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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to “The Song of the Spirit”

The Bhagavad Gita is the most beloved scripture of India, a scripture of scriptures. It is the Hindu’s Holy Testament, or Bible, the one book that all masters depend upon as a supreme source of scriptural authority. *Bhagavad Gita* means “Song of the Spirit,” the divine communion of truth-realization between man and his Creator, the teachings of Spirit through the soul, that should be sung unceasingly....

The entire knowledge of the cosmos is packed into the Gita. Supremely profound, yet couched in revelatory language of solacing beauty and simplicity, the Gita has been understood and applied on all levels of human endeavor and spiritual striving—sheltering a vast spectrum of human beings with their disparate natures and needs. Wherever one is on the way back to God, the Gita will shed its light on that segment of the journey.

Wisdom From an Ancient Higher Age of Civilization

India has preserved in her literature her highly evolved civilization dating back to a glorious golden age. From the undated antiquity in which the Vedas first emerged, through a grand unfoldment of subsequent exalted verse and prose, the Hindus have left their civilization not in stone monoliths or crumbling edifices, but in architecture of ornamental writing sculpted in the euphonious language of Sanskrit. The very composition of the Bhagavad Gita—its rhetoric, alliteration, diction, style, and harmony—shows that India had long since passed through states of material and intellectual growth and had arrived at a lofty peak of spirituality.



Its verses are found in the sixth of eighteen books that constitute India's great epic poem, the *Mahabharata*....This hoary epic—perhaps the longest poem in world literature—recounts the history of the descendants of King Bharata, the Pandavas and Kauravas, cousins whose dispute over a kingdom was the cause of the cataclysmic war of Kurukshetra. The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred dialogue on yoga between Bhagavan Krishna—who was at once an earthly king and a divine incarnation—and his chief disciple, the Pandava prince Arjuna, purportedly takes place on the eve of this fearsome war.

The authorship of the *Mahabharata*, including the Gita portion, is traditionally assigned to the illumined sage Vyasa, whose date is not definitely known....Tradition involves Vyasa in many literary works, primarily as an arranger of the four Vedas, for which he is referred to as Vedavyasa; compiler of *Puranas*, sacred books illustrating Vedic knowledge through historical and legendary tales of ancient India's avatars, saints and sages, kings and heroes; and author of the epic *Mahabharata*, which purportedly was accomplished nonstop in two and a half of his latter years spent in secluded retirement in the Himalayas.

India's Ageless Wisdom

The testament of the Hindu scriptures is that India's civilization goes back far earlier than contemporary Western historians acknowledge. Swami Sri Yukteswar, in *The Holy Science* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship), calculates that the Golden Age, in which India's spiritual and material civilization reached its pinnacle, ended about 6700 B.C. —having flowered for many thousands of years before that. India's scriptural literature lists many generations of kings and sages who lived prior to the events that are the main subject of the *Mahabharata*. In the Gita itself, Krishna describes the long descent of India's spiritual culture from a Golden Age to his own era, as the knowledge of yoga gradually was lost. "Most anthropologists, believing that 10,000 years ago humanity was living in a barbarous Stone Age, summarily dismiss as 'myths' the widespread traditions of very ancient civilizations in Lemuria, Atlantis, India, China, Japan, Egypt, Mexico, and many other lands," a passage in *Autobiography of a Yogi* reads. Recent scientific research, however, is beginning to suggest that the truth of ancient chronologies be reevaluated. (*Publisher's Note*)

Cracking the Code of the Gita's Yogic Symbolism

The ancient sacred writings do not clearly distinguish history from symbology; rather, they often intermix the two in the tradition of scriptural revelation. Prophets would pick up instances of the everyday life and events of their times and from them draw similes to express subtle spiritual truths. Divine profundities would not otherwise be conceivable by the ordinary man unless defined in common terms. When, as they often did, scriptural prophets wrote in more recondite metaphors and allegories, it was to conceal from ignorant, spiritually unprepared minds the deepest revelations of Spirit. Thus, in a language of simile, metaphor, and allegory, the Bhagavad Gita was very cleverly written by Sage Vyasa by interweaving historical facts with psychological and spiritual truths, presenting a word-painting of the tumultuous inner battles that must be waged by both the material and the spiritual man. In the hard shell of symbology, he hid the deepest spiritual meanings to protect them from the devastation of the ignorance of the Dark Ages toward which civilization was descending concurrent with the end of Sri Krishna's incarnation on earth.

Historically, on the brink of such a horrendous war as that related in the *Mahabharata*, it is most unlikely that, as the Gita depicts, Krishna and Arjuna would draw their chariot into the open field between the two opposing armies at Kurukshetra and there engage in an extensive discourse on yoga. While many of the chief events and persons in the compendious *Mahabharata* indeed have their basis in historical fact, their poetic presentation in the epic has been arranged conveniently and meaningfully (and wonderfully condensed in the Bhagavad Gita portion) for the primary purpose of setting forth the essence of India's *Sanatana Dharma*, Eternal Religion.

In interpreting scripture, one must not, therefore, ignore the factual and historical elements in which the truth was couched. One must distinguish between an ordinary illustration of a moral doctrine or recounting of a spiritual phenomenon and that of a deeper esoteric intent. One has to know how to recognize the signs of the convergence of material illustrations with spiritual doctrines without trying to drag a hidden meaning out of everything. One must know how to intuit the cues and express declara-

tions of the author and never fetch out meanings not intended, misled by enthusiasm and the imaginative habit of trying to squeeze spiritual significance from every word or statement.

The true way to understand scripture is through intuition, attuning oneself to the inner realization of truth....Through the help of a God-realized guru, one learns how to use the nutcracker of intuitive perception to crack open the hard shell of language and ambiguity to get at the kernels of truth in scriptural sayings.

My guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar, never permitted me to read with mere theoretical interest any stanza of the Bhagavad Gita (or the aphorisms of Patanjali, India's greatest exponent of Yoga). Master made me meditate on the scriptural truths until I became one with them; then he would discuss them with me....In this way, during those precious years in the blessed company of Master, he gave to me the key to unlock the mystery of scripture.



The *Mahabharata* story begins three generations before the time of Krishna and Arjuna, at the time of King Shantanu....

The genealogical descent of the Kurus and Pandus from Shantanu parallels in analogy the step-by-step descent of the universe and man from Spirit into matter. The Gita dialogue concerns itself with the process by which that descent may be reversed, enabling man to reascend from the limited consciousness of himself as a mortal being to the immortal consciousness of his true Self, the soul, one with the infinite Spirit.

The genealogy is diagrammed in [*God Talks With Arjuna*], along with the spiritual significance of the various characters as was handed down from Lahiri Mahasaya. These esoteric meanings are not arbitrary. In explaining the inner meaning of words and names, the primary key is to hunt for it in the original Sanskrit root. Terrible mistakes are made in definitions of Sanskrit terms if there is no intuitive ability to arrive at the correct root, and then to decipher the correct meaning from that root according to its usage at the time of the origin of the word. When the basis is correctly established, one may then also draw meaning from the various sources relative to the common meaning of words and the specific way they were used to form a cogent connective thought.

It is remarkable how the author of this great Bhagavad Gita has clothed every psychological tendency or faculty, as well as many metaphysical principles, with a suitable name. Each word, how beautiful! Each word growing from a Sanskrit root! A proliferation of pages would be required to delve fully into the Sanskrit underlying the metaphors....

It will become evident to the reader after thoughtful perusal of the key to a few stanzas in the first chapter that the historical background of a battle and the contestants therein have been used for the purpose of illustrating the spiritual and psychological battle going on between the attributes of the pure discriminative intellect in attunement with the soul and the blind sense-infatuated mind under the delusive influence of the ego. In support of this analogy, there is shown an exact correspondence between the material and spiritual attributes of man as described by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* and the warring contestants cited in the Gita: the clan of Pandu, representing Pure Intelligence; and that of the blind King Dhritarashtra, representing the Blind Mind with its offspring of wicked sense-tendencies [the Kauravas or Kurus].



These sense bolsheviks—offspring of the blind sense-mind—have brought only sickness, mental worries, and the pestilence of ignorance and spiritual famine, owing to the dearth of wisdom in the bodily kingdom.

The awakened soul force and the meditation-evolved self-control must seize the kingdom and plant therein the banner of Spirit, establishing a reign resplendent with peace, wisdom, abundance, and health.

Bhagavan Krishna, Lord of Yoga: The Divine Teacher of the Gita

The key figure of the Bhagavad Gita is, of course, Bhagavan Krishna. The historical Krishna is enshrouded in the mystery of scriptural metaphor and mythology. Similarities in the titles “Krishna” and “Christ” and in the tales of the miraculous birth and early life of Krishna and Jesus led some analyzing minds to propose that they were indeed one and the same person. This idea can be wholly rejected, based on even scanty historical evidence in the countries of their origin.

Nevertheless, some similarities are there. Both were divinely con-