



Basic
BHAGAVAD-GITA

सरल गीतोपनिषद्



An Introduction to
BHAGAVAT VEDANTA

Sravaniya DiPecoraro, ACBSP

Barefoot Philosopher Press

PRAISE FOR BASIC BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

“Basic Bhagavad-Gita gives one an authorized interpretation in disciplic succession, based on the 'Bhagavad-Gita As It Is' by His Divine A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. With clarity and devotional potency, Srimati Sravaniya will help bring people from all walks of life to their own natural spiritual nature.”

— Bhakti Brhat Bhagavata Swami; Tridandi Sannyasi, ISKCON; Director, Bhaktivedanta College of Education and Culture; Senior Facilitator, Mayapur Institute of Higher Education



“I send my congratulations and admiration to my spiritual sister Sravaniya DiPecoraro on the publishing of the second edition of her *Basic Bhagavad-Gita*. She fills her writing with the deep wisdom and easy natural style that come from a lifetime of devoted spiritual study and practice. There is much benefit and much happiness to be gained from her book and I congratulate her on this literary achievement.”

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“I am glad to see the new edition of Sravaniya’s Basic Bhagavad Gita and it is certainly our good fortune that it is now available as an e-book. She has been teaching the message of Bhagavad Gita for close to 50 years now and is most qualified to reveal the secrets of Vedic wisdom. Her presentation of the five subject matters of the Gita is clear and instructive. Her language portrays the love which she feels for the Gita and her insights are worthy of hearing even for the enlightened. I feel benefitted from studying her text and I have no doubt in recommending it to others.”

Om tat sat,

— Swami B. V. V. Narasimha, ISKCON Far East
Regional Secretary



“Intellectually stimulating to read. Granted that *Bhagavad Gita* is a complex subject rich with philosophy, expositions, arguments, counter arguments and *sastric* injunctions conveyed by Lord Krishna to the Pandava prince, Arjuna at the battlefield of Kurushetra, Sravaniya is sympathetic to the novice reader bound to be overwhelmed by this sheer complexity. She invites the reader to explore the *Bhagavad Gita* in a mood conducive for its successful study. An interesting interplay of topics, inclusion of anecdotes, personal and professional observations, in text citations from His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami’s writings, as well as from other sacred Vedic treatises. Insights of sages and great thinkers not only from India but from other Eastern and Western cultures keep readers engaged, enable them to reflect on their own thoughts and practices, and arouse

their interest to read Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's
Bhagavad Gita As it Is."

— Dr. Sridevi Srinivass (Sridevi Gaurangi devi dasi),
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics,
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur



"In Basic Bhagavad-Gītā we find a rare blend of masterfully crafted commentary together with a bounty of helpful background in yoga philosophy. Clear, precise and complete, Sravaniya DiPecoraro untangles the complexities and nuances of the Bhagavad Gītā for yogis and scholars alike. Thorough and engaging."

— David Life, Co-founder Jiva Mukti Yoga
Center, NYC



"Goodness! What a book you have created: an absorbing read, layer after layer of insights, anecdotes, explanations, and quotes from Confucius to Le Carre to Betty Freidan. Bravo! I hope this does very well — although, as anyone knows who has labored on a work of devotion as much as you have here, the reward is in the offering."

— Joshua M. Greene, Professor, filmmaker, author of
Swami in a Strange Land

BASIC BHAGAVAD-GITA

An Introduction to Bhagavat Vedanta



SRAVANIYA DIPECORARO



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DEDICATION



नम ॐ विष्णुपादाय कृष्णप्रेषाय भूतले
श्रीमते भक्तिवेदान्तस्वामिनिति नामिने

*nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣhāya bhū-tale
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine*

I offer my humble obeisances
at the lotus feet of my spiritual master
His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda
Founder Ācārya of the
International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

In Sanskrit terminology there are often many words used to indicate someone or something in its different aspects.

abhyāsa — practice

Ācārya — One who teaches by example.

āgāmi-karma — reactions acquired during the present lifetime and will bear fruit in future lives

ahaṅkāra — False Ego; the spirit's false identification with the body/mind and sense of being the enjoyer, the proprietor and the controller.

akarma — action that does not result in reaction

Ānanda-maya — *Brahman*, the joyful Lord

avat — temporary

ātmā — self

aviḍyā — ignorance; knowledge of matter only

Bhagavān — The Supreme Personality of Godhead who possesses in full the six opulences of beauty, strength, fame, knowledge, wealth and renunciation.

Brahman — spirit

brāhmin — scholarly class of individuals

buddhi — intelligence; discrimination of what is true and just, real or unreal

indriya-prīti — sense enjoyment or gratification

Īvara — God, the controller

jīva, jīvātmā — individual small self; one of the many

karma — work or action and its resultant reaction

Kṛishna or *Kṛṣṇa* — “All attractive,” the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the original feature of the *Īśvara*.

manas — mind; the subtle covering of the spirit, the software enabling use of the hardware of the body

mokṣa — liberation from matter, redemption or salvation

Nārāyaṇa — (see *Viṣṇu*)

Paramātmā — Higher Self, the One; the Supersoul.

Pārambrahman — Great Spirit

Paramēśvara — Supreme Controller

prakṛti — The Receptive or nature, energy of God.

prārabḍha — Activities and thoughts carried over from previous lives which karma are experienced as the present life.

Puruṣa — The Creative, God the enjoyer.

rajasic — in the mode of passion

sādhaka — one who practices, a *yogī*

sādhana — practice

saṁsāra — material existence

saṁskāra — subliminal activator (psychic complex)

sancīta-karma — the total accumulated stock of *karmic* deposits (*āśaya*) awaiting fruition

sat — eternal

sattva — the mode of goodness

sattvic — in the mode of goodness, through which the eternal can be perceived

Śrī, Śrīla — respectful prefix, (similar to the French ‘Monsieur’)

tamasic — in the mode of ignorance or darkness

vairāgya — renunciation

vartamāna karma — acquired during the present lifetime and will bear fruit in future lives

vāsanā — impression

vidyā, jñāna — knowledge (gnosis) of what is matter, what is spirit and who is the controller of both

vikarma — forbidden action, the result of which is so pernicious that it should not be done

Viṣṇu or *Viṣṇu* — The Maintainer; the executive or official manifestation of the *Īśvara* in the material world.

ABBREVIATIONS

SB — *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* or *Bhagavat-Purāṇa*, the post graduate study of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* compiled by the author, Śrī Badarāyaṇa Vedavyāsa, in his maturity; Vyāsa’s *Magnum Opus*.

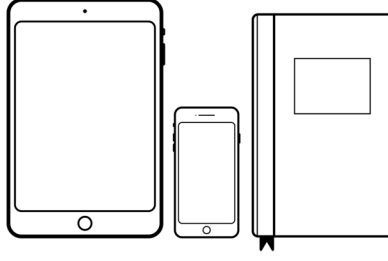
BG — *Bhagavad-Gītā*

CC — *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*



EXPLANATION OF THE ICON ON THE COVER

This symbol depicts the eternal loving relationship between the Great Spirit (*Īśvara*) and the individual spirit (*jīvātmā*) which is described in *Bhagavad-Gītā* and explained in detail in *Bhāgavat Vedānta*. *Yoga* means when the individual spirit wants to reconnect with the Supreme Spirit. That is *yoga*.



PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Over a decade has passed since I self-published the first edition of this beginner's guide to the great *Bhagavad-Gītā AṣṬ It It*, originally translated into English by my beloved spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda. Although many still love to read books, the fact is that the public increasingly uses electronic hand held devices as they go through their busy days. With this in mind I have agreed to reproduce this book in the new format. In this edition we have inserted more *Sanskrit Devanāgarī* and Roman diacritic pronunciation verses. I have also polished the text somewhat, but it is basically the same as the 2006 version.

When my *guru* initiated me in August of 1971 he was in Detroit and I was in St. Louis. He sent my japa beads and a letter to me wherein he wrote, "I have given you the name Śravaṇīya Devī Dāsī — 'that which is to be heard.' Śravaṇīya means the Vedic literatures." He told me to go on reading his books, chanting at least sixteen rounds of *Hare Krishna mahā-mantra* every day and presenting this message of love of God more and more. I took his words to heart.

Now after many years I am able to repeat the ancient teachings to a modern audience in language they can

understand and in a manner easily accessible. I have not altered the principles, although my approach and way of expression may be rather unique. In a letter to another disciple dated January 26, 1973 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "Just read from my books and try and explain the meaning in your own words." He desired that we write what we learned through him and pass on the teachings for the benefit of human society. This is the meaning of *paramparā* or lineage.

He also said, "Vedic knowledge has been kept imprisoned or concealed, but every human being needs to understand it in truth." (SB 10.2.27 purport) I agree, and *Bhagavad-Gītā* is the place to begin. In the ninth chapter the speaker Lord Śrī Krishna tells Arjuna,

"This knowledge is the king of education, the most secret of all secrets. It is the purest knowledge, and because it gives direct perception of the self by realization, it is the perfection of religion. It is everlasting, and it is joyfully performed."

That means it's fun. So what are we waiting for? Let's get started.

Kṛṣṇe matir astu.

Sravaniya DiPecoraro

Dedicated on 7th of August 2017

The Appearance Day of Lord Balarāma

Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

The present little book, like many things in life, was born of necessity. After teaching *yoga āsana* and *prāṇāyama* for twenty years, I found I could begin to teach the inner disciplines of *yogic* science to a certain section of the public who wanted to “deepen” their practice.

When I ask students what they think *yoga* is, across the board the answer is the same: “*Yoga* is a way of life.” But the features of that path and how to follow it in the context of modern urban living remains, for many, an elusive ideal.

During a training course in which I lectured on the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, it became clear to me that the average *yoga* student or teacher trainee has no foundation in the subjects or terminology being discussed in the text. While the *sūtras* are as short as Morse code, the translations abstruse and the elaboration sometimes difficult — if not impossible — to follow, I realized that some basic training is needed before studying them.

That introduction to the science of *yoga* is given for our understanding in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, spoken by Lord Krishna, the master of *yoga*.

In 1971, I encountered Śrīla Prabhupāda’s English translation of this text and was profoundly impressed by it. Other translations I had read seemed pale by comparison. What struck me was the scholarly yet straightforward presentation, which drew me into a rich text that nourished and then propelled the reader to learn more. Since the book is meant to be an introduction to *yoga*, the science of self-realization, and since it actually put me on

a fast track to learning, I recommend it as the best place to begin the study.

Bhagavad-Gītā is the gateway to the vast ocean of *Vedic* wisdom. It is a treatise especially meant for everyman — and everywoman — which makes it ideal for study in what many call the Aquarian Age. I affirm what has been said by others before me, that *Bhagavad-Gītā* is the first book of values for dedicated spiritual students of our day, or any day. It is not ancient; it is timeless. It is as relevant and vital now as when it was redelivered to human society in our epoch nearly fifty centuries ago.

Patañjali mentions the standard for genuine knowledge (YS 1.7) as *pratyakṣa-anumāna-āgamāḥ-pramānāni*, or “perception, inference or logic and testimony.” Perception may be flawed by imperfect senses, and logic may also be based on a faulty premise. The best source for correct understanding is testimony from an authority — sacred texts which are handed down in a lineage of self-realized masters. They are not sacred because of popular superstition or belief; they are sacred because they are true, because they work in actual experience. They are called *śāstra* and are given by God through the sages for our benefit.

Bhagavad-Gītā gives the outline for what Śrīla Prabhupāda called “practical *samādhi*.” It is a complete text for properly understanding how to achieve spiritual wholeness and yet live in this world — if not peacefully and happily, then at least armed with enough real knowledge to effectively face the inevitable challenges that come to meet us. It teaches us the basic techniques of how to “be in the world but not of the world.” This knowledge is the ultimate educational necessity of all

cultured humanity — not merely of the more mystically inclined among us.

My goal is to present the text and subject matter in a manner accessible to the general reader by using diagrams, anecdotes and common references. Hopefully this will bring the transcendental truths down to earth for better comprehension and application.

I won't pretend that I am an objective observer with a detached lack of investment in the subject. My standpoint is that of an initiate into the mysteries, not a scholar or academic. My perspective is one in which God, the gods and goddesses are real personalities, where the hidden world of spirit shapes the living world of events and cultures; where intuition is clearly distinct from imagination and more reliable than the weatherman or the headlines in the news, where the alchemical transformation of matter into spirit is not merely possible — it is the imperative of the eternal now.

Admittedly this volume is a basic primer, not a comprehensive study. I have endeavored to stick to the key analysis, limiting my personal opinions to specific sections — where I may expostulate about the social issues used as examples to my heart's content. I hope that this will not diminish the useful information presented. One can always skip those sections!

At the outset I was not exactly a fan of *Bhakti-yoga*, with its unflattering press and apparently sentimental approach to spirituality. I really wanted something more intellectually stimulating than standing in a field of flowers and holding hands in a circle or something like that. But what I discovered — as Prahladānanda Swami would later tell me — is that *Bhakti* systematically “spiri-

tualizes the emotions by the intelligence.” *Bhakti* does not esteem dry intellectualization over living on all four levels of human experience, nor does it deprecate the body or physical existence, although it acknowledges the shortcomings of matter. Nor does *Bhakti* merely promise paradise later in some future existence, leaving nothing for the present life. *Bhakti* surgically removes the speck from our eye and reveals the truth that paradise was never lost at all.

My understanding of the theoretical study of *śāstra* was accelerated by my formal acceptance by Śrīla Prabhupāda as his disciple, and the service and rituals of Deity worship. Far from being idolatry, Deity worship (*arcanā*) is a primary method of surrender to the Supreme (*Īśvara pranidhāna*) — the last of what may be called Patañjali’s “ten commandments” of *yoga* (*yama-niyama*). It is the art of divine intimacy — a recommended, time tested process that gives direct experience of the Higher Self. And I am a big, *big* fan of experience. Never mind who recommends a path of learning — do the principles work? Efficacy is proof of theory.

Here, then, are the thumbnail icons, the dots which the reader can connect by studying *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* by my guru, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda.

Om Tat Sat

Sravaniya DiPecoraro

Dedicated on February 10, 2006

The Appearance Day of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu

Hong Kong

HOW TO STUDY THE TEXT

“Learning disciplines those whose intellects have
the desire to learn,
the capacity to listen attentively,
the power to grasp what is taught,
the power to retain it in memory,
the capacity to discriminate between the important and
the unimportant,
the capacity to draw inferences,
the power to deliberate and imbibe the truth
and NOT others.”
— Cāṇakya Paṇḍita

Many students I’ve talked with tell me that *Bhagavad-Gītā* appears too impenetrable and difficult to approach. After encountering three Sanskrit words they are already lost in space. How to begin?

PREREQUISITE

As explained in the Introduction, the idea that Krishna, the speaker, is the *Īśvara* or God must at least be theoretically entertained as a possibility, if not fully embraced as the truth.

ACCELERATORS

The student is advised to cultivate the mode of *sattva* or goodness by dedicated yoga practice, including following the *yamas* and *niyamas* (the social and personal ethics of the *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* System which are listed in the chapter

Prakṛti). Without the platform of *sattvic* intelligence, comprehension of the verses is impossible and the text sounds like mumbo jumbo. Access denied without the password — *sattva*.

This is what I tell my students:

- Read the Introduction. It gives you all the background and prepares your attitude for the journey.
- Read the second chapter. (If you haven't read the *Mahābhārata* then most of the first chapter will not seem relevant.)
- Then select whatever section you find interesting and relevant based on what is happening in your life at that time. It is a living text that speaks to the reader.
- Read the entire chapter, translations only, just to catch the flow of thought. Then go back and read the purports.

This may seem like an unsystematic manner in which to approach a sacred text, but let me explain. When I learned to speak Mandarin, I concentrated on the common phrases I needed to get around, gradually expanding my vocabulary as I gained proficiency. When I learned astrology, I focused on charts of people close to me — friends and relatives — instead of example charts in text books. My comprehension and retention of each subject were stepped up quickly. Experience showed me that “systematic study” can be a real turn off because general admonitions are usually irrelevant and have little or no effect on a student. We learn best that which interests us most.

Bhagavad-Gītā is the most easily accessible of all Vedic literature, yet it is surprisingly complete. It is a lifelong study; it grows on the reader, just as one might become fonder and fonder of someone by association. Reading the text reinforces our efforts towards hearing the Higher Self within by introducing us to His language and teachings. Later, as we go about our daily activities, something we read will come back to us. Then we can be sure it is the Higher Self speaking and not merely the mind.

अथातो ब्रह्म जिज्ञासा

athāto brahma-jijñāsā

“Now, in the human form of life,
it is time to inquire about Brahman (spirit).”

— *Vedānta-sūtra*

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Bhagavad-Gītā, “The Song of God” has been available to the western world for only the last two centuries, and the English speaking world for about half that time. It is found in the *Bhīṣma-parva* section of the *Mahābhārata* (Chapters 25 to 42). According to astrological calculations in the *Mahābhārata* itself, the time period for the events described is slightly before 3000 BC.

The paradigm of time that modern man uses to measure and adjust himself to his every day reality is insufficient for understanding timeless knowledge like the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. An adjustment is necessary in our study and can be achieved without much difficulty.

Let's consider two ways of viewing time:

1. Linear Time
2. Circular Time

Linear Time means a progression of events moving from past to present to future. In this modern paradigm a further implication is made; that the past is always simpler, more backward or primitive than the present, and the future is always an evolution or advancement of what was seen before.

Circular Time is most apparent in what we experience as the yearly cycle, beginning at the first day of spring, moving through summer to fall and then “ending” at winter. After the end comes a new beginning in the following spring and things progress along the same parameters, although the exact nature of events during that time will vary. Thus every year is both the same as other years and yet different.

All forms within the material field, both moving and non-moving, go through six transformations of birth, growth, maturity, producing some by-products, decline and death, followed by a recycling of the energy and new expression of form. In other words, every manifested form has its bud, bloom and fade. The complete cosmic manifestation follows the same rule and universal spring, summer, fall and winter seasons are called in *Vedic* terms *Satya*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara*, and *Kali Yugas*.

- *Satya Yuga* — The Golden Age of virtue, wisdom and religion lasts 1,728,000 years.
- *Tretā Yuga* — The Silver Age — 25% vice is introduced, and it lasts 1,296,000 years.

- *Dvāpara Yuga* — The Bronze Age — greater decline in virtue and religion with 50% vice, lasts 864,000 years.
- *Kali Yuga* — The Iron Age of quarrel and hypocrisy that began 5,000 years ago — there is an abundance of strife, ignorance, irreligion and vice, true virtue being practically nonexistent, and this *yuga* lasts 432,000 years.

Kali Yuga, the age we are currently experiencing, is the winter of the cycle and has been called by the philosophers “The Ocean of Faults.”

प्रायेणात्पायुषः सभ्य कलावस्मिन् युगे जनाः
 मन्दाः सुमन्दमतयो मन्दभाग्या ह्युपद्रुताः
prāyenālpāyusaḥ sabhya
kalāv asmin yuge janāḥ
mandāḥ sumanda-matayo
manda-bhāgyā hy upadrutāḥ

“O learned one, in this iron age of *Kali* men have but short lives. They are quarrelsome, lazy, misguided, unlucky and, above all, always disturbed.” (SB 1.1.10)

For those of us who thought we were in the Age of Aquarius — the age of higher consciousness and spiritual evolution of man — this information is a hard pill to swallow. Worse still is the probability that we have all been here before (this is not our first *Kali Yuga*). Far from being the peak of mankind’s achievements, it is the low point of the cycle. By the way, there are fifteen Ages of Aquarius in one *Kali Yuga*.

In previous ages the lifespan, memory and intelligence of human beings was superior to what it is now. There was

no need of writing things down since everyone remembered everything they were taught. But in this age the precepts of *yoga* — formerly an oral tradition — have been written down to avoid being forgotten and lost. For modern scholars who live in the linear paradigm and have no initiation into the mysteries, it appears that mankind, in its evolutionary progress, only learned to write recently and that *yoga* is an invention of the more sophisticated among the cavemen. According to the speaker of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, however, this is not the actual situation.

MORE RECENT ANCIENT HISTORY

In the purport to verse 4.1 Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

“At the present moment we have just passed through five thousand years of the *Kali-yuga*, which lasts 432,000 years. Before this there was *Dvāpara-yuga* (800,000 years), and before that there was *Tretā-yuga* (1,200,000 years). Thus, some 2,005,000 years ago, Manu spoke the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to his disciple and son Mahārāja Ikṣvāku, the king of this planet earth. The age of the current Manu is calculated to last some 305,300,000 years, of which 120,400,000 have passed. Accepting that before the birth of Manu the *Gītā* was spoken by the Lord to His disciple the sun-god Vivasvān, a rough estimate is that the *Gītā* was spoken at least 120,400,000 years ago; and in human society it has been extant for two million years. It was respoken by the Lord again to Arjuna about five thousand years ago. That is the rough estimate of the history of the *Gītā*, according to the *Gītā* itself and according to the version of the speaker, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

HISTORY OF THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Ralph Waldo Emerson and his student, Henry David Thoreau, were prominent philosophers in nineteenth century America in what has been called The American Transcendentalist Movement. Eastern teachings arrived in 1841 through a handful of Indian sacred texts that made their way to their intellectual enclave in Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau studied the *Bhagavad-Gītā* at his Walden hermitage. In 1849 he wrote to a friend: “The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges... To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a *yogī*.”

Many *swamis* and holy men from India landed on the shores of America in the first half of the twentieth century. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda arrived in Boston in 1965 with the mission to bring Krishna consciousness — the essence of *Vedic* teachings and *Vaiṣṇavism* — to the English speaking countries. As a result, the Bhaktivedānta Book Trust was founded and has become the world’s foremost publisher of sacred *Vedic* texts in over fifty languages.

BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ: THE METHOD OF PRESENTATION

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BHAKTI YOGA

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GENERAL LAYOUT

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is divided into three portions of six chapters each. The first six chapters are concerned with *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*. Emphasis, or rather pre-eminence, is given to *Bhakti*, devotional service and at the end of the first six chapters, Lord Śrī Krishna concludes His explanation of the *sāṁkhya* yoga system with this:

योगिनामपि सर्वेषां मद्गतेनान्तरात्मना
श्रद्धावान्भजते यो मां स मे युक्ततमो मतः

yoginām api sarveṣāṁ
māḍ-gatenāntar-ātmanā
śradḍbhāvān bhajate yo mām
sa me yukta-tamo mataḥ

“And of all yogis, he who always abides in Me with great faith, worshipping Me in transcendental loving service, is

most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all.” (BG 6.47)

Vedānta

वेदान्त



“The ways and the means for ultimate realization are stated in the Bhagavad-Gītā, and the doors of this knowledge are open for everyone. No one is barred out.”
— Śrīla Prabhupāda



Veda means knowledge and *anta* means the goal or final destination. The subject of *Vedānta* is *Brahman* or spirit. There are two viewpoints on the nature of *Brahman* — *Advaita Vedānta* (impersonal realization) and *Bhāgavat Vedānta* (Godhead as the Supreme Being with transcendental senses).

SIMILARITIES

Advaita and *Bhāgavat Vedānta* agree on the following points:

- There is no happiness in materialistic life.
- All *yamas* and *niyamas*
- Non-proprietaryship
- Discipline and moderation, self-control
- The importance of cultivating the *sattva guṇa* as the platform of sanity
- Selfless or non-egotistical service devoid of desire for profit, adoration and distinction
- Reverence for sacred scriptures, particularly the *Vedas*

MAIN TEXTS

The *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*, also known as the *Srimad-Bhāgavatam*, is the postgraduate study after the introductory subjects of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. It is a commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra* written by their author, Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsadeva. The subject dwells on the activities and teachings of the various *avatārs* (appearances within the material world) of Lord Viṣṇu. These narrations awaken philosophical insight and impart realization of the ultimate *yogic* achievement — the face to face encounter with the Supreme Self, the source of all emanations.

It is worth noting that *Srimad-Bhāgavatam* is intended for all levels of human society and not restricted to initiates or the clergy.

Vedānta-sūtra, like the *Yoga-sūtra*, are terse aphorisms that

are intended to be elaborated by the spiritual master, one with a broad background in *Vedānta* philosophy and *Purāṇic* histories. The text is meant for study by celibate renunciates, those considered to be finished with material life and its entanglements.

Other names: *Brahma-sūtra*, *Śārīraka-bhāṣya*, *Vyāsa-sūtra*, *Vedānta-darśana*, *Uttara-mīmāṃsā*, *Bādarāyaṇa-sūtra*.

Commentaries by: Śaṅkara (788-820), Bhāskara, Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Vallabha, Madhvā, Baladeva.

LAYOUT OF VEDĀNTA-SŪTRA

Four Chapters, four divisions each which describe:

- Chapters 1 and 2 — How the material world is manifested from the Supreme and the relationship of the living entity with the Supreme.
- Chapter 3: Prescribed duties and engagements.
- Chapter 4: The results of devotional service.

VEDĀNTA — THE MAIN EXPONENTS

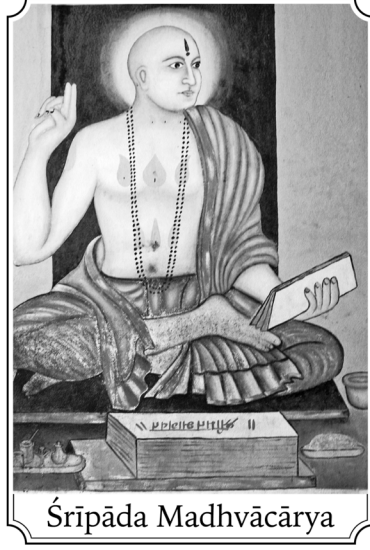
The following biographical sketches of Śrīpāda Śaṅkarācārya and Śrīpāda Madhvācārya are adapted from those given by Śrīla Prabhupāda in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā* 9.244-245.

Śaṅkarācārya was born in the year 608 of the *Śakābda* Era (686 AD. However, there is much controversy elsewhere on the date; 788-820 is the official version.), in the month of *Vaiśākha* (April-May), on the third day of the

waxing moon in Kālāḍi, South India. He lost his father, whose name was Śivaguru, at an early age.



Śrīpāda Śaṅkarācārya



Śrīpāda Madhvācārya

INCREDIBLE SCHOLARSHIP

When Śaṅkarācārya was only eight years old, he completed his study of all scriptures and took the renounced order of a monk (*sannyāsa*) from Govinda, who was residing on the banks of the Narmadā. He stayed with his spiritual master for some days, then he took permission to go to Vārāṅasī, and from there he went to Badarikāśrama, where he stayed until the age of twelve. While there, he wrote the following commentaries:

- *Brahma-sūtra*
- ten *Upaniṣads*
- *Bhagavad-Gītā*

- *Sanat-sujātīya*
- *Nṛsiṃha-tāpanī*

Among his many disciples the chief four were Padmapāda, Sureśvara, Hastāmalaka and Troṭaka.

After departing from Vārāṇasī, Śaṅkarācārya went to Prayāga, where he met a great learned scholar called Kumārila Bhaṭṭa. Śaṅkarācārya wanted to discuss the authority of the scriptures, but Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, being on his deathbed, sent him to his disciple Maṇḍana, in the city of Māhiṣmatī. It was there that Śaṅkarācārya defeated Maṇḍana Miśra in a discussion of the *śāstras*. Maṇḍana had a wife named Sarasvatī, or Ubhaya-bhāratī, who served as mediator between Śaṅkarācārya and her husband. It is said that she wanted to discuss erotic principles and amorous love with Śaṅkarācārya, but Śaṅkarācārya had been a *brahmacārī* since birth and therefore had no experience in amorous love. He took a month's leave from Ubhaya-bhāratī and, by his mystic power, entered the body of a king who had just died. In this way Śaṅkarācārya experienced the erotic principles. After attaining this experience, he wanted to discuss erotic principles with Ubhaya-bhāratī, but without hearing his discussion she blessed him and assured the continuous existence of the Śṛṅgeri-maṭha. She then took leave of material life. Afterwards, Maṇḍana Miśra took the order of *sannyāsa* from Śaṅkarācārya and became known as Sureśvara.

Śaṅkarācārya defeated many scholars throughout India and converted them to his *Advaita-Vedānta*. (Also referred to as *Māyāvāda* — *Māyā* (illusion) *vāda* (doctrine) — wherein 'Everything is *Māyā*.) This philosophy promotes the idea that all form and differentiation are

illusory displays and that the only reality is formless Oneness.

He left his material body at the age of thirty-three.

THE INCARNATION OF LORD ŚIVA

It is stated in the *Padma Purāṇa* that Lord Śiva appeared as a *brāhmin* in the age of *Kali* to promulgate *Advaita Vedānta*, which reestablished the eminence of Vedic authority in India and created order out of the chaos rampant in the philosophical sector at that time.

*māyāvādam asac-chāstram
pracchannaṁ bauddham ucyate
mayaiva vibitaṁ devi
kalau brāhmaṇa-mūrtinā*

“[Lord Śiva informed goddess Durgā:] ‘In the Age of Kali I take the form of a brāhmaṇa and explain the Vedas through false scriptures in an atheistic way, similar to Buddhist philosophy.’”

— Padma Purāṇa, Uttara-khaṇḍa (25.7)

Lord Śiva, speaking to his wife the goddess of the material energy, foretold that, in the guise of a renounced *brāhmin*, he would spread the *Advaita* philosophy specifically to eradicate Buddhism — a non-Vedic doctrine. This was Śrīpāda Śaṅkarācārya. In order to overcome the effects of Buddhist philosophy and spread *Vedānta*, he had to make some compromise. People were very materialistic, and he preached the philosophy of monism, for the disposition of the time made it impossible to tell of anything further than the impersonal oneness of the Absolute.

It should be noted that these different types of impersonalism only negate the platform of material existence. Despite their claims, such doctrines are not helpful in bringing about the final end of all suffering because they cannot permanently eradicate the prime cause of incarnation. Only after one accepts the philosophy of *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which culminates in surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead (*Īvara-praṇidhāna*), does spiritual consciousness reawaken and spiritual life resume.

Śaṅkarācārya's singular outstanding achievement was the reestablishment of the *Vedas* as authority (*pramāṇa*).

THE POWERFUL YOUNG ADVOCATE

Śrīpāda Madhvācārya, the son of Madhyageha Bhaṭṭa, was born in the year 1040 *Śakābda* (1118 AD). According to some, he was born in the year 1160 *Śakābda* (1238). He took his birth near Uḍupī at Pājakā-kṣetra, South Kanara province near the city of Mangalore. His family belonged to a Śivāllī-brāhmaṇa dynasty.

During his childhood Madhvācārya was known as Śivāllī-brāhmaṇa, and there are some wonderful stories surrounding him.

- It is said that once when his father had piled up many debts, Madhvācārya converted tamarind seeds into actual coins to pay them off.
- When he was five years old, he was offered the sacred thread (initiation).
- A demon named Maṇimān lived near his abode in the form of a snake, and at the age of five Madhvācārya killed that snake with the toe of his left foot.

- Whenever his mother was upset, no matter where he might be, he would appear before her in one jump.

He was a great scholar even in childhood and, against the wishes of his father, he became a renunciate and left home at the age of twelve. He took *sannyāsa* initiation from Acyuta Prekṣa and received the name Pūrṇaprajña Tīrtha. After traveling all over India, he finally discussed scriptures with Vidyāśaṅkara, the exalted leader of Śṛṅgeri-maṭha. Vidyāśaṅkara was actually diminished in the presence of Madhvācārya.

Accompanied by Satya Tīrtha, Madhvācārya went to Badarikāśrama. It was there that he met Vyāsadeva and explained his commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* before him. Thus he became a great scholar by studying before Vyāsadeva.

By the time he came to the Ānanda-maṭha, Madhvācārya had finished his commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. His companion Satya Tīrtha wrote down the entire commentary. When Madhvācārya returned from Badarikāśrama he went to Gañjāma, which is on the bank of the river Godāvarī. There he met with two learned scholars named Śobhana Bhaṭṭa and Svāmī Śāstrī, who later became known in the disciplic succession of Madhvācārya as Padmanābha Tīrtha and Narahari Tīrtha.

A MIRACULOUS BLESSING

When he returned to Uḍupī, he would sometimes bathe in the ocean. On such an occasion he composed a prayer in five chapters. Once, while sitting beside the sea

engrossed in meditation upon Lord Śrī Krishna, he saw that a large boat containing goods for Dvārakā was in danger. He gave some signs by which the boat could approach the shore, and it was saved. The owners of the boat wanted to give him a present, and at the time Madhvācārya agreed to take some *gopī-candana*. He received a big lump of the clay and, as it was being brought to him, it broke apart and revealed a large Deity of Lord Krishna. The Deity had a stick in one hand and a lump of food in the other. As soon as Madhvācārya received the Deity of Krishna in this way, he composed a prayer. The Deity was so heavy that not even thirty people could lift it. Yet Madhvācārya personally brought this Deity to Uḍupī. Eight of Madhvācārya's *sannyāsa* disciples became directors of his eight monasteries. Worship of the Lord Krishna Deity is still going on at Uḍupī according to the plans Madhvācārya established.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Madhvācārya then for the second time visited Badarikāśrama. While he was passing through Mahārāṣṭra, the local king was digging a big lake for the public benefit. As Madhvācārya passed through that area with his disciples, he was also obliged to help in the excavation. After some time, when Madhvācārya visited the king, he engaged the king in that work and departed with his disciples.

Often in the province of Gāṅga-pradeśa there were fights between Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus were on one bank of the river, and the Muslims on the other. Due to the community tension, no boat was available for crossing the river. The Muslim soldiers were always stop-

ping passengers on the other side, but Madhvācārya did not care about this. He crossed the river anyway and when he met the soldiers on the other side, he was brought before the king. After some discussion, the Muslim king was so pleased with him that he wanted to give him a kingdom and some money, but Madhvācārya refused.

Non-violence is a good policy only when dealing with gentlemen. While walking on the road, Madhvācārya was attacked by some bandits, but by his bodily strength he killed them all. When his companion Satya Tīrtha was attacked by a tiger, Madhvācārya separated them by virtue of his great strength. After so many adventures he again met Vyāsadeva, who gave him the śālagrāma-śilā known as Aṣṭamūrti. After this, he wrote a summary of the epic tale *Mahābhārata*.

(Note: A ritual stone used as a Deity form for worship of Lord Viṣṇu, the glossy black fossils called śālagrāma are found in particular sacred pilgrimage places in north-west India.)

PARTISAN POLITICS

Madhvācārya's devotion to the Lord and his erudite scholarship became known throughout India, and the owners of Śāṅkarācārya's Śṛṅgeri-maṭha became somewhat perturbed. At that time their followers were afraid of Madhvācārya's rising power, and they began to tease Madhvācārya's disciples in many ways. They even launched an attempt to prove that the lineage of Madhvācārya was not in line with Vedic principles (!). One *Māyāvādī* philosopher from their school, a person named Puṇḍarīka Purī, approached Madhvācārya for

philosophical debate and to discuss the scripture. It is said that all of Madhvācārya's books had been somehow taken away — by whom we can only guess — but later they were found with the help of King Jayasīṃha, ruler of Kumla. Nevertheless, in that discussion Madhvācārya also defeated Puṇḍarīka Purī.

Madhvācārya had many great disciples who wrote many important literatures. Among them one great man named Trivikramācārya, who was a resident of Viṣṇumaṅgala, became Madhvācārya's disciple, and his son later became Nārāyaṇācārya, the composer of *Śrī Madhva-vijaya*. After the death of Trivikramācārya, the younger brother of Nārāyaṇācārya took *sannyāsa* and later became known as Viṣṇu Tīrtha.

It was reputed that there was no limit to the bodily strength of Madhvācārya. There was a person named Kaḍaṅjari who was famed for possessing the strength of thirty men. Madhvācārya placed the big toe of his foot upon the ground and asked the man to separate it from the ground, but the great strong man could not do so even after great effort.

Śrīla Madhvācārya passed from this material world at the age of eighty while writing a commentary on the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*.

For further information about Madhvācārya, one should read *Madhva-vijaya*, by Nārāyaṇācārya. The *ācāryas* of the Madhva-sampradāya established Uḍupī as the chief center, and the monastery there was known as Uttarakādhī-maṭha.

ADVAITA VEDĀNTA IN A NUTSHELL

“Of all the ancient systems, that of Śaṅkarācārya will be found to be the most congenial and the most easy of acceptance to the modern mind.”

— Swami Śivānanda

Śrī Śaṅkarā was the exponent of the *Kevala Advaita* philosophy. His teachings can be summed up in the following words:

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन् मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव न अपराः

brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva na aparāḥ

“*Brahman* alone is real, this world is unreal; the *jīva* is identical with *Brahman*.”

Śaṅkarā's Supreme *Brahman*

1. is *Nirguṇa* (without the *Guṇas*), *Nirākāra* (formless), *Nirviśeṣa* (without attributes) and *Akartā* (non-agent).
2. He is above all needs and desires.
3. "This *Ātman* is self-evident. This *Ātman* or Self is not established by proofs of the existence of the Self."
4. "It is not possible to deny this *Ātman*, for it is the very essence of he who denies it. The *Ātman* is the basis of all kinds of knowledge."
5. "The Self is within, the Self is without, the Self is before and the Self is behind. The Self is on the right hand, the Self is on the left, the Self is above and the Self is below."
6. *Satyam-Jñānam-Anantaṁ-Ānandam* — these are divine and not separate attributes. They form the

very essence of *Brahman*. *Brahman* cannot be described, because description implies distinction. *Brahman* cannot be distinguished from any other than He.

7. The objective world — the world of names and forms — has no independent existence. The *Ātman* alone has real existence.
8. The world is only *vyavāhārikā* or phenomenal (not real or eternal).

ESSENTIAL BHĀGAVAT VEDĀNTA

According to Śrī Madhvācārya's *Tattva-vāda* philosophy, the Supreme Being is Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa. Every follower of the *Mādhvā* school should have a firm belief in the *Pañca-bheda* — five real and eternal distinctions:

1. the distinction between the Supreme Being and the individual soul,
2. between spirit and matter,
3. between one *jīva* and another *jīva*,
4. between the *jīva* and matter,
5. between one piece of matter and another.

Although the forms are constantly changing, sometimes manifested and sometimes not, the phenomenal world itself is real and eternal.

य एषां पुरुषं साक्षादात्मप्रभवमीश्वरम्
न भजन्त्यवजानन्ति स्थानाद् भ्रष्टाः पतन्त्यधः ॥ ३ ॥

ya eṣāṁ puruṣaṁ sākṣād
ātma-prabhavam īśvaram
na bhajanty avajānanti
sthānād bhraṣṭāḥ patanty adhaḥ

“Anyone who does not render service and neglects his duty unto the primeval Lord, who is the source of all living entities, will certainly fall down from his constitutional position.”

— Śrī Camasa (SB 11.5.3)