

Introduction: The Bhagavad Gita as the Journey of Consciousness

In this class I will introduce the Bhagavad Gita in light of what we talked about last time: the journey of consciousness. We are basically all consciousness. Our original nature is pure unadulterated truth: truth, consciousness, presence. These are all words describing the same quality. But initially consciousness had no identity, no sense of itself. It was pure wide open consciousness. It only began to experience itself when it descended out of its original quiescent condition into domains of greater and greater density of matter. Then it became entangled and identified with matter, forgot its original nature, and became whatever it had merged with in matter.

In the process it became a human being who woke up in matter, matter waking up to itself; that is fully mature consciousness in matter. Consciousness believes it is its thoughts, its body, its feelings, its sensations, its story, and its beliefs. Over many lifetimes—birth, death, birth, death—eventually this identification of consciousness with matter grows weak until it comes to the place where it begins to disengage. The beginning of this separation is a turbulent period, a difficult period. This point of transition is what we refer to as the point of dejection, where the soul, the consciousness that has been associated with a body, becomes aware of its bondage, but viscerally below the surface awareness, below the outer oriented sensory intelligence. It is a turbulence that is going on deep in the vibration of consciousness itself in the body, so it is hard to know what is going on. Consciousness is beginning to try to separate from its identity with matter. The journey is reaching its end and it is looking to break free.

(3:17) So this first process is where the return journey starts. (Look at the downloadable chart.) At that point you are a personal individual, you are an individual, separate from all other individuals and other things, and you have a completely separated sense of self. The sense of self is personal; it tends to take everything personally. It is about me, and everything is related to itself. This personal individual is the state of bondage where that which can turn its attention on anything turns its attention on its own self. Your relationships, your job, your money, your many beliefs, your opinions, your stories, and your values are all about you. It thinks it is about other people, but it is about other people only in relationship to you. This is what ego is. It is endless self-referencing, so it takes everything personally. This self-referencing is because the ego doesn't know it is anything but its beliefs or its thoughts or its ideas or its mood or its feelings; this is bondage.

From that condition consciousness goes through a process of separation and begins to lose the fully convincing identification it had as a personal individual and becomes less and less personal. It eventually separates from matter and comes to its own nature. When it returns to the body it is of a completely different paradigm, a completely different way to be. Each stage of the journey creates these shifts in consciousness.

So the Bhagavad Gita describes the journey from this point back to the original purity of what we are. This is a compelling journey. If you take and turn the chart upside down it is more like a falling. We quit struggling to keep on the surface of life. We quit treading water. We finally exhaust ourselves and start falling back into our original nature. But the ego keeps fearing this process; it keeps struggling because it only knows itself when it is on the surface. As it starts descending into the subconscious and inconscient and less known parts of itself it is afraid it will die. So the spiritual journey can also be seen as a process of descending, of letting go, and in that process falling back into our original condition.

It takes energy to keep an ego going. The characteristic of our separate identity is that we are in endless activity, so much so that we have to rest every night because we are always struggling to prove we exist, to prove we are real, to prove that what we believe is right and what other people believe is wrong. So we exhaust ourselves. It is this endless activity. You might say that dejection is a form of a more foundational exhaustion.

(7:20) The Bhagavad Gita maps this return journey. The journey has a number of stages that are reflected in the 18 chapters of the Gita. It is divided into three major segments. Chapters 1 through 6 deal with the struggle of the individual identity separating itself from its own personal issues. It is moving from an individual personal into an individual impersonal, stepping out of taking everything personally and stepping back and getting some witnessing. The first six chapters take us to a state of the being or the self. It concludes in the sixth chapter. Each chapter reflects a part of the process.

From Chapters 7 through 12 we begin to experience the more universal domains, the more shared archetypal structures of the formation of consciousness in matter. If you turn this chart upside down you begin to descend into the subconscious, into the domains no longer on the surface level, into worlds where consciousness is not as much outer sensory-oriented, but more internal. This descent into the subconscious is more and more shared by all beings. We move out of our individual toward the universal; we begin to have a greater sense that we are a reflection of the whole, a piece of the whole. Our anger, our fear, our need to be right, our hatred, our love are shared by everyone and as you descend and you begin to experience this you get in touch with the fact that everything is not so much mine but I am connected to everybody else who is also unconsciously connected to me. We begin to move out of our identity as an individual into a more universal identity. We take things less personally.

In the first part of this process we move from the individual personal to the sixth chapter which is individual impersonal; then we begin to move from the individual impersonal into the individual universal. This movement of the individual universal goes on until the twelfth chapter. It is a movement where we descend to a certain point and then we become stable. Then we descend to the next point and begin to move into the radiance of what we are in truth, and this radiance has much greater power than what our individual consciousness can hold. It takes a universal consciousness, an expanded universal consciousness that has disengaged from its identity with matter sufficiently so that the universe can come in and be experienced and felt.

(11:08) This process has two aspects that correspond to our mental nature and our feeling nature. Our feeling nature includes the body and heart. Our mental nature includes spaciousness and awareness. In the Gita this second part has two major stages. First there is meeting yourself as the universal impersonal, the vast, unlimited awareness. These are usually glimpses. The second stage is meeting the universal personal, meeting what we would call God, or all the emanations of the god forces into the creation. These were all expressions of the original Sat as it first began to manifest and move Itself out into creation. Along the way it created these vast egos, these vast beings of great power and force by which this universe is constantly being maintained. They are the archetypal structures that are holding the world as we know it in place. When we descend we begin to experience these beings, these energies within ourselves and we begin to move into relationship with them. We call it moving into a relationship with God.

The second phase of the Gita addresses two issues: who we are as truth—the unchanging Sat, pure consciousness—and who we are as God, which is the expression of that pure consciousness in its universal aspects. So the next six chapters address the issue of merger—the individual soul merges into the ocean of truth as pure awareness. Buddha called this Nirvana. Or the soul disappears into the Ocean of God and gods, which is called merger.

The next stage of the Gita, Chapters 13 through 18, deals with what happens to a being who has gone through that process. This last part is the manifestation, bringing it into the individual body, integrating all the experiences and openings that have occurred in the consciousness, making it real, making it lived. And then the individual body becomes like a portal into the universal for either Truth or God. And through that individual body the universe can enter into the domain of surface life. It can be transmitted or received or accessed. So in this last stage from chapters 13 through 18 the consciousness, which has merged into its original nature, now returns back to the world.

(14:41) The symptoms of each of these stages is, first, the capacity for natural meditation. It feels like you are being meditated, rather than you meditating. You are being pulled to be in this feeling state or this awareness state. In your awareness your mind will expand and the thoughts will quiet; or it will be in your body where there will be a feeling of bliss; or in your heart where there will be a feeling of connection or love. When that is coming naturally it means you have stabilized in the sixth chapter, the stage of meditation.

The next stage is much rarer, the state of consciousness that says, “I am That.” It is as if the identity reaches a point where instead of saying “I am a body with a spirit,” it says “I am a Spirit with a body.” When the identity has switched from being an individual that has spiritual experiences to being that which is spiritual having human experiences, that is the second stage of the journey. When you have stabilized in knowing yourself as Truth, or “I am That,” or as God, or as absorption in God, then you are in merger. Your individual consciousness has merged into the ocean. The drop has merged into the ocean but comes out. But this sense that I am the ocean and I am not what comes out gets stronger and stronger until that sense of self is very broad, very expanded, not personal—impersonal in its knowing of itself as the All. This can be an experience or an awareness. You can know it

as extraordinarily powerful experiences in your body or as extraordinarily clear insights, revelations, recognitions, and realizations. That realization says, “I am God” or “I am Truth.”

The final stage of the journey is when that consciousness chooses to descend back into the creation and manifest itself. That point is reflected in Chapter 15 called the Purushottama Yoga, where you have become fully conscious of both yourself as an individual and yourself as the universal—both personal and impersonal at the same time. From that place of absolute truth you recover your ability over time to descend back into the world and act as a personal individual while remaining universal and impersonal. So it is a concurrent state. The Gita reflects this in the Chapters from 13 through 18 in particular, describing the nature of how creation works. It is a series of revelatory experiences that lets the consciousness know how the creation works and it gives the universal consciousness that is returning to the universal all the information that it needs to have to begin that higher consciousness into the world.

So the Gita has three major sections. Chapters 1 through 6 is the typical spiritual journey which takes you to the realization of the self; Chapters 7 through 12 take you to the realization of God or Truth; and Chapters 13 through 18 deal with the manifestation.