

Study Guide 2

DVD series vol. 2

The Yogas of Action, Knowledge and Devotion - Bhagavad Gita
The Bhakti Sutras: Joyous Exultation of the Divine

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The Wisdom of Yoga

The Bhagavad Gītā:
Yoga of Action, Knowledge & Devotion
And
The Bhakti Sutras:
Joyous Exultation of the Divine

1. Welcome to the Study of Yoga

Dear friend,

Welcome to volume 2 of The Wisdom of Yoga series.

It is our belief that yoga has a lot to offer to our lives and we are happy to present here the essence of the most important yoga traditions that India has produced throughout its rich history.

Enjoy!

Carlos Pomedá and the Yogakula team

2. How to use this study guide

The purpose of this study guide is to guide you through the study of yoga. Here you will find suggestions that may help you to draw the most out of your study. The DVDs are designed to break down each topic into smaller segments that can be more easily followed in one sitting, although their duration varies.

We advise that you read the study guide first and then apply the steps for each section in sequence. Or, if you want to zero in on only one or two topics, just go directly to those sections. Then watch the appropriate segments and complete any other assignments or recommended exercises.

3. About this DVD series

This series is designed to provide a complete course of study that covers the major systems of yoga in their chronological development.

The first volume includes an overview of the history of yoga, followed by an exploration of the upaniṣadic teachings and practices. The second volume delves into the Bhagavad Gītā and its innovations, followed by the tradition of Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of devotion. The third examines the yoga of Patañjali and his Yoga Sūtras, whereas number four looks at the system of Advaita Vedānta. Finally, volume five explores Tantra and the last one in the series, volume six, takes a look at Kuṇḍalinī Yoga and Haṭha Yoga, completing the historical perspective the series provides.

At the same time, each volume provides practices representative of the particular system of yoga examined in that volume. This design provides the opportunity of focusing on one specific school or exploring the entire spectrum. In either case, we recommend that you take your time with each volume, considering not only the teachings of each, but particularly their application and practice over at least a period of a month for each system.

4. Invocation

Tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca

Mayy arpitamanobuddhir mām evaiśyasy asaṃśayam

"Therefore, at all times remember me and fight. With your mind and your intellect fixed on Me, you will come to Me. There is no doubt." (Bhagavad Gītā, viii.7)

5. The Bhagavad Gītā: The Yogas of Action, Knowledge and Devotion

Your objectives for this segment are:

- Gain an understanding of the historical, social and cultural context in which the Bhagavad Gītā appears
- Understand the significance of the Bhagavad Gītā and the radical departures from previous tradition that it signifies
- Learn the main features of each system of yoga the Bhagavad Gītā offers and what verses encapsulate those

Ask yourself:

- When a text has had such an influence generation after generation, what is it about the text that gives it such power? What does a text need to have, or to do, in order to pass the test of time?
- If the only form of yoga available to you involved severe asceticism and renunciation from the world, what would you do?

You might want to browse through your favorite version of the Bhagavad Gītā before watching the segment, to acquaint yourself with the structure and main themes of the text. If you don't have a favorite version, you will find a reference below, under "Study Suggestions". When you are ready, please watch the segment. Take your time to pause,

write down thoughts, reflexions, questions and any items you may want to record. You may also want to refer to the notes below, which contain some of the principal terms of the presentation:

a) Introduction

Synthesis of ritualism & yoga meditation, vedānta and sāmkhya, Kṛṣṇa devotion

Various approaches: Action (karma), knowledge (jñāna) and devotion (bhakti)

→ First useful definitions of yoga:

samatvaṃ yoga ucyate (ii.48). "Evenness is called yoga"

yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam (ii.50) "Yoga is skill regarding one's actions"

duḥkhasaṃyogaviyogaṃ yogasaṃjñitam (vi.23) "Breaking the contact with pain is called yoga"

Bhagavad Gītā, part of Mahābhārata epic

Family feud: Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas (numerous characters)

Dialog between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna

b) Teachings

Svadharmā: one's own duty, one's own role

Sthita prajñā: steady perception

Karma: action; phala: fruits

Tyāga: detachment, renunciation

viśvarūpa: the cosmic form of Kṛṣṇa

After watching the segment, you may want to take up the following questions for reflection:

- How would I summarize the major teachings of Bhagavad Gītā?
- How would I describe, in one sentence each, the three forms of yoga laid out in the Bhagavad Gītā?
- What is the method of meditation the Bhagavad Gītā teaches? (Hint: browse through chapter VI)
- What teachings and attitudes do I find of application to daily life?

6. The Bhakti Sūtras: Joyous Exultation of the Divine

Your objectives for this segment are:

- Find out how the tradition of Bhakti (devotion) developed historically
- Get a sense of the way in which the lives of the great poet saints of India reflect the underlying principles of the devotional approach
- Become acquainted with one of the main sources of the devotional tradition (Nārada's Bhakti Sūtras) and identify some of its major teachings

Take a moment to familiarize yourself with the following chronological table, which shows some of the major developments of the bhakti tradition:

SOME IMPORTANT DATES

B.C.E.

ca. 200-100 Composition of Bhagavad Gītā

C.E.

ca. 400 Spread of Vaiṣṇavism, beginning of Tantricism

ca. 500 Spread of Śaktism into larger areas

ca. 500 onwards Spread of Vaiṣṇava Āḷvār saints

since ca. 700 Prevalence of bhakti (devotional) traditions

ca. 700-1000 Flourishing of Śaiva Nāyamnār saints

ca. 800-900 Composition of Bhāgavata Purāṇa

ca. 1275-1296 Jñāneśvara and other Mahārāṣṭra mystics

ca. 1420 Life of Mīrabai

1440-1518 Life of Kabir

ca. 1485-1533 Life of Caitanya

Sources: Embree, Ainslie, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Klostermaier, Klaus, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); Kulke, Hermann, and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (London: Routledge, 1990)

As preparation to watch the next segment, please read the selections from the Bhakti Sūtras below. As you read, pay attention to the way Nārada describes the nature of devotion, the various kinds of devotion and the practices of devotion.

Once you have familiarized yourself with the main features of Bhakti Yoga, please watch the segment titled "Bhakti Sūtras". Take your time to pause, write down thoughts, reflexions, questions and any items you may want to record. You may also want to refer to the notes below, which contain some of the principal terms of the presentation:

a) Background:

Tamil Nadu (6th -9th c and beyond) - Nāyaṇārs and Āḷvārs;
 Karnataka (10-12th c and beyond) - Basavanna, Akkhamahadevī;
 Maharashtra (13-17th c) - Jñāneśvar;
 North India (14-17th c) - Mīrabai, Kabir, Ravidas;
 Bengal (12-16th) - Caitanya Mahāprabhū

b) Terms of Bhakti Yoga

DEFINITION: From *bhāñj*, to separate or *bhaj*, to worship

Pūjā: ritual of worship

Tirtha yatra: pilgrimage to a holy place

c) Principal Texts:

Śāṅḍilya Bhakti Sūtras 8th century. More philosophical in nature.

Nārada Bhakti Sūtras (possibly 12th century). 84 sūtras.

Śrīmad Bhagavata Mahāpurāṇa (date uncertain)

d) Selections from the Bhakti Sūtras¹

1. Now we will explain devotion.
2. It has the nature of supreme love for God.
3. And it has the nature of the nectar of immortality.
4. Once that [devotion] is attained, a person becomes realized (siddha); becomes immortal; becomes contented.
19. But according to Nārada, [devotion] consists in dedication of all actions to God and anxiety when He is forgotten.
21. Such as [the devotion] of the gopis of Vraja.
35. That [state of devotion arises] from the abandonment of the sensory objects and the abandonment of attachment.
36. From uninterrupted dedication.
37. From singing and listening to the qualities of the Lord even while in the world.
38. But mainly [it arises] through the grace of the great ones or through a small amount of God's grace.

¹ Translated by Carlos Pomedá

39. But the company of the great ones is difficult to obtain, difficult to comprehend and [yet] infallible.
51. The intrinsic nature of love is indescribable.
52. Like a mute person eating.
53. It manifests in any fit vessel.
54. [The intrinsic nature of love] is an inner experience without qualities, without desire, increasing at every moment, uninterrupted, most subtle.
55. Once that [love] is attained, [the person] sees only that [love], hears only that [love], thinks only of that [love].
65. One who has dedicated all his actions to Him should focus his lust, anger, pride, etc. on Him.
82. Even though [devotion] is one, it takes eleven forms: dedication to praising [His] qualities, dedication to [His] beauty, dedication to [His] worship, dedication to [His] remembrance, dedication to [His] service, dedication to [His] friendship, dedication to [His] filial love, dedication to [His] wifely love, dedication to offering oneself [to Him], dedication to being full of Him, dedication to being completely separate [from Him].
83. So say the teachers of bhakti who are not afraid of what people say [and] are of one mind: Kumāra, Vyāsa, Śuka, Śāṅḍilya, Garga, Viṣṇu, Kauṇḍinya, Śeṣa, Uddhava, Aruṇi, Bali, Hanumān, Vibhīṣana and others.
84. He who trusts [and] has faith in this teaching of Śiva declared by Nārada becomes full of devotion, he attains the most beloved [Lord], he attains the most beloved [Lord].

Om Tat Sat.

After watching the segment, you may want to take up the following questions for reflection:

- From the various accounts of the poet saints, what biographical traits stand out for me?
- How would I summarize the most important messages of the poet saints?
- From the practices of Bhakti Yoga mentioned in this segment, which ones hold the greatest appeal for me?
- What elements of Bhakti Yoga can I implement in my yoga practice? In my life?

7. Chanting

Choose a nice, calm place where you can follow the chant and join in if you wish. Sit comfortably.

First listen to the description of the chant and the words, then join in. The chant is done in a call and response fashion, where the lead group chants first and everyone else responds.

Focus your mind in the words of the chant and on the melody, immersing yourself in the awareness that the mantras express. After the chant, if you wish, you may want to pause or stop your DVD player so that you can sit in silence for a while.

After the practice, take a few moments to reflect on your experience of chanting and take a few notes reflecting that experience.

8. Recap

Watch the brief recap segment and contemplate the following:

- What do I take from this session?

For further study and practice, you may want to continue with the study suggestions given below.

9. Q&A

Take look at the Q&A submenu and explore any or all themes you may be interested in, for additional information.

10. Study Suggestions

For the Bhagavad Gītā: Read Eashwaran, Eknath (tr.). *The Bhagavad Gita*. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1985. (Entire book)

For the Bhakti Sūtras: Closely read enclosed selections from the Bhakti Sūtra-s

Items for reflection:

- Engage in a slow, deliberate and contemplative reading of the Gīta, preferably doing one passage at night, before going to sleep. In your notebook, write down the passages that inspire you the most. Memorize at least one.
- Select three of the Bhakti Sūtras that you find particularly meaningful. Memorize at least one.

Practices:

- Make it a point to remember during the day the passages you have selected and memorized, one at a time. Keep a journal.
- Continue with a daily practice of meditation, based on your chosen method. Pay attention to how the teachings you have selected inform and inspire your practice.

Keep a journal with the results, challenges, questions, insights, etc. that arise from your practice.