

WHAT IS MEDITATION? WHY MEDITATE?

In meditation there is constant observation of the mind. It involves setting aside a regular time and place for the specific purpose of discovering that infinite well of wisdom which lies within. Meditation is an experience that cannot be described, just as colours cannot be described to a blind person. All ordinary experiences are limited by time, space and causation. All finite experience is measured in terms of past, present and future. These concepts are illusory, for they have no permanence.

The meditative state transcends all limitations. In it there is neither past nor future, but only the consciousness of *I AM* in the eternal *NOW*. This consciousness is possible only when all the mental waves are stilled and the mind ceases to exist. Meditation is a state of consciousness; it is the fourth or 'turiya' state. The other three being: waking, dreaming and deep sleep.

WHAT IS MY PURPOSE IN LIFE?

In their search for happiness, most people turn to external objects and events for satisfaction. We think, "If I just had a new car," or "If I could just get that fantastic job, I would be happy." The mind may be stilled and at peace for a short time on attaining the desired object, but eventually it tires of its new toy or experience, and seeks pleasure elsewhere. External objects fail to bring permanent happiness.

We confuse the calmness of mind that we experience on attaining an object with the possession of the object itself.

The challenge, then, is to gain control of the internal world. The mind is constantly conversing with itself - replaying past events, rearranging them into a better drama, planning for the future, discussing the pros and cons of this and that. By methodically slowing down its continuous ramblings, the internal dialogue, and focusing on positive and uplifting objects, it is possible to begin to understand the mechanics of the psyche and bring about a more effective life.

In a sense, the mind is like a phonograph record. It contains grooves, or impressions, called 'samskaras' in Sanskrit. These samskaras are formed when certain thought waves, or 'vrittis', become habitual.

Samskaras are not necessarily negative.

There can be grooves in the mind that are uplifting and ones that bring us down. The express purpose of meditation is to create new, positive channels in the mind, and to eradicate those that are destructive. It is an absolute scientific process, but the goal is spiritual. It is not sufficient to eliminate the negative. Simultaneously there must be a striving to develop love, compassion, a sense of service, cheerfulness, kindness, and the many other qualities which not only make one's own life happy, but which radiate to others.

Through meditation, the play of the mind is witnessed. In the early stages nothing more can be done than to gain understanding as the ego is observed constantly asserting itself. But in time its games become familiar, and one begins to prefer the peace. When the ego is subdued, energies can then be utilised constructively for personal growth and the service of others.

Through regular meditation, the mind becomes clearer and motives more pure. The subconscious releases hidden knowledge that allows better understanding. The ego is slowly eradicated. Ultimately the intuitive forces are released, leading to a life of wisdom and peace.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TECHNIQUES OF MEDITATION

Meditation is an experience that cannot be described, just as colours cannot be described to a blind man. All ordinary experience is limited by time, space and causation. Our normal awareness and understanding do not transcend these bounds. Finite experience, which is measured in terms of past, present and future, cannot be transcendental. Concepts of time are illusory, for they have no permanence. The present, immeasurably small and fleeting, cannot be grasped. Past and future are non-existent in the present. We live in illusion. The meditative state transcends all such limitations. In it there is neither past nor future, but only the consciousness of 'I am' in the eternal NOW. It is only possible when all mental modifications are stilled. The closest analogous state that we can experience is deep sleep, in which there is neither time, nor space, nor causation. Meditation, however, differs from deep sleep, for it works profound changes in the psyche. By curbing and stilling the oscillations of the mind, meditation brings mental peace. On the physical level, meditation helps to prolong the body's

anabolic process of growth and repair, and to reduce the catabolic or decaying process. Ordinarily the anabolic process predominates until the age of 18. From 18 to 35 there is balance between the two, and after 35 the catabolic process dominates. Meditation can significantly reduce the catabolic decline. This is because of the innate receptivity of body cells. Each of our body cells is governed by the instinctive subconscious mind. They have both an individual and a collective consciousness. When the thoughts and desires pour into the body, the cells are activated; the body always obeys the group demand. It has been scientifically proven that positive thoughts bring positive results to cells. As meditation brings about a prolonged positive state of mind, it rejuvenates body cells and retards decay. One cannot learn to meditate, anymore than one can learn to sleep. One falls into both states. There are certain points to remember regarding the techniques and stages of meditation. These will be covered more fully in the section of the Course dealing with meditation.



MEDITATION

Much has been said and written about meditation, yet it takes years to understand its nature. It cannot be taught, just as sleep cannot be taught. One may have a king-sized posture-pedic mattress, an air-conditioned room, and the absence of all disturbances, but sleep may not come. Sleep itself is not in anyone's hands. One falls into it. In the same way, meditation comes by itself. To still the mind and enter silence requires daily practice. Yet there are certain steps that one can take along the way to establish a foundation and thus ensure success.

Before beginning meditation, it is best to have a proper environment and attitude. One's place of meditation, schedule, physical health, and mental state should all reflect a readiness to turn inward. Many of the most difficult obstacles are removed merely by creating a setting which is conducive to meditation.

GUIDE TO MEDITATION

The following are certain practical points regarding the basic techniques and stages of meditation. They are primarily intended for the beginner, although even the most experienced meditator may find a review of them useful.

1. Regularity of time, place and practice are most important. Regularity conditions the mind to slow down its activities with a minimum of delay. It is difficult to focus the mind, which wants to jump about as soon as one sits for concentration. Just as a conditioned reflex is a response to established external stimuli, so the mind will settle down more quickly when time and place are established.

2. The most effective times are early dawn and dusk, when the atmosphere is charged with special spiritual force. The preferred time is Brahmamuhurta, the hours between 4 and 6 a.m. In these quiet hours after sleep, the mind is clear and unruffled by activities of the day. Refreshed and free of worldly concerns, it can be moulded very easily, and concentration will come without effort. If it is not feasible to sit for meditation at this time, choose an hour when you are not involved with daily activities and the mind is apt to be calm. Regularity is the most important consideration.

3. Try to have a separate room for meditation. If this is impossible, screen off a portion of a room, and do not allow others to enter. The area should be used only for meditation, and should be kept free from other vibrations and associations.

Incense should be burned morning and evening. The focal point of the room should be a picture or image of the chosen deity or inspirational figure, with the meditation mat placed before it. As meditation is repeated, the powerful vibrations set up by it will be lodged in the room. In six months the peace and purity of the atmosphere will be felt, and it will have a magnetic aura. In times of stress you can sit in the room, do repetition of Mantra for an hour, and experience comfort and relief.

4. Try to face north or east in order to take advantage of favourable magnetic vibrations. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position, with spine and neck held erect but not tense. This helps to steady the mind, and encourages concentration. Just as important, the psychic current must be able to travel unimpeded from the base of the spine to the top of the head. It is not necessary to place the legs in Padmasana, the classic lotus posture. Any comfortable cross-legged position provides a firm base for the body, and makes a triangular path for the flow of energy, which must be contained rather than dispersed in all directions. Metabolism, brain waves and breathing will slow down as concentration deepens.

5. Before beginning, command the mind to be quiet for a specific length of time. Forget the past, present and future. Begin with a prayer.

6. Consciously regulate the breath. Begin with five minutes of deep abdominal breathing to bring oxygen to the brain. Then slow the breath down to an imperceptible rate.

7. Keep the breathing rhythmic. Inhale for approximately three seconds and exhale for three seconds. Regulation of breath also regulates the flow of prana, the vital energy. If a Mantra is being used, it is best to co-ordinate it with the breathing.

8. Allow the mind to wander at first. It will jump around, but will eventually become concentrated, along with the concentration of prana.

9. Do not force the mind to be still. This would set into motion additional brain waves, hindering meditation. If the mind persists in wandering, simply disassociate from it, and watch it as though you were watching a movie. It will gradually slow down.

10. Select a focal point on which the mind, like a bird in need of a perch, may rest when it tires. For those who are predominantly intellectual, the object of focus should be visualised in the space between the eyebrows. For those who are more emotional, it should be visualised in the heart plexus. Never change this focal point.

11. Focus on a neutral or uplifting object or symbol, holding the image to the place of concentration. If using a Mantra, repeat it mentally, and co-ordinate the repetition with the breathing. If one does not have a personal Mantra, OM may be used. Although mental repetition is stronger, the Mantra may be repeated aloud if one becomes drowsy. Never change your Mantra.

12. Repetition will lead to pure thought, in which sound vibration merges with thought vibration, and there is no awareness of meaning. Vocal repetition progresses through mental repetition to telepathic language, and from there to pure thought. This is a subtle state of transcendental bliss with duality, where there remains awareness of subject and object.

With practice, duality disappears and samadhi, or the superconscious state is reached. Do not become impatient, as this takes a long time.

In Samadhi, one rests in a state of bliss in which the Knower, Knowledge and Known becomes One. This is the superconscious state reached by mystics of all faiths and persuasions.

Begin the practice of meditation with twenty minute periods, and increase to one hour. If the body is overcome by jerking or tremors control them and keep the energy internalised.

If you meditate for half an hour daily, you will be able to face life with peace and spiritual strength. Meditation is the most powerful mental and nerve tonic. Divine energy freely flows to the adept during meditation, and exerts a benign influence on the mind, nerves, sense organs and body. It opens the door to intuitive knowledge and realms of eternal bliss. The mind becomes calm and steady.

Questions

1. Why can meditation neither be described nor taught?
2. What are the external aids to meditation?
3. Why should we be regular in time, place and practice in meditation?
4. How long and how often should one meditate?
5. What are the best times to meditate? Why?
6. What are the first steps when you sit for meditation?
7. What do you do if your mind is not concentrated during meditation?
8. Describe the higher states of meditation?

MANTRAS

Meditation and Mantras

The efficiency of the japa is accentuated according to the degree of concentration. The mind should be fixed on the Source. Then only you will realise the maximum benefits of a mantra. Every mantra has got tremendous force. A mantra is a mass of tejas or radiant energy. It transforms the mental substance by producing a particular thought movement. The rhythmical vibrations produced by repeating the mantra, regulate the unsteady vibrations of the five sheaths. It checks the natural tendencies of objective thoughts of the mind. It helps the spiritual power and reinforces it.

- Swami Sivananda
Practice of Yoga

Mantras are Sanskrit invocations of the Supreme Being. Reinforced and propelled by japa meditation, they pass from the verbal level through the mental and telepathic states, and on to pure thought energy. Of all languages, Sanskrit most closely approaches telepathic language because of its affinity to the fifty primeval sounds. It is the most direct way to approach the transcendental state.

Mantras cannot be concocted or tailor-made for the individual, despite some current claims. They have always existed in a latent state as sound energies. Just as gravity was discovered but not invented by Newton, mantras were revealed to the ancient masters. They have been codified in the scriptures and handed down from guru to disciple. Although it is customary for the guru when giving initiation to accept voluntary offerings of fruit, flowers or money, the selling of mantras is strictly against all spiritual rules.

Neither mantra, deity nor guru, once chosen, should be changed. There are many paths up the mountain. Perseverance on one alone will bring the aspirant to the top faster than if he were to spread his energies in exploring all the alternative paths.

SAGUNA MANTRAS

Mantras used by spiritual aspirants to achieve God-realisation are called deity mantras. They are saguna, with qualities or form-producing, and aid the conceptualisation process, just as do visual symbols. In time, recitation gives rise to the actual form of the particular deity.

As a specialised sound-body of consciousness, the mantra is the deity itself. The form of the deity manifests as the visible portion of the sound. The mantra, therefore, must be repeated in the proper way, with attention to the syllables and rhythm. If translated, it ceases to be a mantra because sound vibrations

newly created in translation are no longer the body of the deity, and therefore cannot evoke it. Only the rhythmical vibrations of the Sanskrit syllables properly recited can regulate the unsteady vibrations of the worshipper and permit the form of the deity to arise. Westerners are prone to think that the various mantras refer to different gods, and that there is a wide diversity in the culminating experience. It must never be forgotten that the deities are aspects of the one Divine whose grandeur is too vast for the mind to comprehend at the beginning of spiritual practice. To use again the analogy of the mountain, the many paths to the top can be viewed as the worship of the various aspects of God. The hill itself is one hill, and the summit is the same. After reaching the pinnacle, one will have the vision to encompass the totality. At the time of initiation by a guru, one's deity, or ishta devata, is chosen. If one cannot discover his own natural inclination, the teacher will choose the deity in accordance with his insight.

Once the deity and appropriate mantra have been selected, and the aspirant has received initiation, he works with the mantra until reaching enlightenment. The mantra becomes his theme song, so to speak. He makes its vibrations his own, and to the extent that he can do this, he is drawn closer to God. Other deity mantras can also be used in a supplementary way. For example, the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra protects against accidents, incurable diseases and calamities, and bestows longevity and immortality. It is also a moksha mantra, bringing liberation. Those who do japa of it daily will enjoy health, long life and ultimate enlightenment.

MEDITATION WITH THE MANTRA

There are various practical aids to progress in japa meditation that have been tested for thousands of years and are based on sound psychological and natural principles.

A japa mala, similar to a rosary, is often used in Mantra repetition. It helps to foster alertness, acts as a focus for the physical energy and is an aid to rhythmic, continuous recitation. It consists of 108 beads. An additional bead, the Meru, is slightly larger than the others. It is the signal indicating that with one Mantra recited for each bead, japa has been done 108 times, or one mala. The fingers should not cross the Meru. When it is reached, the beads are reversed in the hand; one continues reciting the Mantra, moving the mala in the opposite direction. The thumb and third finger roll the beads; the index finger, which is psychically negative, is never used. The rosary must not be allowed to hang below the navel, and should be wrapped in a clean cloth when not in use.

Variety in japa is necessary to sustain interest, avoid fatigue and counteract the monotony that can arise from constant repetition of the same syllables. This can be provided by modifying the volume. The Mantra can be repeated aloud for a while, then whispered, and then recited mentally. The mind needs variety or it becomes tired.

Unaccustomed to this kind of activity, the beginner at first may find himself giving up too soon, after five or ten minutes of repeating the Mantra. By persevering for at least half an hour without interruption, he will give the Mantra time to work itself into his consciousness, and benefits will be felt in a few days.

Meditation on the image of the chosen deity while the Mantra is being repeated adds tremendously to the efficacy of japa. Sound and form correspond and reinforce each other. Sound vibrations alone, if made with care and devotion, are capable of producing the form in the

consciousness of the aspirant. The process can be greatly facilitated by visualising the deity in the heart area or the space between the eyebrows. Thus, in meditating on Siva, the physical energy is focused on rolling the mala beads. The image of the deity, with the third eye and the symbolic crescent moon, serpents, trident, drum, etc. occupies the mind on one level. The Mantra OM Namah Sivaya is simultaneously being repeated, and on another level is being embedded in the consciousness. Repetition of the Mantra has a cumulative effect, and with continued practice it gains in power. It should be evident that japa meditation is far more than a verbal exercise. It is a state of complete absorption.

Concluding prayer and rest are important. When japa practice is finished, it is advisable not to plunge immediately into worldly activity. Sitting quietly for about ten minutes, one should reflect on the Lord and feel His presence. As routine duties are commenced, the spiritual vibrations will remain intact. This current should be maintained at all times, no matter what one is engaged in. When doing manual work, give the hands to work but give the mind to God. When the Mantra can be repeated throughout the day, God-consciousness will permeate one's life.

Mantra writing, *likhita japa*, is another, supplementary form of japa. The Mantra should be written daily with a special pen and notebook which have been set aside for this purpose. It should be done for half an hour, during which time complete silence and concentration are observed. While writing, simultaneously repeat the Mantra mentally so that the impression made in the consciousness will be intensified. *Likhita japa* may be done in any language or script. It greatly helps the aspirant to concentrate and leads to meditation.

SAGUNA MANTRAS FOR JAPA

1. OM SRI MAHA GANAPATAYE NAMAH

Prostrations to the great Lord Ganesha
OM is the original, most powerful Mantra sound. It is a part of almost every other Mantra, and serves to invoke pure supreme vibrations. Sri is the title of reverent respect. Maha means great. Ganapati is another name for Ganesha who is symbolised as the elephant-headed god, representing strength and fortitude. He is the remover of obstacles and bestower of success.

2. OM NAMAH SIVAYA

Prostrations to Lord Siva
Siva is the Lord of ascetics and recluses. He is part of the Hindu Trinity. Brahma and Vishnu, the other two parts, are associated with creation and preservation, respectively. Siva, the Cosmic Dancer, presides over the destructive energies which break up the universe at the end of each age. This is the process of the old making way for the new. In a more personal sense, it is Siva's energy by which one's lower nature is destroyed, making way for positive growth.

3. OM NAMO NARAYANAYA

Prostrations to Lord Vishnu
Narayanaya is a name of Vishnu, the Preserver of the world. After the creation, it is the energy of Vishnu which maintains order in the universe. It is Vishnu who regularly takes on a human form and incarnates on earth to benefit mankind. People who are closely involved in the running of the world and maintaining the harmony of life are drawn to this aspect of God.

4. OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VASUDEVAYA

Prostrations to the Lord Vasudeva
Bhagavan means Lord, referring to Vishnu. Vasudeva, meaning "He Who abides in all things and in Whom all things abide," is a name of Krishna. Krishna is one of the most beloved of all deities. He is considered to be a world teacher for he is the source of the Bhagavad Gita. People are drawn to Krishna because of his playfulness and joyful nature.

5. HARI OM

OM Vishnu
Hari is another name for Vishnu. It is that aspect which forgives the past actions of those who take refuge in Him and destroys their negative deeds.

6. OM SRI RAMAYA NAMAH

Prostrations to Lord Rama
Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, took life on earth for the purpose of upholding righteousness and rewarding virtue. His life is the subject of the *Ramayana*. Rama and Sita epitomised the devotional relationship between husband and wife. They are the model for people with family duties.

7. OM SRI DURGAYAI NAMAH

Prostrations to Mother Durga
Supreme Divinity is without qualities or attributes, and as such It contains all qualities and attributes. The masculine principles are important, yet they must be balanced with the feminine principles. Durga represents the motherhood aspect of God. She is the force, or shakti, through which Divinity manifests. Durga is power. She is the protector and benefactor. According to Hindu mythology, the chaitanya, or pure consciousness of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva were united to form the being of Mother Durga. She is commonly pictured riding a tiger and having eight arms with which she carries flowers and weapons of protection and gives the gesture of blessing.

8. OM SRI MAHA LAKSHMYAI NAMAH

Prostrations to the great Mother Lakshmi
Lakshmi is the bountiful provider. As Vishnu's consort, She aids in the preservation of the three worlds by bestowing wealth and abundance of a material and spiritual nature. She is pictured as a beautiful woman standing on a lotus blossom with her arms open and giving.

9. OM AIM SARASWATYAI NAMAH

Prostrations to Mother Saraswati
Aim is the bija of Saraswati, the source of all learning, and knowledge of the arts and music. She is involved with the creation of new ideas and things. Responsible for bestowing wisdom and knowledge, She is often worshipped by people in the creative arts.

NIRGUNA MANTRAS

Nirguna Mantras are without form. One uses the abstract mantras and vedantic formulas to assert identification with all of creation. Because people are of many different temperaments, not all spiritual aspirants are drawn to a personal deity. For this type of temperament, the abstract mantra creates a vibration in which the meditator identifies with the whole of the cosmos.

1. OM

There is no translation of OM. It consists of three letters: A, U, and M. It signifies the three periods of time, the three states of consciousness and all of existence. 'A' is the waking state, 'U' is the dreaming state, and 'M' is the deep sleep state. OM contains nada and bindu. Nada is the prolonged vowel sound and bindu is the humming sound, made with closed lips, with which the mantra ends.

Correctly pronounced, the sound proceeds from the navel, with a deep and harmonious vibration, and gradually manifests itself at the upper part of the nostrils. The larynx and palate are the sounding boards; no part of the tongue or palate are touched. 'A' is the first sound the vocal apparatus can utter. As 'U' is pronounced, the sound rolls from the root of the tongue to the end of the sounding board of the mouth. 'M' is the last sound, and is produced by closing the lips. Pronounced merely as spelled, OM will have a powerful positive effect upon the nervous system and transforms every atom in the physical body, setting up new vibrations and awakening dormant physical and mental powers.

All mantras are hidden in OM, which is the abstract, highest mantra. OM is the manifest symbol of the sabdabrahman vibration, but it must not be equated with the Divine. The universe has come from OM, rests in OM and dissolves in it. AUM, as it is sometimes written, covers the human threefold experience; A represents the physical plane, U represents the mental and astral plane, and M represents the deep sleep state and everything beyond reach of the intellect. The transcendental sound of OM is heard only by yogis, not by the ordinary ear.

Because of its universality, OM can be used as a mantra by all who are unable to find a guru. However, its very universality and lack of particular form make it very difficult for a beginner to grasp. The mind must be very strong to be able to concentrate on formless and abstract mantras such as OM.

2. SOHAM

I am That I am

The meditator experiences Existence Absolute. It is without form, without quality, without past, present or future. No bonds or limitations restrict the aspirant who has Soham firmly fixed in his mind.

3. AHAM BRAHMA ASMI

I am Brahman

In this great vedantic formula, the meditator asserts himself to be One with the ever-present Brahman. In doing so, he denies confinement to the body and mind, and affirms unity with the Absolute.

4. TAT TWAM ASI

That Thou Art

"That" is the eternal Brahman, and "Thou" is the meditator. Tat Twam Asi, one of the greatest Vedic statements, identifies the individual as one and the same with Brahman, the Absolute Substratum of Creation.

BHAGAVAD GITA



Never the spirit was born; the spirit shall cease to be never;
Never was time when it was not; end and beginning are dreams!
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit for ever;
Death hath not touched it at all, death though the house of it seems!

- *Bhagavad Gita*

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The Bhagavad Gita, often called the fifth Veda, is one of the most important scriptures in yoga. It teaches the means to live a spiritual life while in the midst of daily stress, conflicts and problems. The scene is a battlefield.

Literally, the name Bhagavad Gita means "*Song of God*". It is in the form of a dialogue between Krishna, the divine incarnation and teacher, and the warrior Arjuna, the disciple. It contains 18 chapters, consisting of 700 verses from the epic Mahabharata, written by Vyasa (also known as Veda Vyasa).

THE STORY OF THE MAHABHARATA

Dhritarashtra and Pandu were brothers. Born blind, Dhritarashtra, the elder brother, was barred from being king. He married Gandhari and had 101 children, called the Kauravas, headed by vicious Duryodhana.

Pandu, the younger brother, assumed the throne. His two wives, Kunti and Madri, had five virtuous children, known as the Pandavas: Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva.

Pandu died young; his sons were brought up by Dhritarashtra along with the Kauravas. The young cousins were all trained in the art of kingly conduct and warfare by the great gurus Bhishma and Drona. The Pandavas excelled and were beloved by the people. This inspired great enmity among the Kauravas, who were jealous and plotted against them. When they were old enough, Dhritarashtra gave each group a part of the kingdom. Because of their virtues, the Pandava's kingdom blossomed, and Yudhishtira was declared supreme emperor. Duryodhana, chief of the Kauravas, became increasingly jealous. Knowing Yudhishtira's only weakness, he tricked him into a game of dice. Through cheating, Duryodhana won. The Pandavas had to go into exile for a period of twelve years, then spend another year incognito. During this period the kingdom was to be ruled by Duryodhana.

The Pandavas, after successfully completing this thirteen year period, facing many obstacles and dangers caused by the Kauravas, approached their cousins to regain possession of their share of the kingdom. Duryodhana flatly refused to return even as much land as could be covered by the point of a needle. The Pandavas were pushed into war to re-establish Dharma, righteousness. The whole of Bharata Vastha (ancient India) was divided in this Mahabharata war.

Krishna, cousin of the Pandavas, was living in Dwaraka. Both Duryodhana, as head of the Kauravas, and Arjuna, chief warrior of the Pandavas,

went to seek Krishna's help in battle. Finding Krishna resting, Arjuna stood near Krishna's feet. Duryodhana occupied a nice seat at the head of the couch. As Krishna opened his eyes, he naturally saw Arjuna first. According to prevailing custom, he gave the first choice to Arjuna because of his younger age, and also because his first vision had been of Arjuna. Krishna asked Arjuna to choose between Krishna's powerful army or Krishna himself, adding that he wouldn't fight. Arjuna expressed his desire to have Krishna with him. Duryodhana with great delight, thinking Arjuna a fool, expressed his desire for the powerful army to help his side in the battle. Symbolically Arjuna chose right over might. He had Krishna, the divine avatar, as his charioteer.

When Krishna asked Arjuna why he had made this choice, Arjuna replied, "O Lord! You have the power to destroy all the forces by a mere sight. Why, then should I prefer that worthless army? I have long cherished a desire in my heart that you should act as my charioteer. Kindly fulfil my desire in this war."

After Duryodhana's return from Dwaraka, Krishna himself went to Hastinapura and tried to prevent the war. The egoistic Duryodhana refused to agree to the peace mission and even tried to imprison Krishna. Dhritarashtra, because of his attachment to his sons, failed to control them. The Kauravas, led by Duryodhana, decided to meet the Pandavas in the war.

Sage Veda Vyasa offered Dhritarashtra the opportunity to see the battle. The Kaurava king refused saying, "I have no desire to see this slaughter of my family, but I should like to hear all the details of the battle." The sage conferred the gift of divine vision on Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra's trusted counsellor. The blind king asks Sanjaya to narrate the details of the war. Here commences the Bhagavad Gita, the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna on the Kurukshetra battlefield.

The Mahabharata war was supposed to have taken place around 3000 BC. But the battle can also be interpreted as the battle between the lower mind (**Kauravas**) and the higher mind (**Pandavas**), in which the higher mind wins due to the grace of God (Krishna), even if sometimes the lower mind seems to be stronger.

The *Bhagavad Gita* contains 700 verses (slokas), divided into 18 chapters. Chapters 1-6 deal mainly with Karma Yoga, 7-12 with Bhakti Yoga, 13-18 with Jnana Yoga.

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Dhritarashtra

Father of 101 wicked Kauravas - the 'blind' king

Sanjaya

Narrator of the Bhagavad Gita to Dhritarashtra

Duryodhana

Eldest and leader of the Kauravas.

Drona

Teacher of both the Pandavas and Kauravas.

Because of certain allegiances he must fight on the side of the Kauravas.

Bhishma

Often referred to as the 'grandsire', he is the uncle of both the Pandavas and Kauravas.

Because of the duties that bind him, he must fight on the side of the Kauravas.

Veda Vyasa

Sage who recited the Bhagavad Gita to the scribe Ganapati, while in the transcendental state.

Pandu

Brother of Dhritarashtra; father of the five Pandava brothers.

Kunti

Wife of Pandu and mother of the Pandavas.

Yudhishtira

Eldest of the Pandava brothers; the embodiment of Dharma.

Bhima

Second of the Pandavas; the embodiment of physical strength.

Arjuna

Third-born and leader of the Pandavas, renowned as the greatest bow-man in the world.

Sahadeva and Nakula

Twins; the youngest Pandavas.

Draupadi

Wife of all five Pandavas.

Krishna

Eighth avatar of Vishnu; cousin of the Pandavas on their mother's side.

Questions:

1. What is the Mahabharata?
2. What is the literal meaning of the name Bhagavad Gita?
3. Describe the chief characters in the Bhagavad Gita.
4. Was the war necessary? Why?
5. How can the Bhagavad Gita be divided?