***Gita Way of Life***

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Recommended Reading: The Bhagavad Gita by Jack Hawley and

The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi

**Session 1: The immortality and nature of Soul and its journey through Karma Yoga**

Life long quest for answers to questions such as: who we are, where we came from and where we are going. How did we end up on this planet we call mother earth in this vastly unknown space called Universe? Science cannot answer these questions and we turn to religion. We would discuss Hindu answers as time tested through at least 5000 years; perhaps, much longer.

Hindu thinking is compatible with all other major religions when it comes to the idea of a Supreme God, who is one but in Hindu thinking has many manifestations. He has come to earth to reestablish Dharma (righteousness) over and over again in various incarnations. Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and so on. There is also universal agreement that there exists a Soul in all of us; in all living beings. This soul (Atman) is a part of the BIG SOUL (Paramatma; the GOD); came from it and will merge with it. The soul we possess is immortal, indestructible and is in a continuum journey passing through many lives until it gets liberated and merges with Paramatma.

Self-Realization is the realization that the soul resides in all of us. The soul moves on as the body wears out. Death and Birth are natural. The soul is immortal; has no attachments to this life and to this world. This realization is very difficult as we remain entangled in the worldly web. To see our soul as detached and liberated from worldly possessions is mind boggling. Body, mind and soul are separate.

Imagine that we are in a force field that occupies the universe and we are a part of it. The force lives in our bodies as we call it our soul for a while and then moves on. The eternal God is this force field that is all pervasive and all powerful.

The delusion that we are the body leads to ego. The soul lives in the body as we move from infancy through adulthood into old age. Death happens to the body and not to the soul. Contact of bodily senses with the world creates sorrow, happiness, heat and cold. These are worldly feelings and sensations and are transient in nature. Assert your true self (the existence of the soul) who you really are and you will face the world serenely. There by you assert immortality; not the mortality of the body or the transient nature of the world. The body is not real as it constantly changes but the soul residing within the body is real. The soul is never born nor does it die. When the body and its ego take over, death becomes frightening.

The soul is un-manifested; the human mind cannot perceive or conceive its existence. Before birth, the soul is un-manifested (non-materialized), so is our body. At birth, the body is manifested, the true self remains un-manifested. At death, the body becomes un-manifested and the un-manifested soul passes on. No need to grieve ones death as one’s true self never dies.

This journey of the soul is guided by the laws of Dharma and Karma. You are required to do worldly duties; no escape from doing your Dharma. In the process you are acquiring Karma.

Swa-Dharma: Personal Duty in Life

Responsibility to Self, the Atma, the Soul. Doing the right thing when required.

Lokika- Dharma: Worldly duty

Karma Yoga (Union with God through action): Actions not based on desire or personal reward are directed toward the soul, the true self within. With no selfish desires, you can achieve the utter concentration needed to reach union with God: this is Karma Yoga.

Work hard in the world, but for work’s sake only. You have every right to work (act) but you should not crave the fruits of it. Do not get attached to the results, favorable or unfavorable. Desire for the fruits brings worry about possible failure. Anxiety can rob energy and lead to inaction. Duty uncontaminated by desire leads to inner peacefulness and increased effectiveness. This is the art of living a life of real achievement.

To work without desire sounds impossible. To do this, simply substitute thoughts of divinity for thoughts of desire. Fix your heart on the divine not on desire or outcomes. Be even tempered in success or failure. Equanimity is union with God; it is yoga.

Work done with anxiety over results produces inferior work. Detachment to results leads to equanimity of execution and divine results. Unite your heart with God and then pursue the worldly duties.

A person that has discovered the true self has found real bliss and is the **illumined one**. This person is unperturbed by sorrow or adversity and is free from attachment, fear and anger. The illumined one withdraws one’s senses from the worldly attractions like the turtle pulls its limbs into the shell to protect itself. Attachment to worldly sense objects lead to selfish desires. Thwarted desires create anger. From anger arises delusion; this clouds the reason and leads to loss of discrimination. Those that restrain their senses, steady the mind and free themselves from both attachment and aversion are the illumined ones.

**Session 2: Karma Yoga (the path of action)**

Do your Dharma (Worldly Duty) but without any attachment or desire for its fruits. Pursue divinity (the greater good) in everything you do with no expectations of returns.

You cannot shirk worldly duties with the idea of renouncing and detaching. Nature abhors inaction. Even our hearts beat every moment. Action is inherent throughout the nature. The vibrating atom, the planets, moons, galaxies are all in a state of motion. Being motionless is not inaction; is not renunciation. Engage in action but with full control of mind and senses. The work you do should contribute directly or indirectly to the greater good of humanity.

Karma invariably ties to the wheel of birth and death, but not when performed as an act of sacrifice without any expectations of fruits in return. Tie the fruits to Divinity. Act selflessly without thinking of personal benefits. Selfless karma means offering, helping and being dedicated to the welfare of all humanity. Selfless service (karma) is worship. Serving humanity is serving God. When you engage in selfless service, your desires are fulfilled, unasked. Righteous people give more than they receive.

All life is born of and nourished and sustained by selfless action. Food that nourishes all living creatures is sustained by water from heaven freely given; not to mention the sun light and air. Eating food should be merely to sustain life; you eat to live and not live to eat. Eat only what you need; then it is a selfless act.

Selfless karma (Sacrifice) is the noblest form of action. Work performed in the right attitude of mind becomes sacrifice which has divinity in it. When people perform service as sacrifice, no matter what their work or profession is, the universe becomes elevated and sublime.

Many think that “I am the doer” and with that comes the ego. All actions are performed by worldly nature, not by the soul, which is beyond all karma. When the soul is identified with the body it resides in, the ego arises.

What drives us away from selfless karma into selfish deeds? This awful force is desire. Selfish desires are insatiable; the more you feed them, the more you crave. It is a bottomless pit. Anger is always linked to desire. The desire-anger combination is the most formidable enemy. Desires cloud our spiritual light (true self, soul) and our ability to discriminate. Greed is desire at highly magnified stage. When you kill desire, you recapture your senses, mind and intellect and the splendor of soul will shine.

Realizing the truth of Atma (soul)’s existence (self-realization) is the principal weapon for eradicating desire. Lack of selfish desire will set you on a path of selfless karma and divinity.

People say that the sun sets and rises; he is merely out of sight. So is our soul; it is neither born nor dead. It runs through many births and deaths. Even the Paramatma (God) is born by choice assuming a body to protect Dharma. The avataras of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus.. are testimonials. The soul’s journey through multiple incarnations is governed by the law of karma. The eventual destination is the merger with Parmatma. The paths may be different but the goal is the same. You can be in any profession and your pursuit of selfless karma is what gives you the passage to divinity.

The truly wise person (the yogi, the illumined one) recognizes inaction in action and action in inaction. There is apparent action taking place at the worldly level and inaction within the individual and vice versa.

Truly wise people are in the world but not consumed by it. They are busy with earthly matters but untouched by karma. Not seeking the fruits, they do not suffer inner turmoil caused by attachment and desire. They know that they are not the body, the doer. They indeed are the instrument. Disengagement from desire for the fruits of their action is the key to their success. Expecting nothing, they keep the mind and senses under control, they incur no negative karma even while acting in the world. All karma melts away when one performs one’s duties in the spirit of sacrifice or devotion. Through selflessness, one reaches the Divine.

Although action in ordinary form is binding, it is liberating when transformed to worship.

The knowledge of the self is spiritual knowledge. This knowledge reduces all three karmas, the current, the future and the inherited.

Can we gain happiness and divinity through renouncing everything we possess or is the same possible through the karmic path we are on? Yes, you can in either path. The karmic path is the most suitable for most provided it is the selfless karma that one pursues. The path of action is pursued with the spirit of renunciation! Then the paths of renunciation and action converge.

***Session 3: The Realm of Nature***

**Eight basic components**: **earth, water, fire, air, ether (space), mind, intellect (higher mind) and ego (basic sense of being a physical self) -** All of them belong to the cosmos, the world of nature. The spirit, the consciousness, interacts with the eight components of the nature. This is the Paramatma, Purusha, the divine consciousness that is all pervasive and exists in all of us.

All nature consists of **three characteristics called Gunas**: the first is goodness (sattva), the second is passionate activity (rajas) and the third is darkness, indolence, inertia (tamas).

When you know the true nature of material world, your grief is destroyed. When you understand the true nature of the spiritual world, you achieve bliss.

Further defined, **these eight components expand to 24 components** in the field. First there is the **“un-manifested” nature**. An example of this is a seed soaked in water that swells and sprouts and manifests. From this first comes the higher mind, the **intellect,** the discriminatory faculty, the ability to distinguish between the real and the not-real (between the spiritual self and the worldly self). From the **intellect comes the ego** which causes one to be aware of one’s self as apparently a separate entity. **From the ego, you next recognize your mind,** which through the senses processes messages received from the field and carry them to the intellect. The mind has **ten sense organs** to work from: **five organs of perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell and the five organs of action (vocal cords, hands, feet, the reproductive and generative organs and elimination organs).** From these **ten organs** we develop **five objects of the senses, which are sound, feeling, aspect, taste and smell**. Then you have the **five basic elements of earth, water, air, fire and space.** These are the 24 constituents of the inert matter that comprise the field. There is the mysterious vital force, ***the soul (the Atma) which infuses life into all of this material.*** Altogether we have 25 constituents of the Field.

***The knower of the Field*** will be humble, gentle, forgiving of any hurt received and harmonized in thought, word and deed. Such a person is detached from egoism, selfishness and the attractions of the world; does not see himself as the body-mind complex that suffers the pains of bondage to birth, aging, death and rebirth; knows instead that he is the Atma, the Eternal Reality beyond all that; meets the inevitable good and bad of life with an even mind.

The cause of our body is nature, but the cause of our aliveness is Spirit. This Sprit-self that takes residence in a material body forgets its true nature (Atma) and mistakenly identifies itself with that body. Then it gets attached to the nature, exhibited by the three gunas in varying amounts from person to person. The predominant mode may be generally calm (satvic) or active (rajasic) or lethargic. This individual now is a part of the nature and struggles to achieve salvation from the cycle of birth and death. The divinity in you is beyond all nature and gunas. This realization will free you from all karmas and there will not be any motivation to seek another birth. Then you will do your duties and yet watch life in total peace. The paths to this knowledge are several: meditation (dhyana yoga), acquiring knowledge (jnana yoga), and selfless action (karma yoga). All paths lead to nirvana and to pure love for God (bhakti yoga).

All beings come into existence when the matter (the nature, the field) and the Sprit unite. When the matter of this union dies, the spirit part remains standing.

As there is Divinity in all, you should harm no one. The one that really knows Atma will not injure another Atma.

***The three forces of Nature: the three Gunas***

Sattva (purity, light, calm), rajas (passion and action) and tamas (ignorance, darkness and inertia). We have all three and we are governed by the one that predominates. A sattvic person is rare; is calm, collected and harmonious. Rajasics are very common, full of restless energy. Tamasics are also very common; they are lethargic and unmotivated to act. These Gunas bind the Self (Atma) to the worldly body and thus to life, death and rebirth.

The path to nirvana requires the move from tamasic to rajasic to sattvic. Even sattvics can suffer from attachment to good pleasure like seeking knowledge which leads to desire and grief. Rajasics are naturally driven by desires, hence attachments to action and its fruits. This attachment breeds greed and anger. Tamasics are ignorant and indolent; they forego energy to work and ability to maintain composure.

Over the course of the day, all three gunas ebb and flow within each person. Sattva can rise when you overcome rajas and tamas. Rajas rules when sattva and tamas are weak. Tamas prevails when the other two are dormant and this leads to lethargy.

For sattvics, seeing is sharper, hearing is acute, thinking and actions are steadier and precise. For rajasics, it is impatience, greed, longing and restlessness that compels them to action. Tamasics see laziness and are uncaring and bewildered.

Our next birth is influenced by the state of mind at the time of death. Sattvics go to heaven (nirvana), rajasics are reborn as they have many unfulfilled desires. Tamasics are reborn as subhuman or lower animal.

The path to transcend the gunas is to follow one of the three yogas: devote to the Divine (Devotion Yoga), serve Divinity (Action Yoga) and act with the knowledge that Divinity is present in all and in everything you do (Knowledge Yoga).

***Session 4: Values***

**First the divine traits:**

Fearlessness, purity of heart and emotions, steadfastness in pursuit of realization of Atma, charity and control of senses.

Sacrifice (the spirit of giving), study of scriptures, purification (austerity), straightforwardness (integrity, sincerity) and Ahimsa (not hurting mentally, physically or emotionally)

Truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation (detachment from worldly attachments), equanimity and not slandering

Compassion, not coveting, gentleness, modesty, not fickle but with vigor.

Forgiveness, fortitude (courage, endurance), cleanliness (clean body and mind), no hatred and no pride.

**Next the degenerate qualities: (not to dwell on but to guard against)**

Pride (ostentation, hypocrisy), pompousness (arrogance), vanity (self-conceit), anger, harshness (coarseness, sternly judgmental) and absence of discrimination between right and wrong, truth and non-truth, real and not real.

No sense of truth or dharma (right conduct); Non believer of Divinity; The world is a dog-eat-dog place with no moral foundation.

Serve a negative purpose; Cause destruction and suffering; Self-indulgent, arrogant, vain and prideful.

Three gates to hell: desire, greed and anger

**Three kinds of faith:** Every individual is born into one of three kinds of faith.

Sattvic, rajasic or tamasic temperament (personality).

Sacrifice: is Sattvic when it is offered up for its own sake with no selfish desire in it; no expectation of reward or attachment to the fruits of the offering.

Sacrifice is rajasic when performed for self-glorification, for the sake of show and the benefits it will bring- giving with string attached.

Tamasic persons offer up empty sacrifice devoid of solemnity-giving to unworthy causes and people.

**Two kinds of renunciation:**

Sanyasa and Tyaga

It is impossible for a human to fully renunciate (to give up all action) while still in the body. But the person who detaches from the fruits of actions can be regarded as the true renunciate. True renunciation is relinquishing all desire for personal reward. Those that are attached and do things for selfish purposes will accrue karma, good, bad or mixed depending on the actions.

***Summary:***

Hindu way of life is derived from the learnings documented in the ancient Vedas that were synthesized in a 5000 year old poetry called Bhagavad Gita (the Divine Poetry). The immortality of the Soul and its journey through the cycle of life and birth and its eventual liberation and oneness with Paramatama is governed by the laws of Dharma, Karma and Ahimsa.

While the existence of the Soul and its life cycle may not be fathomed, the reality of Dharma and Karma cannot be escaped. Conducting one’s Dharma in a selfless Karmic way will help one lead a happier life.

Gita way of life rationalizes the existence and purpose of life as we know and experience.

OM TAT SAT: OM stands for the Divinity and chanted universally. TAT means all actions are God’s and not one’s own. SAT signifies that the actions performed are noble.