



Week 15 Lesson:

Deep Listening Makes All the Difference

Whenever there is a decline of dharma (righteousness) and a rise of adharma (unrighteousness), then I manifest myself, Arjuna.

For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of the unvirtuous, and for the establishment of dharma (righteousness), I manifest from age to age.

-words of Krishna (the higher true Self) in the *Bhagavad Gita*, 4: 7-8

The *Bhagavad Gita*, Hinduism's holy book of Vedic wisdom, is known as the preeminent scripture of dharma. Its story unfolds as the seeking soul Arjuna struggles to realize his dharma and engages in illuminating dialogs with Lord Krishna, representing the higher Self. Arjuna's questions about what he should do, what is truly right for him to do, how to deal with his hesitation to move forward with what he knows he should do, how to do it in the highest way, and his fears of failure are all familiar to us. *What am I supposed to do? What if others are hurt by what I do? How can I know what is right? What would it look like if I were living as a fully enlightened person? Is it even possible to fulfill my destiny, be fully awake, and live a dharmic life? What if I try and fail? Then what? What is the nature of dharma? How can I recognize it?*

Scripture can be read and interpreted on many levels—historically, literally, psychologically, metaphorically, and spiritually. Some approach scripture literally, considering it to be a word for word account of something that occurred in the past whose wisdom we can learn to apply in our lives today. Others look at how the scripture relates to the development of ethics for right living and character formation. Still, others explore the metaphysical meaning of it, looking at how the story is meant to reflect the universal pattern of the inner journey of spiritual realization. Spiritual interpretation is discovering how the scripture connects us with higher realities.



By approaching the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* metaphorically and spiritually, we can use it as a guide for exploring both the universal and the personal nature of dharma—what dharma means in terms of the world process as a divine activity, as well as what we, as individuals, can learn to do to live a spiritually aware and fulfilled life by cooperating with this divine cosmic order. This entails realizing our true place in the higher scheme of things and cultivating the skills to discern and stay attuned to divine Reality—learning to listen deeply.

The Inner Dialog with the divine Self

Viewed metaphysically, the dialog that takes place in the *Bhagavad Gita* is an inner dialog—the self-inquiry of the seeking soul is met by revelation of higher knowledge unfolding from the divine Self. It is an exercise in discernment, opening the mind to the divine guidance that will set the soul on its trajectory of fulfilling its dharma, or higher purpose.

Cultivating discernment is learning how to listen to the divine Self. First, we must recognize the inherent connection to our divine Self. When we seek wisdom from God, we are not trying to reach some divine authority that resides in an apartment in the sky above us. We are inquiring of the divine Self, the Supreme Reality that is our life. This metaphysical viewpoint is not a stretch for interpreting the wisdom of the Gita. There, Lord Krishna reveals to Arjuna, “*I am the Self seated in the hearts of all beings.*”¹ The question for us is how do we access the wisdom of this divine Self, seated in our heart, as our essential nature? What will it reveal about our dharma?

Revelation of the Divine Self

The verses from the Gita that began this lesson refer to the divine intention and influence to maintain cosmic harmony. This is the universal meaning of dharma. Commenting on these verses, scholar Anantanand Rambachan writes, “We must first note the use of the term *dharma*. Derived from the root *dhṛ* (to sustain or support), it refers in this context to the network of values and actions that preserves the harmony and well-being of the cosmos. The opposite of *dharma* is

¹ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 10, Verse 20.



adharma, that which brings about the disintegration of order in the universe. It is the loss of wisdom and the consequent collapse of those values necessary for the welfare of creation which instigates the descent of the divine.”² The “descent of the divine” is the reappearance of the Divine in various forms from age to age. Because this world is an emanation of divine Reality, it will naturally reappear, again and again, whenever its presence and intention has become lost to human consciousness. This appearance is known as the *avatar*, which means “descent of the divine”—the embodiment of the divine in the physical universe. Throughout time, various avatars (fully realized divine embodiments) have appeared with the cosmic mission to restore dharma, such as Christ Jesus, Lord Buddha, or in the Kriya Yoga tradition, Mahavatar Babaji.

Because this current age is a time of global spiritual awakening, we are primed for the appearance of the “universal avatar”—the revelation of divinity in the awakened hearts and minds of individuals everywhere. As Roy Eugene Davis explains:

In the collective field of consciousness shared by all living beings, the trend of evolution is always toward growth and completion of impelled purposes. Although there may be occasions of stress and even of conflict and disaster, the inexorable creative force of the Supreme Self, God, will have dominion. In our current Era, evolutionary currents are resulting in mass soul awakening and the emergence of the universal avatar—a more obvious expression of God’s Consciousness expressing through human beings and nature. From time to time enlightened souls are born into the world, to teach anew the eternal truths, implement constructive actions, be an example to others of what life can be like, and to provide collective consciousness a fresh infusion of transformative, vitalizing, redemptive spiritual energy.³

It is possible to view this evolutionary trend toward enlightenment and the coming forth of divinity as occurring within our own body, mind, and consciousness *because it does*. We are a microcosm of the cosmic process. The divine Reality dwells within us, as us. Whenever our

² Anantanand Rambachan, *Gitamritam*, (Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidass, 1993), p. 3

³ Davis, Roy Eugene. *The Eternal Way: The Inner Meaning of the Bhagavad Gita* (Kindle Locations 1534-1540). CSA Press. Kindle Edition.



discernment and our thought processes become clouded over, and we misunderstand the truth of what we are, our speech and actions are prone to lack virtue. Our motives tend to be ego-driven and self-serving instead of divinely inspired and contributing to the well-being of ourselves and others. This lack of alignment with dharma, the way of righteousness, impels the inner light of the divine Self to come forth and restore balance. Due to its nature, which impels the activity of divine grace, God within us will rouse us from our spiritual sleep of forgetfulness.

Looking and Listening Through the Layers

The previous lesson on Inner Life and Power, offered a brief explanation of the koshas, the coverings of the soul that make individualized expression possible. One divine Self is the Reality of all, yet everyone appears to be different. This is due, not to the Self which remains ever the same, but to the koshas, the layered, interpenetrating coverings of the inner Light of the Self. To illustrate this point, think of a room full of lamps with different lampshades. The light that illumines them is the same light, yet all appear different. The material, shape, color and density of the shades all give a different appearance to the light. But the fact to always remember, as we relate to one another, is that the light which shines within is the same. And, as we learn to cultivate the necessary discernment to live a dharmic life, to allow the divine Self to arise and express more fully through the vehicles of our body and mind, knowledge of the koshas gives us insight for cooperating with the impulse of divinity arising within us.

The first step in developing the deep listening required for dharmic living is knowledge of the true Self. We must be able to shift our attention and awareness to abide in our essential nature. We develop this fluidity of our point of reference through the discipline of daily superconscious meditation and the practice of self-inquiry through discernment. To use knowledge of the koshas to guide our self-inquiry, we intentionally move our attention and awareness through the various coverings of the Self. We identify each kosha—physical sheath, energy sheath, mental sheath, wisdom sheath, and bliss sheath. Identify the qualities of each covering and see if you can experience each one, either directly or through your imagination. Feel the density of matter of your physical body, the annamayakosha. Notice the experience of energy or vital force that



moves through the body and mind, circulating the blood and oxygen, moving thoughts through the mental field—this is the pranamaya kosha connecting body and mind. Be aware of the thoughts, the way they arise in the mental field and subside. This is manomaya kosha. Remember your experience of intuitive knowing or flashes of insight that were beyond your ordinary rational thought process. This occurred in vijnanamaya kosha, the wisdom sheath. And, those moments of supreme happiness, the felt sense that you are whole and complete just as you are? Anandamaya kosha, the bliss sheath. The point of this exercise is to experience yourself as the Witness. No longer identified with the body, mind, senses, or intellect we are free to listen deeply to the wisdom of the soul that arises within us.

Here's the next step. At any given time, we process information as we receive it through the various sheaths. The physical body sends out signals, the mind processes input from the senses, intellect makes determinations and offers insight, the soul provides its inclinations. What do we listen to? All of it. We witness what is arising in the body and mind and learn to discern what is in harmony with the divine impulse toward dharmic living. This is learning to listen deeply.

Listen for the Divine Impulse Arising Within

Deep listening can show up in both simple and profound ways. Let's say you decide to get up an hour earlier to meditate. You are following an inner urge to arrange conditions for meeting the divine Self. Early! You say. When the alarm goes off the body says, "I'm tired. I need more sleep." Your energy says, "I'm sluggish." Mind says, "How about starting this routine tomorrow when we don't have such a full day ahead?" Wisdom says, "This is your path of awakening." The urge of the soul says, "Arise!" We choose what we listen to. What will it be? Being our true Self requires deep listening, discerning what being authentic is.

Truly, nothing else in this world is as sanctifying as wisdom. In due course of time, the devotee who is successful in yoga will spontaneously realize this within the Self. —The Bhagavad Gita IV:38





Lesson Journal:

Do I see my dharma as connected to the universal divine impulse toward evolution and spiritual awakening?

Can I imagine “teaming up” or cooperating with that divine imperative? How would it be to accept that my success is actually the success of the universe?

How do I experience the restoration, or establishment, of dharma in my life? Can I identify the “descent of the divine Self”—It’s manifestation in my consciousness, mind, and body?

How is God’s will, or higher good, revealed to me? Do I cooperate with it when I know what it is?

Am I able to identify the various koshas in my own experience?

What is my experience of discerning inner guidance? What is my practice for “deep listening?”

What does being authentic mean to me?