

Bhagavad Gītā with Commentary by Bābā Hari Dāss

Bābā Hari Dāss

Bābā Hari Dāss, or Bābājī, is a life long renunciate and yogi, and the inspiration for Mount Madonna Center, Salt Spring Center, and Śrī Rām Orphanage. He was initiated in the Vairāgi Vaiṣṇava order in 1942 by Bābā Raghubar Dāssjī Mahārāj who was a Saṁskṛt scholar and renunciate. Bābājī took a vow of silence in 1952 and communicated his vast knowledge of yoga by example and by writing on a small chalkboard. His formal instruction and authored books include the topics of Aṣṭaṅga Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Tantra Yoga, Yoga Sūtras, Bhagavad Gītā, Pañcadāsi, Sāṁkhya Karika and Ayurveda.

Bābājī began his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā as a support for his students who asked him to explain this important expression of classical Indian philosophy. This commentary was read and studied with Bābājī weekly, beginning in 1980.

Bhagavad Gītā

In ancient India, when people wanted to teach spiritual lessons, they did so through symbolic stories. The Bhagavad Gītā is one such story. Gītā refers to poems that are sung and so Bhagavad Gītā is known as *The Song of God*. The Bhagavad Gītā has achieved popularity throughout the ages, primarily because its teachings are universal, practical, and accessible. The verses of the Bhagavad Gītā explain the theory and practice of a full range of the Indian spiritual tradition including Sāṁkhya Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jñāna Yoga, and Karma Yoga.

The Bhagavad Gītā tells the story of the inner battle that rages between the positive and negative energies that are within each individual. This battle is waged as we struggle to achieve self-development and ultimately freedom from the bondage of ego, attachment and desires.

The Bhagavad Gītā gives the reasons to engage in this difficult battle, the methods to use, the difficulties encountered, and the promise that our true nature, the Self, can be realized by fighting and overcoming our negative tendencies.

The account of the Bhagavad Gītā is the symbolic story of Arjuna, who represents the embodied soul seeking liberation from the bondage and afflictions of ignorance. Ignorance refers to the human being's misidentification with the body-mind complex and the illusion of separation from the divine that this misidentification causes. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who represents the higher consciousness principle that exists within us all, explains the eternal and unchanging character of consciousness and teaches that the body and its sensory experiences are transitory. Śrī Kṛṣṇa counsels Arjuna to understand that the world operates in pairs of opposites, such as pleasure and pain, and urges Arjuna to treat them with an even mind.

Yoga in the Bhagavad Gītā is defined as both the practice and perfection of union with higher consciousness. Śrī Kṛṣṇa shows how each type of yoga supports the others. All of the teachings on yoga in the Bhagavad Gītā are presented within the context of *dharma* or virtuous life. *Dharma* is general in the sense that there are universal guidelines for all human beings and it is specific in that each individual has nature born qualities and particular *saṁskaras*, or latent impressions in the mind, that help determine one's *dharma*.

Arjuna's situation at the beginning of the battle is much like what each human being faces when contemplating spiritual choices in life. In the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes it clear that if one fights with selfish motives for the fruits of one's actions, one will feel responsible for the pain or pleasure, success or failure of those actions. If one fights with selfless motive, developing evenness of mind in pleasure and pain and in gain and loss, then no binding mental impressions will be created. One that fights the inner battle with persistence and courage will eventually be freed from the cycle of birth and death and attain perfect peace.

Mahābhārata

The Bhagavad Gītā is a teaching scripture imbedded in a larger text called the **Mahābhārata**. The central drama is a great war, which has an historical foundation, between related ruling factions for control of wealth and kingdom. The opposite sides in the conflict are depicted as good and evil: five brothers, the Pāṇḍavas, embody the good and 100 brothers, the Kauravas, embody the evil. However, it is not so simple. Even within the good, there are faults. For example, the elder brother of the Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira, who is considered the embodiment of *dharma* (virtue, righteousness, truth), has a weakness for gambling, a vice. On the side of evil, there are also those with virtuous qualities. For example, Karna shows the virtue of loyalty.

In addition to the drama of the struggle of good and evil, as the divine and human co-mingle, we have a transcendent personality: Śrī Kṛṣṇa, an avatar, God incarnate. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is involved in the conflict, but does not fight. He supports the Pāṇḍavas, the virtuous, but does not deny or underestimate the Kauravas, the non-virtuous.

The Bhagavad Gītā begins as Arjuna despairs over the prospect of the death and destruction that will come about as he and his brothers fight to win their kingdom, their rightful heritage. He asks Śrī Kṛṣṇa to bring him to the center of the battlefield so that he can survey the opposing armies. As he looks he suddenly and fully comprehends that the only result of the battle will be destruction of his entire family. He identifies with the body-mind complex and is overwhelmed by attachment to all those who are related to him and who will be killed in battle. Even though Arjuna was the greatest archer in the world, he is overcome by despair and dejection. He sets down his bow and tells Śrī Kṛṣṇa, "I won't fight. I am going to give up my inheritance, renounce the world, and go to the forest. Let them have their kingdom."

This is the setting of the Bhagavad Gītā. Arjuna knows that at the end of the fight, regardless of who wins, civilization, as they know it, will be destroyed. Śrī Kṛṣṇa imparts the teachings of the Gītā to Arjuna, whose *dharma* is a warrior, to give him the moral fiber to fight. Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna in all the various yogas; including Bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion, Jñāna Yoga, the yoga of knowledge, Rāja Yoga, the yoga of psycho-physical exercises, and finally, Karma Yoga, the yoga of action.

Symbolism of the Bhagavad Gītā

Throughout the **Mahābhārata**, sacred teachings are conveyed through symbols. The aspirant must strive to understand the secret meanings embedded in the text. The Pāṇḍavas symbolize human positive qualities such as righteousness, truthfulness and devotion; the Kauravas symbolize human negative qualities such as greed, jealousy and deceit. Additionally, the five Pāṇḍava brothers represent the positive force that is the rightful owner of the "kingdom" of the human mind-body complex. Their one hundred Kaurava cousin-brothers represent the negative forces that take control over our mind-body complex. These positive and negative forces have the same source, the ahaṁkhar (ego). That is why they are so closely related, like cousin-brothers.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa symbolizes the Self, pure consciousness, the absolute, Brahma, OM (sat cit ānanda or existence, consciousness, bliss solidified), the infinite, changeless, non-dual reality, or the supreme being.

Arjuna is the pivotal character in the story. He represents purity and the striving aspirant. Symbolically, Arjuna is fighting with the forces of darkness, ignorance, limitations, and negativities of all types that bind the soul in the cycle of birth and death. He symbolizes the embodied soul, bound in a state of ignorance of his true Self, struggling to attain that truth.