

The Bhagavad Gita, Demystified for Doctors

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The Bhagavad Gita is a timeless reservoir of knowledge, guiding us in facing life’s challenges with clarity and resilience¹. As Lord Krishna declares, the Gita’s wisdom is available for those who believe in it, yet its principles can resonate universally, especially when simplified and contextualized for today’s world. The 18 chapters and 701 verses of the Gita are organized in a way that can be condensed into a set of fundamental values, allowing it to serve as a philosophical and moral compass for those seeking guidance.

Multiple scholars have written commentaries on the Gita, and its message²⁻⁴. Physicians face unique challenges: the pressures of caring for others often in adverse conditions, the risks of compassion fatigue, and sometimes, the struggle to find meaning amidst stress. We hereby describe the Gita in a physician-friendly manner, using words and verses that health care professionals resonate with. This physician-friendly interpretation of the Gita seeks to bridge spiritual philosophy with the medical profession, offering practical guidance distilled into memorable frameworks.

We present a series of models, each progressively simpler than the last, aiming to offer every reader a version perfectly suited to their needs. This opinion piece builds upon earlier physician-centric commentaries and tries to simplify the complex concepts described in the Bhagavad Gita.

THE MESSAGE SIMPLIFIED

The 18D framework draws from the 18 chapters of the Gita (Box 1). We have curated 18 verses, one from each chapter, and crafted an alliterative list that conveys the core message of each. To make the teachings more accessible, we then condense this list into a 9D and 3D model (Boxes 2 and 3), designed to be easy to

Box 1. The 18D Model: 18 Chapters in 18 Words

1. Doubt and death wish	10. Divine glory
2. Duty	11. Divine form
3. Detachment	12. Dispassionate renunciation
4. Divine grace	13. Deep knowledge
5. Doership and doing	14. Description of gunas
6. “Dhyaan”/Meditation	15. Deep roots: the pipala tree
7. Dual choice	16. Demoniatic and divine deeds
8. Destiny	17. Description of deeds
9. Distraction to divine focus	18. Determination to act

Box 2. The Bhagavad Gita in 9 Ds

- Duty, Discipline, Detachment
- Divine surrender, Devotion, Dhyaan
- Deep fulfillment, Dynamism, Determination

Box 3. The Bhagavad Gita in 3 Ds

- Duty
- Devotion
- Detachment

understand, remember, and apply. These frameworks offer practical guidance for busy physicians who may not have time to read the full text.

As doctors, we often bear a heavier-than-average load of stress and strain. Working in challenging environments, sometimes amid hostility, we may struggle to find purpose in our roles. Compassion fatigue and other professional stresses can detract from the joy of our work. The Bhagavad Gita offers a way to rediscover meaning, even in the seemingly routine aspects of medical practice.

DUTY WITH DEVOTION AND DETACHMENT

Carrying out our duty with devotion and detachment from material outcomes brings both meaning and fulfillment to our work. This message is particularly relevant to physicians, who often invest significant emotional energy into their work yet face unpredictable

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outcomes. By embracing this mindset, physicians can find deeper meaning in their roles while maintaining resilience. Discipline, dynamism, and determination are additional lessons imparted by Lord Krishna. Integrating dhyaan or meditation, into our lives helps us navigate life's challenges and manage stress effectively. This emphasis on mindfulness encourages practitioners to remain grounded amid demanding circumstances.

We recognize that some may view this approach as overly religious, anti-secular, or even misinterpret it as a cognitive bias. However, the principles we present are universally beneficial, regardless of spiritual or religious affiliation. These simple, powerful words offer strength and comfort to those who seek them.

The timeless teachings of the Gita, distilled into practical concepts, offer a pathway to rediscovering resilience, meaning, and balance. Whether one seeks philosophical guidance or simply a clearer approach to daily challenges, the Gita provides a wealth of insight adaptable to the unique demands of the medical profession.

EIGHTEEN CHAPTERS, EIGHTEEN VERSES

"Sanjay said: Speaking thus, Arjun cast aside his bow and arrows, and sank into the seat of his chariot, his mind in distress and overwhelmed with grief." I:47

"Your right is to work only and never to the fruit thereof." II:47

"Therefore, go on efficiently doing your duty without attachment. Doing work without attachment man attains the supreme." III:19

"In whatever way people surrender unto Me, I reciprocate accordingly. Everyone follows My path, knowingly or unknowingly, O son of Pritha." IV:11

"The Yoga of Knowledge and the Yoga of Action both lead to supreme Bliss. Of the two, however, the Yoga of Action being easier of practice is superior to the Yoga of knowledge." V:2

"The mind is restless no doubt, and difficult to curb, Arjuna; but it can be brought under control by repeated practice (of meditation) and by the exercise of dispassion, O son of Kunti." VI:35

"- - I am the source of the entire creation and into Me again it disappears." VII:6

"For these two paths of the world, the bright and the dark, are considered to be eternal. Proceeding by one of them, one reaches the supreme state from which there is no return; and proceeding by the other, one returns to the mortal world, i.e., becomes subject to birth and death once more." VIII:26

"There are those who always think of Me and engage in exclusive devotion to Me. To them, whose minds are always absorbed in Me, I provide what they lack and preserve what they already possess." IX:22

"Every such being as is glorious, brilliant and powerful, know that to be a part manifestation of My glory." X:41

"Arjuna, behold My manifold, multifarious divine forms of various colors and shapes, in hundreds and thousands." XI:5

"Knowledge is better than practice (without discernment), meditation on God is superior to knowledge, and renunciation of the fruit of actions is even superior to meditation; for peace immediately follows from renunciation." XII:12

"They alone truly see, who perceive the Paramātmā (Supreme Soul) accompanying the soul in all beings, and who understand both to be imperishable in this perishable body." XIII:28

"O Arjuna, the persons who are transcendental to the three gunas neither hate illumination (which is born of sattva), nor activity (which is born of rajas), nor even delusion (which is born of tamas), when these are abundantly present, nor do they long for them when they are absent." XIV:22

"He who knows the pipala tree (tree form of creation), which is said to be imperishable with its roots in the Primeval Being (God), whose stem is represented by Brahma (the Creator), and whose leaves are the Veda, is a knower of the purport of the Vedas." XV:1

"Desire, anger, and greed-these triple gates of hell, bring about the downfall of the soul. Therefore, one should shun all these three." XVI:21

"O son of Pritha, whatever acts of sacrifice, charity, or penance are done without faith, are termed as 'Asat'. They are useless both in this world and the next." XVII:28

"Arjuna said: Krishna, by Your grace my delusion has been destroyed and I have gained wisdom. I am free of all doubt. I shall do your bidding." XVIII:73

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