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SPEAKER:

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SPEAKER:

What do you think of when you think of yoga? Poses on a mat? Perfect alignment? Reaching far beyond your toes?

The beauty of yoga is that it's much more than a sequence. Yoga is asana and also activism. Yoga is about a quiet, internal journey. And a growing, powerful outward voice.

Yoga is action, curiosity, and empathy. Join us as we celebrate Yoga. The diversity of the millions who practice it. And the power it gives us all because we are all for yoga. and yoga is all for us.

POOJA SHARMA:

Hello and welcome to this Yoga Alliance session: Ancient Text and Modern Applications. Today is part one of a three-part series on What the Bhagavad Gita is, and Why it Matters. This workshop is eligible for continuing credit education, one hour in philosophy.

My name is Pooja Sharma. My sister and I cofounded Soul Power Yoga. My parents had a Gita group that would meet every Sunday to discuss and hum and I'm excited about this conversation. We teach philosophy as a big part of our programs and I'm excited to tell you about Hari.

He is our presenter today and he has been a yoga teacher, created online philosophy workshops, and is an author and today he will talk to you about the Gita in part one of a three-part series. With that, I will hand it off to Hari to take us through this beautiful discussion we are about to have.

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Thank you very much for that kind introduction and thank all of you who are joining us live, and all of you joining us after the fact. It's a great pleasure for me to be here with you. I'm looking forward to sharing some thoughts with you about an Ancient Text with Modern Applications, specifically the Bhagavad-Gita.

This is a three-part series and today we will speak about what the Bhagavad-Gita is and why it matters. We will talk a little bit about the history and significance, and in so doing we will answer the question: what is the Bhagavad-Gita anyway?

We will speak about the Gita's baseline philosophical proposition: one plus one equals two, the understanding of which allows us to understand the entire rest of what Krishna has to say to his friend Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

We will look at its overarching theme, the central pole around which the entire Gita revolves. We will talk about the three levels of experience in the Bhagavad-Gita and this is analogous to the literary structure of the Bhagavad-Gita. It moves back and forth along a fixed structure and if you know what the structure is, then it's easier to follow the dialogue.

We will speak about who the Gita is for and it may come as something as a surprise to you but it is actually not for everyone. Since you are here, it's a pretty good indication that the Bhagavad-Gita may be for you.

All of this adds up to, what I hope, will be information that will make it easier for you to enter into the Gita's world and to look at the world from the lens that the Gita gives us, as opposed to looking at it from the lens that the modern world hands us.

That's our objective for today. We will begin with the history and significance of the Bhagavad-Gita. It's a summary study of the Upanisads. It's also known as that on part of it being a condensed version of the teachings. Being the philosophical portion of the four --Vedas, which are the original texts of yoga in the tradition that we trace back to the Indian subcontinent.

It is also specifically an episode in the sixth book of the Mahabharata. It's an epic story longer than the Iliad and the Odyssey combined. It's action, inquiry, and adventures - there's only one boring part where two guys sit around and talk about philosophy and that is the most famous part: the Bhagavad-Gita.

This is useful information. It's good to know about the history of the Gita, insofar as it may satisfy one's intellectual curiosity and certainly in academic study of the Gita, it would involve understanding something about its historical development.

But it is actually important from the standpoint of the real purpose of the Bhagavad-Gita and why it exists. The key to understanding the Gita isn't to collect more information about it. That would be a technical change to collect more information. What's actually required is an adaptive change, to be open to the possibility of a completely different worldview than the ones that we are accustomed to, particularly Western readers who grew up in or around Western monotheistic traditions.

Or, those who have come to adopt a modern or even postmodern worldview because the Gita's worldview is actually very different from all of those things. And therefore, requires some willingness to step out of the known and into what may be unfamiliar territory.

Another way to look at what the Bhagavad-Gita is: it is a message of hope. But not the kind of hope we

usually hope for. The hero of the Bhagavad-Gita, Arjuna, is feeling hopeless in his situation, is such that he seems to have some pretty good reasons to feel hopeless.

And in order to instill hope in his hopeless friend, Krishna changes the whole level of the conversation. The hope that we usually hope for is happily ever after. That's very difficult to come by because it requires that we arrange the universe in such a way so that it aligns with our desires.

The universe is very big and we are very small. And it actually is very difficult and rare for the universe to be put into alignment with our desires. And there's a different kind of happiness that does not depend on the alignment of the universe with our desires, and Krishna is going to illuminate it for Arjuna, and therefore for us, what that happiness is and how you get there from here.

This brings us to the first reason why the Bhagavad-Gita is still very relevant and why it has a modern application. We all need reasons to be hopeful and we all need reasons to feel optimistic about our prospects for happiness.

So we begin by changing our conception of happiness. It is also an explanation for how and why the world works the way it does. And it's a different kind of explanation than the ones we might normally be accustomed to hearing.

For one thing, it's an explanation based on metaphysics, which is to say from the Gita's point of view, the physical world comes into being from metaphysical principles, rather than from a modern or postmodern worldview where metaphysical effects are understood to be based in physical or biological causes. The Gita takes a very different view of this.

It also steps outside of our conception of explanations, insofar as, it deals with philosophical questions of why and not just how. If you were to Google why is the sky blue, what you will get is not the answer to "why is the sky blue?" - you will get an answer to how the sky is blue. And an explanation of how light from the sun bounces off of particles in the atmosphere, long molecules and short molecules, etc. But it doesn't say why blue as opposed to green or something else.

So in case you're wondering why the world works the way it does, the Bhagavad-Gita offers at least one explanation and it's up to us to decide if it makes sense.

The how equals metaphysics, an explanation of cause and effect that is probably different from what we are accustomed to. And the why is a theological philosophy. In the Bhagavad-Gita, theology and philosophy are baked in to the same cake. There is no theology and you import the philosophy from somewhere else. Or, there's no philosophy without theology - the two are completely integrated and that's also a little different from what we might be accustomed to.

Finally, it's a guide for transcending the world through engagement with the world and here's what I mean by this: here's what we know. Here's our one lifetime in the material world. The conventional wisdom is that we only live once. We are born, we stay for some time and then it comes to an end. This is what we know and this is how we think about things.

The Bhagavad-Gita zooms way out to put this one lifetime that we are currently experiencing into a much, much bigger spiritual context. And that spiritual context includes something that we may or may not have much of any recollection of, which is innumerable past lives that have brought us to this point.

The birth that we experience in this life, the circumstances of our coming into being or that appearance, actually has a big run up. We are not just popping into existence from a blank slate, but rather many, many lifetimes have preceded this one to lead up to our current situation.

And the world that we live in is composed of three metaphysical base elements known as the (Sanskrit term) because there are three of them, also kind of called the mode of goodness.

These three metaphysical elements combine together like primary colors to create every hue, tint, and shade of everything we experience in the world. They are hierarchical. The idea of yoga is to elevate one's consciousness to the platform of the quality of illumination and this acts as a launchpad into transcendental consciousness, which is beyond all of the material qualities altogether.

As we engage in yoga, our obligation to continue in this transmigration from one body to another, and one lifetime after another, decreases to the point where we burn up all of our past karma, or our obligations to appear in a body in the material world. And experience ourselves in our pure, joyful, eternal, spiritual condition.

However, the path to that experience takes us through the world and so we have movement in two directions at once. Usually, the complaint about the thinking of yoga as a way to transcend the world is that you are climbing up a ladder and leaving the world behind.

The Bhagavad-Gita's recommendation is not that we turn our backs on the world for the sake of our own self-realization, but rather that we find our self-realization through our engagement with the world.

So we have these two things going on at once: a horizontal movement through time as we engage with the world, in such a way as to cause the effect of vertical transcendence of the world at the same time. So that we are engaging with the world from a transcendental position, and therefore not becoming entangled in the world but rather being empowered to make a positive contribution to the

world. And in fact, the most positive contribution to the world, namely our own self-realization and contributing to the self-realization of everyone else.

So, all of this, the fact that the Gita is a summary study, the sixth book of the Mahabharata. The fact that it's a message of hope, an explanation of how and why the world works the way it does - and oh by the way, an explanation for how we have come to see how we are and why people act the way we do. Transcending the world through engaging with the world, all of this answers what is the Bhagavad-Gita.

One answer is the Bhagavad-Gita is a book of transcendental knowledge. That is how I have approached the Bhagavad-Gita in my own spiritual practice and if my testimony is worth anything, it is an approach to the Bhagavad-Gita that has served me reasonably well.

But wait! How exactly do we go from this conception of a single lifetime in the material world, with a beginning, middle, and end, to innumerable life times in the past and how many lifetimes in the future and how we can transcend our material conception of life by moving through these three qualities of material nature?

Let's take a closer look at these four interlocking metaphysical concepts that the Gita relies on to explain how this is. The first is the idea of the atma. It usually specifically refers to a person, a spiritual person, experiencing life in a material body. Roughly analogous to the soul itself, the spiritual individual symptomized by consciousness. Just see if there is a sentient being and there they are!

(Sanskrit term) is for the transmigration of the soul or the cycle of birth and death. Karma, one of the most misunderstood Sanskrit words that has made its way into the English lexicon, is an action that generates a reaction. It is specifically noted as something that creates births. Our actions are planting a seed that will not grow branches and produce a fruit for quite some time. If we accept the idea that we have had past lives that have created the life that we are living now, then it's not that much disbelief to think that the actions that we will take in this life will have a ripple effect out into future lives.

And then (Sanskrit term), are the three qualities of material nature. This is a three-part series and I will get into detail about these terms in a later episode but right now I just want to focus on this first idea, this proposition that we are all atmas, eternal spiritual beings having temporary spiritual experiences.

This comes up as the very first substantive instruction in the Bhagavad-Gita: the 12th verse in the second chapter, where Krishna tells Arjuna, "there has never been a time when I did not exist, nor a time when you did not exist. Nor a time when all of these kings did not exist," referring to all of the combatants on the battlefield who are rulers of different parts of the world.

"Nor is there any possibility in the future, any of us shall ever cease to be." (Reads) This is a really radical statement. Krishna is telling us that we are not created beings.

In our usual frame of reference, we either think God created us at the time of conception, or that we come into being at a certain point in our physical development. Or, that we are created at a point in time by a chance combination of material elements that really don't involve any divine touch of any kind.

One way or another, our tendency is to think that we come into being at a point in time and here Krishna is telling us no, we are features of reality and it is a eternal thing, and therefore we are eternally existing.

He goes on to speak about the implications of this in terms of the meaning of birth and death. And in the very next verse he says, "from childhood to youth, to old age, that same person will pass into another body. Those who are wise do not find this bewildering." (Reads)

Here is the Gita's philosophical baseline: the very first thing that we are presented with is this radical proposition that we are not created beings. And notice more importantly how Krishna is making individual distinctions on a spiritual level.

He's talking about Arjuna and all the different kings who were on the battlefield and himself. As eternal individuals, a eternal feature of individuality on a spiritual level. We often find this when we often hear about yoga philosophy.

We are eternal spiritual beings and not these temporary material bodies and this is the equivalent of one plus one equals two, and $2+2 = 4$. If we understand one plus one equals two, then we will understand the rest of arithmetic.

If we are not really clear on how one plus one equals two, then it will be difficult to advance in our quest for mastering arithmetic or any other kind of mathematics.

How is this relevant, you ask? It's relevant from the standpoint of social justice. The Gita establishes a rational basis for the equality of all beings. We hold these truths to be self-evident and that everyone is created equal but how are we equal?

Not materially. Some people are smarter. Some people are stronger. Some people are beautiful. Some people are more powerful. Some people are wealthier - any test or contest that compares one person to another shows us that one way or another we are not equal. So where is our equality and

what is our equality? It's spiritual equality beyond all of the temporary material designations that we may carry.

We are all spiritual beings made of the same spiritual stuff and therefore, in a spiritual sense, we are all equal and that gives us a basis for social justice because justice is based on equality. And without its curiously, it's very difficult to find some justification for quality in the absence of this spiritual understanding in society, at least from my observation. This is why we have the rationalization or the justification for inequality coming from people who prefer to keep things the way they are if the way things are gives them privileges that other people don't have.

Later in the Gita in chapter 5, Krishna speaks again about "those who are wise and who see an elevated soul who is endowed with higher learning and a gentle disposition - a cow, elephant, and dog, and one who eats dogs with equal vision." (Reads)

This principle of equality extends not just to human beings but to all beings in so far as the Bhagavad-Gita is concerned.

Let's stop here to see what's going on in the Q&A.

POOJA SHARMA:

You've got some great questions coming up. One is which version of the Gita have you been using for your understanding?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

I've read many different editions of the Bhagavad-Gita and the --translations that we are using are my own renderings taken from my upcoming book, but behind me this section of my bookshelf, those are all Bhagavad-Gita's.

POOJA SHARMA:

I also have many that I have read. I'm looking forward to your version to read in the future. The two that I like, one is a translation by Stephen Mitchell 'Bhagavad Gita'. And another one is by (Unknown name).

A couple more questions that are coming out on top. Is the Gita only for those who wish to do action?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

That's a really good question. I'm gonna get to who the Gita is for at the end of this presentation, so please hold that question and hopefully what I have to say towards the end will answer it for you.

POOJA SHARMA:

And two other questions. This one's fascinating: how do we know Krishna knows the facts of existence?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Aha! That gets to who is Krishna and the concept of Krishna, which is different from the concept of God in the Western monotheistic traditions. Stay tuned - that will be in part two or three of this series because the topic of who is Krishna, and the comparison of the concept of God and the concept of Krishna, how they are the same or different, is a very big topic.

You will have to tune in for one of the other two parts of this series in order to get the answer to that question.

POOJA SHARMA:

And there are more questions but let's see how many we can get to before you move on. How does this idea of spiritual equality translate into the caste system?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

The caste system is not anything like what Krishna describes as the four social orders. The caste system is a degraded and corrupted version of this, that's great for maintaining a social order that allows the higher classes to exploit the lowers.

The relationship of spiritual equality to engage in one's material Dharma, is also something I'm going to cover in much more detail in parts two and three but as we look at the structure of the Gita, I will touch on this too.

Go ahead.

POOJA SHARMA:

One other question: will you please restate the basis for why the message of hope is different than what we usually hope for?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Yes. The message of hope that Krishna is sending to Arjuna, and us by extension, is that you usually hope for happiness and our conception of happiness is the alignment of the universe with our desires.

The happiness that Krishna is going to propose comes not from trying to align the universe with our desires, but aligning ourselves with the natural order of the universe, in so doing, we come upon a kind of happiness that is not dependent on external conditions. But rather, an internal happiness, a

categorical different happiness than the one we usually pursue.

I hope that answers that.

Now, let me just quickly run back to the first question. Of all the Gitas on this shelf, the ones I refer to most often are 'Bhagavad-gita As It Is' by A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami, and the one by Graham Schweig, ' The Beloved Lord's Secret Love song' and a comprehensive guide by HD Goswami . Those are the three I probably look at the most.

I like Eknath Easwaran's translation and I find it helpful to put them side-by-side with others. For (Unknown name), I recommend ignoring the introduction and just moving into the translation. I think he undermines the entire authority of the Gita with his preference for Taoism, and other East Asian philosophies.

POOJA SHARMA:

I would recommend to pick one and read it a couple of times. And then once you get a little familiar with the verses, then get another version by somebody else and start comparing. It's almost like your mind can only hold so many -- things and then you can get a better comparison.

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

I agree. That's a good way to go.

POOJA SHARMA:

Another question that refers to chapter 2 verse 12: the type of characteristic, a God, and action, actor, and injustice, exist all of the time. So I think the question is, is that what that verse means?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Can you give it to me one more time?

POOJA SHARMA:

Does it mean that in chapter 2 verse 12, that it states that all of these things exist at the same time: the type of characteristics, God, an actor, action, justice and injustice?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

I will give that a qualified, yes. The God or the Supreme Being, the spiritual individual self or selves, are perpetually existing on a spiritual level. Justice and injustice are features of the material world, so the material world is also eternal, although sometimes in session and out of session, and that's a whole other conversation about veda cosmology but they are perpetual, let's say.

What were the other elements? God, the actor who would be the individual living being? The action? Action - this is interesting because of all the topics in the Bhagavad-Gita, karma is the one thing that is not eternal insofar as you do something, you get a reaction, and the end.

It's perpetual but you can pull the plug on it and that is one of the important questions that the Gita answers: how do you pull the plug on karmic reactions so that you don't have any more reactions that you are obligated to experience?

The freedom from obligation to experience karmic reactions is what liberation means, or at least one of the meanings of liberation. So, anyway I hope that answers it.

POOJA SHARMA:

I will let you get back to your presentation. Just looking at the time.

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Getting back to our regularly scheduled program, let's set the scene up and look at how the Bhagavad-Gita begins. The blind king Dhritarashtra is asking his personal assistant, Sanjaya who is gifted with all seeing vision, to tell him what's going on on the battlefield where his sons, the Kauravas, and the sons of his late brother Pandu, known as the Pandavas, have assembled to basically fight it out - all diplomatic options have been exhausted insofar as the disagreement as to who will inherit the throne as its concerned and now there's nothing left to do but fight.

This brings up issues of ethics and just war theory, and we will talk about those later. The important thing for now is the very first line that Dhritarashtra speaks, which is, "oh Sanjaya, when my sons assembled on the battlefield, determined to fight, what did they do?" (Read)

The very first word is Dharma, on the field of righteousness. And the question is: what did they do? How did they act on the field of righteousness, on the field of dharma?

This signals to us that the overarching theme of the Bhagavad-Gita is Dharma - this is a matter of hermeneutics and the science of understanding Scripture. The first saying said, the last thing said, the thing that is right in the middle, and the thing that gets the most ink - these are the things that we can understand by what the text is emphasizing.

Sanskrit words often have multiple meanings and Dharma is certainly no exception. It is a very contextual language and so Dharma can mean the essential nature of a person, place, or thing. A response to a world that is in harmony with cosmic order. Righteous action that results in justice, social duty, which was considered a virtue in 18th-century Western thought. Everyone does what society calls upon them to do and that makes you a virtuous person.

Universal principles of religion is another way that it is often translated, that which brings us into alignment with divine will. There is such a thing as divine will and that there are objective principles of religion in the world.

Krishna brings up this issue of dharma again in the fourth chapter. Arjuna wants to know what his dharma is. He refers to it when telling Krishna about all of his doubts about fighting. He's thinking maybe he should not go off and fight and maybe go off to the forest and do meditation.

This indicates his lineage. "Whenever and wherever righteousness declines, at that time I personally appear." (Reads) Here, Dharma, when righteousness declines - here he is speaking about righteousness. And the opposite of dharma descends, that is so important that Krishna must personally show up in order to reestablish dharma, for the sake of protecting the saintly and destroy the wicked. He appears after millennium and millennium.

Before we focus on "destroy the wicked", which was always quite understandably scaring everyone in terms of a all powerful Supreme Being, let's focus on the use of this phrase of principles of religion to describe Dharma.

Dharma means universal principles of religion, not doctrines or forms of faith. When we look at the word religion, we usually think of it as meaning a particular expression of faith but if we look at the Latin root, to connect - so re-repeat, like a ligament that takes something that was broken and takes it back to its origin point, that actually gives us a better idea of what religion means from the standpoint of principles of religion - that is to say, principles that bring about religious experience.

So religion means union, or reunion specifically. Yoga, you could put the re: for returning to our spiritual condition as the objective of yoga, and you get to words that might as well be synonyms.

Here's a key concept and important thing to remember: Bhagavad-Gita lives at the intersection of yoga and religion. If you want to find out more about what that intersection is composed of here, what that really means, I recommend you look at a three-part series plus a bonus discussion that I did sometime back with Yoga Alliance on the intersection of yoga and religion.

You go to this URL and go to Watch Past Events and it will pop right up. It's also now available for you in the chat, for those of you who are watching live - but don't go away we still have more to talk about.

The Bhagavad-Gita lives at the intersection of yoga and religion, and yoga lives at the intersection of two kinds of dharma in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Which brings us to the three levels of experience. The first level of experience is material reality, or conditional dharma. That is to say, a way of being in the world that is conditioned by the fact that we are influenced by material nature or material consciousness - and that is the world of our experience.

But there is another world, the spiritual world or reality, which is where our actions are based entirely upon our constitutional dharma - that is to say, the natural state of the living being in eternal reality, sometimes referred to as conditional dharma.

How do we get to there? Via --a third level of reality, the realization of dharma and that comes back to one of our earlier questions: how does all of this relate to the four varnas or social divisions, which in their corrupt state we know of as the caste system, but in their original state are four natural divisions of human society according to one's natural aptitudes, not according to our birth or what family you happen to be born into. What are you naturally inclined to do and what type of work are you naturally inclined to engage in?

When you take your natural aptitudes and inclinations, your conditional dharma, and infuse them with the natural actions of a living being, all of a spiritual being, you get the harmonization of dharmas, or the purpose of yoga. Which has four different paths according to the Bhagavad-Gita: Karma Yoga or action yoga, Astanga Yoga or mystic yoga, Jnana yoga or knowledge, and Bhakti yoga or devotional yoga.

The earlier question is: is this for people going to take action? It's impossible - the question is how will you act and in what way will you act?

We can act in a way that keeps us occupied in this one lifetime, preoccupied with whatever we think is important in this one life. Or, we can use the system of yoga to do what I spoke about earlier: engage in the world or act in the world in such a way so that you gradually find yourself transcending the world and therefore we become empowered to engage with the world from a position of transcendental consciousness.

So, there we go. Alright. Here is the plot of the Bhagavad-Gita: The conversation moves up and down the structure, but the plot moves up towards realization of our constitutional dharma in order to integrate it with the dharma that we currently have in this life and the process of yoga has these four elements that act as a ladder to that connection, that connects level I to level III. If you would like to know more about this yoga ladder, you can get a free excerpt from my forthcoming book, 'Journey Into The Bhagavad-Gita', and go to this link that's about to pop up into the webinar chat or is also in the description of this workshop.

Please avail yourself to this free excerpt. Which brings us finally to, who is the Bhagavad-Gita for? It

just so happens that the Bhagavad-Gita itself tells us who it is for and we will take a look at that. In the fourth chapter, Krishna tells Arjuna, "today I am teaching you the same ancient science of yoga." He first referred to it as something he has been taught previously. "Because you are my devotee as well as my friend, I am revealing this transcendental mystery to you." (Reads)

This speaks to the qualification of someone to hear, understand, and maybe accept the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita. He's not just a worshiper, he's also a friend - in other words, he has a friendly, receptive attitude to what his best friend is telling him.

Interestingly, what Krishna is telling Arjuna, what he expresses as his opinion, they are not commandments. He repeatedly says, "in my opinion, it's like this." He also says, "you should take that into consideration when you evaluate my opinion but it still is my opinion and you can do what you like."

Later in the Gita, Krishna elaborates: "oh Arjuna, best of the Bharatas, there are four kinds of people who are inclined to offer their devotion to me, those who are distressed and right now" - many people who may have been atheists in the trenches along the front line of Ukraine, who are praying more sincerely than they have ever have in their lives. Even if you think God is the last resort, that's what happens.

"Those who seek knowledge, those who seek wealth and want to obtain knowledge." People who don't just take their lives for granted but think about why does anything exist and what is the purpose of their lives - Those who are seeking knowledge.

Those who seek wealth. Some people think that God is the richest person and able to bequeath wealth upon them. Prosperity gospel is kind of based on this. Now, the misinterpretation is that if you are wealthy, God likes you. And if you are not, he doesn't - we won't go there right this moment. It's just people who are seeking material benefits will, if they are pious, ask God for them.

And then finally, those who have obtained knowledge. In other words, people who are situated in transcendental knowledge can never get enough. Too much is never enough when it comes to transcendental knowledge, and so they will read and reread the Bhagavad-Gita in order to get deeper and deeper realizations from the Gita's verses.

So, four more kinds of people who I think it is for: people who identify as spiritual but not religious because it offers something outside established Western monotheism. People who feel wounded or abandoned by religion.

We find in the Gita, a welcoming, patient God who is interested in us, whoever we are and who

welcomes everyone coming from every possible angle. People with firm faith in a monotheistic religion will also get something out of the Gita, insofar as, the answers to questions that may not be fully apparently answered within the realm of a particular form of faith. And of course, people who want to learn about yoga philosophy because this takes us off the mat and into the metaphysics and theology of yoga.

Who is the Gita not for? Krishna answers this question as well. "Those who were foolish." Simple enough. Those people who are of low character and engaged in dastardly deeds - usually not so interested. Usually smart people whose knowledge has been stolen by illusion. You can be very intelligent but still not be interested in spiritual matters and there's plenty of very intelligent materialists out there and they are not usually going to be so interested in the messages of the Bhagavad-Gita.

And those who have acquiesced to an ungodly nature - that is to say, people who are determined in their atheistic points of views.

So this brings us back to the question, what is the Bhagavad-Gita? It is a dissertation on the science of God realization. This is why it is attractive to people with -- a theistic inclination. The concept of God is different from the concept of God that most of us grew up with or are familiar with.

It's a concept of absolute being, who is both a being itself and beyond beings - a being with complete knowledge and who is experiencing limitless joy - this corresponds to the great phrase, (Speaks Sanskrit).

As well as being with inconceivable potency, supreme beauty, and who is the ultimate shelter of all beings. There are various verses in other Upanishads, that speak to this idea of the Supreme Being as a being above all others.

Let us once again stop here and take comments or questions. And then we will wrap things up.

POOJA SHARMA:

There's about five or six minutes left and there are some great questions getting some --upvotes.

Krishna talks about becoming the right actor. Can you explain how one becomes the right actor by giving up the fruits of their actions?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Yes. So, first of all Krishna explains how action is very difficult to understand, even such that wise people have a hard time wrapping their head around it. If you don't get this right away, don't worry, you are in good company.

A right action in the Bhagavad-Gita means two things: first of all understanding that we are responsible for our involvement in the process, our contribution to the action but we are not in control of, or entitled to, the result of the action.

And when we take it a step further, when we try to find a way to make all of our actions and offering to the highest truth that we can conceive of, then this is Karma Yoga. This is action that is liberating action and does not generate a reaction.

Verse nine in chapter 3 specifically speaks to this point and I recommend you take a look at that.

POOJA SHARMA:

I would add, I feel like I explained it this way: every day we take action and so think of some of the actions we have to take like washing dishes. You can wash them in a way that you end up breaking them or you can wash them in a way that you very purposely, nicely, wash each and every dish and put it away. The right action is the action that you have in front of you, doing it with intention. And then to your point, you don't have control of the outcome or the result.

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

There is much more that we do not have control of in the world and that realization can be very helpful.

POOJA SHARMA:

One more question. It's interesting because it goes back to why cannot most of us remember our previous lives? This one has gotten a lot of upvotes.

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

You would remember all of your previous deaths as well and that would be pretty traumatic.

POOJA SHARMA:

In regards to the caste system, if Krishna is whole and we are a mere drop of his, is this totality also within me? If caste is as occupations, how would you assess this understanding?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Well, there's a difference between the complete whole being within you and you being the complete whole. Krishna makes a very clear distinction between the knower of the field, each individual, and the knower of all fields and knowing all of what everyone else knows.

Qualitatively, we are part and parcel's of the one, complete, absolute truth. But quantitatively, we are

not on the same level. So, we have our particular duty to society as an individual, but that does not mean we are expected to do everything.

By the way, I just posted a PDF version of all of my slides in the chat. So if you would like to download those, go get them. Do we have time for anything else?

POOJA SHARMA:

Is there any last words you want to leave everyone with?

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

As a matter of fact I do. Thank you for asking. I want to encourage all of you to download the free excerpt from my book, 'The Yoga Ladder' and you might find some questions for part two on Wednesday, 22 March.

And that's all I got.

POOJA SHARMA:

Thank you everyone for joining and thank you Hari for such a great presentation. We look forward for all of you joining us next week for part two, and the week after for part three. From Yoga Alliance, have a wonderful day. Namaste!

HARI-KIRTANA DAS:

Thank you very much.

(End of webinar)

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