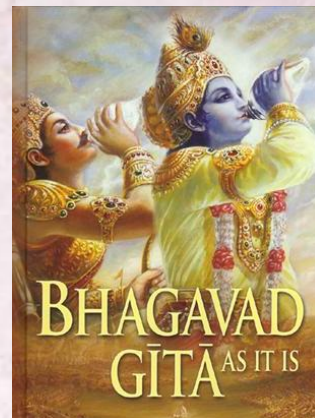




8 - DISCUSSIONS ON HINDU SCRIPTURES

WHAT?

- Weekly discussions on Hindu scriptures:
 - o Bhagavad Gita
 - o Upanishads
 - o Itihasa (History): Mahabharata, Ramayana
 - o Puranic stories



WHY?

Hindu scriptures are like indestructible gems! They have come down during many thousands of years in spotless perfection. From the Vedas they evolved the Upanishads, whose copious enquiries into the nature of man, the Universe, and God, strike us with speechless wonder.

- Doing this will help us all tap into the wealth of information we as Hindus have
- It'll give us a deeper understanding of why we have certain principles, practices, traditions and views as Hindus
- To be able to understand divine truths which have been realised and begin to

WHEN?

- Hold as regular weekly sessions at the same place and time for continuity
- You can hold it after your weekly worship event
- You could even do a shortened version of this during or following your committee meetings

WHERE?

- Hold session in a comfortable environment
- Can use a seminar room/ temple seminar room- try to get a room that can used consistently
- Wherever you do your weekly worship event

HOW?

- We're going to give you all a FREE copy of a fantastic book that is perfect for student discussions. It's called '**Gems from the Bhagavad Gita**'.
- Each week one/two committee member/s to fill in short session plan (attached).
- One or two committee members to facilitate session.
- To read small part of Hindu scripture e.g. 1-2 pages.
- Open to members what they felt was important to learn from that.
- On flip chart board- write most important points.
- Have people sat in a circle and make sure everyone has an open body language.
- Enthuse the audience and try to trigger debate between members.
- Try to reach to conclusion points.
- Make sure that the sessions are advertised well.
- Try to provide another incentive for people to come.
- Make the sessions as interactive as possible- encourage involvement of everyone and be very enthusiastic.
- Try to build a rapport with everyone that attends.
- Try to make people comfortable when they attend.
- Discuss the sessions in the committee meetings- sessions like these are invaluable and just as important as the larger events like the Diwali balls!! Make sure they are discussed!
- HAVE FUN AT THE SESSIONS WHILE LEARNING!!

WHO?

- Every committee member should take responsibility in making sure the sessions go well!!! This means they should try and attend as many sessions as they can
- Learning co-ordinators: prepare outline for session
- Marketing/publicity: Ensure that the sessions are marketed well
- President/vice president: Put an importance on the session in your regular meetings



EXAMPLES OF SESSIONS TO HOLD:

Below are some examples of sessions that can be held; this can be used as a resource/reference but more research will need to be taken before the session:

UPANISHADS

"The Upanishads have tackled every fundamental problem of life. They have given us an intimate account of reality."

108 Upanishads are usually recognised

The following are generally considered to be the principal Upanishads and a separate session could be held on each:

Isha: One of the smaller upanishads. Covers important topics such the paths of knowledge and the paths of action. It also discusses the paradoxical nature of the Self. It ends with a plea to Sun, the God of Light and to Agni (fire) as well as the Creator to help the Atman understand and follow the paths of proper knowledge and action.

Katha: Deals with a discussion between Yamaraja and Nachiketa about issues regarding life after death. The concept of reincarnation is explored. The superiority of good (*shreyas*) over pleasant (*preyas*) and the realization through insight rather than reason are discussed. The concept of body as a chariot carrying the self (*Atman*) also takes shape in this Upanishad.

Kena: It asks and answers the question as to who the Atman is. The knowledge of the Absolute, leads to immediate liberation and emancipation. Knowledge of Ishvara paves the way to a gradual acquisition of knowledge, eventually leads to liberation. Kena Upanishad contains this famous quote, 'It is not understood by those who say they understand it. It is understood by those who say they understand it not'.

Mundukya: It is famous for the theory of the four states of mind of humans. These are waking, dreaming, profound sleep and the fourth stage called turiya, which alone is real. The relationship of these four states to the mystical syllable 'Aum' (or 'Om') is explained.

Mundaka: It is the most poetic of the Upanishads. It proposes the way of life as an ascetic (*sanyasin*). The name is derived from the root *mund*, 'to shave,' as he that comprehends the teachings of the Upanishad is liberated from error and ignorance, signified by shaving of the head. It also recognizes the superiority of knowledge over performance of sacrifice and actions.

Prasna: Six questions are asked of sage Pippalada; on the question of creation, human personality and metaphysical principle in man. A series six questions such as, 'From where came the creatures of birth?' 'Who is the greatest God?' 'How many Gods are there and how many are manifest? How does life enter the body?' 'What are consciousness, sleep and state of being awake? What is it that knows enjoyment?' 'Which heaven does a man attain who meditates on 'Aum'?' and 'What are the divisions of *Purusha*?' are answered in this Upanishad.

Chandogya: It is one of the oldest and best-known Upanishads. A well-known passage is the conversation between Satyakama Jabala and his mother, leading to the assertion that the status of the caste Brahmin is attained by character than by birth. The famous saying 'Tat tvam asi' (Thou art that) is in this Upanishad

Bhadaranyaka: It contains three khandas or sections. The Madhu Khanda expounds the teachings of the basic identity of the individual and the Universal Self. The greatest of Upanishadic philosophers, sage Yajnavalkya's dialogues with his wife, Maitreyi are featured in the Muni Khanda. The third is the Khila Khanda which deals with certain modes of worship and meditation.

It is in this Upanishad the famous doctrine of 'Neti, Neti' ('not this, not this') appears, suggesting the indescribability of the Brahman, the Absolute.

In our daily life Indian culture has emphasized three cardinal virtues. There is a parable in the Brihadaranyka Upanishad: 5.2 Prajapati, the ancestor of man, blessed his creation with a code of conduct consisting of three basic principles: Dama, Dana and Daya i.e. restraint, charity and compassion.

Taittiriya: In it the teacher is describing the ethical rules and the proper dharma to his pupils. It is also famous for the 'Five Sheaths' of the self, namely food, breath, mind, intellect and bliss.

Aitareya: This Upanishad deals with creation and life after death in more clear terms. It is also famous for its idea of Atman as intellect. This Upanishad mentions three classes of men who aspire to acquire wisdom. The highest class consists of those who have turned away from the world and whose minds are free. The second group intends to attain knowledge more gradually by the worship of prana, the life breath. The third class of men cares for worldly possessions and for them the meditative worship of the Samhita is intended

Maitri: This Upanishad is of much later date than the classical Upanishads. Mention is made here of the Trimurthi concept of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The three forms are traced to the three gunas, namely rajas, sattva and tamas.

BHAGAVAD GITA

Regular discussions can be held on the Bhagavad Gita- it may be too much to cover one whole chapter in a session but you can break it up accordingly.

We are providing each chapter with a book called "Gems of Bhagavad Gita"- This will be a very useful book to aid sessions.

Below are some discussion points that could be considered when discussing the relevant chapters:

The Gita consists of eighteen chapters in total:

- 1.** Arjuna requests Krishna to move his chariot between the two armies. When Arjuna sees his relatives on the opposing army side of the Kurus, he loses morale and decides not to fight.
 - Arjuna's dilemma can be likened to many of life problems that we face and may cause us to lose morale
 - The real conflict today is with the self on the battlefield of the soul.
 - Thinking before acting- Arjuna did what others fail to do
 - We all face sad events in life- death, illness, debt, loss of relationships, failing an exam- Arjuna had the mental composure to surrender to God when he was feeling despondent
 - Dhritarashtra- Blind? Does this also represent a blindness/ignorance to the actions of his son- failure to act
 - Arjuna at the end of the chapter puts down his bow and arrow- can be seen as our tools of action- for students; giving up studying, for cooks, putting down the cooking utensils

- 2.** After asking Krishna for help, Arjuna is instructed that only the body may be killed, as he was worried if it would become a sin to kill people (including his gurus and relatives), while the eternal self is immortal. Krishna appeals to Arjuna that, as a warrior, he has a duty to uphold the path of dharma through warfare.
 - What is duty?
 - Modern world duty:
 - Student work
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Religion

- Social
 - Employment
 - Guru Dhrona and Bhismapitama were Arjuna's elders but on the side of adharma
 - Don't worry about death- it is only one small step in the cycle of life
 - Should we succumb to weakness when we can't be bothered to carry out our duty?
- 3.** Arjuna asks why he should engage in fighting if knowledge is more important than action. Krishna stresses to Arjuna that performing his duties for the greater good, but without attachment to results, is the appropriate course of action.
- What is material attachment?
 - Are cars, money, relationships the purpose of life?
 - Krishna does not say that you have to be completely detached from the world; still can have relationships, money etc but for them not to be your end purpose
 - Do your duty without concern for the personal consequences
 - Four ashrams can be discussed; student life, householder, retirement from attachment, renunciation
 - Must always do what is right without desiring success or fearing defeat
- 4.** Krishna reveals that he has lived through many births, always teaching Yoga for the protection of the pious and the destruction of the impious and stresses the importance of accepting a guru.
- What is yoga? Important to point out that it is not the western "yoga" that concentrates on bodily movement but Yoga is connecting/uniting with God
 - The importance of a spiritual teacher
 - Can explore the different Hindu organizations there currently are

5. Arjuna asks Krishna if it is better to forgo action or to act ("renunciation or discipline of action). Krishna answers that both ways may be beneficent, but that acting in Karma Yoga is superior.

- Explain the different types of paths:
 - Bhakti yoga--path of devotion inclination of people who learn through emotion
 - Jnana yoga--path of rational inquiry
 - Raja yoga--path of mental concentration (meditative it said)
 - Karma yoga--path of right action
 - What does Karma Yoga entail?
 - How can we carry out activities that take consideration of Karma yoga in our daily life?

Type in 'What is Yoga' on YouTube and click the first link to see a fantastic yet simple description of the four types of Yoga.

6. Krishna describes the correct posture for meditation and the process of how to achieve Samādhi.

- Discuss the importance of Sadhana (daily practise)
- What different types of Sadhana can be performed
- What is the importance of meditation?
- Why is a flickering/fickle mind dangerous
- Constant endless thoughts that weigh people down- did I do this right? What did this person think of me? Am I a bad person?

7. Krishna teaches the path of knowledge (Jnana Yoga)

- Why is important for us to have knowledge on our Hindu scriptures?
- What different scriptures there are
- The importance of establishing a daily routine into reading Hindu scriptures

8. Krishna defines the terms Brahman, adhyatma, karma, atman, adhibhuta and adhidaiva and explains how one can remember him at the time of death and attain his supreme abode.

- What is Karma?

- How can one get Karma points?!
- What is Atman?
- What is Brahman?
- The importance of always remembering God

9. Krishna explains "all beings are in me" as a way of remembering him in all circumstances.

- Describes the sovereign science that He is Bhagwan- the most supreme
- Explains to Arjuna some of his various manifestations
- Can you separate the blueness from the blue lotus?
- What is the secret that Krishna Bhagwan is talking about?

10. Krishna describes how he is the ultimate source of all material and spiritual worlds. Arjuna accepts Krishna as the Supreme Being, quoting great sages who have also done so.

- Names are many but the Truth is One
- Describe the different opulences of the Supreme Being

11. On Arjuna's request, Krishna displays his "universal form" (Viśvarūpa).

- The universe as part of the body of God
- Discuss God displaying his grace

12. Krishna describes the process of devotional service (Bhakti Yoga).

- The importance of maintaining Japa, Aarti, Bhajans
- Unceasing loving and remembering of God
- Everything you do- offer it as service to God

13. Krishna describes nature (prakṛti), the enjoyer (puruṣa) and consciousness.

14. Krishna explains the three modes (gunas) of material nature.

- Sattva- Mode of goodness
- Rajas- Mode of passion
- Tamas- Mode of ignorance
- Can look at the different qualities of the mode of goodness; selflessness, humility etc

- 15.** Krishna describes a symbolic tree (representing material existence), its roots in the heavens and its foliage on earth. Krishna explains that this tree should be felled with the "axe of detachment", after which one can go beyond to his *supreme abode*.
- What does it mean to be detached from this world- to give up everything?
 - How can you become detached from your friends, family?
- 16.** Krishna tells of the human traits of the divine and the demonic natures. He counsels that to attain the supreme destination one must give up lust, anger and greed, discern between right and wrong action by discernment through Buddhi and evidence from scripture and thus act correctly
- Demonic natures include; the indulgence of alcohol, promiscuity, eating meat.
 - Why lust is destructive?
 - Why anger is destructive?
 - Why greed is destructive?
 - Discussion on the difference between right and wrong
- 17.** Krishna tells of three divisions of faith and the thoughts, deeds and even eating habits corresponding to the three gunas.
- Explore the different eating habits
 - Spicy food- anger
 - Why should we observe fasts
 - Introduce the concept of Ekadashi
 - Introduce the concept of observing a prayer before eating
 - Discuss the importance of Prasadam
- 18.** In conclusion, Krishna asks Arjuna to abandon all forms of dharma and simply surrender unto him. He describes this as the ultimate perfection of life.
- Explore ego
 - What is true ego
 - What is the false notion of ego
 - How to work in this world without ego

Important note: There are 6 schools of Vedanta- please discuss these in the sessions e.g. Advaita, Vaishishtha Advaita and Dvaita.

This is a chapter summary for your reference of the Bhagavad Gita:

Chapter number	Number of Verses	Chapter Title
1	47	Arjuna's Dilemma
2	72	Transcendental Knowledge
3	43	Path of Karma Yoga
4	42	Path of Renunciation with Knowledge
5	29	Path of Renunciation
6	47	Path of Meditation
7	30	Self-Knowledge and Self- Realisation
8	28	Imperishable Brahman
9	34	Supreme Knowledge and the Big Mystery
10	42	Manifestation of the Absolute
11	55	Vision of the Cosmic Form
12	20	Path of Devotion
13	34	Creation and the Creator
14	27	Three Gunas of Nature
15	20	Supreme Spirit
16	24	Divine and the Demonic Qualities
17	28	Threefold Faith
18	78	Nirvana through Renunciation