

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

INTERPRETED



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Edited by

Daud Shawní



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Cover Image: Ganesha Writing the Mahabharata

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Written over two thousand years ago, the *Bhagavad Gita* recounts Krishna's revelation of divine truths to his friend Arjuna. Troubled and beset by doubts as he embarks on war against his kinsmen, Arjuna asks Krishna, his charioteer and friend, for guidance. Moments before battle, they pause between the two contending armies. There Krishna instructs Arjuna on concepts of detachment, selfless action, and duty. At Arjuna's urging, Krishna then reveals his divine nature.

The Bhagavad Gita Interpreted is my broad rendering of the teachings of Krishna as revealed in the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is but a part. However, my edition is neither a scholarly nor authoritative version. I did not aim for precise fidelity or a strictly literal translation. I'm not a student of Sanskrit, and this work is merely an interpretation. However, I have referred extensively to multiple competent translations of the *Gita* extant in English. I have relied most heavily on J.A.B. van Buitenen's bilingual edition, considered the most accurate scholarly translation into English, to make certain I'd not drifted too far from the shores of meaning.

Much as concepts of resurrection and paradise have both literal and figurative meanings, so too do I expect that Hindu religious concepts have meanings eclipsing literal understanding. My original motive, when delving into the *Bhagavad Gita*,

while researching my book *The Temple of Hanuman*, was to dissect those few verses in which Krishna refers to reincarnation. I had hoped, and I feel that I was moderately successful, to dispel the notion of reincarnation as a necessarily literal concept.

However, now as I have read the *Gita* more closely, I realize that its central message, which is detachment from the world and the things of the world, has nothing at all to do with reincarnation whether understood literally or figuratively. One can easily dispose of the notion of reincarnation entirely yet Krishna's message is undiminished. Nirvana is not something achieved in death or in future lives; it is not a wistful hope. Krishna plainly describes its attainment by practice *here and today*. Like heaven, it is not a place you go when you die; it is within you now. To the disciplined mind, free from passion and desire, the Nirvana of Brahman is everywhere present at all times. Such detachment is the surest cure for the twin evils that beset the world: depravity and fanaticism.

Although my research of the *Bhagavad Gita* was precipitated by my expectation that reincarnation needed dispelling, I discovered that the *Gita* deserves careful study not merely by Hindus but by anyone who takes belief in God seriously.

One need not be immersed in the deep waters of *The Mahabharata* to glean wisdom from the *Bhagavad Gita*, from

Krishna's counsel to Arjuna in a time of war. Nor does one need to be Hindu; for the battle against one's own lower nature is preached in every major religion. The Islamic concepts of Greater and Lesser Jihad are particularly relevant. The notion of Jihad is much abused and maligned today. The Lesser Jihad is the one with which most are familiar; it is holy war against the enemies of religion; it is the outer form of war. *The Bhagavad Gita* is a book about the war between the Pandava and the Kuru, the war of Arjuna and his brothers against impious kinsmen. But the *Bhagavad Gita* is a metaphor for what Muslims call the Greater Jihad, the war against one's own evil inclinations. Set in the backdrop of an ancient war 3000 years ago, the message of the *Gita* remains meaningful and is properly considered both a revealed religious text and a classic work of philosophy. The allegory of the *Gita* still resonates.

Like Arjuna, we stand on the field of Kurukshetra facing the armies of passion, of greed, and of pride. These we have too long considered our friends, our companions, as dear to us as family. Krishna urges us to fight, to see them as enemies, to vanquish them. Yet we hesitate, uncertain, fearful that destroying them destroys some part of ourselves. Krishna counsels us; this war is not spiritual suicide, but whether we win or lose we must fight for this war is the path to our liberation from the snares and springes of an inconstant world. This is what Krishna taught three thousand years ago.

Throughout this text I have consciously avoided using words that are particular to Hinduism and related faiths. I am unconvinced that such words having entered Western culture are necessarily understood in the West. Therefore I have translated words like Brahma, Karma, Moksha, and Prakriti (with its associated sattva, rajas, and tamas) into English, choosing English words that seem most appropriate to the context of the passage.

For scholars and serious students of the *Gita*, this is unquestionably inadequate. But for those seeking a comprehensible interpretation of the text, I have chosen to render these words into English to remove unnecessary obstacles, to lift the veil a little to reveal the essentially universal and practical message of the *Gita*.

For readers inclined to a literal translation of the text, I recommend van Buitenen's version, to which I refer above. Beyond this recommendation, to those who would understand the context in which the conversation of the *Gita* takes place, a multi-volume translation of the *Mahabharata* should be consulted.

Da'ud ibn Tamam ibn Ibrahim al-Shawní

*The wise do not grieve
for the living or the
dead, for life and death
shall pass away.*

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

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CHAPTER ONE

On the field of Kurukshetra, the sons and armies of Duryodhana faced their cousins, the sons and armies of the Pandava. Arjuna, the son of Pandu, stood in a chariot drawn by white horses. Krishna stood beside him, the reins in his hands. On Arjuna's banner was the symbol of Hanuman, the servant of Rama.

Arjuna said:

—Immortal Krishna, drive my chariot between the two armies, between the warriors and allies of my brothers, and our enemies, the warriors and allies of our cousins. Let me look upon them who are eager to shed blood.

Krishna drove their chariot between the two armies, as Arjuna had asked. He turned the chariot to face the chiefs of Duryodhana's warriors.

Krishna said:

—Here are the armies of the Kurus, gathered to do battle with you and your brothers.

Arjuna looked upon them and saw among them cousins, brothers and fathers of wives, grandfathers and grandsons, uncles, teachers, and friends. Arjuna fell into despair, sinking to the floor of his chariot, and spoke in a voice heavy with grief.

Arjuna said:

—How can I do battle with my kinsmen, with those I love and who have loved me, for whom I have cared, as they once cared for me? Though they have gathered to serve Duryodhana's folly, to deprive us of our birthright, to kill me and my brothers on this battlefield, how can I fight them? My body trembles at the thought. My bow falls from my hands. My flesh burns. My arms and legs have no strength. My mind is confused; my reason confounded. I am lost.

—There is no glory in killing these enemies to whom I am bound by kinship. To spill their blood is no better than spilling my own. Krishna, I do not long for victory. I have no need of a kingdom, or a kingdom's pleasures if I gain them only by destroying my kinsmen. I have no taste for royal bread dipped in their blood.

—Our cousins, our teachers, their fathers and sons, our friends, are these our enemies? How can I think to kill them, even if they are fixed on killing me?

—And if we kill them, evil will fall upon us in victory, as surely as in defeat. Immortal Krishna, though their minds are overcome with greed, though they are unwary of the evil they summon, and the disorder they conjure by destroying this family, by betraying friends, still how can I act against them?

—The ruin of a family is the ruin of righteousness. It is the overturning of order. It is the source of impurity. To act is

to bring upon us a day of pitch darkness. We have come here for the sake of an earthly kingdom; we have come ready to do battle for the point of a needle of earth, for a fist of dirt. But by acting, we reserve for ourselves only a place in Hell. It is best for me if Duryodhana and his armies come before me. Disarmed by doubt, I will not resist them as they kill me. This will be my best reward.

These were Arjuna's words to Krishna as the two armies awaited Arjuna's signal to begin the battle.

CHAPTER TWO

With Arjuna's words sounding in his ears, Krishna's spirit quickened. He spoke to Arjuna, whose eyes burned with tears, overwhelmed by despair.

Krishna said:

—What shameful words are these, Arjuna? This is the hour of trial. Why do you falter? Your despondent grief enfeebles you; it dishonors you. Slunk in the trenches of despair, you will win neither heaven nor earth. Do not exchange arrows and bow for impotence and cowardice; this is not your way. Do not yield to these faults or to this weakness. Rise up and fight!”

Arjuna said:

—How can I fight them, immortal Krishna? These enemies are my teachers from earliest youth. How can I cut them down when they deserve only my veneration? It is better to wander in rags, begging for alms, than to sprinkle the bread of my sustenance with their blood.

—Who is to say that their victory over us would be the worse outcome? And if we are victorious over them, what reasons have I to rejoice, knowing that the luxuries of life were bought at this price?

—My eyes burn and I cannot see the straight way, the lawful path. Lead me forward, Krishna. I am your student and

you are the most excellent of teachers. Tell me what is best, for I see nothing, even in victory in heaven or on earth, which will dispel my doubts and sorrows.

With these words, Arjuna cried out: —I will not fight! and said nothing more. Krishna smiled, hinting of laughter, and spoke gently to Arjuna as they stood between the two armies.

Krishna said:

—Do not weep tears for them. Though your words are sincere and full of insight, your sorrow profits no one. Tears are wasted on the dead; the wise do not grieve for the living or the dead, for life and death shall pass away.

—In time we have always been, both you and I and all these kinds of men; and we will always be. Putting on the body of the child, the youth, the old man, a wise man does not wonder that in death, the Self passes into another body.

—Consider your senses, this illusory world bound up in the body. Joys and sorrows, comfort and discomfort, these pass away; they are ephemeral. Rise above them. When you have passed untroubled beyond comfort and discomfort, and do not distinguish between happiness and unhappiness, you become fit for immortality.

—What is will always be. What isn't will never be. The wise see the clear boundary between these two. The eternal that supports this universe cannot be destroyed. Nothing can de-

stroy what is indestructible. The eternal Self dwells in bodies, but the Self surpasses all bodies. Bodies die in time, but the Self is everlasting.

—The man who imagines he can kill, and the man who fears he can be killed are both in error. The one who kills does not kill; and the one he kills does not die. The Self is never born nor does it die. The Self is constant, eternal, untouched by death even when the body dies. A pitcher filled with moonlight is broken. Do you mourn the loss of the moon? A mirror reflecting sunlight is shattered. Do you mourn the loss of the sun? So does the body die, but the Self does not die. When a man knows the Self, how can he imagine that he kills? How can he imagine that he dies? The body ages, decays, ceases to be; but the Self is unborn, ageless, without end, indestructible.

—As a man puts off tattered clothes, and wears something different and new; the Self discards the earthly body, and wears something different and new. No sword, no spear, no arrow can deprive the Self of life. Fire cannot burn him; water cannot drown him; wind cannot make him dry. Beyond weapon and fire, beyond water and wind, the Self surpasses all, enduring all unblemished, unmoved, unchanged. The Self is unseen, beyond sight; unknown, beyond knowledge; unaltered, beyond alteration; if in wisdom you capture this much, you will not grieve for the loss of what can never be lost.

—Even if you believe that a man is born again and again, and that he dies again and again, you should not grieve, for in

death birth is inevitable and in birth death is inevitable. Being born, he must die. In death, he is reborn. If you understand this, then you will not grieve for the loss of what can never be lost. Before the sun rises, the world is dark. After the sun sets, the world is dark again. Do you mourn each night the death of the sun? Before birth, he is unseen. After death, he is unseen To grieve for him is a lack of vision. Between death and birth, few perceive him; few speak of him; few hear him. Even hearing him, no one truly knows him. Within every body, the inviolable Self resides. Therefore, do not grieve for the death of any of them. The Self resides beyond death.

—Do your duty, Arjuna. Act without hesitation. For the warrior, the greatest good is lawful war against an evil enemy. A lawful war opens the doors of heaven for you. Enter therein, Arjuna. Rejoice in good fortune that this battle is joined. But if you shrink before this battle or turn your back upon your duty, casting aside honor, this is a grievous transgression. Men will recount your shame, dishonor, and disgrace now and in the future. They shall say cowards possess the courage of Arjuna. For one honored, the loss of honor is worse than death. Great warriors will accuse you of cowardice; those who once honored you will treat you with contempt. Your enemies will rejoice in mocking you. They will laugh and say, “See how Arjuna fled before us, a deer among lions.” Death in battle is better than the mocking derision of enemies.

—If you are victorious, you gain glory in this world. If you are defeated and cut down on this field, you gain glory in the

next world. Arise and fight, Arjuna. Glory is upon you. Be detached from happiness and unhappiness, gain or loss, victory or defeat. Be resolved to fight, or you will fall into error. Glory is upon you.

—These are words of My sacred law. Now hear words of sacred practice, of selfless action. Understand this practice and you will break all bonds of action.

—On the path of this law, no exertion or effort is wasted or lost. Even a single step upon this path is liberation from fear. On this path, the follower is resolved and finds singleness of purpose. But those who lack purpose wander lost on many endless roads. In flowery words, unenlightened men take refuge. They know only the letter of the Vedas and say, “There is only this!” Driven by appetite, their heaven is a selfish hunger. Fervently they pray to sate this hunger, but gain only death in rebirth to appetite. They delight in their desires for pleasure and power, seeking these in scriptures. But they lack purpose and wander without end.

—The world of the Vedas, their rites and prayers for prosperity, is the world of desire and attachment. Rise above them; give up the transient world and its possessions and possess your Self. The world of the Vedas is a droplet of water to the man who drinks deeply of the Self.

—You are entitled to action, but never to the fruits of action. Give up all rewards, but never give up action. In the field of ac-

tion, there is peace, free from selfish attachments, unmoved by success or failure. This practice calms the mind.

—If you act to achieve your desires, such action will deprive you of wisdom. Such action impoverishes the one seeking otherworldly riches. Understanding this, a man vanquishes anxiety. He is untroubled whether work ends well or ends poorly. Become wise, therefore, by renouncing the fruits of action.

—The wise man, relinquishing actions' rewards, becoming free from attachment, achieves salvation from the bonds of this world and acquires perfect bliss. Emerging from the wilds of delusion and duality, you will perceive the difference between what men suppose is true, and Truth itself. Long troubled by the contradictions in scriptures, you will rise above these words, you will achieve certitude in contemplation. This is the goal.

Arjuna said:

—The man who practices this discipline, who is focused in action, who achieves certitude in contemplation; what is he like?

Krishna said:

—The one who relinquishes the fruits of action, who gives up all desires, who sunders the bonds of attachment to all things, he achieves oneness with the Most High. He is at peace, not longing for happiness, untroubled by sorrows, untouched

by lust, by fear or anger. His mind is steady. He is free from attachments, neither broken-hearted by evil fortune nor elated by good fortune. He is wise, serene. His insight is unwavering. As the tortoise draws in his limbs, so does he withdraw his senses from the world of desires.

—The unenlightened may renounce sensual pleasure, but still he craves what he desires. He is like one who fasts, but longs for food. His desires vanish when he becomes enlightened and achieves oneness with the Most High. Yet the senses are restless; they drive even the wisest from achieving freedom from the bondage of attachment. Therefore let him be devoted to Me, turning his mind toward Me to banish all longings, to seek shelter in Me, to command his senses.

—The man who seeks shelter in sensual pleasures is lured away from Me. The snares of desire, of lust for possession lead to frustration, and deprive him of focus. Unmastered passion troubles his mind, clouds duty, disarms reason, and leads a man to ruin.

—The one who has mastery over passion, keeps aloof from attachment. He has found harmony and peace. He throws off the yoke of happiness and sorrow. He yokes his mind to Me and finds quietude, untroubled peace in the shelter of the Self.

—The one driven by desire is driven away from focus and contemplation. Here there is no peace, and without peace, there

is no contentment. As a storm on the sea drive ships off course, man's unmastered passions carry him away from insight.

—But insight is firm in the man who draws in his senses from attachments and desires. For him, what is darkness to other creatures is his glorious daylight, and what is day to other creatures, is the darkness of their ignorance and vain imaginings.

—All rivers feed the sea, but the sea is never overfilled. Likewise, for the enlightened man, the rivers of desire never overwhelm the calm waters of his peace. But this is not so for the unenlightened, drowning in the desire for desires. The man who renounces possession, is unmoved by desire, is unselfish in thought and act, achieves the most supreme peace.

—O Arjuna, this is man's eternal Self. Finding him destroys delusion. Even until his final breath, man can reach the Most High, can achieve the Nirvana of Brahman, which is man's best goal.

CHAPTER THREE

Arjuna said:

—If perception of the Most High is my goal, why do you demand that I engage in this monstrous battle? Why do you urge me to terrible action? You have said it is the bondage of action that burdens us, that enslaves us to the transient world. It is better for me to renounce action and make no war against my family. It is better that I withdraw the limbs of perception, renouncing all action, as a tortoise withdraws into her shell.

—I hear contradictions in your guidance. Your teaching eludes me. Show me its straightness that I may not wander lost, that I might come to perception of the Most High.

Krishna said:

—Through two eyes you may see the straight way. Through the eye of wisdom you will see it. Though the eye of selfless action you will see it. Through selfless action, you are free from bondage.

—Those who believe freedom from action is achieved by inaction have erred. In every breath, in every moment, you engage in action. Who would counsel that you must renounce breathing? The worlds of creation demand action; no man can avoid it.

—The man who withdraws within himself and renounces action, yet secretly craves the fruits of action, deceives himself.

A man may fast, but fasting does not sate his appetite. Is he not still hungry? His appetite leads him from the straight way and he wanders lost.

—But the man who engages in selfless action, who surrenders the fruits of action, with the rein of his senses in hand, he is a true follower of the way.

—Know that you must act. Action cannot be renounced, for even renunciation is a form of action. Therefore, act, for this is the way to liberation. Only be sure your action is purified of appetite. Then action is not selfish, but a form of worship. This is selfless action; such action is sacred. Give up the fruits of action, for all action is bondage except action performed in sacrifice. Therefore perform selfless action, free from bondage. The heavens honor him who honors the heavens through selfless action, through the way of sacrifice, by surrendering the fruits of action.

—The Most High has granted you the gift of life and prosperity; to engage in sacrifice is a duty. Yet he who partakes of the good of this world, giving nothing in return, is a thief.

—When a pool of water offers itself to the heavens, the heavens offer up rain. Thus the pool, even dry, is always filled. Selfless action is the way of the Most High. Perform this action in service to the Most High.

—The one who rejects selfless action, rejects the Most High. He is a burden to the world. The one who embraces selfless

action is serene; he transcends all bonds of action. He transcends action as the Sun transcends the Earth, his eye on it, yet unmoved by it. Nothing of the Earth may help or hinder his transit through the heavens. Therefore, perform selfless action, transcend attachment and find liberation from the things of the world. When your action is thus purified, you may perceive the Most High enthroned within you.

—When he engages in selfless action, the king becomes a sage, the warrior, a saint. When he engages in selfless action, he becomes a teacher to the world of men.

—I myself am unbound by action. There is nothing in the worlds that I do not already possess. Yet I am never without action. In all these possessions, I do not partake of them; I give them freely. This is My action. If I were to become still, stillness would fill the worlds. If I did not act, the worlds and all their creatures would cease to be. Selfish men act to achieve selfish ends, to fulfill selfish wishes. The wise act to achieve My ends, to fulfill My wishes. The wise need not preach the truth of selfless action; in their example you will see purity and serenity.

—Every selfish action is driven by desire. The unwise imagine they have chosen, but their desires do the choosing. The wise, however, understand this simple truth. They perceive the forces that govern action and claim no ownership of it. Enslaved by their nature, the unwise chain themselves to selfish action. How will the wise instruct them whose eyes are forever fixed on transient things?

—Fix your eyes on the Most High and sacrifice the fruits of action to Me. This is liberation; this is the straight way, this is the peace of selfless action. The wise follow this straight way, discovering freedom through sacrifice which purifies their actions. But those who cling to the fruits of action, who reject the way of selfless action, follow another path and never reach Me.

—If even the wise are subject to their nature and impulses, why should they restrain themselves? Yet the wise guard against the turbulent passions of their lower nature, recognizing this foe along the straight path, and resist her tyranny. For is it not better to perform one's own duty, even imperfectly, than to do the duty, even with skill and excellence, of a tyrant?

Arjuna said:

—O Krishna, what then drives men to act selfishly, to become distracted by the lures of this world, and to stray from the straight path of sacred action?

Krishna said:

—Desire and wrath, the twin daughters of thoughtless passion, are man's enemies on this path. They are burning fire; their smoke is impenetrable. They are filth on a mirror; who can see what is reflected therein? They envelope the senses, as the womb envelopes one not born. They deprive wisdom of its potency; they make eyes blind, ears deaf. In their unnumbered forms they drive man to sate them, though they can never be

satisfied. Once granted entrance to the palace of the senses, they usurp reason, and are tyrants enthroned. Man is blinded by their false radiance, and offers up wisdom in sacrifice to them. Put these tyrants to death, crown wisdom in their place and regain your sight.

—The senses are lands and seas, the mind is the sky, a sea of milk, spreading over both; reason is the procession of sun and moon and stars. Unseen, above these three, you will find Me. Exceed reason, and discover Me. Let the serenity of the Most High become your serenity. Rise up and fight, Arjuna. Put these tyrants to the sword.

CHAPTER FOUR

Krishna said:

—I first revealed these everlasting truths to the Sun in the heavens. He revealed them to Manu, the father of mankind. Over immemorial ages, these truths were taught to kings and saints. Yet now, after the revolution of years, these truths are lost and forgotten. Now I reveal my mystery to you, Arjuna because I love you.

Arjuna said:

—You were born after the Sun in the heavens, O Krishna. How did you reveal these truths at the beginning that has no beginning?

Krishna said:

—In many lives I have returned before, and so have men like you. But I remember every life, yet you remember none.

—I am the ancient, changeless, everlasting Lord of Worlds. From age to age I manifest myself in the worlds of My creation. I arise among men when they have lost their way, when they exult in their base inclinations. I arise among men to redeem the good and to overturn evil in age after age.

—The one who knows the truth of Me and recognizes Me, he vanquishes death and, leaving life behind, he reaches Me.

His faith in Me purifies him. Free from desire, he reaches Me. Seeking shelter in Me, holding fast to the cord of love for Me, whatever road he walks, he reaches Me. But those who desire the trappings of the world, mere trappings are their reward. In selfish action they receive this reward.

—At My command, I brought order to the world. This action is Mine, though I transcend all actions. I am untainted by desire; therefore My actions are untainted. Those who know this are themselves untainted by action. In past ages, those who sought freedom engaged in selfless action. Do likewise, and truth shall set you free.

—I reveal what is action and what is inaction. I reveal what is selfless action, and what actions will bind you to the world. At the heart of action, you may find inaction; at the heart of inaction you may find action. In stillness one may act. In action, one may fail to act. Seeing this, the wise find freedom from action.

—The wise rid themselves of desire. They purify their actions in the fire of sacrifice. Sacrificing the fruits of action, a man becomes independent of action, neither expecting nor requiring reward. He relinquishes expectations of action, and therefore action relinquishes him. Whatever he possesses is sufficient; unbound by action, he is neither envious nor expectant. In the sacrifice of selfless action, he gains peace and self-mastery, and his labors are pure. In his actions, he sees only the Most High, which is the sacrifice and the full reward.

—Some sacrifice to the gods, but the wise sacrifice themselves to the Most High. In the fire of restraint, some offer the senses. In the fire of the senses, others offer what is sensed. Some surrender life in the fire of union with the Most High. Still others offer their austerities, their penance, their learning and contemplation. Some offer every exhalation and others every inhalation, ever sacrificing in every breath. And some offer every crumb of bread, except what they need to live.

—All of these offerings into the fire of the Most High burn away sin. On these many paths of sacrifice, they each find the straight way. Whatever sacrifice they offer—this is selfless action; this is sacred work. The one who does not sacrifice loses this world and the next. The one who sacrifices reaches Me.

—But the best of earthly sacrifice is the offering of sacred insight, for sacred insight is the sweet smoke of sacrifice. Go to those who offer sacred insight and honor them as a servant honors his master. Go to them and their insight will dispel your confusion. Through the eyes of wisdom you will see all things within yourself, and yourself within Me. The ship of wisdom may carry even the most evil among men across the sea of evil. The fire of wisdom consumes the pollution of action, as fire burns tinder to ashes. There is no better purifier than wisdom. Those with insight discover this and purify themselves of the pollution of action.

—Faithfully the wise restrain the senses, acquire insight, and on the straight path find peace in Me. But the unfaithful

acquire no insight, become lost in the wilds of doubt and illusion, and find peace neither in this world nor in the world to come.

—By the practice of selfless action, the wise overcome all doubt, and are free from bondage to the world. Act without attachment, and wield the sword of wisdom against doubt. Act without desire, without expectation. Rise up and fight, Arjuna.

CHAPTER FIVE

Arjuna said:

—O Krishna, you commend the renunciation of action, yet also its practice. Of these two, which is best?

Krishna said:

—Whether by practice or renunciation of action, you will attain to the Most High. But of these, the practice of selfless action excels renunciation.

—He is true to renunciation who relinquishes desire and hatred. He transcends the false opposites of renunciation and selfless action and is free from bondage.

—The ignorant distinguish selfless action from renunciation. But the wise know that in the harvest of the one, you taste the fruit of both. Whether in selfless action or in renunciation of action, you reach the same goal, because renunciation and selfless action are the same.

—Without selfless action, you cannot attain renunciation. With selfless action, one attains the Most High.

—In selfless action, you purify your soul, you command your senses, you are in harmony with all creatures. Although you act, action does not bind you.

—Whatever you do, whatever your senses experience, whether seeing or hearing, whether eating or drinking, whether asleep or awake, the Self does nothing. These senses act and react, but the purified Self transcends them.

—Offering all actions to the Most High, in action, you are not acted upon. Sin cannot stain you, as muddy water washes clean, leaving no residue on the leaf of the lotus.

—Detached from action even in the heart of action, you become pure. Only the body, the mind, the sense act, but the Self is disengaged from action.

—Renouncing the fruit of action, you are at peace. But the man who lacks discipline, acting on desire, desire enslaves him and action enchains him.

—The man who renounces all selfish action enthrones the Self within the fortress of nine gates. He neither acts nor enjoins action.

—The Most High transcends the actions of nature, but nature does not cease to act. Likewise the immortal Self does not perform action, though the body engages in action. The ignorant are confounded by this; they have confused the body with the Self. The mariner remains utterly still, though the vessel moves over the waters.

—The one who understands this is enlightened by the sun of knowledge, which illuminates for him the world's many

shadows. Devoted to this, he returns no more into darkness, for his perception is pure. Devoted to this, he does not distinguish the Brahmin from the cow, the elephant from the dog, the prince from the prisoner. Devoted to this, he transcends the world and its creatures. His perception is pure and he knows the Most High.

—Knowing the Most High, he does not delight in pleasure; he is not aggrieved in displeasure. He is steady and rightly guided. Knowing the Most High, his senses do not delude him; he transcends his senses. Happiness does not elude him; his happiness is within. Knowing the Most High, his happiness is perpetual.

—He disdains even the delights of sense, for they are distractions from true happiness. Delights of the sense pass away and are no more; therefore he does not cultivate them.

—He is truly happy who, while still alive, does not indulge desire or anger. When he attains this inner joy, when he is bathed in the shining light of insight, he finds perpetual happiness and becomes one with the Most High.

—He is one with the Most High who has defeated his doubts, has purified his Self, has mastered his senses and dedicates his work to all beings. He is one with the Most High who has shed desire and anger, has tamed his restless spirit, and recognizes his true Self.

—He views the outside world as it is, outside. He focuses his gaze within. He devotes his every breath to Me. He sees Me as I am, the beginning and end of all sacrifice, the ancient, changeless, everlasting Lord of worlds, the friend of all beings. When he sees Me, he is at peace.

CHAPTER SIX

Krishna said:

—In selfless action, unbound by desire or aversion or expectation, a man performs My discipline. But the man who does not sacrifice, who makes no offering, is a stranger to Me.

—This discipline is renunciation. It is the relinquishment of desire and aversion and expectation in action. It is not the relinquishment of action itself.

—Piercing the mystery of renunciation, your work is sacred. Such work is your path to peace, and peace your path to such work. Piercing the mystery of renunciation, you give up the fruits of action, you tame your senses. Your work is My work. Therefore, rise up and sound the conch. Do not abase yourself. There can be no better ally than your Self. There can be no deadlier enemy than your Self.

—If you conquer yourself, the Self is your friend. Yet if the worldly self opposes your transcendent Self, you are your own enemy. If at peace with your Self, then you are at peace with Me. That Self is untouched by heat or cold, unmoved by pleasure or pain, untroubled by glory or disgrace.

—Piercing the mystery of renunciation, contented and serene, master of your senses, your vision is ever one. Transcend-

ing the world, you see with the same eye the friend, the enemy, and the stranger. To each you show equanimity.

— In every moment be in balance, untroubled, master your senses with neither expectation nor encumbrance. In solitude, sit neither too high nor too low in a place of ease and comfort. Sitting there, at peace, purified, quiet your thoughts, restrain your senses, and commune with the Most High. Sitting upright, unmoving, turn your gaze within. At peace, washed free of fear, firm in Me, the restrained mind reaches Me. In every breath, worshipping Me, you attain peace in Me, beyond Nirvana.

—He lacks the balance of My discipline who eats too little or too much, who sleeps too little or too much. He finds balance between eating and hunger, between sleeping and wakefulness. Between these are perfection and peace. He finds balance when he has tamed his thoughts and senses, when he resides within the shelter of Self.

— The Self is his lamp, its light unflinching beneath the shadow of renunciation, where the gale of desire does not reach. His thoughts restrained, the self finds the Self, his bliss exceeding any pleasure of senses. Fixed on the Self, he discovers a joy that does not pass away, perceiving beyond any perception of sense. He abides within the Self, unmoving and unmoved by even the most profound grief.

—His heart is courageous and he is firm in My discipline; he unbinds the bonds of sorrow. He drives out all passion, all expectation. He finds shelter in the Self and his senses obey his command. He silences his thoughts; like waters beneath the sun of Self, they evaporate. Should his mind stray, wandering restless away from the Self, patiently he leads it back. His joy is greatest who stills his mind, his passions yoked. Purified he is one with the Most High. His joy does not pass away who contemplates the Most High, who is one with the Most High.

—With perfected vision, he finds the Self within all creatures and all creatures he finds within the Self. Seeing Me in all things, seeing all things within Me, he will find Me always ever present. One with all creatures, he is one with Me. He is never lost to Me, and I am always near to him. He has tamed his mind and achieved his goal who sees without distinguishing another's joys and another's sorrows from his own joys, his own sorrows.

Arjuna said:

—O Krishna, the mind is restless and domineering. It is capricious and changeable. It is willful and unyielding, more difficult to tame than wind or storm.

Krishna said:

—To tame the mind, to calm its restless wandering is difficult. But with vigilance and dispassionate endurance, it may

be tamed. Possessing self-mastery, with discipline and knowledge, if a man struggles with his changeable mind, it may be tamed.

Arjuna said:

—Yet if a man struggles but his efforts fall short, what becomes of him? Does he wander lost between this world and the next? Does he slip away as a cloud dissolves? Teach me, O Krishna, and resolve my doubt, for you are the best of teachers.

Krishna said:

—No, Arjuna, he is not lost. The evil you describe will not befall him. Into the world of his merit he goes. He is born into the house of purity and wisdom; a birth like this is rare in the world. In that world to come, he will recall his life in this world and will struggle again to achieve his goal.

—His efforts in this world are not wasted nor ever lost. They are his in this world and the next, beyond any rite or scripture. He rises therefore above all lives, all worlds. He sheds his earthly body, then abandons his celestial dwelling. He surpasses the ascetics, the wise with their wisdom, and those who act without passion. He attains supreme perfection in Me.

—Become like him, for he is My best disciple among those who follow Me and who sacrifices the Self for Me.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Krishna said:

—Focus your mind on Me. In the practice of My discipline you will find refuge in Me. Knowing with My knowledge, there is nothing more to know. Of a thousand men, only one performs My discipline. Of a thousand of these, only one reaches Me.

—Like you, I am formed of earth and water, fire and air and ether. Like you I am mind and sense and self. But My higher nature is the One at whose command the worlds were made. I am the wellspring of all things. I am all beginnings, all endings. Nothing transcends Me, for I transcend all things. The worlds are a necklace of pearls; I am the unseen thread that binds them.

—I am the taste of pure waters and the brightness of sun and moon. I am the sacred name in scripture. I am the sound of the heavens. I am the strength of men.

—I am fragrance of the earth and the fire of the sun. I am the life that informs all lives. I am the austerity of ascetics. I am the source of all lives and the wisdom of the wise. I am the glory of the most glorious.

—I am action free of encumbrance. I am desire that is lawful. All existence hangs on Me.

—I am the source of the three states: creation, preservation, destruction. I am not in their service; they are in Mine. Deceived by these three states, their eyes beguiled by them, men fail to perceive Me. To escape the deception of these three states is difficult. But coming to Me, their illusion dissolves, while those who reject Me are bewitched by delusion and are lost to Me.

—Those who seek deliverance from suffering, those who pursue knowledge of Me, those who solicit Me for riches and blessings, and those who desire Me for My sake, these four are my devotees. But the best of these four is the one who desires Me alone and above all that is. Ever devoted to Me, he is in balance. I am his best beloved, and I love him.

—While each of these four is good, the one who loves Me for My sake exceeds the rest. I am his single wish; I am his straight path; I am his goal.

—In this life and the next, he comes to Me declaring, “There is only the Most High, the Best Beloved.” Such a man is incomparably rare.

—But others are waylaid by desire and turn to other gods. Adoring these gods, worshipping faithfully, I give their faith an invincible strength. If the gods seem to bless them or answer their prayers, it is only I who provide for them; it is I who answers their prayers. But the rewards they receive are fleet-

ing. Those who worship the gods, they belong to the gods. But those who worship Me come to Me.

—Men lacking perception see only My lower nature and account it for little. They are blind to My transcendent Self, ineffable and unending. Concealed behind the veil of My creation, the world does not see that I am unborn, never dying. I know all that was, all that is, all that will ever be, but no one knows Me.

—All creatures are driven by passions, by desire and aversion and live in delusion. But when men are unbound from the fruits of action, they are unbound from delusion and devote themselves to Me for My sake.

—Those who seek shelter in Me, to free themselves from age and death, they know the One transcendent; they know the One immanent, and they recognize action. They know Me in this world and the next. They find Me in sacrifice. In the final moment, in the last breath, mindful of Me, they are purified and in balance. When they die, think not that they are dead; they are with Me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Arjuna said:

—Who is the One transcendent? Who is the One immanent? What is His action? What is the sacrifice, and who makes it? O Krishna, how are you found in the final moment, in the last breath?

Krishna said:

—The One transcendent is the Most High. The One immanent is His nature within you. His action is creation, through which the universe is fashioned. The universe is perishable, but the One is everlasting, within you and beyond you. The perishable body is the sacrifice, though which I make sacrifice.

—In his final moment, in his last breath, the man who thinks of Me, comes to Me. I am his shelter.

—In his final moment, in his last breath, wherever his mind strays, there he remains. His final thought is his final home.

—Therefore, be mindful of Me, detached from all things, and fight. Mindful of Me, you will come to Me.

—If a man's mind does not stray, but is bound to the Most High, in the practice of detachment and selfless action, he goes to the Most High.

—That man goes to the Most High, the Ancient of Days, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Destroyer of worlds, smaller than an atom, upholding the heavens, blazing like the sun where night never falls.

—He goes to the Most High. In his final moment, if that man restrains his mind, is armed with love and with the strength of My practice, his eyes turned within, he finds shelter in Me.

—This is My path, embodied in scripture, which the wise and devoted, purged of all passion, call eternal. Let me reveal it.

—Bar the doors against the senses, their noise and distraction. Lock away the mind in the four-chambered heart. Pinion the breath of the soul within the head. This way you may embrace My practice.

—He attains his highest end who gives up the body abandoning life while upon his lips is the word of peace, the sound of the heavens. Thinking of Me in that moment, he finds Me at once.

—He finds Me, and there is no more road to take, no better place to go. He finds Me and is never again ensnared by earthly attachments. While the worlds of creation come and go, days and nights ever turning, he is at rest within My eternal shelter.

—You will know days and nights if you know that the Day of Creation is thousands of ages, and the Night that falls is

thousands of ages. When the Day of Creation dawns, all creatures appear. When the Night falls, all creatures disappear. Each Day is followed by Night, each Night followed by Day again and again.

—But there is One beyond appearance and disappearance. He is the Most High; His existence is not contingent on creation or destruction for He is beyond Day and Night and transcends all that can be said of Him, never born, never dying.

—He is unseen, eternal, without beginning, without end. The wise say He is the highest end, the best shelter into which souls go and are free forever from the world and its snares. He is the Supreme, to Whom all creatures are devoted, for Whose sake the worlds were fashioned, through Whose grace all things *are*.

—I am the One determining who shall be ensnared by the world, and who shall be set free. Those whose knowledge brings them into light, in fire or sunshine or brightness of moon, by dawn, by day, by dusk, during the longest days of the seasons, they come to Me and return no more to worldly troubles.

—But those whose knowledge brings them instead into darkness, in smoke or pitch unlit by sun or moon, during the shortest days of the seasons, they remain in the bondage of worldly troubles.

—These are the two roads men take: light or darkness. By light the scholar does not return and his practice has born the

sweet fruit of liberation. By darkness the scholar has gathered sour fruits, green and bitter, burning his stomach and he remains in bondage.

—Those who know these two roads know the difference between them. Therefore, be bound only by this wisdom.

—The one who forgoes all worldly rewards earned by merit, by ritual, by scripture, by deprivation, by generosity, he will instead attain the highest end, the best shelter into which souls go and are forever free from the world and its snares.

CHAPTER NINE

Krishna said:

—I will unveil My most hidden mystery. I will reveal the insight freeing you from evil. This insight is the royal road to the Most Pure. It is the lawful road. Once known, it is undeniable, easily achieved, never lost. But for those who turn aside from this road, they do not find Me and gain only death in rebirth to ignorance.

—Unmanifested I am Myself the source of the worlds. All creatures come into being through Me. But they do not comprise Me. This is My mystery! How can they comprise Me when I transcend even the worlds of My creation? And how am I within them? They cannot contain Me or confine Me. They are as winds within a space, bounded and ephemeral.

—Yet in the end that knows no end they return to Me. And at the beginning that knows no beginning, I bring them forth. Again and again I create them. This is My nature. Though I am unbound by them, transcendent and inconceivable to them, by My authority, never by theirs, do I bring them forth.

—No action binds Me, Arjuna, and I am unmoved by the fruit of action. I transcend all action. My Nature brings forth all those who seek Me, and for them I set the worlds in motion.

—The ignorant disregard Me, seeing Me manifested in a form like their own. They see nothing of My higher nature,

the source of being and nonbeing. They wander on the paths of delusion, deprived of Me, deceived by their expectations, by their desires, by the limitations of their learning. They become servants of desire and arrogant blindness.

—Those who are not deceived, who recognize My divinity, know that I am the source of being and nonbeing. Adoring Me above all others, they sing of My glory, the glory of the most glorious. They are bound only to Me and their sacrifices reach Me.

—Steadfast and unwavering, they offer up their worldly knowledge in exchange for knowledge of Me. They see Me as One, as many, and in all things.

—I am the rite and the ritual. I am the fire and the smoke to the heavens. I am the offering and the One for Whom the offering is made. I am the father and the mother of the worlds; I am the Ancient of Days, the One supporting the heavens and earth. I am the source of true knowledge, and the object of it.

—I am the voice of the heavens and the sacred word. I am goal and master, home and refuge, friend and witness, creator and destroyer, beginning and end, the ever-shining light, the fountain of fathomless waters. Never born, I am life. Never dying, I am death. I am being and nonbeing.

—Those who drink deeply quench their thirst for heaven. In celestial bliss they live awhile; but thirst at last returns and

their joys must end and again they awake as mortal men. Even observant of scripture, if through scripture they attain their ends, they do not attain Mine and I am lost to them.

—I am the eternal bliss of those who serve Me alone and above all others. Those who worship others, who perform rites improperly, still their sacrifices come to Me. For all offerings come to Me, even if those who make offerings are in error. Yet in the end, those who worship false gods, are bound to false gods. Those who worship ghosts, are bound to ghosts. Those who worship demons, are bound to demons. Yet those who sacrifice to Me, come to Me and are free from bondage.

—With love, if one offers Me even the least of offerings, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, a sip of water, I accept his offering and his love. Whatever you give or receive or subdue, whatever offering you make, offer to Me and I will free you from bondage. Through renunciation you will come to Me.

—In My eyes, all creatures are equal, neither despised nor favored. I am near to all. But those who love Me, offering love to Me alone and above all others, they will know I am within them and they are within Me. Whatever his crimes, the worst of men, if he loves Me alone and above all others, he becomes a saint, obeys the law, and is at peace.

—None who serve Me are rejected, whatever their station, their gender, their caste. Even the least of men may find me; so how much more the best of men, Arjuna. Renounce the world

of pain and pleasure, for these things pass in time. Embrace Me. Turn your thoughts, your love, your offerings and worship to Me and you will come to Me and you will have reached the Most High.

CHAPTER TEN

Krishna said:

—Arjuna, hear again the words of the Most High. Because you love Me and are devoted to Me, hear again these supreme words and the truth of them will enlighten you. None in the heavens or earth know My beginning, for I am all beginnings. I am the everlasting Lord of worlds. I am unborn, transcending all beginnings, all endings. Knowing this without doubt, you will overcome delusion and be unstained by evil.

—Wisdom and knowledge, perception and restraint, honesty and serenity, patience and forgiveness, insight and nonviolence, joy and sorrow, being and nonbeing, fear and freedom from fear, austerity and generosity, fame and dishonor—all the attributes of men come from Me and no other. The first of men was born at My behest and likewise the wisest of sages. Know that I am everywhere present, with neither beginning nor end. Believe this with absolute sincerity. Knowing that I am the source of all things in all the worlds of My creation, the wise delight in Me and are filled with joy and contentment. Their thoughts fixed on Me, giving up their lives in My path, recounting tales of My action and the words of My wisdom, the wise delight in Me and are filled with joy and contentment. Through their love, I am generous to them, granting to them this vision of Myself, which eclipses all senses. I dispel the

darkness of their ignorance, and fill them with the light of My wisdom.

Arjuna said:

—You are the Most High, the only shelter, the source of holiness, unborn and eternal. You are the divinity of the divine, everywhere with us, surpassing all and unsurpassed. You are God. The wise have declared this, and You have revealed this, and I have no doubt that Your supreme word is true. Only You can pierce Your mystery, for no other can know You, You who are the source of all things in the heavens and earth. Never tiring of your beautiful voice, of the words of the Most High, I am confounded by your many forms, and cannot comprehend you in worshipful meditation Tell me, in what form should I perceive You, the one of infinite form?

Krishna said:

—I shall reveal to you a few of the many forms by which I might be perceived. I am the highest Self within all beings. Of existence, I am the first, the middle, and the last. Of the names of God, I am Vishnu. Of lights, I am the blazing sun. Of constellations, I am the radiant moon. Of scriptures, I am the melody of every hymn. Of celestials, I am King. Of senses, I am mind. Of creatures, I am awareness. Of winds, I am the storm. Of the elements, I am unquenchable fire. Of the mountains, I am loftiest, unscaled. Of waters, I am seas and oceans unfathomed. Of trees, I am the Tree of Life. Of voices, I am the

sound of heavens. I am the prayer of sacrifices. Of weapons, I am the thunderbolt.

—Of all legends, I am their source, and in all legends I am found. I am the first of fathers, the mightiest of beasts, the highest of birds. I am the wind that purifies and Rama among kings. Among rivers, I am the Ganges. I am time past, and all things future. Of women, I am fairest, wisest, most constant and most patient. Of seasons, I am spring. Of gamblers, I am dice. I am the wisdom of the wise, the beauty of the beautiful, the rod of those who chastise, the courage of the courageous, and the silence of mysteries. I am Krishna; I am Arjuna, I am Vyasa, and I am Usana. I am the glory of the most glorious.

—I am the beginning of all things. Without Me, no creature exists. These are but a few of My limitless forms. Of all beings, however splendid and mighty, I am the source of their might and splendor. How will this revelation of Myself benefit you? With the slightest part of Myself, I am the foundation of the universe.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Arjuna said:

—O Krishna, You have blessed me with the words of the Most High. The light of Your truth has banished the shadow of my delusion. You have revealed that You are the everlasting source and the indestructible support of all being and nonbeing. But let my eyes rest upon Your universal form. Let my eyes testify to the truth of Your words that the darkness of delusion may never again descend upon me or divide me from my love for You. If my eyes can bear it, let me look upon You as You are, O Lord.

Krishna said:

—My friend, look upon Me and see My universal form, radiant and infinite. Look upon My body and see all creatures in the heavens and earth. Look upon Me and see the universe within Me, for there is nothing you desire to see that is not within Me. But mortal eyes cannot bear this divine vision. Therefore, I will give you other eyes.

When Krishna finished speaking, He revealed His divine form. Arjuna saw Krishna's countless mouths and eyes, His numberless ornaments and divine weapons shimmering in His limitless hands. Upon His bodies, Arjuna saw celestial robes draped in garlands of flowers scented with heavenly perfumes.

Arjuna saw God, infinite and universal, the single source of all miracles.

Beside Krishna, a thousand suns were but a flickering candle vanishing in His light. Within Him, the entire universe, unified, in infinite variations, spun in infinite directions. Arjuna trembled and pressed his palms together, bowing until his forehead touched the fingers of his hands.

Arjuna said:

—Within You, O Lord, I see all creatures of heavens and earth. I see Your attendants, Your devotees, and holy seers making obeisance to You. I see the strength of Your countless arms, the dazzling light of Your numberless eyes. I hear the supreme word from Your countless mouths in the lives of Your numberless bodies. I see in You no beginning, no middle, no end, O infinite God.

—Light around Your crown, Your mace and discus illuminates the universe. My eyes cannot bear this radiance, more glorious than the sun, burning with unquenchable fire. You are the Most High, the best end of all knowledge, the firmest foundation of heaven and earth, the changeless source and support of Your law, the Lord at the beginning of the universe, the Lord at the end.

—Immeasurable God, Your eyes are sun and moon and from your mouths like blazing fires, Your word illuminates Your creation, an unmatched gift to the universe.

—In the span of heavens, there is only You; on Earth, only You; on every horizon, only You; whichever way I turn, only You. All worlds tremble with wonder at Your ubiquitous glory.

—In You, the heavenly hosts press their hands together in submission to Your infinite power. In You, the holiest sages and seers sigh in adoration and sing Your praises without end.

—In You, the hosts of destruction, of fire, of prayer, of sun and moon, of wind and storm, the heavenly charioteers, the spirits of ancestors, the celestial choirs, the treasures of heaven, the demons of hell, the sages who have attained You, are stunned with awe and amazement.

—In You, they are stunned and wonder at Your limitless forms. They look with fearful eyes into your infinite sharp-toothed mouths. I am terrified of this vision, O infinite God.

—Your head reaches the highest heavens; Your fiery mouths open; Your eyes blazing. I am terrified of this vision, O infinite God.

—Your mouths are aglow with fire at the end of the age. There is no safety or shelter from their insatiable hunger. Have mercy on Your creatures, for there is no refuge except in You.

—The kings and warriors of my cousins and likewise the kings and warriors of my brothers, eager to do battle, I see them hurrying into Your gaping mouths. You crush them, their broken bodies hanging in pieces upon the spikes of Your teeth.

—Like the waters of a great river they gush into the sea, without bottom and limitless. They rush into the blazing fire of Your mouths.

—Like moths before a fire burning brightly they are ablaze and consumed. They hurry to Your gaping mouths, destroyed and devoured.

—Still hungry and unsated, Your mouths engulf the worlds even to the ends of the universe.

—Tell me, O measureless God, why do you fill the worlds with dread? I am obedient; have mercy on Your creation. I wish to understand, O ancient God; I am ignorant and Your ways are incomprehensible.

Krishna said:

—I am Time now ancient, the destroyer of worlds. I am the Last of the age, the Ancient of Days, the End of all things. I have already defeated these warriors, and have destroyed these opposing armies. I spare only you.

—Therefore, stand on your feet, rise up and fight, and your name will never be forgotten. Put your enemies to the sword, for I have conceived their destruction long before you were born. O king among archers, strike them dead with your arrows.

—Your cousins and their allies, the finest of warriors, destroy them! O hand of God, do not hesitate. Destroy them and win victory in battle!

When Arjuna heard these words, he pressed his palms together. Trembling still, he bowed before his friend. Faltering in speech, stunned, he spoke to Krishna.

Arjuna said:

—It is right that You are praised, that You are the beloved of creation. In fear demons fly before You while sages honor You and sanctify Your name.

—In Your presence or in Your absence, though You are never absent, sages make obeisance to You, for You are the Most High, the shelter of creation. You transcend all that is, and all that is not, and all that can be said of You.

—On You creation relies; You are its only support, by You sustained. You are the knower and the best of all things known. You are the straight way and the final end. All things hang on You, like pearls on a thread.

—You are fire, wind, and water. You are the glow of the moon. You are death. You are the creator, and first of all fathers. I cannot but praise You at every moment for all time. Again I praise You, O God, and yet again without end.

—Whichever way I turn, I praise You. To the north, to the south, to east and west I praise You, for You are found in every direction, mighty Lord; in all directions You are found.

—If in careless ignorance I have called You and named Your name “Krishna, son of Yadu, my friend!” I did not know Your transcendent greatness. Ignorant, but with affection for

my friend, if I have dishonored You privately or in the presence of others, or if I have teased You in games, or at rest, or at feast, I seek Your forgiveness, O infinite God.

—Of the quick and the strong, You are the source of speed and strength. Among the sages, You are their worthiest master. Who is better than You, who even Your equal? None! For Your power is without limit, extending throughout Your creation, and beyond even what You create.

—Therefore, I praise You and bow down before You and seek Your forgiveness. O infinite Lord, I am the foolish son at the feet of his father. I am the thoughtless friend beseeching his friend. I am the one who loves, and You are the best beloved.

—I am awed by this vision of You. I am shaken and afraid, O Lord. Restore my mortal sight to see You again in mortal form. I seek shelter from You in You, O God Supreme. Let me see You as before, in Your mortal form, O immortal and infinite God.

Krishna said:

—Because I love you, by My grace, I have revealed to you My universal form, ancient and without end. No other has seen this vision.

—Through no offering, no study, no scripture nor rite, no sacrifice, no self-mortification can I been seen as you have seen Me. None but you have seen My universal form. You have seen

Me in My divinity. But now I will ease your fear and confusion. Look upon Me now, the man you have known.

With these words, Krishna revealed Himself again, taking human form. And Arjuna was no more afraid and was calmed when he beheld his familiar friend.

Arjuna said:

—Now that You are again the man I have known, my senses are restored and I am at peace.

Krishna said:

—You have seen Me in My infinite form. Even the celestials are envious of this glimpse I have granted you. Not with scripture or austerity, not with gift or sacrifice, however great and wondrous, can I be seen as I truly am. Only through love of Me alone and above all others can I be seen or ever known. Devoted to Me, acting for Me without selfish motive or desire for reward, at peace with My creation, knowing Me without doubt or hesitation as the Most High, only he shall come to Me.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Arjuna said:

—Some worship God by Your name, the one manifest in Your creation. Others worship God beyond all names as the transcendent unmanifest. Between these two paths, which is the best way to Your presence?

Krishna said:

—Those who love Me above and beyond all others, who are devoted to Me, who know Me without doubt or hesitation, follow My way and reach Me. And those who worship Me as the transcendent unmanifest and who restrain their senses, caring for the highest and the lowest, the best and the worst without preference or prejudice, they also reach Me.

—Yet of these two paths, those who worship Me as the infinite, everywhere present, immortal transcendent, their way is more difficult. Not knowing My name, not recognizing My station, how will they find Me, their ineffable goal? I am manifest among the manifest that they might more easily comprehend Me, and love Me above and beyond all others. In My manifest form, they find in Me deliverance from death. I am their manifest way.

—Turn your thoughts to Me alone and you will find the best of shelters. If this is not possible, if your thoughts stray,

continue My practice and your thoughts may yet be tamed. If this is not possible, offer your every action to Me and you may yet attain Me. If this is not possible, be devoted to Me, restrain your senses, and renounce the fruit of your every action. Knowledge is superior to study. Meditation is superior to knowledge. But transcending meditation is the renunciation of the fruit of all action. And in renunciation you will find peace and contentment.

—I love him who is without hatred or arrogance, who is equitable to all, who feels compassion, who is detached from the lures of possession, who is untouched by happiness or sorrow, who is patient and satisfied, self-restrained and resolute, focused, dedicating his every thought to Me.

—I cherish him who neither disturbs the world or is disturbed by it, who is unmoved by joy or misery, who is tolerant, unafraid and untormented.

—I bless him who relies on nothing except Me, who is pure and chaste, who is detached and untroubled, who renounces the fruit of all action.

—I delight in him who relinquishes wrath and joy, who rejects sadness and desire, transcending good and evil.

—I treasure him who is equitable to friend and enemy, who is unmoved by glory or abasement, untouched by heat or cold, who restrains his passions, who sees praise or blame with the

same eye, contented with his state, who regards not the world as his home, who is focused and devoted.

—Of all these, I love him the most who is faithful to Me, his thoughts ever fixed on Me, who does not hesitate but drinks from the camphor fountain of My Law.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Krishna said:

—You are the Field and the Knower of the Field. The Field is both body and mind; these are ephemeral, transient. They produce the illusion of “I am.” Like clouds, they form and change and pass in time. The Knower is the inviolable Self, which no fire may burn, nor water wet, nor wind make dry. Above the Field, it blazes like the sun where night never falls.

—My creation gives rise to the illusion that the Field is the same as the Knower. But these are not the same. The one who cannot distinguish between them is lost. You are only the eternal Self, not body, not mind. In death they are the clothes you put off, they are the smoke of the pyre. Only the Knower remains. And I am the Knower of all the Fields of My creation.

—The truth of this is plain. Seers and saints sing of it, and in story and scripture propound it. Briefly I will reveal that all elements, and the illusion of “I am,” and the mind, all senses and motion and all that is sensed, attraction and aversion, pain and pleasure, the physical body, thought and awareness, these are the Field.

—Humility, reserve, benevolence, patience, virtue, respect and courtesy, purity, endurance, and self-control, detachment from sense and from objects of sense, modesty and sincerity,

awareness of the limits of being, of birth, of aging, of illness and unhappiness, and of death, dispassion toward home and possession, equanimity in censure and success, unwavering devotion to Me, solitude, self-awareness, apprehension of what is Real, all this is the knowledge of the Knower. Its opposite is ignorance.

—I will reveal the object, the purpose, the end of this knowledge. Through it, you may reach the Most High, which has neither beginning nor end, which is neither existent nor nonexistent.

—Within all things it reaches, and faces all directions. It hears all that is spoken and all that is unspoken. It envelops the worlds of creation.

—Without senses, it senses all things. Unsustained, it sustains all things. Nothing contains it, it contains all things. It is the nest, the one that fashions the nest, the tree that bears it, the bird within it, the egg it protects.

—Transcending all qualities of the phenomenal world, it is always in their midst. Transcending all creatures, it is within them all. It is within everything, yet exceeds all things. It is motionless, yet never at rest. Subtler than any subtlety, it is before you, not a hair's breadth away, yet is more distant than the farthest place.

—It is inaccessible, yet all things have their portion of it. It creates, sustains, destroys all creatures. Light of all lights,

no darkness diminishes it. It is the object of knowledge; it is knowledge itself. Here I have revealed the nature of the Field and the Knower. To know these truths is to know with My knowledge.

—The phenomenal world and the inviolable Self are without beginning in time. The world is inconstant; it is the source of sense and of the qualities of sense. The world creates the conditions for joy and sorrow. Yet it is the Self that experiences them. Within the world, the Self experiences the world's sensations. By attachment to them, the Self is in bondage to the world's ephemeral rewards and punishments.

—The Most High creates, witnesses, and sustains the world. The one who knows the inviolable Self, the phenomenal world of sense and qualities of sense, he is free from the snare of material reward and punishment.

—In contemplation some find the Self, or by insight. Some find it in action. Others, even in ignorance, hear of it and believe in it. All such believers overcome the lures of the world and subdue death.

—All that exists is born through the union of the Field and the Knower. The Most High is in all creatures, but is not contingent on any of them. Wherever you turn your gaze, see the Most High. All action is performed by the world, yet the Self does not act. Seeing that all creatures have but one inexhaustible source, you may reach that source and become one with the Most High.

—Because it has no beginning in time, the inviolable Self transcends all senses and qualities of sense. The Self illumines the mind and body, as the sun shines upon the world. But the world cannot touch the sun; nor can the mind and body touch the Self. The one who distinguishes between the Field and the Knower, and sees how the Self stands apart from mind and body, has reached the Most High.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Krishna said:

—Listen, Arjuna, while I reveal to you My wisdom, the best end of all understanding. Those who know it, depart with the taste of its perfection on their lips. Knowing with My knowledge, they are free from the bondage of life and death.

—In the shelter of My creation, I am mother and father. I have conceived all beings. In the fabric of creation are three threads intertwined: the light of joy and harmony, the fire of restless desire, and the darkness of ignorant negligence. All creatures are caught in the web of these threads.

—These three dispositions—light, fire, and darkness—bind all creatures, but sometimes one quality prevails over the others.

—The light of joy binds men to happiness; in harmony, clarity, and right action they reside. When a man shines with the light of joyous knowledge, we know what quality prevails. In light, he ascends to the heavens of light.

—The fire of restless desire binds men to passion; always in action, they are never satisfied. When a man lusts for possession, the fire of greed scorches him. In fire, he is reborn to the torment of desire.

—The darkness of ignorance clouds vision and binds men to confusion and negligence; seeing nothing, they make no offering. When a man resides in negligence, thoughtless delusion envelops him in darkness. In darkness, he descends to the anguish of ignorance.

—Yet these three dispositions are themselves bound to the phenomenal world. They are contingent on the senses even to be perceived. Those who know My way, they see that I am not found among these dispositions. Those who follow My way, they are unencumbered and pass beyond the nature of creation, beyond all that is, or was, or ever will be. They ascend to Me alone. They are free from the bondage of life and death.

Arjuna said:

—O Lord, how is he known; how does he act; how does he transcend this light, that fire, that darkness?

Krishna said:

—By these signs you may know him. He is untroubled. He does not reject these dispositions, nor does he seek them out. Perceiving light, perceiving fire, perceiving darkness when they come to him, he sees them as they are. He knows they are bound to nature and cannot reach the inviolable Self.

—He transcends them when he is firm, unmoved, unperurbed, and disinterested. He does not distinguish between them and is equitable to pleasure and displeasure, praise and

censure, honor and disgrace, friend and enemy. He sacrifices the fruit of all actions, undertaking nothing to indulge these dispositions. Aspiring only to Me, he transcends these ephemeral threads. Not straying from My way, he ascends to Me. For I am the changeless source of all things, the wellspring of My law, and the light of perfect bliss, blazing like the sun where night never falls. In this way, he has transcended nature and these three threads.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Krishna said:

—Arjuna, you have heard of the Tree of Eternity, its trunk nested in the heavens, its branches here among us. Its leaves are the hymns of praise, of sacrifice, and of ritual. The one who knows this Tree, knows the first of scriptures.

—Into all the worlds, its branches spread, each bud an object of desire. Nourished by the three dispositions, its roots attach to action.

—Who has seen this Tree from root to branch? Who has seen its expanse and the breadth of its canopy? Its end, its beginning, its foundation no living eye perceives.

—Hew this Tree with the axe of detachment. Escape the tangle of its roots and branches. Say, “I take refuge in Him. I seek solace in Him alone, the Most High, the One supreme.”

—Come to the place from whence none return. Cut away the fruit of every action. Step out from the shadow of desire and attachment. Come to the One from Whom none depart.

—Give up selfish desire, and reject the opposites of hatred and love, of pain and pleasure, of sorrow and delight. Fix your eye on the inviolable Self and take comfort beneath the canopy of My majesty, within the precincts of My mercy. Here there

is no sun, no moon, no fire. My eternal home shines with the light of My glory.

—With but a spark of Myself, I kindle the light of all lamps. Without its light, what use has a lamp? Who cannot see the fire that burns there? Coming into this world, a man has five senses and mind, and he experiences the objects of sense. Departing from this world, by Creation's perfume he is scented. Yet the one who is lost to himself does not understand his own coming, his going, or his experience of the three threads of nature. While the wise man sees him dwelling within himself, the lost, even by seeking, cannot find him.

—I am the light of creation. Without Me, the sun and moon go dark, and the fire has no glow. I sustain creation. I am the food and drink of every creature. I am their digestion, their inhalation, their exhalation. I reside within every heart, and from Me, your every thought, your memories, your reasonings are possible. I reside in scripture, and am the key to scripture, and its voice. I complete every scripture.

—Within creation there is impermanence and permanence. The impermanent include the lives of every creature. The permanent is the inviolable Self. But there is a third transcending both impermanence and permanence. This is the Most High, the One Supreme, and He alone holds together these three worlds.

—I transcend time and eternity and am higher even than the inviolable Self. In this world and in scripture I am acknowledged as the Most High by those who are free from delusion, who have come to Me as I have bidden them come.

—Blameless prince, I have revealed My wisdom, the best end of all understanding. Knowing with My knowledge, a man becomes wise, and the purpose of his life is achieved.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Krishna said:

—Arjuna, you have heard of the Tree of Eternity, its trunk nested in the heavens, its branches here among us. Its leaves are the hymns of praise, of sacrifice, and of ritual. The one who knows this Tree, knows the first of scriptures.

