



THE BHAGAVAD GITA

This heavily edited translation of the Bhagavad Gita focuses mainly on the first two-thirds of the text (Chapters 1-12). This is where the reader will encounter both the most popular sections of the work as well as those passages which deal specifically with the four yogic paths. You'll notice that I've opted to edit the text in such a way as to cluster texts dealing with specific yogic paths together to try to make the meaning of these texts clearer to the reader. It should also be noted that the original Sanskrit version of the Gita was composed in verses of mainly 32 meters. I've opted for a prose translation, recognizing that this choice necessarily sacrifices much of the majestic poetry of the text. Those who would like to read a more traditional version of this text are encouraged to read the highly regarded version by Eknath Easwaran (Nilgiri Press, 2007), which combines clarity with grace of expression.

OPENING OF THE TEXT

Arjuna's Dilemma [1.20-40, 44-47]

Arjuna beheld the sons of Dhritarashtra, assembled on the battlefield, ready to fight. Raising his bow, he said to his charioteer, "Krishna, move my chariot between the two armies, so that I can see those who are fighting on my side and those who are fighting against me."

Driving his shining chariot between the two armies and facing those kings, Krishna said "Arjuna, behold the members of the Kuru family assembled here."

Arjuna saw before him fathers, grandfathers, uncles, cousins, sons, grandsons, teachers, friends, fathers-in-law, and comrades arrayed in both armies.

Gazing at them there, his heart was filled with great sorrow and he said, "Krishna, when I see my own kinsmen gathered here lusting for battle, my limbs are weakened and my mouth goes dry; my body shakes and my hair stands on end; my bow is slipping from my hand and my skin is burning;

I can't stand still, for my mind is in turmoil.

I see bad omens, Krishna, for what good can come from slaughtering my own kinsmen on the battlefield? I don't seek victory, or kingdoms, or pleasures. For what use are power, or enjoyments, or even life itself, when those for whom I desire these things are now ready to abandon their lives and riches in battle....Krishna, what happiness can come from killing these sons of Dhritarashtra? In killing these desperate men, aren't we in fact committing sin? I wouldn't want to kill them, even to become the ruler of the [entire universe], much less to rule over this world. It doesn't matter if I am killed.

Even if the minds of these men are overcome by greed and they are blind to the evil that they cause by destroying their family and betraying their friends, how can we, who clearly see the evil involved in destroying family, not refrain from committing such sin?

When the family is destroyed, family traditions and codes of moral conduct are destroyed with it....And we have been told, Krishna, that they are forever lost who allow such family traditions to be lost. What a great sin, then, I commit, if I am willing to kill my own kinsmen for the pleasures of a kingdom. It would be better for my own welfare if I allowed them to kill me in battle while I am unresisting and unarmed."

Having said this, Arjuna cast his bow and arrows onto the battlefield. He sat down on the seat of his chariot, his mind overcome by sorrow.

Krishna Urges Arjuna to Fight [2.1-7, 9]

Seeing Arjuna, whose eyes were sorrowful and whose mind was depressed, Krishna spoke these words: "Why has this dejection come over you at such a perilous time? It is not worthy of a noble mind. It will not lead you to heaven and will only bring you infamy. Such unmanliness is unworthy of you, so do not give into it. Banish this petty weakness from your heart and arise for battle, Arjuna!"

Arjuna replied, "Krishna, how can I attack men like Bhishma and Drona who are worthy of my respect? It would be far better for me to live in this world as a beggar than to slay these noble men. If I killed them, the wealth and pleasures that I would enjoy would be stained by their blood.

And I don't know which would be worse—to win this battle or to lose it. I should not even wish to live if I had to kill these men standing in front of us.

My heart is overcome by pity and my mind is confused about where my duty (*dharma*) lies. Krishna, I ask you to tell me frankly what the right thing to do is. I am your pupil. Please instruct me!"...

After speaking like this to Krishna, Arjuna said, “O Krishna, I will not fight!” and was silent.

Fulfilling One’s Dharma [2.10, 31-38]

Krishna, smiling, spoke the following words to the distressed Arjuna as they stood in the midst of the two armies...: “Regarding your duty (*dharma*) as a warrior, you should not falter. There is no higher good for a warrior than a battle fought for the sake of duty. Fortunate indeed are warriors who have a war like this thrust upon them by chance. It is like an open door to heaven.

But if you do not fight this battle, then you will fail in your duty, incur sin, and lose your reputation as a warrior. People will talk of your infamy forever. And for one who has experienced honor, infamy is worse than death. These great warriors will think that you have left the battlefield on account of fear, and will treat you as an object of derision. Your enemies will speak of you with insulting words, mocking your courage. Could anything be worse for you than that?

If you are killed, you will win heaven; if you triumph you will enjoy the earthly kingdom. Therefore, get up with determination and fight, Arjuna! With no thought to joy or sorrow, loss or gain, victory or defeat, prepare to do your duty and fight. By fulfilling your duty in this way, you will not incur sin.”

THE PATH OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The Nature of the Self [2.11-13, 16-27]

Krishna said, “Although you mean well, you grieve for those for whom no grief is due. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead.

There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor these princes. And there will never come a time when we cease to exist. As the Self passes through this body from childhood to youth and to old age, so does the Self acquire another body after death. A wise person is not perplexed by these changes....

The non-existent can never come to be and the existent can never cease to be. This reality of these two is understood by the seers of the truth. That spirit which pervades the entire universe is indestructible. No one can destroy this unchanging reality. Our physical body must inevitably come to an end, but the eternal, immeasurable embodied Self is indestructible.

Therefore, fight, Arjuna!

He who thinks that this Self can kill or that this Self can be killed, fails to perceive the truth. The Self can neither kill nor be killed. The Self was never born and it does not die. Having come to be, it will never cease to be. Birthless, eternal, undecaying, and primordial, this Self does not die when the body dies....

As a man puts on new clothes after discarding old ones, the Self discards old bodies and takes on new ones. Weapons cannot cut it, fire does not burn it, water does not dampen it, and wind does not wither it. It is eternal, all-pervading, changeless and, immovable. It is called the unmanifested, the unfathomable, and the unchangeable. Since you know this to be the case, why should you grieve?

Even if you think that this Self is perpetually subject to birth and death, even then, Arjuna, you should not grieve. For death is inevitable for the living and birth is inevitable for the dead. Since this cycle is unavoidable, you have no reason for your sorrow....”

The Knowledge of Rebirth [4.1-11]

Krishna said, “I taught this eternal doctrine to Vivasvat. Vivasvat taught it to Manu, and Manu taught it to Ikshvaku. The great sages knew this doctrine, which they handed down from generation to generation. But over time, Arjuna, it has become lost.

Today I have described this same teaching to you, because you are my sincere devotee and friend. It is a profound secret, indeed.”

Arjuna said, “You were born long after Vivasvat. How is it possible that you instructed him in this doctrine?”

Krishna said, “You and I have both been reborn many times, Arjuna. The difference is that I remember all of these rebirths, whereas you do not. Although I myself am unborn, eternal, and the Lord of all beings, through my own divine power (*maya*), I manifest myself in various (finite) forms. Whenever there is a decline in righteousness (*dharma*) and disorder runs rampant, then I manifest myself. From time to time, I come into being for the protection of the good, the correction of the wicked, and to reestablish righteousness. He who understands my true nature and works will not be born again when he leaves his body, but becomes one with me. By becoming one with me, many have become freed of attachment, fear, and anger—purified by the fire of knowledge (*jnana tapas*).”

THE PATH OF SELFLESS ACTION

Action and Its Fruits [2.39-41, 47-52]

“I have revealed the wisdom of higher knowledge to you, Arjuna. Now listen to the wisdom of selfless action! By this means will you break free from the bonds of *karma*. On this path, your efforts are never wasted and your gains never reversed. Even a very little of this practice protects one from great sorrow. The thoughts of those who are resolute on this path are single-pointed, but the thoughts of the irresolute wander in numerous directions after many aims....

You have a right to your actions, but not to the fruits of your actions. Don't let the fruits of your actions be your motivation, but don't be enamored by inaction either. Perform your duty without attachments, maintaining your calm in the face of success and failure. This equanimity is called yoga....

The wise perform actions with no thoughts to results, whether good or evil. Therefore focus on right action. For yoga is skill in action. The wise, guided by pure intellect, renounce the fruits of action. Becoming freed of the bondage of rebirth, they attain a state beyond all suffering....”

The Path of Selfless Action: Action and Inaction [3.1-9]

Arjuna asked Krishna, “If you think that the path of knowledge is superior to the path of action, why do you then advise me to engage in this horrible war? Your conflicting words confuse my mind. Therefore please tell me decisively by which means I may attain the supreme good.”

Krishna replied, “In this world, I have said, there are two paths that one may follow—the path of knowledge (*jnana yoga*) for those who are contemplative and the path of unselfish action (*karma yoga*) for the active. One does not attain freedom from the bondage of *karma* by merely abstaining from action. One does not attain perfection [in this way], because there is no one who remains actionless even for a moment. Everyone is driven to action necessarily by the forces of nature. Those who abstain from action while allowing their minds to dwell on sense objects are simply pretending. But one who controls his senses through a well-trained mind and works without attachment to results should be considered far superior.

Perform any actions that you are required to do, because action is better than inaction. You couldn't even maintain your body without some sort of action. Unless you act in the spirit of selfless service to others, your actions

are a form of enslavement to the world. So make your action a sacrifice and become free of all attachments....”

The Cause of Selfish Action [3.36-42]

Arjuna asked, “Krishna, what is it that causes one to engage in selfish actions, as though these actions were forced and against one’s own will?”

Krishna said, “It is desire and aversion, arising from passion. It is all-consuming and taints everything. As fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and an embryo by a womb, similarly is self-knowledge obscured by selfish desire, which is mankind’s greatest enemy.

This selfish desire is found in the senses, the mind, and the intellect, clouding over the understanding with delusion. Therefore, Arjuna, by regulating your senses, conquer this enemy, the destroyer of knowledge and wisdom.

The senses, they say, are superior to the body, the mind superior to the senses, the intellect superior to the mind, and the Self superior to the intellect. Therefore, knowing what is supreme, allow the Self to subdue your ego, destroying selfish desire—difficult as that might be.”

Selfless Action and Liberation [4.19-23]

[Krishna said,] “A person is called wise by the sages when all his undertakings are free from the motive of desire and his deeds are purified by the power of wisdom. By abandoning all thoughts of the fruits of his actions, totally contented and dependent upon nothing, he does nothing even while engaged in all sorts of activity. He does not become attached even while performing actions, being free of expectations and desires and totally self-controlled.

Satisfied with whatever comes along, beyond thoughts of pleasure and pain, free from envy, and the same in success and failure, he remains unbound (by *karma*). The bonds of one who is without attachment, whose mind is free and established in wisdom, and who does work as a sacrifice are thus dissolved entirely.

The Path of Selfless Action and the Path of Renunciation [5.1-4, 6]

Arjuna said, “Krishna, you have recommended both the path of selfless action and the path of the renunciation of action (*sannyasa*). Please tell me which of these two is the better path.”

Krishna replied, “The renunciation of action and the performance of

selfless action will both lead to the supreme goal. Of the two, however, selfless action is better.

One who is engaged in true renunciation is beyond duality, affected by neither like nor dislikes, and freed from bondage. Only the ignorant think that (pure) contemplation (*Samkhya*) and action (*yoga*) are different, but the wise know better. One who practices either of these deeply will gain the rewards of both....

The renunciation of action is difficult without engaging in action. But the wise man, following the path of selfless action, soon attains freedom.”

The Effects of Selfless Action [5. 7-11, 18-21]

He who follows the path of selfless action, who is pure, who has conquered his senses and ego, has realized his own self as the Self in all. Even while engaged in action, he is not bound by his actions. Understanding this truth, he knows “I am not the doer.” Even while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, breathing...; even while speaking, grasping or letting go, opening his eyes and shutting them, he understands that these are simply movements of the senses acting upon sense objects. He who surrenders all selfish attachments is no more tainted by sin than a lotus flower is dampened by water. Renouncing his attachments, one who follows the path of selfless action uses his body, mind, and senses for the sake of self-purification....

One who follows this path. Arjuna, looks upon all beings as equal. He sees the same Self present in a wise priest, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or an outcast. While in the world, he has mastered it, for his mind continually rests in the Absolute (Brahman). He is neither elated when good things happen to him nor depressed when he experiences what is bad. Lucid and serene, his mind is firmly established in the Absolute. Not dependent upon the pleasures of this world, and with his mind purified through spiritual practice, he finds joy in his own Self.”

THE PATH OF MEDITATION

The Practice of Meditation [6.11-19, 25-26]

Krishna said, “One aspiring to liberation (i.e., the yogi) should strive constantly to concentrate his mind in meditation on the Supreme Reality, alone, self-controlled, free from desires and possessions.

Sitting down on a firm seat that is neither too high nor too low, on a clean spot that covered with grass, a deerskin and a cloth, he should

concentrate his whole mind on a single object. Controlling his thoughts and the activities of his senses, he should practice meditation for self-purification.

Holding his body, head and neck erect and still, he should concentrate upon the tip of his nose, without allowing his eyes to wander. Sitting there, serene and fearless, free of desire, he should meditate upon me and have me as his supreme goal. By keeping his mind always fixed upon me, with his thoughts under control, he will attain peace, the Supreme Nirvana contained within me.

Meditation is not for him who eats too much or too little, who sleeps too much or too little. But for one who is moderate in eating, recreation, working, sleeping, and waking, this yoga of meditation will destroy all sorrow. When the mind becomes free of all desires and is centered upon the Self, then one is said to be well-established in yoga. Just as the flame of a lamp in a sheltered spot is unwavering, so too is the mind of the meditator who practices union with the Self....

Little by little, by controlling the intellect, the mind will become fixed upon the Self alone. Whenever the wavering and unsteady mind of the meditator wanders away, let him gently restrain it and bring it back under the control of the Self....”

The Bliss of Meditation [6.20-22, 27-32]

“When the mind becomes disciplined by the practice of meditation, the meditator sees the Self through the Self, experiencing the joy of the Self. He then experiences the bliss that is perceived only through the purified intellect and which is beyond the realm of the senses. Having experienced this absolute reality, he will never again become separated from it. Attaining this state, he knows that there is no greater good and he becomes established there, where even the greatest sorrows can no longer disturb him....

Supreme bliss comes to the one whose mind has become stilled, whose desires are controlled, who is free from faults, and who has become one with the Absolute. Having mastered himself and put away sin, he experiences the bliss that comes from contact with the Eternal. He who experiences the unity of all life, sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself, and looks upon all with an equal eye. For one who sees me in everything and everything in me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to me. One who recognizes the unity of life perceives me in all beings. Whatever his situation in life, he abides in me.

He is a perfect yogi who sees all beings as equal—whether in distress or joy—because they are like himself.”

The Difficulties of Meditation [6.33-45]

Arjuna said, “Krishna, I don’t see how I can attain the state of equanimity that you’ve just described, when my mind is so restless. For the mind is fickle, unsteady, turbulent, wild, stubborn—as hard to control as the wind.

Krishna replied, “Arjuna, certainly it is very difficult to control the restless mind, but it is possible through the practice of meditation, with perseverance and detachment. For one whose mind is not subdued, the practice of meditation is difficult, indeed. But one who possess self-control and who follows the right means will succeed.”

Arjuna said, “But what happens to that person of faith who, because of a wandering mind, fails to succeed in this practice? Does such an individual, unmoored and bewildered, simply perish like a cloud scattered in the sky, lost both in this world and the hereafter? Krishna, please dispel this doubt of mine, because only you can do it!”

Krishna replied, “There is no destruction for such an individual either in this world or the hereafter. For no evil will befall one who strives to do good. One who has strayed from the yogic path goes to realms of the righteous, where he lives for many years, eventually to be reborn into a pious and prosperous family. Or he may eventually be born into a family of yogis rich in wisdom. Such a birth is rare, indeed, in this world. There he revives the knowledge that he gained in a previous life and works again to achieve perfection. Unconsciously he returns to the practices of his former life....Then, after many lives, the one who strives in this way, whose is free of fault, attains the Supreme Goal of life....”

THE PATH OF DEVOTION

The Divine Manifestations [7.1-10, 16-19, 24-26]

Krishna said, “Listen, Arjuna, and I will tell you how you can come to know me in my full perfection with certainty. I will reveal this wisdom to you and how it may be realized, after the experience of which there will be nothing left for you to know in this world. Only one out of thousands of persons strives for self-realization; and of those, scarcely one among them knows me in truth.

Earth, water, fire, air ether, mind, intelligence, and ego are the eightfold divisions of my manifested nature (*prakriti*). This is my lower nature. But beyond this, Arjuna, is my higher nature, which sustains the entire universe. All beings have their source in these two natures. I am the origin of the entire universe and its dissolution as well. There is nothing higher

than me: everything that exists is strung on me like pearls on a thread.

I am the taste of water, the radiance of the sun and moon.

I am the sacred syllable OM in the Vedas, the sound of the ether, and the potency in human beings.

I am the sweet fragrance of the earth, the heat in fire, the life force of all that lives, the austerity of the ascetics.

I am the eternal seed of all that exists.

I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the brilliance of the brilliant....

Those virtuous individuals who come to worship me are of four kinds—the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the wise. Of these, the wise man, who is ever united to me and totally devoted to me, is the best. For I am very dear to him and he is very dear to me. All of these types are worthy, but I regard the wise man as my own Self, because he is the one that abides unwaveringly in me. After many lifetimes, the wise man unites with me, knowing me to be the cause of all. Such great souls are rare....

The ignorant assume that I, the Unmanifest, have entered into some form, not knowing that my true nature is changeless and supreme. Veiled by my creative power (*maya*), I do not reveal myself to such, who do not realize that I am unborn and imperishable. Arjuna, I know all beings in the past, present, and the future, but there is no one who knows me completely.....”

Revealing the Divine Mystery [9.1-14. 16-34]

Krishna said, “Since you are filled with faith, I will reveal to you the profound mystery, the knowledge of which combined with experience, will liberate you from the all suffering. This supreme, most secret knowledge, purest and best, is most easy to practice and everlasting. Those who lack faith cannot attain me, Arjuna, and must return to the path of birth and death (*samsara*).

The entire universe is pervaded by me through my unmanifest form. All beings are in me, but I am not in them. But in truth these beings do not reside in me. Behold my divine mystery! Although I am the sustainer of all beings, I am not confined by them. Understand that, just as the mighty wind moving everywhere, abides in the sky, in this way all beings abide in me.

At the end of one cosmic cycle, all beings return to my primal material nature and at the beginning of the next, I send them forth again. Under the control of nature (*prakriti*), I project forth multitudes of beings again and again, whether they will it or not. But these acts of mine do not bind me, because I remain serene and unattached. Under my guidance, nature

produces all things and thus keeps creation in motion.

The ignorant disregard me when I am clad in human form, unaware that in my higher form I am Lord of all. They are filled with worthless hopes, worthless actions, and worthless knowledge and their lives become frivolous and evil.

But the truly wise, under the protection of my divine nature, are devoted completely to me, knowing that I am the immutable source of all things. Always glorifying me, steadfast in their vows, bowing down before me, they worship me continually with intense devotion....

I am the ritual and the sacrifice.

I am the medicine, the mantra, and the clarified butter.

I am the fire itself and the act of offering.

I am the support of the universe—its father, mother, and grandfather.

I am the object of all knowledge, the purifier, the sacred syllable OM, and the Vedas.

I am the goal, the sustainer, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge, the one true friend.

I am the creation and annihilation, the foundation of all, the resting place, and the eternal seed.

I am the bringer of heat and I am the bringer and withholder of the rain.

I am immortality and I am also death. Both being and non-being are within me.

Those who follow the rituals prescribed in the Vedas, the drinkers of the sacred nectar whose sins are cleansed,...attain the heavenly realm and enjoy celestial pleasures. After their merit is spent, however, they eventually fall back into the mortal realm...to experience birth and death, again and again. But those who worship and meditate upon me constantly, to them I will assure the fulfillment of their aspirations and permanently safeguard that which they attain.

Those who worship other gods, if they do so in faith, also worship me, Arjuna, even if they don't know it. I am the object of all sacrifices, but those that don't know me in my true nature must be reborn. Worshippers of the gods go to the gods, worshippers of the ancestors go to the ancestors, worshippers of spirits go to spirits, but those who worship me will come to me.

If one offers me a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water with love and devotion, I will accept it. O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever sacrifices you make, whatever you give away in charity, whatever austerities you perform, do these as an offering to Me. In doing so, you will become freed from bondage to karma and its good and bad results. Then, through the act of renunciation you will be liberated and come to me.

I look upon all equally. I favor none and reject none. But those who

worship me with devotion are in me and I am in them.

Even a sinner becomes righteous if he worships me with single-minded devotion. How quickly such a person becomes righteous and attains a last peace. Know this, Arjuna: no one who truly loves me will ever perish. All those who take refuge in me—whatever their station in life—will attain the supreme goal. How much more is this so for brahmins and sages.

Having entered this fleeting and sorrowful world, worship me. With your mind fixed on me, love me, worship me, and serve me. Having disciplined yourself in this way, you will most certainly come to me.”

The Divine Powers [10.1-11]

Krishna said, “Arjuna, listen further to my supreme words, which I share for your welfare, since you are so dear to me.

Neither the gods nor the sages know my origins, for I am the source of them all. He who truly knows me as the unborn, the beginningless, Lord of the universe, is freed from all delusion and sin. Understanding, wisdom, truth, self-control, and peacefulness, pleasure and pain, birth and death, fear and fearlessness; nonviolence, equanimity, content, austerity, charity, fame and infamy—all these come forth from me alone.

The seven great sages of old and the four ancient ancestors from whom all human beings descended were born from my mind and came forth from me. He who understands my glorious manifestations and creative power is forever united with me.

I am the origin of all; everything emanates from me. Those who know this truth worship me with intense devotion. Their thoughts are fixed upon me and their lives are totally devoted to me. They derived immense satisfaction from enlightening one another about me.

To those who are constantly devoted to loving and serving me, I give them the understanding whereby they can come to me. Out of mercy, I destroy the ignorance in their hearts through the shining lamp of wisdom.”

More of the Divine Manifestations [10.12-16, 19-22, 34, 39-42]

Arjuna said, “You are the supreme Brahman, the highest abode, the ultimate sanctifier, the supreme Self, the source of all, the all-pervading and absolute being. All of the [sages and seers] have proclaimed it so and now you declare this to me yourself. O Krishna, I totally believe everything that you have told me to be true. For neither demigods nor demons can fully understand your real nature. O source of all, master of all, god of gods, Lord of the universe, you alone know yourself by yourself. Please teach me fully of you divine manifestations, by which you pervade these

worlds...”

Krishna replied, “Alright, Arjuna, I shall now describe to you the most prominent of my manifestations, for there is no end to them.

I am the Self residing in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, middle, and end of all of them.

Of the celestial gods, I am Vishnu; of the lights, I am the radiant sun; of the wind gods, I am Marichi; of the stars, I am the moon.

Of the Vedas, I am the Sama Veda; of the gods, I am Indra; of the organs, I am the mind; in living beings, I am consciousness....

I am death, the destroyer of all, and the source of all things yet to come....

I am the seed of all beings, Arjuna, for without me nothing, animate or inanimate, can exist.

There is no end to my divine manifestations, Arjuna. I have given you only a few illustrations of my infinite glory. Wherever you find strength, grace, or beauty, you may be assured that these have sprung from my splendor.

But what need do you have to know all of this, Arjuna? With a single fragment of my being, I sustain the entire universe.”

The Cosmic Vision [11.1-21, 26-34, 43-45, 47-55]

Arjuna said, “Through the instructions concerning the supreme mystery that you have given me, you have cleared up my confusion. You have explained the origin and end of all beings, O Krishna, and have told me of your eternal glories. You have declared yourself to be the Supreme Lord, and I know this to be so. Now I wish to see your cosmic form. If you think it’s possible for me to endure it, please show me a vision of your imperishable Self.”

Then Krishna said, “Behold, Arjuna, my hundreds and thousands of divine forms in various colors and shapes. Behold all the celestial beings and many wonders never seen before. And here today, behold the whole universe—all things, animate and inanimate—living in me, and anything else you would see. But you cannot see me with the human eye of yours. So I grant you the supernatural sight to behold my divine being.”

Having spoken these words, Krishna, the exalted Lord, revealed his universal form to Arjuna. He appeared in this marvelous vision with countless mouths and eyes, with numerous ornaments, and many heavenly weapons. Wearing divine garlands and garments, anointed with heavenly ointments, he showed himself as the resplendent one—wondrous, brilliant, and boundless. If the light of a thousand suns was to blaze forth all at once in the sky, that might begin to resemble the radiance of that exalted being.

In that vision, Arjuna saw the manifold divisions of the entire universe, united in the one supreme Lord.

Filled with wonder, his hairs standing on end, Arjuna bowed with his hands folded before him, and addressed the Lord in this way: “O Lord, I see assembled in your body all the gods and multitudes of beings, as well as Brahman seated on the lotus throne, and all the heavenly sages and serpents. I behold you in infinite form with countless arms, bellies, faces, and eyes, expanding everywhere, limitless. In you, O universal form, I see no beginning, middle, or end. With your crown, scepter, and discus, you are like a blaze of splendor, difficult to behold, brilliant as the sun, and quite immeasurable.

I believe that you are the changeless, supreme reality to be realized, the ultimate resting place of this universe, the immortal spirit, the guardian of the eternal law (*dharma*). You are [all-encompassing], touching everything with your infinite power. You have countless arms; the sun and the moon are your eyes; your mouth blazes with fire, scorching the entire universe. O Lord, you fill the heavens and earth with your radiance. When this wondrous, terrible form of yours is seen, the celestial spheres tremble with fear. The gods themselves enter into you, filled with awe, their hands folded in prayer. The great hosts of sages and saints sing praises to your glory....

I see the sons of sons of Dhritarashtra, together with the hosts of kings, and those warriors on our side too—all rushing into your fearful mouths. And some I see mangled between your jaws, their heads crushed. As the numerous currents of rivers all flow into the sea, so do these heroes rush into your flaming mouths. As moths fly into the blazing fire to perish there, so do these men pour into your mouth to their own destruction.

O Vishnu, you seem to swallow up entire worlds, burning them with your fiery radiance. Tell me who you are in this terrifying form. Have mercy, O supreme one, let me know you, so that I might better understand you.”

Krishna said, “I am death, the destroyer of worlds. I have come here to annihilate all these people. Even without your participation, all these warriors gathered here on the battlefield will die. Therefore, rise up and gain glory; conquer your enemies; enjoy a prosperous kingdom. I have already destroyed these warriors. You are merely my instrument, Arjuna. Therefore, kill them and do not be disturbed. If you fight, you will certainly vanquish your enemies in battle....”

Then Arjuna said, “You are the father of all things, animate and inanimate. You are the ultimate object of worship, and master of all. In the entire universe, there is nothing equal to you, so how can anything be greater than you, O Lord of immeasurable power? Therefore I fall down

and prostrate myself before you and seek your blessing. Forgive me the way a father would his son, a friend his true companion, and a lover his beloved. I am delighted to have seen you as you have never been seen before. And yet, my heart is stricken with fear. O Lord, please show me your other more familiar form....”

Krishna said, “Arjuna, by my divine power I have shown you my universal form, luminous and infinite, which no one before you has ever seen. Not by the study of the Vedas, nor by sacrifices, nor by gifts, nor by ceremonial rites, nor by severe austerities has any other being seen what you have seen, Arjuna. Do not be distressed and confused by seeing such a terrible form of mine as this. With a peaceful mind, behold now this earlier form of mine.”

After speaking these words, the Lord once again took on the pleasant form of Krishna and consoled the terrified Arjuna.

Arjuna said, “Krishna, seeing this serene human form of yours, my mind is once again calm and returned to normal.”

Then Krishna said, “It is extremely difficult for anyone to experience the vision that you just had, which even the gods themselves desire to experience. Not through the Vedas, nor through austerity, nor by gifts, nor even by sacrifice can I be seen in the form in which you have seen me. But through single-minded devotion, I can be known, seen directly, and entered into, Arjuna. He who does every action for my sake, who makes me the supreme goal of his life, who acts without selfish attachment, and who is friendly to every living creature—he attains me.”

THE HARMONY OF THE FOUR PATHS

The Four Paths Compared [12.1-12]

Arjuna asked, “Lord, who has the better grasp of yoga: those who are steadfast in their devotion to you or those who worship the impersonal aspect of the Absolute?”

Krishna replied, “Those ever-steadfast devotees of supreme faith who fix their minds on me in worship, I consider most perfect in yoga. But those who worship the immutable, the imperishable, the unmanifest, the impersonal Absolute, with their senses controlled and even-minded in all circumstances, will also come to me. But those who fix their attention on the impersonal, unmanifest Absolute face greater hardships, because comprehension of the unmanifest is difficult for embodied beings. But those who... worship me with unwavering devotion I swiftly deliver from the ocean of life and death. Therefore, focus your mind on me and let

your intellect dwell upon me and you will be united with me forever. If, however, you cannot fix your mind steadily upon me, then learn to do so by the practice of meditation. If you're unable to practice meditation, then devote yourself to service for my sake, since this too will lead to the supreme goal. If you are unable to do even this, surrender yourself to me and work to renounce the fruits of all your actions.

Knowledge is superior to blind action and meditation is better than knowledge. But even better is to surrender the fruit of action, since peace will immediately follow....

All Paths Lead to the Supreme Goal [4.11, 13.24-25]

“Whatever way people try to reach me, I accept them; whatever path they may travel, it eventually leads to me.”

Some realize the Self within them through meditation, others by knowledge, and still others through selfless service. Again, there are those who are ignorant of these yogic paths, but, hearing from authorities, engage in worship. They too cross beyond death through the practice of devotion.”

THE LIFE OF THE LIBERATED

The Man of Steady Wisdom [2.54-72]

Arjuna said, “Krishna, how would you describe the man whose wisdom is steady and who has reached the state of bliss. How does such a man speak? How does he sit? How does he walk?”

Krishna said, “One who is completely freed from all desires of the mind and is satisfied with the Self alone—that is a man of steady wisdom. One whose mind is unperturbed in suffering, who no longer craves pleasure, who is free from lust, fear, and anger, who is freed from selfish attachments, and who is neither elated nor pained when good or bad things happen—that is a man of steady wisdom. One who can completely draw back the senses from sense objects the way a tortoise draws back its limbs into its shell—that is a man of steady wisdom.

The desire for sense pleasures fades if one abstains from sense enjoyment, but the taste for them remains. But even the taste disappears when one has reached the highest goal. Arjuna, the tumultuous senses carry off the mind even of one who strives for perfection. Let him restrain them and keep his mind focused entirely on me. Then he shall stand firm in wisdom.

Attachment to sense objects comes from having the mind fixated on these objects. From attachment comes desire and from desire comes anger. From anger comes delusion, and from delusion confusion of memory. Through confusion of memory, understanding is destroyed. And when understanding is destroyed, ruin follows.

But a man with a disciplined mind, who can move freely among the objects of sense without craving or aversion, will attain perfect peace. When there is such peace, all sorrows are destroyed forever, for the mind of one at peace soon becomes steady.

One who does not have a steady mind cannot concentrate. Without the ability to concentrate, there can be no meditation. Without meditation, there can be no peace. And without peace, how can there be happiness? When the mind constantly follows after the call of the senses, it drives away wisdom, like a storm blowing a ship off course.

Therefore, Arjuna, one who can withdraw himself from the objects of the senses will become established in wisdom. The sage is awake while the world sleeps and, during the time when others are awake, it is night to him. He, whom objects of desire enter as waters flowing into the ocean, which though filled remains tranquil—he alone attains perfect peace. He who abandons all desires, who acts free from craving, without any sense ‘I,’ ‘me,’ and ‘mine’—he alone attains perfect peace.

One who attains this divine state, Arjuna, even at the moment of death experiences the bliss of God.”

The Equanimity of the Liberated [6.7-9]

[Krishna said,] “The Ultimate Reality is manifested in he who has achieved control over his mind and body. When he has mastered himself, a man is perfectly content in heat and cold, in pleasure and pain, in honor and dishonor. For one filled with wisdom and self-realization, a piece of earth, a lump of stone, or fine gold are all the same. He looks with the same impartiality upon friends, family, and enemies, upon those who are neutral towards him, predisposed, or hostile, upon saints and sinners alike.”

The One Who is Dear to God [12.13-19]

[Krishna said,] “He who is incapable of hatred towards any being, who is kind and compassionate, free from egoism and pride, the same in the face of pleasure or pain, patient, contented, self-controlled, who is totally dedicated to me, and who is a devotee of mine—that is the one who is dear to me.

He who causes no agitation to anyone and whom no one is capable of

agitating, who does not get carried away by joy, anger, fear, or anxiety—that is the one who is dear to me.

He who is beyond expectation, who is pure, diligent, free from all concerns and cares, and who is selfless in his actions—that is the one who is dear to me.

He who neither rejoices nor hates, grieves nor desires, to whom all good and evil fortune is the same—that is the one who is dear to me.

He who treats friends and enemies alike, who is the same with regard to both honor and disgrace, heat and cold, pleasure and pain, who is free from attachments, who disregards praise and blame, who is quiet, content with all, at home everywhere, and full of devotion—that is the one who is dear to me.”