

*The Rubaiyat  
of the  
Bhagavad Gita*



Tandava Graham





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of the  
Bhagavad Gita*



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*In loving memory of my grandfather,*

*Leonard Cullen Boone*

*1927-2024*

*who would have enjoyed this,  
and who, I think, still does anyway.*

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# Introduction

There is an affinity between poetry and scripture. Both are composed of words, but transcend the sum of their parts. More than simply being read, they need to be experienced.

The “point” of a poem, if one wants to dissect it so mercilessly, may be summed up in a few words or a sentence, but the *joy* of a poem is in its rhythm and meter and rhyme, in its images and metaphors. It is an event that happens simultaneously in the mind and the heart and the body.

Scripture may make good points about life and meaning and morality, but unless you *do* something with it—unless you use it to “renovate your life,” as Swami Sri Yukteswar put it—it is ultimately

pointless. The potential joy of scripture is an event hoping to happen in the soul, via the mind, the heart, and the body.

Because of this synergy, many scriptures of the world have been recorded as poems, or in poetic language. Few scriptures, however, have been originally written in English, my native language, and so the potential power of this combination only first struck me when I read *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam Explained*, by Paramhansa Yogananda and Swami Kriyananda. Edward Fitzgerald's translations from the original Persian are some of the most beautiful and beloved poems of the English language, and though most people have lost sight of the spiritual meaning amidst the metaphors, *The Rubaiyat Explained* pulls it back into focus.

I love the format of the rubaiyat.\* A single quatrain can stand alone or be strung together in sequence with others. The strong meter and rhyme scheme create a more visceral experience than is usually possible with free verse or blank verse. And so for years now I've dreamt of having the much more explicit spiritual teachings of *The Bhagavad Gita* captured in such a form. Last year, it felt like it was time to start writing.

This is by no means a complete translation of the Gita. I tried to cover what I felt were the key points of each chapter, but the original 700 verses have been whittled down to 108 here, so much is necessarily missing. Since I can't read the original Sanskrit, my work is based on the

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\* The word *rubaiyat* is the plural of *rubai*, which refers to a four-line poem, usually rhyming AABA. It is a general term, like a sonnet or a limerick, and not specific to Omar Khayyam, though it is most commonly associated with him.

text of the English edition by Paramhansa Yogananda and Swami Kriyananda, and on my understanding of their teachings generally. Any errors or inaccuracies are my own.

“It is the nature of joy to want to share itself,” as Yogananda said of God creating the universe. And so I offer my own joy in this scripture, and my joy in the creation of these stanzas, as a gift to all of you, my friends and family in God.

—*Tandava Graham*  
*Christmas, 2024*  
*Ananda Palo Alto*



# *Chapter 1*



*1:1*

The blind mind called: Sanjaya, come to me,  
So that through introspection I may see  
What on the battlefield of righteousness  
This day befell, and what the outcome be.

*1:10*

Sanjaya told of countless troops arrayed,  
Delusions endless, ready to invade.  
Against them all, the forces of the Light,  
Though few in number, stand up unafraid.

*1:12-14*

Then both the armies let their conches sing,  
Their soldiers all to courage summoning.  
On one side all the clamors of the world,  
The other inner strength inspiring.



*1:20*

Arjuna, who has tamed the monkey mind,  
Whose spine straight as an arrow is aligned,  
Then called upon his Divine charioteer,  
A call of love uplifted and refined.

*1:21-23*

O Changeless Krishna! come and ride with me  
Between the armies, where we thus may see  
What foes these are  
    with whom I must contend,  
Who take sides with delusion willingly.

*1:26-27*

And there upon the battlefield appeared  
Before their eyes a host of soldiers tiered,  
Of cousins, uncles, brothers, teachers, friends,  
Who with familial love had been revered.

1:33-34

For even so are each of us at war  
Within ourselves, with conflicts we abhor,  
The light and dark opposing qualities  
Entangled in our egos by the score.

1:47

At this Arjuna set aside his bow,  
His head and heart awlirl  
                        with doubt and woe.  
My Lord, You know I cannot fight my kin,  
No matter if whole worlds they overthrow!

# *Chapter 2*



*2:2-3*

Krishna replied: Is this how courage dies?  
What warrior's words are these that agonize?  
Cast off such weakness!

Lift your heart in strength!  
Arjuna, Scorcher of All Foes, arise!

*2:16*

There's no such thing as Unreality,  
And what is Real can never cease to be.  
Therefore, Arjuna, in your wisdom know  
The true and infinite Finality.

*2:19*

Ignorant they, who the world's deceived,  
Whose lamentations cry to be believed.  
None there are who fight, are slain, or slay,  
But all are one, and in the Light conceived.

*2:14*

Sensations that the mind takes by default  
As absolute decrees it must exalt—  
The heat or cold, the pleasure, pain—are but  
Suggestions. Take them with a grain of salt.

*2:22*

This overcoat of clay that you must don,  
To clothe the spirit  
    while from heav'n you're gone,  
Must one day be hung back upon its hook,  
But though you change attire, You still live on.

*2:23-25*

The soul in water is unsinkable,  
By earthly chains it is unlinkable,  
Unburnable by fire, immune from harm,  
And even, to the mind, unthinkable.

*2:40-41*

The path of inner wisdom, wise men say,  
Leads forward only, and will not stop or stray.  
And dire fears, colossal sufferings,  
Dissolve with every step along the way.

*2:69*

The day is dark to those who see the Light,  
And find the glowing Star in darkest night.  
Yet worldly men cast pity on the seer,  
And revel in their unenlightened plight.

*2:70*

O! See the rivers of your mind's desires,  
that drain in endless branching multipliers!  
Be like the Ocean, calling all back home—  
Content the heart whose longing thus retires.

*2:10*

When worries gather, pile upon pile,  
And rocky roads stretch mile after mile,  
If then my heart but turns unto the Lord,  
I feel His secret smile, smile, smile.





# *Chapter 3*



*3:10*

From the Divine seek all that you desire,  
And offer up your energy entire  
Into that Source from which all power comes,  
To find there all your heart will e'er require.

*3:14-15*

All creatures live by food, by rain, by sun,  
And so since the Beginning they have done.  
Trace back this power of Life within yourself!  
Complete the ring that makes Creation one!

*3:22*

O Son of Pritha, nothing holds me here!  
From karma free, I'm strictly volunteer.  
I labor only to uplift mankind—  
Where all such work is done,  
you'll find Me near.

3:33

'Tis Nature's nature all to tyrannize—  
The foolish and enlightened sympathize,  
All subject to their nature's least demands,  
And so, Arjuna, make your nature wise!

3:35

However hard a duty must be done,  
Forsake it not for some more pleasing one.  
Better death in dharma of one's own,  
Than glory in another's, lightly won.

3:36

Arjuna asked: What is that fearsome power  
That plagues mankind  
                                    from birth to final hour,  
Impels us to do wrong against our will,  
And all our good intentions does devour?

*3:37*

Desire it is, the Lord Krishna replied,  
And anger at desire unsatisfied—  
Desire and anger, those twin enemies,  
Keep mankind's will unto delusion tied.

# *Chapter 4*



*4:7-8*

Fear not! Whene'er it comes the world's fate  
That Truth declines and lies predominate,  
Then I descend and take on human form,  
All vice to rout, and Virtue reinstate.

*4:11*

If your devotion, chela, is sincere,  
Then worship any form that you hold dear.  
As father, mother, child, saint or sage,  
In that same form will I to you appear.

*4:36*

However far into the dark you roam,  
How tossed upon delusion's ocean foam,  
Cling tightly to the raft of Wisdom that  
Will take alike all saints and sinners home.



# *Chapter 5*



*5:11*

The yogi in his wisdom understands  
He's not his senses, feelings, mind or hands,  
But as conductor of an orchestra,  
Bends all these functions  
to his least commands.

*5:13*

The soul that dwells within and can maintain  
Control of senses, faculties and brain,  
Over the body's city of nine gates  
Secure in bliss forevermore shall reign.

*5:15*

The All-Pervading cares not for your sin,  
But pities all mankind for having been  
Enmeshed in such delusion that must needs  
Eclipse the Wisdom that resides within.

*5:16*

In those, however, who have banished all  
That Ignorance which kept them in its thrall,  
Shines forth a great effulgence as the Sun,  
Bestowing Light, enlightenment withal.

*5:18*

Such a free soul views all with equal eye—  
The rich, the poor, the lowly and the high,  
The pious priest, the workman and the thief,  
Great elephant to smallest harvest fly.

*5:22*

O Son of Kunti, shun the falsest friend  
Of transitory pleasures that depend  
On senses seeking joy outside the Self—  
A pleasure that begins must always end.

5:23

A yogi, he, who calmly shows his worth,  
By manifesting Heaven here on Earth.  
Mastering every impulse of desire,  
He lives a life of bliss in Divine mirth.

5:29

He will find peace who knows Me as the One  
To Whom devotion's many streamlets run.  
All offerings and sacrifices I  
Receive, the dearest Friend of everyone.

# *Chapter 6*





*6:37-39*

O Krishna, tell me: What becomes of him  
Who uses all his strength of mind and limb,  
Yet still falls short of that most noble Goal?  
Is not his fate beyond all others grim?

*6:40*

O Arjuna, My beloved son,  
The righteous man shall never be undone!  
No matter in this world or in the next,  
His fate will never be an evil one.

*6:41-43*

For in an astral Heav'n he shall abide,  
Or in new earthly home come to reside,  
Propelled towards his Goal by karmic friends,  
Till all his hopes Divine be satisfied.





# *Chapter 7*



7:1

O Partha, hear from Me and comprehend  
The path of Yoga, by which men ascend.  
Through it come to know Me as I Am  
And every slightest trace of doubt transcend.

7:2

To you I will reveal the Truth sublime,  
The logic in the universal Rhyme.  
Armed with this understanding you will find  
Naught left for you to know in space or time.

7:3

Out of a thousand men there will not be  
But one or two who even try to see,  
And of a thousand such who seek and strive  
But hardly one to ever realize Me.

7:7

As gemstones on a necklace all are threaded,  
And by that cord  
    they each to each are wedded,  
E'en so, Arjuna, is My consciousness  
In Nature's every particle embedded.

7:8-10

In every element I can be found:  
Fluidity of water, solid ground,  
In fire's light, in ether's subtle space—  
In Me the highest states of all are crowned.

I am the light of moon and stars and sun,  
I make the waves, the winds, the waters run,  
I am the Life of every living thing,  
The Light, the spark, the glory in each one.



# *Chapter 8*



8:5

The yogi, when he finds his life is fleeing,  
And Death to him appears with its decreeing,  
If he but keeps his mind engrossed in Me,  
He enters without doubt into My Being.

8:15

Those great ones who adore Me and thereby  
Attain that highest state for which they try,  
Need not return to this grief-stricken world—  
Their every karmic bond I will untie.

8:26-27

The soul's two paths of exit from this earth—  
The light to freedom, darkness to rebirth—  
Are each alike open to everyone,  
Therefore, Arjuna, hold the course of worth.

# *Chapter 9*





9:1

The Blessed Lord said: You have proved to be  
Of moods, complaints, and carping spirit free.  
Therefore I now reveal that mystery  
Sublime to you, which makes all evils flee.

9:2

Secret of secrets, this knowledge is the peak  
Of sciences, and holiest technique.  
Through yoga methods, simple to perform,  
You will attain the Wisdom that you seek.

9:22

To those who know Me as their very own,  
And hold Me in their hearts, let it be known:  
I will supply their least deficiencies,  
And make their gains  
more permanent than stone.

*9:25*

All those who worship ancient family,  
In afterlife with ancestors will be.  
Likewise to those who worship gods or sprites,  
But all My devotees will come to Me.

*9:26*

The pure intention in an offering  
Is greater than the riches of a king.  
The slightest gift of leaf, of fruit or flower,  
In it I recognize the love you bring.

*9:30*

Even that one who of his evil ways  
Repents and in new wisdom turns his gaze  
To Me alone, rejecting pain and sin,  
In light of that shall be accorded praise.



# *Chapter 10*



*10:1*

To you who are receptive to My Word,  
Accepting with great joy what you have heard,  
My utterance supreme I give to you,  
With all the blessings that can be conferred.

*10:2*

Nor gods nor angels, devils, saints nor men  
Can grasp My truest form within their ken.  
Beyond the space of even space itself,  
I am their very cosmic Origin.

*10:8*

I am the all-existence bearing Tree,  
The Source of all that was or e'er will be,  
And this Truth realizing in their souls,  
The wise, awe-stricken, live adoring Me.

*10:12-18*

Arjuna asked of Krishna: Dearest Lord,  
How can Your qualities be ever scored?  
How may I come to know You as You are,  
And in what forms and aspects best adored?

*10:20*

The Lord replied: O Conqueror of Sleep,  
In all created beings I dwell deep  
Within their hearts. I their existence sow,  
Provide for, nourish, tend and reap.

*10:21-42*

Among celestial orbs, I am the Sun,  
The Ganges in each sacred river's run,  
Of things unmoving, Himalayas I,  
And true beginning of each thing begun.

The highest and the best in everything,  
The sight in both the seeing and unseeing.  
All creation is sustained with but  
The smallest piece of My essential being.

# *Chapter 11*





*11:2-4*

Arjuna said: O Krishna, Lotus Eyes!  
Through Your teachings into bliss I rise,  
And yet I long to see You as Your Self—  
That boundless Truth  
  behind Your worldly guise.

*11:5-7*

The Lord replied: Arjuna now behold,  
As multifarious forms I will unfold  
Of worlds and wonders hitherto unknown,  
All held within My form of joy untold.

*11:8*

Yet mortal eyes cannot this vision see,  
And so, Arjuna, dearest devotee,  
For this boon I grant you sight Divine!  
Open your inner eye and gaze on Me!

*11:14-34*

And thus Arjuna, wonderstruck, beheld  
A vision of the Lord unparalleled,  
The hairs upon his arms stood up in awe,  
E'en as his heart beyond his bosom swelled.

A million suns could not produce that Light  
Which in Its divine glory blessed his sight,  
And every atom of creation now  
His soul traversed in instantaneous flight.

And in each planet, star and galaxy,  
Each particle that is, was, or will be,  
The Lord of All was gazing back at him  
In neverending love and ecstasy.

*11:52*

The Blessed Lord said:

    This vision you have seen,  
Was not of Earth, nor Heav'n, nor in between.  
This cosmic sight, so sacred to behold,  
Has e'en to gods a seldom blessing been.

*11:53-54*

This revelation, not to be attained  
By penitence, neither by study gained,  
Can only be achieved through love of Me.  
By yoga practice, thus the heart is trained.

*11:55*

That yogi who, whatever may befall,  
Does not lose sight, beholding Me in all,  
And therefore bears no enmity or fear,  
Lives in My cosmic consciousness enthralled.

# *Chapter 12*



*12:1*

Arjuna said: Of those who worship You  
With loving hearts and pure devotion true,  
Or those whose minds pursue Infinity—  
Which is the better yogi, in Your view?

*12:2*

Krishna replied: The devotee whose mind  
Is fixed on Me, whose very heart is twined  
All through and through  
    with loving thoughts of Me—  
None better versed in yoga will you find.

*12:3-4*

Yet those who to Infinity aspire,  
Who seek to grasp Me as I am, Entire,  
The All-Pervading, Indescribable—  
They too will find in Me their souls' desire.

*12:8*

Immerse your consciousness in Me alone,  
Let all distracting thoughts be overthrown.  
Without a doubt, then, you shall come to Me,  
And sit beside Me on the cosmic throne.

*12:9*

If you cannot absorb your thoughts in Me,  
O Dhananjay, take heart from My decree:  
By yoga practice train both heart and mind,  
The path of these techniques will set you free.

*12:10*

And yet, if in this sanctified technique  
You falter, finding resolution weak,  
Perform your outward acts  
  in thought of Me—  
You will attain the victory you seek.

*12:11*

If even this you cannot yet achieve,  
Then do not be downcast or disbelieve,  
But offer Me your failures and your hopes,  
And still My devotee I will receive.

# *Chapter 13*





*13:0*

Arjuna said: O Keshava, I yearn  
Of all Creation's mysteries to learn—  
Of God and Nature, body, mind and soul,  
Of knowing, knower, known,  
each one in turn.

*13:1*

The Blessed Lord replied: O Kunti's Son,  
The body is that field in everyone  
Where good and evil karma both are reaped.  
The soul attends the field and sees it done.

*13:26*

O Best of Bharatas, within the whole  
Of all Creation scribed in cosmic scroll,  
All things arise from innate unity  
Of Nature, body, Spirit, and the soul.

# *Chapter 14*



*14:5*

O Mighty-armed Arjuna, those which bind  
The everlasting soul to earthly grind,  
Are three essential blended qualities  
Of Sattwa, Rajas, Tamas, here outlined.

*14:6*

O Sinless One, of all these gunas three,  
Sattwa brings wisdom and vitality,  
Yet still results in bondage of the soul,  
Though the attachments be of high degree.

*14:7*

The quality of Rajas is imbued  
With passions by desires and whims accrued,  
And thus it binds one through intensity  
Of expectations, restlessness of mood.

*14:8*

And last, Creation's darkest attribute  
Of Tamas is the one that will pollute  
All noble thoughts with sloth and ignorance,  
And all high aspirations will refute.



# *Chapter 15*



*15:1*

The great Ashvatta tree, so say the wise,  
Has limbs below and branches in the skies;  
Its leaves are made of holy Vedic hymns;  
From knowing it, true wisdom may arise.

*15:2*

Yet, guna-born, by senses fed and held,  
This tree by worldly means cannot be felled.  
Its roots extend into this world, and thus  
To action, good or bad, we are compelled.

*15:3-4*

Only the sage, by non-attachment pure,  
Can fell this tree whose roots will else endure,  
And, finding refuge in its Source beyond,  
May thus his true security ensure.







# *Chapter 16*



*16:1-3*

The Blessed Lord said: Gentle, modest, kind,  
Pure of heart, of even-keeled mind,  
Steadfast of purpose, fearless, radiant—  
These are the traits of one to God inclined.

*16:4*

Vainglory, self-conceit and arrogance,  
Wrathfulness and restless ignorance,  
All these, O Pandava, identify  
Those in whose nature all the demons dance.

*16:5*

All qualities Divine to freedom lead,  
Demonic ones continued bondage breed.  
Fear not, Arjuna—you have long refined  
Such qualities that soon will see you freed!

*16:21*

From these three:

  anger, lust and greed for gain,  
Man in his own self-interest should abstain.  
Destroying happiness of soul in all,  
These certain paths to hell  
  are paved with pain.

*16:23*

That one who, by desires ego-driven,  
Ignores the holy texts to all men given,  
Finds neither happiness nor peace of mind,  
And from his sacred Goal is fully riven.

*16:24*

So take true scriptures,  
  therefore, as your guide,  
And with them keep  
  your consciousness allied.  
Intuitively understand their laws,  
And find your life with wisdom fortified.



# *Chapter 17*



*17:1*

Arjuna asked: Of those who set aside  
Those rules and laws by scripture codified,  
Yet with devotion make their sacrifice,  
What is their worship—false, or sanctified?

*17:2*

The Blessed Lord said: Here the only test  
Is in the quality of faith expressed,  
Rajasic, sattwic or tamasic rites  
Are to their own degrees  
both judged and blessed.

*17:11*

A sacrifice to God is ne'er in vain  
If done without desire for private gain,  
But offered up with love and firm belief—  
This one from Me all blessings shall obtain.

# *Chapter 18*





*18:37*

What seems like poison first, yet proves to be  
The sweetest nectar of the Living Tree,  
Is sattvic happiness and leads to Bliss  
Through clear perception of the Self in Me.

*18:38*

Rajasic are those pleasures which arise  
Through senses and the objects  
  that they prize.  
Like nectar first, like poison in the end,  
These traitors are avoided by the wise.

*18:39*

That “happiness,” so called,  
  which most offends  
Is that which all the fire of Life expends.  
Unconscious, drunk, unkempt,  
  debauched—in such  
Tamasic stupor it begins and ends.

*18:46-47*

Perfection is attained when, from the heart,  
One offers up his own especial art—  
O, better death in dharma of one's own,  
Than playing with success another's part!

*18:49*

Each one I will in victory enthrone  
Who, unattached, knows nothing as his own,  
Who reigns triumphant from his highest Self,  
From whom all lesser, base desires have flown.

*18:63*

And now that Wisdom, sacred, secret, true,  
My devotee, has been revealed to you,  
Reflect on it, absorb it in your soul,  
And, going forth, do as you feel to do.





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## *About the Author*



Tandava Graham is part of the Ananda community in Palo Alto, California, where he is both a minister and a middle school teacher. When not writing poetry, he can often be found playing music, singing in the choir, and otherwise enjoying the “education and entertainment” that incarnation on the physical plane provides for a yogi.

If you're interested in reading more of his poetry, spanning the complete range from serious to silly, visit and subscribe to his poetry blog at [poetry.whistledance.net](http://poetry.whistledance.net).