

## HOW TO BE A YOGI IN THE WORLD

by Jack Hawley

**“You are a yogi not only at the end of the path but while you are on the path.”**

— Krishna in *The Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners*

The surest and safest way to transform your mind is to become a yogi. No joke. Yogis are the masterminds of peace of mind. They've spent many thousands of years Learning how to deal with the same vexing issues of life that drag us down today.

**I** MUST CONFESS TO HAVING A SHAMELESS LOVE affair with the Bhagavad Gita, one of the world's oldest spiritual texts. This is a surprise because I have never been much for scriptures or religiousness. Dogma, and especially obedience to it, has never been my strong suit. If my sainted mother were alive today she would hoot at the idea of me being obedient. And yet, despite myself, I fell head to toe in love with the Gita several decades ago. My wife gladly accompanied me.

We were on our way up to a remote mountain top in southern India to be with our Teacher. The day had been beastly hot on the plateau but was cooler now at the higher elevation. In the small guest house where we had put up for the night I noticed a well-worn book on the bed stand. It was the Bhagavad Gita. I riffled through the pages and paused where Krishna—the incarnation of God in the Gita—begins his gripping description of the innermost nature of God. I started reading aloud; Louise curled up beside me to listen. This was God talking:

*“I am Pure Consciousness, the underlying essence of all elements and beings.  
I am the innate nature of everything.  
In pure water I am the sweet taste.  
In the sun and moon I am the radiance...”*

*I am the slight, delicate scent,  
the sweet fragrance of the earth.  
I am the brilliance in both fire and sun,  
and I am the light of Divinity in all beings.”*

Krishna's wondrous account carries on for several more chapters. I continued reading for perhaps ten minutes and then stopped, absorbed. We sat in blessed silence for several minutes.

I flipped to the front of the book.  
*“It's the year 3141 BCE. Two lone figures have parked their chariot in an open field between the armies of good and evil, all-out war about to explode around them. One, the renowned prince Arjuna, the greatest champion of goodness of those times, suddenly buckles under the burdens and pressures of life. His eyes fill with tears, his hands tremble. “I just can't fight again,” he mutters to his best friend, who happens to be God.”*

That's how the Gita story is set in motion. It doesn't end until the secrets of life, death, love and duty are meticulously transferred from the Divine's heart to ours.

The shattered warrior slumped in the chariot personifies how we feel in our times of greatest confusion and struggle. He is who we are when we cannot deal with one more adversity or fight one more battle, when we question our purpose in being here and feel lost in the frantic pace of our daily lives. The friend, Krishna, is the soul-healing voice of the Divine that rests deep within each of us—the revealer of the ultimate Truth, the one who shows us where satisfaction and contentment reside.

Although sometimes referred to as a scripture the Gita is not just a religious text. It's a five or six thousand year old, half-inch thick epic poem that's buried in the middle of a six inch thick masterpiece poem about the heights and depths of the human soul. It's a love song sung to us by Krishna, a timely personification of Divinity who came to Earth at that time to help humanity earn back the ideals it had lost.

The real magic of the *yogi* is his or her permanent cheerfulness. Even when faced with grave difficulties, these illumined ones manage to maintain their equanimity.

They have learned through persistent good effort to be of the same mind in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honor and disgrace.

Now, a quarter century after first discovering the Gita, I find myself more in love with it than ever, even after having researched and written four books about its wondrous messages. The first, about reawakening spirit in the workplace, became a bestseller. At the time I had no idea that the principles presented in the book were so close to the Gita's teachings, but a few years later, in India, the renowned holy man Sai Baba, talking to another businessman, referred to my book as a "modern business Gita."

Not long after that I heard, "Do the Gita." It was Baba directing me to write another book. I tried to ignore it but the message persisted. I argued with him (internally). "Swami! I can't do that. This isn't my culture. I've barely met Krishna and don't even know Sanskrit. I'm too western, too irreverent. I'm just an organization consultant."

My case was ignored. "*Do the Gita*" kept echoing in me, growing stronger with each repetition.

My internal dialogue shifted. "If I take on this *Gita* project, it has to be a book that speaks directly to my life, to my own struggles and daily concerns." I knew I had to do a meticulous job on it, and knew that to write well about these magnificent and sometimes intricate teachings, I would have to know them in my heart.

When I finally made the firm commitment to write the book, Providence, the Cosmic Helper, moved in with me. Written commentary after commentary on the Gita magically found their way to me. I found myself invited to the right conferences and involved in the right conversations. I ended up reading thirty-some versions of the Gita, many of over 1,000 pages, several consisting of two or three volumes—one was seventeen volumes. All together, it took me three years. I loved every minute and page of it. Louise, with me throughout, tells people of an "illumination" that emanated from my

corner of our small ashram room as I wrote. If there were such a light, it was probably the glow of my love for the Gita.

The resulting book, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Walkthrough for Westerners* (2001) reflects this love, and so does the warmhearted reception the book received. Reviews were positive. It was given five stars and named one of the top ten books on the Gita. It has become a favorite of Indians as well as westerners.

Since its publication I have written two more books. One, *Roadmaps to Self-Realization*, is to my knowledge the first time in its thousands of years that the Gita has been presented as a self-inquiry guide to help people assess where they are on the path. My latest is *Essential Wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita*. People will find this one a good entry to the teachings.

## IMAGINE LIFE WITHOUT SADNESS

One of the lesser known themes in the Gita is that we can overcome our anguish. It gets scant attention, not because it's unimportant, but because it's so radical. Indeed, overcoming the widespread mood of annoyance that sours our world is crucial, but people can't even begin to imagine living without pain, irritation, worry and anger. When the audacious possibility of it arises, they dismiss it. "Huh? A life with no suffering? Impossible!"

And yet, moving toward such a state is in large part what the Gita is concerned with, and is precisely what this article is all about.

If you take the long view of humanity's development throughout its thousands of centuries here on Earth, you see that the direction of movement is toward the light rather than darkness. But we live today in dark times buffeted by negativity that hide the long view.

**The big question today is *how*. How do we free ourselves from murkiness and find peace of mind?**

The true, loving yogi of the Gita is a godly person of wisdom who strives to rise above worldly conditions and influences, whether negative or positive.

When this level of consciousness is achieved the yogi is liberated.

The *Gita* is very clear about this: If you want to be truly free of anything, including darkness and woe, you have to spiritualize your life. This does not mean to be more religious, but more spiritual. It's that simple, and yet that baffling.

Let's return to the warrior prince Arjuna's despondency and be very clear about it. It was not an enemy weapon that inflicted his awful wound; the fighting hadn't even begun yet. It was something far more piercing and powerful. It was his *state of mind!* The same applies to the mental condition of freedom from despondency. It too is a *state of mind!*

Look closer. Freedom from despondency is the cosmic bliss that results from high satisfaction with the way things are. In this *freedom* are moments of

total acceptance and times of not judging—intervals when we know for sure that we are in the right place doing precisely what we're supposed to be doing. At these times we are untouched by trouble—or even the absence of trouble. We're neither *down* nor *up*, we're unfazed.

**It's a level of consciousness that makes us bigger than either our negativity or our happiness. Yes, even happiness, the most sought after prize in life, pales in comparison with the contentment we feel at these times.**

The Gita refers to this high state as *moksha* ("liberation"). To reach this is the lofty aim of spirituality. We feel this peacefulness when the inner self joins with the outer universe and recognizes that it is all one.

## CHANGE YOUR MIND

I am reminded of the pithy quote from *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place. It can make heaven of hell and hell of heaven." All humans want to shed their suffering and find true peace of

mind, but very few are ready to—or have the power to—win the internal battle for the mind.

There are plenty of fake ways to escape pain and suffering: work, eating, drinking, taking drugs, searching for new relationships or a new dogma, seeking community, and so forth. The problem is that these escape tunnels don't reach beyond the walls of our self-imposed prisons, we just burrow into new cellblocks. No matter which direction we dig, there seems to be no way out!

**Again the question is *how*? How can we actually revolutionize our own mind and free up that which is beyond even happiness? How on earth can we even imagine, no less actually achieve, such an extreme shift in consciousness?**

And again the answer comes, more vigorous this time: *Spiritualize your life!* Learn to turn inward, to go beyond even the mind. Turn toward Spirit, toward the True Self Within, toward Soul.

### BE AN IN-THE-WORLD YOGI

The surest and safest way to transform your mind is to become a *yogi*. No joke. *Yogis* are the masterminds of peace of mind. They've spent many thousands of years learning how to deal with the same vexing issues of life that drag us down today.

You don't have to do this in public. Being a *yogi* is not for display. Do it for your own peace of mind in the privacy of your inner room. And being a *yogi* does not mean that you become a recluse. *Yogic* abilities are perfect for active people immersed in the daily hustle-bustle.

Forget the cartoon image of a skinny fellow in loin cloth and turban sitting atop a magically stiff rope. The real magic of the *yogi* is his or her permanent cheerfulness. Even when faced with grave difficulties, these illumined ones manage to maintain their equanimity. They have learned through persistent good effort to be of the same mind in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honor and disgrace.

The term *Yogi* comes from *yoga*, the Sanskrit word for *union*, which over the centuries, has grown to mean cosmic unity with the Divine. *Yoga*, as I use the word here, refers not only to *hatha yoga*, the art of achieving quietness through physical postures (which I also admire), but to all the spiritual paths that lead to union with the Divine.

The true, loving *yogi* of the Gita is a godly person of wisdom who strives to rise above worldly conditions and influences, whether negative or positive. When this level of consciousness is achieved the *yogi* is liberated.

Think of Mahatma Gandhi or the Dalai Lama as good *yogi* models, but there are countless millions of others, most of them just unknown high souls. What they all have in common is the capacity to be fully active and effective in the world, and yet be largely unaffected by it. Their rope trick is to accept things as they are, even while they carry out their worldly responsibilities to the utmost extent of their

human capacity for excellence.

*Yogis* have learned four fundamentals. The first is about desire. They know with certainty that pleasure and pain always, *always* go together. When you invite any kind of enjoyment or gratification to the

party of life, pain invariably shows up too, uninvited. *Yogis*, therefore, reduce their desires to the point of not even wanting freedom from suffering.

Secondly, *yogis* cultivate certain human virtues such as being humble, harmless and forgiving. This is not done merely to be nice; it's a conscious, deliberate effort to develop and nurture the human qualities that contribute to an elevation of consciousness. More about this later.

Thirdly, *yogis* learn to live their lives and do their work in a particular attitude, an overall mood of adoration. This attitude, consisting of divine love, worship, service, and sacrifice, helps rid the mind of its impurities. Purity of mind is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress.

And fourthly, *yogis* strive to shift from living an ego-driven to a God-directed life. This is the basic transformation; it's a veritable revolution of the mind. The point is to achieve the realization that the self is not a separate, lonely entity, but is connected with all else, free of suffering. This is *yoga* in the absolute sense. Closing this gap between the self and the Divine is the ultimate aim of all spiritual practices. When you realize this you find yourself not only united with God, but with your True Self Within and with all humanity as well.

*"Those who see Me, the Divine, in everything and everything in Me, finally know the staggering truth that the self in the*



*individual is the Self in all.”*

— Krishna in *The Bhagavad Gita:  
A Walkthrough for Westerners*

### **APPLY THIS NOW**

One of the things I love most about the Gita is its emphasis on application, its insistence that we put the teachings into practice. This makes Eastern philosophy unique. In the West, once the philosophical idea is made clear we assume the job is done. Not so with Eastern thought. Until the philosophy includes a clear means for applying it, it is considered of no value whatsoever.

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At several points in the Gita we are given descriptions of the qualities of the *yogi*. The light eventually dawns that one does not gain higher consciousness through intellectual knowing, but through possessing high intuitive knowing. In Chapter Thirteen we are given a beautiful list of the “distinctive virtues” that give rise to this intuitive capacity. And now, in the spirit of *application*, I here take that list a small step further and formulate those virtues into a self-inquiry instrument. My experience using these instruments in many workshops is that some people perceive them as a test rather than a private self appraisal tool. Please see them not as a measurement but as a simple self assessment that gives you a glimpse of where you are now on the path. Revisited later, this assessment will help you see your spiritual progress over time.

My experience is also that people feel helped in a tangible way by these simple appearing little tools. In this rough and rutted journey through life, it's exhilarating to occasionally find a map—especially a self-drawn one—to guide your spiritual journey.

And finally, remember that the loving *yogi* is seriously on the path, but not necessarily at the end of it. You are a *yogi* during the process of awakening the wondrous Divinity that resides within you—and in all creation. It's the only road that counts.

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# HOW YOGI-LIKE AM I?

A spiritual progress instrument drawn from *ESSENTIAL WISDOM of the BHAGAVAD GITA*

The ancient *Bhagavad Gita* is not, as one might expect, about withdrawing from life to meditate in a cave. It's a friendly guide for living a truly spiritual life in today's tough and troubling times—and staying fully active and effective in the world!

The technical term for this is *Karma Yoga*, which hints at a major theme in the Gita: to become a sort of in-the-world “yogi.” It's not as complicated or far-fetched as you think.

Here, we have taken some of those teachings a step further, fashioning them into a modern self-inquiry instrument.

Don't worry, it's not a test; there are no right or wrong answers—it's just a friendly, private tool to help you see where you are at this point on the path.

So take a deep breath, dive into the teachings below, and find yourself comfortably participating in your spiritual evolvment.

Proceed unhurriedly in a mood of high receptivity. Notice your awareness shift as you progress. Do not seek to *learn* the material, but to *become* it—to actually experience *being* the high consciousness that infuses these wondrous, ancient principles.

## Self-inquiry--Self Assessment

- Candidly rate yourself 1-9 at each of the below items (see scale at page bottom) based on how well you know and apply them in your life.
- Circle the two most important to you now.
- Mark any “impossibles” (unattainable at this point).
- Date this sheet and revisit it later to see progress.

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The Gita's Teachings:

Again, ask yourself: “To what extent (1-9) do I understand and practice these things in my life now?”

\_\_\_ Be humble, be harmless. Be gentle and forgiving of any hurt you receive.

\_\_\_ Be personally harmonized and congruent—make sure your thoughts, words and actions match.

\_\_\_ Purify your mind and heart because purity is indispensable to your spiritual growth.

\_\_\_ To rid yourself of the pain and suffering that drags you down, spiritualize your life.

\_\_\_ The fundamental goal of all spirituality is to know the *Atma*, the soul, the True Self Within. Do not see your self merely as this body-mind complex dependent on external, worldly things.

\_\_\_ Know the breathtaking, staggering truth that the Self in the individual is the Self in all!

\_\_\_ The illusion of separateness is what causes all evils perpetrated by humans on humanity. (How can one who knows *Atma*, injure the same *Atma* in others?)

\_\_\_ Get past the three gates to hell: desire, anger and greed.

\_\_\_ Harbor no ill will toward any being and return love for hate

\_\_\_ Do your worldly duties impeccably and yet be unconcerned and untroubled by life.

\_\_\_ Want *nothing* outside of Soul, the True Self Within.

\_\_\_ Balance your life by giving more than you receive; to receive without giving is stealing.

\_\_\_ Stop assuming that you can avoid pain and only experience pleasure. Pleasure and pain go together; asking for pleasure invites pain. Always.

\_\_\_ The sweet fountain of eternal happiness flows only from the *Atma*, the True Self Within. The cessation of your present pain and sorrow depends on how well you know this.

\_\_\_ Live your life and do your work in a particular attitude, a general mood of adoration. The act of loving is itself the spiritual experience of knowing and *being* divinity.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9  
never                      seldom                      sometimes                      often                      always