

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Bhagvad Gita Home Study

Question

Swamiji, which book would you suggest for the study of the Bhagavad Gita?

Answer

The best book, of course, is the *Bhagavadgita Home Study Program* by our Pujya Swamiji. However, it is not concise. It is a very elaborate in-depth study of the Gita. Swamiji taught a three-year residential course here in Saylorsburg and conducted classes on various topics including the Bhagavad Gita. There are 312 lectures in 312 cassettes on the Bhagavad Gita, which was taught along with Śrī Saṅkarācārya's commentary on it. It was this material that was transcribed, edited, and published as the *Bhagavadgita Home Study Program*. The reason for bringing it out in this form was that Swamiji wanted even those who did not have the benefit of attending a full time course to gain the benefit of the study of the Bhagavad Gita in the same way. It is called a 'home study' in as much as the Gita can be studied at home.

The *Bhagavadgita Home Study Program* is a very elaborate book of almost 2000 crown-size pages. It is now published in four volumes. If one wants an in-depth study that would be an appropriate text. If you want a very short text of the Bhagavad Gita just to get an overview of it, there is another small book called *The Teaching of the Bhagavad Gita*, which is compiled from Pujya Swamiji's public talks. Many years ago, in 1978, Pujya Swamiji gave a series of 19 public evening talks, which were transcribed, edited, and published as a book. That is a very concise book of about 170 pages. One can study it and get an idea of the overall teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. Other than these, there are a number of other books available. I would only prescribe these two books because, in our opinion, they are authentic. It is important that the one who writes a book have clarity regarding the text, the teaching, and its purport.

What does the Gita teach us? What is the subject matter or the purpose of the Bhagavad Gita? The purpose of the teaching is to help us discover the fact that we are truly limitless. Thus, the purpose of the teaching is *mokṣa*. As a result of the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita one should become free.

My sense of sorrow or unhappiness arises from my thinking that I am a limited being. Therefore, discovering the fact that I am limitless makes me free. The similarity between the self and Brahman, knowing which one gains liberation, is the subject matter of the Gita. What do we need to do to gain liberation after gaining this knowledge? Nothing; the knowledge is itself the direct means of liberation. Nothing more need be done. Who is the one qualified to gain this teaching? One who has an intense desire for this knowledge gains it.

The subject matter of the Bhagavad Gita is a consistent revealing of the fact that the one who looks upon oneself as a *jīva* or a limited individual is, in fact, limitless. Some preparation of the mind is necessary to be able to see this fact when it is taught. That is called the purification of the mind. The Bhagavad Gita presents *karma-yoga* as a means to self-purification in preparing for this knowledge. *Jñāna-yoga* is presented as a means to liberation.

The Bhagavad Gita is to be studied with clarity regarding its purpose and teaching. There is great clarity and consistency in Pujya Swamiji's treatment of the Bhagavad Gita in unfolding its teachings, or, for that matter, his treatment of any other Vedantic text. There will be no confusion in the mind of the student only if there is clarity and consistency in the teaching¹.

¹ 2005 Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Family Camp *satsanga*. Transcribed and edited by Chaya Rajaram and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.