



Bhagavad Gita



**English
podcast transcript**

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Dialogues on the order of things

English transcript

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ES = Eliane Schmid

AM = Angelika Malinar

MH = Michael Hampe

ES: Hello and welcome to Wisdom Talks, the podcast accompanying the METIS project, the internet portal for intercultural wisdom literature and wisdom practices to be found on www.metis.ethz.ch. My name is Eliane Schmid and I will be hosting today's podcast centered on the Bhagavad Gita, a 700 verse Hindu text that is part of the Indian epic Mahabharata. It is today considered one of the most significant philosophical classics in the world. The late 18th century Prussian philosopher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, described the Bhagavad Gita as the most beautiful, or perhaps even the only true philosophical poem that literature has to offer. Indian anti-colonial nationalist, Mahatma Gandhi, allegedly said in the early 20th century that the Gita was always a source of comfort to him, saving him from much harm in the vicissitudes of fate. And today, Angelika Malinar, who is in the studio with us will explain her conception of the Bhagavad Gita and what lies behind the sacred Hindu text of wisdom. Angelika Malinar is Professor for Indian Studies at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies at the University of Zurich. Hello and welcome, Angelika Malinar.

AM: Hello Eliane.

ES: Also in the studio with us is Michael Hampe, the initiator of the METIS Project and Professor of Philosophy at ETH Zurich. A warm welcome to you too.

MH: Hello.

ES: Mrs. Malinar, could you give us some more information about the Bhagavad Gita? What kind of text is this? How did it come into being and who was it written for?

AM: As you already pointed out, the *Bhagavad Gita* is part of a literary text, one of the ancient Sanskrit epics of India. The epic is supposed to be composed around the beginning of the common era. The *Bhagavad Gita* is part of this epic, and this means that it is also written in Sanskrit meters. So it's stanzas, it's the first text written in meter, and it's a dialogue between one of the epic heroes called Arjuna and his charioteer and also his comrade throughout much of the epic, Krishna. This text is placed within the larger plot of the epic, right at the beginning of an 18-day battle between two parts of one family. The epic deals with a power struggle, or you could also say dynastic succession, in North India. It's about who will rule a North Indian kingdom of the Kuru Panchalas.

And the point of this epic is that it's really a family feud. So it's not between an outsider and an insider defending, but it's really describing the inner conflict and the violence that evolves in this family. And this dialogue starts, as I said, right when the two armies assembled on the battlefield. In this moment, Arjuna, the epic hero, asks his charioteer to move his chariot in this space between the two armies. And then Arjuna realizes that it's not just a usual fight, but that his enemies are his brothers, his grandfather, his friends, and so on and so forth. And in this moment, he has a crisis, asking himself why he should fight relatives and what would be the meaning of this fight. And what then ensues is this about 700-something dialogue between him and this charioteer, according to what kind of law, what kind of value he should now, in a way, evaluate, judge, and relate to the situation.

In the course of this dialogue, Krishna gives several kinds of answers and Arjuna questions these answers. Eventually, the charioteer Krishna reveals himself to be the supreme being in the cosmos and gives the advice – and there is then also a change in the style of the text, where we have a real poetic part of the text in which there is a hymn – which Arjuna then addresses to the vision or the theophany. It's sometimes described that this highest being reveals himself to the hero Arjuna, and the answer is then that the hero should fight this war. This cannot be avoided for several reasons, and he should fight it for the love to the world and also out of loyalty to him as the highest being who is the creator and protector of cosmic order.

ES: This sounds really like an epic piece of literature. Would you call it literature or as Humboldt said, is it a philosophical poem? And also, what I'm wondering is this, in a sense, a fun text to read because it sounds almost like one of these adventure stories.

AM: Well, it is the plot, the revelation of or the transformation of the charioteer into a God or the supreme being is a storyline you could say, okay, this is then the culmination of this text when the true identity of one of the interlocutors is revealed. I would agree with Humboldt to that point that you could say yes, it is a literary framed text. So this means you need, in a way, to recognize the literary framing of the text and the highly literalized situation that is created in order to really bring across the dramatic crisis Arjuna is experiencing in the battlefield and the poetic parts of the text. Yes, I would say they justify calling it poetic.

MH: We've talked now about the poetic tone of the text and the philosophical impact it has, but you, Ms. Malinar, said that it also reveals the highest being of the cosmos Krishna. And does that mean that the text has a status of being a revelation as well? Could one compare it, for example, to the passage in the Old Testament where Moses meets God in the burning bush? Or does it have a different status in India? Is it not a holy text in the same sense in which the Old Testament is a holy text for the mosaic religions?

AM: Well, one can say that the history of the reception of the *Bhagavad Gita* would justify the status of the text, but it's definitely a later development. The mere fact that a human being or a being that appears to be a human being reveals itself to be some other type of being is

something quite common in Indian literature. And we have also in the epic at least two more or three more texts in which such a being is revealed. The original status is not that the *Bhagavad Gita* was viewed as a revelation text. It is one of several revelation texts we have, even in the *Mahabharata* epic, but also in other contemporary texts. And it is only in the later history of the reception of the text that it is really accorded a position that can be compared to that group of text that since the beginning of Sanskrit literature was recognized as a sacred text, the *Vedas*, the ancient ritual texts, which can be dated around 1000-1500 before the composition of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

And it is only when a philosophical interpretations of the *Veda*, but also of this monotheistic revelation texts, if you want to say it like that, started, which is about the 6th, 7th, 8th century CE, so many centuries after what is possibly the date of the composition of the *Bhagavad Gita*, that this text then, in a way, gets the status of a sacred text that philosophers need to comment on in order to justify their philosophical doctrine or their philosophical teachings in a contested field of philosophy. But then, and you mentioned Gandhi in the introduction to this talk today, of course in the 19th century, 20th century, with the whole encounter between European colonial rule academic interest, but also Christian missionary activities in India and the problems that were created through this encounter, for instance, through the creation of the term 'Hinduism', which was a new term created in this connection, there was then the quest, so what would be the equivalent of the Bible in India?

And then two candidates were there. On the one hand, these *Vedas* and on the other hand the *Bhagavad Gita*, which from the early 19th century – and you referred to Wilhelm von Humboldt – was extremely popular in Europe once it was translated for the first time from Sanskrit into English. And at that point, the *Bhagavad Gita* became one of the central texts in modern India also for the self-perception and self-representation of Hinduism as a religion that represents Indian, or important aspects, of Indian cultural history. And then of course, you find descriptions of the *Bhagavad Gita* as the Bible of Hinduism and all that, but it is certainly not to be compared with the Bible in the sense of this use of the *Bhagavad Gita* as an identification point of India or of Hinduism at large. It was, as I said, in certain circles, highly necessary to deal

with it and to comment upon it. And therefore, you have also many, many different interpretations of the text and also of the figure of Krishna. Is Krishna really the God or is he only an embodiment of another highest being? All these issues were debated.

ES: If you Google and ask Wikipedia and ChatGPT and whoever the general source is that you ask about this text, they tell you that it's a Hindu text, but if I understand you correctly, it's not necessarily only a text related to Hinduism, but it can be a more general text for everyone to read?

AM: Well, originally it was for all the audiences of the epic and who had the occasion to listen to it. And one has to say the epic is one of the texts in India that was open to all the classes. And it was also, in a way, in contrast to the Vedic texts which were only for the male members of the upper three castes. So women and also the lower classes were excluded from practicing this text. But the *Bhagavad Gita* had from the very beginning, this idea of an outreach of a comprehensive audience, which of course meant epic audiences, so near to the royal courts in which these epics were transmitted and whose composition was also funded by these royal circles. It's quite clear I think this provenance and the social context we have to imagine for this text. But of course, it was very popular then in the practice. Of course, we do not have much data on the practice that the text was actually then taught in Sanskrit with an on-spot translation and an explanation in the different regional and local languages of India. And what is on the other hand different – also to maybe monotheistic religions that are connected to the biblical tradition – is that there is a skepticism towards missionary activity. So it is said that you should not go with the *Bhagavad Gita* in your hand and spreading the good news of Krishna being the highest being, but only to those who sympathize already with the text, who are open, who maybe have similar issues in their life, that's the text to read, but it's not something where you should convert people to a specific face. And I think this is something very important also to notice why then the comparison with the Bible needs to be qualified.

ES: You alluded to some key themes and topics before that come time and again in the text that are important also for this text and the people consuming it, I will call it that now, but could you-

AM: But maybe I can also add one thing: one of the important features of the *Bhagavad Gita* is that this narrative frame and this connection to the epic remains an important feature of the text for the audiences. You asked me for this mystery-thing and the fun part of the text and the attractiveness of the text, and I think that despite the sometimes heavy philosophical content of the text and there's all this terminology, there are these features of the text, the beginning of the text with this crisis, and then the revelation text where Krishna appears as the highest being, also explains why this text became so important and popular because both of these characters that, in a way, are in the dialogue are for the epic audiences, very familiar characters. So you have an immediate relationship to these characters. And this of course helps to anchor this text and the dialogue and in particular, the situation of crisis I think very much in audiences. This is also manifested in that the text itself, the *Bhagavad Gita*, was then very soon taken out of the epic and transmitted independently in manuscripts and so on, independent from the epic. And still, all commentators and so on, they do not start when philosophy starts in Chapter 2 or something, but they start at the very beginning with this crisis and you cannot take that literary dimension and, if you want, the poetic dimension away from the text without taking also away a very important aspect of its content.

MH: Can you say a little bit more perhaps about what philosophical means in this context? You pointed out already that there is an ethical problem going on, should you fight against your relatives or not? Should you withdraw from a fight or obey the God and do what Krishna says? And on the other hand, you said that Krishna reveals himself as the highest cosmic being. So there seems to be, say, a theoretical or cosmological impact in the text and an ethical impact. Are these distinctions that exist in the Indian tradition already or is it a Western projection to talk about cosmological and ethical aspects of philosophy here?

AM: I think these levels are very much addressed in the text explicitly along the lines of certain terminology. And I think if we want to deal with the philosophical dimension of the text, I think the first thing is that in contrast to other so-called didactic texts we have in the Indian tradition, telling you how to act, why to act and so on, and for what purpose, the philosophical dimension of the *Bhagavad Gita* can be really spotted in that it takes this crisis to a more fundamental

level in raising the question, what is action? What does it mean to follow norms, and how can you justify these norms and what repercussions can be justified? And this is the point of departure of the text and then it develops along the line of certain very heavily loaded terms that are newly interpreted in the text.

MH: Do I understand it rightly that there is an interconnection between theoretical and practical problems? If one...

AM: Yes.

MH:...would describe it in Western philosophical terms that the theory of action and ethics cannot be separated?

AM: Exactly. You cannot, in a way, talk merely theoretically about a very fundamental issue. You have to decide...at the end of the day, you have to decide, do I fight or not? And so whatever theoretical discussion you present and whatever theories you put forward, at the end of the day, there's somebody who will take that either to the battlefield or withdraws from it. And before doing so, one has to consider the repercussions of such actions. And this cannot be done merely theoretically.

ES: Moving away from theory and more to practice, the Bhagavad Gita has found its place also now in Western societies and everyday life. And what I would like to know more about is that there are these concepts such as yoga, yogi, karma, but also dharma that have become ingrained also in our Western society. How did that link happen and are these terms still carrying the same meaning or have they shifted quite a bit?

AM: Well, I think to come back what we discussed before, these terms, you can go along these terms and try to decipher what the text is all about, the textual content and these texts or these three terms you now listed: dharma, karma and yoga, let's stay with this. Actually milestones, if you want to say so, where you can really follow the argumentation, the argument of Krishna, but also the doubts of Arjuna up to this revelation of Krishna as the highest being. And so, it is not astonishing that these key terms, which were already, in a way, highly debated

at the time – the *Bhagavad Gita* was probably composed at the beginning of the Common Era – as I said before, remain quite important also in nowadays discussions when the *Bhagavad Gita* has, in a way, reached global audiences, has been translated in many, many languages. And of course, certain key concepts of the Indian tradition have also been received in intellectual but also general circles of the Western world. It's not by chance, or just a mere coincidence of a history of cultural encounter that we now have global yoga and dharma is a term you find in pop songs and so on. Or karman is now also entering German dictionary books and the English Oxford Dictionary also has an entry of karman taken as English or German words. But in the *Bhagavad Gita*, these terms are of course, part of an argument about this very issue of: why fight a war you cannot make sense of? You actually need to refuse to fight because you are fighting your brothers, your kin and your relatives. And the key issue, to start with dharma, the whole text starts with the question: I cannot see no longer any meaning in the dharma, which means the law or the norms and the recommended practice by tradition that allows me to live a good life and also to have a meritorious, pleasant afterlife.

And this was promised to Arjuna before, to go and fight. You perform your duty, your dharma as a warrior and everything will be fine. Your family will prosper and, in the end, will end up with the gods in heaven and celebrate all day long. Now he sees, when I do that, I will maybe commit a sin because it's not allowed otherwise to just kill your family members. So you need to have a legitimation. Arjuna asked Krishna, "What would be the right practice? What is the law? What is the norm that is now to be applied here?" And the first answer Krishna gives is, "The law is you are a warrior, you have to fight no matter what." And then he says, "Okay, if this is your message, I want to become an ascetic. I want to have a different dharma. I want to pursue a different way of life, a different normative order because I do not want to be involved in this bloody business."

He refuses to perform his karman. And so there is a strong connection between dharma in the sense of law and order and the karman, the way you perform the dharma, is called karman. This means ritual action. It is an action which is always connected to a fruit. If you perform karman, you always – which sounds very familiar now, where we have karma all over the place

– so everything you do has consequences. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the important point is that the *Bhagavad Gita* reinterprets karman, withdraws it from a purely ritual understanding, meaning only the ritual act, the karman that I want to produce certain fruits, now becomes generalized as a general involvement in the world where you always have to be very mindful what you are actually doing to yourself and to others and to the world at large through what you do.

And this has then also repercussions for the idea of dharma because before dharma was something highly individual. You have certain practices, and these are the fruits. In the time of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the word dharma assumes a new interpretation and meaning: socio-cosmic order, which means an ideal typical notion that if everybody performs his or her dharma as it is prescribed, then we have an ideal socio-cosmic order, also called dharma, which entails that everybody follows his or her course and does dharma and so on, then all living beings in the world have a chance to live more or less nicely and can pursue their goals. If this is disturbed, so if certain parts in the world do not do dharma or follow the norms, then the whole order deranges. And Krishna explains: Dear Arjuna, the moment has come that exactly members of your family are behaving in a way that the whole structure of cosmic order and social order, which allows all living beings, including your family, to realize these goals are to reap the fruits of this performance of dharma. Because they misbehaved that much, you now have to fight them in order to preserve the overall social cosmic system.

MH: Perhaps I may ask a question on the situation in which the hero, Arjuna, is and can one draw a parallel to what is called a tragic situation in the West, if you think about Orestes who has a duty to take revenge for the killing of his father, but the person who killed his father was his mother. So if he takes revenge, he has to kill his mother, but killing your mother is a sin. So whatever he does, he will corrupt the law. Is that a similar situation? Is Arjuna in a tragic situation?

AM: Yes, you could say it's a tragic situation and it's exactly aporetic. It's an aporetic situation where everything you do appears to the person in the situation as wrong, as painful, as something he cannot possibly want given what he has seen, what he has learned until now. And this tragic situation results in this breakdown, which is this complete...the weapons slip out of

his hands and so on, he cannot go on and it is this facing of a problem he cannot solve. It is a tragedy. The whole epic also after the justification of the war remains a tragedy for all sides. And it's not that with the answer of the *Bhagavad Gita*, things are settled for all because it's always, even in the aftermath of this epic battle, there are voices, why did this have to happen? Why could this not be avoided? The *Mahabharata* epic really has, one could say, a tragic core, which is different from the other epic, the *Ramayana*, which also has such points, but in the *Mahabharata*, we are so much confronted with suffering, with aporetic structures, that there is not really a happy end. Also in the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is no good news that you can say, yes, you can avoid it. Or that Krishna says: I will, in a way, take away all the sins. No, it's a confrontation with the aporetic situation and that you have to make hard choices – and this is then the justification path – you have to sacrifice even relatives in order to preserve the order for all beings or the majority of the living beings, which includes also animals, plants, the gods, the demons and so on. Not only human beings. This is, I think, also very important part. But yes, I would say the rest is parallel, it's a very matching one.

ES: So this text offers no consolation, in a sense, and no way out of suffering?

AM: Yes, it offers a consolation, but first of all, one has to experience this dilemma, this aporetic situation, this tragedy, in order to perceive the consolation. Arjuna's first reaction is if this is what my dharma, my duties are all about, then I don't want them, then I want to retire into the forest, practice asceticism and leave the social life. And Krishna says: No, this is no solution to your problem because you interpret what it means to act in the world very egotistically. Your criteria for action, for karman, for doing karman is: Do I suffer or not? Are these fruits of my actions positive or are they negative? And Krishna says this is wrong, this is very egoistic. You cannot, in a way, live according to certain values, only if these values suit you. You cannot choose if you like your cosmic order or not. You have to deal with the cosmic order, and you have to find a relationship to it. Just leaving from one moment to the other will not solve the problem because all the attachments that create the suffering and that create the tragedy will remain with you. And this is where the concept of yoga comes in. The core point is now, yes, you need to act in the world, you need to really create a clear idea or you have to attain a clear

idea. What is the situation? What is cosmic order? What is your own action? What is your relationship to this action? In order to do so, you first of all have to get rid of the idea that karman is all about what you gain or what you avoid by doing an action. And this means you first of all have to detach yourself, which means you have to become a yogi, a person who controls, who restrains emotions, positive, negative emotions and so on in order to be enabled to be in the position to think about the situation clearly, with a clear mind and not a mind affected by all kinds of ideas, emotions, which are not really clear.

And this is why then in the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says at one point: Listen, your duty is not success or failure. Your duty is to perform what you have to do in order to keep the dharma, the social cosmic order, and therefore you have to learn yoga to become a *yogin*. Because yoga means also connecting or linking, yoga means de-linking, de-connecting, disconnecting yourself from suffering. So yoga means *viyoga*, going away from all the entanglements you find yourself in, and then all the misconceptions you have about what karma is, what dharma is, and so on.

ES: If we put this on a more general level, the person as such has to take themselves out of the situation and think for the greater good, in a sense. So you, as a single person are not that important, but you have to think about the bigger picture.

AM: You as a single person are important because dharma functions only as a socio-cosmic order, which allows all kind of living beings to live happily or a good life or to live at all, if you are very careful, if each and every individual is very careful about what he and she is doing. Dharma is all over the place and also karman is all over the place. Everything you do, in a way, has certain repercussions for yourself but also for others. One has to get a clear understanding that this concern, is the concern you need to train yourself to develop because this is not something you have learned to do. What you have learned to do is to say: I feel like that, and this is positive, this is negative. Your education or socialization has told you this and this is positive, negative, and so on. And you have learned to appropriate the world through these filters of what is advertised as being good or bad. But this is a very one-sided, biased, limited view, and therefore, you have to also think of the greater good, if you want to say it like this, which in the *Bhagavad Gita* clearly means this socio-cosmic order, which needs to be preserved

in order that you can develop yourself further, but also not at the price of other living beings habitats.

ES: This is actually quite complex to understand. I have always tried to figure out how these texts are read today because METIS should also be a portal for us to access these texts. As a first question, I would like to know how is this text accessed in India today? And because you said that we see karma now also in dictionaries, and there's a Taylor Swift song called "Karma". Do we properly grasp these terms nowadays? Do you have any tips for our listeners how to grasp the text and these key concepts?

AM: I think one of the key concepts which has been taken from the *Bhagavad Gita* is the so-called idea of 'karma yoga', the yoga of action, which means exactly this claim that you try to become detached and detachment means, in this sense, to be able to care not only for yourself – this goal should not be abandoned – but also in caring for yourself, you also have a look and try to care for all the rest. And this means, so the yoga of action or the yoga that consists in this detached, disinterested way of acting is something which is hugely popular in India and it's a term which became very prominent at the end of the 19th century, also in the aftermath of this famous first World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago where many representatives from various religious and philosophical traditions from all the world met. This idea that you try to act for a greater cause was a very prominent concept, which of course in the anti-colonial struggle and even now, has huge political implications, of course fighting for the cause of the nation and so on and so forth. But still, this is something which is very much in discussion in India and also part of popular literature. For instance, you have a huge publication industry dealing with advisory literature, how to live a good life, also management literature, how to behave as a leader of a company where this concept of karma yoga – to be detached and not to always put yourself in the center – on a very practical level plays an important role and has also become an avenue for philanthropic activities that you try to return something, what you take from the world. Of course, you always consume something and you are attached, but that you try to return something to the world. So it's something which is very popular, but it's not so much connected with yoga as part of yoga movement, the international or global yoga

movement we have now, which is much more concerned, I think, with health issues and spiritual attitudes where you try to cope with your life. Of course, this also has political implications. The yoga tradition as it is now, or what you would call 'modern yoga', there is this *Bhagavad Gita* idea of 'karma yoga', this disinterested, detached activity for the sake of the world at large is rather underrepresented.

MH: This concept of 'karma yoga' seems very interesting to me because the West, if I may talk about such a thing as the West, is haunted, I think, by a dichotomy between causal necessity on the one hand and individual freedom on the other hand. The picture of the natural sciences, the picture we accept if we study physics, chemistry, biology, is that there is a big order which determines what we are doing. But politically also scientists who are investigating this order would say that we are free persons who can intervene and do what we like or what we think is best for us in this order. And what you just told us about 'karma yoga' seems to contradict this dichotomy. On the one hand, if you ask to become detached, then you are considered as a free person it seems. But on the other hand, you have to be detached because that's what the cosmic order asks you. So there is an intermingling of freedom and necessity it seems to me. Is that the right understanding of 'karma yoga'?

AM: Well, that's a very interesting perspective to have on this idea of 'karma yoga'. And I think it's a very protective way to think that concept through because it exactly, in a way, deals with this interface. And it's not an interface which is created artificially through a theoretical construction. But the point of departure is this very entanglement of the range of your own activities and that you always find yourself already in what the Indian tradition calls dharma or the socio-cosmic order that your range of activity is always determined by what they call karma. There has always been action before your action. You are living in a chain, we could call it necessity or causal chain.

MH: So we are both free and responsible, but also bound by what happened before us.

AM: Yes, there's nobody in the world according to this karma idea, who is not there with the baggage, with luggage. And this luggage, in a way, delineates your range of freedom in the first place. And so it makes a huge difference if you are, in a way, acting as a warrior in India or if you're a priest or if you are a woman in this situation and so on. And of course, it also depends what physical condition you have, what kind of educational possibilities, all of that is part of the package before you can even think about becoming free or having choices and so on and so forth. And the *Bhagavad Gita* asks you, in a way, to step back and to really realize that it's not just about I do this and this and get that and that and not, but also to see that this whole attitude is a certain attitude to the world at large, which creates all kinds of repercussions for your own existence. Which means that the idea that you can, in a way, detach yourself from what you are doing in the sense that I interfere only with others' life, but that it affects yourself in the first place. So literally everything you eat, you say, you drink, you listen to and so on, transforms your body-mind continuum. It's not that you can have an intellectual engagement only and then you would say, okay, and what the rest of my body-mind complex does is not affected by these activities, and this is the other way around. To understand that the rest of the world functions as well, and that one is continuously affected by other bodies, might continue, is something which is very, very clear in the Indian tradition. And I would say at that point, really in the Indian tradition, because you have also similar ideas in Buddhist traditions and much of Indian philosophy. And for me, it's very striking when I read, for instance, Bruno Latour has this definition about what it means to have a body, to realize when one is affected by others. And this is very strange for me as a new idea that needs to be really made clear in modern times, which is for the Indian tradition, a fundamental point of departure.

ES: Time is, as always, running away fast. I would like to lead over to a final question – one of the goals of the METIS portal is to make links between different wisdom traditions, and you, Ms. Malinar just alluded to these links between the Bhagavad Gita and the dharma in connection to, for example, Buddhism. Could you point us towards the links that we can see between different wisdom traditions and maybe give us a starting point and our listeners to how we can start using this text for ourselves for our own wisdom learning?

AM: I think the *Bhagavad Gita* is really a text you can engage with in different situations in life. In crisis, if you doubt the goals of your activities – if you suffer from a personal dilemma or you don't know what to do, but also, in a way, think about things, what reality is, what you find yourself with – from a new angle. I think the *Bhagavad Gita* is a text which offers consolation. You can use it also as an edifying text and you have it. And this has happened in India apart from the philosophical level, and you even have parts of the text because the text comprises so many different types of text within this text. I mentioned this at the beginning, you have really didactic texts, you have hymn, you also have passages in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which you could really call consolation texts. For instance, right at the beginning of the text where Arjuna is so in desperation, then there are at least 10 stanzas where Krishna like a refrain, like a litany, tells him: You don't denote. You should not suffer. You should not, in a way, be despaired because the bodies, they will perish, but the self, the immortal self will survive, and so on. And it also offers an opportunity to step back from entanglements in the world by offering these very fundamental perspectives on very concrete issues. It's not that you have to have a huge theoretical background and have to read yourself into the terminology and the history of terms and theories and so on and so forth, to access a text like the *Bhagavad Gita* because even an abstract concept like yoga is illustrated in very concrete terms, what this actually means, that you should not now become a fierce ascetic, but just to implement some moments in your life where you step back. An idea how to go about things is something which *Bhagavad Gita* has to offer, and I think, in this sense, it is also something which perhaps Mahatma Gandhi found so important and that he also withdrew with the text time and again, and when he was in prison. And then withdrew from political activity. Just to put yourself in a perspective and also to accept limitations of what you can do and not do and all these limits you suffer. You have to suffer, or you have to face, are no reason just to turn away from the world and be, in a way, totally cynic or, in a way, fatalistic or totally disinterested what is going on around you and also ultimately disinterested in your own life, which is always a consequence of being a cynic, I think.

ES: Dear Angelika Malinar, thank you very much for all these explanations and for really making us very curious to read this text ourselves because there seems to be so many things you can draw from it, and I'm also happy that there's some consolation to be found within it, and I hope we can all face the world bravely now. Thank you very much for being in the studio, also Michael Hampe.

AM: Thank you very much.

MH: Thank you.

ES: At this point, I would also like to invite our listeners to follow further Wisdom Talks and to curiously plunge into the multitude of texts and further podcasts that can be found on our website: www.metis.ethz.ch, the internet portal for intercultural wisdom literature and wisdom practices. Additionally, dear listeners, you can also become actively involved in contributing to our album. Please send us texts of any kind of wisdom topics, be it about love, everyday life, death, worries, about what you thought about this podcast today. If you have thoughts about the Bhagavad Gita, please share those thoughts with us and send them to the METIS portal. And we can include your ponderings on wisdom topics. And you can of course, as always, also find more information about this podcast in the show notes. Thank you for listening and goodbye.

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