

THE BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

THE *Bhagavad-gītā* is a religious classic rather than a philosophical treatise. It is set forth not as a metaphysical system thought out by an individual thinker or school of thinkers but as a tradition which has emerged from the religious life of mankind. As the colophon indicates, the *Bhagavad-gītā* is both metaphysics and ethics, *brahmayāgyā* and Yoga-śāstra, the science of reality and the art of union with reality.

The *Gītā* derives its main inspiration from the Upaniṣads and integrates into a comprehensive synthesis the different elements of the Vedic cult of sacrifice, the Upaniṣadic teaching of the Absolute *Brahman*, the Bhāgavata theism, the Sāṅkhya dualism, and the Yoga meditation. It is a part of the *Mahābhārata*, and its authorship is attributed to Vyāsa.

Metaphysics. The *Bhagavad-gītā* takes up the Upaniṣadic conception of *Brahman* as absolute reality, and points out that the impersonality of the Absolute is not its whole significance. It develops the theistic side of the Upaniṣadic teaching by giving us a God who exceeds the infinite and the mere finite. In the *Gītā* the Supreme is at once the transcendental, the cosmic, and the individual reality. In its transcendental aspect the Supreme is the pure Self unaffected by any action or experience, detached, and unconcerned. In its dynamic aspect, it not only supports but also governs the whole cosmic action. The same Supreme which is one in all and above all is present in the individual.

The emphasis of the *Gītā* is on the Supreme as the personal God who creates the perceptible world by His nature (*prakṛti*). He is responsible for the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe.

The *Gītā* is interested in the process of redeeming the world, and so this aspect of Viṣṇu is emphasized. Kṛṣṇa represents the Viṣṇu aspect of the Supreme. The *Gītā* makes out that Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation (*avataraṇa*) or descent of the Divine into the human frame. If the Infinite God is manifested in finite existence throughout time, its special manifestation at one given moment and through the assumption of one single human nature by the Divine person is but the free fulfillment of that same movement by which the Divine plenitude freely fulfills itself and inclines toward the finite. The theory of *avatāra* is an eloquent expression of the law of the spiritual world. If God is looked upon as the savior of man, He must manifest Himself whenever the forces of evil threaten to destroy human values.

The world for the *Gītā* is the scene of an active struggle between good and evil in which God is deeply interested. He pours out all his wealth of love in helping man to resist all that makes for error, ugliness, and evil.

Ethics. The *Gītā* is a comprehensive Yoga-śāstra (treatise on *yoga*), large, flexible, many-sided, which includes various phases of the self's development and ascent into the Divine. The different *yogas* are special applications of the inner discipline which leads to the liberation of the self and to a new understanding of the unity and meaning of mankind. This goal of union with God may be attained by *jñāna-yoga* (the way of knowledge), *bhakti-yoga* (the way of devotion), or *karma-yoga* (the way of action). Knowledge, devotion, and work are complementary both when we seek the goal and after we attain it. We may climb the mountain from different paths but the view from the summit is identical for all.

CHAPTER 1. THE HESITATION AND DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA

The question

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said:

1. In the field of righteousness, the field of the Kurus,¹ when my people and the sons of Pāṇḍu had gathered together, eager for battle, what did they do, O Saṁjaya?²

Saṁjaya said:

2. Then, Duryodhana the prince, having seen the army of the Pāṇḍavas drawn up in battle order, approached his teacher and spoke this word:

3. Behold, O Teacher, this mighty army of the sons of Pāṇḍu organized by thy wise pupil, the son of Drupada.

4. Here are heroes, great bowmen equal in battle to Bhīma³

¹ Kurukṣetra is the land of the Kurus, a leading clan of the period. It is a vast field near Hastināpura in the neighborhood of modern Delhi. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king of the Kurus, decided to give his throne to Yudhiṣṭhira, who is also known as Dharmarāja, the embodiment of virtue, in preference to his own eldest son, Duryodhana, the latter, by tricks and treachery, secured the throne for himself and attempted to destroy Yudhiṣṭhira and his four brothers. Kṛṣṇa, the head of the Yādava clan, sought to bring about a reconciliation between the cousins. When all attempts failed, a fratricidal war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas became inevitable. Kṛṣṇa proposed that he and his vassals would join the two sides and left the choice to the parties. The vassals were selected by Duryodhana, and Kṛṣṇa himself joined the Pāṇḍavas as the charioteer of Arjuna.

² Saṁjaya is the charioteer of the blind king, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who reports to him the events of the war. (Many of the other names used in the text are without philosophical significance and no attempt will be made to explain them.)

³ Bhīma is Yudhiṣṭhira's Commander-in-Chief, though nominally Dhṛṣṭadyumna holds that office.

and Arjuna¹—Yuyudhāna, Virāṭa, and Drupada, a mighty warrior;

5. Dhr̥ṣṭaketu, Cekitāna and the valiant King of Kāśi, also Purujit, Kuntibhoja and Śaibya, the foremost of men;

6. Yudhāmanyu, the strong and Uttamauja, the brave; and also the son of Subhadrā and sons of Draupadī, all of them great warriors.

7. Know also, O best of the twiceborn,² the leaders of my army, those who are most distinguished among us. I will name them now for thine information:

8. Thyself and Bhīṣma and Karṇa and Kṛpa, ever victorious in battle; Asvatthāman, Vikarṇa, and also the son of Somadatta;

9. And many other heroes who have risked their lives for my sake. They are armed with many kinds of weapons and are all well skilled in war.

10. Unlimited is this army of ours which is guarded by Bhīṣma, while that army of theirs, which is guarded by Bhīma, is limited.

11. Therefore do ye all support Bhīṣma, standing firm in all the fronts, in your respective ranks.

12. In order to cheer him up, the aged Kuru, his valiant grand-sire, roared aloud like a lion and blew his conch.

13. Then conches and kettledrums, tabors and drums and horns suddenly blared forth and the noise was tumultuous.

14. When stationed in their great chariot yoked to white horses, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna blew their celestial conches.

15. Kṛṣṇa blew his Pāñcajanya and Arjuna his Devadatta and Bhīma of terrific deeds blew his mighty conch, Pauṇḍra.

16. Prince Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of Kuntī, blew his Anantavijaya and Nakula and Sahadeva blew their Sughoṣa and Maṇipuṣpaka.

17. And the king of Kāśi, the Chief of archers, Śikhaṇḍin, the great warrior, Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna and Virāṭa and the invincible Sātyaki;

18. Drupada and the sons of Draupadī, O Lord of earth, and the strong-armed son of Subhadrā, on all sides blew their respective conches.

19. The tumultuous uproar resounding through earth and sky rent the hearts of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons.

¹ Arjuna is the friend of Kṛṣṇa and the great hero of the Pāṇḍavas. Other names used for Arjuna are Bhārata (descended of Bhārata), Dhanarjaya (winner of wealth), Guḍākeśa (having the hair in a ball), Pārtha (son of Pṛthā), Parantapa (oppressor of the enemy).

² One who is twice-born is one who is invested with the sacred thread, the symbol of initiation into the life of spirit, which is the aim of education.

20. Then Arjuna, whose banner bore the crest of Hanumān, looked at the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra drawn up in battle order; and as the flight of missiles [almost] started, he took up his bow.

21. And, O Lord of earth, he spoke this word to Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa): Draw up my chariot, O Acyuta (Kṛṣṇa),¹ between the two armies.

22. So that I may observe these men standing, eager for battle, with whom I have to contend in this strife of war.

23. I wish to look at those who are assembled here, ready to fight and eager to achieve in battle what is dear to the evil-minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

24. Thus addressed by Guḍākeśa (Arjuna), Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa) drew up that best of chariots, O Bhārata (Dhṛtarāṣṭra), between the two armies.

25. In front of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and all the chiefs he said: "Behold, O Pārtha (Arjuna), these Kurus assembled here."

26. There saw Arjuna standing fathers and grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons and grandsons, as also companions;

27. And also fathers-in-law and friends in both the armies. When the son of Kuntī (Arjuna) saw all these kinsmen thus standing arrayed,

28. He was overcome with great compassion and uttered this in sadness:

The Distress of Arjuna

When I see my own people arrayed and eager for fight, O Kṛṣṇa,

29. My limbs quail, my mouth goes dry, my body shakes and my hair stands on end.

30. The bow Gāṇḍīva slips from my hand, and my skin too is burning all over. I am not able to stand steady. My mind is reeling.

31. And I see evil omens, O Keśava (Kṛṣṇa), nor do I foresee any good by slaying my own people in the fight.

32. I do not long for victory, O Kṛṣṇa, nor kingdom nor pleasures. Of what use is kingdom to us, O Kṛṣṇa, or enjoyment or even life?

33. Those for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments and pleasures—they stand here in battle, renouncing their lives and riches:

¹ Acyuta (immovable) is another name for Kṛṣṇa. Other names used for Kṛṣṇa are Madhusūdana (slayer of the demon Madhu), Arisūdana (slayer of enemies), Govinda (herdsman or giver of enlightenment), Vāsudeva (son of Vasudeva), Yādava (descendent of Yadu), Keśava (having fine hair), Mādhava (the husband of Lakṣmī), Hṛṣīkeśa (lord of the senses, *hṛṣīka, īśā*), Janārdana (the liberator of men).

34. Teachers, fathers, sons, and also grandfathers; uncles and fathers-in-law, grandsons and brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen.

35. These I would not consent to kill, though killed myself, O Madhusūdana (Kṛṣṇa), even for the kingdom of the three worlds; how much less for the sake of the earth?

36. What pleasure can be ours, O Kṛṣṇa, after we have slain the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra? Only sin will accrue to us if we kill these criminals.

37. So it is not right that we slay our kinsmen, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Indeed, how can we be happy, O Mādhava (Kṛṣṇa), if we kill our own people?

38. Even if these whose minds are overpowered by greed see no wrong in the destruction of the family and no crime in treachery to friends;

39. Why should we not have the wisdom to turn away from this sin, O Janārdana (Kṛṣṇa), we who see the wrong in the destruction of the family?

40. In the ruin of a family, its ancient laws are destroyed: and when the laws perish, the whole family yields to lawlessness.

41. And when lawlessness prevails, O Vārṣṇeya (Kṛṣṇa), the women of the family become corrupted, and when women are corrupted, confusion of castes arises.

42. And to hell does this confusion bring the family itself as well as those who have destroyed it. For the spirits of their ancestors fall, deprived of their offerings of rice and water.

43. By the misdeeds of those who destroy a family and create confusion of *varṇas* [castes], the immemorial laws of the race and the family are destroyed.

44. And we have heard it said, O Janārdana (Kṛṣṇa), that the men of the families whose laws are destroyed needs must live in hell.

45. Alas, what a great sin have we resolved to commit in striving to slay our own people through our greed for the pleasures of the kingdom!

46. Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, with weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle, while I remain unresisting and unarmed.

47. Having spoken thus on the field of battle, Arjuna sank down on the seat of his chariot, casting away his bow and arrow, his spirit overwhelmed by sorrow.

In the Upaniṣad of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the science of the Absolute, the scripture of *yoga*, and the dialogue between Śrīkṛṣṇa and Arjuna, this is the first chapter, entitled “The Depression of Arjuna.”¹

CHAPTER 2: SĀMĀKHYA THEORY² AND YOGA PRACTICE

Kṛṣṇa's rebuke and exhortation to be brave

Samjaya said:

1. To him who was thus overcome by pity, whose eyes were filled with tears and troubled and who was much depressed in mind, Madhusūdana (Kṛṣṇa) spoke this word.

The Blessed Lord said:

2. Whence has come to thee this stain (this dejection) of spirit in this hour of crisis? It is unknown to men of noble mind [not cherished by the Āryans]; it does not lead to heaven; on earth it causes disgrace, O Arjuna.

3. Yield not to this unmanliness, O Pārtha (Arjuna), for it does not become thee. Cast off this petty faintheartedness and arise, O Oppressor of the foes (Arjuna).

Arjuna said:

4. How shall I strike Bhīṣma and Droṇa, who are worthy of worship, O Madhusūdana (Kṛṣṇa), with arrows in battle, O Slayer of foes (Kṛṣṇa)?

5. It is better to live in this world by begging than to slay these honoured teachers. Though they are mindful of their gains, they are my teachers, and by slaying them, I would enjoy in this world delights which are smeared with blood.

6. Nor do we know which for us is better, whether we conquer them or they conquer us. The sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, whom if we slew we should not care to live, are standing before us in battle array.

7. My very being is stricken with the weakness of sentimental pity. With my mind bewildered about my duty, I ask Thee. Tell me, for certain, which is better. I am Thy pupil; teach me, who am seeking refuge in Thee.

¹ This is the usual colophon, which is not a part of the text. There are slight variations in the titles of the chapters in the different versions, but they are not worth recording.

² The teacher explains in brief in verses 11–38 the wisdom of the Sāṃkhya philosophy. The Sāṃkhya does not refer to Kapila's system but to the teaching of the Upaniṣads.

Sāṃkhya and Yoga are not in the *Gītā* discordant systems. They have the same aim but differ in their methods.

8. I do not see what will drive away this sorrow which dries up my senses even if I should attain rich and unrivalled kingdom on earth or even the sovereignty of the gods.

Saṁjaya said:

9. Having thus addressed Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa), the mighty Guḍākeśa (Arjuna) said to Govinda (Kṛṣṇa), "I will not fight," and became silent.

10. To him thus depressed in the midst of the two armies, O Bhārata (Dhṛtarāṣṭra), Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa), smiling as it were, spoke this word.

The distinction between self and body: we should not grieve for what is imperishable

The Blessed Lord said:

11. Thou grieveest for those whom thou shouldst not grieve for, and yet thou speakest words about wisdom. Wise men do not grieve for the dead or for the living.

12. Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we shall cease to be.¹

13. As the soul passes in this body through childhood, youth and age, even so is its taking on of another body. The sage is not perplexed by this.

14. Contacts with their objects, O son of Kuntī (Arjuna), give rise to cold and heat, pleasure and pain. They come and go and do not last forever; these learn to endure, O Bhārata (Arjuna).

15. The man who is not troubled by these, O Chief of men (Arjuna), who remains the same in pain and pleasure, who is wise, makes himself fit for eternal life.

16. Of the non-existent there is no coming to be; of the existent there is no ceasing to be. The conclusion about these two has been perceived by the seers of truth.

17. Know thou that that by which all this is pervaded is indestructible. Of this immutable being, no one can bring about the destruction.

18. It is said that these bodies of the eternal embodied soul, which is indestructible and incomprehensible, come to an end. Therefore fight, O Bhārata (Arjuna).

¹ While the Sāṁkhya system postulates a plurality of souls, the *Gītā* reconciles this with unity.

19. He who thinks that this slays and he who thinks that this is slain; both of them fail to perceive the truth; this one neither slays nor is slain.

20. He is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having once come to be does he again cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.

21. He who knows that it is indestructible and eternal, uncreate and unchanging—how can such a person slay any one, O Pārtha (Arjuna), or cause any one to slay?

22. Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new.

23. Weapons do not cleave this self; fire does not burn him; waters do not make him wet; nor does the wind make him dry.

24. He is uncleavable. He cannot be burnt. He can be neither wetted nor dried. He is eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, and immovable. He is the same forever.

25. He is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable, and unchanging. Therefore, knowing him as such, thou shouldst not grieve.

We should not grieve over what is perishable

26. Even if thou thinkest that the self is perpetually born and perpetually dies, even then, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), thou shouldst not grieve,

27. For to the one that is born death is certain, and certain is birth for the one that has died. Therefore, for what is unavoidable thou shouldst not grieve.

28. Beings are unmanifest in their beginnings, manifest in the middles, and unmanifest again in their ends, O Bhārata (Arjuna). What is there in this for lamentation?

29. One looks upon Him as a marvel; another likewise speaks of Him as a marvel; another hears of Him as a marvel; and even after hearing, no one whatsoever has known Him.

30. The dweller in the body of every one, O Bhārata (Arjuna), is eternal and can never be slain. Therefore, thou shouldst not grieve for any creature.

Appeal to a sense of duty

31. Further, having regard for thine own duty, thou shouldst not falter; there exists no greater good for a *kṣatriya* [warrior] than a war enjoined by duty.

32. Happy are the *kṣatriyas*, O Pārtha (Arjuna), for whom such a war comes of its own accord as an open door to heaven.

33. But if thou doest not this lawful battle, then thou wilt fail thy duty and glory and will incur sin.

34. Besides, men will ever recount thy ill-fame, and for one who has been honoured ill-fame is worse than death.

35. The great warriors will think that thou hast abstained from battle through fear, and they by whom thou wast highly esteemed will make light of thee.

36. Many unseemly words will be uttered by thine enemies, slandering thy strength. Could anything be sadder than that?

37. Either slain thou shalt go to heaven; or victorious thou shalt enjoy the earth; therefore arise, O Son of Kuntī (Arjuna), resolve on battle.

38. Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then get ready for battle. Thus thou shalt not incur sin.

The insight of Yoga

39. This is the wisdom of the Sāṃkhya given to thee, O Pārtha (Arjuna). Listen now to the Yoga. If your intelligence accepts it, thou shalt cast away the bondage of works.

40. In this path, no effort is ever lost and no obstacle prevails; even a little of this righteousness (*dharma*) saves from great fear.

41. In this, O joy of the Kurus (Arjuna), the resolute understanding is single; but the thoughts of the irresolute are many-branched and endless.

No wisdom for the worldly-minded

42-43. The undiscerning, who rejoice in the letter of the Veda, who contend that there is nothing else, whose nature is desire, and who are intent on heaven, proclaim these flowery words that result in rebirth as the fruit of actions and lay down various specialized rites for the attainment of enjoyment and power.

44. The intelligence which is to be trained, of those who are devoted to enjoyment and power and whose minds are carried away by these words [of the Veda], is not well-established in the Self [or concentration].

45. The action of the threefold modes¹ is the subject matter of the Veda; but do thou become free, O Arjuna, from this threefold

¹ The three modes (*gunas*) are goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*), and dullness or inertia (*tamas*). These are the primary constituents of nature and are the bases of all substances.

nature; be free from the dualities [the pairs of opposites]; be firmly fixed in purity, not caring for acquisition and preservation; and be possessed of the Self.

46. As is the use of a pond in a place flooded with water everywhere, so is that of all the Vedas for the *brāhmin* who understands.¹

Work without concern for the results

47. To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruit; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.

48. Fixed in *yoga*, do thy work, O winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called *yoga*.

49. Far inferior indeed is mere action to the discipline of intelligence, O winner of wealth (Arjuna); seek refuge in intelligence. Pitiful are those who seek for the fruits of their action.

50. One who has yoked his intelligence [with the Divine] (or is established in his intelligence) casts away even here both good and evil. Therefore strive for *yoga*; *yoga* is skill in action.

51. The wise who have united their intelligence [with the Divine], renouncing the fruits which their action yields and freed from the bonds of birth, reach the sorrowless state.

52. When thine intelligence shall cross the whirl of delusion, then shalt thou become indifferent to what has been heard and what is yet to be heard.²

53. When thine intelligence, which is bewildered by the Vedic texts, shall stand unshaken and stable in spirit (*samādhi*), then shalt thou attain to insight (*yoga*).

The characteristics of the perfect sage

Arjuna said:

54. What is the description of the man who has this firmly founded wisdom, whose being is steadfast in spirit, O Keśava (Kṛṣṇa)? How does the man of settled intelligence speak; how does he sit; how does he walk?

The Blessed Lord said:

55. When a man puts away all the desires of his mind, O Pārtha

¹ That is, for those of illumined consciousness or spiritual insight ritual observances are of little value.

² Scriptures are unnecessary for the man who has attained insight.

(Arjuna), and when his spirit is content in itself, then is he called stable in intelligence.

56. He whose mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrows and is free from eager desire amid pleasures, he from whom passion, fear, and rage have passed away—he is called a sage of settled intelligence.

57. He who is without affection on any side, who does not rejoice or loathe as he obtains good or evil—his intelligence is firmly set [in wisdom].

58. He who draws away the senses from the objects of sense on every side as a tortoise draws in his limbs into the shell—his intelligence is firmly set [in wisdom].

59. The objects of sense turn away from the embodied soul who abstains from feeding on them, but the taste for them remains. Even the taste turns away when the Supreme is seen.

60. Even though a man may ever strive [for perfection] and be ever so discerning, O Son of Kuntī (Arjuna), his impetuous senses will carry off his mind by force.

61. Having brought all the senses under control, he should remain firm in *yoga*, intent on Me; for he, whose senses are under control, his intelligence is firmly set.

62. When a man dwells in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire, and from desire comes anger.

63. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory, and from loss of memory the destruction of intelligence; and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes.

64. But a man of disciplined mind, who moves among the objects of sense, with the senses under control and free from attachment and aversion—he attains purity of spirit.

65. And in that purity of spirit, there is produced for him an end of all sorrow; the intelligence of such a man of pure spirit is soon established [in the peace of the self].

66. For the uncontrolled, there is no intelligence; nor for the uncontrolled is there the power of concentration; and for him without concentration, there is no peace; and for the unpeaceful, how can there be happiness?

67. When the mind runs after the roving senses, it carries away the understanding, even as a wind carries away a ship on the waters.

68. Therefore, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), he whose senses are all withdrawn from their objects—his intelligence is firmly set.

69. What is night for all beings is the time of waking for the disciplined soul; and what is the time of waking for all beings is night for the sage who sees (or the sage of vision).¹

70. He unto whom all desires enter as waters into the sea, which, though ever being filled, is ever motionless, attains to peace, and not he who hugs his desires.

71. He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of mineness or egotism—he attains to peace.

72. This is the divine state, O Pārtha (Arjuna); having attained thereto, one is not again bewildered; fixed in that state at the end [at the hour of death] one can attain to the bliss of God.

This is the second chapter, entitled “The *Yoga* of Knowledge.”

CHAPTER 3: KARMA-YOGA OR THE METHOD OF WORK

Why then work at all?

Arjuna said:

1. If thou deemest that the path of understanding is more excellent than the path of action, O Janārdana (Kṛṣṇa), why then dost thou urge me to do this savage deed, O Keśava (Kṛṣṇa)?

2. With an apparently confused utterance thou seemest to bewilder my intelligence. Tell me, then, decisively the one thing by which I can attain to the highest good.

Life is work; unconcern for results is needful

The Blessed Lord said:

3. O blameless One, in this world a twofold way of life has been taught of yore by Me, the path of knowledge for men of contemplation and that of works for men of action.

4. Not by abstention from work does a man attain freedom from action; nor by mere renunciation does he attain to his perfection.

5. For no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; every one is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature.

6. He who restrains his organs of action but continues in his mind to brood over the objects of sense, whose nature is deluded, is said to be a hypocrite [a man of false conduct].

¹ When all beings are attracted by the glitter of sense-objects, the sage is intent on understanding reality. He is wakeful to the nature of reality to which the unwise is asleep or indifferent.

7. But he who controls the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, and without attachment engages the organs of action in the path of work, he is superior.

The importance of sacrifice

8. Do thou thine allotted work, for action is better than inaction; even the maintenance of thy physical life cannot be effected without action.

9. Save work done as and for a sacrifice¹ this world is in bondage to work. Therefore, O son of Kuntī (Arjuna), do thy work as a sacrifice, becoming free from all attachment.

10. In ancient days the Lord of creatures created men along with sacrifice, and said, “By this shall ye bring forth and this shall be unto you that which will yield the milk of your desires.”

11. By this foster ye the gods and let the gods foster you; thus fostering each other you shall attain to the supreme good.

12. Fostered by sacrifice, the gods will give the enjoyments you desire. He who enjoys these gifts without giving to them in return is verily a thief.

13. The good people who eat what is left from the sacrifice are released from all sins, but those wicked people who prepare food for their own sake—verily they eat their sin.

14. From food creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice rain comes into being, and sacrifice is born of work.

15. Know the origin of *karma* [of the nature of sacrifices] to be in *Brahman* [the Veda], and the *Brahman* springs from the Imperishable. Therefore the *Brahman*, which comprehends all, ever centres round the sacrifice.

16. He who does not, in this world, turn the wheel thus set in motion, is evil in his nature, sensual in his delight, and he, O Pārtha (Arjuna), lives in vain.

Be satisfied in the Self

17. But the man whose delight is in the Self alone, who is content with the Self, who is satisfied with the Self—for him there exists no work that needs to be done.

18. Similarly, in this world he has no interest whatever to gain by the actions that he has done and none to be gained by the actions

¹ All work is to be done in a spirit of sacrifice, for the sake of the Divine.

THE EPIC PERIOD

that he has not done. He does not depend on all these beings for any interest of his.

19. Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment.

Set an example to others

20. It was even by works that Janaka¹ and others attained to perfection. Thou shouldst do works also with a view to the maintenance of the world.²

21. Whatsoever a great man does, the same is done by others as well. Whatever standard he sets, the world follows.

22. There is not for me, O Pārtha (Arjuna), any work in the three worlds which has to be done or anything to be obtained which has not been obtained; yet I am engaged in work.

23. For, if ever I did not engage in work unwearied, O Pārtha (Arjuna), men would in every way follow my path.

24. If I should cease to work, these worlds would fall in ruin, and I should be the creator of disordered life and destroy these people.

25. As the unlearned act from attachment to their work, so should the learned also act, O Bhārata (Arjuna), but without any attachment, with the desire to maintain the world-order.

26. Let him not unsettle the minds of the ignorant who are attached to action. The enlightened man doing all works in a spirit of *yoga* should set others to act (as well).

The Self is no doer

27. While all kinds of work are done by the modes of nature (*guṇas*), he whose soul is bewildered by the self-sense thinks, "I am the doer."

28. But he who knows the true character of the distinction of the soul from the modes of nature and their works, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), understanding that it is the modes which are acting on the modes themselves, does not get attached.

29. Those who are misled by the modes of nature get attached to

¹ Janaka was the king of Mithilā and the father of Sītā, the wife of Rāma. Janaka ruled, giving up his personal sense of being the worker.

² "The maintenance of the world" (*lokasaṁgraha*) stands for the unity of the world, the interconnectedness of society. If the world is not to sink into a condition of physical misery and moral degradation, if the common life is to be decent and dignified, religious ethics must control social action.

the works produced by them. But let no one who knows the whole unsettle the minds of the ignorant who know only a part.

30. Resigning all thy works to Me, with thy consciousness fixed in the Self, being free from desire and egoism, fight, delivered from thy fever.

31. Those men, too, who, full of faith and free from cavil, constantly follow this teaching of Mine are released from the bondage of works.

32. But those who slight My teaching and do not follow it, know them to be blind to all wisdom, lost and senseless.

Nature and duty

33. Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish?

34. For every sense-attachment and [every] aversion are fixed in regard to the objects of that sense. Let no one come under their sway, for they are his two enemies.

35. Better is one's own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. Better is death in the fulfilment of one's own law, for to follow another's law is perilous.

The enemy is desire and anger

Arjuna said:

36. But by what is a man impelled to commit sin, as if by force, even against his will, O Vārṣṇeya (Kṛṣṇa)?

The Blessed Lord said:

37. This is craving, this is wrath, born of the mode of passion, all devouring and most sinful. Know this to be the enemy here.

38. As fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an embryo is enveloped by the womb, so is this covered by that [passion].

39. Enveloped is wisdom, O Son of Kuntī (Arjuna), by this insatiable fire of desire, which is the constant foe of the wise.

40. The senses, the mind, and the intelligence are said to be its seat. Veiling wisdom by these, it deludes the embodied soul.

41. Therefore, O Best of Bhāratas (Arjuna), control thy senses from the beginning and slay this sinful destroyer of wisdom and discrimination.

42. The senses, they say, are great; greater than the senses is the mind; greater than the mind is the intelligence; but greater than the intelligence is he [the self].

43. Thus knowing him who is beyond the intelligence, steadying the [lower] self by the Self, smite, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), the enemy in the form of desire, so hard to get at.

This is the third chapter, entitled "The *Yoga* of Works."

CHAPTER 4: THE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

The tradition of jñāna (knowledge)-yoga

The Blessed Lord said:

1. I proclaimed this imperishable *yoga* to Vivasvān; Vivasvān told it to Manu; and Manu spoke it to Iṣvāku.

2. Thus handed down from one to another, the royal sages knew it till that *yoga* was lost to the world through long lapse of time, O Oppressor of the foe (Arjuna).

3. This same ancient *yoga* has been today declared to thee by Me; for thou art My devotee and My friend; and this is the supreme secret.

Arjuna said:

4. Later was Thy birth and earlier was the birth of Vivasvat. How, then, am I to understand that thou didst declare it to him in the beginning?

The theory of avatārs

The Blessed Lord said:

5. Many are My lives that are past, and thine also, O Arjuna; all of them I know but thou knowest not, O Scourge of the foe (Arjuna).

6. Though I am unborn, and My self is imperishable, though I am the lord of all creatures, yet, establishing Myself in My own nature, I come into [empiric] being through My power (*māyā*).

7. Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bhārata (Arjuna), then I send forth [create incarnate] Myself.

8. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.

9. He who knows thus in its true nature My divine birth and works is not born again, when he leaves his body but comes to Me, O Arjuna.

10. Delivered from passion, fear, and anger, absorbed in Me,

taking refuge in Me, many purified by the austerity of wisdom have attained to My state of being.

11. As men approach me so do I accept them: men on all sides follow my path, O Pārtha (Arjuna).

12. Those who desire the fruition of their works on earth offer sacrifices to the gods [the various forms of the one Godhead], for the fruition of works in this world of men is very quick.

The desireless nature of God's work

13. The fourfold order¹ was created by Me according to the divisions of quality and work. Though I am its creator, know Me to be incapable of action or change.

Action without attachment does not lead to bondage

14. Works do not defile Me; nor do I have yearning for their fruit. He who knows Me thus is not bound by works.

15. So knowing was work done also by the men of old who sought liberation. Therefore do thou also work as the ancients did in former times.

Action and inaction

16. What is action? What is inaction?—as to this even the wise are bewildered. I will declare to thee what action is, knowing which thou shalt be delivered from evil.

17. One has to understand what action is, and likewise one has to understand what is wrong action, and one has to understand about inaction. Hard to understand is the way of work.

18. He who in action sees inaction and action in inaction—he is wise among men, he is a *yogin*, and he has accomplished all his work.

19. He whose undertakings are all free from the will of desire, whose works are burned up in the fire of wisdom—him the wise call a man of learning.

20. Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of works, ever content, without any kind of dependence, he does nothing though he is ever engaged in work.

21. Having no desires, with his heart and self under control, giving up all possessions, performing action by the body alone, he commits no wrong.

¹ The fourfold order is the caste system. The emphasis is on *guṇa* (aptitude) and *karma* (function), and not *jāti* (birth). The *varṇa*, or the order to which we belong, is independent of sex, birth, and breeding.

22. He who is satisfied with whatever comes by chance, who has passed beyond the dualities (of pleasure and pain), who is free from jealousy, who remains the same in success and failure—even when he acts, he is not bound.

Sacrifice and its symbolic value

23. The work of a man whose attachments are sundered, who is liberated, whose mind is firmly founded in wisdom, who does work as a sacrifice, is dissolved¹ entirely.

24. For him the act of offering is God; the oblation is God. By God is it offered into the fire of God. God is that which is to be attained by him who realizes God in his works.

25. Some *yogins* offer sacrifices to the gods, while others offer sacrifice by the sacrifice itself into the fire of the Supreme.

26. Some offer hearing and the other senses into the fires of restraint; others offer sound and the other objects of sense into the fires of sense.

27. Some again offer all the works of their senses and the works of the vital force into the fire of the *yoga* of self-control, kindled by knowledge.

28. Some likewise offer as sacrifice their material possessions, or their austerities, or their spiritual exercises, while others of subdued minds and severe vows offer their learning and knowledge.

29. Others again who are devoted to breath control, having restrained the paths of *prāṇa* (the outgoing breath) and *apāna* (the incoming breath), pour as sacrifice *prāṇa* into *apāna* and *apāna* into *prāṇa*.

30. While others, restricting their food, pour as sacrifice their life breaths into life breaths.² All these are knowers of sacrifice [know what sacrifice is] and by sacrifice have their sins destroyed.

31. Those who eat the sacred food that remains after a sacrifice attain to the eternal Absolute; this world is not for him who offers no sacrifice; how, then, any other world, O Best of the Kurus (Arjuna)?

32. Thus many forms of sacrifice are spread out in the face of *Brahman* [i.e., set forth as the means of reaching the Absolute]. Know thou that all these are born of work, and so knowing thou shalt be freed.

¹ That is, his action does not bind him to cosmic existence.

² That is, some practice control of breath.

Wisdom and work

33. Knowledge as a sacrifice is greater than any material sacrifice, O scourge of the foe (Arjuna), for all works without any exception culminate in wisdom.

34. Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry, and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the truth will instruct thee in knowledge.

In praise of wisdom

35. When thou hast known it, thou shalt not fall again into this confusion, O Pāṇḍava (Arjuna), for by this thou shalt see all existences without exception in the Self, then in Me.

36. Even if thou shouldst be the most sinful of all sinners, thou shalt cross over all evil by the boat of wisdom alone.

37. As the fire which is kindled turns its fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, even so does the fire of wisdom turn to ashes all work.

38. There is nothing on earth equal in purity to wisdom. He who becomes perfected by *yoga* finds this of himself, in his self [*ātman*] in course of time.

Faith is necessary for wisdom

39. He who has faith, who is absorbed in it [i.e., wisdom], and who has subdued his senses, gains wisdom, and having gained wisdom he attains quickly the supreme peace.

40. But the man who is ignorant, who has no faith, who is of a doubting nature, perishes. For the doubting soul [*ātman*] there is neither this world nor the world beyond, nor any happiness.

41. Works do not bind him who has renounced all works by *yoga*, who has destroyed all doubt by wisdom, and who ever possesses his soul, O winner of wealth (Arjuna).

42. Therefore, having cut asunder with the sword of wisdom this doubt in thy heart that is born of ignorance, resort to *yoga* and stand up, O Bhārata (Arjuna).

This is the fourth chapter, entitled “The *Yoga* of [Divine] Knowledge.”

CHAPTER 5: TRUE RENUNCIATION

Sāṁkhya and Yoga lead to the same goal

Arjuna said:

1. Thou praisest, O Kṛṣṇa, the renunciation of works and again their unselfish performance. Tell me for certain which one is the better of these two.

The Blessed Lord said:

2. The renunciation of works and their unselfish performance both lead to the soul's salvation. But of the two, the unselfish performance of works is better than their renunciation.¹

3. He who neither loathes nor desires should be known as one who has ever the spirit of renunciation; for, free from dualities, he is released easily, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), from bondage.

4. The ignorant speak of renunciation [Sāṁkhya] and practice of works [Yoga] as different, not the wise. He who applies himself well to one gets the fruit of both.

5. The status which is obtained by men of renunciation is reached by men of action also. He who sees that the ways of renunciation and of action are one—he sees truly.

6. But renunciation, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), is difficult to attain without *yoga*; the sage who is trained in *yoga* [the way of works] attains soon to the Absolute.

7. He who is trained in the way of works, and is pure in soul, who is master of his self and who has conquered the senses, whose soul becomes the self of all beings—he is not tainted by works, though he works.

8. The man who is united with the Divine and knows the truth thinks, "I do nothing at all," for in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, walking, sleeping, breathing,

9. In speaking, emitting, grasping, opening and closing the eyes he holds that only the senses² are occupied with the objects of the senses.

10. He who works, having given up attachment, resigning his actions to God, is not touched by sin, even as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.

¹ The Sāṁkhya method involves the renunciation of works and the Yoga insists on their performance in the right spirit. The two ways are not inconsistent. In Sāṁkhya, *jñāna* (insight) is emphasized. In Yoga, volitional effort is stressed. In one, we know the Self by thinking away the alien elements; in the other, we will them away.

² "Only the senses": that is, not the self.

11. The *yogins* [men of action] perform works merely with the body, mind, understanding or merely with the senses, abandoning attachment, for the purification of their selves.

12. The self in union with the Divine attains to peace well-founded, by abandoning attachment to the fruits of works, but he whose self is not in union with the Divine is impelled by desire, and is attached to the fruit of action, and is therefore bound.

The enlightened self

13. The embodied self who has controlled his nature, having renounced all actions by the mind [inwardly], dwells at ease in the city of nine gates,¹ neither working nor causing work to be done.

14. The Sovereign Self does not create for the people agency, nor does He act. Nor does He connect works with their fruits. It is nature that works out these.

15. The All-pervading Spirit does not take on the sin or the merit of any. Wisdom is enveloped by ignorance; thereby creatures are bewildered.

16. But for those in whom ignorance is destroyed by wisdom—for them wisdom lights up the Supreme Self like the sun.

17. Thinking of That, directing one's whole conscious being to That, making That their whole aim, with That as the sole object of their devotion, they reach a state from which there is no return, their sins washed away by wisdom.

18. Sages see with an equal eye, a learned and humble *brāhmin*, a cow, an elephant, or even a dog, or an outcaste.

19. Even here on earth the created world is overcome by those whose mind is established in equality. God is flawless and the same in all. Therefore are these persons established in God.

20. One should not rejoice on obtaining what is pleasant or sorrow on obtaining what is unpleasant. He who is thus firm of understanding and unbewildered—such a knower of God is established in God.

21. When the self is no longer attached to external contacts [objects], one finds the happiness that is in the Self. Such a one who is in union with God enjoys undying bliss.

22. Whatever pleasures are born of contacts with objects are only

¹ The nine gates are the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils, the mouth, and the two organs of excretion and generation.

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sources of pain: they have a beginning and an end, O Son of Kuntī (Arjuna); no wise man delights in them.

23. He who is able to resist the rush of desire and anger—even here before he gives up his body, he is a *yogin*, he is the happy man.

Peace from within

24. He who finds his happiness within, his joy within, and likewise his light only within, that *yogin* becomes divine and attains to the beatitude of God.

25. The holy men whose sins are destroyed, whose doubts [dualities] are cut asunder, whose minds are disciplined, and who rejoice in doing good to all creatures attain to the beatitude of God.

26. To those austere souls who are delivered from desire and anger and who have subdued their minds and have knowledge of the Self—near to them lies the beatitude of God.

27–28. Shutting out all external objects, fixing the vision between the eyebrows, making even the inward and the outward breaths moving within the nostrils, the sage who has controlled the senses, mind, and understanding, who is intent on liberation, who has cast away desire, fear and anger—he is ever freed.

29. And having known Me as the Enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, the Great Lord of all the worlds, the Friend of all beings, he [the sage] attains peace.

This is the fifth chapter, entitled “The *Yoga* of Renunciation of Action.”

CHAPTER 6: THE TRUE YOGA

Renunciation and action are one

The Blessed Lord said:

1. He who does the work which he ought to do without seeking its fruit is the *sannyāsin* [renouncer], he is the *yogin*, not he who does not light the sacred fire, and performs no rites.

2. What they call renunciation, that know to be disciplined activity, O Pāṇḍava (Arjuna), for no one becomes a *yogin* who has not renounced his selfish purpose.

The pathway and the goal

3. Work is said to be the means of the sage who wishes to attain to *yoga*; when he has attained to *yoga*, serenity is said to be the means.

4. When one does not get attached to the objects of sense or to works, and has renounced all purposes, then he is said to have attained to *yoga*.

5. Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not degrade himself; for the Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self.

6. For him who has conquered his [lower] self by the [higher] Self his Self is a friend, but for him who has not possessed his [higher] Self, his very Self will act in enmity, like an enemy.

7. When one has conquered one's [lower] self and has attained to the calm of self-mastery, his Supreme Self abides ever concentrate:¹ he is at peace in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain, in honour and dishonour.

8. The ascetic (*yogi*) whose soul is satisfied with wisdom and knowledge, who is unchanging and master of his senses, to whom a clod, a stone, and a piece of gold are the same, is said to be controlled [in *yoga*].

9. He who is equal-minded among friends, companions, and foes, among those who are neutral and impartial, among those who are hateful and related, among saints and sinners—he excels.

Eternal vigilance over body and mind is essential

10. Let the *yogin* try constantly to concentrate his mind [on the Supreme Self] remaining in solitude and alone, self-controlled, free from desires, and longing for possessions.

11. He should set in a clean place his firm seat, neither too high nor too low, covered with sacred grass, a deerskin, and a cloth, one over the other.

12. There taking his place on the seat, making his mind one-pointed, and controlling his thought and sense, let him practise *yoga* for the purification of the self.²

13. Holding the body, head, and neck erect and still, looking fixedly at the tip of his nose, without looking around [without allowing his eyes to wander].

14. Serene and fearless, firm in the vow of celibacy, subdued in mind, let him sit, harmonized, his mind turned to Me and intent on Me alone.

15. The *yogin* of subdued mind, ever keeping himself thus harmonized, attains to peace, the supreme *nirvāṇa*, which abides in Me.

¹ That is, established in itself, self-established.

² “*Yoga*” here means *dhyāna-yoga*, meditation.

16. Verily, *yoga* is not for him who eats too much or abstains too much from eating. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much or keeps awake too much.

17. For the man who is temperate in food and recreation, who is restrained in his actions, whose sleep and waking are regulated, there ensues discipline (*yoga*) which destroys all sorrow.

The perfect yogi [or yogin]

18. When the disciplined mind is established in the Self alone, liberated from all desires, then is he said to be harmonized [in *yoga*].

19. As a lamp in a windless place flickereth not, to such is likened the *yogi* of subdued thought who practises union with the Self [or discipline of himself].

20. That in which thought is at rest, restrained by the practice of concentration, that in which he beholds the Self through the self and rejoices in the Self,

21. That in which he finds this supreme delight, perceived by the intelligence and beyond the reach of the senses, wherein established, he no longer falls away from the truth,

22. That, on gaining which he thinks that there is no greater gain beyond it, wherein established he is not shaken even by the heaviest sorrow—

23. Let that be known by the name of *yoga*, this disconnection from union with pain. This *yoga* should be practised with determination, with heart undismayed.

24. Abandoning without exception all desires born of [selfish] will, restraining with the mind all the senses on every side,

25. Let him gain, little by little, tranquillity by means of reason controlled by steadiness, and, having fixed the mind on the Self, let him not think of anything else.

26. Whatsoever makes the wavering and unsteady mind wander away let him restrain and bring it back to the control of the Self alone,

27. For supreme happiness comes to the *yogin* whose mind is peaceful, whose passions are at rest, who is stainless and has become one with God.

28. Thus making the self ever harmonized, the *yogin*, who has put away sin, experiences easily the infinite bliss of contact with the Eternal.

29. He whose self is harmonized by *yoga* sees the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; everywhere he sees the same.

30. He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me—I am not lost to him nor is he lost to Me.

31. The *yogin* who, established in oneness, worships Me abiding in all beings lives in Me, howsoever he may be active,

32. He, O Arjuna, who sees with equality everything, in the image of his own self, whether in pleasure or in pain—he is considered a perfect *yogi*.

Control of mind is difficult but possible

Arjuna said:

33. This *yoga* declared by you to be of the nature of equality [evenness of mind], O Madhusūdana (Kṛṣṇa), I see no stable foundation for, on account of restlessness,

34. For the mind is verily fickle, O Kṛṣṇa; it is impetuous, strong, and obstinate. I think that it is as difficult to control as the wind.

The Blessed Lord said:

35. Without doubt, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), the mind is difficult to curb and restless, but it can be controlled, O Son of Kuntī (Arjuna), by constant practice and non-attachment.

36. *Yoga* is hard to attain, I agree, by one who is not self-controlled; but by the self-controlled it is attainable by striving through proper means.

Arjuna said:

37. He who cannot control himself though he has faith, with the mind wandering away from *yoga*, failing to attain perfection in *yoga*—what way does he go, O Kṛṣṇa?

38. Does he not perish like a rent cloud, O Mighty-armed (Kṛṣṇa), fallen from both and without any hold and bewildered in the path that leads to the Eternal?

39. Thou shouldst dispel completely this, my doubt, O Kṛṣṇa, for there is none else than Thyself who can destroy this doubt.

The Blessed Lord said:

40. O, Pārtha (Arjuna), neither in this life nor hereafter is there destruction for him, for never does any one who does good, dear friend, tread the path of woe.

41. Having attained to the world of the righteous and dwelt there for very many years, the man who has fallen away from *yoga* is again born in the house of such as are pure and prosperous.

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42. Or he may be born in the family of *yogins* who are endowed with wisdom. For such a birth as this is more difficult to obtain in the world.

43. There he regains the mental impressions of union [with the Divine] which he had developed in his previous life, and with this [as the starting point] he strives again for perfection, O Joy of the Kurus (Arjuna).

44. By his former practice, he is carried on irresistibly. Even the seeker after the knowledge of *yoga* goes beyond the Vedic rule.¹

45. But the *yogi* who strives with assiduity, cleansed of all sins, perfecting himself through many lives, then attains to the highest goal.

The perfect yogi

46. The *yogin* is greater than the ascetic; he is considered to be greater than the man of knowledge, greater than the man of ritual works; therefore, do thou become a *yogin*, O Arjuna.

47. And of all *yogins*, he who full of faith worships Me, with his inner self abiding in me,—him I hold to be the most attuned to me [in *yoga*].

This is the sixth chapter, entitled “The *Yoga* of Meditation.”