavad-gīta is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, spoken on the battlefield immediately before the start of the great historical war between the **Kauravas** and **Pandavas** to establish the rightful monarchy.

It would be a mistake to overlook or ignore the historical context of the *Bhagavad-gīta*, as many translators and commentators do, giving metaphysical interpretation to what are names of actual historical places and personalities. (Details of the historical background of the war are described later on in the section “[Historical Background](#)”.)

Immediately before the start of the battle, Arjuna is disturbed by the sight of his cousins, uncles, grandfather, teacher and former friends and supporters on the side of the enemy, and he decides, for personal reasons, that it would be better not to fight. He thinks it would be better to renounce the kingdom and retire to the forest and live as an ascetic than to kill those who are his flesh and blood



and dear to his heart. He forgets his duty to defend the kingdom and establish a righteous monarchy. He actually throws down his bow. It is then that he admits his perplexity and asks Krishna, “What shall I do? Now I am Your disciple and soul surrendered unto You. Please tell me, what must I do?”

At that moment Krishna assumes the role of spiritual master, and He proceeds to enlighten Arjuna. He reminds him of his immediate social duty (**varna-dharma**) as a warrior prince, but more importantly, He explains what is the eternal duty or nature (**sanatana-dharma**) of every living being in relationship with the supreme living being, God. Thus Krishna’s words, though set against a historical background, transcend Arjuna’s battlefield dilemma and speak for the benefit of all souls who have forgotten their eternal nature, the ultimate goal of life and their eternal relationship with Him.

Transcendental TV

How could this dialogue have been recorded by Vyasa, when it was spoken spontaneously on the battlefield, right before the confrontation began? Vyasa’s disciple Sanjaya was empowered with clairvoyant vision of all the goings-on at the battlefield, even though he was sitting in the palace, far from the battlefield. He saw and heard everything as if it were playing on TV. And that is why *Bhagavad-gita* begins with King Dhritarastra asking Sanjaya to tell him everything he could see. So as we read *Bhagavad-gita*, we are reading Sanjaya’s narration, which was recorded by Vyasa.



Who is Krishna?

Supreme Personality of Godhead

If we know something about the identity of the speaker of *Bhagavad-gita*, we can more easily comprehend the *Bhagavad-gita* itself.

Gita means “song,” and *Bhagavad* refers to **Bhagavan**, meaning “God, the possessor of all opulence.” *Bhagavad-gita* is “the song of God,” spoken by Krishna, who is God Himself. In *Bhagavad-gita*, Krishna’s position is made very clear:

“I am the source of everything; from Me the entire creation flows.” (Bg 10.8)

“There is no truth superior to Me.” (Bg 7.7)

“By all the Vedas I am to be known.” (Bg 15.15)

And Arjuna prays,

“You are the Supreme Brahman, the ultimate... the Absolute Truth and the eternal divine person. You are the primal God, transcendental and original...” (Bg 10.12)

“You are the original personality, the Godhead... Knowing everything, You are all that is knowable.” (Bg 11.38)

Throughout the *Bhagavad-gita* Krishna is called Purushottama (the Supreme Person), Parabrahman (the Supreme Brahman), adi-deva (the original Lord), Parameshvara (the supreme controller) and so on.

Besides the *Bhagavad-gita*, other Vedic sources recognize Krishna as the Supreme Absolute Truth, including all forms and aspects of God, and as the original source of the creation, of the impersonal Brahman, of all living entities, of Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva, of all **avatars** and so on.

3 Aspects of the Absolute Truth

The humanlike form of Krishna in which He appeared is not a temporary illusory form that Krishna manifested for the eyes of men, but it is His own

*Ishvarah paramah krishnah
sach-chid-ananda-vigraha
anadir adir govindah
sarva-karana-karanam:*

“Krishna, who is known as Govinda, is the supreme controller. He has an eternal, blissful, spiritual body. He is the origin of all. He has no other origin, for He is the prime cause of all causes.”—*Brahma-samhita* 5.1



original form, purely spiritual and transcendental, unlike the material body that we inhabit. It is said that man is made in the image of God; it is not that God is made up by men in the image of men. Krishna's form is **sat-chid-ananda**, eternally youthful, full of knowledge and bliss.

Krishna, or Bhagavan, is the ultimate in the Absolute Truth. There are 3 phases of understanding the Absolute Truth: as **Brahman**, or the impersonal, all-pervasive spirit, as **Paramatma**, or Supersoul within the heart of all living beings, and as **Bhagavan**, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna. All these features are identical as Absolute Truth, but Krishna is the cause of Paramatma and Brahman, just as the sun-god is the cause of the sun globe and the sun's rays.

At one point, Krishna reveals His magnificent and panoramic universal form



(**vishva-rupa**) of controlling power as eternal time in the cosmic universe to Arjuna, but Arjuna is terrified by the spectacular vision, and prays that Krishna will appear before him again in His own original humanlike form.



Arjuna's Relationship with Krishna

Although Krishna is visible to everyone present, only eyes "tinged with devotion" can understand that He is the "Supreme Person", the Godhead. A devotee is in relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead in one of 5 different ways: 1) in a passive relationship, 2) in an active role of service, 3) as a friend, 4) as a parent, 5) as conjugal lover. Arjuna and the Pandavas were in relationship with Krishna as friends.

Purpose of Krishna's Incarnations

Krishna explains in the *Gita* that His abode is in the spiritual world, but He descends from time to time to re-establish religious principles:

“Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice and a predominant rise in irreligion—at that time I descend Myself. To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to re-establish the principles of religion, I advent Myself millennium after millennium.”
(Bg 4.7-8)

According to the *Mahabharata*, Krishna descended to the Earth in His selfsame spiritual form 5,000 years ago, just before Kali-yuga, in order to lighten the military burden created by impious, politically ambitious kings. By His divine plan, all such demoniac forces were assembled at one place (the battlefield of Kurukshetra) and annihilated in the colossal and devastating war. And soon after He saw that the Pandavas were enthroned and ruled as saintly kings, Krishna returned to His eternal, spiritual abode.

While present on the Earth, Krishna enacted many pastimes as a child in Vrindaban, where He was raised in the care of foster parents, while His mother and father were imprisoned by His demoniac uncle, King Kamsa. At 16, Krishna left Vrindaban to kill Kamsa and liberate His parents and grandfather, King Ugrasena. Krishna then spent His youth as a royal prince of the Yadu dynasty, taking residence in the majestic city Dvaraka. The pastimes of Krishna are recorded mainly in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (*Bhagavat Purana*) and *Vishnu Purana*, as well as in other Vedic literatures.

Central Point of the *Bhagavad-gita*

Sri Prabhupada has written in his Preface:
“If personally I have any credit in this matter, it is only that I have tried to present *Bhagavad-gita* as it is, without adulteration. Before my presentation of *Bhagavad-*

gita As It Is, almost all the English editions of *Bhagavad-gita* were introduced to fulfill someone's personal ambition. But our attempt, in presenting *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, is to present the mission of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna. Our business is to present the will of Krishna, not that of any mundane speculator like the politician, philosopher or scientist, for they have very little knowledge of Krishna, despite all their other knowledge. When Krishna says, *man-mana bhava mad-bhakto mad-yaji mam namaskuru*, etc. ["Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend." (Bg 18.65)], we, unlike the so-called scholars, do not say that Krishna and His inner spirit are different. Krishna is absolute, and there is no difference between Krishna's name, Krishna's form, Krishna's quality, Krishna's pastimes, etc. This absolute position of Krishna is difficult to understand for any person who is not a devotee of Krishna in the **parampara** (disciplic succession) system. Generally the so-called scholars, politicians, philosophers and swamis, without perfect knowledge of Krishna, try to banish or kill Krishna when writing commentary on *Bhagavad-gita*."

"Our only purpose is to present this *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* in order to guide the conditioned student to the same purpose for which Krishna descends to this planet once in a day of Brahma, or every 8,600,000,000 years [see Bg 4.7-8]. This purpose is stated in *Bhagavad-gita*, and we have to accept it as it is; otherwise there is no point in trying to understand the *Bhagavad-gita* and its speaker, Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna first spoke *Bhagavad-gita* to the sun-god some hundreds of millions of years ago. We have to accept this fact and thus understand the historical significance of *Bhagavad-gita*, without misinterpretation, on the authority of Krishna. To interpret *Bhagavad-gita* without any reference to the will of Krishna is the greatest offence. In order to save oneself from this offence, one has to understand the Lord as the Supreme Personality of

Godhead, as He was directly understood by Arjuna, Lord Krishna's first disciple. Such understanding of *Bhagavad-gita* is really profitable and authorized for the welfare of human society in fulfilling the mission of life."

"A living entity is happily the part and parcel of the Lord, and thus his natural function is to render immediate service to the Lord. By the spell of illusion one tries to be happy by serving his personal sense gratification in different forms which will never make him happy. Instead of satisfying his own personal material senses, he has to satisfy the senses of the Lord. That is the highest perfection of life. The Lord wants this, and He demands it. One has to understand this central point of *Bhagavad-gita*." (A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, 12 May 1971, Sydney, Australia)

Historical Background

The *Mahabharata* mainly tells the story of the war between the Kauravas (the 100 sons of the blind king Dhritarastra, headed by the eldest son Duryodhana) and on the opposing side, their cousins, the Pandavas (the 5 sons of Pandu, led by their eldest brother Yudhisthira).

Pandu and Dhritarastra were the sons of King Vichitravirya, a descendent of King Bharata, a former ruler of the world. It is from this King Bharata that the name **Mahabharata** is derived.

Dhritarastra was the elder brother, but because he was born blind, he was disqualified, and the throne fell to his younger brother Pandu. Pandu was a capable and mighty ruler, beloved of his people, but he died untimely at an early age. His 5 young sons—Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadev—came under the care of Dhritarastra, their uncle. Dhritarastra, however, wished his own sons to rule rather than the sons of Pandu, and so he plotted against the lives of the Pandavas and their widowed mother, Pritha (also known as Queen Kunti). The Pandavas repeatedly escaped Dhritarastra's murderous treachery, mainly due to the loving protection of Krishna,

who was Queen Kunti's nephew and thus cousin to the Pandavas.

Ultimately, Duryodhana, the eldest son of Dhritarastra, cheated the Pandavas of their kingdom and their freedom in a gambling match. The Pandavas were forced to spend 13 years in exile. They did return, however, and requested their kingdom from Duryodhana, who bluntly refused. When the Pandavas reduced their demands to a mere 5 villages, Duryodhana swore that he would not give them as much land as the space on the tip of a needle. Arjuna and his brothers prepared for war to restore the rightful monarchy, as was their duty. Yudhisthira was the eldest of the Pandavas, and it was to place him on the throne—or to oppose him—that great warriors from all corners of the Earth assembled to settle the question in what would be a devastating world war. Finally, Yudhisthira sent Krishna as his ambassador to propose a peaceful settlement, in order to avoid the unnecessary slaughter, but Duryodhana snubbed Krishna and foolishly tried to place Him under arrest.

The Pandavas were men of the highest religious and moral character, devotees of Krishna. They recognized Krishna as the Supreme God Himself and embraced Him as their cousin and best friend. But Dhritarastra's impious sons did not accept Krishna as the Supreme Lord Himself and regarded Him with envy.

Krishna offered to take part in the war, but He did not want to appear impartial, so He left it to the Kauravas and Pandavas to choose between Him alone or His powerful Yadu army. He furthermore said that He personally would not take up arms against any side. Duryodhana had no use for Krishna, and without hesitation grabbed Krishna's armed forces, whereas Yudhisthira wanted Krishna, understanding that if he had the Supreme Personality of Godhead on his side, victory was certain.

In this way Krishna became Arjuna's chariot driver. And it is at this point where *Bhagavad-gita* begins, with the two armies facing off, ready for combat.

Main Points in the Introduction (p. 1-29)

The 5 Topics

Bhagavad-gita is divided into 18 chapters, covering 5 topics: (1) the identity of the **Ishvara** (God, the supreme controller), (2) the constitutional position of the living beings (**jivas**), who are controlled, (3) material nature and the living beings as energies (**Prakriti**), (4) time, meaning the duration of existence of the whole universe or the manifestation of material nature and eternity, (5) activity (**karma**). Out of these 5, the Lord, the living entities, material nature and time are all eternal. Karma, however, is not. Its effects may be very old, since time immemorial, but we can change the results of our karma or activity, and this is explained in *Bhagavad-gita*.

The first 6 chapters of Bhagavad-gita mainly cover the constitutional position of the living being. The middle 6 chapters discuss the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the relationship between the individual soul and Supersoul in regard to devotional service. The last 6 chapters, beginning from Chapter 13, cover how the living being comes into contact with material nature and how he is delivered by the Supreme Lord, as well as the divine and demoniac qualities and the different modes of goodness, passion and ignorance, and finally devotional service in surrender to the Supreme Lord.

The Jivas

Right away, beginning with Chapter 2—"Contents of the *Gita* Summarized"—Krishna makes a clear distinction between spirit and matter. He explains that we are not the body, but the living force, the spirit soul that animates the body and spreads throughout it as consciousness.

Understanding of the self, our actual identity is the most essential knowledge, for if we do not know who or what we are in actuality, we will make the mistake to think

Aham brahmasmi: "I am spirit."—Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad

that this body is all there is, and all our activities will be expanded from that mistaken identity.

Bhagavad-gita was spoken to liberate us from the bodily conception of life. It is a message intended to awaken our pure consciousness.

Krishna speaks first of all, then, about the self, what and who we are, what is our nature, and this is the first thing to be understood before we can comprehend anything further what He has to say.

The Jivas in Relation to God

The living beings are all parts and parcels of the Supreme Lord, and are also **sat-chid-ananda** (eternal, full of knowledge or consciousness and bliss). They have all the same qualities of the Supreme Lord, but in minute quantity, just as a drop of water from the ocean is salty, but there is a vast difference between the drop of water and the ocean.

The Supreme Lord living in the heart of all living beings, is always conscious of their psychic movements, and gives them direction. But the living beings forget who they are, who Krishna is, and forget what to do. They become entangled in the actions and reactions of their activities (**karma**) and thus are trapped in the cycle of repeated birth and death (**samsara**). This is another difference between the Supreme Lord and the living beings: the Lord always remembers, but the living beings have a tendency to forget. The distinction between the living beings and the Supreme Lord is presented in the 13th chapter—“Nature, the Enjoyer and Consciousness”.

Ishvara

Who is God?

Ishvara means “controller”. The living entities are all mini-controllers, or mini-ishvaras, but we are not the supreme controller. *Nityo nityanam chetanas chetananam eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman* (*Katha Upanishad* 2.2.13): “Among all the living beings, there is one living being who is chief. It is He who maintains everyone and gives them all facility.” That is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is situated in everyone’s

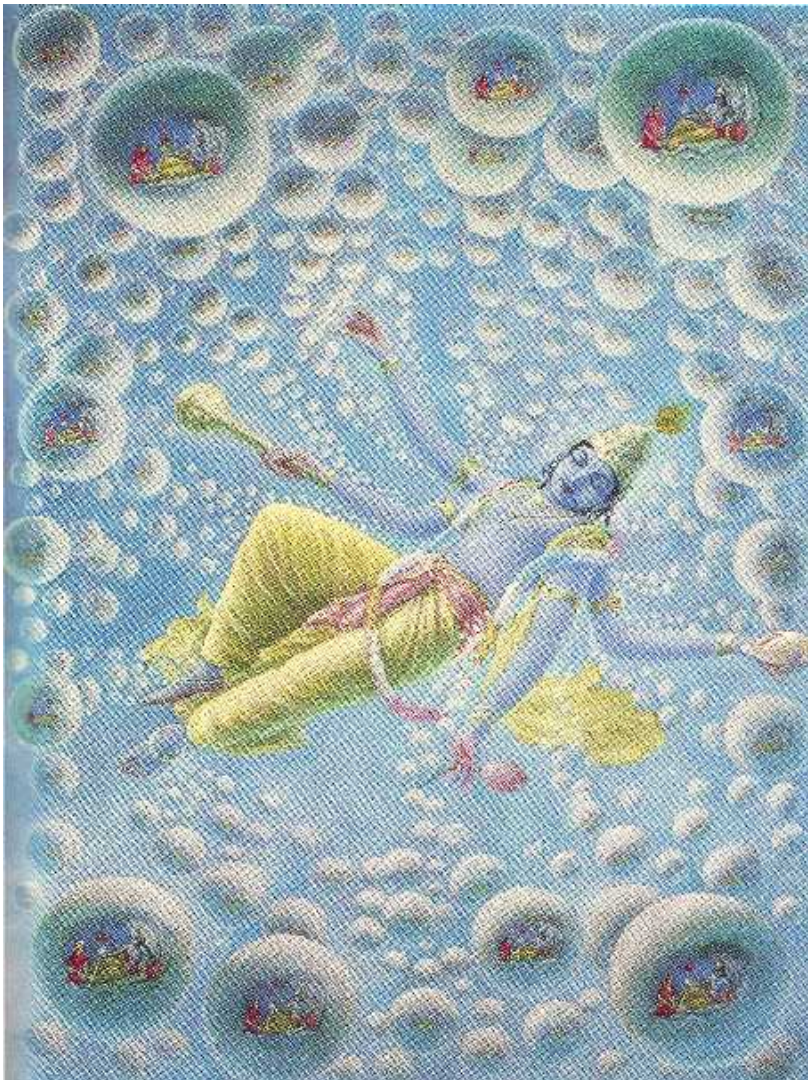
Om athato brahma-jijñāsa:
“Now, in this human form of life, let us inquire into Brahman, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”
—*Vedanta Sutra* 1.1.1

heart as **Paramatma**, or **Supersoul** (the soul of the soul) and who is known as **Bhagavan**, Krishna, the speaker of *Bhagavad-gita*.

Just as we are all individual living beings, the Absolute Truth is also ultimately a living being, a transcendental person with all transcendental features. If He has no form or is less than any other thing, then He cannot be the complete whole or Absolute Truth. Krishna has everything within and beyond our experience. His potencies are immense.



“Behold My mystic opulence! Although I am the maintainer of all living entities, and although I am everywhere, still My Self is the very source of creation.”—Bg 9.5



The *Brahma-samhita* starts out: *Ishvara paramah krishnah sach-chid-ananda-vigrahaḥ*: “Krishna is the cause of all causes. He is the primal cause, and He is the very form of eternal being, knowledge and bliss.” The

impersonal **Brahman** is the **sat** (being) feature of the Absolute Truth. The **Paramatma**, or Supersoul, is the **chit** (eternal knowledge) feature of the Absolute Truth. But Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead is all these features combined: **sat, chit** and **ananda** (being, knowledge and bliss) in complete **vigraha** (form).

He is mentioned repeatedly in *Bhagavad-gita* as Bhagavan, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and Krishna Himself states His identity: “Because I am transcendental, beyond both the fallible and the infallible, and because I am the greatest, I am celebrated both in the world and in the *Vedas* as that Supreme Person.” (Bg 15.18) The *Brahma-samhita* and the *Puranas* also confirm that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as do great spiritual masters (**acharyas**) in disciplic succession coming down from Arjuna.



The Supreme Destination

What is the aim of life? What will be our next destination after we quit this body? These questions are on every sober person’s mind, as they were on Arjuna’s. Krishna answers these questions in Chapter 8— “Attaining the Supreme.”

Krishna speaks of the temporary material world, and then says, “Yet there is another nature, which is eternal and is transcendental to this manifested and unmanifested matter. It is supreme and is never annihilated. When all in this world is annihilated, that part remains as it is. That supreme abode is called unmanifested and infallible, and it is the supreme destination. When one goes there, he never comes back. That is My supreme abode.” (Bg 8.20-21) That destination is called the **sanatana** sky, the eternal spiritual sky. Krishna describes that eternal sky

and reveals His identity in Chapter 15—“The Yoga of the Supreme Person”.

Like the Supreme Lord and His abode, the jivas are also sanatana, eternal, and the whole purpose of *Bhagavad-gita* is to urge us to revive our **sanatana-dharma**, which is the eternal occupation of the living being and resume our pure life in intimate relationship with the Lord. Every information is given: who and what we are, what is the goal of life, how to work in this life, what is the supreme destination, who is God, what is His name, His address, how to go there.

Prakriti

Material nature and the living beings are called **Prakriti**. Prakriti means “under the control of” or “that which is enjoyed” by the **Purusha** (enjoyer). In this sense, Prakriti is feminine in nature, and Purusha is masculine, the predominator. Krishna is the only actual Purusha, original Male, and all His energies, both the living beings and material nature are Prakriti, or Female, for they are under the control of the Supreme Lord.

The material nature is the energy of the Lord, and the living beings are also the energy of the Lord, but the living beings are not separated from Krishna—they are eternally related. Also, the living beings are conscious; whereas material nature is not conscious. That is the difference between the two types of Prakriti or energies of the Lord. Therefore the living beings are called the **superior Prakriti**, and material nature is called the **inferior Prakriti**.

The 8,400,000 species of life form and the senses are the creation of material nature, and the living beings are put into different bodies awarded to them by material nature according to their desires and activities. In the soul’s pure state, he does not know suffering, but in association with the material body, suffering and enjoyment are forced upon him according to the body he takes. When the living being is put into the body of a dog, he has to act like a dog. He cannot act otherwise.

Similarly, if he is given the body of a tree or any other life form, even up to that of a demigod, he cannot act differently. His pure consciousness is covered by false identification with that body. This is called **false ego (ahankara)**. Yet in all circumstances, the Supersoul is with the living being, situated within the soul of the soul.

The topics of material nature, the living beings in contact with material nature, the Supersoul, and the modes of goodness, passion and ignorance are explained in Chapters 13—“Nature, the Enjoyer, and Consciousness” and Chapter 14—“The Three Modes of Nature”.

Time

The material world is real, but it is temporary. It comes into being, stays for some time, produces some by-products, dwindles, and then vanishes. These 5 phases apply to everything of matter—this body, a piece of machinery, or the simplest chemical reaction. But beyond this world, there is a world that consists of another nature which is **sanatana**, eternal.

The Supreme Lord and the living beings are eternal and are eternally related. In the material world the living beings are temporarily engaged in so many different activities, but when these activities are taken up in Krishna consciousness, working under the direction of the Supreme Lord in the spirit of Arjuna, the living beings re-enter their pure life, or eternal occupation (**sanatana-dharma**).

Dharma is often mistranslated as “religion”, meaning a system of beliefs or faith, but the word dharma actually means duty or essence. For instance, it is the dharma of sugar to be sweet, and the dharma of fire to give heat. The dharma of the living being is to serve. Either we serve our self and so many other masters in this world, or we serve the eternal Lord and Master; in any case it is our nature to serve. Now we serve our wife or husband, our children, our parents, our friends and relatives, superiors at work, the community, and nation. But these are all in relation to this term of existence in this body. Whereas it is our

sanatana-dharma, or eternal function, to serve the eternal chief living being, who is the **adi-purusha** (the original enjoyer), the supreme proprietor, and our eternal friend and well-wisher.

Sanatana-dharma is our eternal function. It does not change. A person can change his faith and convert from one “religion” to another, but he cannot undo his very nature, no more than he can take sweetness out of sugar.

Karma Occupation According to Nature

Arjuna is confused how to act according to dharma. He asks Krishna if Krishna means that he should only think of Krishna and do nothing else. But Krishna replies that work is necessary, and He explains the **yoga processes**, by which human beings can perfect their knowledge and realization of self and the Supreme and their eternal dharma while keeping to their occupations. Krishna does not suggest anything impractical.

Human society is divided into 4 social orders according to work—**brahmana**, **kshatriya**, **vaishya** and **shudra**. Each order works in a certain way, and all combine together in cooperation for the benefit of society. These 4 orders are natural, according to one’s nature—not by birth. (The caste system now in practice in India is a perversion of the actual system of **varnashram dharma**, or the social structure based on 4 social orders and 4 spiritual orders.) Everyone of us falls within one of the 4 orders:

- ❖ The **brahmanas** represent the head of society. They are the intellectuals, theologians, judges, parliament speakers, scientists, teachers, those who give political counsel and advice to the rulers.
- ❖ The **kshatriyas** are the arms and shoulders of society. They rule and protect, administrate and keep order. They are the kings or prime ministers, presidents, military men, policemen.
- ❖ The **vaishyas** represent the torso of society. They are the merchants and landowners, farmers, the producers of food and the people who convert natural

resources into wealth. In other words, these are the people who generate and drive the economy.

- ❖ The **shudras** are the legs. Their work is rendering both skilled or professional and unskilled service and support to the other 3 orders. They are the workers, craftsmen, clerks, secretaries, mechanics and machinists, IT technicians, accountants, etc.

Arjuna is a kshatriya, or warrior, and it is his nature to work in that way. Therefore Krishna does not ask him to give up his occupation and go to the forest. Instead, He directs Arjuna to fight, but for the right cause. It is a matter of consciousness. We work with our mind and intelligence, not exactly with our body only. If our mind and intelligence are engaged in thoughts of the Supreme Lord, our senses will also be engaged in His service. *Bhagavad-gita* teaches how to absorb the mind and intelligence in Krishna, and that is **bhakti-yoga**.

Action and Reaction

The word **karma** means action or work. The living beings are not inactive, nor is the Supreme Lord. But the living beings who wish to live independent of the Lord have to enjoy and suffer the reactions to their actions. There are works which give good results, and there are prohibited works (**vikarma**) which give bad results, but in both cases, the living beings have to take birth again to get the results, good or bad. In so many ways, Krishna explains karma as cause and effect.

Krishna further explains action under the influence of the **modes of nature**—goodness, passion and ignorance, and points out the characteristics of the divine and the demoniac.

Work under the Direction of the Supreme Lord—Real Religion

Ultimately, Krishna recommends that Arjuna should carry out his duty under Krishna’s direction and thus be freed from all reactions, good and bad. This is called **akarma**. Work has to be performed, but for Krishna’s purposes, and for elevating our consciousness. “Perform your prescribed duty,” He tells Arjuna, “for action

is better than inaction. Work done as a sacrifice for Vishnu has to be performed, otherwise work binds one to this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunti [Arjuna], perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain unattached and free from bondage.” (Bg 3.8-9) “Though engaged in all kinds of activities, My devotee, under My protection, reaches the eternal and imperishable abode by My grace. In all activities just depend upon Me and work always under My protection. In such devotional service, be fully conscious of Me. If you become conscious of Me, you will pass over all the obstacles of conditional life by My grace. If, however, you do not work in such consciousness but act through false ego, not hearing Me, you will be lost.” (Bg 18.56-58 Then Krishna tells Arjuna, “If you do not act according to My direction and do not fight, then you will be falsely directed. By your nature, you will have to be engaged in warfare. Under illusion you are now declining to act according to My direction. But compelled by your own nature, you will act all the same, O son of Kunti.” (Bg 18.59-60)

Arjuna is a warrior prince, and it is his duty to uphold the monarchy and give protection to all the citizens of the kingdom. But he is confused. He therefore voices his doubts to Krishna, and they are the doubts of every thoughtful person who is confused about duty and religion. Arjuna is concerned that killing his enemies would be a violation of the religious principles of nonviolence and duty to elders. He considers that killing his teacher and grandfather would be sinful, and that such acts would lead to degradation of society and abandonment of religion.

But it is Krishna who is the author of religion, and Krishna is always aware, fully conscious of the positions of the living beings.



It was by His arrangement that all those persons were assembled there for war, and that they were to be killed. It was their karma, and at the same time it served Krishna's purpose to establish His devotee as emperor of the world. Krishna reminds Arjuna of this:

“The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart, O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities, who are seated as on a machine, made of the material energy.”
(Bg 18.61)

Krishna removes all doubt from Arjuna's mind. He gives full assurance that working according to His direction is actual dharma, and Arjuna should not mistakenly think of religion as something separate from Krishna's direction.

“Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear.” (Bg 18.66)

Yoga: Awakening Our Pure Consciousness

S rila Prabhupada has explained that “Krishna consciousness is not an artificial imposition on the mind.” It is the natural, original consciousness of the living being, lying dormant within the heart. It is not something to be learned theoretically by intellect. It has only to be revived or reawakened.

Now our pure consciousness is covered by association with material nature, but *Bhagavad-gita* explains the process of transforming our consciousness from false identity to our real self in relationship to the Supreme Lord, Soul of the soul. The goal of human life is to become absorbed in thoughts of Krishna.

There are 9 processes, and the easiest is **shravanam** (hearing). Hearing *Bhagavad-gita* from the realized person turns our thoughts to the Supreme Being. And by concentrating the mind on the form of Krishna or on the sound of His name, we can remember Him always. Although the mind is very restless, it can rest in the sound vibration of Krishna: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna

Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. But the process must be learned from an experienced person, one who is already in the practice. Therefore Krishna advises, “Just try to approach a spiritual master, inquire from him submissively, render him all kinds of service. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you, because he has seen the Truth.” (Bg 4.34)

Everyone can benefit from *Bhagavad-gita*. The process of awakening our original spiritual consciousness, Krishna consciousness is not difficult, and it is joyful. Anyone can take it up—man, woman, and child. Even if one is unable to practice it perfectly, Krishna promises: “In this endeavour, there is no loss or diminution, and a little advancement on this path can protect one from the most dangerous type of fear.” (Bg 2.40)

The Disciplic Succession

This Bhagavad-gita As It Is is received through this disciplic succession:

1) Krishna, 2) Brahma, 3) Narada, 4) Vyasa, 5) Madhva, 6) Padmanabha, 7) Nrihari, 8) Madhava, 9) Akshobhya, 10) Jayatirtha, 11) Jnanasindhu, 12) Dayanidhi, 13) Vidyanidhi, 14) Rajendra, 15) Jayadharma, 16) Purushottama, 17) Brahmanyatirtha, 18) Vyasatirtha, 19) Lakshmipati, 20) Madhavendra Puri, 21) Ishvara Puri (Nityananda, Advaita), 22) Lord Chaitanya, 23) Rupa (Svarup, Sanatana), 24) Raghunath, Jiva, 25) Krishnadas, 26) Narottama, 27) Vishvanath, 28) (Baladeva) Jagannatha, 29) Bhaktivinode, 30) Gaurakishor, 31) Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, 32) His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

This concludes Part I of the Summary Study of Bhagavad-gita.

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