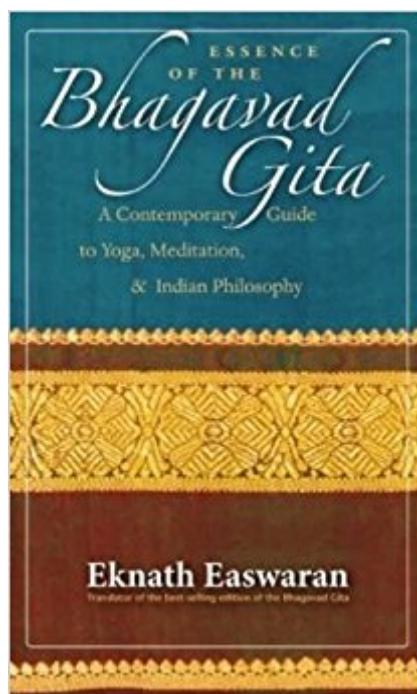


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Essence Of The Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Guide To Yoga, Meditation, And Indian Philosophy (Wisdom Of India)



Synopsis

In this companion to his best-selling translation of the Bhagavad Gita, Easwaran explores the essential themes of this much-loved Indian scripture. Placing the Gita in a modern context, he shows how it sheds light on the nature of reality, the illusion of separateness, the search for identity, and the meaning of yoga. The key message of the Gita is how to resolve our conflicts and live in harmony with the deep unity of life, through the principles of yoga and the practice of meditation. Easwaran grew up in the Hindu tradition and learned Sanskrit from an early age. A foremost translator and interpreter of the Gita, he taught classes on it for forty years, while living out the principles of the Gita in the midst of a busy family and community life. In the Gita, Sri Krishna, the Lord, doesn't tell the warrior prince Arjuna what to do: he shows Arjuna his choices and then leaves it to Arjuna to decide. Easwaran, too, shows us clearly how these teachings still apply to us – and how, like Arjuna, we must take courage and act wisely if we want our world to thrive.

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Customer Reviews

"It is impossible to get to the heart of those classics unless you live them, and [Easwaran] did live them. My admiration of the man and his works is boundless." – HUSTON SMITH, author of *The World's Religions* (Reviewing Easwaran's translation, *The Bhagavad Gita*)

Eknath Easwaran (1910 – 1999) was brought up in the Hindu tradition and learned Sanskrit from a young age. He was chairman of the English department at a major Indian university when he

came to the United States on a Fulbright fellowship in 1959. A gifted teacher and writer who settled in the West, Easwaran lived out the principles of the Gita in the midst of a busy family and community life. His translations of the Indian classics, The Bhagavad Gita, The Upanishads, and The Dhammapada, are all best-sellers in their field, and more than 1.5 million copies of his books are in print.

This book has been produced posthumously from recorded talks. Guided by the author's specific instructions before his death, the editors (long-time students of his) have done a stunning job. (The material in this book has not been previously published.) I hope for at least a few more such posthumous books, and I believe they are in process. The book displays Easwaran's usual graceful clarity of thought and word. But I think this is the deepest of Easwaran's books to date. This one goes deep, deep into the heart and mind of humanity. I've gained insights from this book which I have not gained from his prior books, even though I've studied them all. Maybe I just wasn't ready for these insights until now, I cannot tell for absolutely certain-sure. But I think this book is deeper. I've just finished it; I will re-read it this week, slowly, and ponder its message. I've no doubt it will be read again and again, and become dog-eared rather quickly. It's a life-changing, seriously life-enhancing book, perhaps particularly for those individuals who are chasing material goods and/or power in the sad delusion that these will make them truly happy. But it would be life-enhancing for everyone. In conclusion, I can do no better than copy a sentence from Nalini's review: "Nowhere have I found such a clear exposition of the path into deeper consciousness and how we can truly transform our personalities." This says it all. Pat Meadows (who is deeply grateful to Easwaran and to the editors of this book - Thank you!)

From a small operation in Northern California, Eknath Easwaran and the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation continue to produce books of enormous importance. This latest addition to Easwaran's legacy is one of the most insightful to date. If you enjoy Easwaran's teachings, if you're yearning for ultra deep insights into this beloved Hindu scripture, or if you simply want to read elegant prose seasoned with delightfully modern, often amusing stories and analogies, you'll love this book. Many Gita commentaries (including Easwaran's own three-volume set) explore the text passage by passage. Through these, we quickly discern that the battle described in the Gita is not physical but internal and that this battle is won using will power rather than firepower. Beyond the individual words and passages, however, lies much more. Deftly wielding his little but powerful lamp, Easwaran leads us on a spelunking trip deep into the heart of the Gita. Along the way, we encounter

wisdom from such varied sources as Shankara, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Spinoza, Jung, Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield, physiologist Hudson Hoagland and others. The journey is at once simple and profound. The book begins by introducing the split in consciousness between our lower and higher selves that causes separateness and struggle. Easwaran explores the nature of reality and personality, explaining that we are not our bodies or our minds (!) and that identification with these imposters keeps us feeling separate from everyone and everything. Beginning with chapter six, we move from theory to practice. Easwaran explains how to heal the split using a system of living that includes meditation, living deliberately and experimenting with our likes and dislikes. The words are practical and enormously compelling. The final three chapters describe the journey of humanity toward its ultimate goal: self-realization. We have no choice but to fight this battle, Easwaran and the Gita insist. Putting our heads in the sand or playing with the toys of life only delays the battle and prolongs our misery. Ultimately, Easwaran's Gita tells us we will not only fight but also win and that this glorious day comes much more quickly when we seize the initiative and realize our potential. This story could only be told by a lifelong student of the Gita, someone who has lived it each day and is now so familiar with it that its words pale against the underlying meaning. Even so, in the hands of a lesser writer, no one but an enlightened being could even understand how the meaning derives from the words. But Easwaran's ideas fit together so well and are so nicely supported by the sparsely used but powerful Gita verses that, by the end, it's utterly impossible to deny both the wisdom of this interpretation and the inevitability of its effect on us.

In reading Eknath Easwaran's *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*, you get the impression of someone who is located at the heart of this spiritual classic looking out while the rest of us are peering in through the outer panes. This can only be a result of Easwaran's scholarly knowledge of the Gita combined with "living the message" in his daily life. From this still point, Easwaran uncovers for us the various layers of the Gita in a rich tapestry. He covers topics such as the nature of reality, levels of personality, our illusion of separateness from the rest of life, the meaning of yoga, healing the unconscious, and so on. These are woven together seamlessly, giving the reader a panoramic view of the Gita that few authors can provide. Easwaran's genius is his ability to describe the timeless truths of the Gita in language that is contextual and easy to comprehend. And yet, as the publisher's note points out, this book is a distillation of 40 years of teaching. Like any other distillation, it is concentrated and must be savored in small portions and repeatedly. That is certainly what I intend to do!

This has really awakened my appreciation as to why prolific texts like the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads are timeless, and have changed the lives of many. The author makes the underlying morals and advice understandable and relevant to anyone in today's world, with his graphic analogies. My intention is to read all of his leading texts, and I'll probably be ready to make the second pass upon completion. As if you hadn't guessed; highly recommended for anyone who wants to find a better world and a richer and more fulfilling life.

I've never read or purchased a book from Mr Easwaran that I didn't find full of insight and the cost (in currency) of which wasn't dwarfed by the value in life. If you've heard of this book from somewhere (noted on a blog post maybe) or you've read other of Mr Easwaran's books and are simply looking for another, you won't be disappointed in this one.

This is a very simple, contemporary interpretation of the great book. I am surprised at the complete lack of reference to religion. Instead one's relationship with a divine power is considered an inward drive, fiercely personal. There is an appeal to that!

Eknath has a unique ability to translate the essence of the Bhagavad teachings, excellent study tool for practitioners. Highly recommended. Thank you!

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