



# LIFE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

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## Abstract

The world is in chaos. Stress, anarchy, social evils, unrest, war, strife and a struggle for existence are continually on the rise. Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita Verse 3.31 says that *yadyadacaratisreshthatadtadevatarojanah, sayatpramanamkurutelokas tad anuvartate* (whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues) (Prabhupada 2003). According to Trichy and Cohen (2002), 'in a competitive environment, organizations need leaders who can determine the direction; who can redirect the organisational energies and decide what needs to be done.' Are our current world leaders exhibiting the right principles on which to lead one's life and setting the right examples? Ancient scriptures such as the Ramayan and the Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavad Gita), amongst other wisdom, contain Life Management principles based on which mankind can lead happy, successful and fulfilling lives. If leaders make a thorough study of these principles, explain them in society and follow the principles, the world would be a much better place. This paper strives to dive deep into our ancient scriptures and explore the principles of life management which act as a solid foundation for long term development and prosperity.

The extant literatures have explored the principles such as human capital development, stress management and copying strategy, and management principles from Bhagavad Gita (Chandekar, 2012; Verma and Singh 2014; Satpathy 2008). This study intends to have an in-depth study of Bhagavad Gita to clearly bring out the Life Management principles useful for our day to day life. The paper utilizes the methodology of Hermeneutics to scrutinize several editions (authors) of the Bhagavad Gita including Bhagavad Gita As It Is interpreted by Prabhupada (2003) to arrive at the principles.

Following are some principles drawn from the Bhagavad Gita:

- Stress is inevitable in this world, but suffering is an option. Those who are spiritually strong develop the quality of absorbing pain without being disturbed.

- *Atisarvatravivarjitah*. Excess of anything is bad. The Gita says in Verse 6.17 that one can mitigate all miseries by performing Yoga and by being regulated in one's habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work.
- The Art of Working is to work with knowledge and detachment as one's duty towards the Supreme. Verse 2.47 describes the art of working in this world.
- Instead of focussing on too many projects at a time, better to focus on few.

**Keywords:** *Karmayoga*, Vedic Life Management, Art of Smart Working.

## INTRODUCTION:

Life has always been a mystery. Especially with regards to the purpose or the goals of existence. In general people do have a variety of goals in life but we can narrow them down to two primary goals. One, to be always happy in life, second, to avoid problems. Vedanta Sutra 1.1.12 states two significant aphorisms such as *Ananda mayo abhyasat and AtyantikaDukhaNivrtri*. Whatever activity we may do from morning till evening, for days, months and years, all we want is to be happy and avoid problems. All types of Life Management therefore actually aim to achieve these two goals. Advancement in any fields such as political, economical, social, industrial, technological etc are driven by these two principles of life. All of us abhor suffering and painful situations and look forward to joyful ones. However, with all sorts of advancement, Happiness and Fulfillment in life have always remained elusive commodities. In his paper "World Happiness Report" Helliwell (2012) says

"As one key example, the world's economic superpower, the United States, has achieved striking economic and technological progress over the past half century without gains in the self-reported happiness of the citizenry. Instead, uncertainties and anxieties are high, social and economic inequalities have widened considerably, social trust is in decline, and confidence in government is at an all-time low. Perhaps for these reasons, life satisfaction has remained nearly constant during decades of rising Gross National Product (GNP) per capita".(page no 3)

What has gone wrong? What have we missed? We have tried out infinite methods of achieving these two goals, everything except spirituality, except Life Management principles which have been given a long time ago in our ancient scriptures. We have tried out quick fix and patchwork solutions which have backfired to be tomorrow's problems. It's time to turn to the light of our ancient scriptures.

There has been an extensive study on Life Management principles as evident from existing literature. How to be happy at the work place by Achor S (2011). Psychological aspects of happiness by Cassel, R. N. (1954), Life cycle happiness and its sources by Easterlin, R. A. (2006). Quality of life management. By Greenglass, E. R. (2002). Method and System for Social and Leisure Life Management by Rodenstein (2007), Freund, A. M., & Baltes, P. B. (2002). Life-management strategies of selection, optimization and compensation by Freund, A. M., & Baltes, P. B. (2002). Various aspects of Life have been studied and Solutions have been offered in these papers. However, an interpretative understanding of Life Management Principles from the Vedic scriptures (Bhagavad Gita in particular) and its potential impact (if followed properly) on Life Management is clearly missing. This paper aims to explore the same.

The question arises why to accept the authority of the Bhagavad Gita. Sargeant (2009) says that 'The Bhagavad Gita is a summation of the Vedanta'.

According to Gavin Flood (2013) – a scholar of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita has had an enormous influence over time, becoming the central ideology of the Hindu renaissance in the 19th-century. Mukherjee (2017) writes in his paper

‘Bhagavad Gita’ is one of the essential Indian ancient scriptures like Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads. It guides us by showing various spiritual paths through which we can gain self-knowledge as well as inner-peace. Many of our legendary leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Lokmanya Tilak and many more was influenced by the philosophy of ‘Bhagavad Gita’.(page no. 1)

Verma and Singh (2014) write about the authority of the Bhagavad Gita as such

One of the greatest contributions of India to the world is Holy Gita which is considered to be one of the first revelations from God. The Bhagwad Gita is a doctrine of universal truth. The Bhagwad Gita deals with the most sacred metaphysical science. The Bhagwad Gita an ancient Hindu holy scripture is meant for people of every section and age. The Bhagwad Gita is also a key authority (Bartley, 2011, p. 134). The Bhagwad Gita needs no introduction and is equally respected in Eastern and Western culture. As the Bhagwad Gita deals with human day to day worries, anxieties and inhibitions which people face time to time in everyday life situations? Therefore, it is equally effective of people of any gender, race, religion or culture. The Bhagwad Gita is the essence of the Vedas and *Upanishads*. It is *brahmavidya* and also a *shastra* of *yoga*.(page no. 1)

Prabhupada (1986) states

*Bhagavad-gita* is also known as *Gitopanishad*. It is the essence of Vedic knowledge and one of the most important *Upanishads* in *Vedic* literature.(page no. 2 )

In my study of the Bhagavad Gita As It Is (Prabhupada 1972) and The Bhagavad Gita (Radhakrishnan 1928) amongst other editions, I came across several hitherto untapped principles which if applied in life will have a positive effect on the reader. The Objective of this paper therefore is to delineate Life Management Principles from the Gita and present the same in a manner that academicians and people in general can utilize the principles in their lives and benefit.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and conceptual in nature. Using the methodology of hermeneutics, the study derives the life management principles from the *Vedic* scripture Bhagavad Gita, one of the widely read scriptures of the world. Though *Vedic* tradition has several leading scriptures, Bhagavad Gita is the considered as the summery of all the *Vedic* literatures. The text depicts the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna in most difficult situation of their life that is just before a dangerous battle. Krishna’s sermons in that battle field aimed to help Arjuna understand every aspect of his life and activities clearly and act in right way dispelling all confusions. Therefore, I have selected Bhagavad to derive the life management principles for present day. Using hermeneutics, I selected the relevant sections and verses from Bhagavad Gita and then analyzed and interpreted the relevant verses to derive contextually relevant life management principles for modern day managers, employees in particular and common man in general.

## LIFE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

### **Stress is inevitable in this world, but suffering is an option**

A study on the background of the Bhagavad Gita enlightens us on the nature of this world. The pandavas including Arjuna were rulers of the world, lived a royal lifestyle and were amongst the bravest commanders in earth 5000 years back. Even then Arjuna, in the beginning of the war, succumbed to pressure and stress. The thoughts of losing his relatives participating in the war and more so that he would be the cause of them dying threw him to a depressed state of mind. Arjuna was overwhelmed with so much stress that the symptoms were evident on his body. There was trembling of the body, his hair stood on end, tears were flowing from his eyes and his skin was burning. This was before the Gita was spoken by Lord Krishna. After the Gita was spoken, we see that all the symptoms of stress disappeared and Arjuna says in Verse 18.73 that he is now self composed and peaceful, ready to discharge his duty. The motivation which was not present in him to discharge his duty was imparted by Lord Krishna within the words of the Bhagavad Gita. After hearing the Bhagavad Gita and meditating on Lord Krishna's instructions, Arjuna fought the war to the best of his ability and won the war. So, two principles are evident from this. One there must be stress in this world and two, we have a choice, to suffer or not to. Just like germs are everywhere but one must learn how to become immune to them by proper medical knowledge, one must similarly use the knowledge of the Gita to become immune to the stress of this world. Stress there must be, Lord Krishna says in Verse 8.15 where He uses the word '*Dukhalayam*' an adjective to describe this world as a world of pain and suffering. In Verse 9.31 He uses another adjective "*asukham*" to denote the nature of the world as a place where one cannot be happy. So, stress is inevitable, but suffering is an option because we see that Arjuna is completely relieved of his stress after hearing Bhagavad Gita. So like Arjuna, if we also read the Bhagavad Gita in times of stress and also during normal times, we will develop immunity towards the stress and will be better equipped to face the inevitable troubles of this world.

### **Be well balanced in our roles for minimum suffering in life.**

Man is a mixture of matter and spirit. We are spiritual beings engaged in subtle and gross matter, the Gita says. So, there are three aspects to us. One completely antimatter, spiritual in nature, second, subtle matter constituting mind, intelligence and ego. Third, gross matter which constitutes the physical body perceived by the senses made up of Earth, water, Fire, Air and Sky. Since we are a combination of these three so there are three types of needs which have to be balanced out. Physical, Mental or Emotional and Spiritual. Neglecting any one of these by over indulging in others would lead to a problem. In a similar light, the Gita says in Verse 6.17 that one can mitigate all miseries by performing Yoga and by being regulated in one's habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work. There need to be a balance in life in which we manage to satisfy all three aspects of ourselves. Man has multiple roles in life. A person could be a husband or wife to someone, a mother or father to someone, an employee or boss, a brother or a sister etc. So, one must balance out one's roles in life and also balance out the three different needs. Eating, Exercising, Sleeping are physical needs and so is Working. If one become a workaholic, then that may lead to an imbalance in sleeping and recreation which will then produce stress. So, Gita says be balanced in life, pay attention to your physical and emotional needs and don't forget the spiritual part i.e. yoga. Yoga comprises of reading scriptures like Bhagavad Gita, choosing good company over bad ones, performing Meditation and refraining from sinful acts. Sometimes there could be a situation wherein we have to temporarily shell out more time for each of our roles. That is perfectly alright. Just like when

someone is skiing, one has to tilt one's body to the right or left, front or back as per the snowy terrain so similarly in life we have to tilt sometimes as per the demands of our roles and needs before coming back to normal routine.

### **Don't spread yourself thin rather focus on few projects.**

It is common knowledge that if one digs shallow holes at many places one will not get water but if one digs a deep hole at one place, one is sure to get water. It is the era of multi tasking and consequently we are used to doing many things at a given time. This is actually the greed in man of trying to accomplish more in less time. However, one who believes in quantity loses quality and over time, all projects suffer in quality. The desired output is not there, people working in such teams get burnt out, are dissatisfied etc. On the other hand, people who focus on quality and dive deep into chosen few projects turn out to be successful. Not only they produce good quality work, but also increase in quantity in due course of time because of producing good quality. The Bhagavad Gita delineates this principle by introducing the three modes of nature, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These three modes of nature have three different characteristics. Sattva is living a balanced life as mentioned in the earlier principle, Rajas and Tamas produces unlimited wants or in other words greed. The Gita exhorts one to reject Rajas and Tamas and cultivate Sattva or the mode of goodness in life. People who maintain themselves in the mode of sattva or goodness do not take on too many projects in life. They focus on a few and produce quality results.

### **Lead a life of inquiry and be a seeker**

Man has achieved great heights in different fields because someone chose to inquire more than the rest of us. Newton inquired why the apple fell down and not up. An animal like man would simply sniff at an apple to check whether it is edible or not. However major discoveries and inventions were made just because someone inquired. Human life begins with spiritual inquiry. *Athato Brahma Jijnasa* (Vedanta Sutra 1.1.1) instructs that now having acquired a human body, the soul must inquire. The difference between animals and human beings are that both are inquiring but the inquiries are of different nature. Animals are inquiring where is food, shelter, sex life and security but humans can do more than that. Animals do not have the faculty of spiritual inquiry or philosophical inquiry. They cannot ask questions like who am I? What is life? What is death, Old age and disease? What is this world? Etc. However if a human being neglects to ask these questions he is termed as a two-legged animal by Vedic scriptures. If one however inquires and obtains knowledge, one becomes conversant with the nature of this world and consequently, lives a life of meaning, of happiness and fulfillment. We see in the world that a knowledgeable person earns more. More knowledge leads to more prosperity. Hence a seeker becomes more and happier in life.

### **Private victory versus public victory**

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5.24 (Prabhupada 1986) says,

One whose happiness is within, who is active and rejoices within, and whose aim is inward is actually the perfect mystic. He is liberated in the Supreme, and ultimately, he attains the Supreme. (page no. 262)



In this world winning mean public victory. So, there are people who have leant the art of public victory, of performing in exams and shining in front of the public. But is that really winning that the public sets up some standards of winning and then if we come upto those standards then we have won. So, it is not us who defines our winning. It's the public. So public victory is one thing, having people recognize us is one thing. That's one type of winning. In winning there is a flaw, a mistake. To think that our winning is dependent on the applause of other men, recognition of other men, and that may not really contribute to genuine winning. So, most of the time when people are talking about winning, they are talking about public victory, they are talking about being recognized by people as a winner. But we know of many people who are winners but after their performances, when they go home and are alone in their rooms, they are horrible, they are victims of their own minds. They are actually very weak individuals. Outside they are big winners, in the public they are winners, but inside they are battling with their minds, their habits, they make a wreck of themselves. In his book, the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey (Covey, S. R. 2004) talks about giving more emphasis on Private Victories. So, there is something wrong about this concept of winning which we are taught right from our childhood. Right from our childhood they put us in a paradigm that u must win which means u must stand out more than the others means ur winning is relative. If u win externally but internally, weare not happy, then what type of winning is that? If our happiness lasts for some time till people praise u but when u go back to ourselves when people are not around we are not happy because there are other things in which we are not able to succeed in. Real winning or winning internally, a Private Victory, is getting over weaknesses. So many people make it to the top; they climb the ladder of success only to know that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. They feel life has runout of their fingers. That is why we hear big personalities commit suicide.

**Do your best and leave the rest: Choose career as per psychophysical nature.**

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna exhorts Arjuna many times in different verses, to fight. But nowhere we can find in the Gita, Krishna told Arjuna he MUST win. In other words, Krishna told Arjuna that the art of working is to do one's best and not be affected by the results. Sincerely performed work is in itself real success. One must perform one's work to the best of one's ability, utilize one's intelligence to work smartly, give up laziness and procrastination, work hard and then be detached to the results. Be peaceful and happy that one has done one's best as per one's ability. We see in the world especially now that mental diseases are on the rise and most of them stem from a sense of dissatisfaction in one's career with respect to results. One must learn therefore from the Bhagavad Gita to do our best and leave the rest. Also, current education in general tends to examine all people for the same traits and talents. If we ask an elephant, a monkey and a fish to climb a tree as an exam for all of them, we can be sure beforehand who is going to win and who is going to fail terribly. But then the question is, since the fish and the elephant were not able to climb the tree, have they really failed? Given a chance to swim in the water or to perform herculean physical tasks, the fish and the elephant will succeed in flying colors. The Bhagavad Gita recognizes therefore people with different psychophysical qualities and recommends different careers for them. So, everyone excels in their respective fields which are in sync with their natures. A lack of this in society today is causing huge number of dissatisfied workers who then in turn effect the whole society.

### The success formula: Work smart and be a devotee of god

In the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita Verse 1.1, *Dhritrashtra*, the father of the *Kauravas*, asks his secretary Sanjay indirectly about who would be winning the *Kuruksetra* war. The entire Bhagavad Gita is in one sense Sanjay's answer to *Dhritrashtra*. In the last Verse 18.78 of the Bhagavad Gita, Sanjay finally reiterates his reply and says

Wherever there is Krishna, the master of all mystics, and wherever there is Arjuna, the supreme archer, there will also certainly be opulence, victory, extraordinary power, and morality. That is my opinion.

(Prabhupada, 1986 page no. 751)

In other words, as per the Gita, two things are required for any success. One our hard work, smart work or working to the best of our ability physically, mentally, intellectually, emotionally and second is God's blessings. That's why it is said in the last verse that where there is Arjuna, the perfect worker and wherever there is Krishna's blessings, there must be opulence, victory, extraordinary power and morality. We see practically from the Mahabharata, after the Gita was spoken, Arjuna fought and won the war because of his hard work and Lord Krishna's support in many tough or rather impossible situations in the war. Many times, in spite of his superhuman ability, Arjuna was saved because of the intervention of Lord Krishna. Therefore, just like a train runs on two tracks, the train of our life should run on two tracks, one material and second spiritual. One, our hard work and second, spiritual activities to get God's blessings.

### CONCLUSION

A careful scrutiny of the above shows that the Bhagavad Gita truly has several practical Life Management Solutions, which if truly implemented in the lives of people would bring around a drastic change as regards to the quality of life. As mentioned in the beginning, the two goals of life viz. Happiness and avoidance of problems would become a reality. However just like one must actually eat medicine in order to be cured rather than just knowing the prescription, similarly one must put these principles into practice in order to derive benefit. Society would truly be more peaceful, tolerant and prosperous if these principles are applied individually and collectively. Bhagavad Gita therefore should be promoted in our schools so that people are on the right track from the beginning of life. Elders should act as perfect models or advocates of these principles so as to set up examples for children to follow. These principles would also be useful for corporate to follow. Since a firm's main resource is people and if people are happy, fulfilled in life with minimal problems, ultimately it will enhance the productivity of the firm with minimal strikes or work stoppages. Since the Bhagavad Gita is a vast and deep literature, there lies infinite scope of more studies and discovery of more principles from the same. This work is an attempt to inspire other researchers to unravel more and more jewel like principles in times to come. The study is conceptual in nature and therefore has the limitation that these principles are not tested and validated in empirical world. Future research can be conducted to empirically validate these principles.

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