

# G I T A V A L U E S

*Thousands of years ago two friends, Krishna, the Supreme Lord, and Prince Arjuna, discussed life's most relevant questions. The setting was a battlefield, the issues were urgent, and the resulting text, the Bhagavad-gita, The Song of God, has become an important contribution to the philosophical and spiritual literature of the world. Below are six values from that text that help form the basis of Krishna's advice to Arjuna. We can use them to better our vision, our deeds, and our character. These Gita values are governed by bhakti, a word that literally means 'sharing'. Bhakti describes a relationship of devotional service to the Supreme—a relationship of love. The Gita values can help us discern our relationship with the Supreme, and thus with all living beings, and the environment in which we live.*

## Sama-darshana—equal vision

In the Gita, equal vision means seeing the equality of all living beings and respecting all life regardless of race, gender, caste, creed, or species. The energy we call life is not temporary or material but is eternal and spiritual. Krishna says that the wise see a saint, a labourer, a dog, and an elephant with equal vision, and—while acknowledging their material differences—see spiritual equality. This vision awards personhood to all, links everyone with God, and consequently with each other. Therefore civilization would ultimately be defined by its regard for all life, not just human life.

## Iccha—choice

The Gita begins with Arjuna choosing to seek guidance from Krishna. It concludes with Krishna recognising that that after Krishna offers his opinion Arjuna will do as Arjuna desires. Krishna has spoken to Arjuna openly, truthfully, and with affection. He has not been demanding or dogmatic. By leaving the choice to Arjuna, Krishna has acknowledged this freedom.

Thus, Arjuna can freely choose his relationships, his service, and his responsibilities. The Gita establishes that choice is the basis of love.

## Ahimsa—without harm

Ahimsa means to act in a way that causes the least harm. In the Mahabharata, Krishna says that all dharma, all good acts, will depend on this principle. The context of the Gita, a battlefield, helps us appreciate that ahimsa does not equal pacifism. Nevertheless, a life of ahimsa does include avoiding violence, employing cruel words, distressing or confusing others, withholding knowledge or insight, or being neglectful of ourselves. In the Gita Krishna asks us to consider loka sangraha, the welfare of the world, and sarva-bhuta-hita, the welfare of all beings.

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## Acharya—teaching by example

The word acharya, from the Sanskrit char (to act), means one who leads and teaches by example. The acharya, by behaviour, shows what should be done, what can be done, and how it could be done. The acharya sets standards by practical action. Teaching by example is the essence of education.

Leading by example is the essence of government. Exemplifying one's principles is the basis of respect, dignity, and trust.

## Amanitva—humility

Humility in the Gita is a virtue that is seen in behavior but that rests on understanding. Humility means not being anxious to be honored. Humility helped Arjuna understand himself and what to do in the greater scheme of things. Humility is not weakness. It nurtured Arjuna's self-esteem, self confidence, and courage. It allowed him to know, love, and serve God. It perfumes our communication, is the jewel of the broad-minded, and is the key to a spiritual life. It is the most attractive quality we can possess.

## Priti—affection

In the Gita, Arjuna listens to Krishna's advice and makes his choice because of his love for Krishna. Equally Krishna has shared his knowledge with Arjuna because of this mutual affection. The Gita draws attention to the importance of nurturing affection in all that we say or do - of being kind. Our relationships are enriched by our ability to offer and receive affection. Teaching is excellent when graced with a concern born of affection. Our affection for God and others should be apparent by the kindness of our dealings—as the quality of a rose is apparent by its scent