



ABOVE: The Yadus and Kauravas

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Bhagavad Gita | Part Four

This is the final article in the four part series outlining the significance of the ancient sacred Indian text the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita is a model that teaches us how we can be fully effective in the world as spiritual beings on this human journey. It teaches us how to live life here on earth in the highest way possible.

by Trish Brown



The first six chapters are about one's relationship with one's higher self; the second six chapters are about one's relationship with the world and the final six about one's relationship with God. God in this instance represents the supreme reality, or whatever forms of divinity you personally relate to.

The message of the Bhagavad Gita is for every man, woman and child on this planet, as it does not require you to form allegiance to any religion. Quite simply, it is about each of us as a human being understanding who we are and why we are here. Living the Gita is essentially an active process. It is the practical application of knowledge that brings about inner change. When you know how to apply the knowledge you will find that the Gita can answer your every question about living life skilfully.

The story revolves around Arjuna, the most distinguished warrior prince (representing you and me) and his charioteer and great friend, Krishna (representing our highest self). Together they enter the battlefield of Kurukshetra (the battlefield of life) with their army called the Pandavas (representing our highest, most noble qualities) ready to meet the Kauravas (representing our negative selfish tendencies). Here they hope to resolve the long-standing dispute of kingdom and honour. When we personally take up this battle we choose what aspects of ourselves we will allow to rule our lives. We are faced with asking ourselves: will it be the noble or the selfish parts of myself that I will follow?

In previous issues of Australian Yoga Life we visited the first 10 chapters where Arjuna discovered:

- the secret of wisdom in action
- non-attachment to the results of his actions
- how to bring the mind to stillness through meditation
- the sacred knowledge to awaken to truth
- the nature of death – death of the ego
- his 'true nature' through the divine secret
- the oneness and interconnectedness of all creation

Arjuna has arrived at that place where he can no longer be a spectator, but must actively take on the greatest of all human quests – the quest of self-discovery – in order to realise his true nature and purpose in life. Krishna, his dearest friend and teacher, is the epitome of kindness and patience on this journey. We too are faced with this same challenge – to discover our true nature. Our higher self guides us on this journey just like Krishna guides Arjuna.

Now Arjuna arrives at that special moment when Krishna “lights the lamp of wisdom from within” so that he can witness momentarily how it is to be free from the prison of egoism. Like a blind man suddenly glimpsing the brilliant light of day, everything instantly became crystal clear. Even though Arjuna sees the true nature of his own soul and has received the great and wondrous gift of divine vision, he still feels fear, which indicates he has not yet found complete union. Still the ego hangs on!

To assist Arjuna, Krishna reveals the fullness of his unlimited cosmic form. But this form is so vast that Arjuna becomes frightened. He not only sees beauty as Krishna expands himself, but also terrifying images – the archetypal energies that live inside us, which are often referred to as the ‘shadow side’ of ourselves (chapter 11:31-34) These are the Kauravas representing the myriad facets of our lower human nature.

Many spiritual teachers, counsellors, psychologists and healers believe it important to understand our

shadow side and not be afraid of it. Hopefully then we are able to develop the capacity to be a friend to ourselves and face those aspects of us that we are not happy with, gently replacing them

friend in front of him, so he sincerely and humbly asks for forgiveness. Having overwhelmed Arjuna with the greatness of his being, in chapter twelve Krishna brings him back to see that the only way

challenged to fight those aspects or ourselves that prevent us from being the essence of love. Love is also the most powerful weapon we can use to overcome our less desirable traits and behaviours. In most instances we do not experience our inherent nature as love and contentment. *Why?* Because it is the nature of the mind to be filled with disturbing thoughts and feelings.

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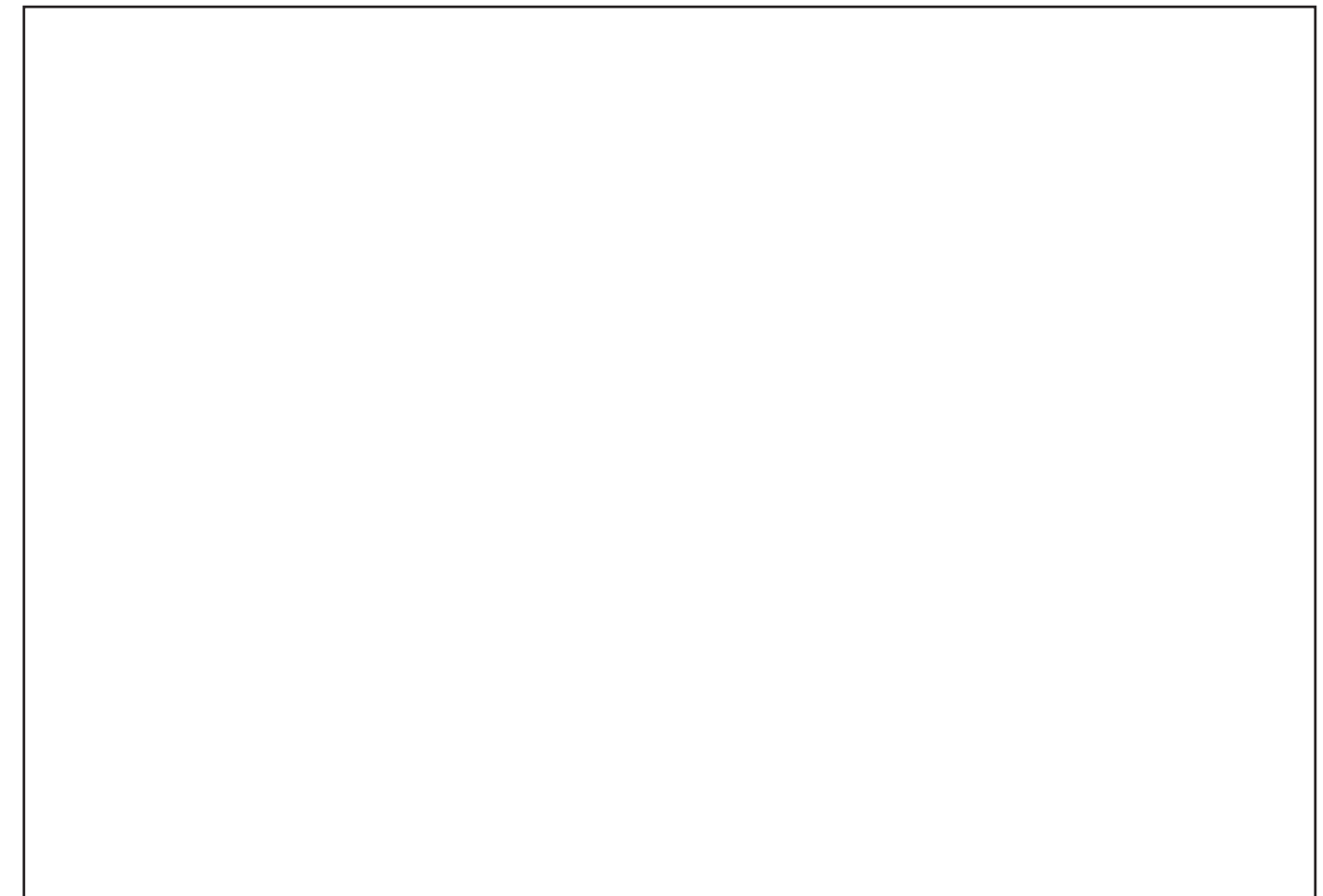
with goodness – generosity, gratitude, kindness, compassion, love, humility. Perhaps then these less appealing behaviours simply disappear!

KRISHNA THEN RESPONDS TO ARJUNA'S plea to return to his familiar gentle form. Now Arjuna, like a man waking up from an incredible dream, is aware once again that he is standing on the battlefield with the two armies on either side of him. He realises how he has been so totally ignorant of the greatness of this dear

to discover himself, his real self, is through a heart full of devotion. This self, whose nature is absolute love and contentment, is the real meaning of the word 'I'. The *Bhagavad Gita* is full of paradox, as in the midst of war Krishna is teaching about love while encouraging Arjuna to take up arms and kill his enemies! However this makes more sense when we realise that we are being encouraged to take up arms and battle our own lower nature. We are being

To discover a love that does not come and go – an abiding love, one that is constant – we must first develop an abiding mind. To develop an abiding mind we need to develop certain values and attitudes that create the 'right' conditions for love. We can so easily be misled through the media to believe that we will experience a peaceful loving contented heart when we find the 'perfect' partner together with a number of 'perfect' children; our ideal home, as well as financial security etc. This formula has the potential to be a recipe for disappointment.

In Dru Yoga we talk about opening the heart because we want to access the power of love that is *already there*. Many



of the movements are specific to activate the energy of the heart centre, anahata chakra. This is why this form of yoga has proven to be a potent emotional healer and therefore perfect for today's society.

Mahatma Gandhi said that love formed the basis of his satyagraha movement. What did he mean by love? Surely he wasn't talking about sentimental love or the warm fuzzy feeling we often call love. He was referring to the great power of love within the heart centre that has the wisdom and power of the universe as its foundation. In the Gita, Krishna says in chapter twelve, that love can only be recognised as such when it flows *out* of us, not in. Many people try to 'get' love from an outside source, which is like trying to catch the wind. The attempt is inevitably doomed to failure!

WE HAVE NOW COME TO A VERY CRUCIAL point in the *Bhagavad Gita*. We have arrived at the *Amritastakam* – the 'Eight Verses of Nectar'. These eight special verses in chapter twelve (numbers 13-20) describe the thirty-six noble attitudes embraced by a seeker. They reveal the six significant qualities of someone dedicated to following the path of a spiritual warrior – compassion, unconditional love, equanimity, selflessness, self-control and trust. In these stanzas Krishna is painting the picture of someone who has achieved spiritual perfection. There is nowhere else in the Gita that can compare to the beauty of these verses and it is said that if we chant them, we will awaken the qualities within.

"Do you know, Arjuna," Krishna says, "the only reason I have taken on this human body is so that I can have these two eyes to see my devotee; so that I can have arms that can embrace him and a heart that can feel the depth of my love for him?" He closes his eyes as two liquid pearls gently travel down his cheeks. Arjuna, with head bowed and palms folded together, is greatly moved by Krishna's tears. Only one thought enters his mind – to become that devotee. It is at this exquisite moment in the *Bhagavad Gita* that we too may feel a calling to love God in whatever form is most precious to us. And from this point



ABOVE: Ganesha

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a new journey awakens and more knowledge can be revealed.

Chapter thirteen, 'The field and the knower', is in many ways a revelation. Here Krishna explains the mystery of the immortal soul dwelling within the mortal frame we call the body. Arjuna tells Krishna, "I want to learn about spirit and matter – *purusha* and *prakriti*." This question is, as far as Krishna is concerned, a very worthy one, containing the power to take them both into the very depths of the great mystery of life itself. "Most people exist at the level of the world, or *prakriti*," says Krishna "but are trying to understand spirit, or *purusha*. This is like the finite trying to grasp infinity." The

knowledge given in this chapter has the potential to create a significant shift in consciousness. It challenges our experience of a physical reality known in the Gita as 'the field'. It pushes us to go beyond our core beliefs about what we think reality is. Is reality the shapes and forms that make up the world we see before us? The 'knower' of the field knows with full awareness that the physical world is on one level illusory and is merely a playground for the soul. The paradox is that even though the physical world is illusory we still have to live in it. However, we can learn to master our physical reality by understanding and adhering to the basic laws that govern it.

Life also becomes a lot more meaningful when we align ourselves with the higher spiritual reality while we do this.

THIS LEADS US INTO CHAPTER FOURTEEN, where Krishna gives the secret to success in both worldly and spiritual life. He summarises the three modes of nature, the *gunas*. The *gunas*, the three qualities of inertia (*tamas*), activity (*rajas*) and harmony (*sattva*), are the building blocks of the entire creation, including ourselves. They arise from the creative energy (*prakriti*), just as waves are part of the ocean and are inseparable from it.

rise above all these qualities through our spiritual practice we become free from birth and death, old age and sorrow.

Arjuna asks Krishna to describe someone who has achieved this wondrous state and Krishna paints a picture of a completely equanimous person whose mind is never disturbed by pain or pleasure, praise or blame, success or failure. This is someone who looks on clay and gold as the same – they are neither attracted to the gold nor do they reject the clay. The person who has gone beyond the *gunas* is said to be “a man of steady wisdom” and the perfect devotee.

the same form’. If you look around and realise what a privilege it is to be in this moment because it will never come again, then you will have some appreciation of the symbolism of this tree. We don’t know if we will be here tomorrow! This is a significant reminder to appreciate the preciousness of every moment. The ashvattha tree, or ‘Tree of Life’, which is described in many traditions of the world, refers to the human body and mind. Cutting down this firmly rooted tree with the weapon of non-attachment (15:3), having no preferences, removes us from the cycle of suffering. An effective way to achieve this state of detachment is by acting selflessly, out of pure love for the divine and all people. This will nurture the roots we wish to keep, while allowing the others to wither and die through neglect. Soon we will find we are no longer feeling attracted to those things that pull us down.

KRISHNA THEN BECOMES PARTICULARLY practical. He breaks down the main qualities that will either help or hinder progress on the spiritual path. The

Is reality the shapes and forms that make up the world we see before us?

In fact the *gunas* are the very energy of *prakriti* – matter. The *gunas* are states of being that influence our thoughts, feelings and actions because they are constantly moving within us. Once we

Krishna then goes on to present the entire universe in one of the most magnificent images, the holy fig or *ashvattha* tree 15:1. *Ashvattha* means ‘that which will not be here tomorrow in

twenty-six qualities that Krishna enumerates are all important steps that take us towards the divine nature we all have within us. They include such qualities as fearlessness, purity, giving, forgiveness, gentleness, yoga, and humility. Krishna clearly outlines to Arjuna the qualities he needs to develop and those that should be avoided. He tells Arjuna that the divine qualities are like a garland of beautiful flowers that, even if we choose to work in depth with only one, will give rise to all the others and lead to ultimate freedom.

IN CHAPTER SEVENTEEN WE ARE GIVEN tremendous insight into ourselves as Krishna responds to Arjuna's question about the importance of faith (*shraddha*). *Shraddha* is governed by the *gunas*. The kind of faith we have can define our whole attitude to life, our body, our relationships, the food we eat, the way we dress – everything. The real meaning of *shraddha* is believing in something and then applying our will towards it. This determines our thinking, understanding, value structure, beliefs, convictions and priorities.

If we have a *sattvic* (balanced, harmonious) nature we focus our energies on that which is pure and we have an abiding faith that God will support us as we do this. If we express ourselves with more *rajasic* tendencies (energetic, active) we are more likely to place our focus on wealth or power and to have faith that those are the things that will support us. People who are *tamasic* (grounded, lethargic) do not know where to obtain appropriate support. These people often reach for whatever addictive substances can help them to numb their suffering and they put their faith in whatever stops the unease in their lives. So our whole attitude to life determines the quality of our *shraddha* and what we have faith in.

KRISHNA ALSO REVEALS TO ARJUNA in chapter seventeen a secret in the form of a sacred mantra. "There are three words that have been used since the beginning of creation to represent the Absolute. The spiritual wisdom, the scriptures and sacrifice were created out of *Om Tat Sat*." *Om* – the creating, to initiate a process, *tat* – that which is created; to make it permanent, present and

powerful, and *sat* – truth, the creator. A living formula by which we can dedicate all to the creator and bring completeness to everything we do.

In a triumphant conclusion in chapter eighteen, Krishna summarises everything he has taught Arjuna. Many

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great scholars consider verse 66 of that chapter to be the most important in the *Bhagavad Gita*, containing the whole of its message. It certainly summarises the essence of renunciation. "Letting go of everything else, with your whole heart take refuge in me. I will free you from everything that causes you pain. There is no need for fear or worry". The selfish ego has died. This is now the sublime moment when Arjuna moves fully into his *dharma*, his duty in life, with no resistance whatsoever to doing what he was born to do. It is the ultimate surrender. Once we also surrender in this way, we become available to be an 'instrument of peace'. Life becomes a seamless flow of selfless actions performed only for the highest purpose and in ways that benefit the whole.

In the last moments of the Gita, Krishna and Arjuna look at each other knowing that their divine partnership and their infinite trust and love for one another have prepared the ground for a great victory. And this auspicious victory is one that we too can achieve.

The whole purpose of the Gita is to help us to understand, through Arjuna's predicament, that we must not run away from our duty in life just because it is painful or inconvenient. This is not a noble thing to do. As long as we are in a body we must act. The secret is to act with pure motive and without attachment. Gandhi said that the myth of the atomic age is that we think we have to change the world, but all we really have to do is to change ourselves. The Gita offers us a way to do this and there is only one way you can understand how this works; that is to simply experience it for yourself. For me, having the privilege of writing these articles has certainly further fuelled my love for the *Bhagavad Gita* and fired my enthusiasm to excite you to explore this 'riveting story' for yourself.

I wish to acknowledge with enormous gratitude my inspiring teachers of this divine text, who truly walk their talk in the world, expressing the knowledge and wisdom residing within the Gita. Some of them – Dr Mansukh Patel, Chris Barrington, Savitri McCuish and John Jones are the authors/translators of the three volumes of the Dru Bhagavad Gita, which has been the inspiration for

these articles. Another major source of material was the Dru Gita Correspondence Course, a home study program developed by Yamuna Loyal and Chris Barrington. If you would like further information on any of these resource materials, please contact Trish Brown on 02 6161 1462 or www.druyoga.com.au

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