

The Bhagavad Gita and A Course In Miracles by Arvind Kumar

The Bhagavad Gita (these Sanskrit words can be translated as ‘The Song Divine’ in English) is perhaps the most widely known and read of the Hindu scriptures. Written down perhaps three thousand years ago or even earlier in Sanskrit, the Bhagavad Gita (referred to as simply ‘the Gita’ by many and also in this article elsewhere) has been translated into most languages spoken in the world today.

There are at least a thousand commentaries available on it, to help us understand its message. Many well-known recent, as well as ancient, personalities have commented upon their experience of getting to know the Gita as one of the most mind-transforming scriptures. These include Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Sri Aurobindo, Carl Jung, Prime Minister Nehru, Herman Hesse, Vivekananda, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Paramahansa Yogananda, Rudolph Steiner, Adi Shankara, Aldous Huxley, Ramana Maharishi and Nisargadatta Maharaj. The Gita is considered one of the greatest spiritual books ever written. It was a most wonderful experience for me to read several commentaries on it, and I liked the Gita so much that at the age of 50, I was able to commit to memory some 150 verses (out of a total of 700) in the original Sanskrit, even though my knowledge of Sanskrit is most rudimentary.

I was born in 1951 in India to a Hindu family and over the years have had the good fortune of being exposed to various Indian scriptures, known as Upanishads which comprise what is commonly called Vedanta (a Sanskrit term meaning “the end of perceptual knowledge”). I came to North America in 1975, and after getting married and settling down here, I began my spiritual quest in earnest. As part of that quest, I studied the Vedas and the various Upanishads over a period of several years and found that there was general though not universal agreement that the Bhagavad Gita represents the essence of all Hindu scripture.

I was introduced to A Course in Miracles (ACIM) in April 2002 and was immediately struck by its similarity to Advaita Vedanta, which has also been commented upon by Bill Thetford in an interview he gave in October 1984 to the New Realities magazine (see <http://www.miraclestudies.net/BillInterv.html>).

I am by no means an expert on either the Course or the Gita, but I have been an earnest student of both, with the Course being my primary focus and spiritual path currently. The purpose of this discussion includes the following:

1. One of the central themes in both of these scriptures is that truth is one, paths are many, and as the Course says: “A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed. Here alone consistency becomes possible because

here alone uncertainty ends.” (From ACIM C-in.2)

2. To increase our commitment to awakening from the dream life we seem to be leading in this physical world (which is the common message of both of these scriptures), to increase our devotion to ACIM as our path as we verify its commonality with a widely regarded, valid ancient scripture to liberation, and by the same token, to increase our devotion to the Gita, if the Gita is our path, as its message is verified by a relatively modern scripture. It is certainly not necessary for Course students or for Gita students to run to other scriptures, as that could delay their awakening. The emphasis in both scriptures is on practice, and ACIM as well as the Gita each give us all that we need to practice in order to awaken from our dream. In my case, the Gita was the first scripture I read but when I read the Course, I got additional insights into what the Gita was pointing to! Many others have reported a similar experience, and perhaps it will pay interested readers to study both scriptures, if they are so guided.

How ACIM Builds on the Gita

There is perhaps no modern teaching that emphasizes innocence and unity in more straightforward terms than the Course. There seems to be no other teaching beside the Course that ranks itself more clearly as just one of many, as a temporary aid only, and as helpful to some but not to all. The Course does not present itself as superior to other authentic teachings on the subject of awakening. Many of these ideas are present underlying the Gita as well, and it is possible, indeed inevitable for students of the Course, to gain significantly by a dedicated study of the Gita, for truth needs to be heard in many different ways, again and again, in the pursuit of awakening.

What can be considered as common between the two scriptures includes the following:

The origin of the scripture – ‘apaurushia’ or non-human, heard by human beings in their state of right-mindedness, by connecting with Jesus in the case of the Course, and Krishna in the case of the Bhagavad Gita

What triggered these scriptures – was a question on the part of those engaged in the battleground of this world – the mighty warrior Arjuna who was confused as to whether he should fight or not, on seeing people he respected arrayed against him on the opposite side in a battle in the case of the Gita, and two University professors who asked to see another way to deal with the constant struggle that seemed to be a part and parcel of their chosen profession at the prestigious Columbia Presbyterian school of medical psychology in the case of the Course.

A unique Guru-disciple relationship, in which the scripture is transmitted in a one-on-one setting, but its message is universal, for the entire humanity.

Both scriptures are demonstrated in the life of the respective teachers, Jesus in

the case of the Course, and Krishna in the case of the Gita. This illustrates the principle that true scripture is not what is written on paper but rather is exemplified through the seeming life of the teacher. Like-wise, the means for human beings to be true followers of scripture is also not so much its intellectual understanding but rather, it is living the teaching that is required in both scriptures

Both scriptures can be viewed as masterpieces of art, with poetic, symphonic and holographic characteristics. I do not see any conflict between the Gita and the Course as far as their basic message is concerned. There are several areas where they complement each other nicely. There are many insights I gained upon reading the Course, which built upon the insights I had received from several readings of the Course. The 'extra' benefits and insights I gathered upon reading the Course include the following:

First hand description in English (as opposed to translations from the original Sanskrit) of a very comforting but non-compromising non-dual thought system, with additional details on the state of Heaven, knowledge, and creation to contrast it with the world of perception.

A detailed description of the seeming split from the perfection of Godhead into the world out here, with the concomitant arising of the problems of sin, guilt, fear, and chaos that we as human beings face (that is, we created the world as an attack on God - an attack so carefully crafted that we actually forgot that we did it, and thus, we could not go back to undo it very easily; we are in a mad dream that we could actually hide from God)

A detailed explanation that the world that I see with the body's eyes is an effect of my mind which seems to have split as a part of it bought into the idea that separation from God is possible, and as such I am completely responsible for everything I see, and squarely in-charge of salvation of the world.

A very detailed exposition on equanimity through the description of 'our special relationships' which are the crown jewels in the ego's strategy to keep us separate as individuals in this world

The use of the body and the world as a classroom for learning the lessons of forgiveness, which paves the way back to the world of spirit.

Essence of the Gita

How to live life in this world, a life so transient and apparently full of sorrows? What is the abiding Truth sought by man throughout the ages? In answer to these questions Krishna offered the eternal Message of wisdom, know thyself, which is the quintessence of the Course and every authentic spiritual tradition. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, at the request of devotees, selected forty-two out of the seven

hundred verses of the Bhagavad Gita, and arranged them in a particular order, which can be found in a booklet the booklet Song Celestial (available at www.ramana-maharshi.org). These forty-two verses contain the essence of the Bhagavad Gita, and they show to the aspirant the direct means to realize the Self Absolute, which is the one, ultimate object of man's quest throughout the ages. Here are a few of these verses.

The Blessed Lord said:

10.20 I am the Self, O Arjuna, dwelling in the Heart of every being; I am the beginning and the middle, and likewise the end of all beings.

4.19 Whose every enterprise is without desire or motive, whose actions are burnt up in the fire of knowledge, him the wise call a Sage.

2.71 Having cast away all desires, that man who goes without longing, devoid of 'I' and 'mine' – he doth attain peace.

18.62 Unto Him alone surrender, O Arjuna, with all thy being; by His Grace shalt thou obtain Peace Supreme, the Abode Eternal.

To seek the Self and abide as one with it in the Heart is at once the path of knowledge and devotion. In that state there is no 'otherness'; only thus, that is, without the least trace of 'otherness', can the Lord be seen, known and in essence entered. Such realization is possible only if the seeker has unswerving faith and earnestness of purpose. Without these twin virtues of faith and earnestness, no sustained effort is possible (Verse 11:54).

The Gita Parallels A Course in Miracles

The message of the Course is summarized in the introduction: "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God." Compare this to the message from the Gita Ch 2 verse 16: "Of the non-existent there is no being, and of what exists there is no non-being; the definite ascertainment of both is seen by the seers of the essence of Truth." The main practice in the Course is forgiveness, and its message is that one need do nothing except those activities, which one's right mind (the Holy Spirit) directs. The message of the Gita is essentially the same: Perform your duties (action in the world) in a spirit of selfless service, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga (union with God). This is action stemming from the right mind; this is not different from forgiveness in the Course.