INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Dialogue, action, consciousness

Paolo Rivosecchi



HARMONIC CIRCLE

01

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

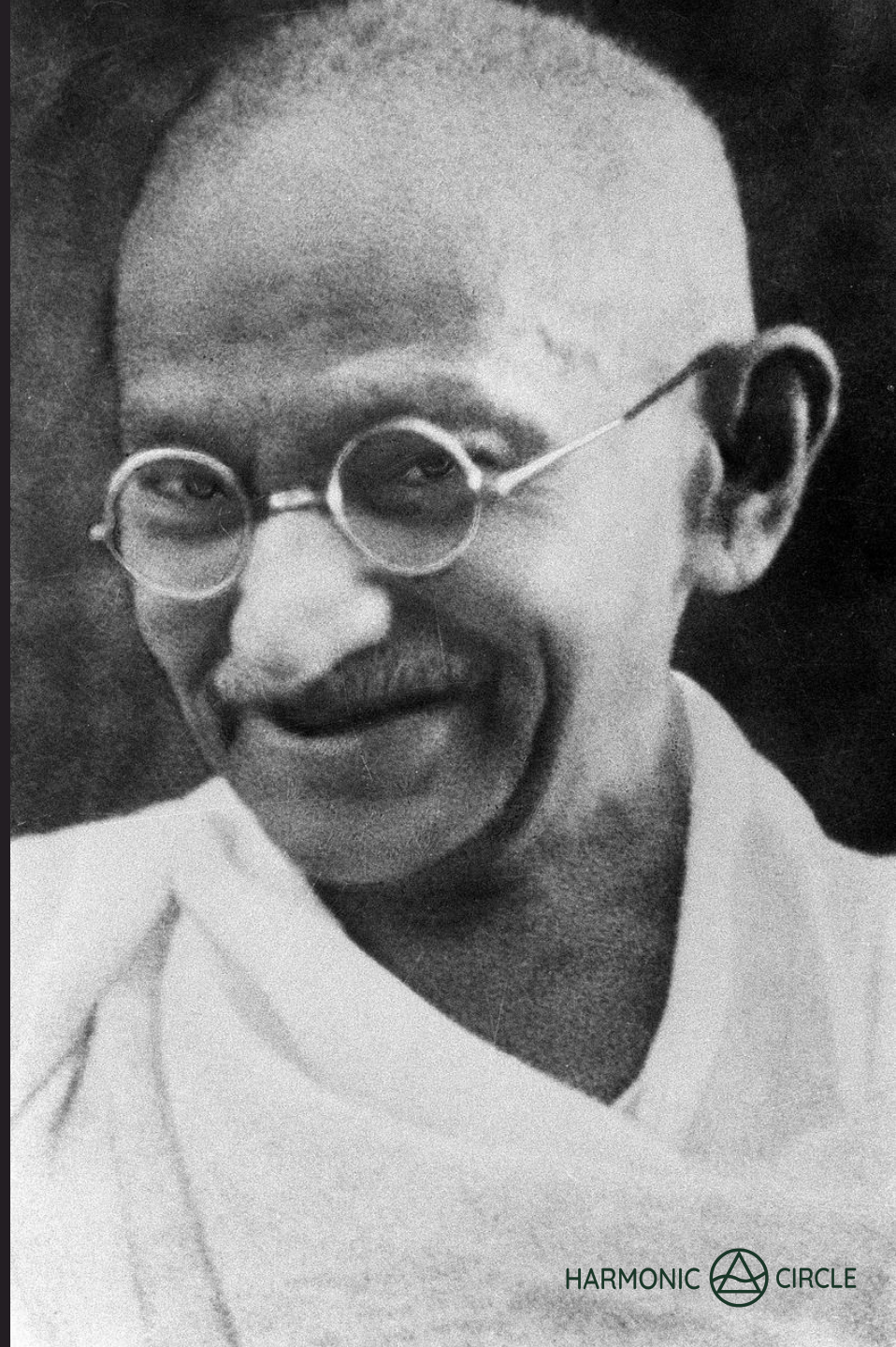
Section transition

HARMONIC CIRCLE

“The Bhagavad Gītā has always been a source of comfort to me. Whenever I couldn't see any glimmer of hope on the horizon, I would open the Gītā and find a verse that gave me new hope.”

— MAHATMA GANDHI

teacher of nonviolence and leader of Indian independence

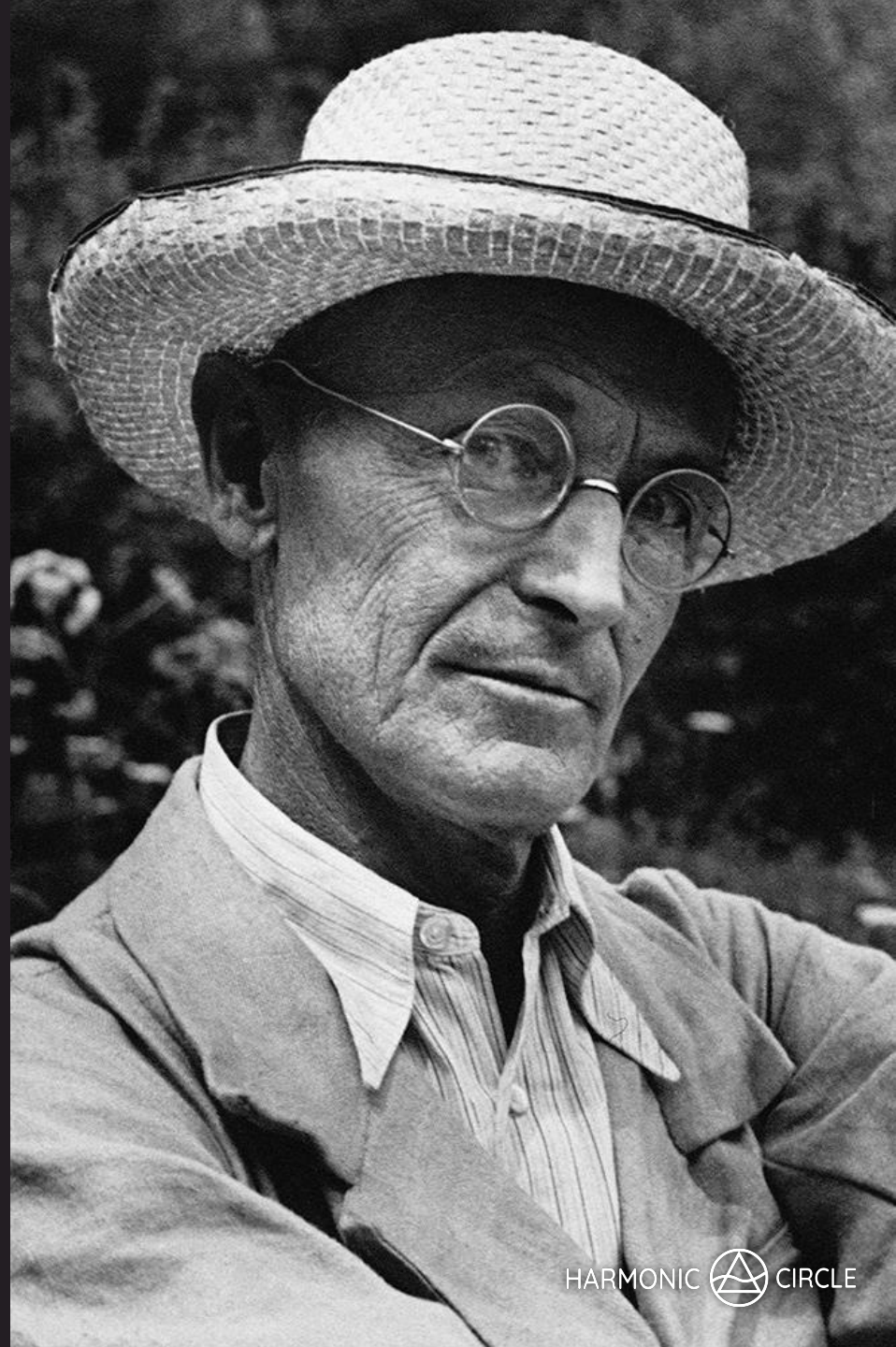


HARMONIC CIRCLE

“The wonder of the Bhagavad Gita lies in its splendid revelation of the wisdom of life, which enables philosophy to blossom into spirituality.”

— HERMANN HESSE

writer, Nobel Prize for Literature



“The Bhagavad Gītā is a true writing of humanity, a living creation rather than a book.”

— SRI AUROBINDO

indian philosopher, mystic and spiritual teacher



HARMONIC CIRCLE

“The Bhagavad Gītā is perhaps the most systematic scriptural exposition of the Perennial Philosophy.”

— ALDOUS HUXLEY

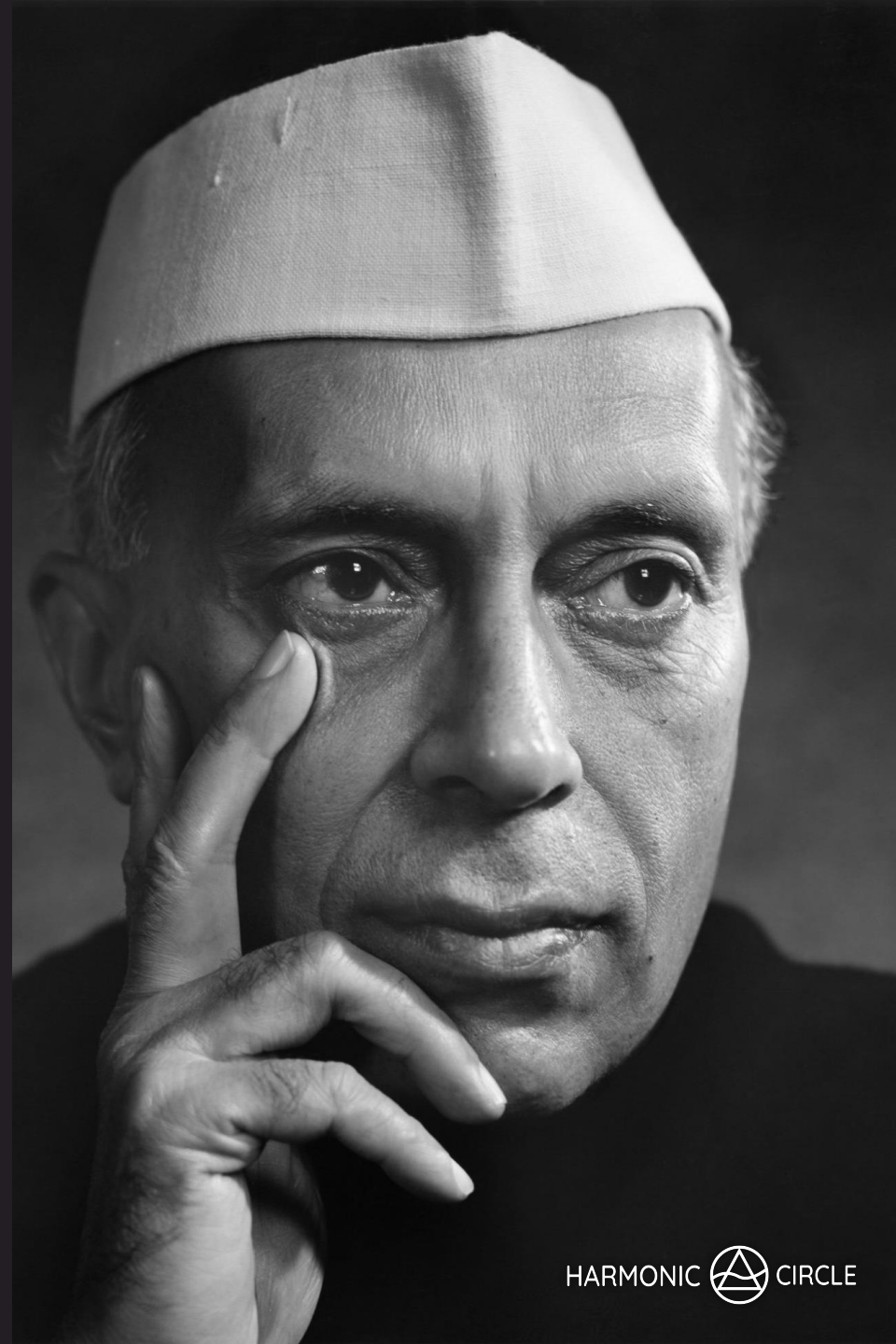
english writer and philosopher



“The Bhagavad Gītā deals essentially with the spiritual foundation of human existence. It is a call to action, to face the obligations and duties of life, keeping in mind the spiritual nature and the broader purpose of the universe."

— JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

first Prime Minister of India



HARMONIC CIRCLE

02

WHAT ARE THE VEDAS?

Section transition

I VEDA — UNA TRADIZIONE VIVENTE

TRASMISSIONE ORALE

The Vedas are the ancient collection of sacred texts of India, transmitted orally for centuries and composed in Sanskrit.

UN PATRIMONIO PLURALE

They include hymns, prayers, ritual teachings, philosophical reflections and indications on human life and the cosmos.

CONOSCENZA

The word Veda means "knowledge": in tradition they are a source of spiritual wisdom, not a single book.



03

TIME AND SPACE ACCORDING TO THE VEDAS

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

CYCLIC TIME

CICLO

In Vedic-Puranic cosmology, time does not proceed in a straight line towards a single end: the world manifests, transforms, dissolves and begins again in cycles.

SPAZIO

Many levels of existence (loka) and countless material universes remain temporary and subject to manifestation and dissolution.



I QUATTRO YUGA

DURATA

Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali together form a 4,320,000-year-old mahā-yuga.

QUALITY

Satya is clarity and righteousness; in Tretā they diminish; in Dvāpara good and conflict are balanced; in Kali confusion, division and material attachment prevail.



MAHĀ-VIṢṆU E BRAHMĀ

VASTNESS.

In the theological language of Brahma-saṁhitā, the universes emanate with the exhalation of Mahā-Viṣṇu and re-enter Him with the inspiration.

KALPA

A day of Brahmā lasts 1,000 mahā-yuga, that is, 4.32 billion human years; its night lasts just as long.



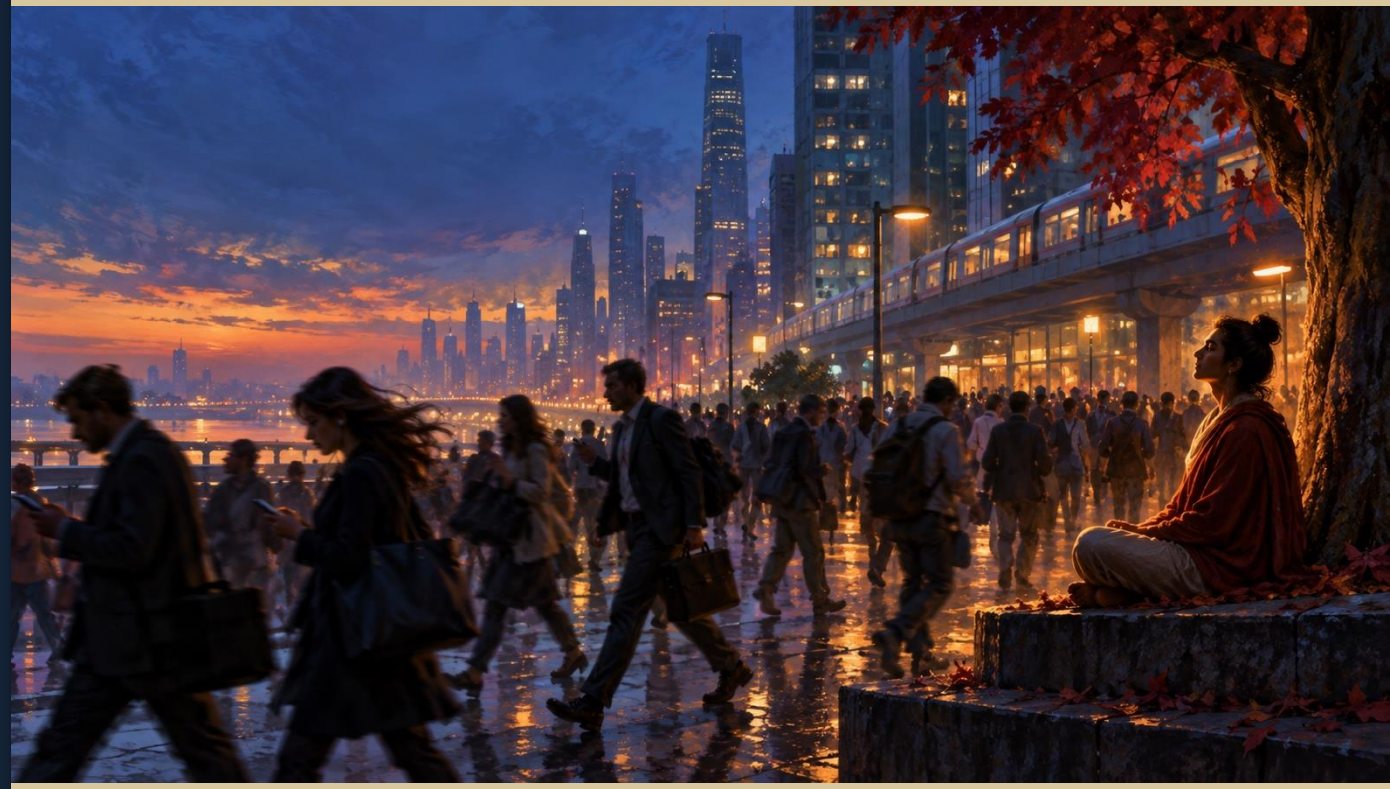
KALI-YUGA

432,000 YEARS

It is the era characterized by conflict, loss and weakening of the dharma.

CRONOLOGIA TRADIZIONALE

It begins with the departure of Krishna, a few decades after the events of the Gītā: around 3102 BC.



04

THE GĪTĀ IN CONTEXT: THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

IL MAHĀBHĀRATA

UNA GRANDE EPOPEA

Almost 100,000 verses, in 18 books: epic tale, dramatic dialogues, genealogies and stories within other stories.

UN CONFLITTO FAMILIARE

A succession struggle between Pāṇḍava and Kaurava, intertwined with questions about ethics, politics, law and dharma.



LA BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ NEL POEMA

700 VERSES

Dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, in the sixth book of the Mahābhārata.

TEMI

Duty, action, soul, death and rebirth, meditation, mind, Divine, devotion, guṇa, human qualities and liberation.



05

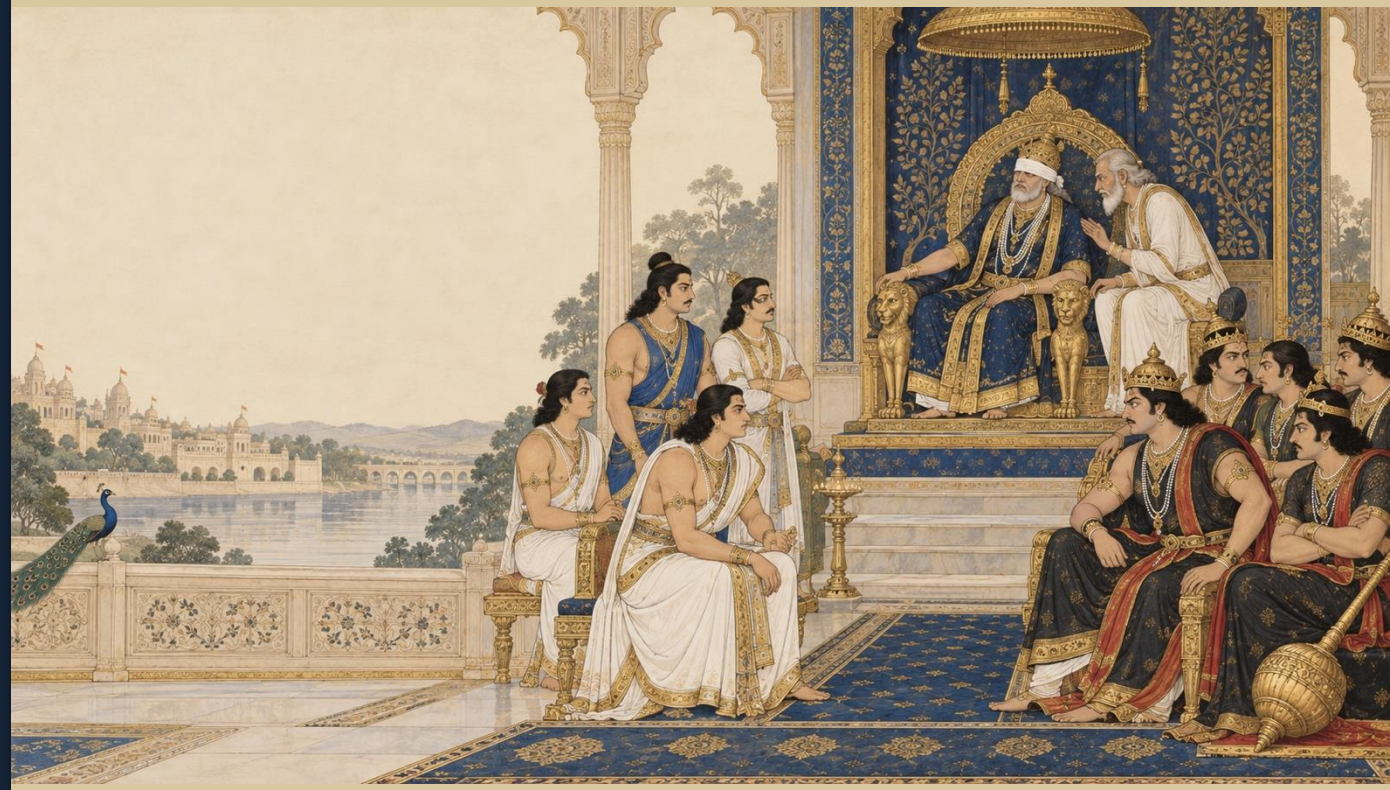
BACKGROUND, PLACES AND CHARACTERS OF THE GĪTĀ

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

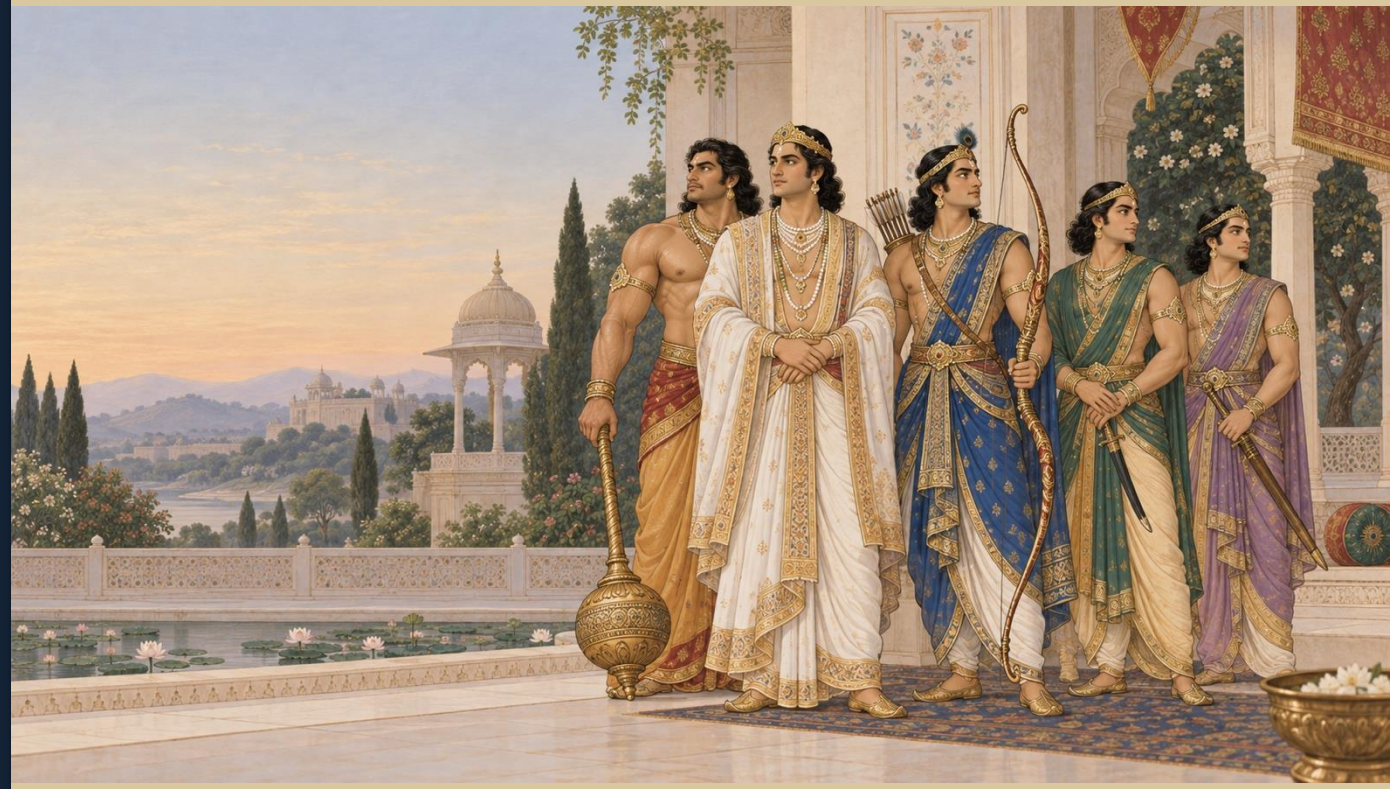
IL REGNO

Hastināpura is the capital of the Kuru dynasty. After the death of King Pāṇḍu, his older brother, the blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, rules the kingdom. However, two branches of the same family grow, both linked to the succession.



I PĀṆḌAVA

Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. Yudhiṣṭhira embodies justice and self-control; Bhīma strength and loyalty; Arjuna discipline and moral vulnerability; Nakula care and grace; Sahadeva discernment and sobriety.



ARJUNA

The greatest archer of the Pāṇḍava, disciplined and courageous, but precisely because he is sensitive to duty and affections, enters a deep moral crisis in the face of war.



DURYODHANA E I KAURAVA

They are the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Duryodhana, the eldest, is intelligent and courageous, but jealousy of the Pāṇḍava and attachment to power lead him to reject any compromise.



FROM RIVALRY TO WAR

Cousins grow up under Master Droṇa. The kingdom is divided and the Pāṇḍava transform a marginal land into the prosperous Indraprastha. Duryodhana then lures them into a rigged dice game: Yudhiṣṭhira loses the kingdom and Draupadī is publicly humiliated.



SILIUS AND PEACE REJECTED

The Pāṇḍavas live twelve years in the forest and a thirteenth year in hiding. When they return, they ask for the kingdom first, then only five villages. Duryodhana refuses. Krishna orients the protagonists towards dharma without removing them from responsibility for their own choices.



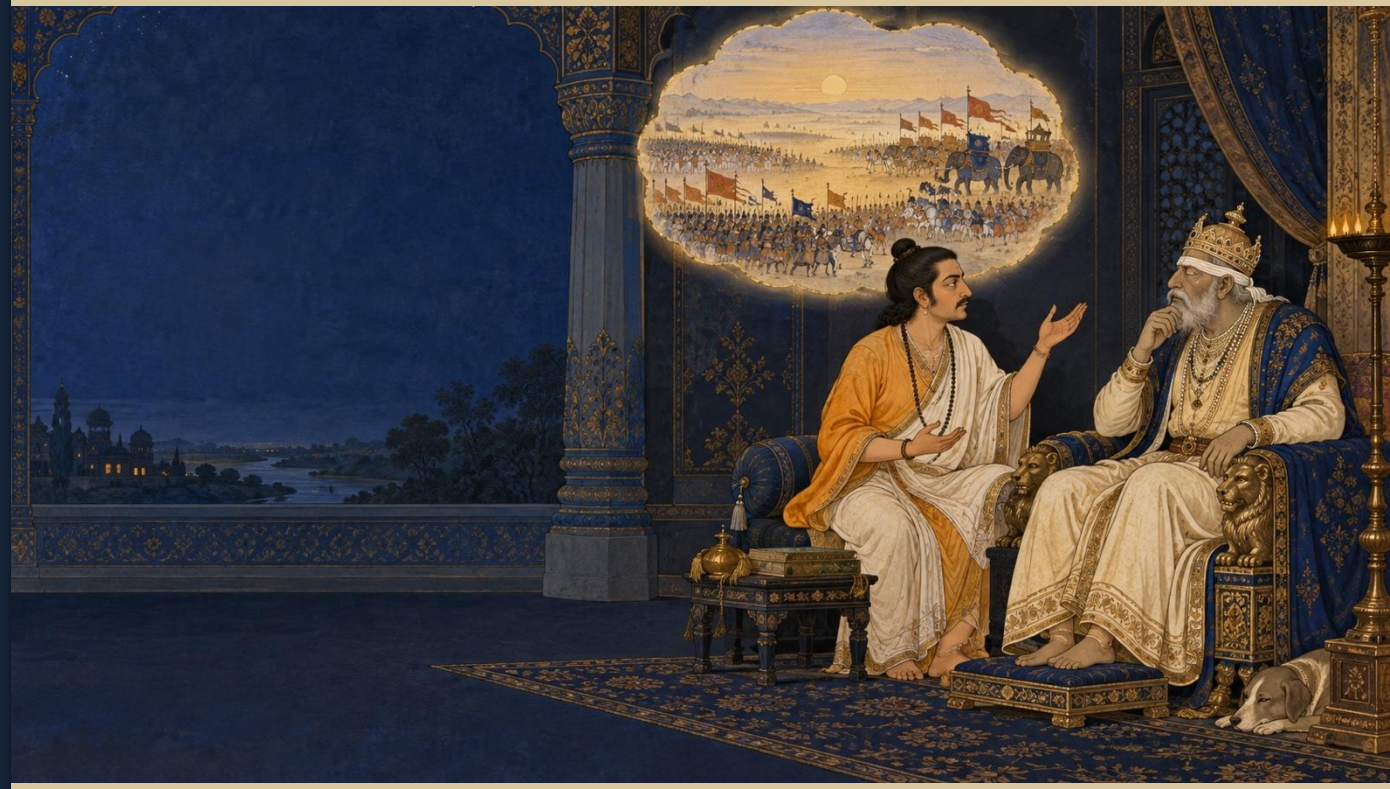
LA SCELTA DECISIVA

Krishna attempts mediation. He offers both sides his army or himself, unarmed: Duryodhana chooses the army; Arjuna chooses Krishna as his charioteer and guide.



DHṚTARĀṢṬRA E SAÑJAYA

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, father of the Kauravas, cannot stop Duryodhana. Sañjaya, thanks to the spiritual vision granted by Vyāsa, observes the battle from afar and narrates it to the king: the Gītā reaches us through her story.



KURUKṢETRA

Arjuna sees teachers, grandparents, cousins and friends in the opposing army. Lay down the bow. Here begins the Bhagavad-gītā.



06

THE STARTING POINT: ARJUNA, IN CRISIS, ASKS FOR HELP

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā 2.7 · Sanskrit and word for word

kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ
pṛcchāmi tvāṁ dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ
yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me
śiṣyas te ’haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam

Word by word

kārpaṇya — weakness of heart; doṣa — defect; upahata — overwhelmed; svabhāvaḥ — nature; pṛcchāmi — ask; dharma — duty; sammūḍha — confused; cetāḥ — mind and heart; śreyaḥ — the highest good; niścitam — with certainty; brūhi — tell me; śiṣyaḥ — disciple; śādhi — instruct; prapannam — entrusted.

Bhagavad-gītā 2.7 · English translation

“My nature is overwhelmed with weakness and my mind is confused about what is right. I ask you: tell me clearly what is really for my good. I am Your disciple: instruct me.”

07

KRISHNA REVEALS TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā · Conoscenza

4.38 In this world there is nothing comparable to spiritual knowledge, the highest form of purification.

5.16 When enlightened by knowledge that destroys ignorance, it reveals everything as the rising of the sun.

4.2 This supreme science was transmitted through a succession of masters; over time this succession was interrupted and the science seemed lost.

Bhagavad-gītā 9.2 · Sanskrit and word for word

rāja-vidyā rāja-guhyaṁ
pavitram idam uttamam
pratyakṣāvagamaṁ dharmyaṁ
su-sukhaṁ kartum avyayam

Word by word

rāja-vidyā — il re delle conoscenze; rāja-guhyam — il segreto più regale; pavitram — puro; idam — questo; uttamam — supremo; pratyakṣa — direttamente percepibile; avagamam — realizzabile; dharmyam — conforme al dharma; su-sukham — gioioso e facile; kartum — da praticare; avyayam — imperituro.

"This knowledge is the king among all sciences, the secret among secrets. It is the purest knowledge: it makes us realize our true identity directly; it is eternal and is applied with joy."

08

ĀTMĀ — THE VIEWPOINT OF THE SOUL

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā 2.20 · Sanskrit and word for word

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre

Word by word

na — non; jāyate — born; mriyate — dies; kadācit — never; ajaḥ — unborn; nityaḥ - eternal; śāśvataḥ - permanent; purāṇaḥ - ancient; hanyate — is killed; śarīre — in the body.

Bhagavad-gītā 2.20 · English translation

“The soul is neither born nor dies. It was not born, it is not born and it will not be born. It is unborn, eternal, always existing and original. She's not killed when the body is killed.”

11.32 I am time, destroyer of the worlds, come to engage all men.

13.34 Just as the sun alone illuminates the entire universe, so the spiritual soul illuminates the entire body with its conscience.

2.13 As the soul passes from childhood to youth and old age, so it passes into another body at the moment of death.

8.6 The memories one has when leaving the body determine the future condition of the being.

THE TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL

Bhagavad-gītā 2.13



HARMONIC CIRCLE

8.16 All material planets are places of suffering, where birth and death follow one another; those who reach My home are no longer reborn.

18.12 The triple result of actions — desirable, undesirable and mixed — awaits after death those who have not practiced renunciation.

09

SELF-MASTERY AND CONTROL OF THE MIND

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā 6.5 · Sanskrit and word for word

uddhared ātmanātmānaṁ
nātmānam avasādayet
ātmaiva hy ātmano bandhur
ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ

Word by word

uddharet — to elevate; ātmanā — through the mind; ātmānam — oneself; avasādayet — to degrade; bandhuḥ — friend; ripuḥ — enemy.

Bhagavad-gītā 6.5 · English translation

“Elevate yourself with the help of your mind, without degrading. The mind can be the friend of the conditioned soul and also its enemy.”

Bhagavad-gītā · La mente

6.6 For those who have conquered the mind, it is the best friend; for those who fail, the worst enemy.

6.18 When the yogi regulates the activities of the mind and is free from selfish desire, he is situated in transcendence.

6.19 As a flame sheltered from the wind does not waver, so the mind-controlling spiritualist stands still in meditation.

6.26 Wherever the mind wanders, it must be brought under the control of the spiritual self.

Bhagavad-gītā 6.33 · Sanskrit and word for word

arjuna uvāca
yo ’yaṁ yogas tvayā proktaḥ
sāmyena madhusūdana
etasyāhaṁ na paśyāmi cañcalatvāt sthitiṁ sthirām

Word by word

arjuna uvāca — Arjuna disse; yogaḥ — yoga; tvayā proktaḥ — da Te esposto; sāmyena — dell’equanimità; na paśyāmi — non vedo; cañcalatvāt — a causa dell’instabilità; sthitim sthirām — stabilità durevole.

Bhagavad-gītā 6.33 · English translation

“Arjuna said: O Madhusūdana, I do not see lasting stability in this yoga of equanimity that you have exposed to me, because the mind is restless and unstable.”

Bhagavad-gītā 6.34 · Sanskrit and word for word

cañcalaṁ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa
pramāthi balavad dṛḍham
tasyāhaṁ nigrahaṁ manye
vāyor iva su-duṣkaram

Word by word

cañcalam — restless; manaḥ — mind; pramāthi — turbulent; balavat — very strong; dṛḍham - obstinate; nigraham — dominate it; vāyoḥ — of the wind; su-duṣkaram — very difficult.

Bhagavad-gītā 6.34 · English translation

“The mind is restless, turbulent, stubborn, and very strong, O Kṛṣṇa; mastering it seems to me more difficult than controlling the wind.”

Bhagavad-gītā 6.35 · Sanskrit and word for word

śrī-bhagavān uvāca
asaṁśayaṁ mahā-bāho
mano durnigrahaṁ calam
abhyāsena tu kaunteya
vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate

Word by word

śrī-bhagavān uvāca — il Beato Signore disse; asaṁśayaṁ — senza dubbio; manaḥ — mente; durnigraham — difficile da dominare; abhyāsena — con la pratica; vairāgyeṇa — con il distacco; gṛhyate — la si padroneggia.

Bhagavad-gītā 6.35 · English translation

“The Blessed Lord said: O mighty-armed Arjuna, it is doubtless difficult to master the agitated mind; yet, O son of Kuntī, it can be mastered by practice and detachment.”

10

KARMA-YOGA: ACTION THAT LIBERATES AND ACTION THAT BINDS

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā 2.47 · Sanskrit and word for word

karmaṇy evādhikāras te
mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr
mā te saṅgo ’stv akarmaṇi

Word by word

karmaṇi — in action; adhikāraḥ — right and responsibility; phaleṣu — in results; karma-phala — fruit of action; hetuḥ — motive; saṅgaḥ — attachment; akarmaṇi — inaction.

Bhagavad-gītā 2.47 · English translation

“You have responsibility only for the action, never for its results. Don't make the result your motive, but don't cling to inaction either.”

Bhagavad-gītā 3.9 · Sanskrit and word for word

yajñārthāt karmaṇo ’nyatra
loko ’yaṁ karma-bandhanaḥ
tad-arthaṁ karma kaunteya
mukta-saṅgaḥ samācara

Word by word

yajña-arthāt — for the purpose of sacred offering; karmaṇaḥ — of action; anyatra — otherwise; karma-bandhanaḥ — binding of action; mukta-saṅgaḥ — free from attachment.

Bhagavad-gītā 3.9 · English translation

“Except when performed as a sacred offering, action binds. So act in this spirit, free from possessive attachment.”

11

THE THREE GUṆAS: QUALITIES OF MATERIAL NATURE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā 14.5 · Sanskrit and word for word

sattvaṁ rajas tama iti
guṇāḥ prakṛti-sambhavāḥ
nibadhnanti mahā-bāho
dehe dehinam avyayam

Word by word

sattvam — clarity, harmony; rajaḥ — passion, impulse; tamaḥ — inertia, darkness; iti — so; guṇāḥ — quality; prakṛti-sambhavāḥ — born of material nature; nibadhnanti — binding; mahā-bāho — or powerful; dehe — in the body; dehinam — the incarnate being; avyayam — imperishable.

"Material nature is formed by three influences: virtue, passion and ignorance. The living being, coming into contact with it, becomes conditioned by it."

THE THREE GUṆAS

Three qualities that colour experience and behaviour

SATTVA

Clarity
harmony
equilibrium

RAJAS

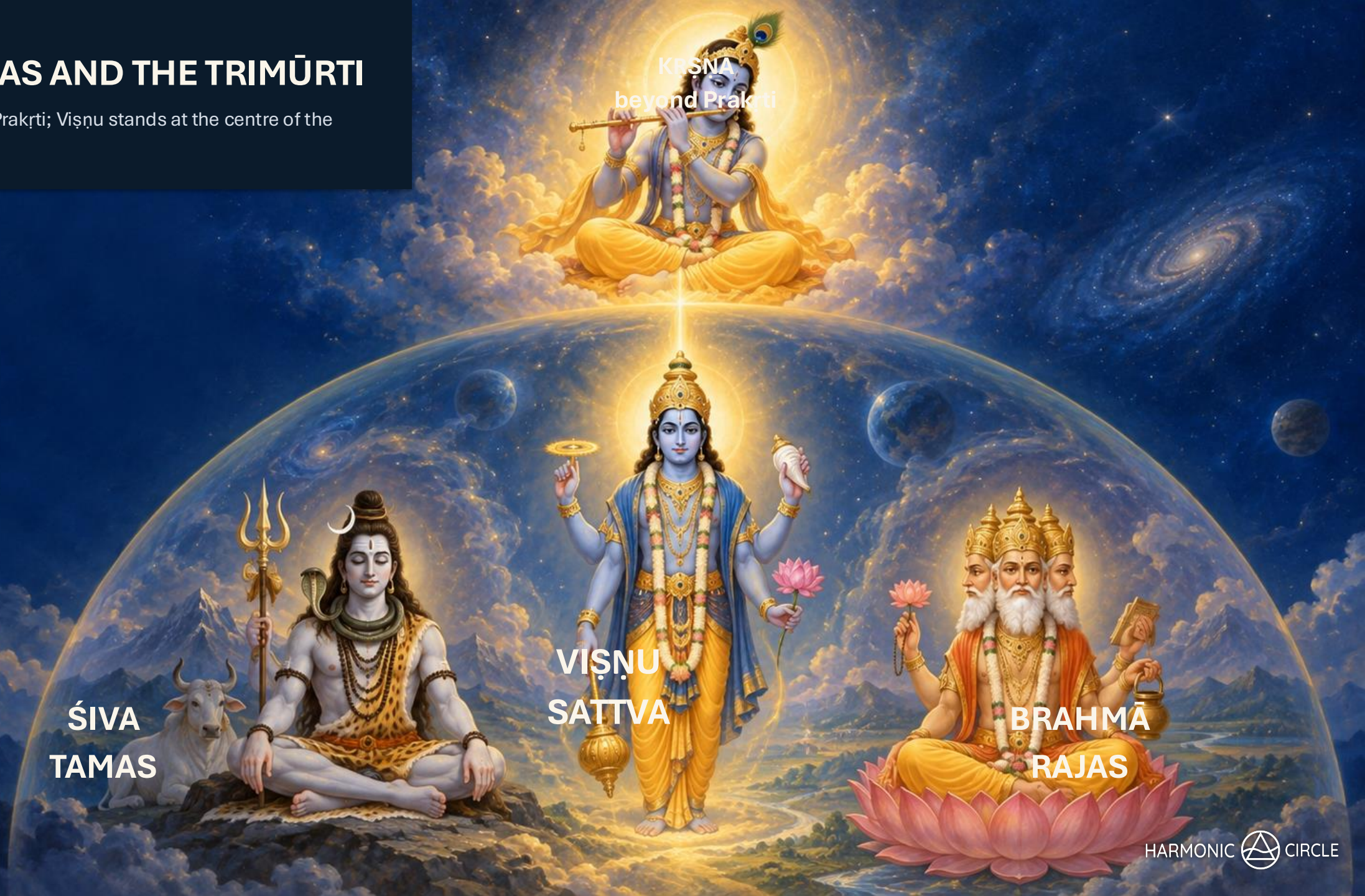
Impulse
desire
restlessness

TAMAS

Inertia
darkness
confusion

THE GUṆAS AND THE TRIMŪRTI

Kṛṣṇa is beyond Prakṛti; Viṣṇu stands at the centre of the Trimūrti.



HARMONIC CIRCLE

14.16 Activity in virtue leads to purification; in passion to suffering; in ignorance to stupidity.

14.17 From virtue comes true knowledge; from passion greed; from ignorance madness, stupidity and illusion.

14.18 Virtue elevates, passion maintains in the intermediate worlds, and ignorance leads to lower worlds.

7.14 This divine energy, formed by the three influences, is difficult to overcome; those who entrust themselves directly to Me easily overstep its limits.

12

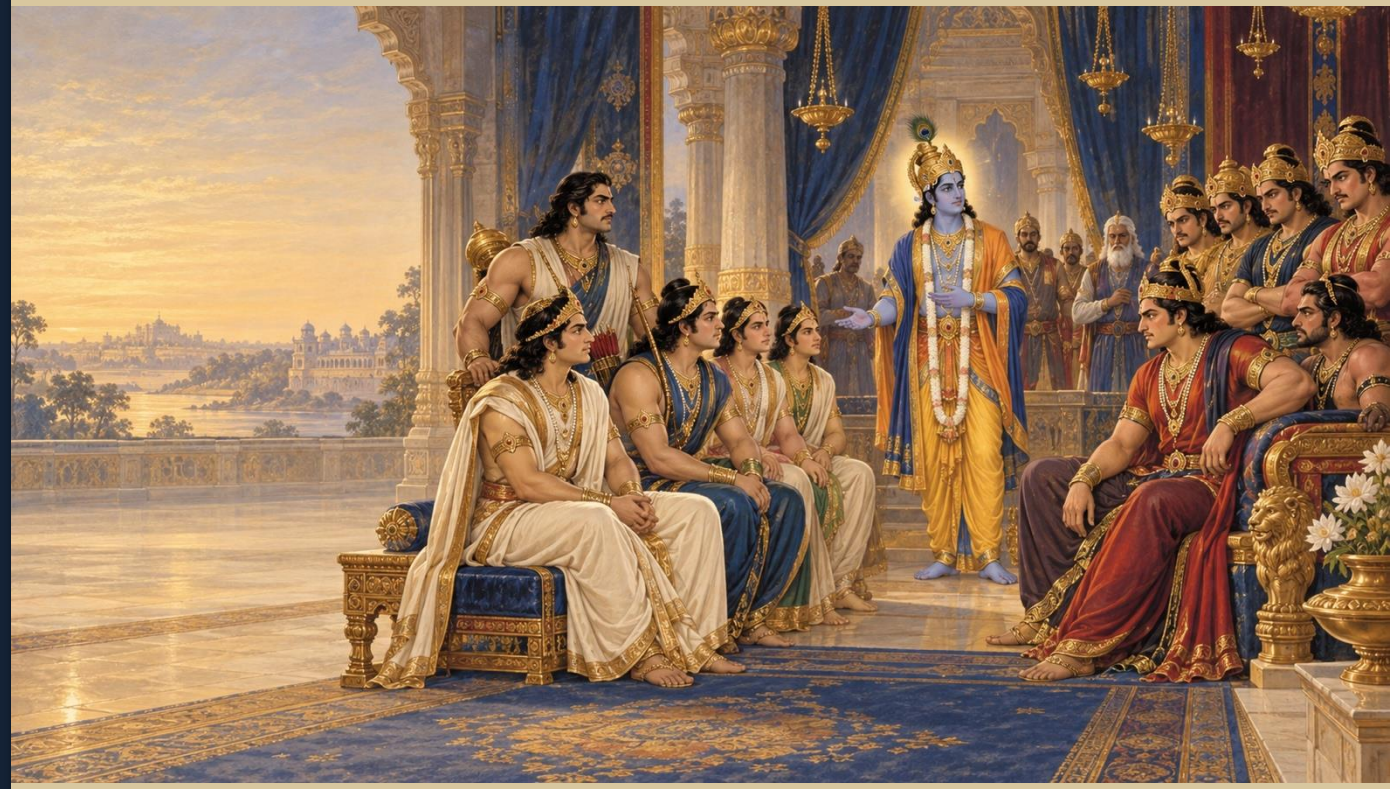
DIVINE AND ASURIC NATURE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

ASURICO

Asuric, from asura, indicates in the Vedic tradition trends that move away from the light and harmony of the dharma: selfishness, arrogance, greed and illusion. It does not designate satanic entities, but qualities of human consciousness present in every being.



Bhagavad-gītā 16.4 · Sanskrit and word for word

dambho darpo ’bhimānaś ca
krodhaḥ pāruṣyam eva ca
ajñānaṁ cābhijātasya
pārtha sampadam āsurīm

Word by word

dambhaḥ — ostentation; darpaḥ — arrogance; abhimānaḥ — presumptuous pride; ca — e; krodhaḥ — anger; pāruṣyam — hardness; eva — certainly; ajñānam — ignorance; abhijātasya — of the one who was born with; pārtha — or son of Pṛthā; sampadam — quality; āsurīm — asurics.

"Ostentation, arrogance, presumptuous pride, anger, hardness and ignorance are the qualities of those who possess an asuric nature."

15.20 He who understands this most confidential part of the Vedic Scriptures becomes wise and attains perfection.

16.6 In this world there are divine and asuric natures.

16.10 Fascinated by the ephemeral, asuric men devote their lives to unhealthy activities.

16.7 They do not know what must be done and what must not be done; in them there is no purity, right conduct or truthfulness.

16.9 Lost and devoid of intelligence, they dedicate themselves to harmful works that aim to destroy the world.

13

EQUANIMITY AND SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

Bhagavad-gītā 2.14 · Sanskrit and word for word

mātrā-sparśās tu kaunteya
śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ
āgamāpāyino ’nityās
tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata

Word by word

mātrā-sparśāḥ — contact of the senses with objects; tu — ma; kaunteya — or son of Kuntī; śīta — cold; uṣṇa — warm; sukha — pleasure; duḥkha — pain; dāḥ — giving; āgama — coming; apāyinaḥ — passing; anityāḥ — impermanent; tān — them; titikṣasva — tolerates; bhārata — or descendant of Bharata.

Bhagavad-gītā 2.14 · English translation

"Joy and pain are ephemeral: they come and go like summer and winter; you have to learn to tolerate them without being disturbed."

Bhagavad-gītā · Equanimità

5.20 Whoever does not rejoice over what is pleasant nor complain about what is unpleasant, with intelligence fixed on the soul, is already situated in transcendence.

6.7 For those who have conquered the mind, joy and pain, cold and heat, honor and dishonor are equal.

16.1–3 Absence of fear, purification, spiritual knowledge, charity, self-control, simplicity, nonviolence, truthfulness, serenity, compassion, modesty, forgiveness, purity and absence of envy are qualities of divine nature.

2.56–57 The wise man with a firm mind is not troubled by suffering or intoxicated by joy; free from attachment, fear, and anger, he does not exult for good or detest evil.

14

BHAKTI — THE PATH OF DEVOTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Section transition

4.11 All men follow My way, one way or another; according as they turn to Me, so I answer them.

7.3 Among thousands of men, perhaps one will seek perfection; and among those who attain it, those who truly know Me are rare.

Bhagavad-gītā 18.66 · Sanskrit and word for word

sarva-dharmān parityajya
mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja
ahaṁ tvāṁ sarva-pāpebhyo
mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ

Word by word

sarva-dharmān — tutti i doveri e rifugi limitati; parityajya — lasciando; mām — a Me; ekam — solo; śaraṇam — rifugio; vraja — vieni; mokṣayiṣyāmi — libererò; mā śucaḥ — non temere.

Bhagavad-gītā 18.66 · English translation

“Leave every limited refuge and come to Me only for refuge. I will free you from every harmful bond. Don't worry.”

GOVINDA

The transcendent source, beyond Prakṛti.

Thank you

