

Yet Another Illustration of Gita 4:18

by Dr Charles Chow

<p><i>karmany akarma yah paśyed akarmani ca karma yah sa buddhimānmanuṣyeṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt</i></p> <p>GITA 4:18</p>
<p>“One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is intelligent among human beings, he or she is a <i>yogi</i> and a doer of all action.”</p> <p>Swami Ranganathananda, <i>Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita, An Exposition of the Gita in the Light of Modern Thought and Modern Needs</i>, Vol 1, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2010, p.430.</p>
<p>“He who recognizes inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a YOGI and a true performer of all actions.”</p> <p>Swami Chinmayananda, <i>The Holy Geeta</i> Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, 2002, p.264.</p>
<p>“One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is intelligent among men, and he is in the transcendental position, although engaged in all sorts of activities.”</p> <p>A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, <i>BhagavadGita As It Is</i>, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Los Angeles, 1983, p.76.</p>

Exhibit 1: DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS OF GITA 4:18

Some translations of Gita 4:18 are tabulated in Exhibit 1. In essence, this Sanskrit verse describes a person’s enlightened state for multi-tasking and yet not individually perturbed, especially in our current volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world punctuated by global warming and fears of a Third World War.

According to Swami Sarvapriyananda, Gita 4:18 is embedded in paradoxical language¹, basically to express a universal truth. Many truths exist even without us knowing, until being “discovered” and given a name. For example, gravity is universal, yet it has only become knowable after Newton gave it a name. Likewise, every human being has the unchanging reality of *sat-chit-ananda*: existence-consciousness-bliss. Exhibit 2 is an attempt to illustrate Gita 4:18 graphically.

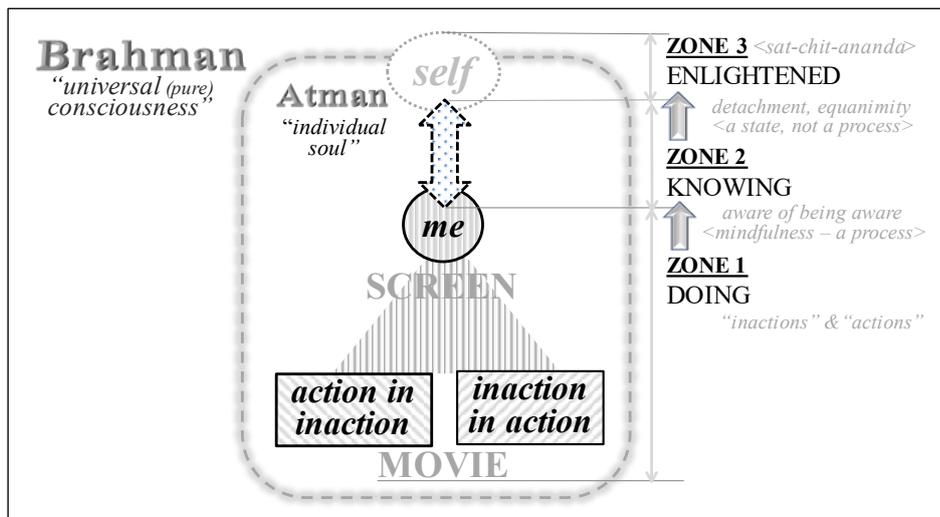


Exhibit 2: GITA 4:18 ILLUSTRATED

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW6AZ1nE5nI> published on 30 Nov 2020, assessed on 20 Oct 2022.

An example of “*action in inaction*” is fasting or when the mind is still active while the body is at rest. On the other hand, “*inaction in action*” is like being seated in a carriage and the stationary body moves when the carriage moves. Such activities are like motions in a movie because the person (“me”) is like a screen to observe accordingly.

Exhibit 2 illustrates these features in ZONE 1 as “Doing”. Elevation to ZONE 2 (“Knowing”) is when the doer is *aware of being aware* which is evident in the practice of mindfulness – a process. Then, the “me” realises the “self”. Transition to ZONE 3 (“Enlightened” – a state, not a process) requires much patience and practice with detachment and equanimity. Then the individual Atman resonates with Brahman.

Gita 4:18 describes what is achievable, yet not quickly or easily attainable. Other parts of The Bhagavad Gita will then outline the methods and orientations toward such an achievement. Based on Gita 4:18, competition will become a contribution, and then every rivalry is a celebration.

Exhibit 2 is however a very simplified model. It cannot fully and accurately describe the link between Atman and Brahman since the six major schools in Vedanta that interpret philosophy from the Upanishads, have each a distinct and different interpretation of this link:

- Advaita (Adi Shankara) states that Atman and Brahman are the same (*non-dualism*).
- Dvaita (Madhvacharya) considers Brahman and Atman as two separate entities (*dualism*).
- Visishtadvaita (Ramanuja) believes that diversity is subsumed under a unified whole (*qualified non-dualism*).
- Dvaitadvaita (Nimbarka) states that Brahman is the highest reality and controller of all (*dualistic non-dualism*).
- Shuddhadvaita (Vallabhacharya) believes that both God and the individual self are one (*inconceivable oneness and difference*).
- Achintya Bheda Abheda (Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) emphasizes that the self is both different and not different from Brahman (*another inconceivable oneness and difference*).

Therefore Exhibit 2 is, at best, another synopsis to graphically illustrate the wisdom of Gita 4:18. The various zones are like a roadmap to help chart individual progress in realizing *sat-chit-ananda*.



Dr Charles Chow is Catholic yet a forever student of The Bhagavad Gita. He can be contacted at chowhoihee@gmail.com.