



INTRODUCTION TO BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

PŪRNA VIDYĀ VEDIC HERITAGE TEACHING PROGRAMME

Invocation

ॐ सह नावतु ।
सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु ।
मा विद्विषावहै ॥

om saha nāvavatu
saha nau bhunaktu
saha vīryaṅkaravāvahai
tejasvi nāvadhītamastu
mā vidviṣāvahaiḥ ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

Om

*Let Him protect us both
May He bless us with the bliss of
knowledge*

*Let us exert together
May what we study be well studied
May we not quarrel with each other*

Om

Peace...Peace...Peace

INTRODUCTION TO GĪTĀ



Knowledge in Sanātana Dharma

- Śruti (the Vedas) – what is “heard”
- Smṛti – what is “remembered”
- Purāṇa – scriptures in a form easily assimilated through the form of stories
- Itihāsa - history
- Other forms – poetry, commentaries, etc.



Gītā Dhyānam

- Chanting the *Gītā dhyānam*
- Meaning and significance
- Why does Gītā occupy an exalted place in the scriptures?

Gītā Dhyānam

- *Gītā* is the loving mother who showers the knowledge of *advaita* on the listener
- *Vyāsa* and his role
- *Ganeśa* and his role (story of one tusk)
- *Krsna* - the “milkman” of the *śruti* (cow)
- *Arjuna* - the cause (calf) for whom the Gita was created

Bhagavad Gītā

- There are several Gītās in **Sanātana Dharma** or Vedic Tradition or Hinduism
- Among all these Gītās, the most famous and well known is the Bhagavad Gītā
- “**Gītā**” = song; “**Bhagavad**” = “of God”
- Thus Bhagavad Gītā can be literally translated as “Song of God” or “Celestial Song” etc.

Background of the Bhagavad Gītā

- If there is one society that is very deeply and widely influenced by epics – it is India.
- Even today the society in India is influenced by the ethos and character of the two most famous epics **Ramayana** (story of Rama) and **Mahabharata**
- Family life in India is inspired by the story of Rama
- The Mahabharata has a very large influence on how people conduct themselves.

Background of the Bhagavad Gītā

- The Mahabharata is the largest epic in the history of mankind - 110,000 verses long!
- The author of this epic is sage **Bādarāyaṇa** – his original name is **Kṛṣṇa** (dark skin).
- **Bādarāyaṇa** lived on an island between two sections of the river Saraswati – that is why he is also called **Dvaipāyana** (literally “island between two rivers”).

Background of the Bhagavad Gītā

- **Bādarāyaṇa** was also known as “**Kṛṣṇa of the island**” because of his dark complexion (not to be confused with “**Kṛṣṇa of Dwaraka**” or **Lord Kṛṣṇa**)
- **Bādarāyaṇa** came to be given the title of **Vyāsa**.
- **Vyāsa** means one who collects and edits the information – someone like an Editor!
- **Vyāsa** also means “...presenting a subject in a very elaborate way...” – meaning that **Vyāsa** does not leave out even a small detail and is not satisfied with superficial treatment.

Background of the Bhagavad Gītā

- Mahabharata is called “**pancama veda**” or the “fifth veda”
- Dharma is a central topic in all the vedas
- The essence of the vedic dharma is captured by **Vyāsa** in his voluminous epic called the Mahabharata
- The purpose of Mahabharata is not to narrate a story but to give a message of dharma to society.

Background of the Bhagavad Gītā

- The vedas represent **kamadhenu** – the celestial wish-yielding COW
- Mahabharata is the essence of the celestial cow (the vedas)
- Milk can be understood as the essence of the cow
- Gītā is called the “**nava nīta**” (fresh butter) – the essence of milk
- Gītā is really the essence of the Mahabharata
- If one distills the message of dharma in the Mahabhārata, one gets the Gītā (i.e., Bhagavad Gītā)

Background of the Bhagavad Gītā

- There are **18 parvās** or sections in the Mahabhārata
- The Bhagavad Gītā
 - 700 slokas in **18** chapters;
 - “located” halfway through the Mahabhārata
- The great war in Mahabhārata went on for **18** days
- **18 akṣauhiṇīs** or batallions (11 for the Kauravas and 7 for the Pandavas) fought in the Mahabhārata war

The Context of the Bhagavad Gītā

- Arjuna was a highly accomplished warrior and great prince who led a life based on **dharma** and was eagerly looking forward to the battle so he could defeat the forces of **adharma**
- Suddenly, when confronted with the spectacle of the war itself, he loses his resolve and finds himself in a **state of confusion** and **intense conflict of dharma**

The Context of the Bhagavad Gītā

- Fortunately for Arjuna, Sri Kṛṣṇa is his charioteer
- When requested by Arjuna (as a student), Sri Kṛṣṇa (as Guru) leads him out of his confusion and conflict so he can think clearly and act accordingly
- Arjuna is representative of a human being whose mind is gripped by confusion and conflict and seeking eternal happiness and fulfilment in things that cannot possibly give it

Guru or Teacher

- What does the word “**guru**” mean? What does the word “**sadguru**” (or sat guru) mean?
 - *gu* (darkness or ignorance); *ru* (remover); *sat* (absolute truth)
- *Guru is one who removes ignorance of any particular subject matter*
- *Sadguru is one who removes ignorance and unfolds the absolute truth of the self to the student*

Guru or Teacher

- What are the qualifications of a Guru?
 - *Śrotriya* (learned in the Veda)
 - *Brahmaniṣṭa* (established in the absolute truth)
 - *Gifted communicator* (one who is adept in understanding student's psychology and in communication with the student)

Śiṣya or Student

- Who is a student or *śiṣya*?
 - “...*śikṣa योग्या इति शिष्या...*” or “...one who is worthy of the knowledge...”
- What are the qualifications of a student or *śiṣya*?
 - One with the fourfold qualification or “*sādhana chatuṣṭaya*”
 - (1) *viveka*, (2) *vairāgya*, (3) *śamādi śaktasampatti*, (4) *mumukṣutvam*

Essentials for Study

- *Śraddha*
 - Faith or trust in: the teaching; the teacher, and one's ability to learn
- *Bhakti*
 - Reverence to the teaching, the Guru, and Īśvara
 - Maturity to accept oneself and others as they are
 - Ability to see Īśvara in all and marvel at “everyday” miracles



The Vision of the Bhagavad Gītā

- What is the fundamental problem?
- Why is it important to recognize and understand this fundamental problem?
- How can this fundamental problem be solved?

The Vision of the Bhagavad Gītā

- What does Arjuna's condition represent? How does Lord Kṛṣṇa remove Arjuna's confusion, conflict and ignorance?
- What is karma yoga? What is jñāna yoga? What is the role of bhakti (devotion)? Are they different? How are they related?
- How can Bhagavad Gītā help me grow and mature as human being?

Questions for Reflection

- What does the Mahabharata war represent?
- What does the chariot represent?
- What does the charioteer (Sri Kṛṣṇa) represent?
- What do the horses represent?
- What do the reins represent?
- Who does Arjuna represent?



Stories

- Story of the **Bhāgavatam** and **Parīkṣit** and how the **Mahabhārata** war is connected to them
- Story of the chariot that **Arjuna** had through the duration of the **Mahabhārata** war

Story of Parikṣit from the Bhāgavatam

- After the end of **Mahabhārata** war
 - **Aśvatthama** kills the sons of the Pandavas (although he intended to kill the Pandavas to please Duroyodhana)
 - He again tries to destroy the entire clan of the Pandavas with a Brahmastra – even though the war is over!
 - **Uttara** (daughter-in-law of **Draupadi** and **Arjuna**), **Parikṣit** (son of Abhimanyu and Uttara)
 - **Kṛṣṇa** protects the baby (**Parikṣit**) in Uttara's womb
- **Parikṣit** is entrusted the kingdom by the Pandavas and becomes known all over the world for his ability to rule wisely

Story of Parikṣit from the Bhāgavatam

- **Parikṣit** is a great king and one day after hunting in the forest, he approaches a sage's hermitage
- The sage **Śamīka** is in deep Samādhi and **King Parikṣit** becomes angry that he is not being attended to by the sage or his disciples; anger & pride overwhelm him and he hangs a dead snake around the sage's neck; he leaves
- **Sage Śamīka's** son **Śringī**, upon his return to the hermitage is incensed; he curses the king that he will die after 7 days when he is bitten by a serpent; at this stage even **Parikṣit** does not know he has only 7 days to live!

Story of Parikṣit from the Bhāgavatam

- Sage Śamīka comes out of Samadhi and learning of the events, instructs his disciple Gauramukha to inform King Parikṣit of his fate
- Gauramukha informs King Parikṣit of his fate; the king realizes his mistake and accepts it
- He realizes that time is short; he anoints his successor to the throne and goes to the banks of the Ganga to gain self-knowledge

Story of Parikṣit from the Bhāgavatam

- **Sage Śuka** (learned son of sage Vyāsa) arrives at the banks of the Ganga shortly after
- **King Parikṣit** informs **Sage Śuka** of his fate and begs the sage to impart self-knowledge to him
- **Sage Śuka** begins his instruction to **King Parikṣit** – this is why the Bhagavatam was unfolded in 7 days (*Bhagavata saptaha*)!

Concluding Śānti Mantra

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम् पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

- Om pūrṇamadah pūrṇamidam pūrṇātpurṇamudacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate ॥
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ॥

That is fullness, this is fullness. From that fullness this fullness came. From that fullness (when) this fullness (is) removed, what remains is fullness. Om peace, peace, peace