

Though bodies change, the actual *people*—the conscious living entities (souls) inhabiting the bodies—do not. The soul is the only locus of life in the material body, and nothing material can touch it.

The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind. (Gita 2.23).

We identify ourselves as male or female, tall or short, thin or fat, black or white, brown or reptilian green. According to *Bhagavad-gita*, all that is true, but only for the external, physical, material body. *You*, the person, are a soul, a spiritual entity temporarily renting space in this particular body.

In your lifetime, you remain constant through your body's changes. Similarly, upon the body's ultimate change (death), you, as a spiritual being, remain alive and unaffected.

As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change. (Gita 2.13).

Because they can't see the soul, most scientists think it doesn't exist. They can't see the electron either, but they see its shadows and understand it through deduction. The soul can be understood in a similar way. The body works only when the soul is present. When the soul leaves, nothing can revive the body—despite the scientific fact that all of the body's physical components are still present.

Life is a different energy, distinct and separate from matter.

Some look on the soul as amazing, some describe it as amazing, and some hear of it as amazing, while others, even after hearing about it, cannot understand it at all. (Gita 2.29).

Understanding that you are not your body is the first step toward living in the fresh and liberating way of the *Bhagavad-gita*.

Lesson Two: You Made Your Swamp, Now Wallow In It.

Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail. (Gita 8.6)

Every Gator has good and bad points. Some are smart; some are popular; some are rich; some have muscles or curves. Some are born with all these qualities. Some are born with lots of one and none of the others. Some are born with lots of problems and little else.

America's Declaration of Independence says everyone is created equal. Yet from all appearances people are quite *unequal*—in health, education, income, status and everything else. Why do some get more than others? Here are three possible explanations:

1. **Tough luck.** There's no one upstairs deciding anything.
2. **A Flawed God.** A higher power likes some people more than others (or else can't get it right).
3. **Free will.** A higher power lets everyone do what they want and receive the consequences.

The '**Tough Luck**' approach fails to explain a simple observation: behind every cell phone, computer or car there stands an intelligent person. The creations of nature—trees, stars, our very bodies—are far more complex and precise than any man-made machine. Is it rational to assume, as atheists do, that there is no intelligent person behind them?



The “Home Alone” view of a creatorless world makes a person think, “It’s all mine to exploit!” The ancient *Gita* seems to link this attitude to modern disasters such as nuclear weapons and global warming:

They say that this world is unreal, with no foundation, no God in control. They say it is produced of sex desire and has no cause other than lust. Following such conclusions, the demoniac, who are lost to themselves and who have no intelligence, engage in unbeneficial, horrible works meant to destroy the world. (Gita 16.8)

The ‘**Flawed God**’ angle suggests a supreme being who plays favorites or screws up. This humanistic view reduces divinity to a second-rate power, unable to reliably help anyone. Why waste time appealing to such a person? The *Gita* refutes this idea as the supreme being describes himself in these terms:

There is no truth superior to Me. Everything rests on Me as pearls are strung on a thread.(Gita 7.7)

The speaker of the *Gita* endorses **Free Will**, the presence of an intelligent supreme being who is kind and eminently fair. He allows everyone do what they want, create their own situation, and then learn from the reasonable consequences of their actions.

This system, in which a personal God patiently gives each soul a series of lives to learn the truth, is known as *karma*. Understanding *karma* leads to personal responsibility and, consequently, ultimate happiness and enlightenment.

It’s common sense: how could a just and powerful God slam some innocent people so badly as to make them Seminoles, Bulldogs or Volunteers? (Just kidding—it is, of course, their *karma*.)

Nature is said to be the cause of all material causes and effects, whereas the living entity is the cause of the various sufferings and enjoyments in this world. (Gita 13.21).

In other words, God makes this world with natural laws that apply to everyone according to their behavior. For example, the government makes both schools and jails. Obey the law and get an education; break the law and get jail time. Every choice brings natural consequences.

The *karma* we create for ourselves, good or bad, defines our next birth.

The living entity in the material world carries his different conceptions of life from one body to another as the air carries aromas. The soul thus takes one kind of body and again quits it to take another. (Gita 15.8)

Look in the mirror and you’ll see your *karma*. The present physical, social and financial situations in your life reflect choices you, the eternal soul, made in this life and lifetimes past. What you choose today creates your future situation. Everyone creates his or her own *karma*.

Understanding *karma* prevents you from getting bogged down blaming fate or God or someone else for your problems—a crippling mistake.

Lesson Three: The Three Material Gators: Good, Greedy and Gross.

Material nature consists of three modes--goodness, passion and ignorance. When the eternal living entity comes in contact with nature, he becomes conditioned by these modes. (Gita 14.5)

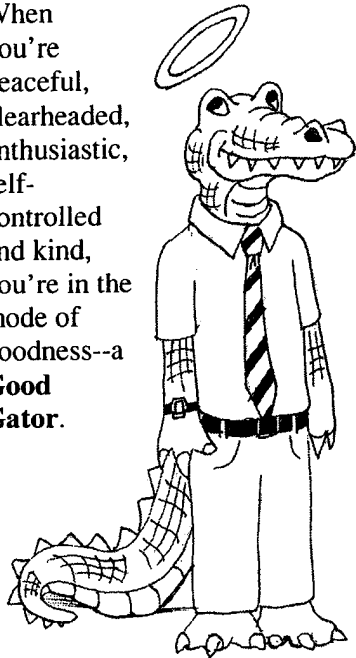
Materialism begins when the spiritual entity misidentifies with the material body. The *Gita* describes that materialism influences the soul through three qualities, or modes of nature: **goodness, passion and ignorance**.

As artistic Gators know, three primary colors—red, yellow and blue—combine to form all other colors. Similarly, the three modes combine to create everyone’s distinct personality. Everyone has some of all three modes, and each mode always tries to dominate.

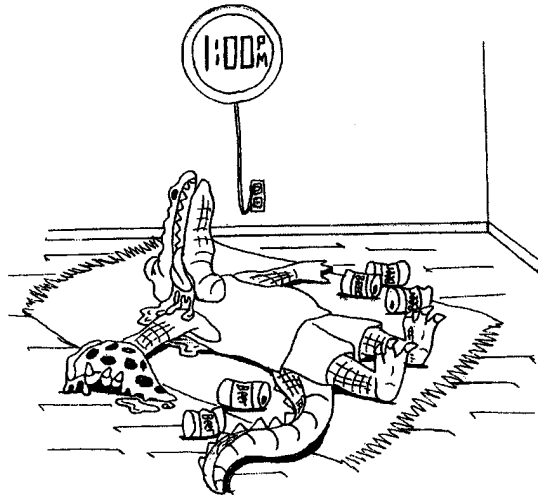
Sometimes the mode of goodness becomes prominent, defeating the modes of passion and ignorance. Sometimes the mode of passion defeats goodness and ignorance, and at other times ignorance defeats goodness and passion. In this way there is always competition for supremacy. (Gita 14.10)

How do goodness, passion and ignorance influence you?

When you're peaceful, clearheaded, enthusiastic, self-controlled and kind, you're in the mode of goodness--a **Good Gator**.



When you're obsessed with some desire and working furiously to reach it, you're in the mode of passion--a **Greedy Gator**.



And when you sleep late, put off homework, get wasted a lot and stuff your laundry in old pizza boxes, you're in the mode of ignorance--a **Gross Gator**.

How might these three Gators respond to various life situations?

Situation #1: Finding a wallet with \$400 cash.

Good Gator: turns it in to Campus Security.

Greedy Gator: takes the cash, leaves the wallet on the ground, and invests the \$400 in high-risk stocks.

Gross Gator: brings the wallet home and lays it somewhere. Takes the cash to a bar to celebrate and blows it all in one night.

Situation #2: Taking a difficult class.

Good Gator: keeps up with assignments, turns in the essay early, reads recommended extra-curricular texts and uses the class as a chance to learn more about life.

Greedy Gator: too busy to attend several classes, then pulls three straight all-nighters finishing the essay and cramming for the final.

Gross Gator: misses or sleeps through nearly every class, then plagiarizes an essay and hires a 'study buddy' who took the test last term.

Situation #3: Dinnertime

Good Gator: Salad, steamed veggies, milk, whole wheat noodles, eaten on a quiet outdoor table at sunset.

Greedy Gator: Greasy drive-through burgers, super-sized fries and a chocolate shake, eaten while weaving through rush hour traffic and steering with knees.

Gross Gator: Three-day-old unheated pizza, eaten with warm beer while playing video games at 2:00 AM.

These powerful modes affect everyone, yet most people think they're just 'being themselves' as the modes produce desires that push them around.

The spirit soul bewildered by the influence of false ego thinks himself the doer of activities that are in actuality carried out by the three modes of material nature. (Gita 3.27)

The Greedy and Gross Gators in us all are obviously not our most enlightened features. However, even the Good Gator suffers from materialism; the mode of goodness creates pride and attachment to being the selfless hero. Spiritual advancement means to overcome the influence of all three modes.

When the embodied being is able to transcend these three modes associated with the material body, it can become free from birth, death, old age and their distresses and can enjoy nectar even in this life. (Gita 14.20)

Freedom from the modes begins when you notice their influence on you.

Lesson Four: Gator Yoga



Yoga means much more than the popular stretching exercises. That kind of yoga is just a warm-up for the real thing.

In the larger sense, yoga is an entirely fresh way of perceiving yourself and your swamp by gaining control of your own mind. And that can be tough. While discussing yoga in the *Bhagavad-gita*, the great warrior Arjuna says to his friend, Krishna:

Arjuna: The system of yoga which You have summarized appears impractical and unendurable to me. The mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate and very strong, and to subdue it, I think, is more difficult than controlling the wind. (Gita 6.33,34)

Krishna: It is undoubtedly very difficult to curb the restless mind, but it is possible by suitable practice and by detachment. (Gita 6.35)

Why control the mind? Why not just let it do what it wants?

For one thing, your mind can make you miserable. Maybe you've been spurned by a sexy mate. Maybe you can't catch a good meal. Maybe you flunked Lateral Walking 101. Whatever the cause, every Gator sometimes feels like sulking in a mud hole.

The *Gita* explains that people suffer frustration because their uncontrolled minds cling to desires. The three modes of nature churn up endless desires in the human mind. Through practice of yoga, you can put desires in their place, gaining the serenity of self-control.

A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of desires—that enter like rivers into the ocean, which is ever being filled but is always still—can alone achieve peace, and not the person who strives to satisfy such desires. (Gita 2.70)

Everyone has desires. How can one live happily without fulfilling them? The *Gita* explains that some desires are beneficial and the yogi need only dismiss harmful ones.

The embodied soul may be restricted from sense enjoyment, though the taste for sense objects remains. But, ceasing such engagements by experiencing a higher taste, one is fixed in consciousness. (Gita 2.59)

The higher pleasure of spiritual realization cancels desire for lower, materialistic whims. A successful yogi discovers a wonderful and sustainable state of love of God beyond the gross, greedy and even the good. Having tasted that sublime state, a yogi desires nothing else.

When one gives up all varieties of desire for sense gratification, which arise from mental concoction, and when one's mind, thus purified, finds satisfaction in the self alone, then one is said to be in pure transcendental consciousness. (Gita 2.55)

One who is thus transcendently situated at once realizes spirituality and becomes fully joyful. Such a person never laments or desires to have anything and is equally disposed toward every living entity. In that state one attains pure devotional service unto Me. (Gita 18.54)

Our last lesson explains exactly how to become a yogi.

Lesson Five: Thinking Outside the Swamp



You've now heard that you're not your body, which is merely a reflection of your past *karma*. You've heard how the modes of nature push you around, and that you have an option to transcend them through *yoga*. (Warning: transcending the modes will put you a little out of sync with other critters in the swamp).

What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled; and the time of awakening for all beings is night for the introspective sage. (Gita 2.69)

Still want to proceed? OK, here we go.

When you do something just to please your material senses, you create *karma*. When you do something to please the senses of the all-attractive Supreme Person—God—you free yourself from *karma*. Though it might be the same action, because your purpose is different, the result is different. And because the new result is much better, you feel better while you're doing what you do.

The *Gita* makes it clear that God is, first and foremost, a person. God creates us conscious individuals; how can He be anything less than His creation? If we have senses, desires and enjoyment, how can God be without them?. The speaker of the *Bhagavad-gita*, Sri Krishna, defines himself as God with statements such as these:

I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who know this perfectly engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts. (Gita 10.10)

By definition, God means the most powerful, wise, opulent person. The name Krishna means, "all-attractive" —an umbrella name for God. If you pray to someone other than Krishna, look at the big picture. I am not saying my God can beat up yours; God is one, though He is known in many different ways and by many different names.

Consider a professor. To you, he's Mr. Such-and-such. To his friends, he's Joe. To his wife, he's Honey Pie. To his kids, he's Dad. He's the same person, but his names differ according to the relationship. If an ordinary person can have many names, why not the Supreme Person?

Whatever the name, the principle is always the same: work for your senses and create *karma*; work for God's senses and become free of it.

How does one please God's senses? Krishna says,

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer or give away, and whatever austerities you perform--do that as an offering to Me. (Gita 9.27)

You can do nearly anything you already do—studying, playing, eating—for Krishna. Doing what you do for yourself creates *karma* and another troublesome material body for you, the eternal soul. Doing the same thing for Krishna frees the soul from material attachments and the suffering that goes with them. Doing it for Krishna lets you be *in* the swamp but not *of* it.



How, for example, does one eat for Krishna?

If one offers Me with love a fruit, flower, leaf or water, I will accept it. (Gita 9.26)

To eat for Krishna, select foods that Krishna likes (no meat, fish or eggs, please), then prepare them for His pleasure and offer them first to Him with love. Then ordinary food becomes transcendent, *karma*-free food (such as the Krishna Lunch). Eating such food helps you transcend the modes.

Why offer food back to its creator? Is He hungry? Well, yes; He's hungry for your affection, and offering food is a gesture, like a toddler offering a piece of candy to Mommy. It's more than saying, "Thanks!" Offering food to Krishna acknowledges that only God make a grain of rice or a drop of milk. You'll be surprised to find more joy in offering food to Krishna than in simply chewing down

As does eating Krishna food, chanting Krishna's names awakens your spiritual life. Repeating God's name—any one you choose—is the simplest and most powerful *mantra* (mind-liberating sound).

Does chanting 'Go Gators' have the same effect as chanting 'Hare Krishna'? Find out for yourself with a thirty-minute experiment:

1. Go to a quiet corner of the swamp.
2. Repeat 'Go Gators' for fifteen minutes.
3. For the next fifteen minutes, repeat:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

You'll experience that material sounds become ridiculous, while spiritual sound feeds and invigorates the heart. The *Gita* suggests:

Chanting of God's names is the best of sacrifices. (Gita 10.25)

The Hare Krishna mantra means, "My dear all-attractive Lord, the source of all pleasure, please allow me to serve You."

Like anyone else, God takes pleasure in hearing His own name. Repeating *Hare Krishna* opens the door to *bhakti-yoga*, the constant, blissful service of the Supreme. *Bhakti* means love of Krishna, as in the Biblical, "Love thy Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and soul."

Chanting and offering food to Krishna awakens that spiritual love, a pleasure far beyond materialism. The joy of serving Krishna pleases one so thoroughly that giving up unsustainable, destructive habits becomes easy. The *Bhagavad-gita* teaches this invaluable art of satisfying Krishna and enjoying the fresh, pure life beyond the swamp.

You may not know much about Krishna, but if you're open-minded enough to *theoretically* approach Krishna as God, you'll be amazed how the lessons of *Bhagavad-gita* put your problems in perspective and revitalize your life. There's nothing to join, no forms to sign, no change of clothes, no cheesy profession of faith.

If you've understood the *Gita* this far, you are now free to choose between *karma* or *yoga*, the swamp or beyond. As Krishna puts it:

Thus I have explained to you knowledge still more confidential. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do. (Gita 18.63)