



## THE DEVOTEE

“He is the devotee.....

- Who is jealous of none;
- Who is a fount of mercy;
- Who is without egotism;
- Who is selfless;
- Who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery;
- Who is ever forgiving;
- Who is always contented;
- Whose resolutions are firm;
- Who has dedicated mind and soul to God;
- Who causes no dread;
- Who is not afraid of others;
- Who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear;
- Who is pure;
- Who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it;
- Who renounces all fruit, good or bad;
- Who treats friend and foe alike;
- Who is untouched by respect or disrespect;
- Who is not puffed up by praise;
- Who does not go under when people speak ill of him;
- Who loves silence and solitude;
- Who has a disciplined reason.”

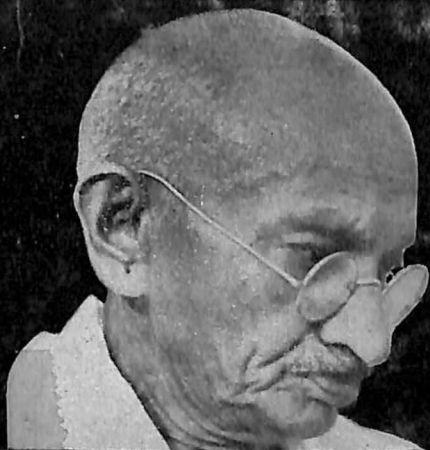
—M. K. GANDHI



POCKET GANDHI SERIES



# THE TEACHING OF THE GITA



*"Let the Gita be to you a mine of diamonds as it has been  
a constant guide and friend on life's  
path and dignify your labour."*

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BHARATI

*M.K. Gandhi*

• BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY - 7 •

## EQUIPMENT FOR READING THE GITA

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“I cannot conceive anything so fortifying as a reverent study of the *Bhagavad Gita*. No man who engages in a reverent study of that book can help becoming a true servant of the nation and through it of humanity.

“The *Gita* contains the Gospel of Work, the Gospel of *Bhakti* or Devotion, and the Gospel of *Jnana* or Knowledge. Life should be a harmonious whole of these three. But the Gospel of Service is the basis of all.

“But you must approach it with the five necessary equipments, viz., *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), and *Asteya* (Non-stealing). Then, and then only, will you be able to reach a correct interpretation of it.

“Read it with the necessary equipment and, I assure you, you will have peace of which you were never aware before.”

—M. K. GANDHI

Abdul Majid Khan.

21.5.63

I like Mr. Singh's idea of collecting my writings under suitable heads. The reader will not fail to appreciate the labours he has given to securing attractive printing & binding.

mkghawhi

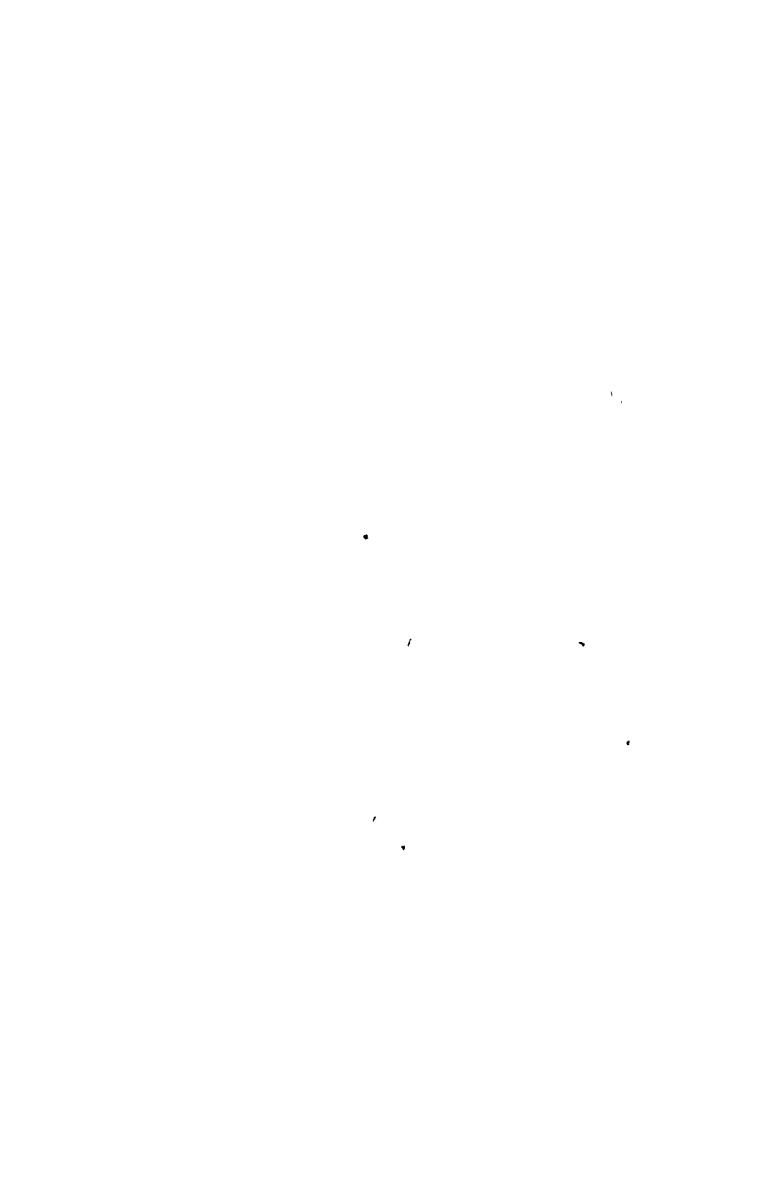
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**THE  
TEACHING OF THE GITA**



"Pocket Gandhi Series" No. 5

# THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

By  
M. K. GANDHI

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EDITED & PUBLISHED  
By  
ANAND T. HINGORANI



1962  
BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN  
BOMBAY-7



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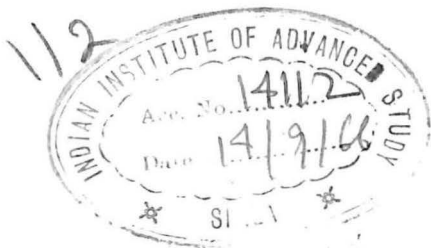


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## PREFACE

OF the books that deeply inspired and influenced Gandhiji and by its magic moulded his entire life, thought and action, assuredly the *Bhagavad Gita* occupies a pre-eminent place. On his very first acquaintance with it, while he was yet a law student in England in 1889, the book struck him as of 'priceless worth'.

This initial acquaintance was, however, made not through the original in Sanskrit, but through Sir Edwin Arnold's English rendering—*The Song Celestial*. Even so, it produced a powerful impact on his mind and, as the years passed and the spell of the Divine Song went on growing with the increasing understanding of its message and meaning, Gandhiji came to regard it not only as the book '*par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth', but also of invaluable help in his 'moments of gloom'.

The *Gita* became for Gandhiji his 'dictionary of daily reference' to which he invariably turned for solace and guidance whenever he found himself confronted by doubts and difficulties, trials and troubles. Especially the last 19 verses of the Second Chapter, wherein are described the characteristics of a man of steadfast wisdom, gripped him so much that they got indelibly inscribed on the tablet of his heart. These verses were recited daily in his prayers and provided to him the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*.

Gandhiji's whole life was patterned on the lofty teachings of the *Gita*. And these teachings, according to him, are such as can be easily understood and enforced in

one's life by all, to whatever race or religion they may belong, who are humble in spirit and who have 'fulness of faith' and 'an undivided singleness of mind'. It is because Gandhiji had all these qualities in an abundant measure that he succeeded so well in attuning his life to the highest truths laid down in the *Gita*. May we, too, taking a lesson from his noble life, endeavour to apply the teachings of the *Gita* in all our activities and thus introduce into our lives, like him, an element of 'perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding' !

7, Edmonstone Road  
*Allahabad* (India)  
July 20, 1962.

ANAND T. HINGORANI

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## 1. MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH GITA

TOWARDS the end of my second year in England, I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation—*The Song Celestial*—and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the Divine Poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them that I had not read the *Gita*, but that I would gladly read it with them, and that though my knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning. I began reading the *Gita* with them. The verses in the Second Chapter

"If one  
Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs  
Attraction; from attraction grows desire,  
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds  
Recklessness; then the memory—all betrayed—  
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,  
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone."

made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears.

The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom. I have read almost all the English translations of it, and I regard Sir Edwin Arnold's as the best. He has been faithful to the text, and yet it does not read like a translation. Though I read the *Gita* with these friends,



## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

I cannot pretend to have studied it then. It was only after some years that it became a book of daily reading.

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part I, Chap. XX.

### 2. RESULT OF INTROSPECTION

I ALREADY had faith in the *Gita*, which had a fascination for me. Now I realized the necessity of diving deeper into it. I had one or two translations, by means of which I tried to understand the original Sanskrit. I decided also to get by heart one or two verses every day. For this purpose, I employed the time of my morning ablutions. The operation took me thirty-five minutes—fifteen minutes for the tooth-brush, and twenty for the bath. The first I used to do standing in Western fashion. So, on the wall opposite, I stuck slips of paper on which were written the *Gita* verses and referred to them now and then to help my memory. This time was found sufficient for memorizing the daily portion and recalling the verses already learnt. I remember having thus committed to memory thirteen chapters. But the memorizing of the *Gita* had to give way to other work and the creation and nurture of *Satyagraha*, which absorbed all my thinking time.

#### My Dictionary of Daily Reference

What effect this reading of the *Gita* had on my friends only they can say, but to me the *Gita* became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. Words like *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *sama-bhava* (equability) gripped me. How to cultivate and

preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had.

### Implication of the Word 'Trustee'

My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the Maxims of Equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly, in the light of the *Gita* teaching, the implication of the word 'trustee'. My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. I understood the *Gita* teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude. I then wrote to Revashankarbhai to allow the insurance policy to lapse and get whatever could be recovered, or else to regard the premiums already paid as lost, for I had become convinced that God, who created my wife and children as well as myself, would take care of them. To my brother, who had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had given him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that henceforth he should expect nothing from me, for future savings, if any, would be utilized for the benefit of the community.

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part IV; Chap. V.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

### 3. WHAT THE GITA TEACHES

**I** DO not believe that the *Gita* teaches violence for doing good. It is pre-eminently a description of the duel that goes on in our own hearts. The Divine author has used a historical incident for inculcating the lesson of doing one's duty even at the peril of one's life. It inculcates performance of duty irrespective of the consequences; for, we mortals, limited by our physical frames, are incapable of controlling actions save our own. The *Gita* distinguishes between the powers of light and darkness and demonstrates their incompatibility.<sup>1</sup>

—*Young India* February 23, 1921.

I do not agree that the *Gita* advocates and teaches violence in any part of it. See the concluding discourse at the end of Chapter Two. Although that Chapter lends itself to a violent interpretation, the concluding verses seem to me to preclude any such interpretation. The fact is that a literal interpretation of the *Gita* lands one in a sea of contradictions. The letter truly killeth, the spirit giveth life.

—*Young India*: March 12, 1925.

### 4. MY MEANING OF THE GITA

**I** ASCRIBE to the *Gita*, a totally different meaning from that ordinarily given. I do not regard it as a description of, or an exhortation to, physical warfare. And, in any case, it is God—the All-Knowing—who descends to the earth to punish the wicked.

—*Young India*: April 9, 1925.

1. "I venture to submit that the *Bhagavad Gita* is a Gospel of Non-co-operation between the forces of darkness and those of light. If it is to be literally interpreted, Arjuna, representing a just cause, was enjoined to engage in bloody warfare with the unjust Kauravas."

—*Young India*: August 25, 1920.

## KRISHNA OF MY CONCEPTION

I have already stated my meaning of the *Gita*. It deals with the eternal duel between good and evil. And who does not, like Arjuna, often quail when the dividing line between good and evil is thin and when the right choice is so difficult?

—*Young India*: May 7, 1925.

### 5. KRISHNA OF MY CONCEPTION

I HAVE no knowledge that the Krishna of *Mahabharata* ever lived. My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person.<sup>1</sup> I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna whom non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the *Gita* and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the *Mahabharata* is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the *Mahabharata* is authentic and that the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God-incarnate. But, to me, the *Mahabharata* is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves, given so vividly as to make us think for the time being that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the *Mahabharata*, as we have it now, as a faultless copy

1. "I believe in Krishna. But my Krishna is the Lord of the Universe, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of us all. He may destroy because He creates."

—*Young India*: April 9, 1925.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

of the original. On the contrary, I consider that it has undergone many amendations.

—*Young India*: October 1, 1925.

### 6. NEITHER FICTION NOR HISTORY

**K**RISHNA failed to do nothing He wished to do, so says the author of the *Mahabharata*. He was omnipotent. It is futile to drag Krishna from His heights. If He has to be judged as a mere mortal, I fear He will fare badly and will have to take a back seat. *Mahabharata* is neither fiction nor history commonly so-called. It is the history of the human soul in which God, as Krishna, is the chief actor. There are many things in that poem that my poor understanding cannot fathom. There are in it many things which are obvious interpolations. It is not a treasure chest. It is a mine which needs to be explored, which needs to be dug deep and from which diamonds have to be extracted after removing much foreign matter. Therefore, I would urge my friends to keep their feet firm on Mother Earth and not scale the Himalayan heights to which the poet took Arjuna and his other heroes. Anyway, I must respectfully refuse even to attempt the ascent. The plains of Hindustan are good enough for me.

—*Young India*: May 21, 1928.

### History of Man

Many of us make the very serious mistake of taking literally what is accepted as scriptures, forgetting that the letter killeth and the spirit giveth life. The *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* are neither history nor simple religious maxims. They appear to me to be wonderfully designed to illustrate the religious history of man in a variety of ways. The heroes described therein are all imperfect mortals, even as we are—the

## NON-VIOLENCE IN THE GITA

difference being one of degree only. Their alleged actions are not infallible guides for us. The *Mahabharata* sums up its teachings by declaring emphatically that Truth outweighs everything else on earth.

—*Young India*: December 15, 1927.

### 7. NON-VIOLENCE IN THE GITA

**W**E should not mix up the historic Krishna with the Krishna of the *Gita* who was not discussing the question of violence and non-violence. Arjuna was not averse to killing in general, but only to killing his own relatives. Therefore, Krishna suggested that in doing one's duty one may not treat one's relations differently from other people. In the age of *Gita*, the question, whether one should or should not wage war, was not raised by any important person. Indeed, it appears to have been raised only in recent times. All Hindus in those days believed in *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), but what amounted to and what did not amount to violence was a question debated then, as it is debated now. Many things which we look upon as non-violent will, perhaps, be considered violent by future generations. For, we destroy life when we use milk or cereals as food. Therefore, it is quite possible that posterity will give up milk production and the cultivation of foodgrains. Just as we consider ourselves as non-violent in spite of our consumption of milk and foodgrains, so also in the age of the *Gita* fighting was such a common thing that no one thought it was contrary to *Ahimsa*. Therefore, I do not see anything wrong in the *Gita* having used warfare as an illustration. But if we study the whole of the *Gita* and examine its descriptions of *Sthitaprajna*, *Brahmabhūta*, *Bhakta* and *Yogi*, we can reach only this conclusion that the Krishna of the *Gita* was the very incarnation of *Ahimsa*, and his exhortation to Arjuna to fight does not detract from

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

his greatness. On the other hand, if he had given him different advice, his knowledge would have been proved inadequate, and he would not have been entitled to be called *Yogeshwara* (the Prince of Yogis) and *Purna Avatara* (the Perfect Incarnation).

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 93.

### 8. THE GITA TEACHES AHIMSA

**I**N our study of the *Gita*, we have only to consider what was the question for which an answer was sought. If, in answering a question, a teacher went beyond the scope of that question, he would be considered stupid. For, the questioner's attention is concentrated on his own question; he is not ready to listen to other things, a discussion about which he can neither understand nor appreciate. Judged by this standard, Krishna's is a perfect answer. And, when after finishing the First Chapter of the *Gita* we enter upon the Second, we find that it teaches *Ahimsa* pure and simple. To look upon Krishna as a *Purna Avatara* (Perfect Incarnation) should not mean that we can obtain from the *Gita* direct answers to all the questions that arise from day to day, just as we find the meaning of words by looking up a dictionary. This would not be desirable even if it were possible; for, in that case, there would be nothing like progress or discovery for mankind. Human intelligence would then simply atrophy from disuse. Therefore, questions that arise in each age must be solved by the people of that age through their own effort. Our difficulties at present, such as world wars, must be met by applying the general principles derived from the *Gita* and similar books, which can be of help only to a limited extent. Real help can come only from our endeavours and struggles. In books on Indian medicine, we find various virtues attributed

## CHARACTERS IN THE MAHABHARATA

to a number of drugs. But their descriptions can serve us only as a guide. So long as these drugs have not been tested in actual practice, our theoretical knowledge of them not only serves no useful purpose, but is even burdensome. The same is true of the questions in life that clamour for solution.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 105.

### 9. CHARACTERS IN THE MAHABHARATA

ALL the names given in the First Chapter of the *Gita* are, in my opinion, not so much proper nouns as names of qualities. In describing the eternal warfare between the heavenly and the devilish natures, the poet has personified them as the characters in the *Mahabharata*. This does not imply a refusal to believe that an actual battle took place at Hastinapur between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. I hold that the poet took some such actual event as the thread upon which to hang his discourse. But I may be wrong. Again, if all the names given are the names of real historical characters, the poet has done nothing improper in giving the list at the historical beginning. And as the First Chapter is an essential part of the subject-matter of the *Gita*, it, too, should be recited as part of *Gitapatha*.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 172.

### 10. LESSON FROM THE MAHABHARATA

ARJUNA'S defeat at the hands of ordinary highwaymen, and the end of the victors in Himalayan snows are intended by the author of the *Mahabharata* to show the futility of war with weapons of steel. *Bhagavan* (The Lord) has given a description of Himself in the *Gita*; that is to say, the author of the *Gita* has put this description in His mouth. But, as a matter



## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

of fact, God has no shape and never talks like man. Then, the question is: Is it proper to put such speeches in the mouth of the Lord? I answer yes. The Lord is omnipotent and omniscient. The speech of one who is omniscient must be truthful. It cannot, therefore, count as boasting. A man cannot similarly take a measure of his own powers; therefore, such language in his mouth would be inappropriate. But when the occasion arises, a man may say that his height is so many feet, so many inches. He then does not boast, but only tells the truth. If a man 6 feet tall says that he is 5 feet in height, that is not modesty, but sheer ignorance or hypocrisy.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 314.

### 11. THE MEANING OF THE GITA

**A** FRIEND puts forward the following poser:

“The controversy about the teaching of the *Gita*—whether it is *Himsa* (Violence) or *Ahimsa* (Non-violence)—will, it seems, go on for a long time. It is one thing what meaning we read in the *Gita*, or rather we want to read in the *Gita*; it is another what meaning is furnished by an unbiased reading of it. The question, therefore, does not present much difficulty to one who implicitly accepts *Ahimsa* as the eternal principle of life. He will say that the *Gita* is acceptable to him only if it teaches *Ahimsa*. A grand book like the *Gita* could, for him, inculcate nothing grander than the eternal religious principle of *Ahimsa*. If it did not, it would cease to be his unerring guide. It would still be worthy of his high regard, but not an infallible authority.

“In the First Chapter, we find Arjuna laying down his weapons, under the influence of *Ahimsa*, and ready to die at the hands of the Kauravas. He conjures up a vision of the disaster and the sin involved in *Himsa*. He is overcome with ennui and, in fear and trembling, exclaims:

“O what a mighty sin we are up to!”  
“Shri Krishna catches him in that mood and tells him.

## THE MEANING OF THE GITA

'Enough of this high philosophy; no one kills or is killed. The soul is immortal and the body must perish. Fight then the fight that has come to thee as a matter of duty. Victory or defeat is no concern of thine. Acquit thyself of thy task.'

"In the Eleventh Chapter, the Lord presents a panoramic vision of the Universe and says:

'I am *Kala*, the Destroyer of the worlds, the Ancient of Days; I am here engaged in my task of destruction of the worlds. Kill thou those already killed by me. Give not thyself up to grief.'

"*Himsa* and *Ahimsa* are equal before God. But, for man, what is God's message? Is it this: 'Fight; for thou art sure to foil thy enemies in the field'? If the *Gita* teaches *Ahimsa*, the First and the Eleventh Chapters are not consistent with the rest, at any rate do not support the *Ahimsa* theory. I wish you could find time to resolve my doubt."

### The Eternal Question

The question put is eternal, and every one who has studied the *Gita* must needs find out his own solution. And, although I am going to offer mine, I know that ultimately one is guided not by the intellect but by the heart. The heart accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Argument follows conviction. Man often finds reason in support of whatever he does or wants to do.

I shall, therefore, appreciate the position of those who are unable to accept my interpretation of the *Gita*. All I need do is to indicate how I reached my meaning, and what canons of interpretation I have followed in arriving at it. Mine is but to fight for my meaning, no matter whether I win or lose.

### My First Acquaintance With the Gita

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* was in 1889, when I was almost twenty. I had not then much of an inkling of the principle of *Ahimsa*. One of the lines<sup>1</sup>

1. "Here are those (for me) wonderful lines:  
'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal;

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

of the Gujarati poet, Shamal Bhatt, had taught me the principle of winning even the enemy with love, and that teaching had gone deep into me. But I had not deduced the eternal principle of Non-violence from it. It did not, for instance, cover all animal life. I had before this tasted meat whilst in India. I thought it a duty to kill venomous reptiles like the snake. It is my conviction today that even venomous creatures may not be killed by a believer in *Ahimsa*. I believed in those days in preparing ourselves for a fight with the English. I often repeated a Gujarati poet's famous doggerel: 'What wonder if Britain rules', etc. My meat-eating was as a first step to qualify myself for the fight with the English. Such was my position before I proceeded to England, and there I escaped meat-eating etc., because of my determination to follow unto death the promises I had given to my mother. My love for Truth has saved me from many a pitfall.

### The 'Eternal Verities'

Now, whilst in England, my contact with two English friends made me read the *Gita*. I say 'made me read', because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But when these two friends asked me to read the *Gita* with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride, I think, was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand all the verses of the *Gita* un-

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*For a kindly greeting, bow thou down with zeal;  
For a simple penny, pay thou back with gold;  
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.  
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;  
Every little service tenfold they reward.  
But the truly noble know all men as one,  
And return with gladness good for evil done'."*

—*My Experiments with Truth: Part I, Chap. X.*

aided. The friends, of course, were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the *Gita*. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the Second Chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they teach me are the 'eternal verities'. There is reasoning in them, but they represent realized knowledge.

I have since read many translations and many commentaries, have argued and reasoned to my heart's content, but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*. I would ever advise rejection of the verses that may seem to be in conflict with them. But a humble student need reject nothing. He will simply say: 'It is the limitation of my own intellect that I cannot resolve this inconsistency. I might be able to do so in the time to come'. That is how he will plead with himself and with others.

### Essentials of Correct Interpretation

A prayerful study and experience are essential for a correct interpretation of the scriptures. The injunction that a *Shudra* may not study the scriptures is not entirely without meaning. A *Shudra* means a spiritually uncultured, ignorant man. He is more likely than not to misinterpret the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Every one cannot solve an algebraical equation. Some preliminary study is a *sine qua non*. How ill would the grand truth 'I am Brahman' lie in the mouth of a man steeped in sin! To what ignoble purposes would he turn it! What a distortion it would suffer at his hands!

A man, therefore, who would interpret the scriptures must have the spiritual discipline. He must prac-

tise the *Yamas* and *Niyamas*—the eternal guides of conduct. A superficial practice thereof is useless. The *Shastras* have enjoined the necessity of a *Guru*. But a *Guru* being rare in these days, a study of modern books inculcating *Bhakti* has been suggested by the sages. Those who are lacking in *Bhakti*, lacking in faith, are ill qualified to interpret the scriptures. The learned may draw an elaborately learned interpretation out of them, but that will not be the true interpretation. Only the experienced will arrive at the true interpretation of the scriptures.

### Truth is Positive

But even for the inexperienced, there are certain canons. That interpretation is not true which conflicts with Truth. To one who doubts even Truth, the scriptures have no meaning. No one can contend with him. There is danger for the man who has failed to find *Ahimsa* in the scriptures, but he is not doomed. Truth—*Sat*—is positive; Non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, Non-violence negatives the fact. And yet, Non-violence is the highest religion. Truth is self evident; Non-violence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but, as it is not self-evident, a man may seek to interpret the *Shastras* without accepting it. But his acceptance of Truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of Non-violence.

Renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth. The sage who realized Truth found Non-violence out of the violence raging all about him and said: 'Violence is unreal, Non-violence is real.' Realization of Truth is impossible without Non-violence. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *Asteya* (non-stealing) *Aparigraha* (non-possession) are means to achieve *Ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the soul of Truth. Man is mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realize all this in his

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search for Truth, and he will then have no difficulty in the interpretation of the *Shastras*.

### Examine the Spirit, Not the Letter

Another canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter, but to examine the spirit. Tulsidas' *Ramayana* is a noble book because it is informed with the spirit of purity, pity and piety. There is a verse in it which brackets drums, *Shudras*, fools and women together as fit to be beaten. A man who cites that verse to beat his wife is doomed to perdition. Rama did not only not beat his wife, but never even sought to displease her. Tulsidas simply inserted in his poem a proverb current in his days, little dreaming that there would be brutes justifying beating of their wives on the authority of the verse. But assuming that Tulsidas himself followed a custom which was prevalent in his days and beat his wife, what then? The beating was still wrong. But the *Ramayana* was not written to justify beating of their wives by their husbands. It was written to depict Rama, the perfect man, and Sita the ideal wife, and Bharat the ideal of a devoted brother. Any justification incidently met with therein of vicious customs should, therefore, be rejected. Tulsidas did not write his priceless epic to teach geography, and any wrong geography that we happen to come across in *Ramayana* should be summarily rejected.

### The Theme of The Gita

Let us examine the *Gita* in the light of these observations. Self-realization and its means is the theme of the *Gita*, the fight between two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might, if you like, say that the poet himself was not against war or violence and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of a war into service. But a reading of the

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*Mahabharata* has given me an altogether different impression. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of war by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to? And where are the Yadavas to-day?

Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject-matter of the epic, it is quite wrong to emphasize those aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of Non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the framework of violence.

### Central Teaching of The Gita

The poet, when he writes, is not conscious of all the interpretation his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The Truth that he reaches, in the highest flights of his fancy, is often not to be met with in his life. The life-story of many a poet thus belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the *Gita* is not *Himsa* but *Ahimsa*; is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in the Second Chapter and summarized in the concluding Eighteenth Chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsa* is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the *Gita* strives to carry us to the state beyond *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger every time he drew the bow to the end of his ear.

### Why Sri Krishna Advised Arjuna to Kill

It was not in a spirit of *Ahimsa* that Arjuna refused to go to battle. He had fought many a battle be-

fore. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say he would kill no one, even if he regarded him as wicked. Sri Krishna knows everyone's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He, therefore, told him: 'Thou hast already done the killing. Thou canst not all at once argue thyself into Non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun.' If a passenger going in a Scotch Express gets suddenly sick of travelling and jumps out of it, he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other advice. But to say that the *Gita* teaches violence or justifies war, because advice to kill was given on a particular occasion, is as wrong as to say that *Himsa* is the Law of Life, because a certain amount of it is inevitable in daily life. To one who reads the spirit of the *Gita*, it teaches the secret of Non-violence, the secret of realizing the Self through the physical body.

### Who are Dharitarashtra, Yudhishtira and Arjuna?

And who are Dharitarashtra and Yudhishtira and Arjuna? Who is Krishna? Were they all historical characters? And does the *Gita* describe them as such? Is it true that Arjuna suddenly stops in the midst of the fight and puts the question to Krishna, and Krishna repeats the whole of the *Gita* before him? And which is that *Gita*—the *Gita* that Arjuna forgot after having exclaimed that his infatuation was gone and which he requested Krishna to sing again, but which he could not, and which, therefore, he gave in the form of *Anugita*?

I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the



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higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the poet-seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch, the heart needs the winding of purity or the Dweller ceases to speak.

### Gita Does Not Teach Despair and Cowardice

Not that actual physical battle is out of the question. To those who are innocent of Non-violence, the *Gita* does not teach a lesson of despair. He who fears, who saves his skin, who yields to his passions, must fight the physical battle whether he will or no; but that is not his *Dharma*. *Dharma* is one and one only. *Ahimsa* means *Moksha*, and *Moksha* is the realization of Truth. There is no room here for cowardice. *Himsa* will go on eternally in this strange world. The *Gita* shows the way out of it. But it also shows that escape out of cowardice and despair is not the way. Better far than cowardice is killing and being killed in battle.

If the meaning of the verses quoted by the correspondent is not still clear, I must confess my inability to make it so. Is it agreed that the Almighty God is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer and ought to be such? And if He creates, He has undoubtedly the right to destroy. And yet He does not destroy because He does not create. His law is that whatever is born must die, and in that lies His mercy. His laws are immutable. Where should we all be if He changed them capriciously?

—*Young India*: November 12, 1925.

## 12. MESSAGE OF THE GITA

**E**VEN in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was

brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a close study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or sub-human origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the *Mahabharata* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

### **Futility of Physical Warfare**

The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare: on the contrary, he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

In this great work, the *Gita* is the crown. Its Second Chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfect man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfect man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

### **Theory of Incarnation**

In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind.

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All embodied life is, in reality, an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth. There is an Urdu saying which means: "Adam is not God, but he is a spark of the Divine." And, therefore, he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought, that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.

This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the *Gita*, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization. That which is to be found, more or less, clearly spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the *Gita* even at the risk of repetition.

### Renunciation of Fruits of Action

This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven. This renunciation is the central Sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body

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as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words, how can one be free from action, *i.e.*, from the taint of sin? The *Gita* has answered the question in decisive language: "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, *i.e.*, by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."

But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the *Vedas* from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the *Gita* has insisted on devotion accompanying it, and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the *Gita*: 'Have devotion, and knowledge will follow.' This devotion is not mere lip-worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence the *Gita's* assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

### Devotion of The Gita

Thus, the devotion required by the *Gita* is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the *Gita* has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread,

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who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

### Salvation is Perfect Peace

We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words, if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the *Gita* is perfect peace.

But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions, a mere learned man will pass as a *Pandit*. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting a *lota*.

### Popular Notion of Bhakti

Or, take *Bhakti*. The popular notion of *Bhakti* is softheartedness, telling beads and the like and disdain to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads etc. might be interrupted. This *Bhakta*, there-

fore, leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

But the *Gita* says: 'No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?'

### **Freedom From Bondage of Action**

While, on the one hand, it is beyond dispute that all action binds; on the other hand, it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is to be included in the term action. Then, how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting? The manner in which the *Gita* has solved the problem is, to my knowledge, unique. The *Gita* says: 'Do your allotted work, but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward, and work.'

This is the unmistakable teaching of the *Gita*. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and the capacity for it. He who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

### **What Renunciation Means**

Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The *Gita* reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means ab-

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sence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces, reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the *Gita* is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result, often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says good-bye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he, therefore, resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.

### Religion in Day-to-day Life

From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit, the author of the *Gita* discovered the path of renunciation of the fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many worldly-wise people say. In my opinion, the author of the *Gita* has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the *Gita* teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice, cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the *Gita*, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation, murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and,

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therefore, taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

### The Gita and Ahimsa

Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the *Gita*, one is bound to follow Truth and Ahimsa. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *Himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the *Gita* was not written to establish *Ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the *Gita* age. The *Gita* had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the Second Chapter.

But if the *Gita* believed in *Ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a war-like illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *Ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *Ahimsa*.

### Implications of Renunciation of Fruit

In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *Ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that, having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this, perhaps, lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expand-



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ed. This is true of the *Gita*. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible, that in the age prior to that of the *Gita*, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita* sense. In the *Gita*, continuous concentration on God is the kind of sacrifices. The Third Chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body-labour for service. The Third and the Fourth Chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice, but never animal sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *Sannyasa* undergone, in the *Gita*, a transformation. The *Sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *Sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet no work.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the author of the *Gita*, by extending meanings of words, has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the *Gita*, it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I, in all humility, feel that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *Ahimsa* in every shape and form.

### A Great Religious Poem

The *Gita* is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age, the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any

1. "*Sannyasa* in the *Gita* is renunciation of actions inspired by desire (*Kamyā*)."

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 113.

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meaning he likes, so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

Nor is the *Gita* a collection of Do's and Don'ts. What is lawful for one, may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

The *Gita* has sung the praises of Knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore, the *Gita* is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say: 'Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand, those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will, by the fact of this service, assuredly reach Me. And those who, being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death.'

—*Young India*: August 6, 1931.

### 13. STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL.

A DISPASSIONATE reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* has revealed to me a meaning wholly contrary to the one given to it by the *Statesman* writer.<sup>1</sup> He has

1. The reference is to the following passage in the *Statesman*:

"Indeed, the true but difficult teaching of Christianity seems to be that society must fight its enemies but love them.

"Such, too,—will Mr. Gandhi please note—is the clear teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna tells Arjuna that victory also goes to him who fights with complete fearlessness and is utterly devoid of hatred. Indeed, on

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forgotten that Arjuna was no conscientious objector in the sense the Western war-resisters are. Arjuna believed in war. He had fought the Kaurava hosts many times before. But he was unnerved when the two armies were drawn up in battle array, and when he suddenly realized that he had to fight his nearest kinsmen and revered teachers. It was not love of man or the hatred of war that had actuated the questioner. Krishna could give no other answer than he did. The immortal author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is one—no doubt the brightest—of the many gems contained in that literary mine, has shown to the world the futility of war by giving the victors an empty glory, leaving but seven victors alive out of millions said to have been engaged in the fight in which unnamable atrocities were used on either side.

### Message of The Mahabharata

But the *Mahabharata* has a better message even than the demonstration of war as a delusion and a folly. It is the spiritual history of man considered as an immortal being, and has used with a magnifying lens a historical episode considered in his times of moment for the tiny world round him, but in terms of present day values of no significance. In those days the globe had not shrunk to a pinhead, as it has today, on which the slightest movement on one spot affects the whole. The *Mahabharata* depicts for all time the

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the highest plane, the argument between the conscientious objector and the knightly warrior is for ever settled in the Second Book of that great classic. We have little space to quote, and the whole poem deserves to be read not once but many times."

—*Harijan*: September 5, 1936.

## A SILENT GUIDE

eternal struggle that goes on daily between the forces of good and evil in the human breast and in which, though good is ever victorious, evil does put up a brave show and baffles even the keenest conscience. It shows also the only way to right action.

—*Harijan*: Sept. 5. 1936.

### 14. A SILENT GUIDE

**T**HE *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is only a tiny chapter, describes in gruesome detail a mighty slaughter of the innocents which, but for our recent experiences of our civilized war, would be considered unbelievable in actual practice. The grim fact is that the terrorists have in absolute honesty, earnestness and with cogency used the *Gita*, which some of them know by heart, in defence of their doctrine and policy. Only they have no answer to my interpretation of the *Gita*, except to say that mine is wrong and theirs is right. Time alone will show whose is right. The *Gita* is not theoretical treatise. It is a living but silent guide whose directions one has to understand by patient striving.

—*Harijan*: Sept. 26. 1936.

### 15. NOT A TREATISE ON NON-VIOLENCE

**A** FRIEND writes:

“I hold the view that, independently of the context of the *Gita* and the preliminary conversation between Arjuna and Sri Krishna, Hinduism does not stand decisively for non-violence in regard to organized invasion. It would be straining too much to interpret all our best scriptures in this way. Hinduism, no doubt, holds the spirit of compassion and love as the very highest duty for man. But it does not preach what you or the pacifists preach, and it is no good straining everything into an allegory for this object.”

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

I have admitted in my introduction to the *Gita*, known as *Anasakti Yoga*, that it is not a treatise on non-violence, nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism, as it is practised today, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the *Gita* and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the *Quran* or the *Bible*. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The *Gita* itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *Karma*, *Sannyasa*, *Yajna*, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the *Gita* has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the *Gita* put these implications in a concrete shape.

### Teaching of Hinduism

I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the *Gita*, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time, they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God

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within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the *Gita* is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

### The Mahabharata and The Ramayana

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they, most probably, deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of Darkness and of Light. Anyway, I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notion of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads*, etc.

—*Harijan*: Oct. 3, 1936.

## 16. THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

**D**R. KAGAWA: I am told you recite the *Bhagavad Gita* daily?

GANDHIJI: Yes, we finish the entire *Gita* reading once every week.

DR. KAGAWA: But at the end of the *Gita*, Krishna recommends violence.

GANDHIJI: I do not think so. I am also fighting. I should not be fighting effectively if I were fighting violently. The message of the *Gita* is to be found in the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind, of mental equipoise. In 19 verses at the close of the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna explains how this state can be achieved. It can be achieved, he tells us, after killing all your

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passions. It is not possible to kill your brother after having killed all your passions. I should like to see that man dealing death who has no passions, who is indifferent to pleasure and pain, who is undisturbed by the storms that trouble mortal man. The whole thing is described in language of beauty that is unsurpassed. These verses show that the fight Krishna speaks of is a spiritual fight.

### Fight Between the Forces of Good and Evil

DR. KAGAWA: But there was actual fighting then, and your interpretation is your own peculiar interpretation.

GANDHIJI: It may be mine, but *as mine* it has no value.

DR. KAGAWA: To the common mind, it sounds as though it was actual fighting.

GANDHIJI: You must read the whole thing dispassionately in its true context. After the first mention of fighting, there is no mention of fighting at all. The rest is a spiritual discourse.

DR. KAGAWA: Has anybody interpreted it like you?

GANDHIJI: Yes. The fight is there, but the fight as it is going on within. The Pandavas and Kauravas are the forces of good and evil within. The war is the war between Jekyll and Hyde, God and Satan, going on in the human breast. The internal evidence in support of this interpretation is there in the work itself and in the *Mahabharata* of which the *Gita* is a minute part. It is not a history of war between two families, but the history of man—the history of the spiritual struggle of man. I have sound reasons for my interpretation.

DR. KAGAWA: That is why I say it is *your* interpretation.

GANDHIJI: But that is nothing. The question is whether it is a reasonable interpretation, whether it carries conviction. If it does, it does not matter whether it is mine or X, Y, Z's. If it does not, it has no value even if it is mine.

### Arjuna's Ideas

DR. KAGAWA: To my mind, Arjuna's ideas are wonderful. Krishna has found some excuse for him, and it was natural and necessary before Christianity.

GANDHIJI: This interpretation is even historically wrong. For Buddha existed long before the Christian era, and he preached the doctrine of non-violence.

DR. KAGAWA: But Arjuna's views seem to me to be superior to Krishna's.

GANDHIJI: Then, according to you, the disciple was greater than the master.

DR. KAGAWA: But I agree with what you say, with your teaching of non-violence. I shall read the *Gita* again, bearing your interpretation in mind.

—*Harijan*: Jan. 21, 1939.

## 17. CENTRAL TEACHING OF THE GITA

VISITOR: Is the central teaching of the *Gita* selfless action or non-violence?

GANDHIJI: I have no doubt that it is *Anasakti*—selfless action. Indeed, I have called my little translation of the *Gita*, "*Anasakti Yoga*". And *Anasakti* transcends *Ahimsa*. He who would be *Anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary, it is included in *Anasakti*, it does not go beyond it.

VISITOR: Then, does the *Gita* teach *Himsa* and *Ahimsa* both?



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GANDHIJI: I do not read that meaning in the *Gita*. It is quite likely that the author did not write it to inculcate *Ahimsa*, but as a commentator draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text, even so I interpret the *Gita* to mean that, if its central theme is *Ana-sakti*, it also teaches *Ahimsa*. Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise *Ahimsa*. In the life beyond, there is no *Himsa* or *Ahimsa*.

VISITOR: But Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. For, Arjuna utters this pacifist resolve:

*"Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,  
To face them weaponless, and bare my breast  
To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow."*

And Lord Krishna teaches him to answer blow with blow.

GANDHIJI: There I join issue with you. Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday,' says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the slightest compunction. Even today, you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your own kith and kin.' The question before him was not of non-violence, but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest.

—*Harijan*: September 1, 1940.

### 18. A POSER

‘A WELL WISHER’ sends these lines for my meditation:

“The *Bible* can be read in 566 languages. In how many can the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*?”

It is usual for me to receive such posers. ‘A well wisher’ deserves an answer. I have great regard for the missionaries for their zeal and self-sacrifice. But I have not hesitated to point out to them that both are often misplaced. What though the *Bible* were trans-

lated in every tongue in the world? Is a patent medicine better than the *Upanishads* for being advertised in more languages than the *Upanishads*? An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody will see it. The *Bible* was a greater power when the early fathers preached it than it is today. 'A well wisher' has little conception of the way truth works, if he thinks that the translation of the *Bible* in more languages than the *Upanishads* is any test of its superiority. Truth has to be lived, if it is to fructify. But if it is any satisfaction to 'A well wisher' to have my answer, I may gladly tell him that the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* have been translated into far fewer languages than the *Bible*. I have never been curious enough to know in how many languages they are translated.

—*Young India*: February 26, 1925.

## 19. GITA—MY SOLACE

Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, tills my whole being and I find a solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishadas* that I miss even in the *Sermon on the Mount*.<sup>1</sup> Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the *Sermon on the Mount* have not left a deep impression upon me, but I must confess that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile

1. "I find the greatest consolation from the *Bhagavad Gita* and Tulsidas' *Ramayana*. I frankly confess that the *Quran*, the *Bible* and the other scriptures of the world, in spite of my great regard for them, do not move me as do the *Gita* of Krishna and the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas."

—*Young India*: September 25, 1925.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

in the midst of overwhelming sorrow.<sup>1</sup> My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

—*Young India*: August 6, 1925.

### 20. THE GITA AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

I have not been able to see any difference between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. What the *Sermon* describes in a graphic manner, the *Bhagavad Gita* reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the Law of Love—the Law of Abandon as I would call it—in a scientific manner. *The Sermon on the Mount* gives the same law in wonderful language. The *New Testament* gave me comfort and boundless joy, as it came after the repulsion that parts of the *Old* had given me.<sup>2</sup> Today,

1. "Nothing elates me so much as the music of the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the *Gita* was my solace."

—*Young India*: October 6, 1921.

2. "I began reading it (the *Bible*), but I could not possibly read through the *Old Testament*. I read the Book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But, just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the Book of Numbers.

"But the *New Testament* produced a different impression, especially the *Sermon on the Mount* which went straight to my heart. I compared it with *Gita*. The verses—'But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right check, turn to him the other also' and 'If any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak too'—delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's:

supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the *Sermon*, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*.<sup>1</sup>

.... There is one thing in me, and that is that I love to see the bright side of things and not the seamy side, and so I can derive comfort and inspiration from any great book of any great religion. I may not be able to reproduce a single verse from the *Gita* or the *New Testament*, a Hindu child or Christian child may be able to repeat the verses better, but those clever children cannot deprive me of the assimilation that is in me today of the spirit of the two books.

—*Young India*: December 22, 1927.

## 21. ON THE GITA

I DERIVE the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I have also derived solace from the *New Testament* and the *Quran*. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the *Bhagavad Gita*, though everything in the former may not appeal to me—everything in the *Epistles of Paul*, for instance,—not everything in Tulsidas. The *Gita* is a pure religious discourse, given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection.

—*Harijan*: December 5, 1936.

'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal', etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, the *Light of Asia* and the *Sermon on the Mount*. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly."

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part I, Chap. XX.

1. "The spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount* competes almost on equal terms with the *Bhagavad Gita* for the domination of my heart."

—*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*: P. 338.

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I have a Christian friend telling me that the *Gita* shows him how to live the *New Testament*, and that many passages in the latter which used to be dark were intelligible to him through a study of the *Gita*.

—*Harijan*: May 25, 1935.

I read and get all my inspiration from the *Gita*. But I also read the *Bible* and the *Quran* to enrich my own religion. I incorporate all that is good in other religions.

—*Harijan*: January 16, 1937.

I enjoy a peace and equanimity of spirit which has excited the envy of many Christian friends. I have got it principally through the *Gita*.

—*Harijan*: January 13, 1940.

### 22. STUDENTS AND THE GITA

**T**he *Gita* is, in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the *Gita* is, in my opinion, unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass, it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple. But I, nevertheless, think that there should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translation should be so prepared as to avoid technicalities and in a manner that would make the teaching of the *Gita* intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For, I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit. But, for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the

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teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* because they do not know Sanskrit.

—*Young India*: August 25, 1927.

### 23. SOULFUL MESSAGE OF THE GITA

**T**HE very first earnest request that I would make to the students is, that each one of you should search within, and wherever you find that my remarks are justified, you will begin to reform and rebuild yourself. And those of you who are Hindus will endeavour to understand the very simple, beautiful, and, to me, soulful message of the *Gita*. The experience, and I think I can say the experience without a single exception of those who have really carried on this search after Truth, to render their hearts pure, is that it is an utterly impossible effort, unless it is accompanied by a heart-prayer to the Almighty. Whatever, therefore, you do, do not lose faith in God. I cannot reason out the thing for you because, really speaking, it is a fact which transcends reason. But I want you to cultivate a spirit of real humility and not summarily reject the experiences of so many teachers, *Rishis* and others of the world, and not regard them as so many superstitious men.

—*Young India*: September 8, 1927.

### 24. HINDU STUDENTS AND THE GITA

**I** DO believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect. It is necessary for all to aspire after perfection, even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection; but when the blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I, therefore, submit in all humility that even the *Vedas*, the *Quran* and the *Bible* are the imperfect word of God; and imperfect beings that we

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are, we are swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions. It is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fullness. And so I say to a Hindu boy that he must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up, as I say to a Mussalman or a Christian boy that he must not uproot his traditions.

### Uprooting of Traditions

And so, whilst I would welcome your learning the *Gospel* and your learning the *Quran*, I would certainly insist on all of you Hindu boys, if I had the power of insistence, learning the *Gita*. It is my belief that the impurity that we see about boys in schools, the carelessness about things that matter in life, the levity with which the student world deals with the greatest and most fundamental questions of life, is due to this uprooting of tradition from which boys have hitherto derived their sustenance.

### No Surrender To Reasoning Faculty

But I must not be misunderstood. I do not hold that everything ancient is good, because it is ancient. I do not advocate surrender of God-given reasoning faculty in the face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient, if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered to be an ancient tradition, the institution of child-widowhood and child marriage may be considered to be ancient tradition, and even so many an ancient horrible belief and superstitious practice. I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power. When, therefore, I talk of respecting the ancient tradition, you now understand what I mean. And it is because I see the same God in the *Bhagavad Gita*, as I see in the

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*Bible* and the *Quran*, that I say to the Hindu boys that they will derive greater inspiration from the *Bhagavad Gita*, because they will be tuned to the *Gita* more than to any other book.

—*Young India*: September 22, 1927.

### 25. EQUIPMENT FOR READING THE GITA

I CANNOT conceive anything so fortifying as a reverent study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and if students will remember that they are to learn it not in order to parade their Sanskrit knowledge, or even their knowledge of the *Gita*, they will know that they learn it in order to derive spiritual comfort and to solve the moral difficulties that face them. No man who engages in a reverent study of that book can help becoming a true servant of the nation and, through it, of humanity.

The *Gita* contains the Gospel of Work, the Gospel of *Bhakti* or Devotion, and the Gospel of *Jnana* or Knowledge. Life should be a harmonious whole of these three. But Gospel of Service is the basis of all, and what can be more necessary for those who want to serve the country than that they begin with the Chapter enunciating the Gospel of Work? But you must approach it with the five necessary equipments, viz., *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) *Satya* (Truth), *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), and *Asteya* (Non-stealing). Then, and then only, will you be able to reach a correct interpretation of it. And then you will read it to discover in it *Ahimsa*, and not *Himsa*, as so many nowadays try to do. Read it with the necessary equipment and, I assure you, you will have peace of which you were never aware before.

—*Young India*: November 3, 1927:



## 26. DISTORTION OF TRUTH

**A** CORRESPONDENT has been endeavouring, with the help of the Headmaster of a High School, to introduce the teaching of the *Gita* among its boys. But, at a recent meeting convened to organize *Gita* readings, a Bank Manager got up and disturbed the even tenor of the proceedings by saying that students had not the *adhikara* 'qualification' for studying the *Gita*; it was not a plaything to be placed before students.

I had heard of *adhikara* in connection with the *Vedas*, but I never knew that the *Gita* required the qualifications that the Bank Manager had in mind. It would have been better if he had stated the nature of the qualifications he required. The *Gita* clearly states that it is meant for all but scoffers. If Hindu students may not read the *Gita*, they may not read any religious works at all. Indeed, the original conception in Hinduism is that the student life is the life of a *Brahmachari* who should begin it with a knowledge of religion coupled with practice, so that he may digest what he learns and weave religious conduct into his life. The student of old began to live his religion before he knew what it was, and this conduct was followed by due enlightenment, so that he might know the reason for the conduct prescribed for him.

### Ā Cardinal Restraints

*Adhikara*, then, there certainly was. But it was the *adhikara* of right conduct known as the five *Yamas* or cardinal restraints, *Ahimsa* (Innocence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), and *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy). These were the rules that had to be observed by anybody who wished to study religion. He may not go to religious

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books for proving the necessity of these fundamentals of religion.

But today the word *adhikara*, like many such potent words, has suffered distortion, and a dissolute man, simply because he is called a *Brahman*, has *adhikara* to read and expound *Shastras* to us; whereas a man, if he is labelled an untouchable because of his birth in a particular state, no matter how virtuous he may be, may not read them.

But the author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is a part, wrote his great work for the purpose of meeting this insane objection, and made it accessible to all irrespective of the so-called caste, provided, I presume, that he complied with the observances I have described. I add the qualifying expression 'I presume', for, at the time of writing, I do not recall the observance of the *Yamas* as a condition precedent to a person studying the *Mahabharata*. Experience, however, shows that the purity of heart and the devotional frame of mind are necessary for a proper understanding of religious books.

### **Gita As Part of Religious Instruction**

The printing age has broken down all barriers and scoffers read religious books with the same freedom (if not greater) that the religiously minded have. But we are here discussing the propriety of students reading the *Gita* as part of religious instruction and devotional exercise. Here, I cannot imagine any class of persons more amenable to the restraints and thus more fitted than students for such instruction. Unfortunately, it is to be admitted that neither the students nor the instructors, in the majority of cases, think anything of the real *adhikara* of the five restraints.

—*Young India*: December 8, 1927.

## 27. A KEY TO THE WORLD SCRIPTURES

**T**HE *Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. "Verily, verily I say unto you, not every one that sayeth unto me 'Lord', 'Lord', shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven shall enter the Kingdom," was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.

—*Harijan*: April 18, 1936.

### A Key to the Knowledge of the *Shastras*

I do believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Smritis* and *Puranas*. But, to me, the *Gita* is the key to a knowledge of the *Shastras*. It enunciates the principles on which all conduct must be based. It sums up the whole of the *Shastras* and, therefore, absolves laymen from having to explore the other books. But I go a step further. The *Vedas* are not the four books known as such. They contain only fragments of the originals. Eternal truth cannot be buried in or confined to printed books. The *Vedas* are, therefore, indefinable and unwritten. They reside in one's heart. And our *Shastras* tell us what discipline and study are necessary for opening out the heart for receiving the truth. One's experience, therefore, must be the final guide. The written word undoubtedly helps, but even that has to be interpreted and, when there are conflicting interpretations, the seeker is the final arbiter.

—*Harijan*: December 22, 1933.

## 28. GITA—THE ETERNAL MOTHER

**E**ARLY in my childhood, I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as an unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. The *Vedas* could not supply that need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the *Gita*, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the *Shastras* and the *Upanishads*. That decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the *Gita*. Today, the *Gita*, is not only my *Bible* or my *Quran*; it is more than that—it is my Mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago; but this Eternal Mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom.

**Helps Me Out of Perplexity**

Often in the course of my struggle against untouchability, I am confronted with conflicting opinions delivered by doctors of learning. Some of them tell me that untouchability, as it is practised today, has no sanction in Hinduism and they bless my efforts to eradicate it; but there are some others who maintain that untouchability has been an essential part of Hinduism from the very beginning. Which authority should I follow under the circumstances? I feel absolutely at sea. The *Vedas* and the *Smritis* are of no avail to me. I then approach the Mother and say: "Mother, these learned *Pandits* have put me in a predicament. Help me out of my perplexity". And the Mother, with a smile, says in reply: "The assurance held out by me in the Ninth Chapter is not meant for the *Brahmans* only, but for the sinner and the outcaste, the down-

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trodden and the disinherited, too." But, in order to be worthy of that promise, we must be obedient and devoted children of the Mother and not disobedient and disloyal children, who only make a pretence of devotion.

### A Store-House of Profound Truths

It is sometimes alleged against the *Gita* that it is too difficult a work for the man in the street. The criticism, I venture to submit, is ill-founded. The *Gita* enabled the late Lokamanya, out of his encyclopaedic learning and study, to produce a monumental commentary. For him, it was a store-house of profound truths to exercise his intellect upon. But that need not scare away a lay reader. If you find all the eighteen chapters too difficult to negotiate, make a careful study of the first three chapters only. They will give you in a nut-shell what is propounded in greater detail and from different angles in the remaining fifteen chapters. Even these three chapters can be further epitomized in a few verses that can be selected from these chapters. Add to this the fact that at three distinct places the *Gita* goes even further and exhorts us to leave alone all 'isms' and take refuge in the Lord alone, and it will be seen how baseless is the charge that the message of the *Gita* is too subtle or complicated for lay minds to understand.

### A True Votary of the Gita

The *Gita* is the Universal Mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of the *Gita* does not know what disappointment is. He, ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the

humble in spirit, who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed.

### What Gita Inculcates

Our students are prone to be upset by trifles. A trivial thing like failure in an examination plunges them into the darkest despair. The *Gita* inculcates upon them the duty of perseverance in the face of seeming failure. It teaches us that we have a right to actions only but not to the fruit thereof, and that success and failure are one and the same thing at bottom. It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves, body, mind and soul, to pure duty, and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of all chance desires and undisciplined impulses. As a *Satyagrahi*, I can declare that the *Gita* is ever presenting me with fresh lessons. If somebody tells me that this is my delusion, my reply to him would be that I shall hug this delusion as my richest treasure.

### Recitation of the Gita

I would advise the students to begin their day with an early morning recitation of the *Gita*. I am a lover and devotee of Tulsidas. I adore the great spirit that gave to an aching world the all-healing *Mantra* of *Ramanama*. But I am here to-day, not to present Tulsidas to you, but to ask you to take up the study of the *Gita*, not in a carping or critical spirit, but in a devout and reverent spirit. Thus approached, she will grant you every wish. It is no joke, I admit, remembering by heart all the eighteen chapters, but it is worth-while to make the attempt. Once you have tasted of its sweet nectar, your attachment to it will grow from day to day. The recitation of the *Gita* verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress, even

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in the darkness of solitary confinement. And, if with these verses on your lips, you receive the final summons and deliver up your spirit you will attain *Brahma-Nirvana*—the Final Liberation.

—*Harijan*: August 24, 1934.

### 29. A WONDERFUL MOTHER

**I** SHALL wait and pray and take to heart the message of *Gitamata*. She is a wonderful mother. *Gita* means 'Song'. It is used as an adjective applied to *Upanishad* which is in the feminine gender. It has been likened to the sacred cow, the giver of all desires. Hence, Mother. Well, that Immortal Mother gives all the milk we need for spiritual sustenance, if we would but approach her as babes seeking and sucking it from her. She is capable of yielding milk to her millions of babes from her exhaustless udder.

In doing the Harijan work, in the midst of calumny, mis-representations and apparent disappointments, her lap comforts me and keeps me from falling into the Slough of Despond.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 249.

### 30. GITA RECITATION

**W**HEN I hear *Gita* verses melodiously recited, I never grow weary of hearing and the more I hear the deeper sinks the meaning into my heart. Melodious recitations of the *Ramayana*, which I heard in my childhood, left on me an impression which years have not obliterated or weakened.

—*Young India*: 10, 1929.

I have always regarded the learning by heart of such books as the *Gita* a very desirable thing. But I

## GITA JAYANTI

was never able to learn all the chapters of the *Gita* by heart myself, though I made several attempts at it. I know I am very stupid at memorizing. So, whenever I meet anyone who knows the *Gita* by heart, he or she commands my respect. . . . I would like, however, the reciters to realize that the mere recitation is not an end in itself. It should be an aid to the contemplation and assimilation of the meaning and the message of the *Gita*. By patience, even a parrot can be taught to recite it by heart. But he would be no wiser for the recitation. The reciter of the *Gita* should be what its author expects him to be—a *Yogi* in its broad sense. It demands from its votaries balance in every thought, word and deed and a perfect correspondence between the three. He whose speech and action do not accord with his thoughts is a humbug or a hypocrite.

—*Harijan*: February 2, 1934.

### 31. GITA JAYANTI

**I** DO not know that these *Jayantis* serve the purpose for which they are intended. Spiritual matters do not admit of the ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and secondly because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus, the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That, to my mind, is the secret of the hold of the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and such other works on the millions.

—*Harijan*: December 16, 1939.



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### 32. THE THEME OF THE GITA

“You have said that for those who have no time to go through the whole of the *Gita* (700 verses), it is sufficient to read the Second and Third Chapters. You have also said that these two chapters can be further epitomized. If possible, you should explain why you regard the Second and Third Chapters as fundamental.”

I have endeavoured to show that its (the *Gita's*) message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the *Gita* is contained in the Second Chapter, and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the Third Chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The *Gita* has been called '*Gitai*' by Vinoba, who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is the real mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties.

#### My Spiritual Dictionary

I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in my distress. It is, moreover, a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard *Gita* as an abstruse book. No doubt learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But, in my opinion, a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the *Gita*. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical

1. “By detachment I mean that one must not worry whether the desired result follows from your action or not, so long as your motive is pure, your means correct. Really, it means that things will come right in the end if you take care of the means and leave the rest to Him.”

—*Harijan*: April 7, 1946.

## THE GITA AND MEDITATION

translation, which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial*.

—*Harijan*: December 16, 1939.

### 33. THE GITA AND MEDITATION

**I**F you read it (the *Gita*) with the idea in your mind that it is our Mother guiding us from day to day, you will not find it uninteresting. After the daily reading, you should ponder over it for a minute, and then you will perceive something new. Only a perfect man could get nothing from it. But for those who fall into error every day, the *Gita* is a saviour of which they will never get tired.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 113.

#### Why Not Meditate on Mother Gita?

To meditate on the image of living people is not to be commended. We must attribute perfection to the object of our meditation, but no living person can be perfect. The illustrations in the *Ramayana* are no good. God has no shape and no attributes. Why not meditate on Him? If that is impossible, let us meditate on *Omkar* (the syllable *Om*), or on a figure imagined by ourselves. Why not meditate on Mother *Gita*? She is compared to the Cow of Plenty (*Kamadhenu*). Let us meditate on this cow. To meditate on the figure of living persons is likely to do harm and must, therefore, be avoided.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 140.

#### Image Worship in the Gita

It is improper that one should meditate over a living person who can never be perfect. If image worship is referred to in the *Gita*, the images must be those of the Incarnations of God. We do not have any real images of them. That is why I say that we may

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

worship the Incarnations of our imagination. I will not go so far as to say that one may not meditate on, say, a picture of Ravivarma. All depends upon the mental attitude of the worshipper.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 143.

### 34. SUGGESTIONS ABOUT MEDITATION

**T**HERE is nothing wrong if you draw a picture by your own imagination and meditate over it. But nothing like it, if one could rest content with the meditation of Mother *Gita*. This can be done either by thinking of one's dead mother as the symbol of the *Gita* or by drawing a self-imagined mental picture. Mother cow, for instance, would serve the latter purpose. The second method is preferable, if possible. We may meditate on any *Gita* verse or even one single word in it. Every word in the *Gita* is an ornament of hers, and to think of an ornament of our beloved object is as good as thinking of itself. But some one could devise a third mode of meditation and should be free to practise his own device. Every brain works differently from every other brain. No two persons think of the same thing in the same way. There is bound to be some difference or other between their descriptions and imaginings.

#### **Sadhana is Not Wasted**

As the Sixth Chapter assures us, the least little *sadhana* (spiritual effort) is not wasted. The seeker will proceed further in his next birth, starting from it as a base. Similarly, if a person has the will but not the ability to make spiritual progress, his environment in his subsequent birth will be such as to strengthen that will. But this fact must not be made an excuse for relaxation now. If it is so made, it means that

## SELFISH vs. SELFLESS ACTIVITY

the will is only intellectual and not heart-felt. Intellectual will serves no useful purpose, as it does not persist after death. If the will is heart-felt, it must manifest itself in effort. But it is quite possible that physical weakness as well as the environment may come in its way. Even so, when the soul leaves the body, it carries its goodwill with it, which fructifies into deed in the subsequent birth when circumstances are more favourable. Thus, one who does good is sure to make steady progress.

### Example of Jnaneshvar

Jnaneshvar may have meditated on *Nivritti* during the latter's lifetime. But we must not follow his example. One on whom we meditate must be a perfect individual. To ascribe such perfection to a living person is improper and unnecessary. Again, it is possible that Jnaneshvar meditated on *Nivritti* not as he actually was, but as he had imagined him to be. Such refinement is not, however, for people like ourselves. When we raise the question of meditating on a living person, there is no room for a mental image of him. If the question is answered with such an image in view, it can only throw the questioner into mental confusion.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 170.

## 35. SELFISH vs. SELFLESS ACTIVITY

**T**O tread the path of Truth and to eschew all activity —this is a contradiction in terms. If a man is not active, how can we say anything about the path he has taken? To tread the path of Truth implies an active life in the world of men. In the absence of such activity, there is no occasion for either pursuing or swerving from Truth. The *Gita* has made it clear that a man cannot remain inactive even for a single mo-

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

ment. The difference, between one who is a devotee of God and another who is not, is that the former is active in the service of others, never gives up Truth in the midst of activity and gradually overcomes his likes and dislikes; while the other is active for selfish reasons and has no scruples whatever as regards the means he employs in order to achieve his selfish ends. This world is not something evil in itself, for only an active life in the world can help us to attain the goal of God-realization. This activity must be directed to the good of others. Selfish activity is fit only to be condemned and should be given up.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 250.

### 36. THE TRUE DEVOTEE

**T**HE *Gita* has defined the *Bhakta*—the true devotee—in three places and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a *Bhakta* is hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have, therefore, suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellowmen. That is why Narasinha Mehta who 'saw and knew' sang: 'He is a true *Vaishnava* who knows to melt at other's woe.' Such was Abu Ben Adhem. He served his fellowmen and, therefore, his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woebegone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a *Bhakta*, therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he who regards the 'suppressed' classes as untouchables serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor, and trots out lame excuses, does not know the mean-

## LIFE AND TEACHING OF SRI KRISHNA

ing of service. An able-bodied wretch deserves no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor, inviting them to do likewise, serves God as no one else does. 'He who gives Me even a trifle such as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of *Bhakti* is My servant,' says the Lord in the *Bhagavad Gita*. And He hath His footstool where live 'the humble, the lowliest and the lost.' Spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.

—*Young India*: September 24, 1925.

### 37. LIFE AND TEACHING OF SRI KRISHNA

WE do not know what Sri Krishna's life means for us, we do not read the *Gita*, we make no attempt to teach it to our children. The *Gita* is such a transcendental book that men of every creed, age and clime may read it with respect, and find in it the principles of their respective religions. If we thought of Krishna on every *Janmashtami* day and read the *Gita* and resolved to follow its teachings, we should not be in our present sorry plight. Sri Krishna served the people all his life, he was a real servant of the people. He could have led the hosts at Kurukshetra, but he preferred to be Arjuna's charioteer. His whole life was one unbroken *Gita* of *Karma*. He refused proud Duryodhana's sweets and preferred humble Vidura's spinach. As a child, he was a cowherd and we still know him by the name of *Gopala*. But we, his worshippers, have neglected the cow today, the Adi-Karnataks slaughter cows and eat beef, and our infants and invalids have to go without cow's milk. Krishna knew no sleep or idleness. He kept sleepless vigil for the world; we, his posterity, have become indolent and forgotten the use of our hands. In *Bhaga-*

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

*vad Gita*, Lord Krishna has shown the path of *Bhakti*—which means the path of *Karma*. Lokamanya Tilak has shown that whether we desire to be *Bhaktas* or *Jnanis*, *Karma* is the only way; but that *Karma* should not be for self but for others. Action for one's own self binds, action for the sake of others delivers from bondage. What can be the altruistic action which can be universally done by Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, by men, women and children? I have tried to demonstrate that spinning alone is that sacrificial act, for that alone can make us do something in God's name, something for the poorest, something that can infuse activity in their idle limbs. Lord Krishna has also taught that to be a true *Bhakta*, we should make no difference between a *Brahman* and a scavenger. If that is true, there can be no place for untouchability in Hinduism. If you are still hugging that superstition, you can cleanse yourself by getting rid of it on this the sacred day of Krishna's birth. He who swears by the *Gita* may know no distinction between Hindu and Mussalman, for Lord Krishna has declared that he who adores God in a true spirit by what name soever adores Him. The path of *Bhakti*, *Karma*, Love as expounded in the *Gita*, leaves no room for the despising of man by man.

—*Young India*: September 1, 1927.

### 38. THE LAW OF SERVICE

**T**HE *Bhagavad Gita* provides you with a Code of Conduct. Whenever you are in trouble, doubt, depression or despair, you will turn to the Code and the Compendium. And what can be a better inspiration for you than Chapter Third? It lays down that God created man, and at the same time imposed on him the duty of *Yajna* or sacrifice. Both these words are derived

## YAJNA OR SACRIFICE

from roots meaning that which purifies, and the Lord also said, that 'by sacrifice shall you propagate your kind.' Sacrifice thus means service, and the *Gita* says that he who works only for himself is a thief. 'Sacrifice ye for the gods, and pleased they will give you the reward of your sacrifice,' says the *Gita*. To proceed a little further, sacrifice means laying down one's life so that others may live. Let us suffer, so that others may be happy, and the highest service and the highest love is wherein man lays down his life for his fellow-men. That highest love is thus *Ahimsa* which is the highest service. There is an eternal struggle between life and death, but the sum total of life and death does not mean extinction but life. For, life persists in spite of death. We have an ocular demonstration, positive proof of the unquestioned sovereignty of *Ahimsa*, and this triumph of *Ahimsa* is possible through sacrifice. There is thus no higher law than the Law of *Yajna*, the Law of Service.

—*Young India*: September 8, 1927.

### 39. YAJNA OR SACRIFICE

**T**HE world cannot subsist for a single moment without *Yajna*<sup>1</sup>, and, therefore, the *Gita*, after having dealt with true wisdom in the Second Chapter, takes up in the Third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *Yajna* came with the Creation itself. This body, therefore, has been given

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1. "*Yajna* means an act directed to the welfare of others. done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity but all life. . . . And the *Gita* teaches, and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *Yajna*, promotes bondage."

—*From Yeravda Mandir*: Chap. XIV.



## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

us only in order that we may serve all Creation with it. And, therefore, says the *Gita*, he who eats without offering *Yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *Yajna*. *Yajna* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus for ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bond-slave receives food, clothing, and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the Universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore, we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be cherished or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is a natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's scheme. One does indeed need strong faith, if one would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God,"—this appears to be the commandment in all religions.<sup>1</sup>

—From *Yeravda Mandir*: Chap. XIV.

### 40. MORE ABOUT YAJNA

**I**T will perhaps be worthwhile further to consider a principle which has been created along with mankind. *Yajna* is duty to be performed, or service to be

1. "So long as we believe that all is from God, we should have no cause for perturbation. The only condition is that whatever we do, we should do with God as witness. It is He who makes the world go and we only reap the consequences of our actions. Therefore, ours is only to obey His law and then be indifferent as to the result."

—*Harijan*: June 23, 1946.

## MORE ABOUT YAJNA

rendered, all the twenty-four hours of the day.<sup>1</sup>

To serve without desire is to favour not others, but ourselves, even as in discharging a debt we serve only ourselves, lighten our burden and fulfil our duty. Again, not only the good but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.<sup>2</sup>

Some object, that life thus understood becomes dull and devoid of art, and leaves no room for the householder. But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one, if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence.

1. "This service is impossible without bread-labour, otherwise described in the *Gita* as *Yajna*. It is only when a man or woman has done bodily labour for the sake of service, that he or she gets any right to live. The *Gita* says that anybody who eats without performing *Yajna*, in Tolstoy's language 'bread-labour', is a thief, 'eats sin'. But body-labour becomes *Yajna* only when it is undertaken in a spirit of service not of indulgence, as it may easily become when it is done only to develop the animal in man. A man who adopts service as his ideal will go on curbing his carnal appetites more and more and though, as in the case of Tolstoy, the attainment of full self-restraint seems always as far away as ever, he will never cease to persevere in it and regard such perseverance as the *summum bonum* of life. Firhad in his quest of Shirin wore away his life in breaking rocks, shall we do less for our Shirin of Truth, without which service is not?"

—*Young India*: September 20, 1928.

2. "The human body is meant solely for service, never for indulgence. The secret of happy life lies in renunciation. Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death."

—*Harijan*: February 24, 1946.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *yajna* if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying.<sup>1</sup>

Self-indulgence leads to destruction, and renunciation to immortality. Joy has no independent existence. It depends upon our attitude to life.

One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on High. He will not, therefore, encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.

Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and must take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.

—*From Yeravda Mandir: Chap. XV.*

### 41. NECESSITY OF BODILY LABOUR

*"By food the living live; food comes of rain,  
And rain comes by the pious sacrifice,  
And sacrifice is paid with tithes of toil."*

—Edwin Arnold

Here there is not only the theory, in my opinion, of bodily labour propounded, but there is also the theory established of labour not only for oneself but for others, when and when only it becomes *Yajna* or sacrifice. The rains come not through intellectual feats,

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1. "No sacrifice is worth the name unless it is a joy. Sacrifice and a long face go ill together."

—*Young India: June 25, 1925.*

## BREAD LABOUR AND THE GITA

but through sheer bodily labour. It is a well-established scientific fact that where forests are denuded of trees, rains cease; where trees are planted, rains are attracted and the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation. Laws of Nature are still unexplored. We have but scratched the surface. Who knows all the ill effects, moral and physical, of the cessation of bodily labour? Let me not be misunderstood. I do not discount the value of intellectual labour,<sup>1</sup> but no amount of it is any compensation for bodily labour, which every one of us is born to give for the common good of all. It may be, often is, infinitely superior to bodily labour, but it never is or can be a substitute for it, even as intellectual food, though far superior to the grains we eat, never can be a substitute for them. Indeed, without the products of the earth those of the intellect would be an impossibility.

—*Young India*: October 15, 1925.

## 42. BREAD LABOUR AND THE GITA

**E**VERY man and woman must work in order to live. This principle came home to me upon reading one of Tolstoy's essays.

In my opinion, the same principle has been set forth in the Third Chapter of the *Gita*. I do not go so far as to say that the word *Yajna* (sacrifice) there means body-labour. But when the *Gita* says that 'rain

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1. "Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation; it will serve to improve even the quality of his intellectual output. I venture to say that in ancient times *Brahmins* worked with their body as with their mind. But even if they did not, body-labour was a proved necessity at the present time."

—*Harijan*: February 6, 1947.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

comes from sacrifice (verse 14), I think it indicates the necessity of bodily labour. The 'residue of sacrifice' (verse 13) is the bread that we have won in the sweat of our brow. Labouring enough for one's food has been classed in the *Gita* as a *Yajna*.<sup>1</sup> Whoever eats more than is enough for sustaining the body is a thief, for most of us hardly perform labour enough to maintain themselves. I believe that a man has no right to receive anything more than his keep and that every one who labours is entitled to a living wage.

### Division of Labour

This does not rule out the division of labour. The manufacture of everything needed to satisfy essential human wants involves bodily labour, so that labour in all essential occupations counts as bread labour. But as many of us do not perform such labour, they have to take exercise in order to preserve their health. A cultivator working on his farm from day to day has not to take breathing exercise or stretch his muscles. Indeed, if he observes the other laws of health, he will never be afflicted with illness.

God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if anyone appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbour to destitution. The starvation of people in several parts of the world is due to many of us seizing very much more than they need. We may utilize the gifts of Nature just as we choose, but in her books

1. "The *Gita* teaches that one should perform *Yajna* (bread labour) and partake of the fruits of that labour. Millionaires who eat without work are parasites. Even they should eat by the sweat of their brow or should go without food. The only permissible exception is the disabled for whom society provides."

—*Delhi Diary*: P. 390; January 29, 1948.

## DUTY OF BREAD LABOUR

the debits are always equal to the credits. There is no balance in either column.<sup>1</sup>

—*Ashram Observances in Action*: P. 60.

### 43. DUTY OF BREAD LABOUR

**B**RAHMA created his people with the duty of sacrifice laid upon them and said: 'By this do you flourish. Let it be the fulfiller of all your desires'. "He who eats without performing this sacrifice eats stolen bread,"—thus says the *Gita*. "Earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow," says the *Bible*. Sacrifices may be of many kinds. One of them may well be bread-labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of over-population, no disease, and no such misery as we see around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be an unattainable ideal. But we need not, therefore, cease to strive for it. Even if without fulfilling the whole law of sacrifice, that is, the law of our being, we performed physical labour enough for

1. "The religious principle requires that the debit and credit sides of one's balance-sheet should be perfectly square. That is also the truest economics and, therefore, true religion. Whenever there is any discrepancy between these two, it spells bad economics and makes for unrighteousness. That is why the illustrious author of the *Gita* has defined *Yoga* as 'balance' or 'evenness'."

—*Young India*: November 3, 1927.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

our daily bread, we should go a long way towards the ideal.

—*Harijan*: June 29, 1935.

### 44. KARMAYOGA

**I**F a labourer does all his work dedicating it to God, then thereby he can attain self-realization. Self-realization means purity of self. Strictly speaking, only those who do bodily labour get self-realization; because 'God is the strength of the weak'. By 'weak' is not meant 'weak in body', though for them also their strength is God—but we should take it to mean weak in means and materials. The labourer must cultivate humility, for mere developing of intelligence may lead to the development of a devilish kind of intelligence. By doing merely intellectual work, we develop devilish tendencies. It is, therefore, that the *Gita* says that one who eats without labour eats stolen food. Humility is inherent in labour. And that is why it is *Karmayoga*, or activity that leads to salvation. Doing physical work simply for getting money is no *Karmayoga*, since the idea is simply to earn money. Cleaning of latrines for earning money is no *Yajna* (sacrifice). But the same act, if done by way of service, for the sake of sanitation and for the good of others, becomes *Yajna*. One who does bodily labour out of a spirit of service, in all humility and for self-realization, gets self-realization. Such a one should never feel reluctant to work. He should ever be tireless.

—*To Ashram Sisters*: P. 103.

### 45. GITA AND THE LAW OF SWADESHI

**T**HE Law of *Swadeshi* is ingrained in the basic nature of man, but it has today sunk into oblivion. Hence, the necessity for the vow of *Swadeshi*. In

its ultimate and spiritual sense, *Swadeshi* stands for the final emancipation of the human soul from its earthly bondage. For, this earthly tabernacle is not its natural or permanent abode, it is a hindrance in its onward journey, it stands in the way of its realizing its oneness with other lives. A votary of *Swadeshi*, therefore, in his striving to identify himself with the entire creation, seeks to be emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.

### Service of Neighbours

If this interpretation of *Swadeshi* be correct, then it follows that its votary will, as a first duty, dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest, but the exclusion or the sacrifice would be apparent only. Pure service of one's neighbours can never from its very nature result in dis-service to those who are remotely situated, rather the contrary. 'As with the individual, so with the Universe' is an unfailing principle which we would do well to lay to heart. On the other hand, a man who allows himself to be lured by 'the distant scene' and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition but fails in his duty towards his neighbours also. Take a concrete instance. In the particular place where I live, I have certain persons as my neighbours, some relations and dependents. Naturally, they all feel, as they have a right to, that they have a claim on me and look to me for help and support. Suppose now I leave them all at once and set out to serve people in a distant place. My decision would throw my little world of neighbours and dependants out of gear while my gratuitous knight-errantry would more likely than not disturb the atmosphere in the new place. Thus, a culpable neglect of my immediate neighbours



## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

and an unintended disservice to the people whom I wish to serve would be the first fruits of my violation of the principles of *Swadeshi*.

It is not difficult to multiply such instances. That is why the *Gita* says: "It is better to die performing one's duty or *Swadharna*, but *Paradharna*, or another's duty, is fraught with danger." Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment, this gives us the Law of *Swadeshi*. What the *Gita* says with regard to *Swadharna* equally applies to *Swadeshi* also, for *Swadeshi* is *Swadharna* applied to one's immediate environment.

—*Young India*: June 18, 1931.

### 46. DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

**T**HOUGHTS, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way. In this connection, we may consider the definition of Knowledge contained in the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita*. We are there told that humility (*amanitvam*), etc., constitute knowledge, and all the rest is ignorance. If this is true,—and there is no doubt that it is true,—much that we hug to-day as knowledge is ignorance pure and simple, and, therefore, only does us harm instead of conferring any benefit. It makes the mind wander, and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in endless ramifications of evil. Needless to say, this is not a plea for inertia. Every moment of our life should be filled with mental or physical activity, but that activity should be, *Sattvika*, tending to Truth. One who consecrates his life to service cannot be idle for a single moment. But one has to learn to distinguish between good activity

## IGNORANCE AND IMAGINATION

and evil activity. This discernment goes naturally with a single-minded devotion to service.

—*From Yeravda Mandir: Chap. VI.*

### 47. IGNORANCE AND IMAGINATION

**I**F we thrive on knowledge, we seem somehow to do so on ignorance and imagination too. "It is folly to be wise when ignorance is bliss." And the shortest and the oldest *Upanishad* says: "He overcomes death through ignorance and mounts to immortality through knowledge." The original words are अविद्या and विद्या meaning also, respectively, activity and inactivity, body and spirit, attachment and detachment. They can be made to mean several other things without doing violence to the text. It is a very simple and lofty *Upanishad* and is also abstruse. It is an epitome of all knowledge like the *Gita*. The latter is perhaps a commentary on the former. And old commentator or rather devotee of the *Gita* compares the *Upanishads* to cows, the *Gita* to milk and Krishna to the cow-boy who milks them.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira: P. 252.*

### 48. WANDERING THOUGHTS

**W**ANDERING thoughts can never be a stage in spiritual development. They do trouble most of us; hence the usual emphasis laid on mental concentration. What we have to bear in mind is this. We think a multitude of thoughts which involve a waste of mental energy even as sensuality results in the waste of vital energy. Just as physical debility affects the mind, so also mental debility affects the body. Therefore, I understand *Brahmacharya* in a comprehensive sense and look upon aimless thinking as a breach of it.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

We have made *Brahmacharya* difficult to achieve by understanding it in a narrow sense. But if we accept the broader definition and try to restrain all the eleven organs of sense, the control of animal passion becomes comparatively very much easier. You seem to think that external action leaves little time for a review of mental purification. But my experience is just the reverse of it. Without mental purity, external action cannot be performed in a selfless spirit. Therefore, mental purity can be measured in terms of the purity of external action. One who tries to attain mental purity without purifying external action, runs the risk of going astray. I can think of many a case of that type. . . . A marvellous verse<sup>1</sup> in the *Gita* (III, 5) lays down a law which physicists have shown is universal in application. It may be translated thus:<sup>2</sup> No one can remain even for a moment without doing work. Work here means motion of inanimate as well as animate beings. It is characteristic of human beings that they may obey this law in a selfless spirit. There are two equally marvellous<sup>3</sup> verses in *Ishopanishad* which are complementary to the *Gita* verse. It is not for me to criticize Buddha of whom I am a worshipper. And who knows whether the organization of the Buddhist monks was due to Buddha himself or to his successors? However that may be, the Sangha became inert and lazy in obedience to this universal law. Even today most Buddhist priests in Ceylon, Burma and Tibet are unintelligent idlers. In India, too, most of the so-call-

1. न हि कश्चित् क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।  
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥

2. Radhakrishnan's *Bhagavadgita*, Allen and Unwin. Ed.

3. The reference here is to कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेत् शतं समाः । and कृतं स्मर । Ed.

## CONQUEST OF SENSES

ed *Sannyasis* scarcely distinguish themselves. I, therefore, am of opinion that real and lasting purity of mind can only be attained through continuous work. We are told in verse 18 of the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita* that he who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is a wise and perfect worker, a *Yogi*. All this is part of my own experience. I have cited the verses because the *Gita* doctrine tallies with it. I never cite scripture unless I have subjected it to the test of personal experience.<sup>1</sup> The experience of others may be different from mine and they, too, may perhaps find a *Gita* verse in support of it. It is also possible that they might interpret these verses in a different way in order to seek corroboration of their experience. I may not, therefore, insist upon my experience being acknowledged as valid by all.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 305.

## 49. CONQUEST OF SENSES

**R**EMEMBER my definition of *Brahmacharya*. It means not suppression of one or more senses but complete mastery over them all. The two states are fundamentally different. I can suppress all my senses today but it may take aeons to conquer them. Conquest means *using* them as my willing slaves. I can prick the ear drum and suppress the sense of hearing by a simple, painless operation. This is worthless. I must train the ear so that it refuses to hear gossip, lewd talk, blasphemy; but it is open to the celestial music, it will hear the most distant cry for succour from thousands of miles. Saint Ramdas is said to have done so. Then, how to use the organs of generation?

1. "I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason."

—*Harijan*: December 5, 1936.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

By transmitting the most creative energy that we possess from creating counterparts of our flesh into creating constructive work for the whole of life, *i.e.*, for the soul. We have to rein in the animal passion and change it into celestial passion. Read here v. 64, Ch. II, of the *Gita*. The burden of the Divine Song is not "fly from the battle, but face it without attachment." Therefore, you and I and every one of us have to stand unmoved in the midst of all kinds of men and women. There is no physical seclusion except temporarily for some.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 257.

### 50. THE LAW OF KARMA

I AM a devotee of the *Gita* and a firm believer in the inexorable Law of *Karma*.<sup>1</sup> Even the least little tripping or stumbling is not without its cause, and I have wondered why one who has tried to follow the *Gita* in thought, word and deed should have any ailment. The doctors have assured me that this trouble of high blood pressure is entirely the result of mental strain and worry. If that is true, it is likely that I have been unnecessarily worrying myself, unnecessarily fretting and secretly harbouring passions like anger, lust, etc. The fact that any event or incident should disturb my mental equilibrium, inspite of my serious efforts, means not that the *Gita* ideal is defective, but that my devotion to it is defective. The *Gita* ideal is true for all time, my understanding of it and observance of it is full of flaws.

—*Harijan*: February 29, 1936.

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1. "Whatever a man sows, that shall he reap. The Law of *Karma* is inexorable and impossible of evasion. There is thus hardly any need for God to interfere. He laid down the law and retired, as it were."

—*Young India*: April 21, 1927.

## 51. NOTHING WITHOUT GRACE

**T**HE introspection has revealed vital defects in my following out the interpretation of the *Gita* as I have understood it. I have discovered that I have not approached with adequate detachment the innumerable problems that have presented themselves for solution. It is clear that I have taken many of them to heart and allowed them to rouse my emotional being and thus affect my nerves. In other words, they have not, as they should have in a votary of the *Gita*, left my body or mind untouched. I verily believe that one who literally follows the prescription of the Eternal Mother need never grow old in mind. Such a one's body will wither in due course like leaves of a healthy tree, leaving the mind as young and as fresh as ever. That seems to me to be the meaning of Bhisma delivering his marvellous discourse to Yudhishtira though he was on his death-bed. Medical friends were never tired of warning me against being excited over or affected by events happening around me. Extra precautions were taken to keep from me news of a tragic character. Though I think, I was not quite so bad a devotee of the *Gita* as their precautions led me to suppose, there was undoubtedly substance behind them.

### Mental Disturbance

The worst, however, was to follow. I have been trying to follow *Brahmacharya* consciously and deliberately since 1899. My definition of it is purity not merely of body but of both speech and thought also. With the exception of what must be regarded as one lapse, I can recall no instance during more than thirty six years' constant and conscious effort, of mental disturbance such as I experienced during this illness. I was disgusted with myself. The moment the feeling

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

came, I acquainted my attendants and the medical friends with my condition. They could give me no help. I expected none. I broke loose after the experience from the rigid rest that was imposed upon me. The confession of the wretched experience brought much relief to me. I felt as if a great load had been raised from over me. It enabled me to pull myself together before any harm could be done.

### What of The Gita?

But what of the *Gita*? Its teaching is clear and precise. A mind that is once hooked to the Star of stars becomes incorruptible. How far I must be from Him, He alone knows. Thank God, my much vaunted *Mahatmaship* has never fooled me. But this enforced rest has humbled me as never before. It has brought to the surface my limitations and imperfections. But I am not so much ashamed of them, as I should be of hiding them from the public. My faith in the message of the *Gita* is as bright as ever. Unwearied ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning that faith into rich infallible experience. But the same *Gita* says without any equivocation that the experience is not to be had without Divine grace.<sup>1</sup> We should develop swelled heads if Divinity had not made that ample reservation.

—*Harijan*: February 29, 1936.

## 52. KARMA ALONE POWERLESS

**GANDHIJI:** So many things have happened in my life for which I had intense longing, but which I could never have achieved myself. And I have al-

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1. "That grace can be obtained by repeating His name all the twenty-four hours, and by realizing that He resides within us."

—*To A Gandhian Capitalist*: P. 53.

## KARMA ALONE POWERLESS

ways said to my co-workers that it was in answer to my prayer. I did not say to them it was in answer to my intellectual effort to lose myself in the Divinity in me! The easiest and the correct thing for me was to say "God has seen me through my difficulty."

**DR. FABRI:** But that you deserved by your *Karma*. God is Justice and not Mercy. You are a good man and good things happen to you.

**GANDHIJI:** No, fear. I am not good enough for things to happen like that. If I went about with that philosophical conception of *Karma*, I should often come a cropper. My *Karma* would not come to my help. Although I believe in the inexorable Law of *Karma*, I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is a strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more *Karma*, to undo the past and add to the present. It is, therefore, wrong to say that because my past is good, good is happening at present. The past would be soon exhausted and I have to build up the future with prayer. I tell you *Karma* alone is powerless. "Ignite this match," I say to myself, and yet I cannot, if there is no co-operation from without. Before I strike the match, my hand is paralyzed or I have only one match and the wind blows it out. Is it an accident or God or High Power? Well, I prefer to use the language of my ancestors or of children. I am no better than a child. We may try to talk learnedly and of books, but when it comes to face facts—when we are face to face with a calamity—we behave like children and begin to cry and pray and our intellectual belief gives no satisfaction.

—*Harijan*: August 19, 1939.



### 53. COMMUNION WITH GOD

**Q.** Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?

**A.** I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.

—*Harijan*: March 23, 1940.

### 54. MEANING OF GOD

**A** CORRESPONDENT writes:

“I am reading your *Gita Bodh* these days and trying to understand it. I am puzzled by what Lord Krishna says in the 10th Discourse. ‘In dicer’s play I am the conquering double eight. Nothing, either good or evil, can take place in this world without My will.’ Does God then prevent evil? If so, how can He punish the evil-doer? Has God created the world for this purpose? Is it impossible then for mankind to live in peace?”

To say that God permits evil in this world may not be pleasing to the ear. But if He is held responsible for the good, it follows that He has to be responsible for the evil too. Did not God permit Ravana to exhibit unparalleled strength? Perhaps, the root cause of the perplexity arises from a lack of the real understanding of what God is. God is not a person. He transcends description. He is the Law-maker, the Law and the Executor. No human being can well arrogate these powers to himself. If he did, he would be looked upon as an unadulterated dictator. They become only Him whom we worship as God. This is the reality, a

## THE GITA AND FASTING

clear understanding of which will answer the question raised by the correspondent.

The question whether it is impossible for mankind ever to be at peace with one another does not arise from the verse quoted. The world will live in peace only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so. No one can deny the possibility nor say when that will come to pass. Such questions are idle waste of time. To a good man, the whole world is good. By following this golden rule the correspondent can live in peace under all circumstances, believing that what is possible for him to be is also possible for others. To believe the contrary connotes pride and arrogance.

—*Harijan*: February 24, 1946.

### 55. THE GITA AND FASTING

**F**ASTING can help to curb animal passion, only if it is undertaken with a view to self-restraint. Some of my friends have actually found their animal passion and palate stimulated as an after-effect of fasts. That is to say, fasting is futile unless it is accompanied by an incessant longing for self-restraint. The famous verse from the Second Chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is worth noting in this connection:

*'For a man who is fasting his senses  
Outwardly, the sense-objects disappear,  
Leaving the yearning behind; but when  
He has seen the Highest,  
Even the yearning disappears.'*

Fasting and similar discipline is, therefore, one of the means to the end of self-restraint, but it is not all, and if physical fasting is not accompanied by mental fasting, it is bound to end in hypocrisy and disaster.

—*My Experiments With Truth*: Pt. IV; Chap. XXI, P. 265.

## 56. NO PRAYER WITHOUT FASTING

THE expression 'There is no prayer without fasting' is thoroughly sound. Here fasting has to be of the widest character possible. Fasting of the body has to be accompanied by fasting of all the senses. And अल्पाहार, the meagre food of the *Gita*, is also a fasting of the body. The *Gita* enjoins not temperance in food but 'meagreness'; meagreness is a perpetual fast. Meagreness means just enough to sustain the body for the service for which it is made. The test is again supplied by saying that food should be taken as one takes medicine in measured doses, at measured times and as required, not for taste but for the welfare of the body.<sup>1</sup> 'Meagreness' is perhaps better rendered by 'measured quantities'. I cannot recall Arnold's rendering. A 'full' meal is, therefore, a crime against God and man, the latter because the full-mealers deprive their neighbours of their portion. God's economy provides from day to day just enough food for all in just medicinal doses. We are all of the tribe of full-mealers. Instinctively to know the medicinal dose required is a Herculean task, for by parental training we are gluttons. Then, when it is almost too late, it dawns upon some of us that food is made not to enjoy but to sustain the body as our slave. It becomes from that moment a grim fight against inherited and acquired habit of eating for pleasure. Hence the necessity for a complete fast at intervals and partial fasts for ever. Partial fast is the meagre or measured food of the *Gita*. Thus

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1. "Food has to be taken as we take medicine, that is, without thinking whether it is palatable or otherwise, and only in quantities limited to the needs of the body. Just as medicine taken in too small a dose does not take effect or the full effect, and as too large a dose injures the system, so it is with food."

—From *Yervada Mandir*: Chap. IV.

## MEAGRE FOOD OF THE GITA

'There is no prayer without fasting' is a scientific proposition capable of verification by experiments and experience.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 241.

### 57. MEAGRE FOOD OF THE GITA

**T**HE passage you quote from the *Gita* refers to moderate habits. That is not what I had in mind. The passage I had in mind occurs in the Last Chapter, 52nd verse. I should translate it thus: "Who prefers solitude, who eats meagre food, who has under perfect control thought, speech and action; who is intent on meditation, who is free always from attachments."

You have no reason to complain of the quantity of your food. You dare not go by the abstract measurement. Double your quantity would be really meagre for many of our friends. The condition of your own body should be the sole guide as to the quantity without any reference to that taken by others. All we should recognize is that voluntary meagre eating is one of the most difficult things in the world. It is a perpetual fast much more difficult than the complete periodic fasts. Meagre food voluntarily taken *must* lead to perfect poise *i.e.*, perfect health of body and mind. We can but make the attempt.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 245.

### 58. 'SPARE DIET'

**I**HAVE always found Arnold's to be, on the whole, a more helpful translation than any other. "Abstemious" is a wrong word. "Spare diet" is a good expression. अल्प means less than enough. What is enough is a matter of conjecture, therefore, our own mental picture. The man of truth, knowing that man

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

is always indulgent to the body, said, in order to counteract the indulgence, that he should take less food than what he would think was enough; then there was likelihood of his taking what in fact was enough. So what we often think is spare or meagre is likely even to be more than enough. More people are weak through overfeeding or wrong feeding than through under-feeding. It is wonderful, if we chose the right diet, what an extraordinarily small quantity would suffice.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira.* P. 254.

### 59. COMMUNINGS ON GITA CHAPTERS

#### Chapter Nine

**C**HAPTER NINE contains what I would describe as the healing balm for us afflicted mortals—afflicted not only with physical ills, but with ills of the spirit. The Chapter contains the promise of God to all erring mortals, nay even to those who may be 'born from the very womb of Sin.' Those that turn to Him shall have no cause to grieve. The Chapter also shows that the *Gita* was written when *Varnashrama* had ceased to exist in its pristine purity and had come to mean, as it does today, a classification of high and low. Let us forget that, and remember that the promise is given to all—अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो—even if they be steeped in sin. And when we are all steeped in sin, more or less, who dare cast the stone at whom? 'Be thou certain, none can perish, trusting Me': says the Lord; but let it not be understood to mean that our sins will be washed away by merely trusting Him without any striving. Only he who struggles hard against the allurements of sense-objects, and turns in tears and grief to the Lord, will be comforted.

### Chapters Eleven and Twelve

Again, Chapters Eleven and Twelve: What can more forcefully turn one to God than this panoramic vision of His multitudinous manifestations? And having thus prepared us for *Bhakti*, the Lord gives us the essence of *Bhakti* in the Twelfth Chapter which is so brief that anyone can commit it to memory, to call it to his aid in moments of trial.

### Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

Chapter Fourteen and the threefold division of the qualities of nature remind me of Henry Drummond's book I read about 30 years ago—*The Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. The laws are numerous, but they have been broadly classified under three heads. The Fourteenth Chapter describes the laws to which man is subject and the Fifteenth describes *Puru-shottama*—the Perfect Man. The 'ascent of man' is what we have to learn from these Chapters. There is no man who is governed exclusively by one of the three *Gunas*—*Satva*, *Rajas* or *Tamas*. We have each of us to rise to a state in which we are governed predominantly by the *Sattva* principle, until at last we rise beyond the three and are 'Perfect Men.' I can think of an illustration from the physical world. Take water, which in its solid state remains on the earth; it cannot ascend until it is rarefied into steam. But once it is rarefied into steam, it rises up in the sky where at last it is transformed into clouds, which drop down in the form of rain and fructify and bless the earth. We are all like water, we have to strive so to rarefy ourselves that all the ego in us perishes and we merge in the Infinite to the eternal good of all.

—*Young India*: January 12, 1928.

## 60. THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

“**T**H**ERE** is not only great poetry in the Eleventh Chapter of the *Gita* as you have made out, but also the vital truth that God is immanent in all created objects which are only different parts of His body.”

You are right, but that makes no difference as regards my introduction to that Chapter. One who looks upon the universe as various facets of God will certainly have the beatific vision. But what he sees will be a creation of his own imagination. A Christian who looks upon the universe as God will see a Christ-like image. A man sees God as he worships Him. A Hindu will always draw fresh inspiration from the Eleventh Chapter, and if he is a devotee (*Bhakta*), he will see God as He has been there described. But what he sees will have no existence except in his own imagination. God is without form, but He assumes form for His devotee. That is His *Maya*, or poetry. The whole thing boils down to this: We have to see God even in the thief and the robber. If we can thus see God in him, he will give up thievish propensities. All our knowledge and spiritual exercises are fruitless so long as we have not had this vision.

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*: P. 244.

## 61. GITA AND THE DOCTRINE OF EQUALITY

**I** DO not believe that all class distinctions can be obliterated. I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*. The *Gita* teaches us that members of all the four castes should

be treated on an equal basis.<sup>1</sup> It does not prescribe the same *dharma* for the *Brahmin* as for the *Bhangi*. But it insists that the latter shall be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning. It is, therefore, our duty to see that the 'untouchables' do not feel that they are despised or looked down upon. Let them not be offered leavings from our plates for their subsistence. How can I accord differential treatment to any person, be he a *Brahmin* or *Bhangi*, who worships the same God and keeps his body and soul pure and clean? I for one would regard myself as having sinned if I gave to a *Bhangi* unclean food from the leavings from the kitchen or failed to render him personal assistance when he was in need.

—*Young India*: January 22, 1925.

### No Difference in Status

I am not after extinguishing all differences. Who can destroy natural differences? Is there no difference between a *Brahmin*, a dog and a dog-eater? And yet the *Gita* says:

*"The men who have realized the Truth look with an equal eye on a learned and cultured Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater."*

1. "The great message of the *Bhagavad Gita* is: 'Treat the *Brahmin* and the *Bhangi* alike, if you would but know God. But how are they alike? A *Brahmin* is any day superior to the *Bhangi* in learning, and how am I to treat both alike? The *Bhagavad Gita* says that you should treat them even as you would wish to be treated by them, or even as you would treat yourself:

आत्मवत्सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्यति स पश्यति ।

That is the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*."

—*Young India*: January 13, 1927.



## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

There is a difference between them, but the man who knows the science of life will say that there is no difference between them in status, as there is none between an elephant and an ant, a savage and a savant. Of course, the savage may be awe-struck before a savant; but the latter should not have any sense of superiority. No, we are all equal in the eye of the law and God. That is the ideal we have to live up to.

—*Harijan*: January 11, 1935.

### 62. GITA AND UNTOUCHABILITY

**M**Y views on untouchability are not the product of my Western education. I had formed them long before I went to England, and long before I studied the scriptures, and in an atmosphere which was by no means favourable to those views. For, I was born in an orthodox *Vaishnava* family and yet ever since I reached the years of discretion I have firmly held my uncompromising views in the matter, which later comparative study of Hinduism and experience have only confirmed. How in face of the fact that no scriptural text mentions a fifth *Varna*, and in face of the express injunction of the *Gita* to regard a *Brahmin* and a *Bhangi* as equals, we persist in maintaining this deep blot on Hinduism, I cannot understand. Regarding a *Brahmin* and a *Bhangi* as equals does not mean that you will not accord to a true *Brahmin* the reverence that is due to him, but that the *Brahmin* and the *Bhangi* are equally entitled to our service, that we accord to the *Bhangi* the same rights of sending his children to public schools, of visiting public temples, of the use of public wells, etc., on the same basis as these rights are enjoyed by any other Hindu. . . . What shall I say of the attitude that persists in holding up a wholly irreligious practice as religious? Let us, therefore,

## GITA AND THE LAW OF VARNA

search ourselves and purge our hearts of all narrowness, let us realize that it is a just Nemesis that is punishing us in South Africa and that our treatment of our brethren is no less iniquitous than the White man's treatment of our countrymen in South Africa.

—*Young India*: February 17, 1927.

### 63. GITA AND THE LAW OF VARNA

**Q.** Can you justify the present caste system? What is your definition of *Varna*?

**A.** '*Varna*' means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The Law of *Varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or choose his father's profession. *Varna*, therefore, is in a way the Law of Heredity. *Varna* is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus; but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of Nature—the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's Law of Gravitation. Just as the Law of Gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the Law of *Varna*. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of Nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

#### Nothing To Do With Caste

*Varna* has nothing to do with caste. Caste is an excrescence, just like untouchability, upon Hinduism. All the excrescences that are emphasized today were

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

never part of Hinduism. But don't you find similar ugly excrescences in Christianity and Islam also? Fight them as much as you like. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of *Varna*. It is this travesty of *Varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the Law of *Varna* is largely responsible both for our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and impoverishment, and it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith. But in quarrelling with the present monstrous form and monstrous practice to which the original Law has been reduced, do not fight the Law itself.

### The Fourfold Division

**Q.** How many *Varnas* are there?

**A.** Four *Varnas*, though it is not a rigid division inherent in *Varna* itself. The *Rishis*, after incessant experiment and research, arrived at this fourfold division—the four ways of earning one's livelihood.

**Q.** Logically, therefore, there are as many *Varnas* as there are professions?

**A.** Not necessarily. The different professions can easily be brought under the four main divisions—that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service. So far as the world is concerned, the dominant profession is the wealth-producing, just as *Grihastha Ashrama* is the most dominant amongst all *Ashramas*. *Vaishya* is the keynote among the *Varnas*. The defender is not wanted, if there is no wealth and property. The first two and the fourth are necessary because of the third. The first will always be very few because of the severe discipline required for it, the second must be few in a well ordered society, and so the fourth.

### Varna and Profession

**Q.** If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what *Varna* does he belong to?

**A.** According to the Hindu belief, he belongs to the *Varna* in which he is born, but by not living up to it he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being—a *patita*.

**Q.** A *Shudra* does an act which belongs to a *Brahmin* by birth. Does he become a *patita*?

**A.** A *Shudra* has as much right to knowledge as a *Brahmin*, but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain his livelihood through teaching. In ancient times, there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the professions. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. To-day he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs. 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain, and a physician like Hakim Saheb<sup>1</sup> thinks that he must charge Rs. 1,000 a day for his medical advice.

**Q.** But may not a man follow a profession after his heart?

**A.** But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his fathers. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession, on the contrary, it is noble. What we find to-day are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' calling, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone by, there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing

1. Ajmal Khan of Delhi.

## THE TEACHING OF THE GITA

wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal, when the motive was purely philanthropic.

**Q.** All that is under ideal conditions. But what do you propose to-day when every one is hankering after paying professions?

**A.** It is a sweeping generalization. Put together the number of boys studying in schools and colleges and determine the percentage of boys going in for the learned professions. Highway robbery is not open to every one. The present seems to be an agitation for highway robbery. How many can become lawyers and Government servants? Those who can be legitimately occupied in earning wealth are *Vaishyas*. Even there, when their profession becomes a highway robbery, it is hateful. There cannot be millions of millionaires.

### Insurance for Happiness

**Q.** You have been saying that the Law of *Varna* curbs our worldly ambition. How?

**A.** When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. *Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

**Q.** You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. To-day, those who follow their father's

professions have no spiritual culture at all—their very *Varna* unfits them for it.

A. We are talking with crooked notions of *Varna*. When *Varna* was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not ever learn the *Gita*, if every one who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to re-arrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have to-day, and we cannot do it unless we follow the Law of *Varna*.

### What Determines The Varna

Q. You will excuse us, if we go back to the same question over and over again. We want to understand it properly. What is the *Varna* of a man practising different professions at different times?

A. It may not make any difference in his *Varna* so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profession from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth, degrades himself and falls from *Varna*.

Q. A *Shudra* may have all the qualities of a *Brahmin* and yet may not be called a *Brahmin*?

A. He may not be called a *Brahmin* in this birth. And it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a *Varna* to which he is not born. It is a sign of true humility.

Q. Do you believe that qualities attaching to *Varna* are inherited and not acquired?

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**A.** They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

**Q.** Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character?

**A.** That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. But you and I do not need to go deeper into this question for understanding the Law of *Varna*, as I have endeavoured to explain to you. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier, but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

### Inter-dining and Inter-marriage

**Q.** Caste, as we see it to-day, consists only in restrictions about inter-dining and inter-marriage. Does preservation of *Varna* then mean keeping these restrictions?

**A.** No, not at all. In its purest state, there can be no restrictions.

**Q.** Can they be omitted?

**A.** They can be, and *Varna* is preserved even by marrying into other *Varnas*.

**Q.** Then the mother's *Varna* will be affected?

**A.** A wife follows the *Varna* of her husband.

### Varnadharmā in The Gita

**Q.** Is the doctrine of *Varnadharmā*, as you have expounded it, to be found in our *Shastras*, or is it your own?

**A.** Not my own. I derive it from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

**Q.** Do you approve of the doctrine as given in *Manusmriti*?

**A.** The principle is there. But the applications do not appeal to me fully. There are parts of the book, which are open to grave objections. I hope that they are later interpolations.

**Q.** Does not *Manusmriti* contain a lot of injustice?

**A.** Yes, a lot of injustice to women and the so-called lower 'castes'. All is not *Shashtra* that goes by that name. The *Shastras* so-called, therefore, need to be read with much caution.

**Q.** But you go by the *Bhagavad Gita*. It says *Varna* is according to *Guna* and *Karma*. How did you bring in birth?

**A.** I swear by the *Bhagavad Gita* because it is the only book in which I find nothing to cavil at. It lays down principles and leaves you to find the application for yourself. The *Gita* does talk of *Varna* being according to *Guna* and *Karma*, but *Guna* and *Karma* are inherited by birth. Lord Krishna says: All *Varnas* have been created by Me—चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टम्—*i.e.*, I suppose by birth. The Law of *Varna* is nothing, if not by birth.

**Q.** But there is no superiority about *Varna*?

**A.** No, not at all, though I do say *Brahmanism* is the culmination of other *Varnas*, just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service, but no superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worthy of being trampled under foot.

—*Young India*: November 24, 1927.



## 64. MY CONCEPTION OF VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

I HAVE called the institutions of *Varnas* and *Ashramas* the special gift of Hinduism to the world. I still adhere to that view, but today neither the *Varnas* nor the *Ashramas* of my conception are in existence anywhere.

*Ashramas* may be said to have disappeared altogether from our midst, while *Varnas* are to be seen only in the corrupt form of exclusive rights and class privileges. All caste feeling whether in a *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* or *Vaishya* connotes pride; and pride and religion go ill together. Where does the poor *Shudra* stand in this classification? Right at the bottom. And the *Adishudra*—the untouchable? He is the meanest of the mean. This is not religion but its negation.

### Varna and Caste

Where are the four *Varnas* of the *Gita* today? *Varna* and caste are two entirely different things. The varieties of the latter are legion. I know of no authority for caste in the *Gita* or any other scripture. The *Gita* has prescribed four *Varnas* based on one's special aptitudes and corresponding duties. The number is only illustrative. It may be added to or reduced. I am convinced that today there is one *Varna* only, viz., *Shudra* or, say, *Adishudra*, Harijan, untouchable.

That being so, in our present fallen state true religion requires us all to become *Adishudras* by choice. We must regard ourselves not as owners but as trustees of our wealth, and use it for the service of society, taking for ourselves no more than a fair return for service rendered. Under this system, there would be none poor, none rich. All religions would be held

## ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

equal. All quarrels arising out of religion, caste or economic grievance would cease to disturb peace on earth.

—*Press Report*: September 18, 1945.

### 65. ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

I HAVE been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we 3:16 John of the *Bible*. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them? Some have said, and not without good reason, the *Gayatri* answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the *Gayatri mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then, as you are aware, I have, for years past, been swearing by the *Bhagavad Gita*, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *Kamadhenu*, my guide, my open sesame, on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a prayerful study before the *Kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

#### Mantra From Ishopanishad

But I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the *Ishopanishad*. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the *Upanishads* and all the other

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scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the *Ishopanishad* were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

### The Mantra Analyzed

Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत्. It means, as I would translate, all this that we see in this great Universe is pervaded by God. Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them: तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीया. I divide these into two and translate them thus: Renounce it and enjoy it. There is another rendering which means the same thing, though: Enjoy what He gives you. Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part, मा गृवः कस्यस्विद्धनम् which means: Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession. All the other *mantras* of that ancient *Upanishad* are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*.

### Gita—A Commentary on The Mantra

As I read the *mantra* in the light of the *Gita* or the *Gita* in the light of the *mantra*, I find that the *Gita* is a commentary on this *mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the Socialist and the Communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true—and I hold it to be true—you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God

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and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the Universe?

### Act of Renunciation

The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation, but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is, therefore, a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation.

### 'Do Not Covet'

As if this was not enough, the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought: 'Do not covet anybody's possession.' The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter. No doubt, it will not satisfy the aspiration of him who does not believe in God and His undisputed sovereignty.

—*Harijan*: January 30, 1937.

## 66. ISHOPANISHAD

"You have spoken of the *Ishopanishad* and said that if the first verse alone survived and all the rest of the Hindu scriptures were destroyed, it would alone save religion from extinction. Perhaps, you know that the verse was a turning

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point in the life of Devendra Nath Tagore, the Poet's<sup>1</sup> father. Young Devendra Nath was in a mood of great depression when his father died, leaving the family estate highly encumbered. One day, while in this mood, a piece of printed paper was wafted by a passing breeze to where he was sitting. He picked it up. It was in Sanskrit which he had not learnt then. He took it to the family *pandit* who read it out. It was the first verse of the *Ishopanishad*. 'Nectar poured into my soul,' says the Maharshi in his autobiography.

"The phrase about enjoying by renunciation puzzled me for long. One day (or night, to be correct) it flashed on me that the phrase but expressed a daily experience. What greater enjoyment is there than renouncing something one values to one—person or cause—which one holds dear."

The subject matter of the letter (from Shri K. Natarajan) is an evergreen. I try to the utmost of my ability to live the meaning that, in my ungrammatical way, I have ascribed to the *shloka*. Not being a reader of books, I never knew the instance that Shri Natarajan quotes from Maharshi Devendra's life. It fortifies my belief that the first *mantra* of *Ishopanishad* is all that undiluted Hinduism—in other words, for me, religion—can have to give. The recitation of the 18 chapters of the *Gita* is finished in one week at the morning prayer, and so it has gone on now for some years from week to week. The *Gita* is a commentary on the first verse of the *Ishopanishad*. And I feel, not without diffidence, that the interpretation that flashed on Shri Natarajan's mind reveals but the partial truth. As I understand it, his interpretation is only the well-worn doctrine of self-sacrifice, which is undoubtedly a common enough experience. Take only one instance. Many a mother sacrifices all for her children. But the *mantra* referred to here was not revealed to confirm the truth of that practice, well-known even during the remote times when it is said to have been given. To live up to that verse means the new birth enunciated

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1. Rabindra Nath Tagore.

## A VOTARY OF THE GITA

in the *New Testament* or *Brahma Samarpana* (dedication to God) as taught in Hinduism. The verse, therefore, seems to me to mean only one thing: Recognize that everything you fancy you have is God's and from God, and take only what you really need for life. In other words, in the language of the *Gita*, it teaches the doctrine of uttermost detachment.<sup>1</sup> Then only is life worth living.

—*Harijan*: June 23, 1946.

### 67. A VOTARY OF THE GITA

SINCE God is a God of Mercy, if we must imagine, it is best to imagine the best. Of course, a votary of the *Gita* never imagines anything.<sup>2</sup> Good and bad are after all relative terms. He takes note of things as they happen and reacts naturally to them, fulfilling his part as if propelled by the Great Mechanic, even as a piece of machine in good order responds automatically to the call of the mechanist. It is the most difficult thing for an intelligent being to be like a machine. And yet, if one is to become a zero, that is precisely what one desiring perfection has to become. The vital difference between the machine and the man is that the machine is inert, the man is all life and consciously becomes like a machine in the hands of the Master Mechanic. Krishna says, in so many words, that God moves all beings as if they were parts of a machine.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 238.

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1. "The detachment prescribed by the *Gita* is the hardest thing to achieve, and yet it is so absolutely necessary for perfect peace and for the vision of both the little self and the greatest Self."

—*Harijan*: February 6, 1937.

2. "Take no thought for the morrow' has got to be literally followed by one who will enforce in his own life the teaching of the *Gita*."

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 159.

### 68. HAPPINESS OF THE GITA

**I**N a manner, everybody trains himself to do without things when he cannot get them. A follower of the *Gita dharma* trains himself to do without things *with happiness*, called equanimity in the *Gita* language, for happiness of the *Gita* is not the opposite of unhappiness. It is superior to that state. The devotee of the *Gita* is neither happy nor unhappy. And when that state is reached, there is no pain, no pleasure, no victory, no defeat, no deprivation, no possession. Prison life is a life of privilege, if we learn to practise the *Gita* teaching. It is easier in the prison than outside. For, outside we have the opportunity of picking and choosing. Hence, we are not always able to test ourselves. In the prison, there are various jarring occasions. Are we able to bear them with equanimity? If we are, it is well with us.

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 250.

### 69. EFFORT NEVER FAILS

**W**E have to acquire the faculty for keeping well under all weathers—a difficult task I know. But it is not beyond human reach. The mind plays a great part in it. If we can completely detach ourselves from the externals in terms of the Sixth Chapter, we can attain that state. That it appears to be beyond our reach for the present, need not baffle us. The author of the *Gita* invites us to the effort and says from his abundant experience that it never fails. It may take long but success is a certainty.<sup>1</sup>

—*Bapu's Letters to Mira*: P. 272.

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1. "I know that there is a school of philosophy which teaches complete inaction and futility of all effort. I have not been able to appreciate that teaching. In my humble opinion, effort is necessary for one's own growth. It has to be irrespective of results."

—*Young India*: October 21, 1926.

## 70. STRUGGLE AGAINST TEMPTATION

**I**S not struggle the law in the natural world? If it is, much more so is it the law in the spiritual world. There is a spiritual law in the natural world and a natural law in the spiritual world. Life is a perpetual striving. There is always a tempest raging in us, and struggle against temptation is a perpetual duty. The *Gita* says this at not less than three places. I dare say there are many more places, but I remember only three. One needs must have the will and then, you know the English proverb, there's the way. And there are those Biblical sayings: 'Ask and it shall be given', 'Seek and you shall find, 'Knock and it shall be open.'

—*Harijan*: July 8, 1938.

## 71. DOCTRINE OF RENUNCIATION

**I** BELIEVE in the doctrine of renunciation, but I hold that renunciation should be sought for in and through action. That action is the *sine qua non* of life in the body, that the Wheel of Life cannot go on even for a second without involving some sort of action, goes without saying. Renunciation can, therefore, in these circumstances, only mean detachment or freedom of the spirit from action, even while the body is engaged in action. A follower of the path of renunciation seeks to attain it not by refraining from all activity, but by carrying it on in a perfect spirit of detachment and altruism as a pure trust. Thus a man may engage in farming, spinning or any other activity without departing from the path of renunciation, provided one does so merely for selfless service and remains free from the taint of egoism or attachment.

—*Young India*: October 25, 1928.



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### 72. THE ART OF LIVING

**B**IRTH and death are inevitable among mortals. What distinguishes the man from the brute is his conscious striving to realize the Spirit within. The last eighteen verses of the Second Chapter of the *Gita* give in a nutshell the secret of the art of living. It is given there in the form of a description of a *Sthitaprajna* or the man of steady wisdom *i.e.*, a *Satyagrahi*, in reply to Arjuna's query to Lord Krishna.

The art of dying follows as a corollary from the art of living. Death must come to all. A man may die of a lightning stroke or as a result of heart failure or failure of respiration. But that is not the death that a *Satyagrahi* can wish for or pray for himself. The art of dying for a *Satyagrahi* consists in facing death cheerfully in the performance of one's duty. . . . It is not enough not to want to hurt or take the life of your enemy. You are no *Satyagrahis* if you remain silent or passive spectators while your enemy is being done to death. You must protect him even at the cost of your life. If thousands in India learnt that art, the face of India would be changed and no one would be able to point his finger of scorn at her non-violence as being a cloak for weakness.

—*Harijan*: April 7, 1946.

### 73. THE IDEAL OF THE STHITAPRAJNA

**T**HE ideal of the *Sthitaprajna* (man whose understanding is secure) described in the Second Chapter of the *Gita* is always before me and I am ceaseless in my efforts to reach that ideal. Whatever others might say of me, I know I am yet far from it. When one really reaches such a state, his very thought becomes charged with a power which transforms those around

him.<sup>1</sup> But where is that power in me now? I can only say that I am a common mortal, made of the same clay of which others are made, only ceaselessly striving to attain the lofty ideal which the *Gita* holds before all mankind.

—*Harijan*: March 23, 1947.

### The Man of Steady Wisdom

If we accept that ideal (of a *Sthitaprajna* (स्थितप्रज्ञ) i.e., 'the man of steady wisdom,' i.e. a *Satyagrahi*) we would not regard anybody as our enemy, we must shed all enmity and ill-will. That ideal is not meant for the select few—the saint or the seer only; it is meant for all. I have described myself as a scavenger having become one, not only in name but in fact while I was in Phoenix. It was there that I took up the bucket and the broom, impelled by the inner urge to identify myself with the lowest of the low. As a humble fellow toiler, then, let me bear witness that anyone, even a simple-minded villager who wants to and tries, can attain the state of mental equipoise described in the *Gita* verses. We all lose our sanity at times, though we may not care to admit it or be even aware of it. A man with a steady mind will never lose patience even with a child, or indulge in anger or abuse.<sup>2</sup> Religion, as taught in

1. "There is a stage in life when a man does not need even to proclaim his thoughts much less to show them by outward action. Mere thoughts act. They attain that power. Then it can be said of him that his seeming inaction constitutes his action. I must confess that I am far from that state. All I can say is that my striving is in that direction."

—*Harijan*: October 26, 1947.

2. "We will have to imbibe the virtue of control on our senses. This, in my view, is the essence of the teaching of the *Gita*. I think that the chief merit of the *Gita* is that certain basic truths are explained in the attractive form of a dialogue.

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the *Gita*, is a thing to be practised in this life. It is not a means for attaining merit in the next, irrespective of what you may do here. That would be a negation of religion.

—*Harijan*: April 14, 1946.

### 74. CHARACTERISTICS OF A *STHITAPRAJNA*

**T**HAT ideal is not meant for *Jnanis* only, it is for all—even ordinary lay people.<sup>1</sup> Lord Krishna himself is depicted in the *Mahabharata* as a charioteer actually driving a team of white horses, while his pupil Arjuna, to whom the *Gita* discourses are addressed, is pictured as being plebeian in his mental make-up and outlook.

What, then, are the characteristics of a *Sthitaprajna*? He is one who withdraws his senses from the objects of the senses behind the shield of the spirit, as a tortoise does its limbs under its shell.

A man whose wisdom is not steady is liable to be betrayed into anger, evil thoughts or abuse. On the contrary, the man with the steady wisdom will remain equally unaffected by adulation or abuse. He will realize that abuse fouls only the tongue that utters it, never the person against whom it is hurled. A man of steady wisdom will, therefore, never wish ill to anyone, but will pray even for his enemy with his last breath.

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Human beings must restrain their senses if they do not want to go mad."

—*Press Report*: April 4, 1946.

1. "The lesson of the *Bhagavad Gita* is meant not for those who have forsaken the world, but for every householder, irrespective of his birth and state. Everybody's duty should be to attain the state described therein, and this can only be done if life is built on the rock of fearlessness."

—*Harijan*: January 5, 1947.

## THE STEADFAST MAN OF THE GITA

Is it too difficult an ideal to follow? No. On the contrary, the conduct laid down in it is the only conduct worthy of the dignity of human beings.

—*Harijan*: April 28, 1946.

### 75. THE STEADFAST MAN OF THE GITA

**A**NSWERING the description of a steadfast man of the *Gita*, such are the lines according to Sir Edwin Arnold's rendering:

*Arjuna* :

“What is his mark who hath steadfast heart,  
Confirmed in holy meditation? How  
Know we his speech, Keshava? Sits he, moves he  
Like other men?”

*Krishna* :

“When one, O Pritha's Son!  
Abandoning desires which shake the mind  
Finds in his soul full comfort for his soul,  
He hath attained the *Yoga*—that man is such!  
In sorrows not dejected, and in joys  
Not overjoyed; dwelling outside the stress  
Of passion, fear, and anger, fixed in calms  
Of lofty contemplation;—such an one  
Is *Muni*, is the Sage, the true Recluse!  
He who to none and nowhere overbound  
By ties of flesh, takes evil things and good  
Neither desponding nor exulting, such  
Bears wisdom's plainest mark! He who shall draw  
As the wise tortoise draws its four feet safe  
Under its shield, his five frail senses back  
Under the spirit's buckler from the world  
Which else assails them, such an one, my Prince!  
Hath Wisdom's mark! Things that solicit sense  
Hold off from the self-governed; nay, it comes,

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The appetites of him who lives beyond  
Depart,—aroused no more. Yet may it chance,  
O Son of Kunti! that a governed mind  
Shall some time feel the sense-storms sweep, and wrest  
Strong self-control by the roots. Let him regain  
His kingdom! Let him conquer this, and sit  
On Me intent. That man alone is wise  
Who keeps the mastery of himself! If one  
Ponders on subjects of the sense, there springs  
Attraction; from attraction grows desire,  
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds  
Recklessness; then the memory—all betrayed—  
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,  
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone.  
But, if one deals with objects of the sense  
Not loving and not hating, making them  
Serve his free soul, which rests serenely in Lord,  
Lo! such a man comes to tranquillity;  
And out of that tranquillity shall rise  
The end and healing of his earthly pains,  
Since the will governed sets the soul at peace.  
The soul of the ungoverned is not his,  
Nor hath he knowledge of himself; which lacked,  
How grows serenity? and, wanting that,  
Whence shall he hope for happiness?

The mind

That gives itself to follow shows of sense  
Seeth its helm of wisdom rent away,  
And, like a ship in waves of whirlwind, drives  
To wreck and death. Only with him, great Prince!  
Whose senses are not swayed by things of sense—  
Only with him who holds his mastery,  
Show wisdom perfect. What is midnight-gloom  
To unenlightened sou's shines wakeful day  
To his clear gaze; what seems as wakeful day  
Is known for night, thick night of ignorance,

## THE STEADFAST MAN OF THE GITA

To his true-seeing eyes. Such is the Saint!  
And like the ocean, day by day receiving  
Floods from all lands, which never overflows;  
Its boundary-line not leaping, and not leaving,  
Fed by the rivers, but unswelled by those;  
So is the perfect one, to his soul's ocean  
The world of sense pours streams of witchery,  
They leave him as they find, without commotion,  
Taking their tribute, but remaining sea.  
Yea; whoso, shaking off the yoke of flesh  
Lives lord, not servant, of his lusts; set free  
From pride, from passion, from the sin of "Self",  
Toucheth tranquillity! O Pritha's Son!  
That is the state of Brahma! There rests no dread  
When that last step is reached! Live where he will,  
Die when he may, such passeth from all plaining,  
To blest *Nirvana*, with the Gods, attaining."

I confess that in spite of my trying to reach the state,  
I am far away from the condition of equipoise. I realize  
how difficult it is in the face of the storm raging  
round us.

—*Harijan*: August 10, 1947.

