

These few pages provide an "overview" of the Gita. Their intent is to facilitate the student's reading of this involved and difficult poem. This "overview" looks at the progression of the learning which Krishna seeks to teach Arjuna, moving Arjuna from the external world of his sense impressions to the internal world of his spiritual mind and soul. Indeed, Krishna moves Arjuna from the biological reality in which he is living because he views the battlefield of life as a war between himself and his foster parents and brothers, to his existential reality, that is to the "war of living", that is, the war between the mortality of his body and the immortality of his spiritual mind.

As in the Buddhist **Damapadda**, so also in the Hindu Gita, Arjuna's radical problem is his mental attitude toward life itself which is a reflection of his own self image. Were we to apply the Chinese **Tao** here, the **yin**, as breath of the soul allows the **yang** or body to manifest self, so the body as being depends upon the soul as non-being and the words we speak through the body can not adequately appreciate or express the emptiness which is the **yin** and **Tao**; thus, we need to know when to stop speaking with the mouth and start listening with the heart (tone poems 1 and 32).

Arjuna's problem stems from the way he thinks about himself and his life; he views his life as born and nurtured thanks to his natural and his foster parents. His very life, however, is actually a gift of God, in this case, Brahman, the source of the breath of life itself. So, Arjuna's actual battle must be waged between the mortal world of his body vis á vis the spiritual world of his soul. Krishna, therefore, must teach Arjuna the knowledge which will free him rather than the knowledge which Arjuna now practices, a knowledge which renders him dependent and a slave of his human birth and nurture. Thus, the second chapter begins with the **yoga** of knowledge, that is the union of Arjuna's mind and his body through breathing so his present self-knowledge as being dependent upon birth parents might be lifted to a self-knowledge as being free through a spiritual self-knowledge - an interesting fact is that the St. Augustine of the

fourth century A.D. comments within his dialogue Soliloquies that the soul (**anima**) "...holds out life to the body" (**corpus**) and, of course, the Greeks from the Pre-socratic down through the Stoics called the principle which is the source of self-movement **psyche**, translated as soul but when pronounced in Greek is the Greek word for "breath" because all beings who self-moved breathed.

Chapter I Arjuna's Depression

The Gita begins by setting the scene and by posing the problem. The scene is set on a battlefield and Arjuna confronts the problem, or the possibility of waging war. However, Arjuna thinks that the war is a physical one between himself, his household opposed by his foster family. This thought leads to Arjuna's depression and decision not to stand and fight. The reason Arjuna misreads the kind of conflict is that he is thinking biologically, that is, he is living on the emotional level when in reality the conflict he faces is on the existential level of being alive, the war between being physically mortal and spiritually immortal. The remainder of the Gita is Krishna's attempt to teach Arjuna what the real war consists in and how successfully to wage the war of living humanly, that is, of being at peace in his soul within the midst of conflict, of dwelling in the reality of being spiritual rather than being torn by the emotional turmoil of being mortal.

Chapter II The **Yoga** of Knowledge

Krishna's first attempt is to teach Arjuna to practice the **yoga** of knowledge. **Yoga** means literally union, that is, the purpose of **yoga** is to bring the body and soul together through breathing, so that the body and soul act as one and so that the body no longer divides from the soul through such physical reactions as the emotion of pity and its counterpart sorrow. The first lesson is a practical one wherein Krishna observes that a wise person neither feels sorrow for the dead or the living; the wise person is devoid of any such emotion - reflect back upon Socrates in the Apology of Plato; Socrates lacked fear

both of living and dying. Krishna calls Arjuna to practice his **dharma**, that is, this righteous, or doing the right thing which radically means embracing the duty of really being alive, that is being spiritually human.

Chapter III The **Yoga** of Action

Krishna now urges Arjuna to act according to the knowledge of his **dharma** and thereby walk on the path by which he will attain goodness. The path is through the mind's control of the senses. Krishna tells Arjuna that his goodness, happiness and "salvation" lie in his ability to live detached or independent from the mortal world. The real enemy of living, states Krishna is desire so Arjuna's **dharma** means that the mind must kill desire and thereby eliminate sorrow. Linguistically, the **Dhamma** (of the **Dhammapadda**) is the **Pali** form of this Hindu **Dharma**, a word with no fewer than six (6) meanings. The first meaning is; the one ultimate reality. The other five meanings in order are: an ultimately real event. This ultimately real event, as reflected in life is: righteousness, virtue; as interpreted in **Buddha's** teaching, it is Doctrine, Scripture as well as Truth; and as an object of the sixth sense-organ, it is the mind. Again, an interesting point is that the Thirteenth Century A.D. Dominican monk and mystic Thomas Aquinas observes in his **Summa Theologiae, I-II Part, q. 80, article 1** that the natural virtue of religion is a function of the virtue of justice(that Greek **dike**, frequently translated as righteousness)in that humans have an obligation or duty to give thanks and honor to God, the source of life itself.

Chapter IV The **Yoga** of Knowledge

Arjuna does not understand this **yoga** of action because he does not understand the **yoga** of knowledge, so Krishna returns to this **yoga** of knowledge by observing that Arjuna's spiritual self is unborn just as divinity is unborn but whenever Arjuna turns toward his mortal self he lives within the passion of mortal birth, losing his very spiritual stability and peace. However, this mortal world of birth is one of dependence, one of attachment and thus, lacks the freedom of the spiritual world.

Chapter V The **Yoga** of Renunciation

Arjuna then asks Krishna how he can achieve this spiritual freedom and Krishna tells him only by renouncing his own works. Whenever Arjuna acts, he must do so without attachment, so he must act unselfishly. Another way to express Krishna's advice is that whenever a human being acts, if he or she is to act virtuously, that person must act with unconditioned love, that is, a love which has no conditions attached to the act of love being practiced. Such love is self-purifying and enables one to "connect" with God-as-love.

Chapter VI The **Yoga** of Meditation

Arjuna learns that to practice **yoga** and attain freedom from division of body from soul and freedom from the attachment to the mortal through passions is possible to one who has become a **yogin**. All the actions of such a **yogin** concentrate on meditating on breathing, "...having made equal the incoming and outgoing breaths moving within the nostrils". Such a person is freed forever because such a person is united with Brahman, the very source of the breath of life.

Chapter VII The **Yoga** of Wisdom and Understanding

The result of such meditation is that Arjuna achieves the wisdom of understanding that "All this universe is strung on Me (the blessed one) like jewels on a string". Arjuna, therefore, arises above the "blessed" as divided eight-fold nature, as "earth, water, fire, wind, ether, mind, intellect and self-consciousness" or as manifested within and through **maya** and unites with the "blessed" as the "higher nature...the life-soul by which this world is supported". This is to know Brahman.

Chapter VIII The **Yoga** of the Imperishable Brahman

Arjuna asks Krishna what this Brahman is? Krishna responds: "Brahman is the indestructible, the supreme; the Self is called the essential nature and **karma** is the name of the creative power which causes beings to exist".

Chapter IX
The **Yoga** of Sovereign Knowledge and Mystery

Krishna explains to Arjuna that Brahman's un-manifested form pervades all this world and reveals the mystery, namely, that "All beings rest in Me but I do not rest in them". The profane **maya** which is the world is, therefore, the sacred presence of Brahman - to use the terms of Mircea Eliade's The Sacred and the Profane! Note that the distinction between the **maya** and Brahman precludes any identity between this Brahman and "me" and this "me" and the world, including any and every individual soul contrary what some interpreters claim.

Chapter X
The **Yoga** of Manifestations

This chapter provides the fruit of meditation, that is, the understanding of how Brahman is present in and through the **maya** so this chapter enables Arjuna to unite with Brahman through Brahman's manifestations within this world: "How may I know You, O **Yogin**, by meditating always? What states of being are you, O Blessed Lord, to be thought by me?" The answers are: "Only you know yourself by yourself, O Supreme spirit, Source of beings, Lord of creatures, God of gods, Lord of the world!" and "I am the Self seated in the hearts of all beings...I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings". Note that this passage echoes that of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy:

...**Yhwh** our God is the one **Yhwh**. You shall love **Yhwh** your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let these words I urge on you today be written on your heart...(Dt. 6:4-7)

Chapter XI
The **Yoga** of the Vision of the Universal Form

Arjuna now asks to see that of which Krishna has spoken, however, the answer is: "You can not see Me with your own eye. I give you a divine eye. Behold My divine **yoga**" - this is an interesting chapter, but this statement is most interesting because the Catholic Christian Dominican teacher and mystic, Thomas Aquinas in the

thirteenth century A.D. observes within his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, chapter LI (51) that after death the righteous, or virtuous will see God, but not by their own effort because human beings as creatures can not "see" the Creator - since now humans "see" God as in a mirror; however, God will give the virtuous creatures the capacity to see God, as promised to Moses "face to face".

Chapter XII The **Yoga** of Devotion

Arjuna now asks who is more learned in **yoga**, those who are always disciplined and honor You or those who worship the Imperishable and the Un-manifest? Arjuna answers that the most learned in **yoga** are those who "fixing their mind on Me, worship Me with complete discipline and with supreme faith". However, to worship the Imperishable and the Un-manifest while in the body is very difficult and much harder. Then Krishna enumerates the characteristics of those devoted to Brahman who are so disciplined.

Chapter XIII The **Yoga** of the Distinction Between the Field and the Knower of the Field

The prior chapter raises the distinction between the "field" and the "knower of the field", an essential distinction for anyone seeking union with Brahman through the discipline of being a **yogin**. The "field" is everything mortal, the **maya** of this world whereas the "knower of the field" is "constancy in knowledge of the Self, insight into the end of essential knowledge". They who know this distinction and live by it "'attain to the Supreme", "the light of lights beyond darkness".

Chapter XIV The **Yoga** of the Distinction of the Three Gunas

Interesting is the fact that this Chapter reverts to a biological analogy to explain how the wise become united to Brahman and, therefore, become spiritual and immortal: "My womb is the great Brahman; in that I place the seed and the birth of all beings comes from that, Oh Arjuna". Then Krishna lists the characteristics of Brahman, the characteristics in which any **jogin** or wise person will share when united to Brahman. An interesting point is that

Brahman observes "Even those who are devotees of other gods and who worship them full of faith, even they worship Me only" - an observation which St. Paul made as recorded within the Acts of the Apostles, while viewing the altar To An Unknown God erected by the Council of the Areopagus within Athens (Acts: 17:22-34)

Chapter XV The **Yoga** of the Highest Spirit

This chapter provides another analogy to understand this relationship of unity of all beings to Brahman and Brahman to all beings; the analogy is simple. The analogy is that of a tree whose branches are above and whose roots are below the ground. Again, the point is that Brahman is "...seated in the hearts of all; from Me (come) memory, wisdom and argument. I am that which is to be known by the **Vedas**; I am the author of the **Vedanta** (*Upanishads*) and I am also the knower of the **Vedas**". Again, this relationship reflects that found within the Old Testament in two places, first in Genesis and secondly within Deuteronomy:

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. (Image here is the Hebrew **zelem**; Genesis: 1:27)

...**Yhwh** our God is the one **Yhwh**. You shall love **Yhwh** your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let these words I urge on you today be written on your heart...(Dt. 6:4-7)

Of course, this also mirrors Christ's own analogies about Himself and his followers found in John, namely, Christ being the vine and his followers being the branches and Christ being the Head and his followers being the other bodily members. (N.T., John 15:1:17)

Chapter XVI The **Yoga** of the Distinction Between the Divine and Demoniatic Endowments

This chapter draws a sharp distinction between the **yogin** and "... (one) who is born with the demoniac nature", literally, one who lives a spiritual life and one who lives a material life. The virtues of the former include

"...non-violence, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peace, absence of guile, compassion towards beings, absence of covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness" and the vices of the latter include "hypocrisy, arrogance, excessive pride and anger, harshness and also ignorance..." - noteworthy here is that Krishna observes that the vicious people do not believe in God, however, the virtuous do believe in God, an observation which Eliade repeats when he discusses the world as sacred contrasted with the world as profane, as is current with those who Eliade labels as "secular humanists". Read the Sacred and the Profane, pp. 200-206.

Chapter XVII The **Yoga** of the Threefold Division of Faith

Krishna now describes the various kinds of faith because Arjuna wants to know the characteristic of faith which unites a believer to Brahman, since various kinds of faith are practiced among humans. Krishna defines human beings as being faith people -the **homo religiosus**, or most religious being which Eliade finds humans to be, then Krishna states: "Whatever faith a man has, that he is". "**Sattvic** men worship the gods; **rajasic** men worship demi-gods and demons and other, **tamasic** men, worship elemental spirits and ghosts". **Sattvic** humans are united with Brahman through breathing of "Om" whereas the others are not.

Chapter XVIII The **Yoga** of Freedom of Renunciation

The consequence of the instruction of the prior seventeen chapters is that Arjuna says: "I desire to know...the true essence of renunciation and abandonment...and the distinction between them..." Krishna then defines renunciation and abandonment simply as "...the giving up of acts of desire" and "...the surrendering of the fruits of all actions". But, such a life can only be lived as a result of unconditional love which basically is identical with the **Tao's Way**, that is, the way of non-action characteristic of the **yin**, the valley and the earth whose abandonment of self permits conception, pregnancy and birth!

Krishna offers this conclusion to this dialogue: "And he who shall study this sacred dialogue of ours, by him I

would be worshiped with the sacrifice of wisdom. Such is
My thought."

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