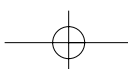


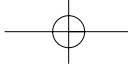
The Bhagavad Gita

Part **Two**

by Trish Brown

In the previous article on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the stage was set for the great story to unfold. Let us refresh a little with where we have come from – you may also find it valuable to return to the last few paragraphs of that article in issue 12.





The Bhagavad Gita – Part Two

We arrive at the point of diving into the ocean of wisdom of the Gita, which is part of the magnificent epic poem, the Mahabharata whose characters portray every aspect of life in a rich tapestry of intrigue and mystery. Every person represents an aspect of the human psyche and the poem is a complex allegory of the inner struggle we experience as human beings. The great truth is that each one of us is inwardly battling with two opposing forces - goodness and that which opposes goodness.

For this reason, the Gita begins by bringing us to Kurukshetra, the battlefield of life. We are introduced to the two armies of great and noble warriors that exist inside each and every one of us. On one side, the five Pandavas represent our virtues of truth,

courage, beauty, strength and wisdom and are led by Arjuna. He is the courageous hero and represents each one of us. On the other side of the battlefield is Duryodhana, representing the ego whose nature it is to fight, not to reason. He leads the huge numbers of Kauravas who represent the forces of negativity that live inside us, constantly conspiring to lead us away from the very highest within. While Arjuna's motives are essentially divine and based on truth, Duryodhana, whose motives are selfish and egocentric, is also a great and noble warrior. The other main character is Krishna, the Supreme Self who is the very highest we can aspire to, and He is inviting us to fight to be with Him because He is our rightful inheritance...

Part Two

It is said that the first and last words of a great scripture will always give us the key to its central message. The first word of this text is *dharmā* (to uphold) and the last is *mama* (my). The dharma of the sun is to shine, the dharma of a river is to flow and the dharma of human beings is to uphold that which is true to our higher nature – our life purpose. The Gita invites us to discover our *svadharma* – our own personal dharma, that which is ours to do in this life and ours alone, then to stand up and have the courage to follow it.

Now let us have ears to hear and a heart that can open wide enough to receive the great wisdom that the words within the pages of the Gita hold to reveal the greatest secrets of all time.

The Despondency of Arjuna

There is an air of excitement in chapter one as the armies gather with trumpets and conches blowing and the beating of tabors and drums heralding the beginning of the great battle. "My chariot, Krishna," Arjuna's voice shouts above the deafening noise. "Take it between the two armies so that I can clearly see who I have to fight when the battle begins!" Krishna enters the field driving his magnificent golden chariot drawn by five white stallions. We too as seekers, when we confront our own spirituality and arrive at the inner battlefield, must be able to see who it is we are going to fight.

From the centre of the battlefield, Arjuna is totally confused at the sight of his enemies arrayed before him. He realises he has to fight his own dear family and friends (being his attachments, desires and ego-centred habits). He must even fight Dronacharya, the teacher who trained him as a warrior and Bhishma, the surrogate father who nurtured him. For the first time in Arjuna's life he is overwhelmed by fear. His voice breaking with emotion, he turns towards his friend and says, "Krishna, these men I see in front of me are my kinsmen. Looking at their faces makes my body tremble, my limbs weak, my mouth dry and my hair stands on end. I can hardly stand up and my mind is whirling" (1:29). Arjuna is making excuses!

In just the same way, we make excuses when we first understand that, in order to discover who we are, we must confront our attachments, addictions, habits, desires and ambitions. These attachments are our friends and relatives and like Arjuna we often react with fear and despondency as our inadequacy overwhelms us. It is really much easier to go back to what is familiar and comfortable. In utter despair Arjuna throws down his bow, Gandiva (representing self-will and egocentric defence) and slumps down in his chariot his heart overwhelmed by sorrow (1:47). With tears in his eyes he humbly pleads with Krishna, "I am paralysed by sadness and grief. You must help me. Please! I will not fight!"

LEFT: On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, a metaphor for the battlefield of life. © B.G. Sharma.

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Krishna begins teaching

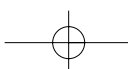
Chapter two of the *Bhagavad Gita* is often called 'the Gita in brief'. In slokas 11-46 we learn about the path of knowledge and in slokas 47-60 the way of action. We learn about the power of devotion in slokas 61-70 and finally the path of renunciation in slokas 71-72.

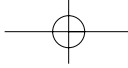
Up until now Krishna has not uttered a word. In fact he has been the epitome of patience and tolerance and he smiles as Arjuna struggles with all his reasons for not fighting, presenting his well thought out arguments and rational, practical reasons for retreat. Is this something that is familiar to *you*?

The mind will try anything to dissuade us from engaging in any confrontation with our desires and habits. In fact it will say, "What is the point of getting out of bed an hour earlier for some yoga and a walk?" The inner dialogue will be truly convincing as to the value of the extra sleep to get us through the day, to the extent that we completely forget the positive benefits of the activity – vitality, alertness, enthusiasm, productivity! At times the major problems that arise seem to completely swamp us, to the point where we become depressed. The determination and effort that are required to make changes seem to appear be too much and we give up before we have even started. This is the vital point we must all reach – when we realise we cannot overcome all the negativity inside us alone. This is that beseeching moment when we beg for help and turn to the very highest within us. Now Krishna can begin to teach Arjuna. How desperate are we before we beg for the Truth to be revealed?

Krishna said fiercely with no trace of sympathy in his voice, "What do you think you are doing, Arjuna? This despair and confusion does not become you. These kinds of emotions have no place in the heart of a warrior. Do not give in to weakness. You must get up, rise to your full greatness with courage and pride and fight with confidence!"

The early morning sun spread its red and orange glow throughout the sky, glinting softly on the helmets and breastplates of the assembled warriors. Uncertainty





The Bhagavad Gita – Part Two

rippled through the armies like a wave, as they questioned the extraordinary encounter they were witnessing in the middle of the field of Kurukshetra. Duryodhana was full of impatience. Arjuna's grandfather, Bhishma, stood erect and noble with his eyes as still and calm as a deep lake, and watched intently the figures of the two people who meant so much to him. He knew and could sense that Krishna was imparting a wisdom that even the Gods themselves longed to hear.

Krishna is saying to all of us: all your problems, all your worries, all your anxieties arise simply because you are looking at the world in a particular way. Change your viewpoint, change the basic way you see the world to one of truth, and all these problems will be problems no more. As he replied to Arjuna, "The truth is that there never was a time when you or I, or all the warriors gathered here today, did not exist and there never will be a time when we cease to exist (2:12)."

Each chapter of the Gita holds a valuable lesson to help us develop the right attitudes and appropriate responses to enable us to make our relationships and situations work for us.

He put his hands together in prayer, bowing his head in reverence to this great event. Quietly he responded to Duryodhana, "You have a lot to learn. We are probably witnessing one of the greatest events in the history of mankind. Why don't you curb your impatience and be still?" The young king angrily turned on his heel and stormed back to his chariot.

The highest knowledge

Krishna looked at Arjuna, thinking "I have to shake him out of this despondency". "You know Arjuna," he said calmly, "although your words sound wise, they are not actually based in Truth. You really should not be grieving for these people you know, because those who are truly wise do not grieve for anyone - either living or dead" (2:11). This verse contains the whole of the Gita's message – the highest and most sacred knowledge that a human being can ever absorb in a lifetime. Like a pearl dropped into the consciousness of our mind we could almost pass it by and not realise its importance. Krishna is using shock tactics as he explains to Arjuna that he is not the physical body but the immortal soul within. Trying to give Arjuna hope, he says (in verses 23-24) "Weapons cannot touch the Self. Fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it, and neither can it be dried by the wind."

Put your own problems into a larger arena. Ask yourself, in comparison to the thousands of people that die every day from malnutrition, or lack of hygiene or water, or those caught up in violence or war...how big are my problems? Go one stage further. Consider that there might be a deeper reason why a problem is there for you. Remember the saying, 'every problem has a gift for you in its hands. We seek our problems because we need their gifts!'

Perhaps we may find ourselves in the situation where we develop a major illness, for instance, chronic fatigue – a common one in our country. For years we have been stressing about our heavy work volume and other commitments with no time to rest, read, dance or even to 'smell the roses'. The gift (chronic fatigue) is giving us time to stop, assess life and perhaps adopt a more balanced lifestyle. We may not recognise the 'gift' immediately, but with time it will be revealed.

If you want change in your life, what are you going to do differently tomorrow so that you don't discover in a few years time that you are still in the same situation?

Establishing steady wisdom

As Krishna spoke, a mighty hush settled over the plains. Even the restless horses became still as if to hear his words more clearly. "Would you get upset if I threw

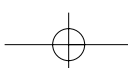
away an old coat?" Krishna asked. Arjuna shook his head in response. "Our body is no different. It is an outer covering that contains who we really are. When it is worn out, we just cast it aside like a piece of clothing, but the real Self inside remains untouched, indestructible and immortal" (2:12-13).

The concept that things can be born or die is an illusory one. People are only afraid of death because they don't understand what it means. In fact, the quality of fear is probably the most predominant one that people have in their lives. Fear of things that they know about and things that they don't know about. Fear of leaving their loved ones behind, as well as fear of the unknown that death presents.

Arjuna did not appear to be grasping this understanding. So Krishna deftly delivered another aspect. "You can't perceive this truth because you are entangled in the duality of life – good and bad; pleasure and pain – the pairs of opposites. You will have to go beyond this state of perception, however, if you want to really understand what I am telling you. Remember you have been born a Kshatriya, Arjuna – a warrior, and you have to do your duty... you have no choice but to maintain dharma and balance in society. Not for your sake but for the good of the whole. And if you run away from your duty, you are deliberately allowing evil to prevail." As a human being on the planet this is our responsibility too!

"So get up Arjuna!" Krishna's voice was firm and authoritative. "Resolve to face your conflict! You should not consider thoughts of the future and whether you will win or lose. Do not delight in happiness or be cast down by pain. Just perform your duty and whatever comes, endure it bravely with a steady mind. Get involved, Arjuna, and fight with confidence!"

The air between them trembled with an awesome power as these words enveloped the proud warrior. They were like arrows and Arjuna had no armour against such ancient truth. What choice did he have but to face this great challenge? Crisis and pain are part of life and help us grow! However hard they are at the time, they pass and we inevitably have the opportunity to embrace the situation or to remain within the 'battle'.



Skill in action – balance of mind

Krishna continued, “You have to learn the wisdom of skill in action, meaning perfect balance, unshakeable equanimity, poise and peace of mind. In establishing an ever present awareness of the core of your real, immortal Self first, you can be effective in the field of action!”

Fascinated, Arjuna asked, “How can I achieve this?” Krishna’s gaze was direct and piercing. “Make the mind your friend so you can use its great power instead of it using you. Make your mind so focused and disciplined that you cannot be swayed by raging emotions. With sincerity and constant practice the wisdom I am imparting to you will enable you to accomplish this.”

Krishna said, “To fight is your duty without regard of defeat or victory, heat or cold, pleasure or pain – these all come to us and we must put up with them as we have no control over them.” This is real skill in action! This teaching has the power to eliminate our eternal attachments to success and failure, approval motivation; happiness based on the perfect situation or state of being! “You have the right to work, but

If you want change in your life, what are you going to do differently tomorrow...?

never to the results. Never allow yourself to be motivated by the fruits of your actions, nor should you be attached to inaction.” (2:47) Arjuna was puzzled. It did not seem natural not to be concerned about the outcome of the battle.

If we relate this to being in the workplace today, how best could we make this teaching a reality? In our daily life we can be either too involved in our work, or, at the other end of the spectrum, we avoid work whenever possible. All of us fall somewhere between these two states. To be *sattvic* (clear, pure) in the way that we work, we need to be full of energy and yet not upset if the results don’t turn out the way that we want. It is important to try to find balance in life with everything we do.

Nobody on their deathbed ever wished they had spent more time at work. No one is indispensable! Similarly, if you are caught up in being lazy, remember that the

result of living in the mode of *tamas* (inertia) is always pain and frustration. When we are caught up in how we want things to turn out we forget one fundamental rule – we are not in control! It is good to plan ahead and organise things, but don’t get caught up in thinking that all will go according to plan. By all means plan your day, but add at the end of the plan, “God willing”.

Controlling the senses

The yellow silk of Krishna’s robe rippled gently against his body which stood majestic and straight, his dark skin glistening in the sunlight. The peacock feather in his crown bowed softly in the wind. The horses (the senses) became agitated as if troubled by some unseen presence. They began to pull and strain in different directions, causing the chariot to lurch and sway from side to side and forcing the wheels deeper into the earth. Krishna pulled the reins tighter to bring them back under control. With his

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The Bhagavad Gita – Part Two

compassionate eyes ablaze with light, he told Arjuna. “As a tortoise withdraws its limbs, the wise withdraw the senses and control them. By following the senses without control, strength of will and unity of purpose are lost” (2:58). When we are governed by the senses the mind becomes confused and scattered and these rampant desires dictate our actions.

One of Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga, *pratyahara* – withdrawal of the senses – enables us to restrain the impulse to follow our senses outward and instead to go within. This is an important precursor to meditation.

Art of living

Arjuna is curious to know how he will recognise the ‘man of steady wisdom’ (*sthitaprajna*), who is always aware of the Self. “How does he live, move and think?” he asks (2:54). Krishna’s reply, contained in the last eighteen verses of chapter two, gives in a nutshell the secret of the art of living. These were very dear to Mahatma Gandhi’s heart and he meditated on them every day without fail. In the book *Gandhi the Man*, Eknath Easwaran quotes Gandhi as saying “Those verses have been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. There is a reasoning in them, but they represent realised knowledge. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the Gita.”

As Krishna teaches the way of ‘the man of steady wisdom’ Arjuna feels a deep longing rising up within him. He realises he cannot do this on his own and is forced to ask for help. Initially Arjuna is completely unable to accept the precious knowledge that is imparted by Krishna because it is too far above his understanding. Through the next chapters, Krishna the wise and loving teacher shows Arjuna natural stages of spiritual growth and offers practical tools to awaken the journey of the seeker.

In the next issue we will share more of this ancient scripture. Every verse is worthy of being an article in itself. Each chapter of the Gita holds a valuable lesson to help us develop the right attitudes and appropriate responses to enable us to make our relationships and situations work for us. As we continue to explore the teachings of Krishna to Arjuna, we will see that chapter six is about the practical instruction in the art of meditation, chapter eight explains the nature of death and awakens Arjuna to his immortality – and therefore the oneness of all things – and by chapter 12 Arjuna has become a true devotee. Now all the knowledge that is to follow is able to settle into a perfect place inside him. From chapters 13 to 18 the very highest knowledge is revealed, enabling Arjuna to complete his transition from a place of great sorrow to a place of pure freedom, thus fulfilling his destiny – his dharma.

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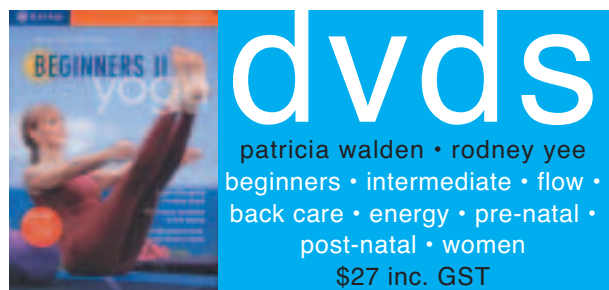
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