

Gita Values

Thousands of years ago two friends, Krishna, the Supreme Lord, and Prince Arjuna spoke about life's most relevant questions. The setting was a battlefield, the issues urgent, and the resulting text, the Bhagavad-gita, The Song of God, has become an important contribution to the philosophical and spiritual literature of the world.

The six values presented here are selected because they help us understand the worldview that forms the basis of Krishna's advice to Arjuna. We can use them to better our vision, our deeds, and our character.

These Gita values are governed by Bhakti, a word that means "devotion" which is always used in relation to the Supreme. They can thus help us discern what we can do to develop our relationship with the Supreme, all living beings, and the environment in which we live.

The Values

Sama Darshana (equal vision)

The Gita's idea of equal vision speaks of the equality of all living beings, where life is respected regardless of race, gender, caste, creed, or species. This rests on the understanding that the energy we call life is not a temporary material energy but an eternal spiritual energy. Thus Krishna says that the wise see a saint, a laborer, a dog and an elephant with equal vision, and – while acknowledging their material differences – sees real substance in their spiritual equality. This vision awards personhood to all, links everyone with God, and consequently with each other. It does not consider human dignity to be the natural basis of civilization, but instead the dignity of all life.

Ichhā (choice)

Ichhā means desire. The Gita begins by Arjuna making a choice to seek guidance from his friend Krishna. Krishna concludes his Gita by recognizing that after offering his opinion Arjuna will do as Arjuna desires. Krishna has spoken to Arjuna openly, truthfully, and with affection. He has not been demanding or dogmatic. By leaving the choice to Arjuna, Krishna has acknowledged this freedom. Thus Arjuna can freely choose his relationship with Krishna, his service and responsibilities, and fight or flight on the battlefield. The Gita establishes that love depends on individual choice.

Ahimsa (without harm)

Ahimsa means to act in a way that causes the least harm. In the Mahabharata Krishna says that all dharma, all good acts, are dependent on this one principle. The context of the Gita, a battlefield, helps us appreciate that ahimsa does not mean pacifism. Nevertheless, a life of ahimsa does include avoiding violence, the harm of offering cruel words, of making other's lives distressed or confused, of withholding knowledge or insight, and of being neglectful of ourselves. In the Gita Krishna asks us to consider loka sangraha – the welfare of the world, and sarva-bhuta-hita – the welfare of all beings. Ahimsa encourages such a life dedicated to truth, dharma, and spirituality, allowing us to be better servants of God and the greater good.

Acharya (teaching by example)

The word acharya means one who leads and teaches by example. The Acharya, by behavior, shows what can be done; how we can live a full life with a minimum of possessions; how a dedicated life of service gladdens the heart; and how a spiritual life is a practical life. The Acharyas inspire integrity and good character in others by the standards they set. Teaching by example is

the essence of education. Leading by example is the essence of government. Exemplifying ones principles is the basis of dignity, respect, and trust.

Amānitva (humility)

Humility in the Gita is a virtue which is seen in behavior but which rests on understanding. Humility is the quality of not being anxious to be honored by others. Humility aided Arjuna to understand himself and what he must do in the greater scheme of things. Humility is not weak. It nurtured Arjuna's self-esteem, self-confidence, and courage. It allowed him to know, love, and serve God. It perfumes our communication, is the jewel of the broadminded, and is the key to a spiritual life. It is the most attractive quality we can possess.

Prīti (affection)

In the Gita Arjuna listens to all the advice given by Krishna and chooses his path because he wants to please him. His relationship with Krishna is based on love and Krishna has shared his knowledge with Arjuna because of this love. All of the principles we have mentioned are enriched by our ability to offer and receive affection. Love for God develops our kindness, our gratitude, and our concern. Our ability to be compassionate and tolerant is nourished by affection. Preaching is excellent when graced with a concern born of affection, and our affection for God should be apparent in all our dealings – as the quality of a rose is apparent by its scent.