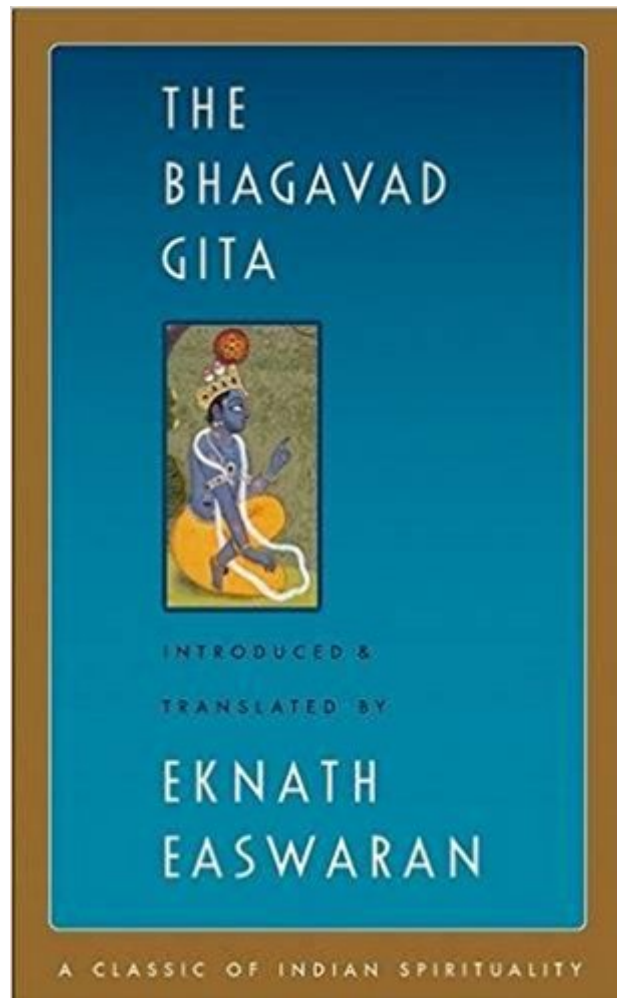




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The Bhagavad Gita (Easwaran's Classics Of Indian Spirituality)



Synopsis

Easwaran's best-selling translation of the Bhagavad Gita is reliable, readable, and profound. His 55-page introduction places the Gita in its historical context, presents key concepts, and brings out the universality and timelessness of its teachings. This edition includes chapter introductions, notes and a Sanskrit glossary. Easwaran grew up in the Hindu tradition in India, learned Sanskrit from a young age, and became a professor of English literature before coming to the West. He is a gifted teacher and an authority on the Indian classics and world mysticism. The Gita opens, dramatically, on a battlefield, as the warrior Arjuna turns in anguish to his spiritual guide, Sri Krishna, for answers to the fundamental questions of life. Yet the Gita is not what it seems – it's not a dialogue between two mythical figures at the dawn of Indian history. The battlefield is a perfect backdrop, but the Gita's subject is the war within, the struggle for self-mastery that every human being must wage if he or she is to emerge from life victorious. •

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"No one in modern times is more qualified - no, make that 'as qualified' - to translate the epochal Classics of Indian Spirituality than Eknath Easwaran." --Huston Smith, author of The World's Religions

Text: English (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This translation of Gita is straightforward and simple to understand. It also gives just enough context of Hindu religion and culture required in form of chapter summaries and also points out similarities between messages of Gita and other religions. Would recommend this to anyone starting to explore Gita at any age.

This book is the Bible of Hinduism. Okay, that may not be entirely accurate, but what is accurate is Easwaran's translation and commentary of the Bhagavad Gita. The information is beautifully presented in a neat font, there is an enlightening, succinct section preceding every chapter, there are no annoying "purports" below each verse like there is in "Bhagavad Gita As It Is"--ironically this Bhagavad Gita is more as it is, because it allows you to read an entire chapter without getting interrupted by an author's remark. Overall, the translation is excellent. I've read another translation of the Gita and this by far the best I've encountered. I would argue it is the best translation available. Easwaran strikes the perfect balance between capturing the intended message without distortion and ensuring the reader can understand the underlying message. Highly recommended, whether or not you are spiritual. This is a book about morality, which influences every single one of our lives. Thus I would recommend it for everyone who knows how to read.

How does one post a rating for an ancient text? Having never learned Sanskrit, I can't very well rate the translation, but I can only say that in reading the Bhagavad Gita, I learned a lot about Hindu religion, and I found much of it thrilling. There's a word they have, which escapes me at the moment because I read it almost a year ago, but it deals with doing the right thing and not being attached to the results. What a concept. The overtures to each chapter are great for folks like me, who have only had high school level exposure to Hinduism.

I tried to read another interpretation of Gita from a different author. I left it in between as I couldn't convince me on some of the points. I almost lost hopes on Gita. Fortunately, I happened to read the sample of this book. Now, I strongly suggest my friends to give it a try.

Moving & wonderful translation from the Heart. The teachings of this book are a message the world needs today. The True Grave of Life.

If you are a Hindu and you know very little about Hindu teachings this is the book to start with. Eknath's writing and explanation of concepts drive you into reading and understanding more about

the teachings of Gita. Some concepts which are supposed to come naturally to an Indian Hindu are explained with perspectives that I might have missed. Highly recommended for anyone and everyone!

1 The Bhagavad Gita "Gandhi's Favorite The Most Loved Hindu Scripture Translated by Eknath Easwaran 1st Shambhal Edition 2004 The word "Gita" means "song", and "Bhagavad Gita" means "song of the Lord". The Bhagavad Gita (The Gita), was and is viewed by many, including Mahatma Gandhi, as India's most important gift to the world. It is not an academic work of philosophy but a poetic, practical guide for a lay audience. Whoever would claim to be a student of religion can ill afford to ignore this work. More The Introductions to each of its 18 Chapters are still essential to guide the lay reader through the thicket of Hindu parlance, including its frequent use of Sanskrit words (which often have multiple and very different meanings). The Gita is short, comprising only a small part (100 pages or so) of a very long Hindu scripture, The Mahabharata (believed to have been written about 1000 B.C.), some 500 years after The Rig Veda, which is the oldest of the Hindu scriptures (which Hindus date hundreds of years before Moses and The Torah -- the first five books of the Old Testament); the Veda also includes the Upanishads, another prominent Hindu scripture. In the aggregate, the Hindu scriptures include texts that are roughly 700 times the size of the Christian Bible. Both Hinduism and Judaism evolved from idol worship of many objects and forces of nature (gods) into faith in one god and, 1000 or so years later, Judaism gave birth to Christianity and, about 625 A.D., the Islamic faith. Westerners often misread Hinduism as a belief in many gods, but Hindus believe in one Supreme Being (referring to it as Love, Truth, and Reality, the Supreme Being, Vishnu, etc.), although they have retained their many names for the varied "faces" or aspects of one god and have statues as reminders of their multifaceted one god and some of their saints, but these statues are no more "idols of worship" than are the crosses and other jewelry-ornaments and paintings, figures, figurines and statues that proliferate in many Christian churches (including evangelical) and homes and which Christians wear around their necks. Hindus have thousands of saints (which some Westerners also misread as gods), a number of which saints the Hindus maintain "ascended" (not dissimilar from the Christians' belief in the ascensions of Christ and Elijah). Hinduism has spawned or inspired many tangential religions, including Buddhism, Jainism (which adopted many of the Hindu scriptures verbatim), Zorasterism, Hari Krishna's, Taoism, Pantheism, Humanism, and even the Muslim Sikhs have borrowed much from Hinduism (understandably as many of them live in

Northern India). Buddhism is very similar to Hinduism; Buddha preached Hindu ideals, but he abhorred the priestly caste and their rituals, and he lived his life as a mendicant and ascetic, as did his devoted disciples and pupils, who lived off the largess of others, which prompted the Indians to force most Buddhists to leave India, as a beggar class hardly helps the local economy. Hinduism appears to have influenced Christianity, as some Eastern scholars maintain that Jesus's travels included India and that he, too, enjoyed Hindu influences and an exchange of ideas. Hinduism is appealing, because it has a history of non-violence and of loving all sentient creatures. Westerners misinterpret this respect of (and kindness towards) creatures, even extending to insects, as fanaticism or barbarism, rather than as a logical expression of love of all life forms. Of the major religions, Hinduism is the only one that hasn't spread its gospel, at times, through violence. It sees God in everyone and everything. Amazingly, Hindus have no urge whatsoever to convert anyone to their views. They are concerned only with their own salvation, which keeps them constructively engaged and denuded of the pretentious presumption that they know what is the best philosophy for others. The main subject of The Gita (the shortest and most loved of all Hindu scriptures) is the war within, the struggle for self-mastery. Most of it is imbedded within a conversation between Arjuna (who symbolizes the average man) and Lord Krishna (Arjuna's charioteer, who is the incarnation of the Supreme Being and such avatars are common in Hindu scriptures). (Aum Hari is another name for Krishna, hence the splinter faith's moniker, Aum Hari Krishna). Krishna counsels Arjuna: to be compassionate to friend and enemy alike; to see himself in every person; to suffer other's sorrows as his own; to see Reality (God) in every creature; to be incapable of ill will; to see all of life as Reality's manifestation; to harm no one; to see life as a seamless whole; and to endure pleasure and pain in the same way. What Westerner could disagree with such loving tenets? Krishna, the Deity, refers to himself as Aum the Self in every creature Aum (Gita, 10:20). Philosophers Spinoza and Huxley called The Gita Aum the Perennial Philosophy Aum, because it appears in every age of all known civilizations, except the Egyptians Aum (which antedate it by stretching back to 3000 B.C.). The Gita's fundamental precepts are: (1) there is an infinite, changeless reality (Reality); (2) it lies at the core of every human being and creature; and (3) the purpose of life is to discover this Reality; it is Aum God within us Aum. Unlike Christian and Muslim bibles, The Gita does not dwell on the subject of creation or a creator, opting to focus on the individual's struggle to achieve inner peace. Dharma and karma are the two most important Hindu words. Dharma means Aum that which supports Aum and/or Aum the essential order of things Aum and/or Aum the oneness of life Aum. The highest dharma is

nonviolence, a universal love for all creatures; that is the fundamental law of the unity of life. Karma, a Sanskrit word, literally means "something that is done" or "deed", but it has many expansive meanings; in brief, it might be said to be the sum of the individual's thoughts and actions. The Law of Karma is that every thought and every action has consequences. Buddha, born a Hindu and a lover of The Gita, said, "We are not punished for our anger; we are punished by our anger." (Gita, 15) The Gita asserts the importance of converting negative thoughts into positive ones. The key to life is in the mind, not outside it. The objects that we see are shaped by the attitude with which we look. Krishna tells Arjuna that we never really encounter anything; rather, we only experience our own nervous system. To discover the unity of the world, our consciousness needs to be withdrawn from our (five) senses "via meditation, which is an enormous component of yoga (and the foundation of self-hypnosis, a key tool used in modern psychology, psychiatry and medicine to control pain, gain inner peace, etc.). The nothingness of matter "indeed, atoms are empty" has become a more dominant theme of 20th and 21st Century physicists. The Gita is a textbook on the supreme science of yoga, but yoga (like many Indian words) has many meanings. Its central theme is karma yoga: we are the product of our thoughts and actions. There are four, primary types of yoga: (1) knowledge yoga, in which man learns to identify the Self within; (2) devotion yoga, where man identifies with the Lord or Love "recalling the New Testament's John 4:8, "God is love"; (3) karma yoga, wherein man turns his thoughts and actions to the service of others and accepts that he is the product of his thoughts and actions; and that actions bind mankind to an endless cycle of cause and effect; (4) meditation yoga, wherein man transcends the conscious mind into the subconscious mind. The Gita doesn't urge us to give up material things (as does Buddhism) but, rather, to give up our attachment to material things. It doesn't ask us to give up the pleasures of life but only to do things without selfish motives. To Gandhi, The Gita can be summarized in two words: "selfless action", which requires selfless motives. The person whose overriding desire is to give and love and serve has found the true joy of life. The Gita is not a book of commandments but a book of choices. Positive to a fault, it never mentions sin. It dwells on reforming thoughts and conduct, ego, selflessness, love and the relationship between thought and action, and the need to see the same Self (goodness) in every person and creature. The Gita places human destiny in human hands; it sees God (Love, Truth, Reality) in each man, and it teaches that we shape ourselves and our world by what we think and do. Devotion to selfless work is the supreme goal of life (Gita, 3:19). It also holds that there are two paths at the time of death: rebirth and liberation, and that one's attitude at the time of death can influence which path is taken. Rebirth is

generally required for those who have not mastered the supreme goal and liberation (the end) for those who have. While a life of selfless service is a primary driver of Hinduism, meditation may be an even larger part of it, and rudimentary techniques for meditation are set forth, although modern techniques of self-hypnosis may well provide a more advanced and more direct route to the same goal. Interestingly, The Gita and other Hindu scriptures maintain that there are many cosmos or universes which die and are reborn endlessly. Their ancient views on point are similar to the current views of many cosmologists, which hold that our universe began in a Big Bang, will end in a Black Hole in a "Big Crunch" (some billions of years hence) and will be born again in another Big Bang, hence fostering an endless cycle of universes, coming and going. Thus, the prescient authors of Hindu scriptures appear to have been 3-4,000 years ahead of their time, albeit without enormous telescopes and the benefit of any modern sciences. The author, Bill Bryson's "episodic extinctions" (e.g. solar flares, supernova), as described in my report on his brilliant Short History of Almost Everything, suggest many other similarly unpleasant but possible denouements for our terrestrial ball, which might occur in millions of years. Even sooner, another meteor, like the KT Meteor that extinguished the dinosaurs 65 million years ago, could strike anytime, or never (but there are so many errant meteors careening recklessly in space that statistical probability makes it likely within a million or so years), but, if that occurred, it would likely do so with only a few seconds' warning; so, we'd never know what hit us anyway. Bottom line: the odds are that no such episodic extinction will occur for a million or more years. The point remains that, for eons, the Hindus have believed in sequentially reoccurring universes, a more expansive concept than that depicted in Revelations, as written by the Gospels' John, which deals only with our planet and was written 1,000 or more years after The Gita. In sum, The Gita has become synonymous with the most beloved human being in modern history -- Mahatma Gandhi. Its text is brilliant in its simplicity but complex in subtle profundity. Unlike the Torah, the many Christian Bibles and the Koran, The Gita, which never preaches violence, was written to inspire love without the use of force or intimidation. Like all old religious texts (and Hindu scriptures are the oldest of all), it had to be written originally on plant leaves, clay tablets, and parchment (as it long antedated papyrus), and it had to be copied by hand (with predictable edits and revisions to suit the scribes or the clerics from whom the scribes took their directions) with far too many translations, and revisions to compliment the mutations in contemporary mores. Such evolutions render any text problematic at best and, over time, will impose a host of different meanings for the same words with resultant ambiguities. Notwithstanding any such vagaries, the overriding ideology of The Gita is pure virtue, and its text is largely devoid of contentious

statements. Understandably, countless luminaries praise The Gita as the most important of all religious texts. Its ultimate premise makes manifest sense: "No one who does good work will ever come to a bad end." (Gita, 6:40). On such a logical and felicitous note, this reader commends The Gita to all, as a positive and loving scripture, which can help any reader become a better human being, while gaining some appreciation of the world's oldest faith and of the loving Hindu spirit. BookAWeekMan (leeglovett.com)

When my daughter suggested we share a reading of the Gita a few years ago, I recalled slogging through this classic as required reading for a philosophy of religion class in college and hoped that this time I might get more out of it. Then, to assist in the project, a friend of mine presented me with a copy of Easwaran's publication of the Gita. That was the turning point in my understanding of and appreciation for this great piece of literature. Since then, I've had the pleasure of gifting the same book to friends and family members who admit to not "getting anything out of" the Gita. Easwaran's publication provides a transformational look into the underpinnings and backdrop of these writings that make it very easy to get caught up in the timeless nature and profound messages contained on every page. I would venture to make a comparison to Proust - for the non-native speaker, the translation is everything. Get it wrong, and the meaning will be forever locked behind the door of language. Get it right, and lives will be changed. Thankfully, Easwaran got this one right.

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