

SACRED TEXTS

The Bhagavad Gita for Yogis

The 18 chapters summarised, 80 key verses in Sanskrit with our own translation, and the four yogas of action, knowledge, devotion and meditation



गीता

gītā

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

The Bhagavad Gītā (भगवद्गीता), "the Song of the Lord", is a dialogue of 700 verses between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer Kṛṣṇa, on a battlefield, a few moments before a war. It is probably the most widely read spiritual text of India. Gandhi called it his "mother"; it is recited in temples, at funerals, in schools and in ashrams; and in Rishikesh you will hear its verses chanted on the ghats at dawn.

For a yogi, the Gita matters for a particular reason: it is the text that widened the meaning of the word yoga. In the Yoga Sūtras, yoga is the stilling of the mind. In the Gita, yoga is also action without attachment (karma yoga), the path of knowledge (jñāna yoga), the path of love and devotion (bhakti yoga) and the discipline of meditation (dhyāna yoga). Each of its eighteen chapters ends with a colophon that names it as a "yoga". When teachers in India speak of "the four paths of yoga", they are drawing largely on the Gita.

This book is written for practitioners. It gives you:

1. **The context:** where the Gita sits in the Mahābhārata, who speaks, and how it has been read through the centuries.
2. **The four yogas of the Gita**, explained clearly, with the key Sanskrit terms.
3. **All eighteen chapters summarised**, one by one, in the order of the text.
4. **Eighty key verses** in Devanāgarī, in IAST transliteration and in our own translation, each followed by a short note for practice.
5. **A 30-day reading and practice plan**, a one-page recap, a glossary and sources.

About the translations.

Every translation in this book was written for Yogide directly from the Sanskrit. None is copied or adapted from a modern published translation. When we mention older English versions for comparison (Kashinath Trimbak Telang, 1882; Edwin Arnold, 1885), they are in the public domain.

Which Sanskrit text we use

The Gita forms chapters 23 to 40 of the Bhīṣmaparvan, the sixth book of the Mahābhārata. We follow the text of the critical edition of the Mahābhārata prepared at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, as made available in electronic form by GRETIL (Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages), and compared it with the traditional "vulgate" text, also on GRETIL. For the verses quoted here the two agree, apart from spelling conventions. The verse numbering is that of the critical edition (700 verses). Many popular editions, and the vulgate file on GRETIL itself, add a question of Arjuna at the beginning of chapter 13 (prakṛtiṃ puruṣaṃ caiva...), which gives 701 verses; we follow the critical edition, which does not include it. In those editions, add one to our verse numbers in chapter 13 only: our 13.1 is their 13.2, our 13.7 is their 13.8. All other chapters are numbered identically.

The Devanāgarī in this book was generated from the transliteration and checked verse by verse.

How to pronounce

Letter	Sounds roughly like	Example
a	the u in "but"	Gītā = "gee-taa" (the final ā is long)
ā, ī, ū	long: "father", "see", "moon"	Kṛṣṇa, jīva
c	ch as in "church"	citta
ś, ṣ	sh	Śiva, Kṛṣṇa
ṛ	a short ri	Kṛṣṇa = "krish-nuh"
ḥ	a light breath echoing the vowel	namaḥ = "na-ma-ha"
ṁ	nasalises the vowel	saṁsāra
aspirates (bh, dh, th...)	consonant + puff of air	bhakti = "b-hak-tee"

How to use this book

- **To understand the whole:** read chapters 1 and 2 of this book, then the eighteen summaries straight through.
- **To study:** read one chapter of the Gita a day with its key verses; the 30-day plan in Chapter 22 does this for you.
- **To practise:** each verse has a note "for practice". Choose one verse a week and live with it.

Chapter 1. The Gita in its world

The story around the dialogue

The Mahābhārata is one of the two great Sanskrit epics, with the Rāmāyaṇa. It tells the conflict between two branches of a royal family: the five Pāṇḍava brothers (Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva) and their hundred cousins, the Kauravas, led by Duryodhana, son of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. After years of injustice, exile and failed negotiation, the two armies face each other on the plain of Kurukṣetra.

Kṛṣṇa, prince of the Yādavas and cousin and friend of the Pāṇḍavas, has refused to fight but agreed to drive Arjuna's chariot. Just before the battle, Arjuna asks him to place the chariot between the two armies. He sees teachers, grandfathers, cousins and friends in the opposing ranks, and collapses. The Gita is Kṛṣṇa's answer.

The whole dialogue is reported by Sañjaya, the minister of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, to whom the sage Vyāsa has given divine sight so that he can tell the blind king what is happening. This is why the text begins with a question of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and ends with a verse of Sañjaya.

When was it composed?

The Mahābhārata grew over several centuries. Most scholars place the composition of the Gita roughly between the second century BCE and the second century CE, though estimates vary. Tradition attributes the epic, and so the Gita, to the sage Vyāsa.

The great commentaries

Commentator	Approximate date	School	Reading of the Gita
Śaṅkara (Ādi Śaṅkarācārya)	8th century	Advaita Vedānta (non-dualism)	knowledge of the self as identical with Brahman is the goal; action prepares the mind
Rāmānuja	11th–12th century	Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism)	devotion and surrender to a personal God is the culmination
Madhva	13th century	Dvaita (dualism)	the soul and God are eternally distinct; devotion is the path
Jñāneśvar	1290	Marathi commentary in verse (Jñāneśvarī)	a poetic, devotional and yogic reading in a vernacular language

In the modern period, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Gītā Rahasya, 1915) read it as a call to action; Mahatma Gandhi read it as a guide to selfless service and non-violence understood inwardly; Sri Aurobindo and Swami Sivananda, among many others, wrote influential commentaries. Charles Wilkins published the first

English translation in 1785.

Is the Gita a call to war?

The question has been asked for centuries. Traditional commentators read the battle as the setting of a teaching on duty; Gandhi read Kurukṣetra as the battle within the human heart. This book does not settle the debate. It focuses on what the Gita teaches the practitioner: how to act, know, love and meditate.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 49 pages.

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