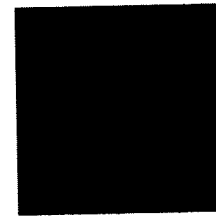


BHAGAVAD
GITA



A New Translation
Stephen Mitchell

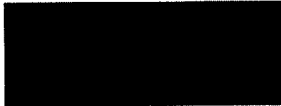


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Chapter 8

ABSOLUTE FREEDOM



ARJUNA SAID:

What is this absolute freedom,
Krishna? What is the Self?
What is the true nature of action,
the nature of beings and of gods?

Teach me the way of worship:
what it is, here, in the body.
And how at the hour of death
can a man be with you in spirit?

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Freedom is union with the deathless;
the Self is the essence of all things;
its creative power, called action,
causes the whole world to be.

About beings, know that they die;
about gods, know the Supreme
Person; and know that true worship
is I myself, here, in this body.

Whoever in his final moments
thinks of me only, is sure
to enter my state of being
once his body is dead.

Whatever the state of being
that a man may focus upon
at the end, when he leaves his body,
to that state of being he will go.

Therefore, Arjuna, meditate
on me at all times, and fight;
with your whole mind intent on me,
you will come to me—never doubt it.

Strong in the practice of yoga,
with a mind that is rooted in me
and in nothing else, you will reach
the Supreme Person that I am.

Meditate on the Guide,
the Giver of all, the Primordial
Poet, smaller than an atom,
unthinkable, brilliant as the sun.

If you do this at the hour of your death,
with an unmoving mind, drawing
your breath up between your eyebrows,
you will reach the Person that I am.

I will teach you about the state
called the eternal, the absolute,
which those who strive toward me enter
desireless, freed from attachments.

Closing the nine gates of the body,
keeping the attention in the heart,
drawing the breath to the forehead,
with the mind absorbed, one-pointed,

uttering the sacred *Ôm*,
which itself is freedom, focused
on me as you leave the body,
you attain the ultimate goal.

For men whose minds are forever
focused on me, whose love
has grown deep through meditation,
I am easy to reach, Arjuna.

Reaching me, these great souls
attain the supreme perfection
and no longer are reborn in this fleeting
world of sorrow and pain.

All realms, up to the realm
of Brahma, are subject to rebirth;
but those who attain me, Arjuna,
will never be reborn again.

If you know that one single day
or one single night of Brahma
lasts more than four billion years,
you understand day and night.

When day comes, all things emerge
from the depths of unmanifest nature;
when night comes, all things dissolve
into the unmanifest again.

These multitudes of beings, in an endless,
beginningless cycle, helplessly
dissolve when Brahma's night comes
and emerge once more at his dawn.

But beyond this unmanifest nature
is another unmanifest state,
a primal existence that is not
destroyed when all things dissolve.

This is the eternal unmanifest
and is called the ultimate goal;
men who reach this, my supreme
dwelling, are never reborn.

This Supreme Person, Arjuna,
who contains all beings and extends
to the limits of all that is,
can be reached by wholehearted devotion.

Now, Arjuna, I will tell you
the times at which men of yoga
die and must be reborn,
or die never to return.

Fire, light, day, the moon's brightness,
the six months of the north-turning sun:
dying then, men who are free
go to absolute freedom.

Smoke, gloom, night, the moon's darkness,
the six months of the south-turning sun:
dying then, men of yoga
reach the moon's light and return.

These paths, of light and of darkness,
have always existed; by one,
a man will escape from rebirth;
by the other, he is born again.

Knowing these two paths, Arjuna,
the man of yoga, at all times
resolute in his nonattachment,
goes far beyond the merit

gained from the study of the scriptures,
from acts of worship or control
or charity; dying, he reaches
the supreme, primordial place.

Chapter 9

THE SECRET OF LIFE



THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Because you trust me, Arjuna,
I will tell you what wisdom is,
the secret of life: know it
and be free of suffering, forever.

This is the supreme wisdom,
the knowing beyond all knowing,
experienced directly, in a flash,
eternal, and a joy to practice.

Those who are without faith
in my teaching, cannot attain me;
they endlessly return to this world,
shuttling from death to death.

I permeate all the universe
 in my unmanifest form.
 All beings exist within me,
 yet I am so inconceivably

vast, so beyond existence,
 that though they are brought forth
 and sustained by my limitless power,
 I am not confined within them.

Just as the all-moving wind,
 wherever it goes, always
 remains in the vastness of space,
 all beings remain within me.

They are gathered back into my womb
 at the end of the cosmic cycle—
 a hundred fifty thousand
 billion of your earthly years—

and as a new cycle begins
 I send them forth once again,
 pouring from my abundance
 the myriad forms of life.

These actions do not bind me, Arjuna.
 I stand apart from them all,
 indifferent to their outcome,
 unattached, serene.

Under my guidance, Nature
 brings forth all beings, all things
 animate or inanimate,
 and sets the whole universe in motion.

Foolish people despise me
 in the human form that I take,
 blind to my true nature
 as the Lord of all life and death.

Their hopes and actions are vain,
 their knowledge is sheer delusion;
 turning from the light, they fall
 into cruelty, selfishness, greed.

But the truly wise, Arjuna,
 who dive deep into themselves,
 fearless, one-pointed, know me
 as the inexhaustible source.

Always chanting my praise,
steadfast in their devotion,
they make their lives an unending
hymn to my endless love.

Others, on the path of knowledge,
know me as the many, the One;
behind the faces of a million
gods, they can see my face.

I am the ritual and the worship,
the medicine and the mantra,
the butter burnt in the fire,
and I am the flames that consume it.

I am the father of the universe
and its mother, essence and goal
of all knowledge, the refiner, the sacred
Ôm, and the threefold Vedas.

I am the beginning and the end,
origin and dissolution,
refuge, home, true lover,
womb and imperishable seed.

I am the heat of the sun,
I hold back the rain and release it;
I am death, and the deathless,
and all that is or is not.

The righteous who follow the scriptures
strictly, who drink the *soma*
and are purified of their sins,
who pray to be taken to heaven —

they reach the world of the gods
and enjoy an indescribable
bliss, although after eons
of those vast and glorious pleasures,

when their merit is spent, they fall back
into the mortal world;
impelled by desire, they achieve
only what will pass away.

But to those who meditate on me
undistracted, and worship me
everywhere, always, I will bring
a reward that never can be lost.

Arjuna, all those who worship
other gods, with deep faith,
are really worshiping me,
even if they don't know it.

For I am the only object
and the only enjoyer of worship;
and they fall back because they cannot
know me as I truly am.

Worshiping the gods, men go
to the gods; worshiping spirits,
to the spirits; worshiping me,
they come to me in the end.

Any offering—a leaf,
a flower or fruit, a cup
of water—I will accept it
if given with a loving heart.

Whatever you do, Arjuna,
do it as an offering to me—
whatever you say or eat
or pray or enjoy or suffer.

In this way you will be freed
from all the results of your actions,
good or harmful; unfettered,
untroubled, you will come to me.

I am the same to all beings;
I favor none and reject none.
But those who worship me live
within me and I live in them.

Even the heartless criminal,
if he loves me with all his heart,
will certainly grow into sainthood
as he moves toward me on this path.

Quickly that man becomes pure,
his heart finds eternal peace.
Arjuna, no one who truly
loves me will ever be lost.

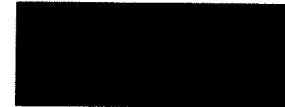
All those who love and trust me,
even the lowest of the low—
prostitutes, beggars, slaves—
will attain the ultimate goal.

How much easier then for ordinary
people, or for those with pure hearts.
In this sad, vanishing world
turn to me and find freedom.

Concentrate your mind on me,
fill your heart with my presence,
love me, serve me, worship me,
and you will attain me at last.

Chapter 10

DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS



THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Listen further, Arjuna,
to these words that delight your heart;
this is my utmost teaching,
which I tell you for your greatest good.

Neither the myriad gods
nor any of the sages know
my origin; I am the source
from which gods and sages emerge.

Whoever knows me as the Unborn,
the Beginningless, the great Lord
of all worlds—he alone sees
truly and is freed from all harm.

Understanding and wisdom,
 patience, truth, peace of mind,
 pleasure and pain, being
 and nonbeing, fear and courage.

nonviolence, equanimity,
 control, benevolence, fame,
 dishonor—all these conditions
 come forth from me alone.

The seven primeval sages,
 the four progenitors from whom
 all human beings descend
 arose from my own depths, mind-born.

He who can understand
 the glory of my manifestations
 is forever united with me
 by his unwavering love.

I am the source of all things,
 and all things emerge from me;
 knowing this, wise men worship
 by entering my state of being.

Thinking and speaking of me,
 enlightening one another,
 their lives surrendered to my care,
 they are always serene and joyous.

To those who are steadfast, who love me
 with true devotion, I give
 the yoga of understanding,
 which will bring them to where I am.

Acting with deep compassion
 from within my own being, I dispel
 all ignorance-born darkness
 with wisdom's resplendent light.

ARJUNA SAID:

You, Lord, are the supreme
 freedom, the supreme abode,
 the eternal Person, the primordial
 god, all-pervading, birthless.

This is how the great sages
describe you — the divine Narada,
Asita, Devala, and Vyasa—
and now you yourself confirm it.

Everything you have told me,
Krishna, I believe is true;
neither the gods nor the demons
can grasp your infinite forms.

You alone know yourself
through yourself, Lord of all beings,
cause and origin, master
of the universe, God of gods.

Tell me now, in detail,
the divine self-manifestations
by which you pervade these worlds
and grace them with so much splendor.

How can I know you, Krishna?
Which of your many forms
should I visualize, Lord of Yoga,
as I focus my thoughts on you?

Give me some further examples
of your glorious manifestations;
for I never can tire of hearing
your life-giving, honey-sweet words.

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

All right, Arjuna: I will tell you
a few of my manifestations,
the most glorious ones; for infinite
are the forms in which I appear.

I am the Self, Arjuna,
seated in the heart of all beings;
I am the beginning and the life span
of beings, and their end as well.

Of the sky gods, I am Vishnu;
of the heavenly lights, the sun;
Marichi, chief of the wind gods;
among stars, I am the moon;

of the Vedas, I am the hymns;
 Indra among the gods;
 the mind among the six senses;
 the consciousness of all beings;

of the storm gods, I am Shiva;
 of the demigods, Kubera;
 Agni among the bright gods;
 and Meru, highest of mountains.

Know, Arjuna, that among
 priests I am Brihaspati;
 of generals, the war god Skanda;
 of waters, I am the ocean;

of the great seers, I am Bhrigu;
 of words, the syllable *Ôm*;
 of worship, I am the mantra;
 of mountain chains, Himalaya;

of trees, the sacred fig tree;
 of divine sages, Narada;
 of the high celestial musicians,
 Chitraratha; of saints,

the wise Kapila; of horses,
 Uchhaishravas, Indra's
 favorite, born of the sea foam;
 of elephants, Indra's winged

Airavata; of men,
 I am the king; of weapons,
 Indra's thunderbolt; of cows,
 Kamadhuk, the wish-granter;

Kandarpa, the god of love;
 the king of reptiles, Vasuki;
 of divine snakes, I am Ananta,
 the cosmic serpent; Varuna

among the gods of the ocean;
 of the blessed forefathers, I am
 Aryaman; of the controllers,
 Yama, the god of death;

of demons, the devout Prahlada;
 of things that compel, I am time;
 the king of animals, the lion;
 Garuda among the birds;

of purifiers, the wind;
 of warriors, I am Rama;
 of sea monsters, Makara;
 of rivers, the holy Ganges;

of creations, the beginning and end
 and the middle as well, Arjuna;
 of knowledge, knowledge of the Self;
 of orators, I am the speech;

of letters, the first one, A;
 I am imperishable time;
 the Creator whose face is everywhere;
 death that devours all things;

the source of all things to come;
 of feminine powers, I am
 fame, wealth, speech, and memory,
 intelligence, loyalty, forgiveness;

of chants, I am the great Brihat;
 of poetic meters, the *gayatri*;
 of months, Margashirsha, the first month;
 of seasons, flower-lush spring;

of swindles, I am the dice game;
 the splendor of the high and mighty;
 determination and victory;
 the courage of all brave men;

of the Vrishi clan, I am Krishna;
 of Pandavas, I am Arjuna;
 of the sages, I am Vyasa;
 of poets, the sublime Ushanas;

of punishers, I am the scepter;
 the astuteness of the great leaders;
 the silence of secret things;
 and I am the wisdom of the wise.

I am the divine seed
 within all beings, Arjuna;
 nothing, inanimate or animate,
 could exist for a moment without me.

These are just a small number
 of my infinite manifestations;
 were I to tell you more,
 there would be no end to the telling.

Whatever in this world is excellent
and glows with intelligence or beauty—
be sure that it has its source
in a fragment of my divine splendor.

But what need is there for all these
details? Just know that I am,
and that I support the whole universe
with a single fragment of myself.

Chapter 11

THE COSMIC VISION



ARJUNA SAID:

Graciously, Lord, you have spoken
about the ultimate secret
revealed when one knows the Self,
and your words have cleared up my confusion.

You have told me in detail
the origin and dissolution
of all things, and have described
your own vast, imperishable Being.

I do not doubt that you are
 what you say you are, Lord. And yet
 I want to see for myself
 the splendor of your ultimate form.

If you think I am strong enough,
 worthy enough, to endure it,
 grant me now, Lord, a vision
 of your vast, imperishable Self.

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Look, Arjuna: thousands,
 millions of my divine forms,
 beings of all kinds and sizes,
 of every color and shape.

Look: the sun gods, the gods
 of fire, dawn, sky, wind, storm,
 wonders that no mortal has ever
 beheld. Look! Look, Arjuna!

The whole universe, all things
 animate or inanimate,
 are gathered here—look!—enfolded
 inside my infinite body.

But since you are not able
 to see me with mortal eyes,
 I will grant you divine sight. Look!
 Look! The depths of my power!

*After he had spoken these words,
 Krishna, the great Lord of Yoga,
 revealed to Arjuna his majestic,
 transcendent, limitless form.*

*With innumerable mouths and eyes,
 faces too marvelous to stare at,
 dazzling ornaments, innumerable
 weapons uplifted, flaming—*

*crowned with fire, wrapped
 in pure light, with celestial fragrance,
 he stood forth as the infinite
 God, composed of all wonders.*

*If a thousand suns were to rise
and stand in the noon sky, blazing,
such brilliance would be like the fierce
brilliance of that mighty Self.*

*Arjuna saw the whole universe
enfolded, with its countless billions
of life-forms, gathered together
in the body of the God of gods.*

*Trembling with awe, his blood chilled,
the hair standing up on his flesh,
he bowed and, joining his palms,
spoke these words to the Lord.*

ARJUNA SAID:

I see all gods in your body
and multitudes of beings, Lord,
and Brahma on his lotus throne,
and the seers, and the shining angels.

I see you everywhere, with billions
of arms, eyes, bellies, faces,
without end, middle, or beginning,
your body the whole universe, Lord.

Crowned, bearing mace and discus,
you dazzle my vision, blazing
in the measureless, massive, sun-flame
splendor of your radiant form.

You are the deathless, the utmost
goal of all knowledge, the world's base,
the guardian of the eternal
law, the primordial Person.

I see you beginningless, endless,
infinite in power, with a billion
arms, the sun and moon
your eyeballs, the flames of your mouth

lighting the whole universe with splendor.
You alone fill all space,
and the three worlds shudder when they see
your astounding, terrifying form.

Multitudes of gods approach you,
 palms joined in dread and wonder;
 multitudes of sages chant to you
 hymns of deep adoration.

The storm gods, the gods of light,
 of sky, dawn, and wind, the angels,
 the saints, the demigods and demons,
 all gaze at you in amazement.

Your stupendous form, your billions
 of eyes, limbs, bellies, mouths, dreadful
 fangs: seeing them the worlds
 tremble, and so do I.

As you touch the sky, many-hued,
 gape-mouthed, your huge eyes blazing,
 my innards tremble, my breath
 stops, my bones turn to jelly.

Seeing your billion-fanged mouths
 blaze like the fires of doomsday,
 I faint, I stagger, I despair.
 Have mercy on me, Lord Vishnu!

All Dhritarashtra's men
 and all these multitudes of kings—
 Bhishma, Drona, Karna,
 with all our warriors behind them—

are rushing headlong into
 your hideous, gaping, knife-fanged
 jaws; I see them with skulls crushed,
 their raw flesh stuck to your teeth.

As the rivers in many torrents
 rush toward the ocean, all
 these warriors are pouring down
 into your blazing mouths.

As moths rush into a flame
 and are burned in an instant, all
 beings plunge down your gullet
 and instantly are consumed.

You gulp down all worlds, everywhere
 swallowing them in your flames,
 and your rays, Lord Vishnu, fill all
 the universe with dreadful brilliance.

Who *are* you, in this terrifying form?
 Have mercy, Lord; grant me even
 a glimmer of understanding
 to prop up my staggering mind.

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

I am death, shatterer of worlds,
 annihilating all things.
 With or without you, these warriors
 in their facing armies will die.

Therefore stand up; win glory;
 conquer the enemy; rule.
 Already I have struck them down;
 you are just my instrument, Arjuna.

Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha,
 Karna, and the other great heroes
 have already been killed by me. Fight;
 without hesitation kill them.

*Having heard Krishna's speech,
 Arjuna, his palms joined, shivering
 with terror, bowed to the Lord
 deeply, and stammered these words.*

ARJUNA SAID:

Now I know why the universe
 delights and rejoices in you;
 terrified, the demons scatter
 before you, and the sages bow.

Why should they not bow, eternal
 Creator, infinite Lord?
 You are both being and nonbeing,
 and what is beyond them both,

the primal God, the primordial
 Person, the ultimate place
 of the universe, the knower and the known,
 the presence that fills all things.

You are wind, death, fire, the moon,
the Lord of life, the great ancestor
of all things. A thousand times
I bow in front of you, Lord.

Again and again I bow to you,
from all sides, in every direction.
Majesty infinite in power,
you pervade — no, you *are* — all things.

If, thinking you a human, I ever
touched you or patted your back
or called you “dear fellow” or “friend”
through negligence or affection,

or greeted you with disrespect,
thoughtlessly, when we were playing
or resting, alone or in public,
I beg you to forgive me, immeasurable

God, great father of the world,
teacher, sustainer, goal
of all reverence, unique and peerless
Lord of unthinkable splendor.

Therefore, most sincerely, I beg
your pardon. As a father forgives
his son, a friend his dear friend,
a lover his beloved: forgive me.

Having seen what no mortal has seen,
I am joyful, yet I quiver with dread.
Show me your other form — please —
the one that I know; have mercy;

let me see you as you were before,
crowned, bearing mace and discus,
with only four arms, O billion-armed
Lord of infinite forms.

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Graciously for your sake, Arjuna,
I showed you my highest form —
dazzling, infinite, primal —
which no one has seen but you.

Not by worship or study
or alms or ascetic practice
can I be seen in this form
by anyone but you, Arjuna.

Do not be frightened or confused
at seeing my horrific form.
Free of fear, lighthearted,
see me as I was before.

*Having spoken thus to Arjuna,
the Lord stood before him again
in the mild and pleasant form
of Krishna, the kind, the beautiful.*

ARJUNA SAID:

Seeing your human form,
Krishna, I feel at ease;
once more I am myself,
and my mind has regained its composure.

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

The vision that you have been granted
is difficult to attain;
even the gods are always
longing to behold me like this.

Not by study or rites
or alms or ascetic practice
can I be seen in this cosmic
form, as you have just seen me.

Only by single-minded
devotion can I be known
as I truly am, Arjuna—
can I be seen and entered.

He who acts for my sake,
loving me, free of attachment,
with benevolence toward all beings,
will come to me in the end.

Chapter 12

THE YOGA OF DEVOTION



ARJUNA SAID:

One man loves you with pure devotion; another man loves the Unmanifest. Which of these two understands yoga more deeply?

THE BLESSED LORD SAID:

Those who love and revere me with unwavering faith, always centering their minds on me — they are the most perfect in yoga.

But those who revere the Imperishable, the Unsayable, the Unmanifest, the All-Present, the Inconceivable, the Exalted, the Unchanging, the Eternal,

mastering their senses, acting at all times with equanimity, rejoicing in the welfare of all beings — they too will reach me at last.

But *their* path is much more arduous because, for embodied beings, the Unmanifest is obscure, and difficult to attain.

Those who love and revere me, who surrender all actions to me, who meditate upon me with undistracted attention,

whose minds have entered my being — I come to them all, Arjuna, and quickly rescue them all from the ocean of death and birth.

Concentrate every thought
on me alone; with a mind
fully absorbed, one-pointed,
you will live within me, forever.

If you find that you are unable
to center your thoughts on me,
strengthen your mind by the steady
practice of concentration.

If this is beyond your powers,
dedicate yourself to me;
performing all actions for my sake,
you will surely achieve success.

If even this is beyond you,
rely on my basic teaching:
act always without attachment,
surrendering your action's fruits.

Knowledge is better than practice;
meditation is better
than knowledge; and best of all
is surrender, which soon brings peace.

He who has let go of hatred,
who treats all beings with kindness
and compassion, who is always serene,
unmoved by pain or pleasure,

free of the "I" and "mine,"
self-controlled, firm and patient,
his whole mind focused on me—
that man is the one I love best.

He who neither disturbs
the world nor is disturbed by it,
who is free of all joy, fear, envy—
that man is the one I love best.

He who is pure, impartial,
skilled, unworried, calm,
selfless in all undertakings—
that man is the one I love best.

He who, devoted to me,
is beyond joy and hatred, grief
and desire, good and bad fortune—
that man is the one I love best.

[12.18–20]

The same to both friend and foe,
the same in disgrace or honor,
suffering or joy, untroubled,
indifferent to praise and blame,

quiet, filled with devotion,
content with whatever happens,
at home wherever he is—
that man is the one I love best.

Those who realize the essence
of duty, who trust me completely
and surrender their lives to me—
I love them with very great love.