



Bhisma has the ability to choose his moment of death.

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Bhagavad Gita

To live well do we do what we want to do,
or what we should do?

Part **Three**

by Trish Brown

It may seem strange that the setting for one of the world's most sacred texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is a battlefield. It is, of course, a direct parallel with the eternal struggle within us between the forces of good and evil and the battlefield of life.

In the previous two issues we met Arjuna, the noble warrior who represents us, and his charioteer, Krishna, representing our higher self. In chapter one the two armies, the Pandavas (our highest most noble qualities) and Kauravas (our negative, selfish tendencies), are standing opposite each other waiting to start the battle. What

transpires is a great dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna – teacher and student. Arjuna is despondent when he sees who he has to fight and throws in the towel at this point! Krishna assures him that he must fight.

In the second chapter (the Gita in brief) there are two key messages:

1. there is an indivisible divinity existing in all life which is in everything and in everyone from the smallest plant to the greatest living being
2. the purpose of life is to discover that infinite, loving source

In the previous articles I have endeavoured to offer a greater understanding of how every dedicated yogi can discover the wisdom of the ancient sages and have it totally relevant here and now. Yoga is far more than doing asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing awareness) and shavasana (relaxation) alone! The *Bhagavad Gita* is yoga! Yoga is life! Therefore perhaps we can conclude from this that life, yoga and Gita are one and integral to each other in every moment of every day.

Let us now continue together our journey through the chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

When the dust is cleaned from the mirror, how clear is the image?

Chapters 3 to 6 encompass a very intense and challenging journey for our erstwhile hero, Arjuna.

At the beginning of Chapter 3 he is still not at all sure where he is heading and he travels from this point of doubt to one of inner stillness by the end of chapter 6. Krishna, an insightful teacher guides his student skillfully through the various steps, often repeating an important point by coming at it from a different angle – a very good teaching strategy.

Although in chapter 2 Arjuna asked Krishna to be his teacher, he has not made any real progress by chapter 3. He at least is willing to fight but still very confused as to what to do and, in despair, beseeches his dearest friend, companion and teacher, Krishna, to help him. Krishna is crystal clear when he tells him he must act. This message reminds me of a line in one of Mary Poppins' songs: "A job begun is halfway done." Taking action is a fundamental step for anyone facing any challenge at any time, whether fighting an army five thousand years ago or finding a solution to one of life's many interesting situations in our modern world. The next question of course is "How should I act?"

It is the manner and quality of action which takes up most of Chapter 3 which is entitled, appropriately, 'The secret of action'. Krishna points out that we have no choice but to act – simply

staying alive and maintaining our bodies requires action, but it is the quality of the action that is important. Karma (action) yoga begins when we act selflessly, with deep sincerity, and dedicate the action to the very highest. Early in the chapter he reveals a wonderful truth to Arjuna, namely that if your action is dedicated to the highest, then you free yourself from the bonds of the material world. He develops this point later in the chapter when he says "You must perform your duty without preferences or attachment to the results of your actions, because it is selfish action that leads to exploitation, manipulation and sorrow."

Just as a city map gives the general situation of suburbs at the beginning, then the main roads linking the suburbs leading to the more detailed maps of individual suburbs, so Krishna is gradually defining the meaning of action.

The Gita touches on some very deep and challenging concepts, and in Chapter 3 the Law of Sacrifice is introduced, not so much in the traditional meaning of forfeit or surrender, but in the deeper meaning of making something sacred. "All of life revolves around this great Law of Sacrifice" (Verse 16). This sounds very similar to the stance taken by the well known author Joseph Campbell, but in *The Dru Bhavagad Gita*, a new, modern translation that was reviewed earlier in *Australian Yoga Life* (issue 12,

p.71), this concept is developed along the lines of making your actions sacred, rather than forfeiting or going without something. The intention with which you act is the secret ingredient for making your actions sacred.

Verse 25 tells us "While the unwise act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, the wise act without any attachment for the welfare of the world." The mark of wise action is therefore the intention that it be for the wellbeing of all and that the doer has no attachment to the outcomes of his or her action. If we are attached to outcomes then it will not be the higher self who is orchestrating our actions but the ego. This may at first appear difficult for someone to do in their day to day life, but it can be achieved with thought and practise.

An important understanding lies in verses 38 and 39: "Like fire covered by smoke, like a mirror covered by dust, like the unborn foetus completely surrounded by a membrane, so too is the wisdom in man covered by the insatiable fire of desire, the mortal enemy of the Self." When the smoke disappears, how radiant is the fire? When the dust is cleaned from the mirror, how clear is the image? When a babe emerges from the membrane, is that not a miracle to witness? So too when we are no longer controlled and led by our desires, we discover strength of mind and heart beyond measure.

When Arjuna suggests that meditation is impractical for him, because of his restless mind, Krishna admits that it is not easy to conquer the mind

By Chapter 4, Arjuna has discovered he is willing and capable of action of the highest order but Krishna knows his student well and wants to give him even more confidence. After dispelling Arjuna's despondency and motivating him into action, Krishna is now starting to lift him into another realm altogether where he no longer feels separate and alone. In our times of greatest need, it is easy to feel alone, whereas in fact if the truth be known, the creator is never closer.

Our higher self is always nearby – we just do not always see it! Krishna gives Arjuna a sacred promise that he will always come to his rescue when his needs are greatest and that he will never desert him. This promise to Arjuna can be taken as a direct promise to all.

In the film, *The Lord of the Rings II, The Two Towers*, in that magnificent moment when the heroes appear to be completely overwhelmed by the opposing forces, Gandalf, the magician, who symbolises the embodiment of Truth, appears on the horizon, just as

he promised. He is a vision of light in his white flowing robes seated upon a white stallion. This is an example of what Krishna is wanting Arjuna to understand. He intends to empower his faith and fill him with conviction and strength.

As mentioned above, Krishna returns to a subject again and again, both revising what has been given previously and also refining and deepening the understanding. He further expounds on sacrifice and non-attachment to actions. He also introduces the concept of spiritual wisdom "The offering of wisdom is better than any material offering, Arjuna, for the goal of all seekers is spiritual wisdom" (Verse 33). He outlines the considerable fruits to be gained by having attained spiritual, wisdom. In fact he indicates that it is the way to freedom. Hence the title of this chapter – 'Freedom through action'.

Chapter 5 can be compared to a bridge linking the activity of chapters 3 and 4 to stillness in chapter 6. However

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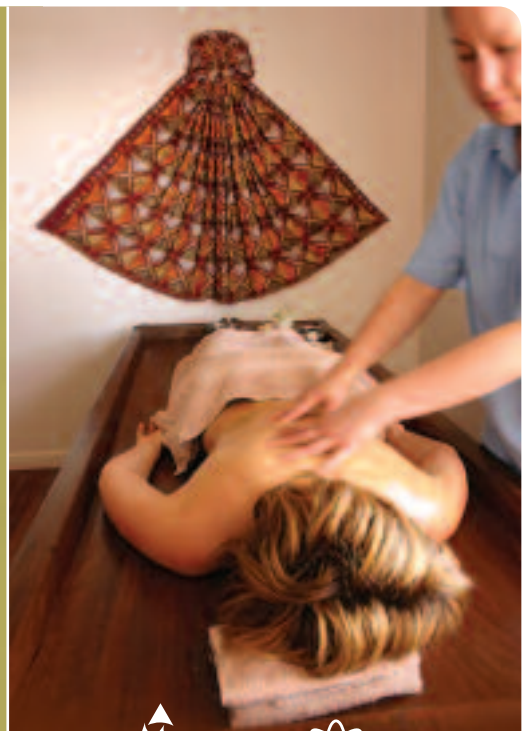
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our hero still has a long way to go and displays his confusion when he asks, “O Krishna, you seem to be advising both the path of selfless action and the renunciation of action. Please tell me definitely which one is better” (5:1). Krishna replies, “The renunciation of action and selfless action will both lead to the supreme goal, but the path of selfless action is better” (5:2).

Krishna describes a renunciate as one who never grieves if they lose something. Renunciation is achieved when a person totally lets go of desire and becomes desireless. This means you are internally free, not acting to get anything, but simply to make your contribution for the benefit of the whole. The challenge is to constantly apply these teachings in our daily lives. For example, if we are trying our best at our work, acting in service of those around us, then even harsh words from our boss can potentially wash over us when we are steadfast in the knowledge that we have done all that we could.

This attitude of non-attachment to results can be compared to the outcome for an archer when he shoots an arrow. He will fix his arrow carefully, aim his bow with concentration and determine its path as accurately as possible. However, once the arrow has left the bow, he no longer has any control over its path as many factors may come into play to determine where it will finally land. He has done the best he can – the final result, being beyond his control, should cause neither grief nor joy.

Arjuna has discovered how to act in the world while remaining connected with the higher self; now he has to grasp the fundamental need for stillness, which was hinted at in the last few verses of Chapter 5 and is the destination of the first part of Arjuna’s journey. Meditation is the most important tool that Krishna can give Arjuna, as it is the only way that he will be able to transcend the body/mind complex and find his real self. Krishna knows that as soon as Arjuna can touch who and what he is, everything that he is not will melt away. Thoughts, emotions, ego, personality and intellect will all be transcended.

Krishna explains how to establish a meditation practice by giving some very clear guidelines – how to create the most



Krishna reveals his universal form.

conducive space; how to sit, eat, sleep and work in moderation; how to have balance, and so on. He intends to bring Arjuna to this point of stillness and his instructions are specific and can be easily adapted by present day readers of the *Dru Gita* (the recently published *Dru Bhavagad Gita* mentioned earlier). People on the deeper path of yoga will always include meditation in their practice. Osho says that meditation is an adventure. The greatest adventure the human mind can undertake.

Early in this chapter there is a beautiful teaching, “Lift yourself up by the power of your Self and never allow self-will to degrade you. The self can be a friend to the Self but also an enemy.” (6:5) When I catch myself on a mental

downward spiral and remember this statement with conviction, “Come on Trish, lift yourself up by the power of your mind”, I instantly experience change that is empowering and cultivates inner strength.

Krishna is telling us to take responsibility and use the mind to sort ourselves out! Make the mind your friend by setting the ground rules. Like taming a wild stallion, the mind requires us to skillfully draw the reins in and allow it to discover stillness.

When Arjuna suggests that meditation is impractical for him, because of his restless mind, Krishna admits that it is not easy to conquer the mind, but he states that steady practice and detachment will yield results. He



Arjuna submits to Krishna.

promises that constant effort and gradual purification will eventually attain the supreme goal (enlightenment) even if it takes several lifetimes! And if you are lucky enough to take only one lifetime, isn't that worth the effort of a lifetime?

The first six chapters of the Gita are about our relationship with ourselves and the world. The next six are all about the divine – love and devotion. Krishna knows that Arjuna has no idea as to who he, Krishna, really is or what he has

come to do on the earth. Imagine if your best friend, a playmate and companion since childhood, were to suddenly announce that he or she was the creator of the universe and that the person you knew and loved was only a very small aspect of that being. All this while you are about to face your enemies in battle. Mind blowing to say the least!

Readers of the *Dru Gita* have an advantage in coming to grips with this difficult concept as the story form of Chapter 7, told at the beginning of volume 2, paints the interaction between the two in realistic terms. The reactions of the teacher (trying to get it across) and the student (who really can't believe what he is hearing) to each other are beautifully depicted. When reading the Dru version of the *Bhagavad Gita*, I could feel myself identifying with Arjuna and thinking, "I know how he feels – I'd react the same in his position".

Krishna gives Arjuna a beautiful image of how his creation is nothing but himself in different forms. Arjuna is taken on a magical mystery tour of his being so that he can understand that

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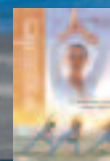
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Krishna is the essence and substratum of everything visible and invisible. For spiritual seekers in the 21st century, this is the same realisation that we must understand. Just like Arjuna, we have to come to grips with the realisation that, whoever we accept as the supreme spirit, he/she is not a remote figure, but is the very essence of all creation and indeed is part of our own essence.

“I am the only reality

Nothing exists higher than Me

Everything is strung on Me like pearls on a thread.” (7:7-11)

Without understanding the omnipotence of Krishna, Arjuna will never be able to go beyond the illusion of how he thinks things are, his perception of the situation, of himself – created in his mind, his ‘reality’ – and discover what the real truth is. As we believe, so we become! This is portrayed so eloquently in the film *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, when the character played by Marlee Matlin finally discovers she has been creating the self-defeating patterns of her own life. She eventually realises that the only way to change her life, to be happier, is to change the way she perceives her world.

This chapter gives the clues on how to die consciously but also shows us how to live consciously. It tells us to live in the moment, constantly remembering the highest. We need to be prepared to fight whatever internal forces might distract us from what is actually real – for example, voices of negativity or selfishness. We are also encouraged to have reverence for the divine through offering and to honour all aspects of our physical self – body, mind and spirit.

By the end of Chapter 7, Krishna has intrigued Arjuna with words he has not heard before as he tries to strengthen him to face the situation and fight. We are all on the battlefield, continually fighting our own inner battles. Our lives are also constantly subject to change. Our inner battles, our thoughts, life circumstances and people around us change constantly. Each moment and even life itself is impermanent. But our higher nature is not destroyed even by death. So Krishna approaches the importance of dying a conscious death. At the moment of

death, it is said our thoughts determine the destiny of our next incarnation, which in turn helps support our level of enlightenment. However, we can only be thinking about the supreme spirit at the time of our death if we have spent our whole life training our mind to do so. It took Mahatma Gandhi a whole lifetime to prepare for the moment when he was shot and be able to speak the name of his god at the exact moment of his death. A turbulent mind simply would not be able to do this!

Now Krishna is going to reveal the most cherished secret of his heart to Arjuna. Arjuna is suffering from a disease for which Krishna has the cure and in this Chapter 9 Krishna gives him his divine prescription. The disease we are all suffering from is rooted in our sense of alienation from the rest of life. The only ‘cure’ is to realise the truth of our innate oneness and interconnectedness with life in all its myriad manifestations. Krishna invites Arjuna – and us – to rediscover our relationship with the universe in which we live.

...anything offered with pure intention and love is more potent than costly material items offered conditionally .

KRISHNA PROCLAIMS THE KINGLY SCIENCE

of self-realisation as the highest knowledge of all because it is the only thing that can permanently uproot the cause of all suffering. Once we realise our true nature we start to penetrate the core mystery of how the higher divine self can be both near and far and that we are a microcosm of that great mystery. “Anything that is offered to Me with devotion and a pure heart,” says Krishna, “even if it is only a leaf, a flower, a piece of fruit or water, I will gladly accept” (9:26). In its beautiful simplicity, this verse shows that anything offered with pure intention and love is more potent than costly material items offered conditionally .

By the time we arrive at chapter ten we have witnessed a beautiful ascension

in Arjuna’s consciousness from confusion and dejection to clarity and inspiration. He has moved from an inability to act (in terms of the *gunas*, a *tamasic* state), through the *rajasic* state, engaging in action through non-attached service and finally into the pure, clear state of *sattva*. Krishna has prepared him perfectly and now the moment of realisation has arrived. Krishna “lights the lamp of wisdom from within” (verse 11) and Arjuna instantly becomes liberated.

This is a good moment to look back and observe how Krishna has enabled Arjuna to reach this point. Through all that Krishna has shared to date we have the knowledge to free us from the prison of egoism. Everything we need to know to become enlightened has been given to us. It is important to understand that the grace of realisation that is now given to Arjuna is the result of his sincere effort. Arjuna is our role model. He is eager, attentive, pure of heart, full of courage and very determined to know the higher self and that which is truly divine.

In the next and final article, we journey with Arjuna as he moves from the longing for freedom to realising the pure joy of enlightenment.

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