



*An Ordinary Life*  
**Transformed**

Lessons for  
Everyone from  
the *Bhagavad Gita*

तन्मे  
त्वां प्रपन्नम् Sloka 2.7

Rev. Stephanie Rutt





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# Your Personal Pilgrimage

## *How This Commentary Differs from Others*

For the past nine years, I have been privileged to facilitate study groups of the Bhagavad Gita with participants from all religions and walks of life. I have witnessed again and again that it doesn't matter if you are passionate about a particular religion, don't have a religion, or have simply become disenfranchised. Study of the Bhagavad Gita makes a Methodist a better Methodist, a Jew a better Jew, a Catholic a better Catholic, a Buddhist a better Buddhist. For those not connected with a faith tradition or perhaps feeling disenfranchised, I have often seen the study rekindle a remembering, a yearning, to reconnect with the One about whom all religions speak.

I am a hands-on, how-does-it-show-up-in-daily-life teacher. I am most interested in how we navigate the storms of life when the rudder breaks and darkness falls. This is where we meet Arjuna at the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita and where we meet ourselves each time fear descends. And like us, Arjuna is an ordinary human. So, as we listen in on Krishna's (God's) council to Arjuna, we know with certainty that He is speaking directly to us as well.

There are very useful translations and commentaries of the Bhagavad Gita which provide in-depth analysis of this great epic poem. This book

is different. It does not pretend to be a scholarly or an exhaustive commentary on the multiple levels of meaning of the Bhagavad Gita. There are many authors more qualified than I to offer such commentary. I have a different goal. The intention here is to provide a description of the Bhagavad Gita as an allegory of the spiritual journey and to distill the essence of each chapter in such a way as to make the concepts readily available for application to everyday living.

This book invites you, the reader, to embark on your own personal pilgrimage. Do not shrink from its challenge. The Potter's wheel awaits you. The touch of grace will shape you and the fire will transform you. This book is filled with real-world stories and examples of how ordinary people have found the courage to stand up and do what needs to be done. How ordinary people have discovered that when they speak, live and act from their deepest impulse, Truth is served. How ordinary people have *fallen in love with that which is the same in all of us and how that experience changes everything*.

Simply, I am an ordinary woman who loves God. One of the things I tell myself every day is *I am enough and I am nothing*. To me, this is the entire essence of Krishna's message to Arjuna. When Arjuna succumbs to despondency on the battlefield, Krishna admonishes him to get up and get over it! He reminds him that he is a skilled warrior and there's a war to be fought *and* victory is guaranteed if he will only take refuge in Him. Like Arjuna, we too are *enough*, as we have a unique part to play in the Divine plan. And, like Arjuna, we are *nothing* when—in those glorious moments—we take refuge in our God, crying out in sweet surrender, "Thy will be done!"

And, in an instant, we are free.

Welcome Home.



# Why Study the Bhagavad Gita?

## *From Sorrow to Joy*

*Bhagavad Gita* means *Song of God*. Its purpose is to bring about an end to sorrow through the realization that *we are That which we seek*. All of us seek peace, happiness and joy, but *within* ourselves is not usually the first place we look. Instead, we look outside ourselves, searching from place to place, experience to experience, teacher to teacher for *That which we already are*. It never occurs to us that what we're looking for is literally as close as our breath—that we *already have all we need to be content in any circumstance*.

In our desperate search, we overlook the place of true joy—our inner sanctuary, where joy resides, not in response to a particular set of circumstances, but simply as a humble response to continued self-acceptance. Here, *all* is received. Here, the quiet truth whispering softly from the center of our being can be heard. Here, joy is immune to the changing tides of outward circumstance. By turning inward to embrace all, we find what we have so desperately been seeking. It's called freedom.

But, we are not aware. So, we search.

And, then, something happens. Maybe it's an event that unceremo-

niously catapults us out of our comfortable existence. An unexpected diagnosis, accident, loss of a job, divorce, death of a loved one. Or maybe it's just waking up from a long period of sleepy boredom that shouts, *something's got to change!* Like Arjuna, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory, feeling overwhelmed, inadequate, unable or just simply unwilling to meet the challenges ahead. Our rudder is broken and night is falling fast. Desperately, we may continue searching for someone or something *outside* ourselves to save us. But, this time, nothing satisfies.

It's a critical juncture. We can continue the old ways of coping or we can choose a less familiar route called *surrender*. At first, this surrender route does not appear to be such an attractive option. We fear the loss of control. But this time, as skeptical as we are of the surrender route, we are even more reluctant to repeat the same old patterns. And, so it is with Arjuna. His rationalizations for not rising up to do his duty aren't working. His familiar ways of thinking aren't providing escape from his self-imposed bondage. Overwhelmed and desperate, he chooses *surrender* and cries out to his Lord for guidance.

And, where he thought he would lose himself, he finds himself.

But, the old ways are not so easily shed. Again and again, Arjuna, and we too, must choose. Over time, we start to trust this new route called surrender, for a joy comes that passes all our old understanding. Slowly, we start to trust the Potter within. We begin to suspect that each experience is just a stroke of the Potter's hand molding us for a higher purpose. We begin to see that surrender makes us free.

And, more and more, we start to fall in love. Not with what used to make us happy or even with what we think will make us happy—but with the Potter Himself, *for nothing will satisfy now short of the Potter Himself*. Loneliness and our sense of separateness fade. We start to see with new eyes as the Potter reveals His face—the face of God—everywhere.

There is God bagging our groceries, cashing our check, finding the right size shirt, bringing our food. We start to notice that it doesn't matter what mood folks are in, what they have or haven't done, what they believe or don't believe. All we see is God. And when we hear an ambulance or fire engines or learn about "collateral damage" on the news, our heart aches for the one whose name we don't even know. Because now no one is outside the bounds of our love. *No one*.

Now, we love our neighbor as our self.

And, like water to parched lips, this is the only joy that matters. It is all that can truly sustain us through the changing seasons of our life. It is our compass when the storm hits, the rudder breaks and darkness falls. It is what is left when we fear all is lost. It is what brings us to our prayer mat. It is what looks at the enemy and sees our self. It is what can raise the sword of courage to combat hatred without hating. It is what can love the saint and sinner the same.

This joy sees what's the same in all of us.

And having seen, knows.

And knowing, is never the same.



What We Must Do To Realize We Are Atman:  
Surrender to the Voice of the True Self

*Junah's problem is simple.  
He thinks he is Junah.*

—THE LEGEND OF  
BAGGER VANCE

CHAPTER 2

# Realizing Who We Are

This chapter offers an overview of the entire Bhagavad Gita. Krishna offers a theoretical explanation of the true Self, reminds Arjuna of the importance of doing his duty and gives practical suggestions for realizing Atman within. As Atman, an individual expression of the One, Arjuna, and we, may experience the outer world of the senses while holding awareness of true Self within. We may be *in* the world but not *of* the world.

Many key concepts are introduced here that will be revisited in later chapters.

## Slokas 1-3

*Sanjaya spoke:*

- 2.1 Arjuna sat there overwhelmed by compassion, his eyes blurred and filled with tears. And then Krishna spoke these words to him:

*The Blessed One spoke:*

- 2.2 Where does this weakness in you come from, Arjuna, at this time of crisis? It is not fitting to a nobleman. It does not gain you heaven. It does not bring you any honor.
- 2.3 Don't give in to this impotence! It doesn't belong in you. Give up this

petty weakness, this faintness of heart. You are a world conqueror,  
Arjuna. Stand up!

Krishna sees that Arjuna is overcome with despair and wastes no time delivering a scathing rebuke. Remembering that Krishna is God personified in us, *it is really our own inner knowing that is offering this rebuke. This means that there is a part of us that knows exactly what we should be doing in any situation to bring about the greatest good.* The problem is, lost in emotional turmoil, we stop listening to our inner knowing. Instead, we only hear the familiar tapes of our thoughts and feelings. Arjuna asked Krishna to be his charioteer but is allowing fear to drive instead.

Krishna does not coddle Arjuna at this critical juncture. He challenges him to wake up and remember who he is, a Pandava, and it is his duty to defend the dharma or righteousness in the kingdom. Sometimes, a good, swift kick in the backside is what it takes to wake us up!

In the early 90s, I witnessed a beautiful example of what can happen when one person has the courage to show up as a Pandava on the battlefield of life. It happened, surprisingly, on a TV talk show. On this particular day, the audience was filled with black people and, on stage, were people representing various white supremacy groups. The atmosphere was very volatile, with a lot of shouting back and forth. It seemed everyone was feeding on the frenzy.

Then, a guest, a white man, was introduced. He had written a book about how a black man had taught him to love and how the experience had changed him. As a result, he had been able to give up his membership in a hate group.

I don't remember a word the man said. What I have never forgotten was the silence that fell over the audience as he spoke. All the shouting and frenzy stopped. The mood shifted. Then, after a break for commercials, the show returned, the man was gone and the frenzy resumed.

Recall from our earlier discussion in "A Story of Yogic Wisdom," the nature of God *is that which is the same in all of us—the one Essence from which all variations arise.* This awareness of the one Essence behind all variations allows a Pandava on the battlefield of life to see beyond the duality of black and white, to confront hatred without hating, and, in doing so, to elevate all onto the common ground of love. But, many of us are uncom-

comfortable when confronted with our sameness, as it causes us to give up the comfort of our positions and the security of our viewpoints.

However, any time we are able to rise above the duality of having to be right or having to win, we come upon a neutral ground where we may simply seek to serve the greater good. Notice that it is often the emotion of anger that keeps us positioned in our corners ready to come out fighting. The black people in the audience and the white people on the stage were simply mirrors of one another in their mutual hate and anger.

When we hand over the reins of our chariot to Krishna, God within, it is no longer about “us” and “them.” Now, it’s just “us.” We are free to rise up and take action in the name of goodness and truth. We are able to act instead of react, and the forces of ignorance dim in direct response to our resolve. It is not that the world becomes different. *We* become different.

This is exactly what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did in his “I Have a Dream” speech. He challenged us to rise above hatred to arrive on the common ground of what we all want for our children. This is why this short speech is so remembered and so loved. It is worth noting here that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a great admirer of Gandhi, who often referred to the Bhagavad Gita as a manual for daily living.

Acting as a Pandava on the battlefield of life, Krishna is our charioteer. We “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” and we “fear no evil” for the Light of Lights guides our way. Krishna is stern with Arjuna because his very soul is at stake.

And so is ours.

But, Arjuna is not persuaded.

#### Slokas 4-9

- 2.4 But how can I engage Bhishma and Drona in battle, Krishna? How can I fight them with my arrows, these two men who deserve my devotion instead?
- 2.5 No, instead of killing my gurus, these men of great authority, it would be better for me to eat the food of a beggar here in this world. If I were to kill my gurus here, even though they seek their own ends against me, it would be like eating food smeared with blood.
- 2.6 And we do not know which is the heavier burden: whether we should win the fight, or whether they should win. Dhritarashtra’s men stand

there, drawn up before us. If we were to kill them, we ourselves would no longer wish to live!

- 2.7 My compassion is an error that harms my very being. I ask you because my understanding of duty [dharma] is confused. What would be better? Tell me unambiguously. I am your student. You are my refuge. Teach me!
- 2.8 Even if I could attain unrivalled wealth on this earth and a prosperous kingdom and lordship over the gods, I still would not be able to see what might dispel this sorrow which so distracts me from my senses.

*Sanjaya spoke:*

- 2.9 So Arjuna, the conqueror, spoke. "I will not fight!" he said to Krishna, and having spoken thus, he became silent.

Arjuna repeats the same logic he expressed in Chapter 1 as to why he does not want to fight. We, too, find ourselves repeating the same recordings of our notions and beliefs. It's comforting and familiar. It also serves us. Stuck in this rut, we don't have to face the fear of moving forward.

Sloka 2.7 represents the critical turning point without which the rest of the Bhagavad Gita could have taken place. *My compassion is an error that harms my very being.* Arjuna knows he is lost. His rudder is broken and night is falling fast. And, at this critical juncture, he chooses *surrender*. He takes refuge in his Lord and now he is ready to listen. It is often our suffering that brings us to our knees. We lay down our weapons and with head bowed we confess we are lost. How free it feels to come to this place—how strangely unencumbered.

Unencumbered by all our notions about how things *should* be, we become a kind of blank slate upon which our deepest knowing may write. It is the place of prayer, when we have come to the end of all we know. And, it is the beginning of all true knowing. We pray that God will remember us in our hour of need, although we may have rarely visited our inner sanctuary. After all, we had thought that we could make it alone. But, nonetheless, there awaits the grace of God that has never left us. How could it? It *is* us.

Arjuna, though, has forgotten who he is—*Atman—an individual expression of the One eternal Brahman—never born nor die—That which is the same in all.* He has forgotten that this eternal expression of Brahman or God

is not affected by the changing conditions of the nature, the world of the senses, prakriti. So, Krishna reminds him.

### Slokas 10-18

- 2.10 O my lord of the Bharatas, Krishna responded, it seemed with a smile, as Arjuna sat there between the two armies. These were his words.  
*The Blessed One spoke:*
- 2.11 You grieve for those who are beyond grieving, and you talk like one with wisdom, but the truly learned grieve neither for those who have lost their lives nor for those who still have them.
- 2.12 But in fact there never was a time in the past when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these other lords. And there never will be a time in the future when we do not exist.
- 2.13 Just as in this body the embodied person experiences childhood, and youth, and old age, in the same way one enters other bodies. The wise are not disturbed by this.
- 2.14 O Arjuna, encounters with the material world induce sensations of coldness and heat and pleasure and pain. They come and they go. They are impermanent. You are a Bharata! Endure it!
- 2.15 For these sensations do not make a man waver who is a bull among men, a man for whom pain and pleasure are the same, a truly wise man. Such a man is fit for immortality!
- 2.16 What does not exist cannot gain existence, and what does exist cannot lose existence, but the border between these two – existence and non-existence – can be perceived by those who can see things as they really are.
- 2.17 But know that this is imperishable, this which pervades the whole world. No one can bring about the destruction of what is imperishable.
- 2.18 These our bodies are said to have an ending, but they belong to an embodied one who is unending, who does not perish and is beyond measure. For this reason, O Bharata, you should fight!

A beautiful Sufi aphorism says, “When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.” This is why Sloka 2.10 says that *Krishna responded, it seemed with a smile*. No, it is not the fun part of the journey to confront our rationalizations, good reasons, fears, weakness

and sorrow. But Krishna knows that Arjuna just needs a reminder—to remember—and his condition can be transformed.

Recall in “A Story of Yogic Wisdom,” our discussion of the two aspects or expressions of God: the eternal, unchanging, never-born-nor-dies Brahman; and, the transient, changing aspect, prakriti, that brings forth the ongoing cycle of birth, death and rebirth in all creation. Arjuna is suffering because he is only identifying with the changing aspect, prakriti, and therefore, only sees the personalities of his family and friends before him.

Krishna knows that Arjuna has lost his will to fight because he has mistakenly made the fight *personal*, and, as a result, has become overwhelmed with sentimentality.

And how easy it is to become sentimental when it comes to truly seeing ourselves or a family member. How easy it is to overlook the signs of our teenager’s drug habit because she or he “is really such a good kid” or, more importantly, because we don’t want to feel like a bad parent. We cannot rise up to face the truth of what is happening because our vision has become clouded with personal concerns. What courage it takes to say, “This is happening and we all need help.” To paraphrase a line from the Simon and Garfunkel song “The Boxer,” we only hear what we want to hear and disregard the rest. Lost in sentimentality, we, like Arjuna, serve no one.

There is also a different intention behind fighting *for* righteousness, truth, help for our family and fighting *against* someone or something. Mother Teresa once remarked that she would not participate in an anti-war rally but would gladly attend a create-peace rally. Fighting *against* leaves us in duality, often with strong personal attachments to outcome. Fighting *for* truth or dharma elevates us to a higher ground where we can serve all for the greater good.

So, Krishna reminds him that *what is the same in all*, the true Self, is eternal and cannot kill nor be killed. He is challenging Arjuna to rise up and *confront the injustice*—not the personalities—before him, and, in doing so, *defend the dharma*.

### Slokas 19–30

- 2.19 Whoever thinks that this one is a murderer, or who thinks that that one has been murdered, in both cases they are wrong. The one does not kill, nor is the other killed.
- 2.20 One is not born, nor does one die—in any way! Once one exists, one

- can never not exist! Unborn, eternal, permanent, primordial – one is not killed when the body is killed!
- 2.21 How can one who knows that he is imperishable and eternal and unborn and unchanging, how can this person kill, or cause anyone else to kill?
- 2.22 Just as a man discards worn-out clothes and gets others that are new, so one who is embodied discards worn-out bodies and enters others that are new.
- 2.23 Weapons do not cut him, fire does not burn him, water does not wet him, the winds do not dry him out.
- 2.24 He cannot be cut or burned, he cannot be made wet or dried out: he is unchanging, everywhere, immovable, and eternal.
- 2.25 He is called the unmanifest, the inconceivable, the immutable. Therefore, once you have understood that this is so, you should not mourn for him.
- 2.26 But even if you think that he is constantly born and constantly dies, even then, Arjuna, you should not mourn for him.
- 2.27 For death is certain for anyone who has been born, just as birth is certain for anyone who has died. Since this condition cannot be avoided, you should not mourn.
- 2.28 The origins of all things are inaccessible to us. Here in the midst of life things are accessible. But the ends of all things are also inaccessible. So what is there to lament?
- 2.29 It is a rare and wonderful thing when someone sees him, rare and wonderful when another speaks of him, and rare and wonderful also when another hears of him. But to have heard about him is not to have known him.
- 2.30 The embodied [self] which dwells in the body of each one of us is completely beyond harm. Therefore, you should not mourn for any being whatsoever.

But, just in case Arjuna is not persuaded by the more esoteric truths of the real and the unreal, Krishna makes the argument more personal, challenging Arjuna to do the duty of his nature.

### Slokas 31–36

- 2.31 Also, reflect upon your own caste-duties [svadharma]. You should not

- get agitated. For a warrior there is nothing more noble than a war of duty.
- 2.32 The opportunity arises by pure chance and the doors of heaven open. Arjuna, those warriors are happy who gain the opportunity to fight such a war!
- 2.33 But if you will not participate in this war of duty, you will have abandoned your caste-duty and your honor, and you will have won only evil for yourself.
- 2.34 The whole world will talk only of your permanent dishonor, and for someone of your stature dishonor is far worse than death.
- 2.35 These great chariot-warriors will think that you have fled from the battle out of fear, and you will become a small and despised man among men who once thought so highly of you!
- 2.36 Your enemies will say many scandalous things and they will ridicule your competence. What could be more disgraceful than this?

In the book, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, by Steven Pressfield, a young man called Junah is involved in a golf match with two well-known competitors. The game is an exhibition match being played in Savannah, Georgia during the Depression. Although Junah has Bagger Vance, God personified, as his caddy, he is losing miserably because he cannot get out of his own way. He is trying too hard. Although, he has the potential to win, he cannot see it and continues to create his own nightmarish experience.

Finally, one of the elders of Savannah, Judge Anderson, can take the embarrassment no longer and goes over to find out what “fool nonsense” the caddy might be putting into their champion’s ear. He approaches the caddy and asks for an explanation.

“Junah’s problem is simple,” Bagger Vance said. “He thinks he is Junah.”

“What in damnation does that mean?” The judge’s face flushed crimson. “He *is* Junah, you damn twit!”

“I will teach him that he is not Junah,” the caddy answered with his accustomed calm. “Then he will swing Junah’s swing.”

Bagger Vance states beautifully, “I believe that each of us possesses, inside ourselves, one true authentic swing that is ours alone.” His job as

caddy is simply to reconnect Junah with his authentic swing because, in doing so, *winning* becomes the *only* possibility. Like Junah, in order for us to reconnect with our authentic swing and *sink the putt*, we must be willing to move out of our own way—to stop being a problem to ourselves. We must surrender to the advice of Krishna, our caddy.

When we recognize the golf game as a metaphor for the game of life, we see that our one true authentic swing comes to represent those times when we are acting in ways that are in the greatest harmony with our inner knowing and purpose. Sometimes, we can more easily recognize the times when we are *not* in harmony. We may feel dissatisfied, unhappy, unfulfilled. We just know that there is something else we should be doing.

What is calling is our *svadharma* referred to in Sloka 2.31. Our *svadharma* is a kind of predestined duty—the thing that calls us based on our interests, abilities and talents. It is our gift for the world.

Krishna reminds Arjuna of his *svadharma* as a warrior, *kshatriya*, and of his duty to restore righteousness to the kingdom. He tells him in Sloka 2.32 that in such a battle *the doors of heaven open*. Each time we act from a place of inner truth and knowing, we too are expressing our *svadharma* and experience a kind of heaven on earth. Arjuna is despondent because he knows he is a warrior, yet, he cannot seem to find the will to fight. He knows who he is and what he must do and still he cannot move forward.

And, sometimes, so it is with us.

In moments of doubt, we become Kauravas, desperately grasping for the winnings that we think will bring us happiness. As a Pandava, we find our authentic swing. Junah must decide what it is he wants most and so must we. Does he want to win a golf game or does he want to win at the game of life? It is our decision, as well. Do we align ourselves with the fleeting victories of the outer world or do we align ourselves with the inherent victory in our own true authentic swing? It is possible to “win” the golf game and, yet, lose at the game of life. Yet, it is impossible to win at the game of life and lose the golf game. So, which will it be?

### Slokas 37-38

- 2.37 If you are killed you will win heaven, or if you are victorious you will have the world to enjoy. Therefore, stand up, Arjuna! Don't hesitate! Fight!

- 2.38 Joy and suffering, success and failure, victory and defeat: treat them all alike. Brace yourself for this battle. In this way you will avoid dishonor!

Krishna is telling Arjuna that he cannot lose the war with his inner demons. Acting in accordance with the deepest impulse of his heart and releasing all attachment to the outcome, Arjuna cannot lose. This is because the “war” is not about a particular outcome but rather about overcoming the illusionary fears of the ego so that we may become instruments for a greater purpose.

And as such instruments, even if killed, we die a noble death. This is why we really can't lose. When we walk our path in truth, we've already won, regardless of outside circumstances or outcomes. Bagger Vance “wins” when he plays his authentic swing in service to the greater good.

And, so do we.

In the next Slokas, Krishna begins to speak less of the philosophical and more to the techniques for practical realization.

### Sloka 39

- 2.39 This insight has been presented to you as a form of Sankhya philosophy. Now hear it in the form of yoga tradition. Disciplined by this insight, Arjuna, you will escape from the bonds of action.

In simplest terms, *Sankhya* philosophy is concerned with the wisdom of the cosmos as expressed through the interplay of nature and spirit. *Yoga* is the science offering techniques for the practical realization of such philosophical truths.

### Sloka 40

- 2.40 Progress in yoga is never completely wasted and it is never unproductive. Even a little effort in this practice [dharma] saves you from the great terror of life.

Sloka 2.40 is comforting. *Even a little effort* saves us. This is because we each have an impulse toward wholeness. It's why you're reading this book. It's why we go to our helpers and healers. The truth is *we're not all happy being sad* to paraphrase, in part, Swami Dayananda Saraswati's quote at the beginning of this book. Psychologist Carl Jung called it the self-regulating mechanism. I call it God.

**Slokas 41-44**

- 2.41 The insight that is based on firm resolve is uniquely special. Arjuna, men who have no resolve have poor insight that veers endlessly in all directions.
- 2.42 People who please themselves with debating the Vedas, they recite those florid Vedic chants, but they have no insight, while saying all the time that only the Vedas matter!
- 2.43 In their hearts they are driven by desire and eager for heaven. Their words promise rebirth as the fruit of their actions. Their talk is all about all of their elaborate rituals whose purpose is to gain pleasure and power.
- 2.44 They are obsessed with pleasure and power. The words of the Vedas deprive them of their good sense. They lack the insight that is based on firm resolve and they do not gain it even when engaged in intense concentration.

The antidote to fear is equanimity. Arjuna is stalled because he is averting what must be done. Yet, he also must release any desire for power or to win, (Slokas 2.43 and 2.44) or else, like in the TV show, he will simply mirror his enemy, the Kauravas. He must find the middle way to simply doing his duty, releasing all attachment to outcome and trusting that in doing so the greater good for all is won.

**Slokas 45-46**

- 2.45 The world of the Vedas is the natural world with its three qualities. Arjuna, live in the world that is beyond this one, free of its qualities and its dualities. Remain always within your true self, free from effort and comfort. Remain in your soul [Atman].
- 2.46 As useful as a water-tank is when there is flooding in all directions, that's how useful all the Vedas are to a Brahmin who has true insight.

The *Vedas*, of course, are the ancient scriptures of India. The *three qualities* referred to in Sloka 2.45 are the *gunas*, or energetic qualities of nature, *prakriti*. (Recall in “A Story of Yogic Wisdom” our discussion of *prakriti* as the transient, changing aspect of God. The *gunas* will be discussed in depth in later chapters.)

In Sloka 2.46, Krishna warns of confusing the scripture or ritual for

true insight—for the *real* thing. I think of ritual as simply the context *through which* I may receive insight—and *through which* I may be informed. Informed by dancing a Psalm with a man with Cerebral Palsy in a wheelchair and his helper, informed by singing an old Christian hymn in a small Methodist Church in the deep South, informed by chanting the ancient Vedic mantras, informed by a cold shower at 3:30 AM to do yoga and chant the sun up, informed by sixty-two minutes with raised arms in White Tantric Yoga, informed by twirling with the Sufis, informed by time in the sweat lodge. *Everywhere* is God if we invite the ritual to *inform us*.

### Slokas 47-53

- 2.47 Focus your mind on action alone, but never on the fruits of your actions. Your goal should never be the fruits of your actions, nor should you be attached to non-action.
- 2.48 Practice yoga and perform the actions that you are obliged to do, but, Arjuna, don't be attached to them. Treat success and failure alike. This kind of even-mindedness is called yoga.
- 2.49 Arjuna, action is far inferior to the yoga of insight. Seek refuge in insight. Those whose goal is the fruits of their actions wind up miserable.
- 2.50 A man who is committed to insight leaves behind both good actions and bad. Therefore commit yourself to yoga, for yoga is skillfulness in all action.
- 2.51 Those who are committed to insight, who are wise, renounce the fruit that is born of action. Freed from the bonds of rebirth, they go to a place where there is no misery.
- 2.52 When your insight transcends this jungle of delusion, then you will become indifferent both to what you've been taught by tradition and what you will be taught.
- 2.53 When your insight, which has been distracted by the traditional teachings, stands unwavering, motionless in concentration, then you will reach yoga.

True insight becomes ours when we keep our minds single-pointed and release attachment to the fruits of our actions. This is why Krishna's first practical instruction to Arjuna comes in Sloka 2.47: *Focus your mind on action alone, but never on the fruits of your actions*. Only with such a single-pointed mind can he rise above sentimental emotions to act with clarity.

In the Bible, this would be, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all will be handed unto you.” The single-pointed mind enables us to see beyond the transient duality of black and white, joy or sadness, desiring or averting, winning or losing. Instead, our only single-pointed prayer is like that of Saint Francis, “Lord, Make Me an Instrument.” We start to live the precepts only alluded to in scripture and become free to do the work that comes to us because we trust our place in the Divine plan.

But such sweet surrender only occurs when we focus our intention on the *process*—not the *outcome*—of our actions and when we *need nothing* in return for our efforts. To *need nothing*, no particular feedback from the outside, requires we rein in our attraction to the transient, changing world of sense experience and return to the eternal, unchanging, inner sanctuary where God in us resides. Such dispassionate non-attachment is *vairagya*. It’s called Home. Only there can we trade in moments of fleeting happiness based on outside circumstances for the joy illuminated solely from within. Only there can we start to become our Self.

In the following Slokas, Krishna expounds on the importance of withdrawing the senses from all the sense objects—*like a tortoise that draws its legs into its shell* (Sloka 2.58).

### Slokas 54-61

- 2.54 Krishna, How do you describe someone who is stable in this wisdom, who can stay fixed in concentration? How would such a person speak, how would he sit, how would he go about in the world?

*The Blessed One spoke:*

- 2.55 Arjuna, when one gives up all the desires that fill one’s mind, when one is content with oneself in one’s self [atman], then one is said to be stable in this wisdom.
- 2.56 When bad fortune no longer disturbs his mind, and when good fortune no longer excites him, then you could call this person a sage who is stable in this wisdom, one in whom longing and fear and anger have vanished.
- 2.57 When one feels no desire for any thing whatsoever, and no matter what good things or bad things happen to him, he doesn’t delight in them nor hate them, such a person has wisdom that is stable.
- 2.58 When he withdraws his senses from all sensuous things, like a tortoise that draws its legs into its shell, then his wisdom is stable.

- 2.59 Sense objects withdraw from one who while still in the body gives up food. For him only the flavor, the trace of the flavor, lingers, and once he has seen the highest, that too leaves him.
- 2.60 Even an intelligent man who strives to control his senses can be tormented by them. They can attack him and violently seize his mind.
- 2.61 He should restrain all of his senses and committed [to yoga] he should sit, intent on me. If his senses are under control, then his wisdom will be stable.

. . . *he should sit, intent on me.* Only a single-pointed mind can hold such intention. But simple desire is not enough. We must use discernment or the *buddhi* aspect of our mind. A mind controlled by the world of the senses is called the *manas* mind. *How much time we spending using either our buddhi faculties or our manas mind determines how much free will we exercise.* For example, if we allow our *manas* mind to rule, we lose all *viveka* or discrimination, and do whatever the world of the senses dictates. We may eat anything or as much as we want. We may choose to skip meditation in favor of a “B” movie. We may spend much of our time focused on our own desires and goals without regard for others.

Inevitably, over time, we may wonder why we still never seem to reach a state of satisfaction. We may wonder why the happy moments slip away so fast. But, we usually do not sit with discontentment for too long before we are off in pursuit of the next thing that will satisfy our unending craving for fulfillment. It never occurs to us to look inward for the eternal well of contentment that is as close as our very breath.

However, if we are using *buddhi* to discern what is truly good for us, we will try to eat moderately and in a healthy manner. We will create the time for our spiritual practice. We will naturally look for ways to be of service. In short, by disciplining ourselves, we experience freedom from the constant cravings for satisfaction because we are finally beginning to look in the right place—within—to the blessings of each moment. Happiness is not an achievement anymore. Happiness becomes the experience of our being, because we have remembered our connection to the greatest happiness of all.

*By not allowing ourselves to be controlled by the world of the senses, we become free to actually enjoy the world more fully.*

**Slokas 62-66**

- 2.62 When a man meditates on sense objects, attachment to them develops in him, and this attachment produces desire in him, and this desire produces anger.
- 2.63 From this anger comes delusion and from this delusion comes the distortion of memory and this distortion of memory leads to the loss of insight. After that, one dies.
- 2.64 But when a man approaches sense objects with his own senses detached from desire and anger, that is, when his senses are controlled by his self [atman], then he is in control of himself and he finds peace.
- 2.65 In that peace, all of his sorrows vanish, for as soon as his thoughts become tranquil his insight becomes steady.
- 2.66 The undisciplined one who does practice yoga has no insight. The undisciplined one has no inner concentration, and lacking inner concentration he has no peace. And without peace how can such a one be happy?

Being attached to the world of the senses can bring about what I call the “I’ll be happy when” syndrome. This is when we base our happiness upon what is happening outside of us. Some examples: King Duryodhana, leader of the Kauravas army, thinks he will be happy when he can rule the entire kingdom. We may think: I’ll be happy when I get that degree . . . find the right partner . . . get over my fears . . . convince you I’m right . . . buy that new house . . . or find the right career. We are bombarded by this notion at every turn in our society. All advertising is based upon this premise. The trouble is that everything that comes from the world outside of us, including our very bodies, thoughts and feelings, is changing every second. So, soon, the original glow of getting “it” begins to fade and we’re off in a search for the next thing to satisfy our never-ending craving for stimulation.

**Slokas 67-69**

- 2.67 For the senses wander, and when one lets the mind follow after them it carries away wisdom like a wind-blown ship on the waters.
- 2.68 Therefore, great warrior, the one who has withdrawn his senses entirely from the things of the senses has steadfast wisdom.

- 2.69 When it is night for all creatures, the one who is self-restrained is awake, and when others are awake, it is night for the sage who sees truly.

It is only when we use our discriminating intellect, buddhi, to shift our focus inward that we become Pandavas and find the place of no change. At home in this place, we may once again *enjoy all the stimulation of the sense objects around us without needing them* to make us feel complete. Sloka 2.69 reminds us that such paradox is at the heart of the spiritual journey. The happiness we had thought could only come from the outside was inside, waiting, all the while.

### Slokas 70-72

- 2.70 Just as the waters that enter the ocean do not fill it nor do they disturb its depths, so too is the peace of the one into whom all these desires pour. The man who is driven by desire does not know such peace.
- 2.71 The man who abandons all desires, who goes about free from cravings, for whom there is no talk of “mine!” or “me!” – he finds peace.
- 2.72 This, Arjuna, is a divine state. Having attained this, one is no longer confused. When one abides in this state, even at the moment of death, one attains divine serenity [brahmanirvana].

Krishna warns Arjuna that he must release all personal desire or sense of “me” and “mine.” Here we come to another paradox. It is our duty to show up on the battlefield of life and live the will of our nature *and* it is our duty to release all to Krishna or the Divine within.

*It is all about us and not about us at all.* We recognize those moments of perfect balance between our will and Divine will because we could not be *more present yet unattached* at the same time. In full equanimity, we discover full love.

In letting go of our self, we suddenly find our Self.

Arjuna has asked Krishna to be his charioteer and yet he cannot hand over the reins. There was once a sign in front of a church that said, “We want God but only in an advisory capacity.” And, yet, full victory is ours—just waiting for us—if we could only let go and let God.

In Chapter 3, Krishna will begin offering practical advice on how we may let go and let God to manifest our unique gift in service to all.

## Key Points

1. Krishna's strong rebuke is our own inner knowing.
2. Asking for guidance—surrendering—allows for our own inner guidance, Krishna, to be heard.
3. Remembering that we are eternal—that we cannot kill nor be killed—allows us to rise above sentimentality to focus on the duty at hand.
4. Each time we act in accordance with the will of our nature, we create a little heaven on earth.
5. We can't lose the war!
6. No effort is ever lost.
7. To find peace, keep the mind single-pointed, centered in equanimity, and release all personal desire.
8. Don't confuse the letter of the scripture for the Truth.
9. Use discernment to control the senses and enjoy all.
10. Paradox is at the heart of the spiritual journey.
11. In letting go of self, we find our Self.

## Terms

**Atman** (*Aht-mahn*) individual expression of the One

**Svadharma** (*Sva-dar-mah*) predestined duty

**Kshatriya** (*Kshut-tree-yah*) someone from the warrior cast

**Sankhya** (*Sun-kyah*) philosophy concerned with the interplay of nature and spirit.

**Yoga** (*Yo-gah*) the science of practical techniques for realization

**Vedas** (*Vay-dahs*) ancient scriptures of India

**Gunas** (*Goo-nahs*) energetic qualities of nature

**Prakriti** (*Prahk-ri-ti*) nature or creation

**Vairagya** (*Veye-rah-gyah*) dispassion; non-attachment

**Buddhi** (*Buh-dee*) discerning intellect

**Manas** (*Mah-nahs*) mind

**Viveka** (*Vi-vay-kah*) discrimination

## Personal Reflection

1. If there is a part of us that knows exactly what we should be doing, who is it that's messing up?
2. What reaction comes when you think of "surrender"?

3. What shift starts to happen when you think of yourself as “eternal”?
4. Why is releasing personal attachment key to doing your duty?
5. Are you living your Svadharma?
6. What does “You can’t lose the war!” mean to you?
7. Describe in your own words a “single-pointed mind.”
8. Discuss the relationship between discipline and freedom.
9. How can you be totally present yet unattached at the same time?
10. So, what’s wrong with being attached to someone or something anyway?