

Liberation and Non-Attachment: Arjuna's Fear in the Bhagavad-Gītā

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Abstract

This thesis takes liberation to be supreme knowledge of the unity underlying the world of multiplicity. This knowledge is always already attained, so all are eternally liberated, but it is unrecognized in ordinary experience. We will look at the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to consider why this is so. When Arjuna saw Kṛṣṇa's imperishable Self, he saw all beings standing as one in Kṛṣṇa; thus, he was confronted by supreme knowledge. But he was overwhelmed with fear and confusion and took refuge in blindness. I argue that Arjuna was not prepared to face recognition because he was unpractised in non-attachment. Attached to his subjectivity, he trembled in the face of unity. The supreme goal is standing firm in recognition while living in the world.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis begins with an inquiry into liberation. We will focus on how liberation is understood in the *Prasthānatrayī*¹—the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad-Gītā* and *Brahma-Sūtras*—as well as by Śankara, a proponent of *Advaita Vedānta*. The *Prasthānatrayī* form the basis of this inquiry and Śankara serves as a guide who takes us through these. Śankara’s navigation of these texts is interesting in many ways, yet we will remain a few steps behind in order to examine his path before following it. I argue that liberation is supreme knowledge of the unity underlying the world of multiplicity. This knowledge is eternal but not ordinarily noticed. Liberation cannot be attained, only recognized. To explore why it is unrecognized, we will consider why Arjuna could not stand firm in the face of supreme knowledge in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. In Book XI, Kṛṣṇa revealed to Arjuna His imperishable Self. In this vision, Arjuna saw all beings standing in Kṛṣṇa—he saw the unity underlying the multiplicity; thus, Arjuna was confronted directly by the knowledge that is liberation. He reacted, however, with fear and confusion, and finally asked Kṛṣṇa to return to his previous form. Why was Arjuna affected in this way? I argue that Arjuna was not prepared to face supreme knowledge because he was unpractised in non-attachment. The different kinds of non-attachment prescribed by Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* (non-attachment to the fruits of action, to actions themselves, and to the sense objects) all entail non-attachment to the notion of oneself as a subject. Arjuna, still attached to his subjectivity, was confused and scared by this vision of non-duality.

¹ *Prasthānatrayī* means “three sources”. These are often considered the canonical texts of the *Vedānta* schools.

I will now make three notes on how I will approach this inquiry. Firstly, I will take care not to get caught up untangling the trivial details of these texts. In *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between two elements of Scripture: “one temporary, perishable, belonging to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced, the other eternal and imperishable and applicable in all ages and countries.”² This eternal truth “cannot be shut up in a single trenchant formula, it is not likely to be found in its entirety or in all its bearings in any single philosophy or Scripture or uttered altogether and for ever by any one teacher, thinker, prophet, or avatar.”³ The eternal element cannot be taught by any one text or teacher due to the limitations of language, as we will explore further in Section 2.1. Although no text or teacher can express that which is beyond language, they can point towards it. One must be careful, however, not to be mesmerized by the index finger. This is particularly important to keep in mind when looking at the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, for this text combines several schools of thought that may contradict one another in their temporary truths. Therefore, I will not attempt to produce an overarching schematic of this *Gītā*’s temporary truths, for this distracts from looking towards that to which the text is pointing.

Secondly, we must not approach the *Prasthānatrayī* as if they are self-help books that are meant to provide a simple, step-by-step guide to attaining liberation. While the texts do contain injunctions related to liberation, none provide a straightforward path to follow. The obscurity of instruction is not a sign of poor writing, but a revelation about the nature of liberation. To begin any inquiry into liberation with the question “What can I do to attain liberation?” is to start with a misunderstanding of what liberation is.

² Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1966), 2.

³ Ibid.

Liberation is not an attainment, for it is always already attained. It is not a condition, but essential to the Self. This is a crucial point that I will expand on and return to throughout this thesis. We will see it taught in the *Upaniṣads* (see Section 1.1), the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (see Sections 1.1 and 2.2), the writings of Śankara (see Section 1.2), Zen and Mahayana Buddhism (see Section 1.4), and Kaśmir Śaivism (see Section 1.4).

Even with this understanding of liberation, the question “What can I do to attain liberation?” threatens to lure us in by appealing to the familiar idea that we should perform actions in order to attain desired ends. We must resist this notion by remembering that liberation is not an end. If we succumb to the idea that the only purpose of thinking is the attainment of ends, then this marks the end of our inquiry. Not so if we remember the *Gītā*’s teaching of unattached action: “In action alone is your authority, not in fruits at any time. Action should not be motivated by fruit; your attachment should not be to non-action” (2.47). Being unattached to action does not mean abstaining from action, but acting without attachment to ends. This is not an inquiry into what we can attain, but an inquiry into what we are.

Thirdly, translations and interpretations of ancient Indian scriptures often strive to be accessible to the “modern Western mind”, processing these texts into easily digestible nuggets in order to achieve this. But when these texts are manipulated to fit the modern Western reader, the modern Western reader cannot be affected by the texts. I will attempt to preserve the unfamiliar aspects of these texts by translating quite literally. All passages cited from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Brahma-Sūtras*, and Śankara’s *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in this thesis have been translated by me in such a way. I have also added etymological notes and explored various English translations of some words, whenever this proved to be

illuminating. For example, just a few of the translations of the verb root \sqrt{sj} listed in the *Monier-Williams Dictionary* are: “to discharge; to let go; to emit; to utter; to create (the universe)”.⁴ While the connections between some of these words are familiar to the English speaker (e.g., between “to discharge”, “to let go”, and “to emit”), others appear to be unrelated (e.g., “to create”). These apparently scattered meanings, however, were interconnected for the ancient Indians: In the *Prasthānatrayī*, the creation of the universe is often described as a sacrificial releasing or emitting from the body of the creator.⁵ Knowing this, one can see why the word that means “to create (the universe)” also means “to let go”.

Translators should not attempt to transmit the meaning of the original, for if one seeks to transmit meaning, then one is bound to transmit one’s own interpretation of the text. Such a translation moulds the text into something that makes sense to the translator, rather than preserving that which resides beyond the familiar; therefore, a translator who is unconcerned with the transmission of meaning actually lets the meaning of the original through the best. This does not mean that I will not think about the meaning or interpret the passages, as this is a philosophical paper, but this will be a task that *follows* translation.⁶

⁴ Monier Monier-Williams, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeler, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (University of Cologne, 2014).

⁵ See *R̥g-Veda* 10.90 and 10.125; *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1 and 2; the *Maha Vana Parva* in the *Mahābhārata* 484 (187).

⁶ Nor should the translator be concerned with eloquence (i.e., producing a translation that sound as if it were originally written in the language of the translation). In “The Task of the Translator”, Walter Benjamin writes that a literal rendering of the syntax better serves language itself; he quotes Rudolf Pannwitz on this:

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works....The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. (Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 80-81).

A challenge that is frequently encountered in the translation of Sanskrit texts is the abundance of compound words, which are intrinsically vague. Only the last word in a compound is inflected, so various translations are often possible for the preceding words. For example, in *Gītā* 13.19, Kṛṣṇa calls the *guṇas*⁷ “*prakṛti-sambhavan*”, which can be translated as “*prakṛti*⁸-origins”. Because this compound does not reveal the declension of *prakṛti*, it could be, for example, genitive, entailing that the *guṇas* are the origins of *prakṛti*; ablative, entailing that the *guṇas* originate from *prakṛti*; instrumental, entailing that the *guṇas* originate with *prakṛti*; or it could be a *dvandva* (“pair”) compound, entailing the *guṇas* are the both the origins and *prakṛti*. I generally dealt with such vague compounds in one of two ways: either I rendered them with hyphens in order to retain the text’s inherent ambiguity, or, when I chose one translation, I made note of the possible alternatives. The Sanskrit language seems to affirm what the poets proclaim in *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka* (4.22) and *Aitareya* (3.14) *Upaniṣads*: “The gods are fond of the cryptic⁹”.¹⁰ I aim to approach these texts where they reside in the cryptic, rather than slaying them so they can be carried to the already-known.

This thesis has three chapters.

The syntax of the original language cannot comfortably fit into the language of the translation, so it cannot be carried over without affecting the language of the translation. Thus, by producing a literal rendering of the syntax, a translator “breaks through decayed barriers of his own language” (Benjamin, 80).

⁷ Literally meaning, “strand” or “rope”, the word *guṇas* came to refer to *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, the building blocks of the world.

⁸ Monier-Williams translates *prakṛti* as, “the original or natural form or condition of anything, original or primary substance, origin, extraction, nature, character, the original producer of (or rather passive power of creating) the material world”. This is broken down to *pra* (“forward, in front, forth”) and *kṛti* (“doing, acting”). In the Sāṃkhya school, *prakṛti* is the state of equilibrium of the three *guṇas*.

⁹ The word translated as “cryptic” is *parokṣa*, meaning “beyond the range of sight; unknown”, from *para* (beyond) and *akṣa* (the eye; knowledge; the soul; sensual perception).

¹⁰ Robert E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (Oxford UP, 1921), 132, 298.

Chapter 1, “Liberation and the World”, begins with a brief etymology of the Sanskrit word for “liberation”, *mokṣa*. We will look at how this word, and other derivatives of its root, \sqrt{muc} , was used in the *Ṛg-Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Brahma-Sūtras*, and *Bhagavad-Gītā*. We will then consider how liberation is understood by Śankara, and briefly Buddhism and Kaśmir Śaivism. These all teach that liberation is eternally attained. Liberation is knowledge of the unity underlying the world of multiplicity (i.e., Brahman-knowledge). This knowledge is eternal, but not noticed. All that is to be attained is recognition¹¹ of what is already here and always known. I argue that this knowledge is not covered by the world of multiplicity (the world of name and form), but by attachment to the empty conception of it—i.e., the understanding of it that does not recognize Brahman. *Avidyā* (“unwisdom”, often translated as “ignorance” or “nescience”¹²) is not seeing the world of multiplicity, but rather failing to recognize the unity that underlies it.

In Chapter 2, “The *Bhagavad-Gītā*”, I argue that Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* is, like the Brahman of the Upaniṣads, the All—i.e., the unity underlying the world of multiplicity. In exalting a God with name and form, the *Gītā* teaches that the world of name and form need not be turned away from to see this unity; on the contrary, this unity is found *in* the world of name and form. We will explore the two-fold nature of Kṛṣṇa: Kṛṣṇa as the friend and charioteer of Arjuna, and Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self as revealed in Book XI. The former is describable; the latter, beyond human language. Though description must be transcended for the indescribable, I argue that this is not seen by turning away from human language, but looked at more closely (i.e., free from attachment). Finally, I argue

¹¹ The reason I chose to use the word “recognition” instead of “remembrance” is explained in Section 2.2.

¹² The reason I prefer “unwisdom” is explained in Section 3.4.

that going to Brahman is the initial moment of recognition of unity, but entering Kṛṣṇa is standing firm in this recognition while living in the world of multiplicity.

In Chapter 3, “The Path to Steadiness in Recognition”, I challenge the widespread interpretation that the *Gītā* teaches three or four different paths (knowledge, action, devotion and, sometimes, meditation) to the supreme goal that can be taken by different kinds of people. I argue instead that these “paths” are utterly inseparable. I conclude by returning to a consideration of Arjuna’s fear, specifically in regards to his vision of Kṛṣṇa as the Destroyer. By showing that “to destroy” actually means “to bring together”, I will argue that Kṛṣṇa’s role as the Destroyer is not just “the one who performs the act of destruction”, but actually “the one in whom the state of destruction (i.e., unity) exists”. Arjuna feared Kṛṣṇa the Destroyer not only because he saw armies crushed in Kṛṣṇa’s flaming mouths, but because he saw the being-together of beings in Kṛṣṇa, which conflicted with the understanding of the world with which he was familiar.

CHAPTER 1: Liberation and the World

1.1 The Meaning of *Mokṣa*

The Sanskrit word for “liberation” is *mokṣa*. This comes from the verbal root \sqrt{muc} , which has a number of meanings:

To loose, free, release, liberate; to spare, let live; to set free, dismiss; to relinquish, abandon; to yield, grant, bestow; to send forth, shed, emit; to yoke, unharness.¹³

The meaning of *mokṣa* depends on the text and school of thought. To get a deeper understanding of this word, we need to look at how derivatives of \sqrt{muc} are used in the *Ṛg-Veda*, *Upaniṣads*, *Brahma-Sūtras*, and *Bhagavad-Gītā*. This account will be brief, but a thorough etymological index is provided in the Appendix.

The *Ṛg-Veda* is the oldest of the Vedas, generally thought to be composed between 1500 and 1200 BCE. While the word *mokṣa* does not appear in this text, there are other derivatives of \sqrt{muc} . These most frequently refer to the unyoking of horses (see *ṚV* 1.101.1, 1.171.1, 1.177.4, 2.38.3, etc.). \sqrt{Muc} is also found in the name of the drought demon, Namuci (literally, “not liberating”), who held the rivers within himself until he was slain by Indra (see *ṚV* 5.30.7, 8.14.13, 10.111.9). Because these derivatives usually refer to a physical loosening of bonds, most etymologies of *mokṣa* ignore the *Ṛg-Veda*. There are, however, a few references to liberation from non-physical bonds, thus setting the foundation for a broader understanding of \sqrt{muc} . In *ṚV* 7.71.5, for example, the poet asks to be liberated (*amumuktaṃ*) from *jarasa*, “becoming old, decay, old age.”¹⁴ In *ṚV* 8.24.27, the poet asks to be liberated (*mucad*) from *aṃhasa* “woe, anxiety, trouble, sin.”¹⁵ A particularly interesting occurrence is found in a hymn that is both to, and about, Indra

¹³ Monier-Williams.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

(10.27.24): “This is thy life: and do thou mark and know it. As such, hide not thyself in time of battle. He manifests the light and hides the vapour: his foot is never free [mucyate] from robes that veil it.”¹⁶ This connection between bondage and a veiling of God is noteworthy, for bondage will be later understood as a veiling of Brahman.

In the Upaniṣads, both *mokṣa* and other derivatives of \sqrt{muc} are frequently used to refer to liberation from non-physical bonds. In the introduction to his translation of the Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads, Robert E. Hume writes that the usual date assigned to these texts is 600 or 500 BCE¹⁷, though they were probably composed over several centuries. The *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* is considered to be one of the oldest Upaniṣads. It refers to being liberated [*atimucyata*] beyond death (3.1.3), from day and night (3.1.4), and from the waxing and waning moon (3.1.5), and to the heavenly world (3.1.6). In the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, liberation “from the womb” (i.e., from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of death and rebirth) and “from all fetters” is tied to supreme knowledge: “By knowing what is therein, Brahma-knowers become merged in Brahma, intent thereon, liberated (*muktāh*) from the womb” (1.7); “By knowing God (*deva*) one is released (*mucyate*) from all fetters” (1.8).¹⁸ This connection between knowledge and liberation continues to be made throughout Indian philosophy. The *Maitrī Upaniṣad* teaches that bondage is a state of thought:

Saṃsāra is just one’s own thought;
With effort he should cleanse it then.
What is one’s thought, that he becomes;
This is the eternal mystery.

For by tranquility (*prasāda*) of thought,
Deeds (*karman*), good and evil, one destroys,

¹⁶ Ralph Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (Kotagiri, 1896), 434.

¹⁷ Hume, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 395.

With soul serene, stayed on the Soul,
Delight eternal one enjoys!...

The mind, in truth, is for mankind
The means of bondage and release:
For bondage, if to objects bound;
From objects free—that's called release!¹⁹ (6.34).

There is no physical entering the state of liberation, just a shift in thought. This passage also teaches that good and evil deeds are destroyed, not by non-action, but by tranquility of thought. This is akin to the teaching of unattached action that Kṛṣṇa upholds in the *Gītā*.

Many of the passages we have seen refer to liberation *from* things. This is sometimes called the negative notion of liberation. There are, however, some references to what this liberation entails in a positive sense—reaching Brahman (translated here as “Brahma”²⁰) and immortality: “When are liberated all the desires that lodge in one’s heart, then a mortal becomes immortal! Therein he reaches Brahma!” (*Bṛ.* 4.4.7)²¹; “He, verily, who knows that supreme Brahma, becomes very Brahma. In his family no one ignorant of Brahma arises. He crosses over sorrow. He crosses over sin (*pāpman*). Liberated from the knots of the heart, he becomes immortal” (*Mu.* 3.2.9)²². If liberation is eternally attained, then it is unnecessary to distinguish between positive and negative notions of liberation, for liberation is overcoming that which obstructs its recognition.

The *Brahma-Sūtras*, also called the *Vedānta-Sūtras*, are difficult to date. Whether they were composed before or after the *Gītā* is questionable, because the *Gītā* refers to

¹⁹ Ibid, 447-8.

²⁰ The word in both of these verses is *Brahma*, the nominative case of *Brahman*, not the creator-God *Brahmā*.

²¹ Ibid, 141. This same verse occurs in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.14.

²² Ibid, 377.

the *Brahma-Sūtras* (see *Gītā* 18.4), and the *Brahma-Sūtras* quote the *Gītā* (see *Brahma-Sūtras* 2.3.45, 4.2.21). Swami Vireswarananda writes, “It can be pointed out that there existed in the time of Pāṇini Sutras known as Bhikshu-Sutras which are identified by Vāchaspati with the Vedānta-Sutras.”²³ Though Pāṇini’s dates are also uncertain, most scholars agree that he lived sometime around the 5th century BCE, so the *Brahma-Sūtras* were likely composed before then. From the first mention of liberation in this text, it is connected to Brahman: “*Mokṣa* is of the standing in²⁴ that [Brahman]²⁵; [this is known] from teaching (*upadeśa*)” (1.1.17). Verses 1.3.1-2 also associate liberation with Brahman: “[Brahman] is the abode of the sky, earth, and so on... This is approached by the liberated (*mukta*).” If Brahman is the abode of all, then all must already be in Brahman. Liberation is eternal, and approaching Brahman is approaching recognition of this.

The date of composition of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is also uncertain, but most scholars estimate sometime between 200 and 500 BCE. Sargeant writes that the written version probably came much later than this: “The Bhagavad Gita, in its written form at any rate, is generally thought to date from the second or third century A.D., being considered a later interpolation in the long Epic, the Mahabharata, most of which describes an India of an earlier period, possibly 800 B.C.”²⁶ The *Gītā*, like the *Upaniṣads*, makes many references to liberation *from* things—from rebirth (*janma-bandha*) (2.51), from fault (*kilbiṣa*) (3.13), from (the bonds of) action (*karma, karma-bandha*) (3.31, 4.28), from misfortune (*aśubha*) (4.16, 9.1), from the body (*śarīra*) (5.23), from old age and dying

²³ Swami Vireswarananda, *Brahma-Sutras with Text, Word-for-Word Translation, English Rendering, Comments and Index* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1936), vii-viii.

²⁴ “Standing in” is *niṣṭha*. This is typically translated as “devoted to”, but “standing in/on”, “situated in/on”, “resting in/on”, or simply “being in/on” are more literal translations.

²⁵ The chapter begins, “Now hence the Brahman-investigation” (1.1.1) and continues to refer to Brahman throughout.

²⁶ Winthrop Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: State U of New York, 2009), 4.

(*jarā-maraṇa*) (5.29), and from evil (*pāpa*) (10.3). In some of these cases, liberation is tied to knowledge (see 4.16, 9.1); in 10.3, it is specifically tied to knowledge of Kṛṣṇa. 5.28 is a particularly notable verse about liberation, for Kṛṣṇa teaches that it is eternally present, but its recognition is obstructed by desire, fear, and anger:

[Kṛṣṇa said:]
Senses, mind, and *buddhi*²⁷ controlled,
The sage, with liberation (*mokṣa*) as the supreme path,
Desire, fear, anger departed,
He is always (*sadā*) liberated (*mukta*).

We will see why liberation is obstructed by these in Chapter 3.

1.2 Śankara on Liberation

Śankara is the most prominent proponent of *Advaita Vedantā* (non-dualism based on the *Prasthānatrayī*). We will consider his views on liberation because his writings and commentaries are foundational in Classical Indian Philosophy and still influence Indian philosophy today. For Śankara, (and *Advaita* in general), liberation is the unity²⁸ between the Self (*ātman*²⁹) and Brahman³⁰. Therefore, to understand Śankara’s notion of liberation, we must look at his understanding of the Self and Brahman. He writes, “Nothing whatsoever can exist separately from Brahman.”³¹ For Śankara, Brahman is all that is real. In some places in the *Prasthānatrayī*, it seems as if the reality of Brahman (or the supreme Self) is denied; but Śankara refutes such interpretations. For example, the following verse, which occurs several times in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*

²⁷ *Buddhi*, usually translated as “intellect”, comes from the root *√bodh*, “to awaken”. The *buddhi* is the faculty of awakening. We will look at this further in Section 3.4.

²⁸ This unity is eternal. There is no “coming together” of the Self and Brahman, only recognition of the non-difference between the two.

²⁹ *Ātman* also means “breath”. The Old English word for “breath” is similar: *æðm*.

³⁰ The *Monier-Williams Dictionary* suggests the root of *brahman* as *bṛh*, “to tear; to root up; to expand; to speak.”

³¹ Gambhirananda, *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965), 635.

Upaniṣad, could also be interpreted as a denial of the reality of the Self: “That Self (*ātman*) is not this, it is not that (*neti neti*)” (3.9.26, etc.). Śankara writes that the *Vedāntin*’s “Opponent” argues that the first *neti* negates the phenomenal manifestations of Brahman, and the second, Brahman itself. Śankara refutes this point on the ground that something can only undergo sublation on the basis of something real. The Sanskrit word that is translated as “sublation” is *bādhā*. The root $\sqrt{bādh}$ means “to force, drive away, repel, remove”. Sublation is the removal of the illusion that covers what is real. Śankara explains sublation with the example of a person stepping into a dark room and thinking they see a snake, and then, upon closer examination, recognizing the snake to be a rope. The illusory snake was superimposed (*adhyāsa*³²) on the rope, and the snake was sublated—i.e., removed—by recognition of the rope. The rope is real and was always there, even when it appeared to be a snake. Likewise, the phenomenal world is sublated by recognition of Brahman, which is real and has always been here. There must be something real underlying an illusion, or there would be no illusion in the first place. The phenomenal world can only be experienced if something real (Brahman) underlies it. *Neti neti* is not a denial of Brahman, but an expression of Brahman’s ineffability.

Another place where it seems like the reality of Brahman is denied is in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* 13.12: “The beginningless *para*-Brahman is not being (*sat*), not non-

³² *Adhyāsa* is literally “sitting over”. John Grimes writes that there are two kinds of superimposition: *Svarūpa-adhyāda* and *samsarga-adhyāda*. The former consists in superimposing an illusory (*mithyā*) object on something real; i.e., superimposing an illusory snake on a real rope, which is an example of an ordinary error, or of superimposing ignorance (*avidyā*) and the empirical world upon the Absolute (Brahman), which is an example of a foundational error. *Samsarga-adhyāsa* is the superimposition of an attribute on an object. This relation is false (*mithyā*); i.e., to superimpose redness upon a crystal which is in the immediate physical proximity of a red object. (John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English* (Albany: State U of New York, 1996), 13).

Śankara writes that *avidyā* is the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the non-Self on the Self (Gambhirananda 3) and *vidyā* is “separating the superimposed thing from it” (Gambhirananda 4).

being (*asat*)³³, it is said.” In the *Gītā Bhāṣya*, Śankara comments that this verse is not meant to deny the reality of Brahman, but rather to express that Brahman “cannot be, like a pot, etc., an object of consciousness accompanied with the idea of either (existence or non-existence) and is therefore not said to be ‘sat’ or ‘asat’.”³⁴ While a pot can be thought to exist or not exist, Brahman can never be considered non-existent. Saying that Brahman is *sat* implies that it could be otherwise—i.e., it implies that in another time Brahman could be *asat*—which is not so. If one says that Brahman exists, one must keep in mind that this existence is not a contingency, but a necessity; therefore, to say that Brahman exists is redundant. As Śankara writes, “Brahman is neither acceptable nor rejectable.”³⁵ Moreover, to call Brahman *sat* is to attempt to describe the indescribable. By saying that Brahman is neither *sat* nor *asat*, Kṛṣṇa expresses the ultimate ineffability of Brahman.

According to Śankara, Brahman is not only beyond speech, but the mind:

“Brahman is beyond speech and mind; It cannot be classed with objects of knowledge; It is one’s inmost Self; and It is by nature eternal, pure, intelligent, and free.”³⁶ Despite this, Brahman is known: “The existence of Brahman is well known from the fact of Its being the Self of all; for everyone feels that his Self exists, and he never feels, ‘I do not exist.’ And that Self is Brahman.”³⁷ It is not a contradiction that Brahman is known, yet beyond the mind, because the Self is not known by the mind, but by the Self alone.³⁸ The mind (*manas*³⁹) is a faculty of the embodied self. It processes experience of the phenomenal

³³ *Sat* is the present participle of *as* (“to be”), meaning literally “being”. *Asat* is its negation, “non-being”.

³⁴ Mahadeva Sastri. *The Bhagavad-Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya* (Mysore: G. T. A. Printing Works, 1901), 345-346.

³⁵ Gambhirananda, 95.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 625-626.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁸ The *buddhi* is the faculty that awakens one to the Self. We will look at this further in Section 3.4.

³⁹ *Manas* comes from the root \sqrt{man} , “to think, believe, imagine” (Monier-Williams). Interestingly, *manuṣya*, meaning “man” or “human”, also comes from this root.

world in a framework that separates the knower from the object of knowledge.

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad explains the limitations of this kind⁴⁰ of knowledge: It “requires the structure of experience, of subject and object, subjective apparatus and objective features. These are exactly what are penultimate and transcended when the self de-individuates its consciousness back into the consciousness of Brahman.”⁴¹ Brahman is beyond the mind because Brahman is beyond duality, and, therefore, can never be the object of knowledge. Supreme knowledge does not separate between knower and known. For this reason, from this point onwards, I will call supreme knowledge “Brahman-knowledge” instead of “knowledge of Brahman”. The kind of knowing performed by the *manas* is, at best, a means to recognizing liberation⁴²; but the supreme knowledge, as we will now see, *is* liberation.

First, let us consider what Śankara means by the self. There are two senses of the self: the *ātman*, which is Brahman, and the embodied Self, which is the *ātman* identified, or “tangled up”, with the body. Even the tangling itself is illusory, as the *ātman* is eternally liberated, and bondage is thus an illusion. Śankara gives a helpful analogy to explain this: The individual self can be thought of as the space within a jar. From the perspective of bondage, the space within is shaped by the jar and is different from the space outside—this represents the embodied Self, or the Self that is identified with the body. From the perspective of liberation, the space within is known to be non-different

⁴⁰ Ram-Prasad does not distinguish between these two kinds of knowledge—knowledge of objects and supreme knowledge—in this book, taking knowledge to be, vaguely, “an understanding of some aspects of reality” (Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Indian Philosophy and the Consequences of Knowledge: Themes in Ethics, Metaphysics and Soteriology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub., 2007), xi), but it is clear that he is speaking of the former here.

⁴¹ Ram-Prasad, 128.

⁴² For example, the knowledge gleaned from reading the scriptures or hearing a teacher may encourage someone to practise non-attachment, which allows for standing firm in recognition.

from the space outside—this represents the *ātman*, the Self identified with Brahman. It is not the Self, but the perspective, that differs. As the coiled object is not changed upon the recognition that it is a rope, so the Self is not changed when it is identified with Brahman.

Śankara also calls liberation “unembodiedness”: “The unembodiedness, called liberation, is eternal and different from the results of works that have to be performed.”⁴³ This does not mean a separation from the physical body; first, because Śankara believes in the possibility of a *jīvan-mukta* (“living-liberated one”—i.e., one who recognizes liberation while living in the world), and second, because unembodiedness is eternal. Therefore, one does not transition to the state of unembodiedness. The space in the jar is always the same as the space outside (unembodiedness/liberation are eternal), but when one identifies with the space inside the jar, one thinks that the space outside is different than the space inside. Śankara defines unembodiedness as “the state of not being identified with the body.”⁴⁴ Unembodiedness is not leaving the body, but recognizing that the Self is not the body—at least, not the body *alone*.

Śankara teaches that the Self is eternal and unchanging. If it were to transition from a state of bondage to liberation, it would be subject to change. Therefore, the Self is eternally liberated. Śankara teaches that liberation comes from the knowledge of Brahman: “Bondage...comes from the ignorance about the nature of God and freedom...comes from the knowledge of His reality.”⁴⁵ But if liberation is eternal (the Self and Brahman are always one), it does not make sense to say that liberation *comes from* knowledge; after all, that which is eternal does not “come from” anywhere.

⁴³ Gambhirananda, 27-28.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 595.

Liberation *is* Brahman-knowledge. If the Self is always liberated, then the Self must always possess⁴⁶ supreme Brahman-knowledge. Brahman can never not be known because Brahman is All.⁴⁷ *Avidyā*, therefore, is not an absence of Brahman-knowledge, but an absence of recognition. Though we cannot deliberate on what can be done to attain liberation, we can deliberate on why Brahman is unrecognized. This is what we will do in Chapters 2 and 3.

I have used the word “recognition” instead of “remembrance” for two reasons. First, “recognition” is etymologically fitting, for “recognize” is broken down to *re* (again) + *co* (together, with) + *gnize* (cognate of Gk. *gnōsis*; Sk. *jñāna*); thus, “recognition” is the return to *jñāna*⁴⁸. This is a suitable translation, for recognition is the return to Brahman-*jñāna*.

Secondly, I have used the word “recognition” to distinguish it from the Platonic notion of remembrance (Gk. *anamnesis*, ἀνάμνησις). In the *Meno*, Socrates teaches that there is nothing that souls have not learned, because they have been repeatedly incarnated. When it seems as if they don’t know something, it is only because they have forgotten. Teaching is just reminding, and learning is just remembering:

[Socrates said,] Given, then, that the soul is immortal and has been incarnated many times, and has therefore seen things here on earth and things in the underworld too—everything, in fact—there’s nothing that it hasn’t learnt. Hence it isn’t at all surprising that it should be possible for the soul to recall what, after all, it also knew before about excellence and about everything else. For since all nature is akin and the soul has learnt everything, there’s nothing to stop a man recovering everything else by himself, once he has remembered—or ‘learnt’, in common parlance—just one thing; all he needs is the fortitude not to give up the

⁴⁶ This must not be confounded with possession in the ordinary sense (i.e., of an object), because possession of supreme knowledge could not be otherwise; it is essential to the Self.

⁴⁷ Even though one sees the world as

⁴⁸ The meaning of *jñāna* will be explored in more detail in 3.4

search. The point is that the search, the process of learning, is in fact nothing but recollection.⁴⁹

Although it sounds as if Socrates is saying that all knowledge was learned at some other time—implying that it was, at some time, not known—he goes on to show that knowledge is eternal, for the soul is immortal. Learning is waking up to what has always been known. In this sense, Platonic remembrance is like the recognition of Brahman-knowledge. Platonic remembrance and Brahman-recognition differ, however, in that the former is remembrance *of* things. For example, in the *Meno*, Socrates shows that an uneducated boy can calculate the area of a square by answering well-asked questions, for he needs only to be reminded of the geometric rules that he already knows. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates shows that knowledge of the forms (the equal, the beautiful, etc.) could not have been attained on earth, because the sense-objects always fall short of the forms. Knowledge of geometry and the forms is entirely different than Brahman-knowledge because the former is knowledge of objects (even though they are not physically present in the world), whereas Brahman can never be the object of knowledge. Platonic remembrance happens within the perspective of duality, whereas Brahman-knowledge is beyond it.

Śankara teaches that Brahman-knowledge (and, therefore, liberation) cannot be attained through action: “The knowledge of Brahman has emancipation as its result, and does not depend on any other performance”⁵⁰; “By no stretch of the imagination can such a Brahman or Its knowledge be brought into contact with work.”⁵¹ Śankara does acknowledge prerequisites to the deliberation on Brahman—“Discrimination between the

⁴⁹ Robin Waterfield, *Meno and Other Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 114.

⁵⁰ Gambhirananda, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 30.

eternal and the non-eternal; dispassion for the enjoyment of the fruits (of work) here and hereafter; a perfection of such practices as control of the mind, control of the senses and organs, etc.,; and a hankering for liberation”⁵²—but this deliberation is distinct from the supreme Brahman-knowledge that is liberation. All actions distinguish between subject and object, as Ram-Prasad explains: “Action remains within the unliberated existence of the world, which is structured by subject–object duality; it therefore provides no way of getting the subject to transcend its individuated separation from *brahman*.”⁵³ Śankara writes that even mental activities, including meditation, do not lead to supreme knowledge: “Brahman is denied to be an object of the act of knowing. So also there is the denial of Its being the object of the act of meditation.”⁵⁴ When one meditates, one meditates *on* something; therefore, meditation differentiates between subject and object, and does not lead to liberation.

Besides the fact that they distinguish subject and object, there is a more significant reason why no action (or ordinary knowing) can lead to liberation: Nothing can lead to what is already here. This does not, however, mean that actions and ordinary knowledge are meaningless, for they are what clears the way for recognition. There is a process involved, but this is not a *becoming*; instead, it is a stripping away of that which hides the true nature of the Self. I will expand on this point throughout this thesis.

1.3 Śankara on the Reality of the World

Śankara’s stance on the reality of the world is somewhat confusing. At times, it seems that he takes the world as real. This is particularly evident in his criticism of the

⁵² Ibid, 9.

⁵³ Ram-Prasad, 128-129.

⁵⁴ Gambhirananda, 31.

Vijñānavādins (Buddhist idealists) in the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhaṣya*. He writes, “It cannot be asserted that external things do not exist”.⁵⁵ According to Śāṅkara, the *Vijñānavādins* believe that perceptions alone are real—perceptions merely *resemble* external things. Śāṅkara replies that it is impossible to resemble something that does not exist: “It is wrong to say that external things do not exist merely on the ground that cognition is seen to have the likeness of an object, because the very likeness of an object is not possible unless the object itself be there.”⁵⁶ Moreover, Śāṅkara notes that there must be something real underlying perceptions for the means of knowledge to be valid,⁵⁷ because valid knowledge is dependent on that which is known, not on the action of the knower.⁵⁸ Therefore, there would be no valid knowledge of the world if external things did not exist.

At other times, Śāṅkara writes that the world is caused by *avidyā*: “[Knowledge of the Self] serves the purpose of eradicating the unreal nescience that is the cause of the worldly state.”⁵⁹ Śāṅkara gives the following analogy to explain how unchanging Brahman can become the world of multiplicity: “This difference of aspects is created by ignorance. A thing does not become multiformed just because aspects are imagined on it through ignorance. Not that the moon, perceived to be many by a man with blurred vision (*timira* – diplopia), becomes really so.”⁶⁰ The multiformed moon is illusory; however, there is a real moon underlying it. Likewise, the world is illusory, but the perceptions are grounded on something real (Brahman).

⁵⁵ Ibid, 418.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 420.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁸ Though I am referring to ordinary knowledge (i.e., knowledge of objects) here, we have seen that the same is true in regards to supreme knowledge (i.e., Brahman-knowledge).

⁵⁹ Ibid, 38.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 356.

Śankara takes the world as neither real (*sat*) nor unreal (*asat*). That which is *sat* is permanent and, therefore, cannot be sublated. The world is not *sat* because it can be sublated by Brahman. That which is *asat* is like the son of a barren woman or a round square—a mere verbal formulation, not something that can be experienced or even imagined. The world is not *asat* because it can be experienced. In Sūtra 20 of the *Vivekcūḍāmaṇi*, Śankara calls the world *mithyā*: “Brahman is real (*satya*⁶¹) and the world (*jagat*) is *mithyā*”. *Mithyā* can mean:

Invertedly, contrarily, incorrectly, wrongly, improperly; falsely, deceitfully, untruly; not in reality, only apparently.⁶²

Some translate *mithyā* as “unreal”, but this is completely misleading when the word is used by Śankara, for, as we have seen, Śankara does not take the world as unreal.

“Illusory” is a better translation, because an illusion is both experiencable (not unreal) and sublatale (not real). For example, the mirage of an oasis in the desert is not unreal because the mirage is experienced, but it is not real because it is sublated by the knowledge that it is only sand. The term “illusion” is preferable over “delusion” because delusions are purely subjective, whereas illusions are based on something real—the mirage in the desert cannot exist without sand; the rope cannot exist without the snake; and the world cannot exist without Brahman.

Śankara writes of a type of knowledge connected with *mithyā*: “This connection of the soul with the intellect has but false ignorance (*mithyā-jñāna*) as its root, and this false ignorance cannot be removed by anything other than complete knowledge (of

⁶¹ *Satya* is usually translated as “truth” or “reality”. The suffix *-ya* means “coming from”, so a literal translation is “coming from being”.

⁶² Monier-Williams.

Brahman).”⁶³ Though *mithyā-jñāna* is translated by Gambhirananda here as “false ignorance”, “illusory knowledge” is not only more literal but more revealing, for it shows that Śankara sees two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the world of multiplicity (*mithyā-jñāna*), and Brahman-knowledge. *Mithyā-jñāna* is knowledge, not “false ignorance”, because it is based on something real; the world is not a mere perception, for it is Brahman. Moreover, when one is in the state of bondage, the world should be treated as real. In this state, thinking and acting as if there were duality is justified. But the perspective of liberation removes the perspective of bondage, as the snake instantly disappears with recognition of the rope. *Mithyā-jñāna* and Brahman-knowledge are, for Śankara, incompatible, for Brahman-knowledge removes *mithyā-jñāna*.⁶⁴

Śankara rejects “unity and difference”—as one cannot see *both* the snake and the rope, one cannot see the Self as both an embodied being and as Brahman: “Like the idea of the rope removing the ideas of snake etc. (superimposed on it), the acceptance of the unity of the (individual) Self with Brahman, as declared in the scripture, results in the removal of the idea of an individual soul bound up with the body.”⁶⁵ Knowledge of the rope does not destroy the snake, as Brahman-knowledge does not destroy the world; instead, true knowledge reveals that the snake and world were never really there. As Śankara writes in Sūtra 197 of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (“Crest Jewel of Discrimination”), “The snake in the rope belongs to delusion (*bhrānti*)⁶⁶ alone; in destruction of delusion, the snake is not so.” It is only delusion that is destroyed—the snake is simply “not so”,

⁶³ Gambhirananda, 491.

⁶⁴ In Section 1.5, I will argue that it is not Brahman-knowledge and knowledge of the world that are incompatible, but Brahman-recognition and non-recognition.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 328.

⁶⁶ *Bhrānti* is defined: “Wandering or roaming about, moving to and fro; perplexity, confusion, doubt, error” (Monier-Williams).

for that which is not ultimately real cannot be destroyed. It may appear that Śankara supports “unity and difference” in the following passage:

The foam, wave, etc. do not lose their individuality in relation to one another, even though they are modification of the sea and non-different to it. Again, even though they do not lose their individuality in one another, they are never different from the point of view of their being the sea. Similar is the case here. The experiencer and the things experienced never get identified with each other, nor do they differ from the supreme Brahman.⁶⁷

But if we look carefully, Śankara is not supporting “unity *and* difference”, but “*neither* unity *nor* difference”. The experiencer and experienced are *not* the same as each other, *nor* different from Brahman, just as the world of multiplicity is neither real nor unreal.

Śankara runs into a predicament here: If Brahman-recognition removes knowledge of the world of multiplicity, then how can Śankara allow for the possibility of a *jīvan-mukta*? Simply put, how could one who does not know the world live in it?

Śankara answers this by saying that knowledge of the world does not disappear immediately with Brahman-knowledge:

And when it is granted that knowledge is based on that medium (viz the body produced by the residual results), it is but natural that knowledge has to wait (for its result) till the acquired momentum of that medium exhausts itself out as in the case of a wheel of a potter; for there is nothing to stop it in the intervening period. As for the knowledge of the Self as the non-performer of any act, that destroys the result of works by first sublating false ignorance (*mithyā-jñāna*) [illusory knowledge]. This false ignorance [illusory knowledge], even when sublated continues for a while owing to past tendencies like the continuance of the vision of two moons.⁶⁸

This explanation, however, contradicts Śankara’s rejection of unity and difference. If only one perspective can be taken, then *mithyā-jñāna* is immediately removed by Brahman-knowledge. It seems that Śankara’s rejection of unity and difference does not

⁶⁷ Gambhirananda, 325.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 840.

allow for the possibility of a *jīvan-mukta*; for if one cannot see both the phenomenal world and Brahman, then one who has recognized Brahman cannot live in the world. I will now argue that the world of multiplicity need not disappear with Brahman-recognition.

Although the world is sublated by Brahman, the world *is* Brahman. Śankara writes that Brahman is not only the efficient, but also the material cause of the world. The creation stories of the *śruti* reveal the foundation of this idea. Though the cosmogonies differ in details, an underlying theme is that the universe was not created out of nothing, but out of the body of the First Being, whatever it may be called.⁶⁹ Let us look at some examples. *Ṛg-Veda* 10.90 teaches that in the beginning there was *Puruṣa*⁷⁰. It was sacrificed, and the different parts of its body became the different parts of the universe. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 1.4.1-4 teaches that in the beginning there was the *Ātman* alone. It fell into two pieces, which formed a husband and wife. They copulated in the forms of various animals to create all living beings. In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 1.4.10, in the beginning there was Brahma, who became the All. *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 3.19 teaches that the First Being was an egg. It split asunder and its parts became the universe. In *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 6.2, in the beginning there was Being. Desiring to be many, it emitted heat, which emitted water, which emitted food. Into each of these, Being entered

⁶⁹ These creation stories can be thought of as a shift in perspective: The state before creation (which, as we will see later, is also the state after destruction) is the perspective of non-duality, and the creation of the world of is the creation of the subject/object divide.

⁷⁰ Often translated “person” or “soul”, *pusuṣa* can mean both a person in the ordinary sense and the Supreme Person. Though the etymology is unclear, several playful explanations are offered in in the Upaniṣads, such as in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 2.4.1: “In the beginning this world was Soul (Ātman) alone in the form of a Person... Since before (pūrva) all this world he burned up (√uṣ) all evils, therefore he is a person (pur-uṣ-a)” (Hume 63).

and separated out name and form⁷¹, thus creating the universe. Some creation stories begin with non-being, out of which being arose (see *R̥g-Veda* 10.73, *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 3.19, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*. 2.7). When these stories refer to *asat*, they do not mean *asat* as we have defined it, for nothing can come from this (e.g., nothing can come from the son of a barren woman); instead, these passages simply refer to the non-existence of the world as we know it—as Śankara writes, “Since in the world a thing is said to exist when it manifests itself through name and form, therefore, as a concession to common sense, the universe is said to be non-existent before being evolved through name and form.”⁷² Regardless of whether the First Being came out of non-being or not, all these cosmogonies teach that this whole world *is* the First Being. This is different than the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, in which God creates the world external to Himself; in these stories, the creator *is* creation.

To clarify the last point, let us look at the doctrine that the effect is non-different from its material cause. Śankara writes that this is proven by perception (when we see clay we perceive a pot); by reasoning (if one wants to make a pot, one must take up its well-established material cause, clay); and by the scriptures—on the last point, Śankara cites *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1: “In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being (*sat*)”⁷³, on which he comments, “In this passage we find that the word ‘this’, meaning the product (i.e. creation), is placed in apposition with Existence, from which fact the product is established to be both existing (in) and non-different (from the cause).”⁷⁴ If

⁷¹ Name and form is *nāmarupa*. Grimes writes, “In the Upaniṣads, the term is used in the sense of determinate forms and names as distinguished from the indeterminate indefinable reality” (200).

⁷² Gambhirananda, 339.

⁷³ Hume, 241.

⁷⁴ Gambhirananda, 345.

Brahman is the material cause of the world, and the effect is non-different than the material cause, then the world is non-different from Brahman, as clay is non-different from pots. If Brahman is ultimately real, then the world, too, must be ultimately, not just empirically, real. Śankara writes: “From the fact of non-difference before origin, it is understood that the effect must be non-different from the cause even after its birth. Just as Brahman, the cause, is never without existence in all three periods of time, so also the universe, which is the effect, never parts with Existence in all three periods.”⁷⁵ In supporting the ultimate existence of the world, is Śankara contradicting his earlier assertion that the world is not ultimately real? These two positions can be reconciled only if we distinguish between what is meant by “the world” in each case. The world is ultimately real *insofar as it is Brahman*, but this doesn’t entail that the world that we ordinarily experience is so. It is the ordinary experience of the world that fails to recognize Brahman; this “world-without-Brahman” is *asat*, for all is Brahman. To say there is a world-without-Brahman is as senseless as saying there is a round square. This is why Brahman-knowledge is eternal: by seeing the world, one inevitably sees Brahman. This is not lower knowledge, even for one who sees the world as divided, for supreme knowledge is seeing the unity *in* the difference (even if one only notices the difference).

Though there is non-difference between cause and effect, there must be some distinction between the state of creation and destruction—i.e., between Brahman and the world, or between the (material and efficient) cause and effect—even if only apparent, or else we would not talk about these two states at all. What differentiates pots from clay, jewelry from gold, waves from water? Name and form (*nāmarūpa*). This is what

⁷⁵ Ibid, 337.

differentiates the world of creation from unmanifest Brahman. Name and form are modifications within Brahman, not changes of Brahman. “Modification” and “change” must not be confounded. The wave is a modification within the water, but the water is unchanged upon forming a wave insofar as it is still just water. Likewise, name and form are modifications within Brahman, but Brahman is unchanged when manifested thus.

Śankara writes, “Name and form⁷⁶ which constitute the seeds of the entire expanse of phenomenal existence, and which are made by avidya, are, as it were, non-different from the omniscient God, and they are non-determinable either as real or unreal.”⁷⁷ Name and form are neither real nor unreal because they are not real from the perspective of liberation, but they are not unreal from the perspective of bondage—they are *mithyā*.

Śankara calls name and form “limiting adjuncts” (*upādhi*⁷⁸). *Upādhi* is defined by the *Monier-Williams Dictionary* as:

A substitute; anything which may be taken for or has the mere name or appearance as another thing, disguise; an attribute; title; limitation, qualification; condition; deception.

Śankara explains limiting adjuncts with an analogy: The sun spreads everywhere, but when it comes in contact with a limiting adjunct, such as finger, it seems to assume the form of that finger. Likewise, Brahman spreads everywhere, but seems to take on attributes when it comes into contact with the limiting adjuncts name and form. As the sunlight appears to change when it is reflected in changing water, so Brahman appears to change when it is seen in limiting adjuncts: “As light, space, the sun, etc. appear to be

⁷⁶ John Grimes writes, “Advaita Vedānta uses the term [nāmarupa] to indicate the phenomenally existent (*vyāvahārika*) universe” (200).

⁷⁷ Gambhirananda, 333-334.

⁷⁸ *Upādhi* is broken down to *upa* (“near to, at, on”) + *ā* (“near”) + *dhī* (“to think”).

diversified in relation to the activity taking place in such limiting adjuncts as a finger, a pail, water, etc., and yet they do not give up their natural unity, so also this difference in the Self is a creation of limiting adjuncts; but in Its own essence It is the one Self alone.”⁷⁹ When the limiting adjuncts are removed, Brahman remains.

There are two different ways that Brahman can be understood: Brahman as seen with attributes (i.e., in contact with limiting adjuncts), and Brahman without attributes. Śankara writes, “Brahman is known in two aspects—one as possessed of the limiting adjunct constituted by the diversities of the universe which is a modification of name and form, and the other devoid of all conditioning factors and opposed to the earlier.”⁸⁰ Śankara sometimes calls these two ways of understanding Brahman *saguṇa*-Brahman (“with-*guṇas*-Brahman”; often translated as “qualified Brahman”) and *nirguṇa*-Brahman (“without-*guṇas*-Brahman”; often translated as “unqualified Brahman”). It is important to keep in mind that these are not two kinds of Brahman, but two ways of understanding Brahman. *Saguṇa*-Brahman can be represented by sunlight on a finger, whereas *nirguṇa*-Brahman can be represented by sunlight itself. The sunlight is not different in either of these cases; what differs is the way in which it is understood. Śankara writes:

These [attributes assigned to Brahman in the Upaniṣads such as ‘having joy as head’] are imagined as means for concentrating the mind on the supreme Brahman, but they are not meant for realization (as actual characteristics)...Even though the Brahman to be meditated on is the same in all of them [i.e., in the meditating on different attributes described], yet the meditations differ according to the different contexts, and as such the attributes found in one are not to be transferred to another. Just as the two wives of a king may adore him in two ways—one with a chowrie (fly-whisk) and the other with an umbrella, and the behavior of the king may differ there according to the mode of adoration, although the person adored is the same, so also is the case here. The possession of intensive or felle attributes is possible in the case of the qualified Brahman

⁷⁹ Gambirananda, 630.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 62.

alone, with regard to whom dualistic ideas persist, but not so in the case of the unqualified supreme Brahman.⁸¹

Ultimately, Brahman does not have qualities, but it is only with qualities that Brahman can be spoken of and meditated on. *Saguṇa*-Brahman is Brahman limited by description and thought. Such a distinction is made in the *Upaniṣads* and *Gītā*, too, but it is expressed in terms on *śabda*-Brahman and *aśabda*-Brahman. I will expand on this in 2.1.

Śankara has given two very different kinds of analogies to explain the relation between Brahman and the world of creation. In the analogy of the sunlight on the finger, the sun and the finger are two different entities. This portrays the world of name and form as ultimately separate from Brahman and, therefore, as ultimately not real. In this case, limiting adjuncts are the product of *avidyā* and cover Brahman, as Śankara teaches here: “There occurs a covering up of the knowledge and Lordship of the soul owing to an error of non-distinction of the soul from the body etc., arising from its association with the limiting adjunct comprising the body etc., and created by name and form, which are conjured up by nescience.”⁸² This kind of analogy implies that the world of name and form is to be turned away from in order to find supreme knowledge. As the reflection of the sun distracts one from the sun itself, so it seems that name and form distract one from Brahman.

The analogies likening Brahman and the world to, respectively, waves and water (or pots and clay, or jewelry and gold), express the opposite: a unity between Brahman and its modifications. As the waves are non-different from water, so the world is non-different from Brahman. The wave is *within* the water and cannot exist separately. On a

⁸¹ Ibid, 664-665.

⁸² Ibid, 596.

wavy day, the only way to see the sea is by looking at the waves. This kind of analogy implies that, in the state of creation, the world of name and form is what reveals Brahman.

These two analogies seem to be at odds with one another. In the former, Brahman is seen by looking away from the world (you must turn away from the finger to see the sun); in the latter, Brahman is seen by looking at the world more closely (one sees the water by looking at waves). But they can be reconciled if we take the “world” in the former kind of analogy as ordinary experience of the world, *which does not look at it closely*. Ordinary experience of the world does not recognize Brahman. It is from this that we must turn away. We will continue to come back to this idea throughout this thesis.

1.4 Other Non-Dualist Views

We will now briefly discuss other schools of non-dualist thought. My intention is not to look at the way in which these schools of thought differ in details, as this would be like comparing index fingers to get a better understanding of that to which they are pointing; rather, it is to get a glimpse of that to which they are pointing from different perspectives. In particular, discussing these schools of thought will serve to reinforce the notion that liberation is eternally attained. This will distance this thesis from the familiar notion that we must strive towards becoming something. This is seen, for example, in the New Testament, which teaches that one should follow God’s example (Ephesians 5:1) and one should follow in Christ’s steps (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6). Becoming more God-like does not make sense, however, in a belief system in which all beings *are* God. In this

case, all that one can strive for is recognition of this. The goal is not to become something, but to release that which hides the eternal nature of the Self.

Zen Master Dōgen (13th century BCE), like Śāṅkara, sees liberation (referred to as enlightenment here) as eternally attained. He writes, “If there are birds or fish that try to enter the sky or water, they cannot find either a way or a place.”⁸³ Likewise, if we try to enter the state of enlightenment, we will not find a way, for one cannot enter the place where one already abides. Dōgen concludes, “If we understand this point, there is actualization of enlightenment in our daily life. If we attain this Way, all our actions are the actualization of enlightenment.”⁸⁴ Thus, enlightenment is not separate from daily life. Like Śāṅkara, Dōgen teaches the importance of knowledge of the self: “To learn the Buddhist Way is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to perceive oneself as all things.”⁸⁵ For both Śāṅkara and Dōgen, knowledge of the self is perceiving the self as all. They disagree, however, over the meaning of this. For Śāṅkara, the Self is the eternal, unchanging Brahman, whereas for Dōgen, the self is not permanent: “If you have right practice and return to your origin then you will clearly see that all things have no permanent self.”⁸⁶

The school of Madhyamaka (“Middlemost”) Buddhism, a branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism, also rejects a permanent self. Mādhyamikas⁸⁷ see the self—and all things—as empty. That things are empty means that they are without *svabhāva*. *Sva* means “own” and *bhāva* is a noun derived from the verbal root $\sqrt{bhū}$, “to be, become, arise”. Patāñjali

⁸³ Olson, 341.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 339.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Followers of Madhyamaka Buddhism.

gives three interpretations of *bhāva*, which Hideyo Ogawa outlines in *Process and Language: A Study of the Mahābhāṣya*:

- 1) *bhāva* as existence (*bhavanam bhāvaḥ*)
- 2) *bhāva* as something that comes into being (*bhavaīti bhāvaḥ*)
- 3) *bhāva* as something that is brought into being (*bhāvyate yaḥ sa bhāva iti*)⁸⁸

Only if we take the first interpretation of *bhāva* does “without *svabhāva*” entail “non-existent”. If we take the second or third interpretations, then “without *svabhāva*” means “without self-arising” (i.e., not coming into being autonomously)—this is the Madhyamaka interpretation of the term. This school accepts the doctrine of dependent origination, which teaches that nothing is causally autonomous. Because all things are causally interlinked, nothing has *svabhāva*. Thus, to say that the self is without *svabhāva* is not to say that there is no self, but that the self, like all beings, is causally interlinked to other beings. For the Mādhyamikas, bondage is perpetuated by clinging to the idea of the self. While it seems that Śāṅkara teaches the opposite—that bondage is perpetuated by ignorance of the Self—these teachings are actually similar if we clarify what is meant by the “self” in each case. Although Śāṅkara teaches that knowledge of the supreme Self (*ātman*) is liberation, he would agree that clinging to the individual subject—i.e., the notion of the self without Brahman—perpetuates bondage. Clinging to this illusory individual “self” perpetuates bondage because it hides the true nature of the Self as Brahman. The Madhyamaka teaching of no-self is not opposed to Advaita if we take “no-self” to mean “no-subject” rather than “no-*ātman*”.

⁸⁸ Hideyo Ogawa, *Process and Language: A Study of the Mahābhāṣya Ad A1.3.1 Bhūvādayo Dhātavaḥ* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), 129.

The Mahāyāna Buddhists have a notion similar to Śankara's *jīvan-mukta*, which they call a *bodhi-sattva* ("awakened-being"). The *Prajñāpāramitā-Hṛdaya* ("Heart of the Perfection of Understanding") *Sūtra* (350 CE) puts it as follows:

Because there is nothing to be attained, the Bodhisattva, relying on the Prajna Paramita [the Perfection of Understanding], has no obstruction in his mind.
Because there is no obstruction, he has no fear;
And, thus, he passes far beyond confused imagination
And reaches Ultimate Nirvana.⁸⁹

This passage teaches that a *bodhi-sattva* is not one who has attained liberation or enlightenment, as "there is nothing to be attained", but one who has overcome that which obstructs its recognition. Having overcome obstruction, a *bodhi-sattva* can face liberation without fear. When we look at the *Gītā*, we will see that this obstruction is attachment; therefore, Arjuna, still obstructed by attachment, trembled in the face of supreme knowledge. But a *bodhi-sattva* is one who, having passed beyond obstruction, and, therefore, beyond fear, stands firm in the recognition of supreme knowledge while living in the world.

The later school of Kaśmir Śaivism attempts to correct some philosophical problems encountered by Advaita. To explore this school of thought, we will look briefly at Kṣemarāja's *Pratyabhijñā-Hṛdayam* ("Heart of Recognition"), a text written in the 10th Century CE that overviews the *Pratyabhijñā* branch of Kaśmir Śaivism. While Śankara teaches that liberation is the identification of the *ātman* with Brahman, Kaśmir Śaivism teaches that liberation is identification of the individual with *cit*⁹⁰ (Universal Consciousness), which is also Śiva: "The experient or subject is identical with Śiva

⁸⁹ Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang, trans., *The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra* (New York: Sutra Translation Committee of the U.S. & Canada, 2000), 6-7.

⁹⁰ *Cit* can mean "to think", "to recognize", and "to shine" (Monier-Williams).

whose body is the universe.”⁹¹ As the world is Śiva’s body, Śiva is the material creator of this world, and therefore ultimately non-different from it. In this respect, Śaivism is reminiscent of Advaita.

Like Śankara, Kṣemarāja teaches that bondage is a mental state: “The condition of a *saṃsārin* (transmigrant)...is due to delusion (*vyāmohitatvam*⁹²) (which means) being nailed by various doubts created by the *śāstras* (scriptural texts), and worldly opinions.”⁹³ It is due to a state of mind, not a state of the world. In this school of thought, the knowing that is tied to liberation is called *pratyabhijñā*. *Prati* means “back, again, in return”, *abhi* means “over, towards, into”, and *jñā* means “to know”⁹⁴, so *pratyabhijñā* means “to return to knowledge”—i.e., to recognize. Liberation is the recognition of knowledge that is eternally present. If the universe is Śiva’s body, then everything is Śiva; therefore, it is meaningless to say that Śiva can be known, for Śiva (like Brahman) can never *not* be known. Śiva can, however, be recognized.

In Śaivism, liberation is the attainment of bliss of the spirit through recognition of one-ness with Śiva, called *samāveśa*⁹⁵ or *samādhi*⁹⁶. This occurs in a trance-like state. This trance is only temporary, as one must return to daily activities in order to survive. It is followed by the return to the world, called *vyutthāna* (“rising up”). This is the return to daily activities. Unlike the trance-state in which the senses are withdrawn, in *vyutthāna*,

⁹¹ Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijñāhrdayam* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963), 45.

⁹² *Vyāmohitvatva* is broken down to *vi* (“divided, asunder, apart, different”) + *ā* (“near, towards”) + *mohita* (“stupefied, bewildered, infatuated, deluded”; past passive participle *moha*, from the verbal root *muh*, “to become stupefied or unconscious, to be mistaken; to become confused”) + *tva* (-ness).

⁹³ *Ibid*, 67.

⁹⁴ We will explore the meaning of *jñā* in more detail in Section 3.4.

⁹⁵ *Samāveśa* is translated by the *Monier-Williams Dictionary* as “entering together”. This is broken down into *sam* (together) + *ā* (near, towards) + *veśa* (entrance).

⁹⁶ *Samādhi* is likely composed of *sam* (together) + *ā* (near, towards) + *dhā* (placing, putting), so a possible literal translation is “putting together”.

one puts the senses out into the world. Though the initial trance-state is temporary, permanent *samādhi* can be maintained while moving about the world if one continues to recognize *cit*: “In vyutthāna which is full of the after-effects of *samādhi*, there is the attainment of permanent *samādhi* by dwelling on one’s identity with *cit* (the universal, supreme consciousness) over and over again.”⁹⁷ Śaivism thus has the notion of living liberation, but this school does not encounter the same problems as Śankara since recognition in Śaivism does not entail the disappearance of the world. Living liberation is the enjoyment of the world, which is the manifestation of Śiva. Liberation is not confined to the initial moment of recognition, but finding steadiness in it while living in the world: “That firmness of consciousness of identity with *cit* is *jīvanmukti*, i.e. liberation of one who is still alive i.e. who still retains his vital breaths, which (i.e. liberation) is due to the complete dissolution of the fetters (of ignorance) on the recognition of one’s true nature.”⁹⁸ Though all are always liberated, it is only a *jīvan-mukta* who can stand firm in this recognition. Śankara’s notion of living liberation can be saved if, like the Śaivas, he allows for unity and difference. Therefore, it is not the world of multiplicity that is removed with Brahman-recognition, but the unreal world-without-Brahman.

1.5 The Covering of Brahman

The unity underlying the multiplicity—which I will call Brahman for now—is not covered by name and form, but rather by attachment to name and form *alone*. *Avidyā* is not mistaking the world as real, but failing to recognize that Brahman underlies it. It is both the non-recognition of Brahman and the mis-recognition of the Self—i.e.,

⁹⁷ Ibid, 91.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 80.

identifying the Self with the body alone, or with one’s subjectivity (*aham-kāra*). The world-without-Brahman is unreal—it is *asat*, like the son of a barren woman, for nothing can exist apart from Brahman. As we have seen, we are not only eternally liberated but we also always have supreme Brahman-knowledge. Just as it is impossible to see waves without seeing water, it is impossible to see the world without seeing Brahman. *Avidyā* is not the absence of Brahman-knowledge, which is eternal, but the non-recognition of Brahman in ordinary experience. It is not the world that is sublated (removed) by Brahman, but the empty⁹⁹ conception of the world that does not recognize Brahman.

Though the world of name and form covers Brahman insofar as it distracts from the unity underlying it, it is also only in the world of name and form that Brahman is revealed. As clay pots do not disappear with the recognition that they are clay, so the world of name and form does not disappear with recognition that it is Brahman. Rather than taking the rope and snake to represent, respectively, Brahman and the world, which entails that the world disappears upon recognition of Brahman, we should take them to represent, respectively, recognition and *avidyā*, for these are mutually exclusive. It is not Brahman and the world that cannot coexist, but recognition and non-recognition.

Why does ordinary experience cover Brahman? This is where we turn to the *Gītā*. Kṛṣṇa bestowed on Arjuna a divine eye, with which Arjuna saw Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self: “There Arjuna beheld, standing as one, the entire universe, divided in many ways, in the body of the God of Gods” (11.13). Arjuna saw the unity underlying the multiplicity; in this moment, he recognized the supreme knowledge. Yet he responded with fear and confusion, saying, “Having seen the previously unseen, I am excited and my mind is

⁹⁹ By “empty”, I do not mean the Buddhist notion of “without *svabhāva*”. The empty conception of the world is the one that does not recognize that beings are Brahman.

trembling with fear. Cause me to see, O God, the form. Have mercy, O Lord of Gods, O World-Abode” (11.45). Why could Arjuna not stand firm in supreme knowledge? Why did he fall back to ignorance? In the following chapters, I will argue that Arjuna was not prepared to face supreme knowledge because he was unpractised in non-attachment.

CHAPTER 2: The *Bhagavad-Gītā*

2.1 Brahman and Kṛṣṇa

To transition to the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, let us begin by considering the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Brahman. Some scholars, including R.C. Zaehner, argue that Kṛṣṇa is beyond, or greater than, Brahman in the *Gītā*. He writes that the *Isā* and *Śvetāśvatara* Upaniṣads set the foundation for the *Gītā*'s notion of a God that is beyond Brahman: “Brahman, then, is the ‘All’: but in these two Upanishads a personal God appears, and He is greater and ‘other’ than the All¹⁰⁰... This, in the main, seems to be the position of the *Gītā*.”¹⁰¹ Zaehner supports the last point by citing *Gītā* 14.3, “[Kṛṣṇa said,] My womb is the Great Brahman” and 14.27, “[Kṛṣṇa said,] I am the base (*pratiṣṭhā*) of Brahman.” Zaehner also notes that in 4.24 Brahman is the sacrifice, whereas in 5.29 and 9.24 Kṛṣṇa is the recipient of the sacrifice.

Despite these verses that may imply that Kṛṣṇa is other than Brahman, Kṛṣṇa is identified with the *para*-Brahman. This is most explicit in 10.12, when Arjuna says to Kṛṣṇa, “The *para*-Brahman, the *para*-Abode, the *para*-Purifier is You.” Moreover, Arjuna’s description of Kṛṣṇa in 11.16 is very similar to Kṛṣṇa’s description of the *para*-

¹⁰⁰ Zaehner justifies this claim by citing *Isā* 9-10 and *Śvetāśvatara* 5.1 (Zaehner 37). That there is a God that is greater than Brahman is far from evident in the verses:

Blind darkness enter they who revere the uncompounded:
Into a darkness blinder yet [go they] who delight in the compounded.
Other, they say, than what becomes, other, they say, than what does not become:
So from wise men we have heard who instructed us therein. (*Isā* 9-10)

In the imperishable, infinite city of Brahman two things there are—
Wisdom and unwisdom, hidden, established there:
Perishable is unwisdom, but wisdom is immortal:
Who over wisdom and unwisdom rules, He is Another (*Śvetāśvatara* 5.1)

¹⁰¹ R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā: With a Commentary Based on the Original Sources* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 36-37.

Brahman in 13.13: Both are said to be all-pervasive, having organs everywhere in the universe. Zaehner, translating *para*-Brahman as “highest Brahman”, writes:

There would indeed seem to be no point in drawing a distinction between the *highest* Brahman and Krishna...He is the *highest* Brahman (10.12) and therefore distinct from and higher than the Brahman of the *Īsā* and *Śvetāśvatara* Upanishads...It can be said that in the *Gītā* Brahman is the ‘All’, both temporal and eternal, while the ‘highest’ Brahman is identical with the personal God, Krishna, who transcends both.¹⁰²

The identification of Kṛṣṇa with the *para*-Brahman is meaningless if we do not consider what is meant by “*para*-Brahman”. *Para* has a multitude of meanings, including:

Distant, beyond; previous; ancient; future; final; exceeding; better or worse than, superior or inferior to, highest, supreme.¹⁰³

Para is a difficult word to translate. Not only are there many possible meanings, but some are in opposition, such as “previous and future”, and “superior to and inferior to”.

“Beyond” is perhaps the best rendering, as it encompasses these scattered meanings. If we take this translation, then to call Kṛṣṇa the *para*-Brahman is to call him the *beyond*-Brahman; in this case, it seems right to say that Kṛṣṇa is beyond Brahman. But if Kṛṣṇa is other than Brahman, then Brahman in the *Gītā* is not the All, for “other than the All” is a contradiction in terms. If there is something other than Brahman, then what is meant by Brahman in the *Gītā*?

In 6.44, Kṛṣṇa speaks of a Brahman that can be transcended—the *śabda*-Brahman: “Even he who wishes to know yoga transcends¹⁰⁴ the *śabda*-Brahman.” *Śabda* means, “Sound, tone, word, language, speech.”¹⁰⁵ Although the *śabda*-Brahman is not

¹⁰² Ibid, 38.

¹⁰³ Monier-Williams.

¹⁰⁴ “Transcends” is *ativartate*. The prefix *ati* means “beyond, over” and the verb root \sqrt{vrt} means “to turn, dwell, move, be”.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

discussed further in the *Gītā*, it is expounded in *Maitri Upaniṣad* 6.22 (translated here as “sound-Brahma”):

Now, it has elsewhere been said: “Verily, there are two Brahmas to be meditated upon: sound and non-sound. Now non-sound is revealed only by sound.” Now, in this case the sound-Brahma is *Om*. Ascending by it, one comes to an end in the non-sound...

Passing beyond this variously characterised [sound-Brahma], men disappear in the supreme, the non-sound, the unmanifest Brahma. There they are unqualified, indistinguishable, like the various juices which have reached the condition of honey. For thus has it been said:—

There are two Brahmas to be known:
Sound-Brahma, and what higher is.
Those people who sound-Brahma know,
Unto the higher Brahma they go.¹⁰⁶

This verse teaches that *aśabda*-Brahman (non-sound Brahman) is beyond *śabda*-Brahman. *Śabda*-Brahman is *Om*, the sacred syllable that begins and ends many invocations. *Śabda*-Brahman is Brahman insofar as it is spoken of and heard about. It is Brahman expressed by language, but Brahman is ultimately beyond description; thus, the *śabda*-Brahman is to be transcended. But this verse also teaches that *aśabda*-Brahman is only revealed by *śabda*-Brahman. *Śabda*-Brahman is not to be ignored, for one can only start to understand *aśabda*-Brahman through description. If an ordinary person hears nothing about Brahman, they will go about their daily activities in ignorance. Though Brahman is beyond description, description is what points towards Brahman. For example, *Gītā* 13.12—“The beginningless supreme Brahman is not being (*sat*), not non-being (*asat*), it is said”—does not describe Brahman, but its strangeness may startle one out of the familiar. While this verse is not a statement of a fact, it is a push toward recognition.

¹⁰⁶ Hume, 437-438.

There is a two-fold nature of language: language is to be transcended, but it is only in language that the Ultimate Reality is revealed. Though the limitation of language is acknowledged in ancient Indian thought, language is also seen as sacred. Speech, Vāk, is a god in the *Ṛg-Veda*:

When men, Brhaspati, giving names to objects, sent out Vak's first and earliest utterances,
All that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was disclosed through their affection... (10.71.1)
One man hath ne'er seen Vak, and yet he seeth: one man hath hearing but hath never heard her.
But to another hath she shown her beauty as a fond well-dressed woman to her husband. (10.71.4)¹⁰⁷

Vāk is the divine that underlies language. It is words that reveal Vāk, for her utterances are expressed through men's naming¹⁰⁸ of things; yet one can read and hear words without seeing or hearing (i.e., noticing) Vāk if one sees language as purely instrumental. Thus, Vāk is revealed only to some. The relationship between Brahman and the world parallels the relationship to Vāk and human language. As name and form are limiting adjuncts of Brahman, so sound and letters are limiting adjuncts of Vāk. As Brahman is revealed in the world of name and form, so Vāk is revealed in letters and sounds. But the ordinary understanding of language is empty, in that it does not recognize of Vāk (just as the empty understanding of the world fails to recognize Brahman). As name and form both reveals and conceals Brahman, letters and sounds both reveal and conceal Vāk. Words need not be ignored to see Vāk, but rather understood more fully .

The connection between Brahman and Vāk is not merely one of similarity—*Kena Upaniṣad* 1.4 teaches that Brahman is that which underlies language:

¹⁰⁷ Griffith, 458.

¹⁰⁸ The Sanskrit word for “to name”, *udāhṛ*, is broken down to *ud* (up) + *ā* (near, towards) + *hṛ* (to carry)—“to carry towards”.

That which by speech (*vāc*) is not risen,
By which speech is raised—
That, indeed, perceive to be Brahman,
Not this that they worship.¹⁰⁹

Although Brahman is inexpressible with language, Brahman underlies it; therefore, although language cannot describe Brahman, it nevertheless reveals Brahman. But when speech is burdened with instrumentality, Brahman is unrecognized in it, and language usage falls into error. The grammarian, Bhartṛhari (5th century CE), teaches that grammar is “nearest to that Brahman”, and is what clears the way for liberation:

The wise say that grammar, nearest to that Brahman and the foremost spiritual training is the most important (of such) subsidiary texts of the Veda. (10.11)
It is a direct path towards that holiest of lights, that supreme essence of the kind of speech which has assumed distinctions of form. (10.12)
Words are the sole guide to the truths about the behavior of objects, and there is no understanding of the truth of words without grammar. (10.13)
A gateway to liberation, a cure to the blemishes of speech, purifier of all (other) disciplines, it shines as being applied to them. (10.14)¹¹⁰

As Brahman is revealed in the world, so Vāk is revealed in human language. The world of name and form distracts from Brahman when one is caught up in the attainment of ends, but the world is also where Brahman is revealed. Likewise, letters and words distract from Vāk when they are used as instruments, but it is in words that Vāk is revealed. It is not the world of name and form that needs to be transcended, but the empty conception of the world that fails to recognize Brahman. Likewise, it is not human language that needs to be transcended, but empty, instrumental language that fails to

¹⁰⁹ My translation. This Upaniṣad also teaches that Brahman is not heard, but is that by which one hearing is heard; not seen, but that by which sight is seen; not thought of, but that by which the mind is thought. Though Brahman is beyond the senses, Brahman is also revealed by the senses because It is what underlies sense experience.

¹¹⁰ K. Raghavan Pillai, *Studies in the Vākyapadīya Vol 1: The Vākyapadīya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), 2-3.

recognize the divine which underlies it. To transcend the *śabda*-Brahman is not to turn away from it, but to look at it more closely.¹¹¹

There are two senses to Kṛṣṇa, as well: There is Kṛṣṇa as the friend and charioteer of Arjuna, who can be described as beautiful, dark-skinned, ornamented, etc., and there is Kṛṣṇa as revealed in Book XI—the majestic form (*rūpam āśvaram*), the imperishable Self (*ātmānam avyayam*). Though called the “majestic form” (11.9) by Saṁjaya, this is not really a form at all, for when Arjuna was overcome by fear, he said, “Cause me to see, O God, the form” (11.45)¹¹², implying that what Arjuna was seeing was beyond form altogether. Though Saṁjaya’s description is flawed, this is inevitable, for Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self is beyond description. Though Kṛṣṇa as understood in description must be transcended for that which is beyond human language, this is not done by turning away from Kṛṣṇa the charioteer. When Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa who knows *yoga* better, one who is present with Kṛṣṇa, or one who is present with (*upāsate*¹¹³) the “eternal unmanifest” (*akṣaram avyaktam*¹¹⁴), Kṛṣṇa replies:

Those who, having caused the mind to enter me, continually yoked to me, are present with me (*upāsate*);

With supreme trust, they are thought the most yoked by me. (12.2).

But those who are fully present with (*paryupāsate*) the imperishable, not-to-be-shown, unmanifest, Everywhere-going, not-to-be-thought-of, summit-standing, unmoving, unchangeable, (12.3)

Having held down the multitude of senses, even-minded everywhere,

They reach me indeed, delighting in the welfare of all beings. (12.4)

¹¹¹ As we will later see, this means looking at it without attachment.

¹¹² This is translated by Sargeant as “Show me that form, O God, in which You originally appeared” (497), but the text just says *rūpam*, “form”.

¹¹³ *Upāsate* often translated as “worship” or “honour”. The word is from *upa* (by the side of, with; near to, at, on) + *√ās* (to be present; to exist; to inhabit, dwell in), so “exist with”, “be present near”, “dwell in”, etc. are more literal. “Worship” and “honour” suggest a distance between worshipper and worshiped, whereas “be present”, “dwell in”, etc. suggest togetherness.

¹¹⁴ “Unmanifest” is *avyakta*, the past passive participle of *a* (“not”) + *vi* (“divided, asunder, apart, different”) + *√āñj* (“to anoint, decorate”). *Vyakya* and *avyakta* are explained in the Markandeya-Samasya Parva of the *Mahābhātata* (202, 11): “Whatever is created by the senses is known as the manifest. Whatever cannot be grasped by the senses bears the mark of the unmanifest” (Bibek Debroy’s translation).

The trouble is greater of those whose thoughts cling to the unmanifest.
For the unmanifest is a difficult goal to reach by the embodied. (12.5)

The eternal unmanifest is Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable self that is beyond the senses and language; it is the *para*-Brahman. Both those who are present with (*upāsate*) this eternal unmanifest and Kṛṣṇa the charioteer reach the supreme goal. But those who are present with the unmanifest have more trouble reaching the goal. Kṛṣṇa may be simply teaching that it is better to keep the mind on a being with name and form because it is easier to do so; after all, it seems easier to keep the mind on something that can be grasped by the senses—especially since the mind is one of the senses. But I argue there is more to it than this. It is easier to still the mind when one has cut off the senses from the world. When one meditates in a trance-like state that shuts out the world of name and form, one is present with the unmanifest. But such a person is vulnerable to fall from recognition upon going back to daily activities. One who finds recognition *in* the world—i.e., by recognizing a being with name and form (Kṛṣṇa the charioteer) as the All—is better prepared to stand firm in recognition when moving about the world. By exalting a personal God with name and form, the *Gītā* teaches that supreme knowledge should be recognized in—not apart from—the world of name and form.

Whether some passages in the *Gītā* imply that Kṛṣṇa is other than Brahman is unimportant to our purpose. Kṛṣṇa and Brahman are both the All, as is any being when seen with supreme knowledge. As “by one piece of clay everything made of clay may be known” (*Ch. VI. i. 4*)¹¹⁵, so by recognizing any one being as the All, one recognizes all beings as the All. If all is ultimately non-dual, then it is meaningless to say that one being is beyond another. We can, however, say that one *understanding* of ultimate reality is

¹¹⁵ Hume, 240.

beyond another: the understanding that is rooted in the world of name and form is beyond that which is removed from it.

2.2 The Soteriology of the *Gītā*

Kṛṣṇa teaches that remembering Him allows for finding Him, which entails liberation from *saṃsāra*:

He who never thinks of another, who always remembers (*smarati*¹¹⁶) me,
For him, the always-yoked yogin, I am easy to find (*labha*¹¹⁷), Pārtha. (8.14)
Coming near to me, the great selves do not reach rebirth, the impermanent home
of misery,
Having gone to final perfection (*siddhi*). (8.15)

Perfection—*siddhi*—also means “readiness”. Perfection does not mean becoming something,¹¹⁸ but being prepared to see the eternal nature of the Self. That Kṛṣṇa is to be “found” means he is always here, but hidden. Going near to Kṛṣṇa is not a goal¹¹⁹ in the sense that it is “yet-to-be attained”, but rather “yet-to-be-recognized”, for all beings dwell in Kṛṣṇa, as Kṛṣṇa teaches throughout the *Gītā* and reveals in Book XI.

Though Kṛṣṇa says that all beings dwell in Him, he also says that all beings do not dwell in him:

By me, this whole world is extended¹²⁰ by the unmanifest form,
All beings dwell in me, and I do not dwell in them. (9.4)
And beings are not dwelling in me. Behold my lordly *yoga*!
Bearing beings and not dwelling in beings, my Self causing beings to be. (9.5)
As in space dwells eternally the mighty wind, going everywhere,
So all beings dwell in me. Consider this! (9.6)

¹¹⁶ *Smarati* is from the verbal root \sqrt{smr} , “to remember, recollect, bear in mind, call to mind, think of, be mindful of” (Monier-Williams). This is tied to the mind (*manas*) and is not the supreme recognition, but for Him, Kṛṣṇa is easy to find. Though the *manas* is not the faculty of supreme knowledge, it can nonetheless help someone approach its recognition.

¹¹⁷ *Labha* can also mean “catch, seize, meet with” (Monier-Williams).

¹¹⁸ See Section 1.4.

¹¹⁹ The Sanskrit word for “goal” is *gati* (literally, “going”), which can also mean “way”.

¹²⁰ “Extended” is *tata*, the past passive participle of *tan*, “to extend, spread, diffuse, shine, stretch, display” (Monier-Williams).

All beings dwell in Kṛṣṇa, for Kṛṣṇa is everywhere. But beings that are bound by ignorance do not recognize this, and in this sense (i.e., from their perspective), they are not in Kṛṣṇa. Entering Kṛṣṇa is a “goal” only from the perspective of ignorance, but from the perspective of supreme knowledge, it has always been attained. The only true goal is standing firm in recognition of this.

At times, it seems that Kṛṣṇa teaches that being Brahman (i.e., recognizing that the Self is Brahman) and entering Kṛṣṇa are different. This distinction is the clearest in the following passage, where Kṛṣṇa says that one knows and enters Him *after* becoming Brahman:

Brahman-been (*brahmabhūtaḥ*), the serene Self does not mourn, does not desire,
The same in all beings, devoted to me, he attains the *para*. (18.54)
With devotion he approaches knowing me, how great and who I am from that-
ness (*tattvata*),
Then, having known me from that-ness, he enters immediately. (18.55)

What might this distinction between being Brahman and entering Kṛṣṇa mean? When one is in bondage, one moves about in the world of name and form without recognizing the unity that underlies it. Though recognition of the supreme knowledge happens *in* the world, there must be an initial “stepping away” from (ordinary experience of) the world at the moment of recognition.¹²¹ In this moment, one recognizes oneself as Brahman. But this moment must be followed by a return to the world. This is not a return in the sense of going back to a place one left, as one never really left the world. Rather, it is a settling down from the initial shock of recognition in order to resume daily life activities, which

¹²¹ In Kāśmīr Śaivism, this is the trance-state of *samādhi*, in which the senses are removed from the world. But this “stepping away” from the world doesn’t need to be a trance-state; rather, it can be any moment in which one is shaken so far outside of everyday experience that one recognizes Brahman.

one must undertake in order to survive.¹²² These worldly activities, though necessary, tempt attachment to fruits, sense objects, etc. to return, for the world is caught up with such concerns. This attachment obstructs recognition.¹²³ This is why, during the battle of Kurukṣetra, Arjuna quickly encountered the same doubts that he claimed to have overcome at the end of the *Gītā*: When it was time for Arjuna to fight his wise grandsire Bhiṣma, he hung down his head and said, “To acquire sovereignty with hell in the end, having slain those who should not be slain, or the woes of an exile in the woods, which of these should I achieve?”¹²⁴ Even when Kṛṣṇa again encouraged Arjuna to fight, Arjuna fought mildly. Arjuna fell back into *avidyā* because he was not prepared to stand firm in recognition while engaging in worldly activities.¹²⁵

Being Brahman is the initial moment of recognition, whereas entering Kṛṣṇa is living in the world of name and form *while* being Brahman. Entering Kṛṣṇa is, in other words, seeing the world of multiplicity without failing to recognize the unity that underlies it. One who has entered Kṛṣṇa sees both unity and difference, and is thus a *jīvan-mukta*—one who lives in the world while liberated (or, more specifically, one who lives in the world while standing firm in the recognition that one is eternally liberated).

Being Brahman does not necessitate entering Kṛṣṇa. As we saw in 18.54-55, there are further requirements (having a serene self, non-mourning, non-desiring, etc.). One can experience the initial moment of recognition (being Brahman), as Arjuna did, but fall from it (i.e., not enter Kṛṣṇa) if one is unable to maintain this recognition in the

¹²² Kṛṣṇa makes note of this in 3.8: “The maintenance of your body could not be accomplished without action.”

¹²³ In Chapter 3, we will consider why attachment obstructs recognition.

¹²⁴ Pratāpacandra Rāya, *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa: Bhisma Parva* (Calcutta: Bharata, 1887), 387.

¹²⁵ It is important to keep in mind that Arjuna, still attached to his subjectivity, was not a *jīvan-mukta*. There is no backsliding to *avidyā* for one who is completely unattached.

world of name and form. One cannot maintain this recognition if one is distracted by desire, the attainment of fruits, one's subjectivity, etc. Though Arjuna attained the momentary recognition of the unity of beings in Book XI, he fell from recognition due to fear and confusion. The supreme goal is not just the *moment* of recognition, but finding firmness in it while living in the world.

If the supreme goal is standing firm in recognition, then what is meant by liberation in the *Gītā*? Recall, the *Gītā* mentions liberation from various things: from rebirth (*janma-bandha*) (2.51), from fault (*kilbiṣa*) (3.13), from action (*karma*) or the bonds of action (*karma-bandha*) (3.31, 4.28), from misfortune (*aśubha*) (4.16, 9.1), from the body (*śarīra*) (5.23), from old age and dying (*jarā-maraṇa*) (5.29), and from evil (*pāpa*) (10.3). These are connected: Freedom from rebirth and from old age/dying are both freedom from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of death and rebirth. When one is free from action, one acts without attachment to fruits, and therefore is free from fault, for one acts out of duty alone. Such a person is also free from misfortune because they are the same in fortune and misfortune. Freedom from action is freedom from *saṃsāra* because it is attachment to actions that perpetuates *saṃsāra*.¹²⁶ In 9.28, Kṛṣṇa teaches that one who is liberated from the bonds of action goes to Him:

From good and evil fruits, from the bonds of action (*karma-bandha*) thus you will be liberated (*mokṣyase*),
Renunciation-yoga-yoked-self (*saṃnyāsa-yoga-yukta-ātmā*), liberated (*vimuktaḥ*),
you will come to me. (9.28)

The bonds of action are the source of fear in the face of supreme knowledge, for bondage to action is attachment to the fruits of action, which is rooted in attachment to one's

¹²⁶ We will look at this further in Section 3.3.

subjectivity.¹²⁷ When one is attached to subjectivity, one is attached to the empty understanding of the world (i.e., the “world-without-Brahman”), which is opposed by supreme knowledge. Liberated from the bonds of action, one is prepared to face recognition without fear, for one is no longer attached to the understanding of the world that is undermined by supreme knowledge. Liberation from the bonds of action is, therefore, preparation for the supreme goal. Kṛṣṇa teaches that liberation from *saṃsāra*, which is also called liberation from birth-bondage (*janma-bandha*, 2.51) or rebirthlessness (*apunar-āvṛttim*, 5.17), is not attained by those who do not reach Him, for they are in the “death-*saṃsāra* path” (9.3). However, one who has attained Kṛṣṇa (in other words, one who can stand firm in the recognition while in the world) is liberated from *saṃsāra*, for such a person has released attachment to subjectivity, and is, therefore, free from the repeated birth of the subject.

2.3 Kṛṣṇa’s Imperishable Self

In Book IX of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna what he calls the “supreme secret” (*guhyaatama*) that is “knowledge (*jñāna*) and discrimination (*vijñāna*) put together” (9.1). *Vijñāna* is often translated as “understanding”, but the prefix *vi* generally means “divided, apart, asunder”, so “divided-knowledge” or “discrimination” are better translations.¹²⁸ “Divided-knowledge” in this context may mean the knowledge of beings as divided; in other words, knowledge of the world of multiplicity. If so, then one who hears the “supreme secret” hears of both the being-together (*jñāna*) and being-divided (*vijñāna*) of beings, which is the supreme knowledge of the unity underlying the multiplicity. Having

¹²⁷ More on this in Section 3.3.

¹²⁸ In the Sāṃkhya school of thought, *vijñāna* refers to discrimination between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, which is considered to be supreme knowledge.

known (*jñātvā*) this secret, one is released from misfortune (*aśubha*) (9.1). However, hearing about this is not the same as recognizing it. Likewise, though Kṛṣṇa has described Himself extensively up to Book XI—he is all-pervasive, higher than the *guṇas*, that which causes beings to be, the origin and dissolution of the entire universe—hearing *about* Kṛṣṇa is not recognizing Kṛṣṇa. As we have seen, one must ultimately go deeper than description. Knowing this, Arjuna asked to *see*:

Thus as you have said of the Self¹²⁹, O Supreme Lord,
I desire to see (*draṣṭum*) Your majestic form (*rūpam āiśvaram*), O Supreme
Puruṣa. (11.3)
If you think that it is possible for me to see (*draṣṭum*) this, O Lord,
O Prince of Yoga, then cause to be seen (*darśaya*) the imperishable Self (*atmāna*
avyaya) for me¹³⁰. (11.4)

Rāmānuja notes that *avyaya*—literally *a* (“not”) + *vyaya* (“perishable”)—can mean “completely”, and suggests that Arjuna is saying here, “Reveal everything about Yourself to me.”¹³¹ This imperishable Self cannot be experienced by the ordinary human senses, for these grasp objects; therefore, Arjuna needed a divine eye (*divya cakṣu*) to see this:

[Kṛṣṇa said:]
But you are not able to see (*draṣṭum*) me with this indeed, your own eye,
A divine eye I give for you, behold (*pasya*) my lordly yoga! (11.8)

Samjaya, the narrator of the *Gītā*¹³², proceeds to describe what he sees. How could Samjaya (and in 11.20 “the three worlds”) have seen this? Rāmānuja suggests that other beings were granted clairvoyance by Kṛṣṇa as a way of demonstrating his power to Arjuna.¹³³ If we look at the Sanskrit, the text supports this possibility. First, in 11.8 Kṛṣṇa

¹²⁹ This is often translated as “yourself”, but it is not in the genitive (possessive) case; hence, I have chosen “the Self”. After all, the true Self belongs to no one; it is the Self of all beings.

¹³⁰ Or, “of me”.

¹³¹ Sri Rama Rāmānuja Achari, ed., *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā with Gītā Bhāṣya of Bhagavad Rāmānujācārya*, (Blacktown: Srimatham, 2013), 132.

¹³² Samjaya had been gifted with the ability to witness the events of the battle from afar to report them to the blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

¹³³ Ibid, 135.

did not say that he was giving the eye “for” Arjuna: the word used is *te*, the short form of the singular dative and genitive cases of *yusmad*, meaning either “for you” or “of you”. Secondly, in 11.4, Arjuna did not ask Kṛṣṇa to show the form “to” him: the word used is *me*, the short form of the singular dative and genitive cases of *asmad* (“for me”, “of me”). If we translate this in the dative case, then Arjuna is asking for Kṛṣṇa to reveal the imperishable Self *for* him, which does not entail that it would be revealed only *to* him—it could have been revealed to the three worlds on Arjuna’s behalf.¹³⁴ If we translate this in the genitive case, then Arjuna recognizes that the imperishable Self of Kṛṣṇa is also his own Self—and the Self of all beings. Neither translation implies that Arjuna was the only one who saw the imperishable Self.¹³⁵

Samjaya describes Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self as follows:

Not one mouth or eye, not one wondrous aspect,
 Not one divine ornament, not one uplifted divine weapon, (11.10)
 Wearing divine garland and garment, with divine perfumes and ointments,
 Made up of all marvels is the deity, endless, facing in all directions.¹³⁶ (11.11)

Arjuna then gives a similar description, saying that Kṛṣṇa has many arms, bellies, faces, eyes, mouths, arms, thighs, feet, and tusks. To understand the significance of these descriptions, we must keep in mind that the dialogue of the *Gītā* takes place between two stationed armies, the soldiers of which are decorated with ornaments and armed with weapons. Samjaya calls Kṛṣṇa “endless” (*ananta*), so He must encompass all. Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self is not an excessively ornamented, armed, and limbed version of Kṛṣṇa

¹³⁴ This is not to say that the grace of God is necessary for the moment of “seeing”. This moment of recognition is instigated by any shock out of ordinary experience of the world.

¹³⁵ Granted, the dative case can be used to refer to the indirect object, so it would not be grammatically incorrect to translate these as “to you” and “to me”; however, this translation conflicts with the other parts of the text.

¹³⁶ This is similar to Krishna’s description of the *para-Brahman* in 13.13: “Everywhere hand and foot, this, everywhere, eye, head and face, everywhere in the world having hearing, having covered all, it stands.”

the charioteer; instead, the imperishable Self encompasses all the ornaments, weapons, and limbs of the soldiers on the battlefield. Arjuna sees “there one-standing, the entire universe divided (*pravibhakta*) in not one way In the body of the God of Gods” (11.13). Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self is not a magnificent being that stands between the two armies; rather the armies (and the whole universe) stand in Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self.

In facing supreme knowledge, Arjuna and the three words were filled with fear:

“[Arjuna said,] Having seen [your great form] the worlds are trembling and so am I” (11.23).¹³⁷ Finally, Arjuna asked to return to blindness to it:

Having seen the previously unseen, I am excited and my mind is trembling with fear.

Cause me to see, O God, the form. Have mercy, O Lord of Gods, O World-Abode. (11.45)

Moreover, as we saw in Section 2.2, he was later struck by the same doubts that he had overcome in the *Gītā*. Though Arjuna recognized the supreme knowledge that is liberation¹³⁸, he was not prepared to stand firm in it. In the next chapter, we will look into what prepares someone to face supreme knowledge without fear.

¹³⁷ See also *Gītā* 11.24, 11.25, 11.29.

¹³⁸ This recognition was not complete: Though Arjuna saw the oneness of all other beings, he could not have seen himself as part of this unity, at least not fully; for if his self had been totally identified with Brahman, he could not have been attached to his subjectivity.

CHAPTER 3: The Path to Steadiness in Recognition

3.1 Ancient and Modern Commentary

The interpretation that there are various paths (*mārgas*) to the supreme goal for different kinds of people is found in most commentary on the *Gītā*. Usually three or four paths are suggested: *jñāna-yoga* (knowledge), *bhakti-yoga* (devotion), *karma-yoga* (action), and sometimes *rāja-yoga* or *dhyāna-yoga* (meditation). In *Gnosis and the Question of Thought in Vedānta*, Arapura writes the divisions of the paths was first set by Rāmānuja, who “favoured the division of the 18 chapters of the *Gītā* into three arbitrary groups of six chapters (*śaṭaka*) each, under gnosis (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and action (*karma*).”¹³⁹ However, this notion of different paths for different kinds of people is expounded even earlier by Śankara, who writes that Kṛṣṇa assigned the path of *jñāna* to the Sāṃkhyaans and *karma* to the yogins (see *Gītā* 3.3), so “two distinct paths have been shown by the Lord, seeing the impossibility of Jnana and Karma being conjoined in one and the same person simultaneously, the one being based upon the idea of non-agency and unity, and the other on the idea of agency and multiplicity.”¹⁴⁰ Though Śankara sets the foundation for the interpretation that there are different paths for different kinds of people, he does not, like later commentators, see these paths as separately leading to the supreme goal; *karma* and *bhakti* lead to *jñāna*, which is the only path that leads to the supreme goal: He writes, “Devotion to action is a means to the end, not directly, but only as leading to devotion to knowledge; whereas the latter, which is attained by means of devotion to action, leads to the goal directly, without extraneous help.”¹⁴¹ Rāmānuja also

¹³⁹ Arapura, 98.

¹⁴⁰ Sastri, 18.

¹⁴¹ Sastri, 82.

acknowledges the inseparability of the paths. In the *Vedārtha Saṃgraha*, he writes that the final step to attaining Brahman is *bhakti* for its own sake, which “is an absolute delight in itself and which is meditation that has taken on the character of the most vivid and immediate vision.”¹⁴² Here Rāmānuja dissolves the distinction between *bhakti* and meditation (*dhyāna*), seeing *bhakti* as a kind of meditation. Rāmānuja also breaks down the distinction between meditation and knowledge: “In all these [Upanisads] and similar cases the term ‘Knowledge’ (*vedana*) signifies meditation (*dhyana*)”¹⁴³, and between knowledge and *bhakti*: “*Bhakti* is that particular kind of knowledge, which is a state that elicits absolute love towards itself, which is an end in itself, and eliminates the desire for everything else.”¹⁴⁴ For Rāmānuja, knowledge and meditation are broader than *bhakti* (i.e., not all knowledge and meditation are *bhakti*). *Bhakti* is the supreme knowledge/meditation that leads directly to the attainment of Brahman.

In modern commentary, the notion that there are different paths for different personality types, or even for different learning styles, is widespread. Such an interpretation is evident in Huston Smith’s introduction to Sargeant’s translation of the *Gītā*:

There are several paths to spiritual realization. People are born with different temperaments and tendencies: some like to be active, others reflective, others affective and engaged with their feelings, and others (the show-me types) favor experiments (let’s see what works). Spiritual paths exist for each of these four types. For the active there is the Way of Work, *karma yoga*; for the reflective there is the Way of Knowledge, *jñāna yoga*; for the affective type in whom sentiments prevail, there is the Way of Devotion, *bhakti yoga*; and for the

¹⁴² S. S. Raghavachar, *Vedartha Saṅgraha of Sri Ramanujacarya* (Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama: Mysore, 1978), 126.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 127.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 128.

experimental, let's-see-what-works type, there is the Way of Meditation, *raja yoga*.¹⁴⁵

This interpretation is presented by many other commentators, such as Stephen Mitchell¹⁴⁶ and Eknath Easwaran¹⁴⁷. This conventional interpretation is not without grounds in the *Gītā*, for Kṛṣṇa does teach different ways to attain the supreme goal. This is most notable in the following passage in Book XII, in which it seems like meditation, knowledge, non-attachment, and yoga are separate paths for people of different levels of ability:

On me alone the *manas* place, in me the *buddhi* cause to enter,
You will dwell in me alone thenceforth, there is no uncertainty. (12.8)
Now, if you are not able to put together thought in me, steadily,
Then by repetition of *yoga*, seek me, Conquerer of Wealth. (12.9)
If in repetition you are not suitable, on my work be intent,
And, performing actions for my sake, perfection you will attain. (12.10)
Now, if you are unable to do even this, then act, to my *yoga* affixed,
Abandoning all action-fruit, self subdued. (12.11)

If one can keep the mind on Kṛṣṇa, one should do so—if not, one should take the path of *yoga* practice. But keeping the mind on Kṛṣṇa is seeing that He is all; as we will see in the next section, *yoga* in general is seeing sameness in everything¹⁴⁸. Therefore, keeping the mind on Kṛṣṇa is *yoga*. Kṛṣṇa goes on to say that, if *yoga* practice is not possible, then one should act for His sake. One acts for Kṛṣṇa's sake when one does not act for the sake of satisfying the desires of the individual self. One acts not for the individual self

¹⁴⁵ Huston Smith, foreword to *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Winthrop Sargeant (Albany: State U of New York, 2009), xii.

¹⁴⁶ “Of the various paths to self-realization—*karma yoga* (the path of action), *jñāna yoga* (the path of knowledge or wisdom), *raja yoga* (the path of meditation), and *bhaktiyoga* (the path of devotion or love)—the poet clearly prefers the last. But he is aware that for people of different constitutions and affinities, different paths are appropriate. When he says that one particular path is superior, his statement doesn't come at the expense of the other paths. All paths and all people are included” (Stephen Mitchell, Introduction. *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation* (Google Books: Potter/TenSpeed/Harmony, 2007), n.p.).

¹⁴⁷ “What kind of yoga does the Gita teach? The common answer is that it presents three yogas or even four – the four main paths of Hindu mysticism... Thus the Gita offers something for every kind of spiritual aspirant” (Eknath Easwaran, Introduction. *The Bhagavad Gita* (Tomales: Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 2007), 48-49). Easwaran does, however, acknowledge that there is a common thread between these paths: renunciation (Ibid, 51).

¹⁴⁸ “Sameness (*samatvam*) is yoga, it is said” (*Gītā* 2.48).

when one sees the same in all; therefore, acting for Kṛṣṇa’s sake is inseparable from *yoga* practice. Finally, Kṛṣṇa says that if one cannot act for His sake, then one should act without attachment to fruits. This is the same as the former, for when one acts for Kṛṣṇa’s sake, one does not act for the sake of fruits.

To understand why Kṛṣṇa would at times teach the one path as different, we must consider that Kṛṣṇa was teaching a members of society which upheld the *varṇa* system. Under this system, each person was born into one of four ranks, to which different duties were assigned: Brahmins (priests), Kṣatriyas (kings and warriors), Vaiśyas (farmers, merchants, and artisans), and Śūdras (servants). Arjuna, being a Kṣatriya, may have been more inclined to act for Kṛṣṇa’s sake than meditate on Kṛṣṇa. This does not mean that Arjuna could *not* meditate, for meditation is an action as well, but outward, bodily action was the framework in which Arjuna could begin to approach liberation. Kṛṣṇa was a good teacher: He knew that his students clung to their individuality and, therefore, to the notion that different people are suited for different tasks, so he spoke of different paths for their sake. We will see, however, the paths are really one—this is the ultimate teaching that can be approached by those who have released attachment to the notion of individuality.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the supreme goal is not limited to any one *varṇa* (*Gītā* 9.32). Thinking in terms of various paths may be a helpful starting point, but it must not be clung to as the final truth.

¹⁴⁹ Buddha, likewise, taught according to his audience: He taught the doctrine of “no-self” to those who were still attached to the ordinary, degraded notion of the self, for this notion of the self is poisonous. But to those students who had released clinging to this idea of the self, he expounded the presence of the self again: “It is because I need to straighten out [the thinking] of living beings—because I am aware of their situation—that I expound the absence of self. . . . But what I am speaking of is not what ordinary people imagine the self to be. . . . Therefore when I preach ‘dharma are without self,’ in truth they are not without self” (Mark L. Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra (Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra)* (Berkeley: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, 2013), 67-68).

That there is only one path does not mean that there is only one kind of person who can go to the supreme goal, for the path is beyond personality altogether. The attachment that covers supreme knowledge is deep-rooted in the world—for example, language separates subject and object. The notion that certain people are more able spiritual seekers than others is itself derived from attachment to individuality. The supreme goal is not attained by individuals; instead, it is inseparable from the world.

3.2 *Yoga*

We will consider at each of the so-called paths to the supreme goal in order to see that they are one; but first we must consider what is meant by *yoga*, for these paths are sometimes described as kinds of *yoga* (e.g., *jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga*). Its verbal root is \sqrt{yuj} , which has various meanings, including:

To yoke or join or fasten or harness; to make ready, prepare; to recollect, recall; to attach one's self to.¹⁵⁰

Yoga generally means “the act of *yuj*”, so it can be translated as “(the act of) yoking, preparing, recollecting, attaching, etc.” A person can be *yukta* (see *Gītā* 2.39, 2.50, 2.51, 2.61, etc.), which is the past passive participle of \sqrt{yuj} , thus meaning “yoked, prepared, attached, etc.”, or a *yogin* (see *Gītā* 3.3, 4.25, 5.11, 5.24, etc.), which can either mean one who practises (or has attained) *yoga* in general, or it might refer to a follower of the Yoga philosophical system, which emphasizes action as the means to attaining the supreme goal.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Monier-Williams.

¹⁵¹ Though the philosophical school of Yoga is generally considered to be founded on Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras*, which were composed after the *Gītā*, the ideas that were the foundation for this work were present earlier.

There is not one overarching meaning of *yoga* in Indian philosophy. One of the earliest references to a practice of *yoga* is in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, in which it is defined as the holding back of the senses:

When cease the five [sense-]knowledges, together with the mind (*manas*),
And the intellect (*buddhi*) stirs not—that, they say, is the highest course.
This they consider as Yoga—the firm holding back of the senses.
Then one becomes undistracted. Yoga, truly, is the origin and the end.¹⁵² (6.10-11)

“Undistracted” is *apramatta*; other translations listed in the *Monier-Williams Dictionary* are: “not careless, careful, attentive”.¹⁵³ When one practises *yoga*, one is undistracted by the attainment of fruits; thus, one pays attention to the world. When one pays attention to the world, one recognizes Brahman.

In *Gnosis and the Question of Thought in Vedānta*, Arapura writes that *yoga* generally means effort made towards attaining the supreme goal, but this meaning is altered in the *Gītā* to include *jñāna*—he concludes, “Therefore, while *yoga*, or effort-making, in its generic definition would be radically distinct from *Samkhya*, or gnosis as such, in the new definition the former is perceived as that which has been charged with a destiny to ‘lead to’, or more appropriately, clear the way for the latter.”¹⁵⁴ Action clears the way for knowledge because one who undertakes *unattached* action—that is, action that is unattached to fruits and agency¹⁵⁵—can stand firm in supreme knowledge. But this is not a one-way path; not only does unattached action clear the way for knowledge, but knowledge brings non-attachment (2.59). *Yoga* is the united path of unattached action and knowledge.

¹⁵² Hume, 359-360.

¹⁵³ Monier-Williams.

¹⁵⁴ Arapura, 112.

¹⁵⁵ More on this in Section 3.3.

Despite this connection between *yoga* and the highest goal, some of the meanings of this word, such as “yoking” and “attaching”, imply bondage. Kṛṣṇa plays with this double meaning of *yoga* in 6.23:

Let this be known: the un-yoking of pain-yoga is known as yoga,
This is yoking with determination, yoga with undismayed mind. (6.23)

Yoga can be associated with either bondage or liberation, depending on that to which one is yoked. This verse specifically mentions unyoking from pain, but, as we have seen, the *Gītā* mentions release from rebirth (2.51), fault (3.13), action (9.28), misfortune (4.16, 9.01), the body (5.23), old age and dying (5.29), and evil (10.03). One who is in bondage is yoked to these. In a positive sense, one should be yoked to Kṛṣṇa:

[Kṛṣṇa said:]
Of the *yogins*, even of all these, the inner self having gone to me,
Faith-having, he who is devoted to me is the most yoked to me. (6.47)

Yoga, in this sense, is not a mere means to the highest goal, but it *is* the highest goal.

Kṛṣṇa gives two definitions for *yoga* in general in Book II. The first is “sameness”:

Yoga-standing, perform actions having abandoned attachment, Conqueror of
Wealth,
Having become the same (*sama*) in attainment and non-attainment, sameness
(*samatvam*) is yoga, it is said. (2.48)

Here, *yoga* is *samatvam*. This word is broken down to *sama*, which means “even” or “same” and the suffix *-tva*, which functions like the English “-ness” and “-ship”, changing the word into an abstract noun. Therefore, *samatvam* can be translated as “sameness” or “evenness”. While this verse refers to sameness in attainment and non-attainment, we can expand this definition to seeing all beings as the same, for in 6.8, Kṛṣṇa teaches that one who is yoked (*yukta*) sees a clod of clay and gold as the same.

Seeing beings as the same does not end with seeing *other* beings as the same as each other; it also means seeing other beings as the same as *oneself*. When one sees oneself in all beings, one is a supreme *yogin* (6.32). The supreme *yogin* has released attachment to the individual subject and, therefore, to the fruits of action, for such a person is no longer attached to the desires of the individual.¹⁵⁶ The supreme *yogin* not only sees a clod of clay and gold as the same because he sees their underlying unity, but because he is equally unattached to both. The second definition of unqualified *yoga* is “skill in action”:

Buddhi-yoked, one abandons both good-acts-evil-acts,
Therefore, yoke to yoga. Yoga is skill in action (*karmasu kāuśalam*). (2.50)

A person who is skilled in action has abandoned both good and evil acts, which means not that he does not perform them, but that he is unattached to them. This is how Kṛṣṇa defines *karma-yoga* in 3.7. Free from the desires of the individual, the supreme *yogin* is prepared to stand firm in recognition.

At other times, *yoga* is qualified (e.g., *jñāna-yoga*, *buddhi-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, *bhakti-yoga*). The meaning is vague in these compound words since the first word in the compound is not inflected. For example, *karma-yoga* could mean “yoking *by* action”, “yoking *to* action”, or “yoking *of* action”. The first translation suggests that action is the means to *yoga* (i.e., to yoking to Kṛṣṇa), the second, that being yoked to action is the end, and the third, that action itself must be yoked. All of these are true: One is yoked (to Kṛṣṇa) *by* action when one is yoked *to* action that is itself properly yoked (i.e., to the purpose of sacrifice, not fruits). Likewise for the others, for *yoga* is both the path and the goal.

¹⁵⁶ To what one should be unattached is discussed further in Section 3.3.

As we have seen, one of the meanings of *yoga* is preparing. In *Gītā* 15.11, the *yogins* are placed in opposition to the *akṛta* ones:

Striving, the *yogins* see this one [the embodied Lord] standing in the self,
Even striving, the *akṛta*-selves not this one they see, the unthinking.

Akṛta is composed of *a* (“not”) and *kṛta* (past passive participle *kṛ*, “to do, make”), meaning “not done” or “not made”. Monier-Williams also lists “not prepared”. While all are eternally liberated, the *akṛta*-selves are those who, like Arjuna, are still attached. They are not prepared to face recognition; thus, they do not see the embodied Lord (i.e., Kṛṣṇa/Brahman underlying embodied beings). The *yogin*, in contrast to the *akṛta* self, is one who is prepared. Kṛṣṇa teaches that one who attains perfection (*siddhi*) is unattached:

Buddhi unattached everywhere, conquered self, desire gone,
One attains supreme without-action-perfection (*siddhi*) by renunciation
(*saṁnyāsa*). (18.49)

Recall, *siddhi* can mean both “perfection” and “readiness”. Non-attachment, the state of freedom from actions—i.e., *yoga*—is preparation to stand firm in recognition of supreme knowledge. But since supreme knowledge is already here, then the removal of that which covers supreme knowledge *is* the attainment of it—in other words, the preparation is the goal. Being yoked to Kṛṣṇa is standing firm in the recognition of Kṛṣṇa. This is attained when one sees all as the same, for such a person is unattached, and therefore, does not tremble in the face of supreme knowledge.

3.3 Karma-Yoga

Karma means “act, action, performance”, from the root $\sqrt{kṛ}$, “to do, make, perform”. At the time of the composition of the *Gītā*, deluded spiritual seekers, thinking that one must be reborn to reap the rewards and penalties of actions, were pursuing

complete non-action as a means to liberation from *samṣāra*. Kṛṣṇa teaches the futility of this:

Not by non-commencement of actions does a man attain the state beyond *karma*,
And not by renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) alone does he approach perfection. (3.4)

Abstention from action is futile as a means to attaining liberation because it is impossible; even the ascetic who forsakes all unnecessary action must still, for example, eat, drink, and breathe.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, one is bound by *prakṛti* to act (*Gītā* 3.33; 18.59-18.60).

Therefore, one does not attain the state of freedom from action by abstaining from action, but by acting without attachment:

But one who, holding down the powers¹⁵⁸ by the mind, grasps, Arjuna,
By the *karma*-powers, *karma-yoga*. Unattached, he is distinguished. (3.7)
Held down, you perform action, for action is better than non-action,
And the maintenance of your body could not be accomplished without action.
(3.8)

Other than sacrifice-purpose action, this world is action-bound,
Action for that purpose, Son of Kuntī, attachment-liberated, perform. (3.9)

Though non-action is impossible, action that is for the purpose of sacrifice (*yajña*) does not perpetuate bondage, for it is unattached. Kṛṣṇa teaches that *karma-yoga* is better than *karma-saṁnyāsa* because the *karma yogin* is the eternal *saṁnyāsin* (5.3). The word *saṁnyāsa* consists of *sam* (“with, altogether”) and *nyāsa* (“putting down”). It means total renunciation or abandonment. *Karma-saṁnyāsa* is the attempt to abandon action entirely. *Karma-yoga* is better than *karma-saṁnyāsa*, for one who engages in unattached action is both a *yogin* and a *saṁnyāsin* (*Gītā* 6.1).

¹⁵⁷ Zen Master Hakuin teaches the same: “There are some blind, bald idiots who stand in a calm, unperturbed, untouchable place and consider that the state of mind produced in this atmosphere comprises seeing into their own natures...People of this sort spend all day practicing non-action and end up by having practiced action all the while” (Olson, 353).

¹⁵⁸ Both here and in the next line, “powers” is *indriyāni*, which can refer to the senses or the organs of action.

Karma-yoga is preparation for the supreme goal, for when non-attachment is attained “on all sides”, one stands firm in knowledge:

He who is without attachment on all sides, encountering this or that, pleasant or Unpleasant, he rejoices not, he dislikes not, he stands firm in knowledge. (2.57)

What does it mean to be unattached “on all sides”? From what must one release attachment? The *Gītā* mentions three kinds of non-attachments: to the fruits of action, to action itself, and to the sense objects. We will look at each of these in turn and consider why non-attachment to these would prepare one to stand firm in supreme knowledge.

First, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that his motive for action should never be the fruits (2.47); instead, one should perform actions simply because they are “to-be-done”¹⁵⁹ (3.19). Why would non-attachment to the fruits of action free one from bondage? A superficial explanation is that it brings “karmic indebtedness” to an end. One only reaps the consequences of actions to which one is attached; therefore, one who acts without attachment will be free from rebirth once the consequences of their old karmic debt (i.e., the past actions that they performed with attachment) has been reaped. But if we consider the final goal to be standing firm in recognition, then this explanation does not tell us very much. Why might attachment to fruits obstruct recognition?

When one is attached to fruits, beings appear as instruments to attain them. When one acts without attachment, beings are no longer seen this way, for one who has no purpose in action “has no need of any being for any purpose (*artha*) whatsoever” (*Gītā* 3.18).¹⁶⁰ One who sees beings as fruits, or as instruments to attain them, fails to recognize

¹⁵⁹ “To-be-done” is *kārya*, the future passive participle (gerundive) of *kṛ*. The gerundive implies ought. Thus, *kārya* implies “should be done”; it is translated by Sargeant as “duty”.

¹⁶⁰ This does not mean that the unattached person acts without purpose. *Artha* means both “purpose” and “wealth”—it is purpose that is associated with material gain. Instead, one’s purpose should be rooted in beliefs about what is to-be-done.

that they are Brahman. Knowledge of beings, from this perspective, is limited to how they can be used. This is a degraded knowledge that seeks to grasp or dominate the object of knowledge. It is something that is *done to* the object. It separates knower from known, unlike the supreme knowledge, which brings them together. When one is attached to fruits, one clings to the subject/object divide, and, therefore, cannot face supreme knowledge of the unity underlying the world.¹⁶¹

Secondly, Kṛṣṇa teaches that one should be unattached to action itself—i.e., to thinking of oneself as the agent of action:

By the *guṇas* of *prakṛti* are actions performed in all cases,
 The *ahaṃ-kāra*-deluded self thinks, “The doer am I.” (3.27)
 But the thatness-knowing one (*tattva-vid*) of the two roles of *guṇa* and action,
 Great Armed-One,
 Having thought, “The *guṇas* dwell in the *guṇas*”, is not attached. (3.28)

To be freed from action, one must know not only that *prakṛti* is the doer, but also that the Self is not *prakṛti* alone. When one wrongfully identifies the Self with the *ahaṃ-kāra* (“I-maker”) of *prakṛti* (i.e., the subject) alone, one thinks of oneself as an autonomous agent, unconditioned the state of the world. Attachment to agency is attachment to being an independent subject—to separateness from other beings. Non-attachment to agency, therefore, prepares one to face the world’s underlying unity.

Thirdly, Kṛṣṇa teaches that non-attachment to the sense objects (*indriya-artha*) leads to steadiness in wisdom:

[Kṛṣṇa said:]
 And when this one carries together (*saṃharate*) like tortoise limbs completely
 The senses (*indriya*) from sense-objects (*indriya-artha*), his wisdom stands firm.
 (2.58)
 The objects turn away (*vinivartante*) from the fasting embodied one excluding
 taste,

¹⁶¹ This unity includes beings that can only be considered objects from the perspective of duality (e.g., screwdrivers), for Brahman is All. By seeing *any* being as Brahman, one sees all beings as Brahman.

But, having seen the Supreme (*parām*), his taste turns away (*nivartate*). (2.59)

This distinction between objects turning away and taste turning away is important: When objects turn away, one still longs for them; but when taste turns away, one is free from desires—this is complete non-attachment. Just as it is impossible to abstain from action, so it is impossible to abstain from sense objects. One must move through the world of sense objects in order to survive. However, as one can be unaffected by action by giving up attachment to its fruits, so one can be unaffected by sense objects by giving up attachment to them. One is completely unattached to the sense objects (i.e., the taste for sense objects turns away) when one sees the Supreme—i.e., when Kṛṣṇa/Brahman (the unity underlying the multiplicity) is recognized. Thus, knowledge is as much necessary for non-attachment as non-attachment is for knowledge. Kṛṣṇa continues:

Of a man dwelling on¹⁶² the sense objects, attachment to them is born.
From attachment, desire is born. From desire, anger is born. (2.62)
From anger arises confusion; from confusion, wandering of memory;
From wandering of memory, loss (*nāśa*) of *buddhi*; from loss of *buddhi*, he is lost
(*praṇaśyati*). (2.63)

Praṇaśyati means both “is lost” and also “causes to disappear; allows to be lost”.

Attachment to sense objects causes Kṛṣṇa to be unrecognized. Being lost is the same as causing Kṛṣṇa to be lost, for one who is lost does not see that one is in Kṛṣṇa. Later, Kṛṣṇa says of the man who sees Him everywhere and sees all things in Him: “I am not lost to him and he is not lost to me” (6.30). Again, we see that supreme knowledge is finding what is lost or hidden but, nevertheless, present here and now. Freedom from the

¹⁶² “Dwelling on” is *dhyayatā*, the genitive present participle of *dhyā*, possibly from $\sqrt{dhī}$, “to perceive, think, reflect”. *Dhyayatā* can also be translated as “contemplating”.

sense objects does not require withdrawing the senses from the world as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell; instead, it requires not dwelling on them.¹⁶³

The world of sense objects is *māyā*. *Māyā* is a word with uncertain etymology¹⁶⁴ and varying uses throughout Indian philosophy, but here we will focus on how it is understood in the *Gītā*. It is often translated as “illusion”, “phenomenal world”, or “power” (i.e., the power to create illusions), and is commonly thought to be the objective counterpart to subjective *avidyā* (i.e., *māyā* is the illusion; *avidyā* is the delusion). For Śankara, *māyā* conceals the truth of the Self (see *Sūtra* 65 of the *Vivekcūdāmaṇi*) and is destroyed, or made to disappear (*nāśyā*), by awakening to the non-dual Brahman (see *Sūtra* 110). I would argue that *māyā* it is not necessarily tied to concealment, nor is it the objective side of *avidyā*; on the contrary, *māyā* can dispel *avidyā* (non-recognition) if one pays attention to it.

Kṛṣṇa teaches that His *māyā* is made of the *guṇas* (7.14), which are the constituents of the phenomenal world. *Māyā*, therefore, is Kṛṣṇa’s manifestation as the world of multiplicity.¹⁶⁵ Kṛṣṇa teaches that *māyā* can conceal or reveal Him:

I am not visible to all, *yoga-māyā*-covered,
Deluded, this the world recognizes not (*abhijānāti*): me, the unborn, the
imperishable. (7.25)

Though being the birthless imperishable Self of beings, though being the lord,
Standing over my own *prakṛti*, I come into being (*sambhavāmi*) by Self-*māyā*.
(4.6)

¹⁶³ The Markandeya-Samasya Parva of the *Mahābhārata* (499/202) also teaches that non-attachment to sense objects allows for knowledge of the unity underlying the world: “Sound and others grasp and embodied body and make him subjugate to the senses. But if he can transcend this, he can see the world extended in his soul and his soul extended in the world” (Debroy’s translation).

¹⁶⁴ The *Monier-Williams Dictionary* suggests that *māyā* is derived from the root verbal $\sqrt{mā}$, “to measure, compare with”. This is interesting, because some of the creation accounts in the Rg-Veda involve a measuring out of the regions (see RV 1.154, 8.41, 10.121). As a second possibility, *mā* can also be a particle of negation. The verbal root $\sqrt{yā}$ means “to go, proceed”.

¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that in midst of the battle of *Kurukṣetra*, single demons used their powers of *māyā* to appear as many.

In 7.25, *māyā* covers Kṛṣṇa; in 4.6, it is through *māyā* that Kṛṣṇa comes into being. Kṛṣṇa would not be experiencable if not manifest. As we saw in Chapter 1, the world can conceal or reveal Brahman: It is in the world of multiplicity that Brahman is seen, but it is also attachment to the ordinary experience of the world (that is concerned with the attainment of fruits, etc.) that covers Brahman. Likewise, *māyā* conceals Kṛṣṇa only to those who cling to it as the complete truth. Seeing Kṛṣṇa does not mean becoming blind to the world of multiplicity, but seeing that He underlies and pervades it. Kṛṣṇa says:

For divine is this *guṇa*-made *māyā* of mine, difficult to go past (*duratyayā*),
Only they who fall in front of me cross (*taranti*) *māyā*. (7.14)

This verse teaches that *māyā* is not to be conceived negatively; it is divine. It is not to be destroyed, but to be gone past. *Avidyā* is not seeing *māyā*, but seeing *māyā* as empty (i.e., not recognizing Brahman in *māyā*). *Māyā* confuses one who is attached to the empty conception of it, but to one who is unattached, it is what reveals supreme knowledge.

When he was confronted by Kṛṣṇa's imperishable Self, Arjuna had not yet engaged in *karma-yoga*. He was still attached to seeing beings as instruments, the notion of himself as an individual agent, and to the empty understanding of the phenomenal world; therefore, he was filled with fear and confusion by the vision that conflicted with these attachments.

3.4 Knowledge

The supreme goal in the *Gītā* is abiding in Kṛṣṇa (*Gītā* 7.18). Since all beings already stand in Kṛṣṇa, to abide in Kṛṣṇa is to know Kṛṣṇa—i.e., to know that one is already in Him. Because Kṛṣṇa is All, He can never not be known; He can only be

ignored. The only goal, therefore, is to recognize Kṛṣṇa as the All, and to be steadfast in this recognition.

The connection between knowledge and the supreme goal is found throughout Indian Philosophy. We have seen this connection made in the Upaniṣads (see Section 2.1; see also *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1 and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.9), by Śankara (see Section 1.2), and by other schools of non-dualist thought (see Section 1.4). This connection is made in the *Gītā*, too: Kṛṣṇa says, “The knowledge-possessor (*jñānī*)... abides in me, indeed, the supreme goal” (7.18); “They go to Brahman, the Brahman-knowing (*brahman-vidas*) men” (8.24). Kṛṣṇa also teaches that one who knows His *vibhūti* and *yoga* is yoked to Him:

My *vibhūti* and *yoga*, one who knows (*vetti*) this in truth,
By unwavering *yoga* is yoked with me, there is no doubt. (10.7)

Vibhūti is listed in the *Monier-Williams Dictionary* as “manifestation of might, great power”, but it means literally *vi* (“divided, asunder, apart, different”) + *bhūti* (“being”). Thus, the yoked one knows both Kṛṣṇa’s being-divided (*vibhūti*) and Kṛṣṇa’s being yoked with All (*yoga*)—i.e., he knows the world of multiplicity and its underlying unity.

There are two Sanskrit verbal roots meaning “to know”: √*jñā* and √*vid*. From √*jñā* comes *jñāna*, and from √*vid* comes *vidyā* (we have more often come across its negation, *avidyā*). There is a great deal of overlap between the meaning of these two roots:

- jñā*: To know, have knowledge, become acquainted with, perceive, apprehend, understand, experience, recognize; to know as, regard or consider as.
- vid*: 1. To know or regard or consider as, take for, declare to be, call; to mind, notice; observe, remember; to experience, feel.
2. To find, discover, meet or fall in with, obtain, get, acquire; to seek out, look for.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Monier-Williams.

Arapura writes that \sqrt{vid} functions as five different roots: “These are *vid*, to know or see; *vid*, to happen or to be in existence; *vid*, to get or obtain, or to find, or to feel; *vid*, to discuss or consider; *vid*, to feel, to tell, to dwell.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, the knowledge of *vidyā* is more than intellectual knowledge; it is an experience, a noticing of what has been ignored, a finding of what has been hidden. \sqrt{Vid} is connected with seeing, as is demonstrated by its cognates in Greek, German, and English:

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. S. <i>jñāna</i> , | Gk. <i>gnōsis</i> , | G. <i>kennen</i> ,
<i>erkennen</i> , | E. knowledge. |
| 2. S. <i>vidyā</i> , | Gk. <i>oida</i> ,
L. <i>video</i> , | G. <i>wissen</i> , | E. wisdom.
E. vision. ¹⁶⁸ |

It is difficult to translate \sqrt{vid} into English because the Old English “to wit” was displaced by “to know”, though its derivative “wisdom” is still used. To distinguish between *jñāna* and *vidyā*, we can translate *jñāna* as “knowledge”, *ajñāna* as “ignorance”, *vidyā* as “wisdom”, and *avidyā*—typically translated as “ignorance” or “nescience”—as “absence of wisdom” or “absence of vision”; or, more concisely, “unwisdom”, as suggested by Wayman.

The *Gītā* emphasizes the connection between supreme knowledge and vision. For example, in 6.29 Kṛṣṇa says that one who sees (*īkṣate*) the *ātman* in all beings and all being in the *ātman* is yoked to the *ātman*; in 6.30, He says of one who sees (*paśyati*) Him everywhere, “I am not lost to him, and he is not lost to Me”; and in 13.28 he says that, seeing (*paśya*) all beings resting in the Lord, one goes to the supreme goal (13.28). The connection between supreme knowledge and seeing is perhaps the clearest when Kṛṣṇa

¹⁶⁷ Arapura, 31-32.

¹⁶⁸ Alex Wayman, “Notes on the Sanskrit Term *Jñāna*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75 (1955): 253.

refers to the “knowledge-eye” (*jñāna-cakṣu*), with which one goes beyond (13.34) and sees the Lord (15.10). Though speaking of the supreme knowledge as a “seeing” emphasizes that it is beyond intellectual knowledge, we must remember that this is not seeing in the ordinary sense, for Arjuna was not able to see Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self with his own eyes. This supreme seeing/knowing transcends not only that which can be expressed in intellectual thought, but that which can be grasped by ordinary sense experience.¹⁶⁹

Arapura writes that in the Upaniṣadic tradition, *jñāna* (which he calls here “gnosis”) and *vidyā*:

...are not by any means really different from each other in what they entail for the philosophical discipline. Rather, it is the case that what is only implicit in the one is brought out explicitly and into clearer visibility by the other – that is how they function. The term *brahma-vidyā* expresses both the *theōrea* and the *praxis* underlying the gnosis which has sole reference to *Brahman*, and hence is applicable to the conduct of thought.¹⁷⁰

Vidyā expresses the unity between *jñāna* and *karma*, which, in their highest senses, are not distinct. Arapura goes on to point out that *vidyā*’s meaning includes “even such things as certain kinds of practical skills and knowledge of certain crafts. Archery too, accordingly, is considered a great *vidyā*.”¹⁷¹ *Vidyā* is tied to the world. If *Brahma-jñāna* is the recognition of Brahman, *Brahma-vidyā* is seeing Brahman in the world. These are not really different, but different ways of expressing the true knowledge, for Brahman cannot be known apart from the world, and the world cannot be (truly) known apart from Brahman. In the *Gītā*, *jñāna* and *vidyā* seem to be used interchangeably, and the choice of

¹⁶⁹ As we saw in Section 2.1, this doesn’t mean that sense experience is to be turned away from; instead, it is to be understood more deeply in order to find what underlies it.

¹⁷⁰ Arapura, 81.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

one over the other may be simply poetic. It is clear that *jñāna* cannot be separated from action, either: Kṛṣṇa says that *jñāna* is non-conceitfulness (*amānitva*), non-deceitfulness (*adambhitva*), non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsa*), patience (*kṣānti*), uprightness (*ārjava*), teacher-reverence (*ācārya-upāsana*), purity (*śauca*), steadfastness (*sthāiryā*), self-restraint (*ātmavinigraha*) (13.7), non-attachment to the sense-objects (*indriya-artheṣu vāirāgya*), absence of “I-making” (*an-ahaṃ-kāra*), seeing the darkness (*doṣa*) of birth, death, old age, disease and pain (13.8), non-attachment, non-clinging to sons, wives, houses, and the like, a constant same-mindedness (*samacittatva*) to the desired and undesired (13.9), firm *bhakti*, being yoked to Kṛṣṇa, inhabiting a secluded place, being dissatisfied in crowds of people (13.10), constantly knowing the Over-Self (*adhi-ātman*), and seeing the goal as thatness-knowledge (13.11). *Jñāna* encompasses both right action (non-harming, etc.) and one’s mindset while performing it (non-attachment, etc.). Supreme knowledge, whether it is called *jñāna* or *vidyā*, is seeing the world of multiplicity as Brahman and allowing this knowledge to pervade daily life. The “paths” of action (*karma-yoga*) and knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*), therefore, are one (as Kṛṣṇa teaches in *Gītā* 5.5). Supreme knowledge must expand past the moment of recognition and into daily life activities. If one stands firm in recognition while living in the world, then knowledge will pervade all action.

Sometimes Kṛṣṇa speaks of *buddhi-yoga*. *Buddhi* is normally translated as “intellect”, but this is unsatisfactory. It comes from the root \sqrt{budh} , which means “to wake up, be awake; to perceive, notice, become aware of; to know to be, recognize as”.¹⁷² The *buddhi* is the faculty of awareness, noticing, or recognition. “Awakener” is a better

¹⁷² Monier-Williams.

translation than “intellect”. While one can never be without Brahman-knowledge, one can fail to notice it. The *buddhi* is the faculty that awakens one to it. Kṛṣṇa teaches that when one is yoked by the *buddhi*, one leaves the bondage of *karma* (2.39). *Buddhi-yoga* frees one from attachment to acts. Kṛṣṇa also teaches that *karma* is inferior to *buddhi-yoga* (2.49). This means not that action is inferior to knowledge, but that action performed in *avidyā* is inferior to action that is pervaded by awakenedness to supreme knowledge. One who is *buddhi*-yoked casts off good and evil deeds (2.50) and is freed from rebirth bondage (2.51). Therefore, awakenedness leads to non-attachment as much as non-attachment leads to awakenedness. One cannot exist without the other.

3.5 *Bhakti*

Bhakti means “devotion, worship, love, attachment; division, portion share.”¹⁷³

It is derived from the verbal root \sqrt{bhaj} , meaning “to divide, distribute, apportion to; to bestow.”¹⁷⁴ The connection between distributing/bestowing and devotion is significant: Highest *bhakti* is bestowing or distributing Kṛṣṇa on all beings, and all beings on Kṛṣṇa—it is knowing Kṛṣṇa as All. The connection between knowledge and *bhakti* is not just revealed by the meaning of the word, but it is explicitly taught throughout the *Gītā*. Kṛṣṇa says that by undistracted *bhakti* can He be known (*jñātum*) and seen in truth (*tattva*) and entered (11.54, 18.55). To the constantly yoked and devoted (*bhajatām*) ones, Kṛṣṇa gives *buddhi-yoga* and destroys the darkness (*tamas*) that is born from ignorance (*ajñāna*) (10.10-11). In these verses, it may sound as if *bhakti* is a means to knowledge,

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

but Kṛṣṇa says that one who knows (*jānāti*) Him is devoted to (*bhajati*) Him (15.19)¹⁷⁵. Only one who has Kṛṣṇa-devotion¹⁷⁶ can have supreme knowledge, and only one who has supreme knowledge of Him can be Kṛṣṇa-devoted, for true devotion *is* supreme knowledge.

As there is a lower kind of knowledge (knowledge *of* something), there is a lower kind of devotion: devotion *to* something—i.e., devotion that takes an object. These are both utterly different from the supreme goal, for they work within a perspective of duality; they are based on the notion of difference between the devotee and the devoted-to, and between the knower and the known. Highest *bhakti*, on the contrary, (like supreme knowledge) sees the unity between the Self and Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa says:

He who, with devotion (*bhaktiyā*), offers to me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water,
That devotion-offering (*bhaktiyupahrtam*), I eat from the offered self. (9.26)

Some commentators take this kind of offering to be a lower kind of *bhakti*. For example, Huston Smith writes that knowledge arises out of this lower kind of *bhakti*: “Emotional devotees water the plant of devotion with tears of love (BG IX:26)...[and then] the flower of devotion evolves into the fruit of knowledge.”¹⁷⁷ Smith acknowledges the connection between knowledge and *bhakti*, stating that “they intermingle and strengthen one another”¹⁷⁸ and “one cannot truly know anything that one does not love”¹⁷⁹, but he does not see the depth of this connection. I argue that offering a flower to Kṛṣṇa is the

¹⁷⁵ “He who, thus unconfused, knows (*jānāti*) me as the Supreme Person (*puruṣottamam*)—he, all-knowing (*sarva-vid*) is devoted to (*bhajati*) me with all-being (*sarva-bhāvena*), Descendent of Bharata.”

¹⁷⁶ I have hyphenated this, as I did with Brahman-knowledge earlier, to emphasize that highest *bhakti* does not take Kṛṣṇa as an object of devotion.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, xvii. There is no mention of “tears of love” in this verse, nor anywhere in the *Gītā*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

highest *bhakti*. It is not something that, with time, develops into the supreme knowledge; instead, it *is* the supreme knowledge. Offering a flower to Kṛṣṇa with devotion means seeing Kṛṣṇa as the flower and seeing the flower as Kṛṣṇa. As the Upaniṣads teach, by seeing one as Brahman, one sees all as Brahman. To recognize a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water, or any beings as Kṛṣṇa is to see All as Kṛṣṇa. Highest *bhakti* is supreme recognition.

3.6 *Rāja-Yoga*

Some *Gītā* commentators refer to a fourth path in addition to *jñāna-yoga*, *bhakti-yoga*, and *karma-yoga*: *rāja-yoga*. *Rāja* simply means “king”, but *rāja-yoga* has come to be associated with meditation, as Huston Smith’s interpretation exemplifies: “For the experimental, let’s see-what-works type, there is the way of Meditation, *raja yoga*.”¹⁸⁰ A path of *rāja-yoga* is never taught in the *Gītā*, and, in fact, the word *rāja* is only used three times in the text: Twice in 9.2, when Kṛṣṇa says he is going to reveal the royal wisdom (*rāja-vidya*), also called the royal secret (*rāja-guhyam*), and lastly, when Kṛṣṇa says that, since even the women, *vāiśyās*, and *śūdras* who take refuge in Him go to the highest goal (*parām gatim*), then this is certainly true for the devoted royal seers (*bhaktā rājarṣayas*) (9.33). From these verses, it is unclear why the word *rāja* would come to be associated with a distinct path of meditation.

The interconnection between the term *rāja-yoga* and a practice involving meditation was popularized by Swami Vivekananda (19th Century CE). In his book entitled *Rāja Yoga*, Vivekananda writes that *rāja-yoga* is a science that is guided by personal experience and methodic experimentation: “The science of *Rāja Yoga* proposes

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, xvii.

to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching this truth [that will cause all doubts to vanish, all darkness to be scattered, and all crookedness to be made straight]”¹⁸¹; “In the study of this *Rāja Yoga* no faith or belief is necessary. Believe nothing, until you find it out for yourself.”¹⁸² This seems to be the basis of Smith’s interpretation that *rāja-yoga* is for the “experimental let’s-see-what-works type”.

Though a path called *rāja-yoga* is not taught in the *Gītā*, the practices that have come to be grouped together and designated by the term are. These are Patañjali’s eight limbs of *yoga*:

1. **Yamas** (abstentions): *ahiṃsā* (non-harmfulness), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacarya* (life of study and celibacy), and *aparigraha* (non-possession).
2. **Niyamas** (observances): *śauca* (cleanliness, purity), *santoṣa* (tranquility), *tapas* (lit. heat; austerity), *svādhyāya* (self-study), and *īśvara-praṇidhāna* (paying attention to, or contemplating, the lord).
3. **Āsana** (sitting).
4. **Prāṇāyāma** (breath control).
5. **Pratyāhāra** (drawing back (the senses)).
6. **Dhāraṇā** (holding, bearing, maintaining; keeping in remembrance).
7. **Dhyāna** (meditation, reflection).
8. **Samādhi** (putting together).

The first four are outward practices and the last four are inward practices. These practices are prescribed by Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*. For example, Kṛṣṇa teaches that knowledge (*jñāna*) is, among other things, non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*) and cleanliness *śauca* (6.7). He teaches that one who is without possession (*aparigrahaḥ*) (6.10), is sitting firmly (*āsana*) (6.11), and is established in the vow of celibate study (*brahmacārya*) (6.14) goes “to peace, to *nirvāṇa-paramām*, to union with Me” (6.15). He teaches that truthfulness (*satya*), austerity (*tapas*), and non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*) arise from Him alone (10.4-5). Those

¹⁸¹Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (Leeds: Celephais, 2003), 6.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 10.

who are born into the divine destiny practise self-study (*svādhyāyas*), austerity (*tapas*) (16.1), non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), tranquility (*śanti*) (16.2), and cleanliness (*śauca*) (16.3). This is a non-exhaustive list of places in which the outward practices that came to be known as *rāja-yoga* are taught in the *Gītā*. Now, let’s look at the inward practices.

Pratyāhāra is broken down to *prati* (“again, back, towards”) + *ā* (“near, towards”) + *hāra* (“bearing, carrying”). It means drawing back or withdrawing. In this context, it refers to the withdrawal of the senses. As Kṛṣṇa teaches, one who draws together (*saṃharate*)¹⁸³ the senses as a tortoise does its limbs, “his wisdom stands firm” (2.58). In the *Gītā*, this is not a literal withdrawal of the senses, but, as we saw in Section 3.3, it is non-attachment to sense objects. Thus, the senses—including the mind—need not be removed from the world, but controlled in the world. Kṛṣṇa teaches that one who has controlled their thoughts, like a lamp in a windless place, is unmoved by sorrow (6.19-22). The *Yoga-Sūtras* teach, “Yoga is thought-turning (*citta-vṛtti*) confinement (*nirodha*)” (1.2).¹⁸⁴ *Yoga* not the ceasing of thoughts, but the confinement of their turning. Kṛṣṇa says that one should hold back a wandering mind and lead it into the Self (6.26). Since the Self is the world, the mind is not to be removed from the world, but from the empty conception of the world that does not recognize the Self. The mind and other senses are still put out into the world, but they are confined, or withdrawn, in the sense that they do not cling to the objects of the world. This is *prayāhāra*. Momentary *pratyāhāra*, however, is not enough. When one is still attached to subjectivity, one cannot stand firm in recognition; thus, *dhāraṇā* is important. *Dhāraṇā* means “the act of holding,

¹⁸³ *Samharate* comes from the same root as *pratyāhāra*: √hr̥ (to bear, carry).

¹⁸⁴ Translated by me.

bearing, maintaining” and can also mean “holding in remembrance”¹⁸⁵. *Dhāraṇa* is the maintenance of *pratyāhāra* while living in the world.¹⁸⁶

So far, these inward practices have focused on removing that which hides recognition. *Dhyāna* is about keeping the mind on that which is to be recognized. *Dhyāna* means “meditation, thought, reflection”. It comes from the root √*dhyai* “to think of, imagine, contemplate, meditate on, call to mind, recollect”.¹⁸⁷ It means continually thinking of Kṛṣṇa (see 18.58, 18.65) or Brahman. *Dhyāna* is not, however, the end, for meditation and thought still distinguish subject from object. When this distinction has dissolved, one has reached *samādhi*—“putting together”. This is the supreme knowledge. But the state of *samādhi* can only be maintained if one is unattached—the importance of the other practices is not lost here.

Samādhi is the supreme recognition that is *jñāna-yoga* (and also supreme *bhakti*) and *pratyāhāra* is the non-attachment (*karma-yoga*) that allows for *dhāraṇa*—steadiness in this recognition while living in the world. These ideas that have come to be grouped under the term *rāja-yoga* are no different than the “paths” to the supreme goal that we have already seen.

We have seen that *jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, *bhakti-yoga*, and *rāja-yoga* are part of one path: The releasing of the attachments that obstruct the recognition of the eternally known (Brahman/Kṛṣṇa). Though temporary recognition can be attained by one who is

¹⁸⁵ Monier-Williams

¹⁸⁶ Zen Master Hakuin recognizes the importance of meditation while being active in the world, for “those who use the quietistic approach can never hope to enter into meditation in the midst of activity” (Olson, 351). His point is not that one should disregard quietistic meditation, but that “what is most worthy of respect is a pure koan meditation that neither knows nor is conscious of the two aspects, the quiet and the active” (Olson, 351-352). As Kṛṣṇa also teaches, one cannot abstain from action even for a moment. One who knows the truth knows that all meditation is done in the midst of activity.

¹⁸⁷ Monier-Williams.

still attached, as was the case with Arjuna, it is accompanied by fear and confusion, and, eventually, the return to blindness. Let us consider in more detail Arjuna’s fall from recognition now.

3.7 The Fear of Destruction

Seeing the opposing army rushing into Kṛṣṇa’s flaming mouths, Arjuna says, “Indeed, I do not comprehend what You are doing” (11.31). To this, Kṛṣṇa responds:

I am time, world-destruction-making, fully grown, arisen to destroy (*samāhartum*) the worlds.

Even without you, all those who are placed in opposite armies will not be. (11.32)

We now need to consider the significance of Kṛṣṇa’s role as the destroyer.

The Sanskrit word for “to destroy” in the verse above is *samāhartum*, the infinitive of *samāhr̥*, which is broken down to *sam* (“together”) + *ā* (“near, toward”) + *hr̥* (“to take, bear, carry”). This allows a literal rendering of “to carry together”.

Destroying in this verse is not a bringing to nothing, but rather a bringing together. There is no such thing as coming to nothing, as Arjuna is assured by Kṛṣṇa:

Indeed, not ever was I not, nor you, nor these lords of men,
And not indeed will we not be, all of us, from here beyond. (2.12)

As we have seen, most Indian cosmogonies begin with one being, out of which all beings arise. Kṛṣṇa says:

All beings, Arjuna, go to my own *prakṛti* at the end of a *kalpa*¹⁸⁸,
At the beginning of a *kalpa*, I send them apart (*visṛjāmi*). (9.7)

¹⁸⁸ A *kalpa*, when used as a measure of time, is one day of Brahma, or 4.3 billion human years.

Creation is a spreading apart from one, and, time being circular in Indian thought, destruction is a bringing together—in other words, a bringing back to the origin¹⁸⁹.

Creation brings multiplicity and destruction brings unity.

Arjuna saw Kṛṣṇa as the destroyer not only because he saw the armies rushing into His flaming mouths, but because he saw the unity of beings in Him. Kṛṣṇa is the destroyer because He is the one who brings beings together. Arjuna saw both the multiplicity and the unity of beings in Kṛṣṇa (*Gītā* 11.13); in other words, he saw the states of creation and destruction at once. Time (*kālas*¹⁹⁰) alone divides these states, but in Kṛṣṇa, who is Time, they coexist. The understanding of Kṛṣṇa as the creator and destroyer should not be limited to “the one who performs the acts of creation and destruction”, but should be “the one in whom the states of creation and destruction exist”.

Having heard Kṛṣṇa’s explanation, Arjuna was not pacified. He said, “I tremble indeed in my heart, and I find neither courage nor tranquility” (11.24); “I lose my sense of direction, and I do not find comfort” (11.25); and finally:

The previously unseen, excited¹⁹¹ am I having seen, and with fear my mind is shaken,
Cause me to see, God, that form. Be merciful Lord of Gods, Universe-Abode.
(11.45)

Though the visions of crushed heads sticking between Kṛṣṇa’s flaming teeth (11.27) would certainly have been terrifying, this was not the only reason for Arjuna’s fear.

Unpractised in *karma-yoga* (non-attachment), Arjuna still clung to the world of

¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, the word “origin”, *sambhava* (used in 3.14, 4.8, 10.41, 14.3, 15.4), means literally “being together”.

¹⁹⁰ *Kālas* means both “time” and “dark, dark blue, black” (Monier-Williams). This is an interesting play on words, as the name Krishna (*kṛṣṇa*) also means “dark, dark blue, black”.

¹⁹¹ Excited is *hr̥ṣitas*, the passive past participle of √*hr̥ṣ*, which means “to be excited or impatient, rejoice in the prospect of, be anxious; to rejoice, be glad or pleased; to become erect, become on edge” (Monier-Williams). Thus, this can mean both joyous and anxious excitement.

multiplicity devoid of unity. Thus, seeing it destroyed (“brought together”) in Kṛṣṇa caused him to tremble. Still attached to the understanding of the world with which he was familiar, Arjuna could not stand firm in the face of supreme knowledge.

When one stands firm in recognition, one is free from the attachments that kept one anchored in the world.¹⁹² Losing these anchors to the world does not mean losing the ability to function in the world, but seeing the world differently. Things that previously seemed of great importance lose their grip; thus, one without anchors is the same in happiness and sadness, honour and dishonour, pleasure and pain, gain and loss. For example, Arjuna was attached to the notion that one should not kill one’s kin under any circumstances. Therefore, he was overtaken by doubt when he witnessed his cousins and friends stationed in the opposing army. Had he been able to stand firm in the recognition of the one-ness of beings—knowing that there is no coming-to-nothing, only coming-together—then he would not have fallen back into doubt about the right course of action.¹⁹³ One who is steadfast in recognition is not removed from the world, for such a person still acts in the world. One who has lost their anchors to the world does not float away from the world, but, on the contrary, is so firmly rooted in the world—seeing non-difference between the Self and all beings—that anchors are no longer necessary. The anchors of subjectivity, etc., only serve to yoke one to the empty conception of the world. One who is steadfast in supreme recognition does not need anchors to the world because such a person recognizes that they *are* the world, and, therefore, can never be lost.

¹⁹² As we have seen, the reverse is also true: Only when one is free of attachment can one stand firm in the recognition.

¹⁹³ This battle was the right course of action according to *dharma* (sacred law). Besides the fact that the (arguably) rightful kingdom of the Pāṇḍavas that had been taken from them in an unfair game of dice, Arjuna and his brothers had previously vowed to engage in this battle, and it would be against *dharma* to act in opposition to their word.

CONCLUSION

Throughout Indian Philosophy, there is a connection between liberation (*mokṣa*) and knowledge. Liberation is supreme knowledge of the unity underlying the world of multiplicity, whether this unity is called Brahman, Kṛṣṇa, or something else. This is not knowledge *of* something, even though it may be referred to as such due to the limitations of language. Rather, it is knowledge that is beyond duality. Supreme knowledge is the knowledge that the Self is All. It does not separate subject from object or knower from known. This knowledge is eternal but unrecognized in daily life. Liberation in the negative sense (i.e., liberation *from* things) is the same as liberation in the positive sense (i.e., supreme knowledge) because one stands firm in the recognition of unity when one is liberated from that which keeps it hidden. That liberation is eternal does not mean that one should engage in non-action, for it is action that clears the way for recognition. There is a process involved, but it is a stripping away rather than a becoming.

Śankara teaches that the world is *mithyā*, meaning it is neither *sat* nor *asat*. That which is *sat* cannot be sublated, but the world is sublated by Brahman; and that which is *asat* cannot be experienced, but the world is experienced. According to Śankara, Brahman-knowledge removes *mithyā*-knowledge; therefore, he does not allow for the perspective of unity and difference (i.e., seeing both the world of multiplicity and its underlying unity). This, however, causes a problem for his notion of living liberation, for a person cannot live in the world of multiplicity if the world has disappeared for them.

I challenged Śankara's assertion that Brahman-knowledge removes knowledge of the world. The world *is* Brahman, and therefore, does not disappear with Brahman-recognition. What differentiates the world from unmanifest Brahman—as waves from

water—is name and form. Name and form can distract from Brahman, yet it is only by Brahman’s manifestation into the world of name and form that Brahman can be experienced. Brahman is not seen by turning away from the world; on the contrary, Brahman is seen by paying closer attention to the world. *Avidyā* is not seeing the world, but it is failing to recognize that Brahman underlies it. It is not the world of name and form (i.e., the phenomenal world) that disappears with Brahman-recognition, but the unreal world-without-Brahman. It is not Brahman and the world that cannot coexist, but recognition and non-recognition. The world-without-Brahman is *asat* (i.e., a contradiction in terms) because the world is Brahman. As one can never look at a wave without seeing water, one can never look at the world without seeing Brahman. Brahman is all, so the Brahman-knowledge that is liberation is eternal, just unrecognized in daily life. The only goal is standing firm in recognition of this while living in the world.

Brahman can be understood in two ways: as *śabda*-Brahman, which is Brahman understood through description and sense experience, and as *aśabda*-Brahman, which is Brahman insofar as It is beyond language and the senses. Though Brahman is ultimately beyond language and the senses, *aśabda*-Brahman can only be found *in śabda*-Brahman. Description and sense experience need not be turned away from; instead, they must be penetrated to see what underlies them. Both the phenomenal world and language can conceal or reveal Brahman, depending on whether one pays attention to them.

The supreme goal in the *Gītā* is entering Kṛṣṇa, but all beings already stand in Him. The goal is not yet-to-be-attained, but yet-to-be-recognized. Kṛṣṇa, like Brahman, is the unity underlying the world of multiplicity. By exalting a God with name and form over the eternal unmanifest, the *Gītā* does not teach that Kṛṣṇa is beyond Brahman (for

nothing can be beyond that which is All). Rather, it teaches that supreme knowledge is found in the world of name and form, not apart from it. Kṛṣṇa teaches that one enters Him after becoming Brahman, for becoming Brahman is the moment of recognition of unity between the Self and the All, but entering Kṛṣṇa is standing firm in this recognition while living in the world.

Many modern commentaries on the *Gītā* teach that there are four paths to the supreme goal (*jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga*, *bhakti-yoga*, and *rāja-yoga*), and that they can be taken by different kinds of people—i.e., each person can choose the path that best suits them. We saw that these are all part of the same path and are, therefore, inseparable.

Arjuna was not prepared to stand firm in recognition because he was unpractised in *karma-yoga*. *Karma* means action, but *karma-yoga* means specifically unattached action. Kṛṣṇa teaches that one should be unattached to the fruits of action, to agency, and to the sense objects. All of these are rooted in non-attachment to one's subjectivity. Non-action does not free one from *saṃsāra*, because non-action is impossible. Non-attachment to one's subjectivity frees one from *saṃsāra*, for *saṃsāra* is the repeated birth of the subject. Knowledge and non-attachment are inseparable, for knowledge is necessary for complete non-attachment and non-attachment allows one to stand firm in knowledge. Knowledge is both right action and one's mindset when performing them—the supreme goal is not simply the moment of recognition, but allowing recognition of supreme knowledge to pervade daily life activities. Highest *bhakti* is bestowing all beings on Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa on all beings. To be devoted to Kṛṣṇa is to know that Kṛṣṇa is All—*bhakti*, therefore, is supreme knowledge. A path of *rāja-yoga* is not mentioned in the *Gītā*, but the practices that have come to be designated by this term—Patañjali's eight

limbs of yoga—are prescribed by Kṛṣṇa. The inward practices of *rāja-yoga* are no different than the practices we have already seen in the other “paths”: *pratyāhāra* is the control of the senses (i.e., non-attachment to sense objects); *dhāraṇa* is steadiness in this; *dhyāna* is keeping the attention on that which is to be recognized; and *samādhi* is at-onement between the Self and all beings.

We ended by considering more closely why Arjuna—and the three worlds—were frightened by the revelation of Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self: They feared the vision of Kṛṣṇa as the Destroyer. “To destroy” (*samāhṛ*) does not mean “to bring to nothing”, for nothing can come to be nothing. Instead, it means “to bring together”. Both Arjuna and Saṁjaya described this “form” as having many limbs, ornaments, and weapons, for Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self encompassed all the limbs, ornaments, and weapons of the soldiers in the surrounding battlefield. The entire world stands in Kṛṣṇa’s imperishable Self. Arjuna, and the three worlds, saw Kṛṣṇa as the Destroyer not only because they saw armies rushing into his flaming mouths, but because they saw the togetherness of beings in Him. This is the supreme knowledge, but its recognition was only momentary because it caused Arjuna (and the three worlds) to tremble. Still attached to their subjectivity, they were frightened by the revelation of non-duality. As the creation of the world brings multiplicity from the sacrifice of unity, so destruction brings unity from the sacrifice of multiplicity. These are not ultimately separate states, for they coexist in Kṛṣṇa; instead, they are two ways of understanding the world. When one is attached to one’s subjectivity, one clings to one kind of understanding—that of beings as divided. It is this attachment that covers the supreme knowledge that is liberation.

The unity underlying the multiplicity, whether it is called Kṛṣṇa or Brahman, is not seen by turning away from the world, but by removing the attachment that hides it *in* the world. Brahman is not in some other time or place. To turn away from the world is to turn away from Brahman, for Brahman is the world. Kṛṣṇa says:

He from whom the world shrinks not, and who shrinks not from the world,
Pleasure¹⁹⁴-impatience-fear-anxiety liberated (*muktas*), he is my beloved. (12.15)

The world shrinks from one who is in *avidyā* because such a person sees the world as empty (i.e., without Brahman). But one who is not fearful can face the world as it is. Brahman is already here; we need only to release the attachment that keeps Brahman hidden, and Brahman—and the world—will be revealed.

¹⁹⁴ Pleasure is *harṣā*, the happiness tied to the attainment of fruits. But there is an imperishable happiness (*sukham akṣayam*) that is to be attained by one who finds happiness in the Self (*Gītā* 5.21). Fruits, and therefore the happiness tied to them, are perishable, but happiness found in the Self is eternal.

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APPENDIX: The Etymology of √*Muc*

The following is a list of the derivatives of √*muc* in the *R̥g-Veda*, *Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads*, *Brahma-Sūtras*, and *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Extra grammatical notes are provided for the derivatives in the *Gītā*.

RG-VEDA

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Derivative</u> ¹⁹⁵	<u>Context</u> ¹⁹⁶
1.31.4	<i>mucyase</i>	Agni thou madest heaven to thunder for mankind; thou, yet more pious, for pious Pururavas. When thou art rapidly freed (<i>mucyase</i>) from thy parents, first eastward they bear thee round, and, after, to the west.
1.42.1	<i>vimucas</i>	Shorten our ways, O Pusan, move aside (<i>vimuco</i>) obstruction in the path: Go close before us, cloud-born God.
5.46.1	<i>vimucam</i>	Well knowing I have bound me, horselike, to the pole: I carry that which bears as on and gives us help. I seek for no release (<i>vimucam</i>), no turning back therefrom. May he who knows the way, the Leader, guide me straight.
6.50.10	<i>amumuktam</i>	Come also to my call, O ye Nasatyas, yea, verily, through my prayers, ye Holy Sages. As from great darkness ye delivered (<i>amumuktam</i>) Atri, protect us, Chiefs, from danger in the conflict.
6.55.1	<i>vimucas</i>	Son of Deliverance (<i>vimuco</i>), come, bright God! Let us twain go together: be our charioteer of sacrifice.
8.24.27	<i>mucad</i>	Who will set free (<i>mucad</i>) from ruinous woe, or Arya on the Seven Streams: O valiant Hero, bend the Dasa's weapon down.
7.71.5	<i>amumuktam</i>	Ye freed (<i>amumuktam</i>) Cyavana from old age and weakness: ye brought the courser fleet of food to Pedu. Ye rescued Atri from distress and darkness, and loosed for Jahusa the bonds that bound him.
10.27.24	<i>mucyate</i>	This is thy life: and do thou mark and know it. As such, hide not thyself in time of battle.

¹⁹⁵ Sandhi has been removed from all words in this column.

¹⁹⁶ All verses in this column are from Griffith's translation.

He manifests the light and hides the vapour: his foot is never **free** (*mucyate*) from robes that veil it.

10.138.3 *amucad* In the mid-way of heaven the Sun **unyoked** (*amucad*) his car: the Arya found a match to meet his Dam foe.
Associate with Rjisvan Indra overthrew the solid forts of Pipru, conjuring Asura.

References to the demon *Namuci* (lit. “not loosing”):

1.53.7; 2.14.5; 5.30.7; 5.30.8; 6.10.6; 7.19.5; 8.14.13; 10.73.7; 10.111.9; 10.131.4.

References to the unyoking of horses:

1.104.1 (*vimucyā*); 1.171.1 (*mucadvam*); 1.177.4 (*mucā*); 2.38.3 (*mucāti*); 3.32.1 (*vimucyā*); 3.35.3 (*muceha*) 3.41.8 (*mumuco*); 3.43.1 (*mucopa*); 5.62.1 (*vimucanty*); 6.40.1 (*mucā*); 7.91.5 (*mumuktam*).

THIRTEEN PRINCIPLE UPANIṢADS

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Derivative</u>	<u>Context</u> ¹⁹⁷
<i>Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad</i>		
3.1.3	<i>atimucyata,</i> <i>muktis,</i> <i>atimuktis</i>	“Yājñavalkya,” said he [the Hotri-priest Aśvala], “since everything here is overtaken by death, since everything is overcome by death, whereby is a sacrificer liberated (<i>atimucyata</i>) beyond the reach of death?” [Yājñavalkya replied,] “By the Hotri-priest, by fire, by speech. Verily, speech is the Hotri of sacrifice. That which is this speech is this fire, is the Hotri. This is release (<i>muktiḥ</i>), this is complete release (<i>atimuktiḥ</i>).”
3.1.4	<i>atimucyata,</i> <i>muktis,</i> <i>atimuktis</i>	“Yājñavalkya,” said he, “since everything here is overtaken by day and night, since everything is overcome by day and night, whereby is a sacrificer liberated (<i>atimucyata</i>) beyond day and night?” “By the Adhvaryu-priest, by the eye, by the sun. Verily, the eye is the Adhvaryu of sacrifice. That which is this eye is yonder sun, is the Adhvaryu. This is release (<i>muktiḥ</i>), this is complete release (<i>atimuktiḥ</i>)”
3.1.5	<i>atimucyata,</i> <i>muktis,</i> <i>atimuktis</i>	“Yājñavalkya,” said he, “since everything here is overtaken by the waxing and waning moon, by what means does a sacrificer obtain release (<i>atimucyata</i>) from the waxing and waning moon?” “By the Udgatri-priest, by the wind, by breath. Verily breath is the Udgatri of the sacrifice. That which is this breath is wind, is the Udgatri. This is release (<i>muktiḥ</i>), this is complete release (<i>atimuktiḥ</i>).”

¹⁹⁷ All verses in this column are from Hume’s translation.

3.1.6 *muktis,*
atimuktis,
atimokṣās “Yājñavalkya,” said he, “since this atmosphere does not afford a [foot]hold, as it were, by what means of ascent does a sacrificer ascend to the heavenly world?”
 “By the Brahman-priest, by the mind, by the moon. Verily, the mind is the Brahman of the sacrifice. That which is this mind is yonder moon, is the Brahman. This is **release** (*muktiḥ*), this is **complete release** (*atimuktiḥ*).”—Thus [concerning] **liberation** (*atimokṣaḥ*).

4.4.7 *pramucyante* When are **liberated** (*pramucyante*) all
 The desires that lodge in one's heart,
 Then a mortal becomes immortal!
 Therein he reaches Brahma!

Chāndogya Upaniṣad

7.26.2 *vipramokṣas* In acquiring the traditional doctrines there is **release** (*vipramokṣaḥ*) from all knots [of the heart].

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad

1.7 *muktāḥ* By knowing what is therein, Brahma-knowers become merged in Brahma, intent thereon, **liberated** (*muktāḥ*) from the womb.

1.8 *mucyate* That which is joined together as perishable and imperishable, as manifest and unmanifest – the Lord (*īśa*, Potentate) supports it all. Now, without the Lord the soul (*ātman*) is bound, because of being an enjoyer; By knowing God (*deva*) one is **released** (*mucyate*) from all fetters.

6.13 *mucyate* Him who is the constant among the inconstant, the intelligent among intelligences,
 The One among many, who grants desires,
 That Cause, attainable by discrimination and abstraction (*sāṅkhya-yoga*)—
 By knowing God, one is **released** (*mucyate*) from all fetters!

6.16 *mokṣa* He who is the maker of all, the all-knower, self-sourced,
 Intelligent, the author of time, possessor of qualities, omniscient,
 Is the ruler of Primary Matter (*pradhāna*) and of the spirit (*ksetra-jña*), the lord of qualities (*guṇa*),
 The cause of transmigration (*saṃsāra*) and of **liberation** (*mokṣa*), of continuance and of bondage.

6.18 *mumukṣu* To Him who of old creates Brahmā,
 And who, verily, delivers to him the Vedas—
 To that God, who is lighted by his own intellect,
 Do I, being **desirous of liberation** (*mumukṣu*), resort as a shelter.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

3.2.9 *vimuktas* He, verily, who knows the Supreme Brahma, becomes very Brahma. In his family no one ignorant of Brahma arises. He crosses over sorrow. He crosses over sin (*pāpman*). **Liberated** (*vimukto*) from the knots of the heart, he becomes immortal.

Kaṭha Upaniṣad

6.8/2.3.8 *mucyate* Higher than the Unmanifest, however, is the Person (Purusha), All-pervading and without any mark (*a-liṅga*) whatever. Knowing which, a man is **liberated** (*mucyate*) And goes to immortality.

6.14/2.3.14 *pramucyante* When are **liberated** (*pramucyante*) all The desires that lodge in one's heart, Then a mortal becomes immortal! Therein he reaches Brahma!

Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad

6.30 *muktas,*
mokṣas,
mokṣa Verily, freedom from desire (*niṣkāmatva*) is like the choicest extract from the choicest treasure. For, a person who is made up of all desires, who has the marks of determination, conception, and self-conceit, is bound. Hence, in being the opposite of that, he is **liberated** (*muktaḥ*).
On this point some say: “It is a quality (*guṇa*) which by force of the developing differentiation of Nature (*prakṛti*) comes to bind the self with determination [and the like], and that **liberation** (*mokṣaḥ*) results from the destruction of the fault of determination [and the like].”...
Hence a person who has the marks of determination, conception, and self-conceit is bound. Hence, in being the opposite of that, he is liberated. Therefore one should stand free from determination, free from conception, free from self-conceit. This is the mark of **liberation** (*mokṣa*). This is the pathway to Brahma here in this world.

6.34 *mucyeta,*
mokṣam,
parimucyate,
mokṣayos,
mokṣas As firmly as the thought of man Is fixed within the realm of sense— If thus on Brahma it were fixed, Who would not be **released** (*mucyeta*) from bond?...

So long the mind should be confined,
Till in the heart it meets its end.
That is both knowledge and **release** (*mokṣam*)!
All else is but a string of words!...

In water, water; fire in fire;
In air, air one could not discern.
So he whose mind has entered in [Atman]—
Released (*parimucyate*) is he from everything!

The mind, in truth, is for mankind
 The means of bondage and **release** (*mokṣayoḥ*):
 For bondage, if to objects bound;
 From objects free—that’s called **release** (*mokṣaḥ*)!

BRAHMA-SŪTRAS

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Derivative</u>	<u>Context</u> ¹⁹⁸
1.1.7	<i>mokṣa</i>	Liberation (<i>mokṣa</i>) is of the situated in that [Brahman].
1.3.2	<i>mukta</i>	It [Brahman] is to be approached by the liberated (<i>mukta</i>).
2.1.11	<i>anirmokṣa</i>	Moreover, of the ungrounded reasoning, “It is to be inferred otherwise” ¹⁹⁹ , absence of liberation (<i>anirmokṣa</i>) is the consequence.
3.4.52	<i>mukti</i>	Thus there is no rule of liberation (<i>mukti</i>)-fruit. ²⁰⁰
4.4.2	<i>muktas</i>	Completed, one is visible ²⁰¹ (4.4.1)... [And] liberated (<i>muktaḥ</i>), [this is known] from the promise (4.4.2).

BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Derivative</u> ²⁰²	<u>Context</u> ²⁰³
2.51	<i>vinimuktās</i> (m. nom. pl. participle <i>vi nir</i> √ <i>muc</i>)	For the <i>buddhi</i> -yoked, having abandoned Action-born fruit, the wise, Birth-bondage- liberated (<i>vinimuktās</i>), The place they go is without sickness.
3.9	<i>mukta</i> (p. pass. participle √ <i>muc</i>)	Besides sacrifice-purpose action, This world is action-bound, Action for that purpose, Son of Kunti, Attachment- liberated (<i>mukta</i>), perform.
3.13	<i>mucyante</i> (3 rd pl. pr. indic. passive √ <i>muc</i>)	The sacrifice-remainder-eating good ones Are liberated (<i>mucyante</i>) from all fault (<i>kilbiṣa</i>), They eat impurity, the wicked Who cook for their own sake.

¹⁹⁸ All verses in this column have been translated by me.

¹⁹⁹ The previous verses stated that Brahman is the cause of the universe.

²⁰⁰ Śankara interprets this to mean that there is no rule whereby one who has attained knowledge can delay liberation, since one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman.

²⁰¹ Śankara interprets “visible” as meaning the manifestation of the real nature of the *jīva* (individual soul).

²⁰² All grammatical notes in this column are from Sargeant’s translation of the Bhagavad-Gītā.

²⁰³ All verses in this column have been translated by me.

3.31	<i>mucyante</i> (3 rd pl. pr. pass. √ <i>muc</i>)	Who my teaching constantly Follow, men, Faith-having, not displeased, They are liberated (<i>mucyante</i>) by actions.
4.15	<i>mumukṣubhiḥ</i> (ins. pl. desiderative noun from √ <i>muc</i>)	Thus having known, action was performed By the prior ones, by the desirous of liberation (<i>mumukṣubhiḥ</i>), Perform action therefore, you, As the prior ones have prior done.
4.16	<i>mokṣyase</i> (2 nd sg. future passive √ <i>muc</i>)	“What is action, what is non-action?” Even the poets are in this matter confused, This, for you, action I will proclaim, Which, having known, you will be liberated (<i>mokṣyase</i>) from misfortune.
4.23	<i>muktasya</i> (m. gen. sg. p. pass. participle √ <i>muc</i>)	Of the attachment-gone, of the liberated (<i>muktasya</i>), Of the one whose thoughts stand in knowledge, Approaching action for sacrifice, Wholly it is melted.
4.32	<i>vimokṣyase</i> (2 nd sg. fut. pass. <i>vi</i> √ <i>muc</i>)	Thus the many forms of sacrifices, Spread in the mouth of Brahman, Action-born know them all, Thus knowing, you will be liberated (<i>vimokṣyase</i>).
5.3	<i>pramucyate</i> (3 rd sg. pr. indic. passive <i>pra</i> √ <i>muc</i>)	[The <i>karma</i> -yogin is] to be known the eternal <i>saṃnyāsī</i> (renouncer), Who does not hate, does not desire, For without opposites, Mighty-Armed One, Easily from bondage he is liberated (<i>pramucyate</i>).
5.23	<i>vimokṣanāt</i> (m. abl. sg. verbal noun from <i>vi</i> √ <i>muc</i>)	He who is able here to overcome, Prior to body- liberation (<i>vimokṣanāt</i>), Desire-anger-arising agitation, He is yoked, he is a happy man.
5.28	<i>mokṣa</i> (part of BV cpd.), <i>muktas</i> (m. nom. sg. p. pass participle √ <i>muc</i>)	Senses, mind, and <i>buddhi</i> controlled, The sage, with liberation (<i>mokṣa</i>) as the supreme path, Desire, fear, anger departed, He is always (<i>sadā</i>) liberated (<i>muktas</i>).
7.28	<i>nirmuktās</i> (m. nom. pl. p. pass. participle <i>nir</i> √ <i>muc</i>)	But those whose wickedness has gone to the end, Those whose actions are auspicious, They, liberated (<i>nirmuktā</i>) from duality-confusion, Are devoted to me with fixed vows.
7.29	<i>mokṣāya</i> (m. dat. sg.)	Those who strive for old-age-and-dying- liberation (<i>mokṣāya</i>), On me resting, Know Brahman wholly,

		The Over-Ātman and action without gap.
8.5	<i>muktvā</i> (gerund √muc)	And at the end-time, indeed, Remembering me, having liberated (<i>muktvā</i>) the body, One who dies, to my-being goes— There is not in this matter doubt.
9.1	<i>mokṣyase</i> (2 nd sg. future pass. √muc)	But this for you, the highest secret, I will proclaim to the non-sneering, Knowledge and discrimination put together, Having known which, you will be released (<i>mokṣyase</i>) from misfortune (<i>aśubha</i>).
9.28	<i>mokṣyase</i> (2 nd sg. future pass. √muc), <i>vimuktas</i> (m. nom. sg. p. pass. participle vi √muc)	From good and evil fruits, thus From the bonds of action (<i>karma-bandha</i>), you will be liberated (<i>mokṣyase</i>), Self-yoked-yoga-of-renunciation, Liberated (<i>vimuktaḥ</i>), you will come to me.
10.3	<i>pramucyate</i> (3 rd sg. pr. indic. passive pra √muc)	He who knows me, the birthless and beginningless, The World’s Great Lord, Not confused—he, among mortals, From all evils is liberated (<i>pramucyate</i>).
12.15	<i>muktas</i> (m. nom. sg. p. pass. participle √muc)	He from whom the world shrinks not, And who shrinks not from the world, Joy-impatience-fear-anxiety liberated (<i>muktas</i>), He is my beloved.
13.34	<i>mokṣa</i> , (m. acc. sg.)	Those who know the interior of the field-field-knower ²⁰⁴ Thus, by the knowledge-eye, And the liberation (<i>mokṣam</i>) of <i>prakṛti</i> -beings, They go beyond.
14.20	<i>vimuktas</i> (m. nom. sg. p. pass. participle vi √muc)	Transcending these three <i>guṇas</i> , The embodied one, the body-originating one, Liberated (<i>vimukta</i>) from birth, death, age and pain He attains immortality.
15.5	<i>vimuktās</i> (m. nom. pl. pass. participle vi √muc)	Without arrogance and confusion, attachment-evils conquered, Eternally in the Over-Ātman, desires turned away, With the dualities known as pleasure and pain liberated (<i>vimuktās</i>), The unconfused go to that imperishable place.

²⁰⁴ “Field-field knower” is the compound *kṣetra-kṣetra-jñayos*. The case of *kṣetra* is unknown, so this could mean “field-knower and field”, “field-knower in field”, “field-knower with field”, “field-knower of field”, etc. As Kṛṣṇa taught in Book XIII, He is the field-knower and the body is the field.

16.5	<i>vimokṣāya</i> (m. dat. sg.)	The divine destiny is for liberation (<i>vimokṣāya</i>), For bondage is the demonic, it is thought. Do not grieve. To the destiny divine, Born are you, Son of Pāṇḍu.
16.22	<i>vimuktas</i> (m. nom. sg. p. pass. participle <i>vi</i> \sqrt{muc})	Liberated (<i>vimuktas</i>), Son of Kuntī, From the three <i>tamas</i> -gates, a man Practises the Self’s best, Then goes the <i>parām gatim</i> .
17.25	<i>mokṣa</i> (m.)	Saying “that” without taking aim at Fruit, acts of sacrifice and austerity, And acts of giving of various sorts, Are done by the liberation (<i>mokṣa</i>)-desirous.
18.26	<i>mukta</i> (p. pass. participle \sqrt{muc})	Attachment- liberated (<i>mukta</i>), without “I”-speaking, By firmness and power accompanied, In accomplishment and non-accomplishment unchanged, This doer is said to be <i>sattvic</i> .
18.30	<i>mokṣam</i> (m. acc. sg.)	Progress and non-progress, The to-be-done and not-to-be-done, the to-be-feared and not-to be feared, Bondage and liberation (<i>mokṣam</i>), the <i>buddhi</i> which knows this, That, Son of Pṛthā, is <i>sattvic</i> .
18.40	<i>muktam</i> (n. nom. sg. p. pass. participle \sqrt{muc})	There is not on earth or In heaven or among the gods again, A being that may be liberated (<i>muktam</i>) By the three <i>prakṛti</i> -born <i>guṇas</i> .
18.53	<i>vimucya</i> (gerund <i>vi</i> \sqrt{muc})	Egoism (<i>aham-kāra</i>), force, insolence, Desire, anger, possession Having liberated (<i>vimucya</i>) , without “my”, pacified, One is fit for Brahman-being.
18.66	<i>mokṣayisāmi</i> (1 st sg. causative future act. \sqrt{muc})	All <i>dharmas</i> abandoning, In me alone refuge take, I, to you, all evils Will cause to be liberated (<i>mokṣayisāmi</i>); do not grieve.
18.71	<i>muktas</i> (m. nom. sg. p. pass. participle \sqrt{muc})	Even the man, faith-having and not spiteful, Who hears [this dialogue], He is also liberated (<i>muktas</i>). May he attain the happy worlds of the auspicious actions.