

# THE GOSPEL OF THE BHAGAVADGITA

---

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society  
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: [swami-krishnananda.org](http://swami-krishnananda.org)

I shall endeavour to touch upon a few salient points which will be of some meaning and utility in our day-to-day life. To apply knowledge to life is the most difficult aspect of knowledge. We have always been accustomed to bifurcate life from knowledge, and vice versa, so that a learned man is not necessarily a happy man nor even a rich man. The reason is that learning, knowledge, has been isolated from the facts of life. This is one of the conflicts that we observe in life. As they say humorously, Sarasvati and Lakshmi never live in the same house, meaning thereby that learning and wealth do not go together. There are many such conflicts, all which are supposed to be solved, in one way or the other, by means of the great teachings known as the Bhagavadgita.

Bhagavan Sri Krishna, when He spoke the Bhagavadgita, intended to resolve a conflict. What is a conflict, may be a question that raises itself before our minds. There are, actually, four types of conflicts, within which every other type or variation of disharmony can be subsumed. The occasion for the delivery of this Gospel was the battle of the Mahabharata, which means a field of conflict with other people. The first conflict one encounters in life is with other people. 'You do not like me,' and 'I do not like you'. When we wake up in the morning and look at the world, we are faced

with a conflict with other people, the human society. This is a difficulty which saps the vitality of many in the world. We have to see faces with whom we cannot reconcile ourselves. It may be a boss, a subordinate or an equal, it makes no difference. When we cannot reconcile ourselves with another face, there is a conflict; and we see nothing but faces when we get up in the morning and look at the world outside. The battle of the Mahabharata is a large epic, describing this primary conflict of human nature - conflict of one person with another person, in which can be included conflicts of groups, communities and nations, because all these are nothing but personalities and individualities associating and clashing in certain manners and patterns. What we call a society, or a family, or a nation, or a community, is the way of human beings grouping themselves into patterns. Thus, conflict with other people includes every kind of conflict in the world.

We have the Mahabharata epic, in the middle of which the Bhagavadgita occurs. Where is the Bhagavadgita located? In the middle of the battle of the Mahabharata. What is this epic battle? A conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, cousin brothers in a unitary family. It was a family feud. We may say it was a conflict between Yudhishtira and Duryodhana, which amounts to the same essential situation. So, again, to reiterate, the conflict which Bhagavan Sri Krishna tries to resolve has as its background the conflict enumerated in the long epic poem of the Mahabharata. What is this background? The conflict of personalities! That was the occasion for the war. Huge armies were arrayed on both sides. Thousands were about to fly at the throats of one another. That was the occasion for the giving of this Gospel. The Gospel was not delivered in a school, a college, or a university, a temple, a church, or an auditorium. This most interesting and indispensable Gospel which we try to enshrine in our hearts, in our memory, was given on that momentous occasion of a war that was about to break between large contending armies. Nobody would, normally, like to seek wisdom on such a tense occasion. That is not the

time to speak at all; it is the time to act and do something immediately. Who would speak philosophy when there are large numbers of men emotionally worked up into such a heightened pitch of anxiety and wrath that they will hear no words spoken by anyone, and are bent upon a severe type of action! On that occasion who would speak a sublime Gospel or a scripture! But that was the occasion, and there could not be a better time.

Now, the very purpose of this war was primarily to resolve a social conflict. Well; it was agreed that the war was indispensable. The purpose behind the war was not to destroy people but to resolve a social conflict or a political tension. It was impossible to mend people, and so they thought it was necessary to end people. And they concluded that by the ending of the embodiments of conflict, the conflict would automatically vanish. If you cannot untie a knot, you cut the knot. And for memory's sake I may mention a few specimens who were involved in this conflict - the leaders, the generalissimos of the war. There were powerful veterans on the side of the Kauravas, almost invincible in battle, three of whom, the most prominent ones, were Bhishma, Drona and Karna. Nobody could face them with immunity to their lives. On the other side, that of the Pandavas, we have leaders like Bhima and Arjuna, the brothers of King Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas. While the most powerful from the Kaurava side was Bhishma, the most invincible on the side of the Pandavas was Arjuna. They knew every tactic of war, and people would shudder in their hearts by merely hearing the name of these people.

Now, on mutual acceptance, it was agreed that the war had to be waged to end a social conflict. But, when the hour of crisis came, when the iron was hot and it had to be struck, when that moment came, what happened? A most unexpected conflict arose within the mind of Arjuna. It was not a conflict with other people, but a conflict within one's one self. I told you that there are four types of conflicts. The first one is conflict with other people, and to end it they started or embarked upon this perilous adventure of war.

But before it broke out or started, the most important of the leaders, the hero of one party, the most renowned warrior, had to pass through a muddle of conflict within himself - his own thoughts, feelings, emotions, and the various tantrums of his psychological organ. You know the situation. All action emanates from the individual, and to do or not to do is to be decided by the individual himself. A decision can be taken only when there is no conflict in one's mind. Either you do a thing or you do not do the thing. Either you want a thing or you do not want the thing. These are decisions that the mind takes. But if one begins to waver between the two horns of the dilemma, and one does not know which side to take and what steps to put forward, due to a conflict within one's one mind, there would be no solution at all. A most surprising attitude did Arjuna put on, to the wonder and marvel of everyone there. The most heroic of persons began to speak words of pusillanimity, feelings of pity which would be completely unexpected from a warrior girt up on the brink of a war. Instead of attempting to solve the social conflict for the sake of which the war was to be engaged in, another conflict was added on to it. So, instead of one conflict, we have two conflicts here. Arjuna, the leader, the great warrior, advanced specious arguments before Krishna, his colleague, his friend and guide, who was seated on the very same chariot, and clinched the whole matter by saying, "I am not for this." It was a very difficult thing to swallow, and only a personality like Krishna could take it in the true spirit in which it arose.

When a person is truly friendly with you, he knows how to take your moods. That is a wisdom of life. Krishna was not pleased; nor was he displeased. A doctor is neither pleased nor displeased with the patient. An emotion will not rise in the mind of a physician. Krishna was not distressed at the agonising condition of the mind of Arjuna. He did not weep, cry or beat his breast. He spoke words of wisdom laden with the profundity of the experience of life which, incidentally, opened up the gates for a solution to all conflicts in life. Not merely Arjuna's conflict, but your conflict, my conflict, and

anyone's conflict at any time found a solution herein. All problems, all conflicts, all disharmonies, in everyone's mind, in every pattern of society, and for all times, were dealt with effectively. Thus it is that the Bhagavadgita became a scripture of universal significance. Though it arose on account of a historical context, it gradually bordered upon timeless questions and the eternal problems of mankind, or humanity as a whole. The Bhagavadgita teaches not the Hindu religion, but religion as such. It is not my religion, or your religion, but it is the religion of the human soul that is spoken in the words of the Bhagavadgita. It is an answer to the questions of mankind, not merely the themes of some religion, cult or creed. It is 'man' putting a question to God. Not any particular person or any particular faith or association or affiliation raising a problem, but man, signifying humanity, raising a problem before the Maker of all things. And to it, the answer came from all sides. The answer came from all the mouths of the Cosmic Person, not merely from one individual called Krishna. There was no Krishna then, when this answer came. The query was not raised by Arjuna as a historical person. It was not Arjuna that kicked up the problem; it was the humanity present in Arjuna that raised the question. There is a character of humanity in everyone of us, which is neither male nor female, neither eastern nor western. The human element puts the eternal question. Hence, the answer has to be all-comprehensive. The human complexity raised the question, and who will answer the question? Not 'another' man. One man's problem cannot be solved by another man or another person. Because another person is also a human being like this person. You cannot solve my problem, nor can I solve your problem, because both of us stand on the same pedestal of the human outlook. And here was the problem of humanity as a whole, not of one individual; and who will answer this question? Not Krishna, because to utter the name Krishna in this context would be to raise the question of an individual. It was not the historical Krishna that spoke to Arjuna, but it was Narayana who spoke to Nara. This is also

known as Nara-Narayana-Samvada, though, indeed, Krishna-Arjuna-Samvada. God spoke to man, not Krishna to Arjuna, as a person. The Universal spoke to the particular. The All-comprehensive began to speak words of wisdom to that which is localised in space and time. Humanity was face to face with the Absolute. With this background of understanding we shall be able to realise the importance of this scripture of Yoga.

Thus, on the background of the necessity to solve a social conflict, an individual conflict arose in the mind of a symbol of humanity, known as Arjuna. As I already pointed out, I cannot answer this question and you cannot answer this question, because we are all persons, human beings, individuals, and it is the individual that raises the question. Then who is to give the answer? Not anyone in the world. The answer has to come from That which is beyond the world. And hence the personality of Krishna began to expand gradually into the All-inclusive Consciousness which covers the entire gamut of the evolution of mankind and the world as a whole. This apocalypse of Consciousness is what is known as Virat, or the Visvarupa. It expanded not merely quantitatively in space and time; it is not the swelling of a body that is called Virat, or Visvarupa, but a humanly unimaginable expansion of Consciousness, which alone can solve the questions of mankind's conflict.

And what is mankind's conflict? One person set against another person. This is the first phase of the problem. That each one is at loggerheads with one's own self is another phase of the conflict. You do not know what you will think tomorrow. You do not agree today with what you thought yesterday. Your understanding cannot go hand in hand with your feeling. Your feelings cannot go hand in hand with your will. Your emotions will not agree with your logical argument. Your logic goes against the facts of human society outside. All this is a description of internal conflict. "I can neither fully agree with you nor fully reject you." This is also a personal conflict. If I can fully agree with you, there can be no conflict. If I can fully reject you, then also there is no

conflict. But, unfortunately, I cannot fully reject you for certain reasons and cannot also wholly accept you for certain other reasons. This is individual conflict. And there are also non-alignments of the layers of the personality itself.

The four conflicts are a, b, c, d. The earlier one is the cause of the later. I am proceeding from the posterior to the prior, from the gross to the subtle, from the visible to the invisible, from the outer to the inner, for the purpose of explanation. The outer conflict of society is an outcome of the internal conflict of human nature. Why has this conflict come? Is there any solution for this? Arjuna fell at the feet of Krishna. "I am confused, and I do not know what I am supposed to do. Bewildered is the condition of my mind. It is true that I have come here for battle, as a general of the army, but now something is happening within my own mind. I do not know, Krishna, what is happening! I am sunk in grief. I am gripped by sorrow. I cannot lift my finger. I cannot raise my hand. My nerves are getting paralysed. I cannot even stand up. I am falling down. My reason is failing." This is what happens when internal conflict reaches its climax. And here the real Bhagavadgita starts, which is God speaking. Up to this time man was speaking: "I shall wage a war, I shall end these people, crush them and pound them to powder." That was the boast of man before the war was entered upon. Then the sinking down of the personality: "This is impossible. I shall withdraw, because I do not think that I am fit to adjust myself to this complex that has arisen now in the form of a social conflict, which, I hold, is raised by us due to ignorance, greed and callousness towards the consequences of war." The answer of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, representing the unity of the cosmos, is simple and precise, though it is apparently a long gospel of many chapters.

Arjuna was thoroughly mistaken in assessing the values of life. "Your understanding is turbid, it is not clear enough to grasp the vitality of life. Nobody asked you to start the war. It is you who started this, and I merely said nothing against it. If you want it, have it, and be done with it. After having started it of your own accord, relying on the strength of your arms,

listening to nobody else's advice, what makes you now sing a different tune altogether, as if you are another person having nothing to do with the previous person that you were who decided to wage the war? The answer of Arjuna was: "I do not know." There are some students who come to this Ashram. If I ask them why they came, the answer is: "I do not know." It is difficult to speak to such people. How is it that they do not know anything? You must know something at least. The truth is that you know that you do not know. Don't you know even that much? Well, it looks something humorous. But, this was exactly what Arjuna did. "I do not know what to do. Tell me what is my duty." The answer is the Bhagavadgita, which is supposed to be a Gospel on duty.

What is the duty of man? I began by speaking of the four conflicts, which the Bhagavadgita endeavours to resolve. To solve the first conflict, Arjuna thought that battle is the only way. But before the war took place outside, a war broke out inside the warrior. There was a psychological war which fumed up like wild fire within the mind of the hero, even before the outer social war took place. "Do you know why this happens? Do you know why any war takes place at all? Why conflicts should arise at all? The ultimate cause of all conflicts? Do you know this, Arjuna?" Sri Krishna spoke. You do not know anything. You do not know that you have a higher conflict pushing you forward into a further external conflict. Behind the social conflict, is the individual conflict. Behind the individual conflict, there is another conflict which was not apparent to the mind of any person then, but Krishna knew what it was. It was the conflict between the individual and the world as a whole in the form of this vast creation.

Man has estranged himself from Nature. This is the third conflict - the conflict between man and Nature. The world seems to be outside us, and we seem to be strangers in this world. We are not sure if we are really wanted in this world. Sometimes it looks that we are not wanted at all, and yet we, somehow, reconcile ourselves with the hardships of this mysterious creation and pull on in life, "get on", as we say.

The world is not going to be reconciled if we are not going to obey its laws. Because of a conflict of our individuality with the universal Nature we suffer various pains - hunger and thirst, heat and cold, and, finally, death. All these catastrophes of human life, and life in general, are the outcome of an isolation of the individual from the cosmic Nature. Nature does not die; it is the individual that dies. Nature has no hunger and thirst; it is the individual that has hunger and thirst. Nature does not feel cold. Nature does not want a blanket or a sweater; it is the individual that feels heat and cold. The bodily limitations, the vital limitations, the mental limitations, the intellectual limitations, are all the result of this bifurcation of personality or individuality from the universal Nature. If you are to be tuned to Nature, you are to become an integral, vital, universal part of Nature. Then you will have no hunger and thirst, no heat and cold, no death. But why should this difficulty arise? "I never wanted to isolate myself from Nature." Nobody would purchase trouble deliberately. And why has this happened? Who is responsible for this banishment of the individual from the universal? This third conflict is due to another conflict altogether, viz., the fourth conflict - the conflict between the Universe and the Absolute, between man and God. We are removed from God Himself. That is why every other disease has cropped up. Social conflict or political conflict is due to individual conflict. The individual conflict is due to the conflict of natural forces in respect of the individual. This, again, is due to a higher conflict between the Universal Being and the individual.

The war seen before us is the array of forces which God has unleashed to teach us a lesson. The whole world is up in arms against us, because we have set ourselves against God. Can we expect to have peace and happiness here when we wage a battle with God Himself? But this is the secret that man does not know because of an original ignorance, what we call the original sin of man, the fall of man, the fall of the soul from its Divine Status of Universality. Unless we reconcile ourselves with God, we are not going to reconcile

ourselves with Nature. Nature is nothing but the army of forces let loose by God against the erring individual, as a reaction to the rebellion set against Him. When there is conflict with a country in war, we cannot speak to its soldiers, "My dear friends, please do not fight," for they are not responsible for the battle. They are released by some other force behind them. We must tackle that force, which is the cause of the release of these forces. Why do we talk to the soldiers, because they, poor fellows, know nothing except that they have been ordered; and they act. Thus there is no use of speaking to the world, "My dear friend, Wind, don't bite me. Water, do not drown me. Fire, do not burn me." They will say, "We do not know. We are only ordered to act, and we shall do according to the order. You speak to the Person, the Force who has ordered thus. Otherwise, we shall burn you down, cut you, blow you up, drown you, kill you." So there is no use trying to get rid of the troubles of life, because these are forces released by a higher Nature. Unless we reconcile ourselves with God, we are not going to be friendly with Nature. And unless we reconcile yourself with Nature, the cosmos as a whole, our internal conflicts are not going to cease. And until internal conflicts are solved, the external wars are not going to end. The social peace which we are clamouring for, the national peace, world-peace, the Ramarajya as we call it - all these wonderful things that we are aspiring in life - cannot be had on earth until we solve the original conflict that is between us, within us, with Nature, and God.

This is the essence of the themes described in the chapters of the Bhagavadgita. We are face to face with the Supreme Being in the eleventh chapter; and whatever I have told you now is the inner significance of the contents of the first eleven chapters. The chapters that follow from the eleventh onwards describe methods of practically applying this knowledge in specific contexts of life. Before doing anything, understand well. And think well, dispassionately, taking into consideration all aspects of the question that arises in your mind. Cast a glance around you, and recognise

where you really stand in this world, what your difficulties are, and tap the difficulties in their roots. Then it is that you will be blessed, and mankind at large reach blessedness and beatitude.

Social collaboration, individual self-control, universal interrelatedness, and Absolute Oneness are the standpoints from which the Bhagavadgita exhorts us at different levels of its teaching. The highest Reality is Aksharam Brahma (the Imperishable Absolute). It is the Supreme Person, or Adhiyajna from the standpoint of creation. It is manifest as Adhibhuta (the external universe) as the object on the one side, and as Adhyatma (the individual experiencer as the subject) on the other side. The Divine Principles organising the relations between subjects and objects is Adhidaiva (superintending Deity). The movement of the cosmic cycle, the inexorable impulse to action, the universal urge of creativity, is Karma-Visarga (the complex of activity determined by interconnected universal factors). No one can escape this duty of 'All-Life,' and none can afford to be ignorant of this secret of existence. Here is the Bhagavadgita in a nutshell.