



Your Personal Pilgrimage

How This Commentary Differs from Others

For the past nine years, I have been privileged to facilitate study groups of the Bhagavad Gita with participants from all religions and walks of life. I have witnessed again and again that it doesn't matter if you are passionate about a particular religion, don't have a religion, or have simply become disenfranchised. Study of the Bhagavad Gita makes a Methodist a better Methodist, a Jew a better Jew, a Catholic a better Catholic, a Buddhist a better Buddhist. For those not connected with a faith tradition or perhaps feeling disenfranchised, I have often seen the study rekindle a remembering, a yearning, to reconnect with the One about whom all religions speak.

I am a hands-on, how-does-it-show-up-in-daily-life teacher. I am most interested in how we navigate the storms of life when the rudder breaks and darkness falls. This is where we meet Arjuna at the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita and where we meet ourselves each time fear descends. And like us, Arjuna is an ordinary human. So, as we listen in on Krishna's (God's) council to Arjuna, we know with certainty that He is speaking directly to us as well.

There are very useful translations and commentaries of the Bhagavad Gita which provide in-depth analysis of this great epic poem. This book

is different. It does not pretend to be a scholarly or an exhaustive commentary on the multiple levels of meaning of the Bhagavad Gita. There are many authors more qualified than I to offer such commentary. I have a different goal. The intention here is to provide a description of the Bhagavad Gita as an allegory of the spiritual journey and to distill the essence of each chapter in such a way as to make the concepts readily available for application to everyday living.

This book invites you, the reader, to embark on your own personal pilgrimage. Do not shrink from its challenge. The Potter's wheel awaits you. The touch of grace will shape you and the fire will transform you. This book is filled with real-world stories and examples of how ordinary people have found the courage to stand up and do what needs to be done. How ordinary people have discovered that when they speak, live and act from their deepest impulse, Truth is served. How ordinary people have *fallen in love with that which is the same in all of us and how that experience changes everything.*

Simply, I am an ordinary woman who loves God. One of the things I tell myself every day is *I am enough and I am nothing.* To me, this is the entire essence of Krishna's message to Arjuna. When Arjuna succumbs to despondency on the battlefield, Krishna admonishes him to get up and get over it! He reminds him that he is a skilled warrior and there's a war to be fought *and* victory is guaranteed if he will only take refuge in Him. Like Arjuna, we too are *enough*, as we have a unique part to play in the Divine plan. And, like Arjuna, we are *nothing* when—in those glorious moments—we take refuge in our God, crying out in sweet surrender, "Thy will be done!"

And, in an instant, we are free.

Welcome Home.



Why Study the Bhagavad Gita?

From Sorrow to Joy

Bhagavad Gita means *Song of God*. Its purpose is to bring about an end to sorrow through the realization that *we are That which we seek*. All of us seek peace, happiness and joy, but *within* ourselves is not usually the first place we look. Instead, we look outside ourselves, searching from place to place, experience to experience, teacher to teacher for *That which we already are*. It never occurs to us that what we're looking for is literally as close as our breath—that we *already have all we need to be content in any circumstance*.

In our desperate search, we overlook the place of true joy—our inner sanctuary, where joy resides, not in response to a particular set of circumstances, but simply as a humble response to continued self-acceptance. Here, *all* is received. Here, the quiet truth whispering softly from the center of our being can be heard. Here, joy is immune to the changing tides of outward circumstance. By turning inward to embrace all, we find what we have so desperately been seeking. It's called freedom.

But, we are not aware. So, we search.

And, then, something happens. Maybe it's an event that unceremo-

niously catapults us out of our comfortable existence. An unexpected diagnosis, accident, loss of a job, divorce, death of a loved one. Or maybe it's just waking up from a long period of sleepy boredom that shouts, *something's got to change!* Like Arjuna, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory, feeling overwhelmed, inadequate, unable or just simply unwilling to meet the challenges ahead. Our rudder is broken and night is falling fast. Desperately, we may continue searching for someone or something *outside* ourselves to save us. But, this time, nothing satisfies.

It's a critical juncture. We can continue the old ways of coping or we can choose a less familiar route called *surrender*. At first, this surrender route does not appear to be such an attractive option. We fear the loss of control. But this time, as skeptical as we are of the surrender route, we are even more reluctant to repeat the same old patterns. And, so it is with Arjuna. His rationalizations for not rising up to do his duty aren't working. His familiar ways of thinking aren't providing escape from his self-imposed bondage. Overwhelmed and desperate, he chooses *surrender* and cries out to his Lord for guidance.

And, where he thought he would lose himself, he finds himself.

But, the old ways are not so easily shed. Again and again, Arjuna, and we too, must choose. Over time, we start to trust this new route called surrender, for a joy comes that passes all our old understanding. Slowly, we start to trust the Potter within. We begin to suspect that each experience is just a stroke of the Potter's hand molding us for a higher purpose. We begin to see that surrender makes us free.

And, more and more, we start to fall in love. Not with what used to make us happy or even with what we think will make us happy—but with the Potter Himself, *for nothing will satisfy now short of the Potter Himself*. Loneliness and our sense of separateness fade. We start to see with new eyes as the Potter reveals His face—the face of God—everywhere.

There is God bagging our groceries, cashing our check, finding the right size shirt, bringing our food. We start to notice that it doesn't matter what mood folks are in, what they have or haven't done, what they believe or don't believe. All we see is God. And when we hear an ambulance or fire engines or learn about "collateral damage" on the news, our heart aches for the one whose name we don't even know. Because now no one is outside the bounds of our love. *No one*.

Now, we love our neighbor as our self.

And, like water to parched lips, this is the only joy that matters. It is all that can truly sustain us through the changing seasons of our life. It is our compass when the storm hits, the rudder breaks and darkness falls. It is what is left when we fear all is lost. It is what brings us to our prayer mat. It is what looks at the enemy and sees our self. It is what can raise the sword of courage to combat hatred without hating. It is what can love the saint and sinner the same.

This joy sees what's the same in all of us.

And having seen, knows.

And knowing, is never the same.