



BHAGAVAD GITA—THE BOOK OF LIFE

Several thousand years ago in north-central India, two people sat in a chariot in the midpoint of a great battlefield. One of them, the yogi Arjuna, knew that it would not be long before the conflict would begin. So he asked Krishna, the Master of Yoga (Yogeshwara), what should be his attitude and perspective in this moment. And above all: What should he do?

There was no time to spare in empty words. In a brief discourse, later turned into seven hundred Sanskrit verses by the sage Vyasa, Krishna outlined to Arjuna the way to live one's entire life so as to gain perfect self-knowledge and self-mastery.

The battle was ferocious and—as always with war—everyone lost. But when Vyasa wrote his epic poem, the Mahabharata (The Great Indian War), he put Krishna's inspired teachings into it as a precious jewel. Instantly they were extracted, named Bhagavad Gita (The Song of God), and circulated throughout the subcontinent.

That was several thousand years ago, and today the Gita is found in nearly every household in India and has been translated into every major language of the world. Literally billions of copies have been handwritten and printed. (A few years ago a spiritual organization in South Africa printed one million copies for free distribution.) When Rudyard Kipling became a Freemason in Lahore, four scriptures were on the altar, including the Bhagavad Gita.

What is the appeal of the Gita? First of all, it is totally practical, free of any vague or abstract philosophy. During my first trip to India over fifty years

ago, I heard about a yogi who lived in a small houseboat on the Ganges river in the holy city of Benares (Varanasi). He never spoke or wrote, yet every day for many years people came to him for advice. How did he manage? He had a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, and after he was told the problem or question he would open the book, point to a portion, and the inquirer would have a perfect and complete solution to the trouble.

My own spiritual awakening began by kicking me out of the nest of comfortable religion into a vast world of realities I had no idea how to cope with. I floundered around in the sea of my new horizons until one day I bought a paperback edition of the Bhagavad Gita. I did not read it, I inhaled it. I was not reading the words of a long-dead teacher: my own Self was talking to me in the pages of that little book. Nor did I learn anything from the Gita—I *remembered* that which I had always known. Eternal Self spoke Eternal Truth. The Bhagavad Gita changed my life by giving me Life that has never ended.

Nothing has ever arisen in my life, internal or external, that the Gita has not made clear and enabled me to deal with or understand. Yet is it not dogmatic. At the very end Krishna says to Arjuna: “Now I have taught you that wisdom which is the secret of secrets. Ponder it carefully. Then act as you think best.” No threats, no promises, no coercion. It is all in the reader’s hands.

Even better: the Bhagavad Gita tells us that we can attain a Knowing beyond even what it tells us. And it shows us the way. It is a wise resolve to read the Gita every day without fail for the rest of one’s life.

A practical suggestion

The translation used in this commentary is my own, but I recommend that you obtain other translations of the Gita, for it is impossible to produce a definitive translation of a text written in such a complex language as Sanskrit. I always check at least four translations when looking into the meaning of a verse: those of Swamis Prabhavananda, Swarupananda, Sivananda, and that of Winthrop Sargeant. I sometimes consult those of Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, and William Judge, as well.

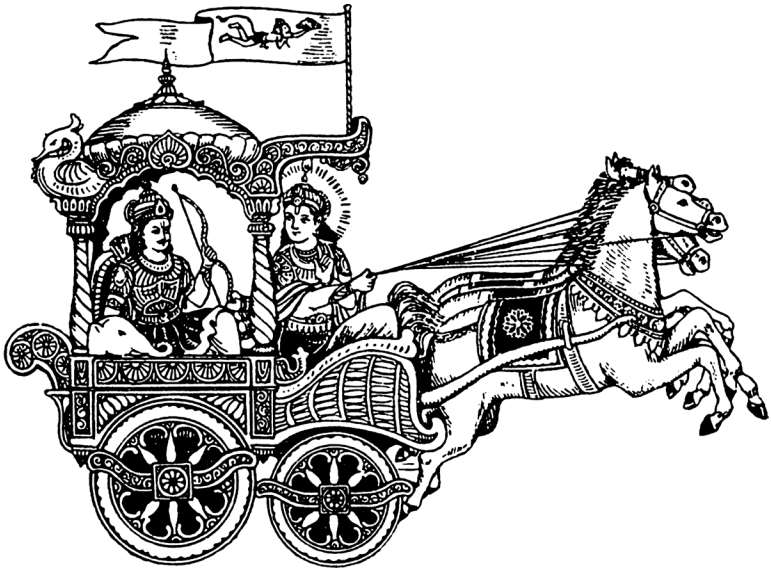
I would like to point out that reading any English-only translation of the Gita, however good, will only be skimming the surface. This is because of the many meanings of Sanskrit words—meanings that were in the mind of

Vyasa and that were used for that very reason. In the West we have the idea that spiritual texts have but one meaning, and that may be so for some, but this is not at all the case for Sanskrit texts which are intended to have multi-level messages and subtle nuances. Words which carry several relevant ideas are ideal for the profound wisdom of the Gita and Upanishads, particularly.

In the Gita translation, words in parentheses indicate alternate readings of the actual Sanskrit word preceding them. Those alternate readings are as legitimate as the English term I have used. Brackets indicate words not in the Sanskrit text but inserted by me to clarify the meaning.

Because of this I recommend that you obtain translations of the Gita that contain the Sanskrit text with word-by-word translations as well as the usual verse form. Sargeant's translation is definitely the best for this, but it would be good to have one or two more. In addition you need some Sanskrit dictionaries. I recommend: *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* by John Grimes, *The Yoga-Vedanta Dictionary* of Swami Sivananda, *Sanskrit Glossary of Yogic Terms* by Swami Yogakanti and *A Sanskrit Dictionary* by John M. Denton. My own endeavor, *A Brief Sanskrit Glossary*, is certainly helpful, and definitely complements them.

Abbot George Burke
(Swami Nirmalananda Giri)





THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND

Most of us have heard the story of the centipede who, when asked how he managed to walk with so many legs, tangled his legs in the attempt to figure it out and ended up on his back, helpless. This is not unlike the person who attempts to plumb the depths of oriental scriptures. Right away it becomes evident that they consist of incalculable layers, many symbolic in nature. Furthermore, the meanings of the symbols are not consistent, changing according to the levels on which they occur. For example, on one level water symbolizes the mind, on another level the constant flux of samsara, and on another the subtle life-currents known as prana. This being the case, the Western linear mode of thought becomes as entangled and disabled as the fabled centipede. Knowing this to be so, I have decided to avoid subtle symbolism and concentrate instead on the obviously practical side of Krishna's teachings in the Bhagavad Gita. (For an exposition of the symbolism of the Gita, see Paramhansa Yogananda's commentary, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*.) However I do want to take some time and consider the obvious symbolism encountered in the first chapter of the Gita.

We find ourselves on Kurukshetra, a field of impending battle. It is not as vast as our Hollywood-epic-shaped minds might imagine, as can be seen for oneself by a visit to Kurukshetra, not very far from Delhi. At one end is a hillock topped with a huge tree under which there is a great bronze statue of Arjuna, Krishna and their chariot. (When I was there only the tree and a large marble replica of the chariot marked where they sat.) This is the vantage

point from which Arjuna, the great warrior, and Sri Krishna, his teacher, looked out over the field. Today its tranquillity is charming, despite the strong feeling in the air that something tremendously momentous occurred there in the distant past. It is both awesome and soothing.

For background information regarding how the battleground came to be thronged with soldiers, chariots, elephants and the other paraphernalia of a deadly war, see the introductory essay, “Gita and Mahabharata” in Swami Prabhavananda’s translation *The Song of God*.

Suffice it to say that the two opposing armies are very easy to morally identify. The Kauravas, led by the murderous Prince Duryodhana, are fundamentally evil, although many honorable men have, through various complicated alliances and obligations, found themselves among their ranks. The Pandavas, headed by the virtuous and noble Yudhisthira, the eldest brother of Arjuna, are embodiments of all that is good, among them being the divine Sri Krishna himself who chose to be the charioteer of Arjuna.

The symbolism is not very hard to figure out (leaving aside the complex matter of assigning a symbolic meaning to every person named in the battle narrative). Kurukshetra is the personality—particularly the mind (intellect)—of the awakened seeker for higher consciousness. Such a seeker, determined to end the whirling cycle of birth and death, finds that his aspiration itself has inspired opposition from within his own mind and heart, where good and evil, truth and falsehood, ignorance and wisdom, like the Kauravas and Pandavas, have drawn themselves up in readiness for a conflict that must end in the annihilation of one side or the other. Even more daunting is the fact that much considered good is found lining up in support of negativity, and most of the Pandava side will also be blotted out in the eventual transmutation of the individual into a higher state of being itself, much as the endearing ways of infancy and childhood must be eradicated at the advent of adulthood and replaced with completely different virtues.

In the chariot set betwixt the two armies we find Arjuna and Krishna. Many interpretations of these two pivotal figures are possible, nearly all of them correct, but the words of the Mundaka Upanishad, written long before the Gita, are certainly worthy of our attention.

“Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the selfsame tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes.

“The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more” (Mundaka Upanishad 3:1:1, 2. This is the translation found in *The Upanishads, Breath of the Eternal*, by Swami Prabhavananda.)

These two paragraphs are a perfect picture of the setting of the Gita. Arjuna is the bewildered and sorrowing Atman, the individual Self, and Krishna is the divine Paramatman, the Supreme Self from which the Atman derives its very being and existence. Forgetful of its true nature as part of the Infinite Spirit, the finite spirit passes through countless experiences that confuse and pain it, producing utterly false conclusions that compound and perpetuate the confusion and pain. Only when the perspective of the Divine Self is entered into, can its troubles cease. We can also think of Arjuna as our lower, mortal self, and Krishna as our higher, immortal Self. Krishna and Arjuna thus represent both God and Man and our own (presently) dual nature as mortal and immortal. Keeping this perspective before us, the ensuing dialogue which forms the Gita is to be seen both as God’s communication to human beings and the communication of our own divine Self with our human self, liberation (moksha) of the spirit being their sole intention.

With this in mind, we are ready to begin. I will be using my own version of the Gita which is based a great deal on the translation of Winthrop Sargeant: *The Bhagavad Gita*, published by State University of New York Press, which I recommend as an excellent version, especially since it gives a word-by-word translation of the entire text. The translation of Swami Prabhavananda is unparalleled for beauty and interpretation, so I recommend both translations.



ON THE FIELD OF DHARMA

We begin with King Dhritarashtra, the blind father of the evil Duryodhana:

Dhritarashtra said: Assembled there on dharma’s field—Kurukshetra—desiring war, what did my sons and the Pandavas, O Sanjaya? (1:1)

The opening words of this verse are *dharmakshetre kurukshetre*: “the field of dharma, the field of the Kurus.” Dharma means the right way of thought and action, but it can also mean the accurate expression of one’s own dominant character, for dharma also means “quality.” This entire world is a dharmakshetra, a field upon which we act out the character of our inner makeup—i.e., the quality of our emotions, mind, intellect, and will. We as individuals are each a dharmic field, expressing the actuality of our present level of evolution.

How is it, though, that the field of dharma is the field of the Kurus, the enemies of dharma? This is necessary for the portrayal of our present situation here in the world. Not only do negativity and ignorance—the enemies of dharma—dominate society in general, we find within ourselves a welter of negative impulses, conflicts, confusions, fears, and ignorance of all kinds. Yes; we are definitely in—and are—the field of the Kurus, whatever our intentions may be. We are going to have to fight through the whole field and wipe out all the Kurus and most of the Pandavas. Remember, we have lived millions of lives: mineral, plant, animal, and human, and we have brought all the

impressions (samskaras) and habits (vasanas) of those lives along with us. Our past is our present. No wonder we are in trouble! But, as Swami Sri Yukteswar often said: “Forget the past. The vanished lives of all men are dark with many shames. Human conduct is ever unreliable until anchored in the Divine. Everything in future will improve if you are making a spiritual effort now.” And the Gita will help us in this effort.

Desiring to fight

Yuyutsavah certainly means “desiring to fight,” but it can also be translated “battle-hungry.” There is deep within us an impulse to divinity, but it has been overlain and overruled by a multitude of impulses to delusion and delusion-produced desires. So they both fight with each other—often on the subconscious level. Both are “battle-hungry” for they are fighting for their very life.

The Mahabharata War is a historical fact, just as are the field of Kuruksheta, Krishna, and Arjuna. Yet Vyasa is using this setting and the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna to give us spiritual teachings, some of which are in symbol. In the real battle many families were represented on both sides, which depicts the inner conflicts of human beings, whether spiritually awakened or not.

The warriors of ignorance and delusion are children of the blind ego (Dhritarashtra), whereas the the inner soldiers of truth and higher consciousness are the children of the Spirit-Self, the divine Atman. The ego is the false self that reigns on the throne of our minds and hearts, blinding us to everything else, making us think that it is the reality of our being—that we are it. But it is a lie. Buried deep within is the real Self, awaiting its liberation and possession of its rightful kingdom. This is why the evil twin/good twin plot always appeals to people; it is symbolic of our dilemma of false self/real Self.

Son of Ego—more of the same

Sanjaya said: King Duryodhana, seeing the Pandava forces ranged ready for battle, approaching his teacher, Drona, spoke these words: (1:2).

Duryodhana is certainly his father in extension, but more dangerous because he can see—that is, he can consciously choose evil if he feels it suits his own ends. (By the way, Dhritarashtra literally means “He by whom the kingdom is held,” and Duryodhana means “dirty fighter.”)

The Bhagavad Gita occurs in the *Mahabharata* epic only after an immense amount of historical material is given, showing all that led up to the battle. There we see Duryodhana as one of the foulest, most evil figures in recorded history. Many times he attempted to kill the Pandava brothers, whose kingdom he had usurped. He also plotted the death of Krishna several times. He is evil, and Vyasa is going to show this to us by his conversation with Drona, a venerable man who was his teacher, the one who had given him all his education and training as a kshatriya (a member of the warrior-ruling caste). Actually, the whole Gita consists of two conversations: that between Duryodhana and Drona (though it was really a monologue in the style of all egotists) and that between Arjuna and Krishna. Arjuna pleads with Krishna to teach him, but Duryodhana only seeks to set Drona straight and accuse him for also being the teacher of Arjuna who is now facing him as an opponent in battle. So it begins...

**Behold, O Teacher, this great army of Pandu’s sons, assembled
by Arjuna your brilliant pupil (1:3).**

See what I mean? “You got us into this mess” is the meaning. Next he rubs it in by enumerating the great warriors on the Pandava side:

**Here are heroes, mighty archers, Bhima and Arjuna’s equals,
Yuyudhana and Virata, and Drupada the great car warrior (1:4).**

Bhima, one of Arjuna’s brothers, was perhaps the strongest human being that has ever lived. He was all brawn and no brains, but beloved by those who could survive knowing him. His name means “tremendous,” but in the sense of terrifying. All those listed by Duryodhana are maharathas—mighty chariot-warriors (car warriors) who could fight huge numbers of foot-soldiers singlehandedly.

Drishtaketu, Chekitana, and the valiant King of Kashi, Purujit and Kuntibhoja, and Shaibya: the mightiest among men. And courageous Yudhamanyu, and valorous Uttamaugas; the son of Shubhadra and the sons of Draupadi: all great car warriors (1:5-6).

Well, that tells Drona! (Subhadra was Krishna's sister. "The sons of Draupadi" are the children of the Pandava brothers.) Even though Drona got Duryodhana into this tangle (egotists always take the credit for success, even when it is not due them, but always manage to blame someone else for failure), there is no need for worry.

Those of ours who are indeed distinguished, now know. O highest of the twice-born, the leaders of my army I now I recount unto you by name (1:7).

As if Drona would not know all of them very well! This is extremely insulting—as is the way of all bullies. The fact that he speaks of "my army" reveals his egotism. "Twiceborn" was a title referring to the three higher of the four castes, referring to their having undergone a spiritual birth through initiation into the Gayatri mantra and the spiritual rites of Vedic religion.

Your Lordship and Bhishma and Karna and Kripa, victorious in war, Ashwattama and Vikarna, and the son of Somadatta also. And many other heroes, whose lives are risked for my sake, ready to discharge various weapons, all very skilled in battle. (1:8-9).

Yes, all those who serve ego and work to ensure its preservation are certainly risking their lives. It is amazing to see how the world and the ego devour a person, sapping his life, turning him into an aimless husk, and all the while he thinks he is really living the good life. This is the fatal illusion in which humans dwell. Only those who have glimpsed the truth of their inner divinity have a chance at escaping the realm of death.

Bravado, not bravery

Sufficient is that force of ours guarded by Bhishma; insufficient, though, is that force guarded by Bhima. Stationed in your proper places, whatever be your positions, certainly all of you: protect Bhishma (1:10-11).

It is true that the Pandavas were greatly outnumbered by the Kauravas. So naturally, those that see only with the bodily eyes would think that their numbers were inadequate. But throughout history great victories have been won by a few—sometimes even by only one. In the Bible (the seventh chapter of Judges) we find that God kept telling Gideon that he had too many soldiers, and ordering that he pare down their numbers. He did so, and they routed a huge number of soldiers without even fighting! It is foolish to think that numbers make either strength or right. But that is the way of Duryodhana and his kind.

Empty noise

To make Duryodhana happy, the aged Kuru grandsire, Bhishma, bellowing with a tremendous sound of a lion's roar, then blew his conch with great power, making a tremendous sound. Thereupon the Kurus' conches and kettledrums and cymbals and trumpets were sounded all at once, producing a tumultuous uproar (1:12-13).

This is nothing new. In many ways bullies and thugs make a lot of noise to intimidate others. And it often works. But not this time.

Divine sound

Then Krishna and Arjuna, standing in the great chariot that was yoked with the white horses, sounded forth their divine conches (1:14).

This is something completely different, not just more of the same. The symbolism here is important. Horses are symbolic of life-force, of prana, of energy/power itself. White horses symbolize the powers of Divine Light. Furthermore, the conches of Krishna and Arjuna were not mere seashells like those of the Kurus, they were *divyau*—divine instruments of Light.

All that exists is vibration. The sound of the Kurus' conches represent the vibrations of Maya, of delusion and ignorance, of materiality and ego. But the sound of the Pandava conches represents the divine inner sound of the highest level of consciousness. The sound of the Kurus is intended to make the spirit faint, but the sound of the Pandavas, the vibration of Truth, enlivens, inspires, and strengthens the spirit. The names of the conches are titles of Divine Sound and indicate its powers when invoked by the yogi.

Krishna blew Panchajanya, Arjuna blew Devadatta, and Bhima of ferocious deeds, blew the great conch, Paundra. King Yudhishtira, Kunti's son, blew on Anantavijaya, Nakula and Sahadeva blew on Sughosha and Manipushpaka (1:15-16).

Panchajanya was the name of an evil enemy defeated by Krishna. Some say he owned the conch that later bore his name, some say that he was a shape-changing demon that lived in the conch (which was under the sea), and others that Krishna made a conch out of his bones. But a great yogi once told me during a conversation in Rishikesh that it is a contracted form of Panchavijaya, which means "Five Victories," meaning the spiritual victory over the five elements (bhutas) and mastery of the five bodies (koshas) and the five senses.

Devadatta means "God-given," the key to liberation given by God (Ishwara) himself to human beings.

Paundra, the yogi told me, means mighty sound, or "of a mighty sound."

Anantavijaya means "unending victory."

Sughosha also means "making a great noise," but the yogi said it also means "making a sweet, soothing sound."

Manipushpaka literally means "jeweled bracelet" or circlet. In verse seven of the seventh chapter we are told that "On me all this universe is strung like

jewels on a thread.” But the yogi told me its intended meaning is “mind like a flower,” opened like a lotus at the shining of the light of the Self within. It can also mean “aerial chariot of the mind” opening and flying in the Sky of Consciousness, the Chidakasha.

Whether any of these meanings are correct or intended by Vyasa cannot be known for sure, since Sanskrit also has undergone mutations over time. Anyhow, these are very good speculations, I think.

The other Pandava leaders on the battlefield sounded their conches as well.

And Kashi’s king, the supreme bowman, and the great warrior Shikhandi, and Dhristadyumna and Virata, and the invincible Satyaki, and Drupada and the sons of Draupadi, O Lord of the Earth, and Shubhadra’s son, the mighty-armed, each blew upon his conch(1:17-18).

This is a symbolic picture of the yogi engaged in the interior battle, who has marshalled all his faculties in meditation and united them, causing them to vibrate throughout his being. So the next verse says:

Throughout the sky and the earth resounded the terrific noise which rent asunder the hearts of those in Dhritarashtra’s ranks (1:19).

Divine Light and Divine Sound resound throughout the total being of the yogi, and burst apart the hearts of all the foes of the Self, first rendering them powerless, and then annihilating them.



TAKING STOCK

Then seeing Dhritarashtra's ranks drawn up in battle array for the forthcoming clash of weapons, Arjuna took up his bow, and said unto Krishna: O Lord of the earth, drive my chariot to stand in the midst between the two armies, until I can behold these battle-hungry men arrayed here with whom I must fight in this conflict. I would behold those who are about to give battle, having assembled here wishing to do service in warfare for the evil-minded son of Dhritarashtra. Thus addressed by Arjuna, Krishna brought the chief chariot to stand in the midst of the two armies. Thus facing Bhishma, Drona, and all the rulers of the earth, Krishna said: Behold, Arjuna, these Kurus assembled here. (1:20-25).

Authentic, traditional yoga is very serious and circumspect, and the intelligent yogi believes in the old adage: Look Before You Leap. Jesus put it this way: "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" (Luke 14:28-31). Vyasa felt the same way.

There is an interesting detail here. Sanjaya, the narrator of the Gita, calls Dhritarashtra "Lord of the Earth," and Arjuna gives Krishna the same title—at

least in the English translation. But in Sanskrit two different words are used. Sanjaya calls Dhritarashtra *Prithivipate*: Lord of the Earth, of prithvi, the earth element, the principle of non-sentient material existence. Krishna, though, is called *Mahipate*: Lord of the Earth (mahi) in the sense of the intelligent world of sentient beings. It is the difference between marble and a marble statue. One is mere matter, the other an expression of intelligence and artistry—even genius.

What Arjuna saw

Arjuna saw standing there fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons as well as friends, fathers-in-law and companions in the two armies. In both of them he saw all who were relatives arrayed. Then filled with profound pity, desponding, he said:

O Krishna, seeing my own people standing near, desiring to fight, my limbs sink down, my mouth dries up, my body trembles, and my hair stands on end. My bow drops from my hand, my skin is burning, I am unable to stand; my mind is reeling.

Inauspicious omens I mark, and not good fortune do I foresee, if I should kill my own kinsmen in war. I do not desire victory, nor kingship and pleasures. What is kingship to us? What are enjoyments or even life? Those for whose sake we should desire kingship, enjoyments and pleasures, are arrayed in battle, abandoning their lives and riches: Teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen, too. I do not desire to kill them who are about to kill—not even for the sovereignty of the three worlds; how then for the earth? What pleasure could the striking down of Dhritarashtra's sons be to us? Having killed these aggressors, evil would thus cling to us.

Therefore we are not justified to kill the sons of Dhritarashtra, our own kinsmen. Indeed, having killed our own people, how could we be happy? Even if those whose thoughts are overpowered

by greed do not see the wrong caused by the destruction of the family, and the crime of treachery to friends, why should we not know to turn back from this evil through discernment of the evil caused by the destruction of the family?

In the destruction of the family, the long-established family dharmas perish. When dharma perishes, adharma predominates in the entire family. From overpowering by adharma the women of the family are corrupted. When the women are corrupted, the intermixture of caste is born. Intermixture brings to hell the family destroyers and the family, too. Indeed their ancestors fall from heaven back to earthly rebirth, deprived of offerings of rice and water. By these wrongs of the family's destroyers, producing intermixture of caste, caste dharmas and long-established family dharmas are obliterated. Those whose family dharmas have been obliterated dwell indefinitely in hell—thus have we heard repeatedly.

Ah! Alas! we are resolved to do great evil with our greed for royal pleasures, intent on killing our own people. If the armed sons of Dhritarashtra should kill me in battle, unresisting and unarmed, this would be a greater happiness for me.

Thus having spoken, Arjuna, in the battle which had already begun, sat down upon the chariot seat, throwing down both arrow and bow, with a heart overcome by sorrow (1:26-47).

This is long, but needs no comment. (We will be considering the subject of caste and caste-mixture later.) All we need understand is the great upset of Arjuna. It is the symbolism that matters. As already said, when we take stock of the inner conflict, we identify with both sides. Thinking that if they are dissolved or destroyed a part of us will cease to exist, we are appalled and feel that our very existence is threatened. Then, like all human beings who do not like the truth when they see or hear it, we become “confused” and try to avoid the unpleasant prospect. Bitter as death seems the inner battle, so we shrink from it and desperately try to find a way out.

So does Arjuna. In a lengthy and impassioned monologue he has presented to Krishna what is really a plea to inaction, to avoidance of conflict, thinking

that such a negative condition is peace, whereas peace is a positive state, not the mere absence of unrest and conflict. It is also reached only through unrest and conflict, however little we like the fact.

Running away from spiritual obligation—and therefore spiritual life itself—the awakening soul on occasion brings all its ingenuity to bear on justification of such avoidance. Arjuna veils his aversion with words of compassion for others, when in actuality he is the sole object of his dishonest “compassion.” He simply does not wish to see others suffer because that will make him suffer—and feel guilty for their suffering. Krishna makes this clear to him. The Stoic, Epictetus, was once visited by a man who told him that he loved his daughter so much he had run from the house rather than see her suffering from illness. Carefully, gently yet firmly, Epictetus led him to understand that it was his self-love that motivated him, not love for his child.

It is the same with us; ego-involvement—addiction, actually—grips us, and we are the only ones who can free ourselves from it. And battle is the only means.

Krishna’s response

Sanjaya said: To him who was thus overcome by pity, whose eyes were filled with tears, downcast and despairing, Krishna spoke these words

The Holy Lord said: Whence has come this faintheartedness of yours in the time of danger—ignoble, not leading to heaven, but to disgrace? At no time should you entertain such cowardice—it is unsuitable in you. Abandon this base faintheartedness and stand up.

Arjuna said: But how can I in battle fight with arrows against Bhishma and Drona, who are worthy of reverence? Better that I eat the food of beggary in this world instead of my slaying these great and noble gurus. If I should kill them, desirous for gain, in truth here on earth I would enjoy pleasures stained with blood. We know not which is preferable: whether we should conquer them, or they should conquer us. The sons of Dhritarashtra stand

facing us after slaying whom we would not wish to live. Weakness and pity overcome my being; with mind in confusion as to my duty, I supplicate you: Beyond doubt tell me which is preferable. I am your disciple; do you direct me. Truly, I see nothing that can remove this sorrow that dries up my senses, though I should attain on earth unrivalled and prosperous dominion, or even the sovereignty of the gods.

Sanjaya said: Thus having addressed Krishna, Arjuna said, “I shall not fight,” and became totally silent (2:1-9).

Hopefully we all sympathize with Arjuna and see his perspective which certainly seems to be that of dharma. Nevertheless, note that Arjuna at the end of his words asks Krishna to remove his error—if such it is. This shows his humility, in contrast to the arrogance and swaggering of Duryodhana. Therefore he merits the alleviation he pleads for. Even the wisest are conscious that they can be wrong.



THE SMILE OF KRISHNA

Arjuna, overcome with anguish at the prospect of killing in battle those he loved and was obligated to respect, presented to Krishna his reasons for refusing to fight. Hearing Arjuna's words:

To him who thus was despondent in the midst of the two armies, smiling, Krishna spoke these words: (2:10).

The smile of Krishna

The smile of Krishna is extremely significant, and we must be grateful to the sage Vyasa for including this detail that carries a momentous message.

Why did Krishna smile, considering how grief-filled Arjuna was, and how impassioned he had been in his insistence that to fight would be the greatest of evils—in contradiction to the urging and advice of Krishna? Arjuna was both sad and rebellious. Yet Krishna smiled. The word in the Gita is *prahasann*, which means to smile before laughing. (Sargeant renders it: “beginning to laugh.”) So it is not some weak smile, nor a condescending or sarcastic grimace, but a very positive sign of impending mirth. How is this? Krishna smiled for several reasons.

1. He was showing to Arjuna that he was not condemning him, that his words had in no way offended or angered him, that he could feel confident of Krishna's love and regard for him.
2. He was showing to Arjuna that he understood his feelings and his reasoning.

3. He was showing to Arjuna that all our little teapot tempests that we exaggerate and make into life-and-earth-shattering concerns and agonies are nothing to cause confusion, anxiety, anger, or grief, but rather are fever-dreams that will vanish the moment we rise to higher consciousness and behold them with the perspective of the divine spirit that is our true nature.

This reminds me of an incident in the life of Sri Anandamayi Ma. A man came to see her, overwhelmed with grief at the recent death of his wife. “Ma will understand my suffering,” he said to himself, “she will realize the extent of my sorrow.” But the moment he entered the room, Ma began laughing merrily, looking at him all the while. “Ma!” he protested, “Seeing how unhappy I am, how can you laugh like that?” “Baba,” Ma replied, “there is now one less obstacle between you and God!” I have witnessed similar incidents with Ma in which her laughter instantly healed the sorrow or anxiety of those who came to her for sympathy. Krishna is going to dispel the sadness and bewilderment of Arjuna in the same way.

4. He was showing Arjuna that his words meant nothing—that he was going to fight anyway, because Arjuna’s kshatriya nature would impel him to do so, whatever he might think he thought. Further, in Krishna’s perspective the battle was over and done; there was no question as to Arjuna’s participation or the outcome: “These have already been struck down by me; be merely an instrument. [Only those] already killed by me, do you kill. Do not hesitate” (11:33-34).
5. He was showing Arjuna that nothing can change the state of divine consciousness, that the myth of a Pleased/Displeased God is a foolish fable. God is always God, and we are always ourselves. That is how God sees it—and so should we. Nothing we can say, think, or do can possibly change God in any way. If God could be angered or gladdened by us, he would be as ignorant, changeable, and subject to suffering as we are. In fact, we would have more control over him than he has over us, as we are continually ignoring him and being indifferent to him. Our changeability is a myth, too, for all change takes place only in the delusive wrappings (prakriti, shakti) of our unchanging spirit (atman, purusha).

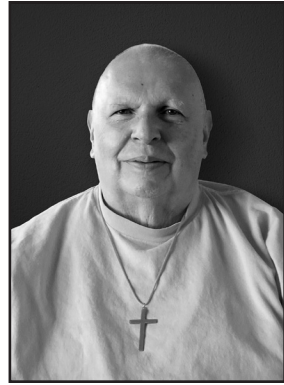
Therefore, no matter what we think we do, God knows we have done nothing. Swami Prabhavananda's very interpretive translation says it very well: "You dream you are the doer, you dream that action is done, you dream that action bears fruit. It is your ignorance, it is the world's delusion that gives you these dreams" (Bhagavad Gita 5:14). Whatever our foolish antics, God smiles, knowing our eternal destiny within him.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Abbot George Burke (Swami Nirmalananda Giri) is the founder and director of the Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA.

In his many pilgrimages to India, he had the opportunity of meeting some of India's greatest spiritual figures, including Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Anandamayi Ma. During his first trip to India he was made a member of the ancient Swami Order by Swami Vidyānanda Giri, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, who had himself been given sannyas by the Shankaracharya of Puri, Jagadguru Bharati Krishna Tirtha.



In the United States he also encountered various Christian saints, including Saint John Maximovich of San Francisco and Saint Philaret Voznesensky of New York. He was ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church (International) to the priesthood on January 25, 1974, and consecrated a bishop on August 23, 1975.

For many years Abbot George has researched the identity of Jesus Christ and his teachings with India and Sanātana Dharma, including Yoga. It is his conclusion that Jesus lived in India for most of his life, and was a yogi and Sanātana Dharma missionary to the West. After his resurrection he returned to India and lived the rest of his life in the Himalayas.

He has written extensively on these and other topics, many of which are posted at OCOY.org.



LIGHT OF THE SPIRIT MONASTERY

Light of the Spirit Monastery is an esoteric Christian monastic community for those men who seek direct experience of the Spirit through meditation, sacramental worship, discipline and dedicated communal life, emphasizing the inner reality of “Christ in you the hope of glory,” as taught by the illumined mystics of East and West.

The public outreach of the monastery is through its website, OCOY.org (Original Christianity and Original Yoga). There you will find many articles on Original Christianity and Original Yoga, including *Esoteric Christian Beliefs*, *Foundations of Yoga* and *How to Be a Yogi* are practical guides for anyone seriously interested in living the Yoga Life.

You will also discover many other articles on leading an effective spiritual life, including *The Yoga of the Sacraments* and *Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet*, as well as the “Dharma for Awakening” series—in-depth commentaries on these spiritual classics: the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada, and the Tao Teh King.

You can listen to podcasts by Abbot George on meditation, the Yoga Life, and remarkable spiritual people he has met in India and elsewhere, at <http://ocoy.org/podcasts/>



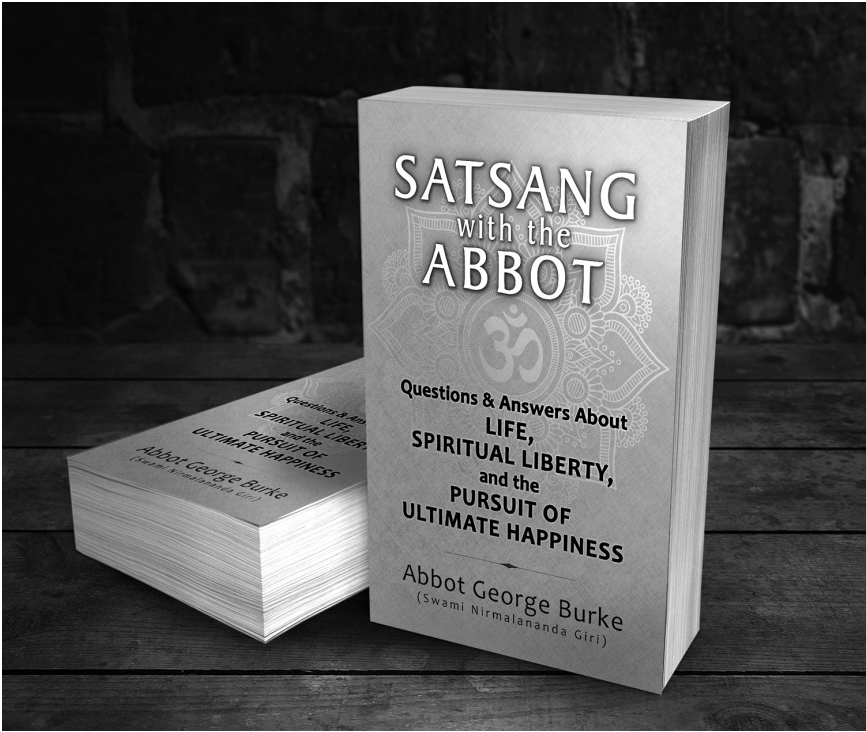
READING FOR AWAKENING

Light of the Spirit Press presents books on spiritual wisdom and Original Christianity and Original Yoga. From our “Dharma for Awakening” series (practical commentaries on the world’s scriptures) to books on how to meditate and live a successful spiritual life, you will find books that are informative, helpful, and even entertaining.

Light of the Spirit Press is the publishing house of Light of the Spirit Monastery (Atma Jyoti Ashram) in Cedar Crest, New Mexico, USA. Our books feature the writings of the founder and director of the monastery, Abbot George Burke (Swami Nirmalananda Giri) which are also found on the monastery’s website, OCOY.org.

We invite you to explore our publications in the following pages.

Find out more about our publications at
lightofthespiritpress.com



Satsang with the Abbot

Questions & Answers about Life, Spiritual Liberty, and the Pursuit of Ultimate Happiness

“The scriptures contain a mixture of sand and sugar, as it were. It is extremely difficult to separate the sugar from the sand. Therefore one should learn of the essence of the scriptures from the teacher or from a sadhu.” —Sri Ramakrishna

Abbot George Burke has spent a lifetime helping spiritual aspirants separate the sand from the sugar. Grounded in the perspective of classic Indian thought, directly taught by such luminaries as Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Sri Anandamayi Ma, and blessed with the clarity and originality of thought that can only come from years of spiritual practice (sadhana), his answers to his inquirers' questions are unique, fresh, and authoritative.

The questions in this book range from the most sublime to the most practical. “How can I attain samadhi?” “I am married with children. How can I lead a spiritual life?” “What is Self-realization?” Among these 350+ questions and answers, you will find these topics:

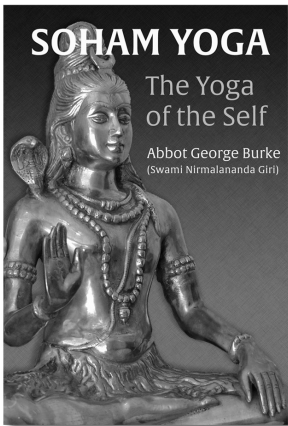
- karma, reincarnation, and spiritual evolution,
- avatars, angels, devas, spirits, ghosts and demons,

- death and the after-life, astral travel, astrology,
- esoteric view of Jesus and Christianity, the “Lost Years,” and modern yogis who saw Jesus,
- effective meditation methods, how to deal with the mind, vegetarianism, and practical spirituality,
- stories of Babaji, Yogananda and his disciples, Anandamayi Ma, Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples, and modern saints of India,
- the spiritual principles (dharma) that unite the inner traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and other world religions.

In Abbot George’s replies to these questions the reader will discover common sense, helpful information, and a guiding light for their journey through and beyond the forest of cliches, contradictions, and confusion of yoga, Hinduism, Christianity, and metaphysical thought.

What Readers say:

“Abbot George speaks as one who knows his subject well, and answers in a manner that conveys an effortlessness and humor that puts one at ease, while, at the same time, a wisdom and sincerity which demands an attentive ear.”—*Russ Thomas*



Soham Yoga
The Yoga of the Self

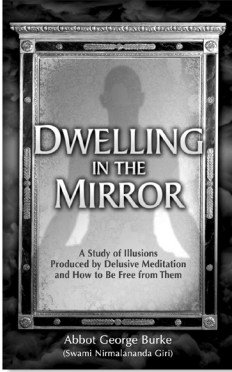
An in-depth guide to the practice of Soham sadhana.

Soham (which is pronounced like “Sohum”) means: I Am That. It is the natural vibration of the Self, which occurs spontaneously with each incoming and outgoing breath. By becoming aware of it on the conscious level by mentally repeating it in time with the breath (*So* when inhaling and *Ham* when exhaling), a yogi experiences the identity between his individual Self and the Supreme Self.

The practice is very simple, and the results very profound. Truly wondrous is the fact that Soham Yoga can go on all the time, not just during meditation, if we apply ourselves to it. The whole life can become a continuous stream of liberating sadhana. “By the mantra ‘Soham’ separate the jivatma from the Paramatma and locate the jivatma in the heart” (Devi Bhagavatam 11.8.15). When we repeat Soham in time with the breath we are invoking our eternal being. This is why we need only listen to our inner mental intonations of Soham in time with the breath which itself is Soham.

Visit sohamyogameditation.com to read online or to download a free PDF.

Also available online in paperback and ebook version.



Dwelling in the Mirror

A Study of Illusions Produced by Delusive Meditation and How to Be Free from Them

“There are those who can have an experience and realize that it really cannot be real, but a vagary of their mind. Some may not understand that on their own, but can be shown by others the truth about it. For them and those that may one day be in danger of meditation-produced delusions I have written this brief study.” —Abbot George Burke

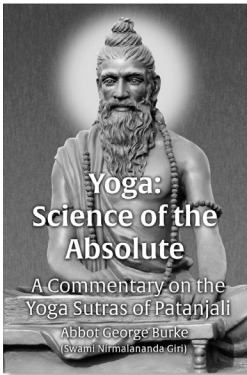
In *Dwelling in the Mirror* you will learn:

- different types of meditation and the experiences they produce, and the problems and delusions which can arise from them.

- how to get rid of negative initiation energies and mantras.
- what are authentic, positive meditation practices and their effects and aspects.
- an ancient, universal method of meditation which is both proven and effective.

What Readers say:

“I totally loved this book! After running across many spiritual and self-help books filled with unrealistic promises, this little jewel had the impact of a triple Espresso.”—Sandra Carrington-Smith, author of *Housekeeping for the Soul*



Yoga: Science of the Absolute

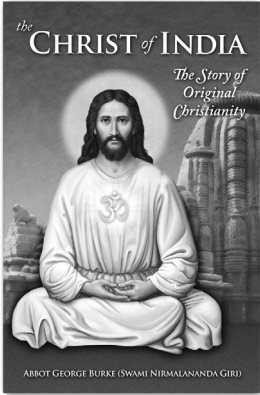
A Commentary on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

In “Yoga: Science of the Absolute”, Abbot George Burke draws on the age-long tradition regarding this essential text, including the commentaries of Vyasa and Shankara, the most highly regarded writers on Indian philosophy and practice, as well as I. K. Taimni and other authoritative commentators, and adds his own ideas based on half a century of study and practice.

Serious students of yoga will find this an essential addition to their spiritual studies..

What Readers say:

“Abbot George’s Yoga: Science of the Absolute has managed to unpack one of Yoga philosophy’s foundational texts in an incredibly skillful way. Abbot George had provided a commentary that is not only deeply informative, making brilliant connections across multiple traditions, but eminently practical, leading the reader through the intricacies of the sutras with enlightening contextual explanations. More importantly, he describes how they can help one empower their own practice, their own sadhana.” —Michael Sabani



The Christ of India

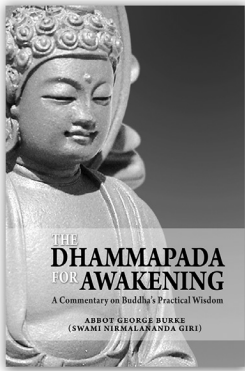
The Story of Original Christianity

“Original Christianity” is the teaching of both Jesus of Nazareth and his Apostle Saint Thomas in India. Although it was new to the Mediterranean world, it was really the classical, traditional teachings of the ancient rishis of India that even today comprise Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Dharma, that goes far beyond religion into realization.

In *The Christ of India* Abbot George Burke presents what those ancient teachings are, as well as the growing evidence that Jesus spent much of his “Lost Years” in India and Tibet. This is also the story of how the original teachings of Jesus and Saint Thomas thrived in India for centuries before the coming of the European colonialists.

What Readers say:

“Interpreting the teachings of Jesus from the perspective of Santana Dharma, *The Christ of India* is a knowledgeable yet engaging collection of authentic details and evident manuscripts about the Essene roots of Jesus and his ‘Lost years’. ...delightful to read and a work of substance, vividly written and rich in historical analysis, this is an excellent work written by a masterful teacher and a storyteller.” —*Enas Reviews*



The Dhammapada for Awakening

A Commentary on Buddha's Practical Wisdom

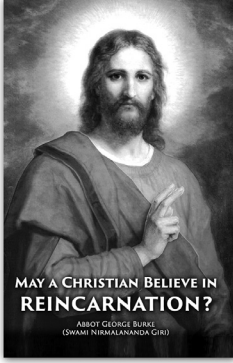
The Dhammapada for Awakening brings a refreshing and timely perspective to ancient wisdom and shows seekers of inner peace practical ways to improve their inner lives today.

It explores the Buddha's answers to the urgent questions, such as “How can I find lasting peace, happiness and fulfillment that seems so elusive?” and “What can I do to avoid many of the miseries big and small that afflict all of us?”.

Drawing on the proven wisdom of different ancient traditions, and the contemporary masters of spiritual life, as well as his own studies and first-hand knowledge of the mystical traditions of East and West, Abbot George illumines the practical wisdom of Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, and more importantly, and make that makes that teaching relevant to present day spiritual seekers.

What Readers say:

“In this compelling book, Abbot George Burke brings his considerable knowledge and background in Christian teachings and the Vedic tradition of India to convey a practical understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. ...This is a book you'll want to take your time to read and keep as reference to reread. Highly recommended for earnest spiritual aspirants” —*Anna Houriban, author, editor, and publisher at Vedanta Shores Press*



May a Christian Believe in Reincarnation?

Discover the real and surprising history of reincarnation and Christianity.

A growing number of people are open to the subject of past lives, and the belief in rebirth—reincarnation, metempsychosis, or transmigration—is becoming commonplace. It often thought that belief in reincarnation and Christianity are incompatible. But is this really true? May a Christian believe in reincarnation? The answer may surprise you.

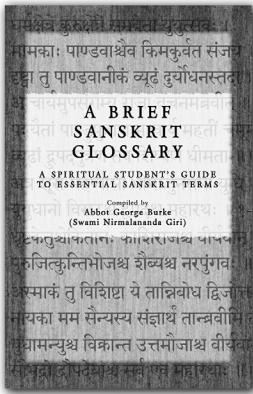
Reincarnation—also known as the transmigration of souls—is not just some exotic idea of non-Christian mysticism. Nor is it an exclusively Hindu-Buddhist teaching.

In orthodox Jewish and early Christian writings, as well as the Holy Scriptures, we find reincarnation as a fully developed belief, although today it is commonly ignored. But from the beginning it has been an integral part of Orthodox Judaism, and therefore as Orthodox Jews, Jesus and his Apostles would have believed in rebirth.

What Readers say:

“Those needing evidence that a belief in reincarnation is in accordance with teachings of the Christ need look no further: Plainly laid out and explained in an intelligent manner from one who has spent his life on a Christ-like path of renunciation and prayer/meditation.”

—*Christopher T. Cook*



A Brief Sanskrit Glossary

A Spiritual Student's Guide to Essential Sanskrit Terms

This Sanskrit glossary contains full translations and explanations of many of the most commonly used spiritual Sanskrit terms, and will help students of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and other Indian scriptures and philosophical works to expand their vocabularies to include the Sanskrit terms contained in them, and gain a fuller understanding in their studies.

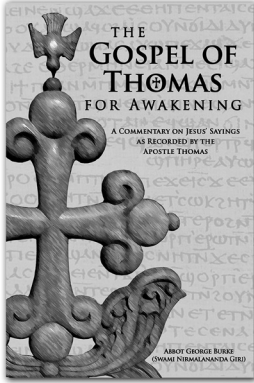
What Readers say:

“If you are reading the writings of Swami Sivananda you will find a basketful of untranslated Sanskrit words which often have no explanation, as he assumes his readers have a background in Hindu

philosophy. For writings like his, this book is invaluable, as it lists frequently used Sanskrit terms used in writings on yoga and Hindu philosophical thought.

“As the title says, this is a spiritual students’ guidebook, listing not only commonly used spiritual terms, but also giving brief information about spiritual teachers and writers, both modern and ancient.

“Abbot George’s collection is just long enough to give the meanings of useful terms without overwhelming the reader with an overabundance of extraneous words. This is a book that the spiritual student will use frequently.”—*Simeon Davis*



The Gospel of Thomas for Awakening

A Commentary on Jesus' Sayings as Recorded by the Apostle Thomas

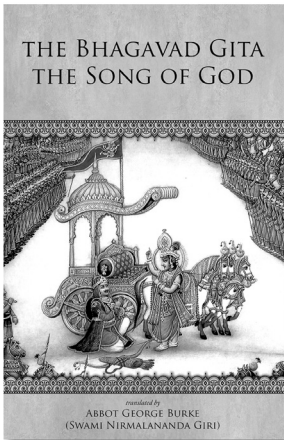
“From the very beginning there were two Christianities.” So begins this remarkable work. While the rest of the Apostles dispersed to various areas of the Mediterranean world, the apostle Thomas travelled to India, where growing evidence shows that Jesus spent his “Lost Years,” and which had been the source of the wisdom which he had brought to the “West.”

In *The Gospel of Thomas for Awakening*, Abbot George shines the “Light of the East” on the sometimes enigmatic sayings of Jesus recorded by his apostle Saint Thomas, revealing their unique and rich practical nature for modern day seekers for spiritual life.

Ideal for daily study or group discussion.

What Readers say:

“An extraordinary work of theological commentary, *The Gospel of Thomas for Awakening* is as informed and informative as it is inspired and inspiring”.—James A. Cox, *Editor-in-Chief, Midwest Book Review*



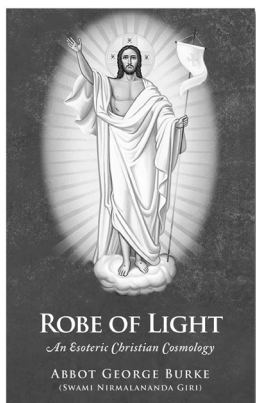
The Bhagavad Gita—The Song of God

A new translation of the most important spiritual classic which India has produced.

Often called the “Bible” of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita is found in households throughout India and has been translated into every major language of the world. Literally billions of copies have been handwritten and printed.

The clarity of this translation by Abbot George Burke makes for easy reading, while the rich content makes this the ideal “study” Gita. As the original Sanskrit language is so rich, often there are several accurate translations for the same word, which are noted in the text, giving the spiritual student the needed understanding of the fullness of the Gita.

For those unable to make a spiritual journey to India, a greater pilgrimage can be made by anyone anywhere in the world by simply reading *The Holy Song of God, the Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. It will be a holy pilgrimage of mind and spirit.



Robe of Light

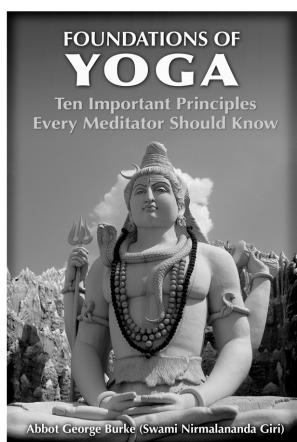
An Esoteric Christian Cosmology

In *Robe of Light* Abbot George Burke explores the whys and wherefores of the mystery of creation. From the emanation of the worlds from the very Being of God, to the evolution of the souls to their ultimate destiny as perfected Sons of God, the ideal progression of creation is described. Since the rebellion of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise flawed the normal plan of evolution, a restoration was necessary. How this came about is the prime subject of this insightful study.

Moreover, what this means to aspirants for spiritual perfection is expounded, with a compelling knowledge of the scriptures and of the mystical traditions of East and West.

What Readers say:

“Having previously read several offerings from the pen of Abbot George Burke I was anticipating this work to be well written and an enjoyable read. However, *Robe of Light* actually exceeded my expectations. Abbot Burke explicates the subject perfectly, making a difficult and complex subject like Christian cosmology accessible to those of us who are not great theologians.”—*Russ Thomas*



Foundations of Yoga

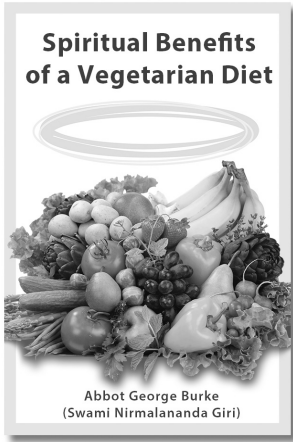
Ten Important Principles Every Meditator Should Know

An in-depth examination of the important foundation principles of Patanjali's Yoga, Yama & Niyama.

Yama and Niyama are often called the Ten Commandments of Yoga, but they have nothing to do with the ideas of sin and virtue or good and evil as dictated by some cosmic potentate. Rather they are determined on a thoroughly practical, pragmatic basis: that which strengthens and facilitates our yoga practice should be observed and that which weakens or hinders it should be avoided.

It is not a matter of being good or bad, but of being wise or foolish. Each one of these Five Don'ts (Yama) and Five Do's (Niyama) is a supporting, liberating foundation of Yoga. An introduction to the important foundation principles of Patanjali's Yoga: Yama & Niyama

Available as a free Kindle ebook download at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



Spiritual Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet

The health benefits of a vegetarian diet are well known, as are the ethical aspects. But the spiritual advantages should be studied by anyone involved in meditation, yoga, or any type of spiritual practice.

Although diet is commonly considered a matter of physical health alone, since the Hermetic principle “as above, so below” is a fundamental truth of the cosmos, diet is a crucial aspect of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development as well. For diet and consciousness are interrelated, and purity of diet is an effective aid to purity and clarity of consciousness.

The major thing to keep in mind when considering the subject of vegetarianism is its relevancy in relation to our explorations of consciousness. We need only ask: Does it facilitate my spiritual growth—the development and expansion of my consciousness? The answer is Yes.

A second essay, *Christian Vegetarianism*, continues with a consideration of the esoteric side of diet, the vegetarian roots of early Christianity, and an insightful exploration of vegetarianism in the Old and New Testaments.

Available as a free Kindle ebook download at Amazon.com.