



THE WORK IS YOURS, NOT THE FRUIT

The One Who Acts

*Where the Bhagavad Gita meets
modern psychology*

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You have a claim on the work, never on its fruit. Do not make the fruit your reason, and do not cling to inaction either.

A plain rendering of Bhagavad Gita 2.47.

Disclaimer

This book is for general education and self-understanding. It is not medical, psychological, legal, or financial advice, and it is not a substitute for a qualified professional. Nothing in it is intended to treat, cure, or prevent any condition.

The practices here are contemplative and behavioral practices, not clinical interventions. For most people they are safe. For some people, in some conditions, they are the wrong tool. If you are dealing with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, trauma, an eating disorder, psychosis, or any other significant mental or physical health concern, work with a qualified professional and treat anything here as something to discuss with them.

If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, reach out now. Contact your local emergency number or crisis line. That comes before anything in these pages.

A Note Before You Read

Four things about how to read this book.

On tradition and remaking. The Bhagavad Gita is a scripture set inside a war epic, spoken by a god to a soldier. This book reads it through psychology and behavioral science, as a technology for acting when you cannot control the result. That reading costs something. Devotion to Krishna becomes “a stance of release”; the offering of work to the divine becomes “naming who the work is for”; the eternal self that neither slays nor is slain becomes “a decentered vantage you can train.” Each of those is thinner than the original, and each still works as far as it goes. The Gita also carries a social order I do not accept, and the chapter on one’s own work says so directly rather than quietly editing it out. The fuller statement is in the back matter.

On what science can show. Where research and the text converge, I show the convergence. It does not prove the text’s metaphysics. A finding that outcome-fixation harms skilled performance does not prove that the fruit of action belongs to God. There is a second caution specific to this book: much of the psychology that would seem to back the Gita comes from the era before large replication checks, and some of the most quotable findings have failed those checks. Where a favorite result did not survive, I say so, because a manual that leans on a collapsed finding is a manual that will fail you at the moment you need it.

On the companion books. *The One Who Notices*, which I call the first book below because it was written first, followed Patanjali’s eight limbs inward, from conduct to stillness. This book runs the other direction: from a mind that will not fully still, out into work, decisions, people, and loss. It stands alone. Where a

practice from the first book does a job better than anything here, I point to it rather than repeat it. The two texts share their method in the same two words (steady practice and release, *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, Gita 6.35 and Yoga Sutra 1.12), and they share the same distinction between the observer and what is observed. They disagree on God. I hold that open in both books. Two other books sit beside these. *The Long Argument* is the map of the six schools this text belongs to; its chapters on the three qualities, the four roads, and dharma as a decision procedure are the short versions of what Chapters 3, 5, and 7 here do at length. *The Practical Yoga Sutras* is the complete manual to Patanjali. Nothing here requires any of them.

On who is speaking, and how this was made. I write as a practitioner, not a teacher. The substance comes from my own notes and practice; I used AI tools to help draft and organize it into prose, then edited it and checked every claim against its source. The errors that remain are mine. None of that asks for your trust. Read closely, notice where claims are hedged, test the practices, and prefer your own results to my report of mine. That is the method the book asks you to use on your life, and it applies to the book.

Introduction

The Gita opens with a man who cannot act. Arjuna is a soldier at the edge of a battle he has trained his whole life for, against people he loves, and when the conches sound he sits down in his chariot, drops his bow, and says he will not fight. The rest of the text is a conversation about what to do when you must act and cannot know how it will turn out.

That is the situation of most decisions that matter. The result is not in your hands. The action is. The mind treats the two as one object, and, unable to secure the first, refuses the second. You do not leave the job, have the conversation, ship the work, or make the call, not because you decided against it but because deciding would mean accepting an outcome you cannot guarantee. Arjuna's paralysis has a very ordinary shape.

The Gita's answer, in one line, is that you have authority over your actions and none over their fruits, so do the action completely and release the fruit. The line is famous and is usually quoted as consolation. It is not consolation. It is a claim about mechanism: that attention spent on the outcome is attention taken from the work, and that a mind gripping a result it cannot control is a mind running its threat system through the whole task. The rest of the text works out what follows from that claim: how to read a result once it arrives, how to find the work that is yours, how to hold pleasure and pain and praise and blame without being run by them, how to speak, how to regard other people, and what to do about death, which is the one outcome no one has authority over. This manual follows that sequence, in modern clothes, with one concrete practice per chapter.

On the science. Psychology has, from a different direction, described most of the machinery the Gita is pointing at. It has shown that watching your own performance disrupts it, that intrinsic motivation predicts the quality of work while rewards predict its quantity, that people misjudge how long a gain or a loss will feel, that a wandering mind is an unhappier one, that speaking to yourself by name cools an emotion, and that a wish for someone's wellbeing does not burn you out the way feeling their pain does. Where the research sees the problem better, it leads; that is mostly the mechanics of motivation, attention, and emotion. Where the tradition sees it better, the tradition leads; that is mostly what to do about outcomes you cannot control, how to hold a role, and how to meet loss. Where they disagree, I say so. The Gita wants the fruit released entirely; psychology finds that outcome goals still orient and energize people, and that people who never look at results do not learn. That disagreement is real and I do not paper over it.

On the Yoga Sutras. Patanjali describes how a mind settles. The Gita describes how to act from a mind that has not settled and may not. They were compiled within a few centuries of each other and use the same vocabulary for the method. Both hold that what you are is the knower, not the known. The Sutras supply this book's fourfold attitude toward other people, its list of obstacles, and its method for changing a habit of mind. The Gita supplies everything about work, result, role, and surrender. I practice the Sutras. The Gita I have leaned on in the years when what I needed was not stillness but the ability to stand up.

How to use the book. It is organized by function: the field you act in, how you act, how you hold what comes back, how you meet others, and how you let go. Each chapter states the text's claim, gives the research at its real strength, marks the divergence, and closes with one practice. Do not do them all. Read the whole thing once if you like, then pick the chapter that matches what is loud, do its practice for a season, and let go of how fast it works. The back matter has a Practice Index and a Season Planner for that.

Start Here

If something is loud now, do not read your way in. Pick the entry point that matches it.

If you are frozen before a decision, start with Chapter 1 and the Decision Card that follows it.

If you are working hard and miserable about how it will land, start with Chapter 5.

If you have just failed, or just succeeded, and cannot tell what it means, start with Chapter 6.

If you suspect you are in the wrong work, or you cannot stop comparing yourself to someone else's, start with Chapter 7.

If you are angry more than you want to be, start with Chapter 4, then Chapter 10.

If you cannot stop, cannot rest, and your days have no shape, start with Chapter 3 and Chapter 11.

If someone you love is ill or gone, start with Chapter 12, then Chapter 15.

If you keep saying things you regret, start with Chapter 13.

If you cannot tell whether what you carry is something a practice can touch or something clinical, read When to Seek Help in the back matter first.

The Decision Card

For a decision you must make and cannot. You do not need to read this. Do the first thing.

First, the body. Exhale longer than you inhale for one minute, roughly in for four and out for six. A frozen decision sits on a frozen body, and the body moves first.

Then, split the page. Draw a line down the middle. On the left, write what is yours: the action, how you would do it, by when. On the right, write what is not yours: the result, other people's reactions, what it will mean in a year. Only the left column is a decision. The right column is a forecast, and forecasts are not decided.

Then, ask one person, plainly. Write one sentence beginning "I am confused about" and finish it without softening. Send it to one person whose judgment you trust, with no framing, and ask for their read. This is the move that turns the whole Gita; Chapter 1 explains why.

Then, choose the smaller reversible step if one exists. If none exists, choose, and set a date to review.

Then, say the close. I have done what is mine. The rest is not in my hands. Then act.

If the paralysis has lasted weeks, is costing you sleep, and you cannot tell why, see When to Seek Help.

PART ONE: THE FIELD

The Gita's word for the place where all of this happens is *kshetra*, the field. The text's opening words put you on one: *dharmakshetre kurukshetre*, on the field of dharma, at Kurukshetra. Before any technique, four things about the field: what paralysis actually is, the two things you are made of, the three weathers your mind runs in, and the chain that turns a passing want into a wrecked afternoon. I skipped this layer for years and kept fixing the surface.

Chapter 1: The Collapse Before the Battle

Notice what the Gita records first. Not an argument. A body. Arjuna's limbs fail, his mouth dries, his body trembles, his hair stands, the bow slips from his hand, his skin burns, he cannot stand, his mind reels (1.28-30). The reasons come after, and they arrive as a cascade: if we fight, families die; if families die, the order of things collapses; if the order collapses, everything I care about ends; so it would be better if they killed me unarmed (1.31-46). Body first, then a chain of anticipated consequences, then a conclusion dressed as principle.

That order is the diagnosis. The freeze is physiology. The reasoning is what the mind generates afterward to explain a state it is already in, which is the same observation the first book made about emotion arriving before thought. If you have ever sat in front of a decision with your chest tight and found that every path you traced ended in catastrophe, you have run Arjuna's first chapter.

The text's turning point is not Krishna's teaching. It is what Arjuna does at 2.7. He stops arguing. He says, in effect: my nature is overcome by weakness, my mind is confused about what is right, I ask you, tell me clearly what is better; I am your student. Three moves in one sentence: name the state, name the confusion, hand the question to someone whose judgment you trust. Everything after in the Gita is answer, and there would be no answer if he had not stopped rehearsing consequences and asked.

The research on why deciding freezes fills in the mechanism, and it needs to be held at its real strength. First, anticipated regret: people weigh the regret of a wrong action more heavily than the cost of a wrong omission, so inaction feels safer even

when its expected cost is higher, because its costs are diffuse and nobody is blamed for them. Second, choice overload. The popular version, that more options paralyze, does not hold on average; a 2015 meta-analysis found roughly zero net effect, with paralysis appearing under specific conditions: when the options are complex, when preferences are unclear, when the decision is difficult, and when the goal is to pick the best rather than a good one. Arjuna has all four. Third, the distinction between brooding and reflection. Researchers who study rumination separate brooding, a passive comparison of your situation with an unmet standard, from reflective pondering, a purposeful turn inward to solve something. Brooding predicts depression; reflection does not, or much less. Arjuna's first chapter is brooding: consequences rehearsed with no decision procedure and no addressee. His 2.7 is reflection: a question, with an owner.

There is a harsher line later that belongs here. The one who doubts perishes, Krishna says; for the doubter there is neither this world nor the next nor happiness (4.40). Read as theology it is severe. Read as mechanism it is plain: an unresolved decision is a running cost. Unfinished goals intrude on unrelated tasks, and the intrusion is relieved not by finishing the goal but by making a specific plan for it. Doubt, unaddressed, is a background process that eats the foreground.

The divergence matters here. Arjuna asks a god who knows how the war ends. You will not have that. What you can borrow is the shape of the move, not the certainty behind the answer: body, confusion named, a question with an addressee, then action. The certainty was never the useful part anyway. Krishna's final instruction is that Arjuna should reflect and then do as he wishes (18.63), which is not the sentence of someone offering certainty.

The practice. The 2.7 move. When you are frozen: first, write the body in one line, what the mouth and chest and hands are doing, so you see the freeze as physiology and not as a verdict. Second, one minute of the long exhale. Third, write one sentence beginning "I am confused about" and finish it without softening.

Fourth, send that sentence to one person whose judgment you trust, unframed, and ask for their read. Fifth, set a decision time within three days. You are not deciding yet. You are converting brooding into a question with an owner and a deadline, which is the only form of doubt that resolves.

Chapter 2: Two Things You Are Made Of

The Gita's first teaching, once Arjuna has asked, is not about war or duty. It is about what he is. There is that which changes and that which knows the change. The body is worn like clothes and set aside like clothes (2.22). What knows the body is not born and does not die (2.20). In the thirteenth chapter the text names the two directly: the field, *kshetra*, is the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, the whole aggregate; the knower of the field, *kshetrajna*, is what knows it (13.5-6). Patanjali says the same with fewer words: the seer is pure seeing (2.20), and when the mind's turnings settle, the seer rests in its own nature (1.3).

The first book built its whole path toward that knower as a place of stillness. This book uses the same distinction as a tool for action, and the use is different. Consider what happens to an outcome depending on where it lands. If you are identified with the field, every result lands on the self. A project that fails becomes "I am a failure." A critique of the work becomes an injury to the person. Praise inflates something that then has to be defended. When the field is held as field, results land on the field, and a result that lands on the field can be read. You can look at it. That is the entire practical value of the distinction, and it is large.

Psychology reached the same place under other names. Metacognitive awareness is the capacity to experience thoughts and feelings as events in the mind rather than as facts about the world or the self. In people recovering from depression, higher metacognitive awareness predicted lower relapse, and training it is the core of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, which a 2016 pooled analysis of trials found reduced relapse risk over

sixty weeks compared with usual care, and somewhat better than maintenance medication. Acceptance and commitment therapy calls the same stance self-as-context: you are the context in which experience occurs, not the content. Research on contingent self-worth supplies the cost of the alternative: people whose sense of worth depends on outcomes in a domain show larger swings in mood and more defensive behavior when that domain delivers bad news. Their results land on the self, and they pay for it.

Where the two part is the size of the claim. The Gita says the knower is eternal and untouched, that weapons do not cut it and fire does not burn it (2.23). Psychology says only that a decentered stance is trainable and that people who have it function better. You can use the stance without the eternity. I do, and I hold the eternity as the text's claim, not as mine.

The practice. The field inventory. Once a day for a week, after something lands (praise, criticism, a result, a message), draw two columns. On the left, headed Field, write what happened, what the body did, what thoughts arrived, what the mood did afterward. On the right, headed Knower, write nothing. The point of the exercise is that everything you can write goes on the left. Then ask one question: which item on the left did I treat as me today? That item is what you hold as field tomorrow. The blank right column is not a trick. It is the closest a page can come to the thing the text is pointing at.

Chapter 3: The Three Weathers

The Gita grades almost everything by three qualities, the *gunas*, and most modern readers skip those chapters as taxonomy. That is a loss, because the *gunas* are the text's model of the operating condition of a mind, and the model is usable.

Sattva shows as clarity and steadiness; it binds, the text says, through attachment to happiness and to knowing (14.6). *Rajas* is drive born of craving; it shows as greed, restlessness, activity, longing, and binds through attachment to action (14.7, 14.12). *Tamas* is inertia born of not seeing; it shows as dullness, not acting, confusion, and binds through heedlessness and sleep (14.8, 14.13). The three rise and fall against each other: *sattva* prevails when the other two are overcome, and so on (14.10). Everything is then sorted by them, food, work, understanding, resolve, giving, even happiness (chapters 17 and 18).

The mistake is to read these as personality types. They are weathers. *The Long Argument* gave the *gunas* two pages and a one-beat check at transitions; this chapter is the long version. The same person runs all three in a day, and the text's practical claim is twofold: you can learn to read which one is running, and certain inputs move it.

Psychology has a model that maps onto this more closely than I expected. Robert Thayer's work on mood describes two independent dimensions: energetic arousal, from energetic to tired, and tense arousal, from tense to calm. Cross them and you get four states. Calm energy is the one people describe as clear and productive; it resembles *sattva*. Tense energy is driven, effective for a while, restless; it resembles *rajas*. Tense tiredness is the bad corner, irritable and dull at once; it is *tamas* at its worst. Calm

tiredness is the benign version, the state before sleep, and the text would still call it *tamas*, correctly. Thayer found energetic arousal follows a daily curve, rising through the morning, dipping in mid-afternoon, and falling into evening, and that a brisk ten-minute walk raised energy and lowered tension for over an hour, while a sugar snack raised energy briefly and then left people more tired and more tense than before. Sleep research adds the rest of the inputs: a night of lost sleep pushes toward dullness and, at the same time, raises reactivity to negative stimuli, which is *tamas* and *rajas* arriving together. Caffeine buys energy and charges tension for it.

Indian psychologists have built self-report scales for the three *gunas* and found that *sattva* scores track wellbeing while *rajas* and *tamas* track distress. I hold those results lightly, because the items describing *sattva* describe wellbeing, and a scale that correlates with itself has not discovered much. The useful part of the tradition here is not the scale. It is the instruction to notice the weather before you schedule the day.

The divergence: the Gita describes a person beyond the three, who neither resents their presence nor longs for them in their absence (14.22-25), and it ties the *gunas* to rebirth. Psychology has no state beyond mood; it has better regulation of it. I use the model without the escape from it.

The practice. The weather log. Three times a day for one week, morning, mid-afternoon, and evening, write one word: clear, driven, or dull. Beside it, note what you ate, how you slept, and what you did in the two hours before. At the end of the week you will have a map of your own weather by hour and by input, and it will be more accurate than anything a book can tell you. Then make one change: put the work that needs clarity into your clear window, and put the ten-minute walk where the dull window begins. You are not trying to be *sattvic* all day. You are trying to stop scheduling against your own weather.

Chapter 4: The Chain

Two verses in the second chapter describe how a wrecked afternoon happens, and they are precise enough to use as a checklist. Dwelling on an object produces attachment; attachment produces desire; desire, thwarted, produces anger; anger produces delusion; delusion, loss of memory; loss of memory, loss of discernment; and with discernment gone, the person is lost (2.62-63). Eight links. Krishna's point, which is easy to miss, is that the chain does not begin with desire. It begins with attention. You cannot stop wanting. You can stop dwelling.

The text returns to it later. What drives a person to wrong action, Arjuna asks, as if against their will (3.36)? Desire, born of *rajas*, Krishna answers, which covers knowledge the way smoke covers fire (3.37-38). The senses, the mind, and the intellect are its seat (3.40).

Psychology has described each link separately, and setting them in order shows the chain is not a metaphor. Dwelling produces attachment: exposure to a cue raises craving for what the cue stands for, and repeated exposure trains the response. Attachment produces desire: the brain's wanting system, which the first book discussed, assigns pull to cues by prediction, and it does this whether or not the object satisfies; dwelling on a cue is training the wanting circuit regardless of what the thing is actually like. Desire thwarted produces anger: the frustration-aggression research, in its careful modern form, holds that a blocked goal produces negative affect that primes aggression. Anger produces delusion and lost memory: anger narrows attention and impairs deliberation, and the folk cure makes it worse. In a well-known experiment, people who hit a punching bag while

thinking about someone who had angered them ended up angrier and more aggressive than people who sat quietly, so venting does not discharge anger; it rehearses it. Discernment lost: decisions made in a hot state systematically misjudge what the cool self would want, which is the hot-cold gap that behavioral economics has measured in many forms.

The chain also tells you where to cut it, and here the text and the research agree exactly. The cheap link is the first one. Controlling the cue is far easier than controlling the craving, which is why the first book's chapter on reclaiming the senses is the most practical thing in it. The second-best point is the anger link, and the move there is not expression and not suppression but distance, which Chapter 10 takes up.

They part on the deepest cure. The Gita says the taste for objects finally falls away when something higher is seen (2.59). Psychology's cure is environment and extinction: remove the cue, let the response fade. Both can be true. The first is slower and reaches further down.

The practice. Map one chain. Take a recent blow-up or binge and write its eight links backward from the end. What was the ruin, the thing you regret. What discernment was lost. What did you forget. What deluded you. What was the anger. What was the desire under it. What were you attached to. And what were you dwelling on, for how long, before any of it felt like a problem. Most chains, written out, show a dwelling phase of minutes to days that felt entirely harmless. That phase is the target. The next time you catch yourself returning to a thought about a thing, name it in one word: dwelling. It is the only link in the chain that is cheap to cut.

PART TWO: HOW YOU ACT

The field is mapped. Now the work itself. The Gita's central teaching is about action, and it is more specific than "do your duty." It says where to put your attention while you work, how to read a result once it arrives, how to tell which work is yours, and what changes when the work is done for someone. Psychology has measured all four, and on the first it has measured something the tradition could only assert.

Chapter 5: The Right to the Work

The verse everyone knows is 2.47, and it has four clauses, not one. You have a claim on the action, never on its fruits. Do not make the fruit the motive of the action. And do not, for that reason, attach yourself to inaction. The fourth clause is the one people forget, and the whole text depends on it: renouncing action does not free you (3.4), an embodied being cannot stop acting for a moment (3.5), and inaction is not an option but a disguised action with worse fruits.

Around it sit three verses that turn the instruction into a method. Equanimity is called yoga (2.48): do the work with the same mind in success and failure. Yoga is skill in action (2.50): the mind that has released the fruit works better, not worse. And work done for reward is inferior work (2.49), which I read as a claim about quality, not morality.

The mechanism is simple to state. A result is a function of your action plus causes you do not control (the next chapter counts them). Attention on the result is attention on something you cannot act on, taken from the thing you can. It is also threat-attention: an outcome you are gripping is an outcome you might lose, and a mind monitoring a possible loss is running its alarm system through the whole task.

Here the research leads, because it has measured what the text asserts. The choking literature shows that attending to the outcome of a skilled action, or monitoring your own performance during it, degrades execution; experts perform worse when made to watch themselves and better when their attention is on the task. Studies of goal types find that early in learning a skill, process goals (attend to this step) build competence and confidence more

than outcome goals (hit this score). A 2014 pooled analysis of 183 studies found that intrinsic motivation predicts performance, especially the quality of performance, while external incentives predict quantity, and that incentives tied directly to performance weaken the link between intrinsic motivation and results. That is 2.49 as a finding: work done for the reward is measurably poorer work. And research on trying not to think about something shows it fails; the Gita does not ask you not to think about the fruit. It asks you not to make the fruit the reason.

The divergence is the sharpest in the book, and I will not soften it. The text says release the fruit as motive entirely. Psychology finds that outcome goals still orient and energize, that feedback on results is how people learn, and that people who never look at outcomes drift. My working resolution: the outcome is a compass, not a motive. Set it, look at it once at the end of the day, and during the work look at the work. The tradition would call that a compromise. It is one, and I have not found a better one that still lets me learn.

The practice. The split ledger. Before a piece of work, draw two columns. On the left, headed Mine: what I will do, how, by when. On the right, headed Not mine: the result, and everything it depends on that I do not hold. Work the left column. Look at the right once, when the work is done. During the work, when you notice yourself checking the right column (refreshing a page, rehearsing someone's reaction, imagining the number), name it in one word: fruit. Then return to the line you were on. Count each return as a repetition, the same way the first book counted returns to the breath, because it is the same muscle.

Chapter 6: The Five Causes of Any Result

The eighteenth chapter explains why the fruit was never yours. Every action that produces a result has five causes: the seat, meaning the body and the situation it acts in; the doer; the various instruments; the diverse efforts; and *daiva*, which the text uses for the divine, for fate, and for what no one controlled (18.13-14). The one who sees the self alone as the cause, Krishna says, does not see; the understanding is unformed (18.16). Your effort is one cause in five. Reading a result as a verdict on that one cause is an error of arithmetic before it is an error of humility.

Psychology has spent fifty years cataloguing that error. The fundamental attribution error over-weights the person and under-weights the situation, which is the seat. The self-serving bias credits success to the self and failure to circumstances; the Gita's arithmetic says both readings are four-fifths wrong. Outcome bias judges a decision by its result rather than by what was knowable when it was made, and it has been shown with medical and gambling decisions alike. Hindsight bias rewrites the chance column as having been foreseeable. Regression to the mean guarantees that an exceptional result, good or bad, is followed on average by a more ordinary one, and people reliably attribute the return to something they did. And the work on skill and luck makes the general point: the more chance an activity contains, the less a single outcome tells you about the actor, and the more outcomes you need before you can read skill at all. The Gita's word for that residual is *daiva*. Naming it is more honest than pretending the column is empty.

Where they part is what *daiva* is. In the text it is sometimes divine will, sometimes fate, and the metaphysics differ by com-

mentator. Psychology calls the same column noise and chance. For the purpose of reading your own results, the two uses are identical: there is a share of every outcome that belonged to no one, and a person who cannot write something in that column, in victory as well as defeat, cannot learn from either.

The practice. The five-column post-mortem. After any result that matters, draw five columns. Situation: what the ground gave, the market, the timing, what the other side had already decided. Doer: what state you were in, which weather, how slept. Instruments: the tools, the people, the resources, what was missing. Effort: what you actually did, in hours and in moves, not what you meant to do. Chance: what happened that no one controlled. Assign rough shares that sum to a hundred. The discipline of the exercise is filling the Chance column with something real both when you won and when you lost. Then notice that the only column you can change next time is Effort, and partly Doer and Instruments. Plan those three. Leave the other two on the page, where they belong.

Chapter 7: Your Own Work

Better your own work done imperfectly than another's done well, the text says twice (3.35, 18.47), and adds a reason: doing the work determined by your own nature, you incur no fault (18.47), and no undertaking is without flaw anyway, since fire is never without smoke (18.48). Even the wise act according to their nature, Krishna says; what will restraint accomplish (3.33)?

A hard fact before the useful part. In the text, *svadharma*, one's own work, is tied to *varna*, a hereditary social order, and the eighteenth chapter assigns work by class. I do not accept that order, and I am not going to pretend the verses say something else. What I take from them is the psychological content, which the text itself grounds in *svabhava*, one's own nature (18.41), not in birth. The load-bearing word in 18.47 is nature. Whether the tradition has always read it that way is a question for the back matter. I read it that way, and I say so.

Read as psychology, the instruction is two claims. First, that fit between the person and the work matters more than the prestige of the work. Second, that comparison with someone else's role is not just painful but wrong, because their work done well is still a poor match for the equipment you have. Both claims have been tested. Pooled analyses of person-environment fit find that fit predicts satisfaction, commitment, and staying, across many kinds of work. Research on signature strengths finds that people who use their strongest traits at work report modestly higher wellbeing and perform modestly better; the effects are real and small. A well-known study of how people relate to their work found three orientations, a job, a career, or a calling, and found that those who saw their work as a calling reported higher

satisfaction with work and with life, and that the orientation was distributed across occupations rather than tied to prestige; administrative assistants held all three. Job crafting research then showed the mechanism by which people move toward fit inside a role they cannot leave: they reshape tasks, relationships, and how they frame the work, and the ones who do report more meaning. On the second claim, social comparison research has documented for seventy years that comparing upward, on a dimension you care about, lowers wellbeing, and the platforms most of us carry are machines for upward comparison.

The divergence is about direction. *The Long Argument* turned this material into a five-move decision procedure; here the question is narrower, whether the work in front of you is yours. Modern fit research is mostly about choosing your environment. The Gita's instruction is about acting rightly inside the one you are already in. The two combine without strain: change what you can, through crafting and, when it is open to you, through choice; and stop measuring yourself against a role that was never sized for you.

The practice. Three functions. Write down the three things people come to you for without being asked. Then write the three things you do at work that you would do unpaid. The overlap, if there is one, is a first draft of your own work. Then make one job-crafting move this month: shift one recurring task toward the overlap, or add one that sits inside it. Finally, name one comparison you will stop running: the person, and the axis you have been measuring on. Write it down. The written version is easier to catch the next time it starts.

Chapter 8: Work as Offering

The third chapter of the Gita reframes work as *yajna*, offering. Work done as an offering does not bind (3.9). The wise act as the unwise do, but without attachment, for the holding-together of the world, *lokasangraha* (3.20-25). Whatever you do, eat, give, or undertake, do it as an offering (9.27). Later the text says that a person attains completion by worshipping through their own work (18.46), and it grades gifts: the sattvic gift is given because it should be, at the right time and place, to one who cannot repay; the rajasic gift is given for return or grudgingly; the tamasic gift is given without respect, at the wrong time, to the wrong person (17.20-22).

The mechanism of an offering is that its motive sits outside the doer's own account. The Gita's claim is that this changes two things: the doer's experience of the work, which binds less, and the quality of the work itself.

The research on the second claim is good. In a set of field experiments, fundraisers who spent a few minutes with a person who had benefited from the money they raised subsequently raised substantially more than colleagues who had not, and the effect held over weeks. Prosocial motivation, when it is combined with intrinsic interest in the work, predicts persistence, performance, and productivity. Meaning at work is one of the strongest predictors of engagement in the organizational literature. On the first claim, that giving changes the giver, the evidence is real and smaller than its reputation. The original study finding that spending on others made people happier than spending on themselves was tiny. A large preregistered replication found the effect, small, and clearer when people actually spent than when they recalled

spending. A later review of fifteen preregistered experiments, seven of them large, found it held in the large samples and stayed small. Two further findings match the Gita's grading of gifts with surprising precision: the emotional benefit of giving is larger when the giver can see the difference the gift made, and larger when the giving is freely chosen rather than pressured. That is the sattvic gift, described two thousand years early: right time, right place, chosen, and to one who cannot repay.

The divergence: in the text the offering is to the divine and participates in a cosmic exchange. The secular reading keeps the addressee, a person, a world, and loses the cosmos. It works as a stance, and I noted in the first book that something warm goes missing when the divine is removed. It goes missing here too. You should know it was there.

The practice. The dedication. Before any piece of work that will take more than an hour, write one line naming who it is for and what it does for them. Not "the company" or "users." The analyst who will open the spreadsheet on Monday. The person who will read the report with ten minutes to decide. If you cannot name anyone, that is information about the work. Then, once this month, make one gift by the Gita's checklist: at the right time, in the right place, to someone who cannot repay you, chosen freely, with nothing said about it afterward.

PART THREE: HOW YOU HOLD

Act well and the results still come back, and they come back in pairs: gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. This part is about holding what arrives. The Gita's word for the person who can is *sthitaprajna*, one of steady wisdom, and the text is careful that steadiness is not flatness. The person it describes moves among things (2.64), not away from them.

Chapter 9: Steady Wisdom

The pairs run through the whole text. Contact with the world brings cold and heat, pleasure and pain; they come and they go; endure them (2.14). The one they do not disturb is fit for what does not die (2.15). Treat pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat alike, and then engage (2.38). Notice the order in that last verse: equanimity first, then engagement, not equanimity instead of it. The steady person is not agitated in sorrow and does not long in pleasure (2.56), and is compared to a tortoise drawing in its limbs (2.58), and to the ocean, which rivers enter without making it overflow (2.70).

The mechanism the text is describing is a change in how far an event travels once it lands. The event is the same. What changes is how much of the person it reaches and for how long.

The research on how far events travel is the affective forecasting literature, and its central finding is that people overestimate both the intensity and the duration of their reactions to good and bad events alike. The promotion feels less than you predicted and for less time; so does the rejection. The Gita's "they come and go" is, in that literature, a measured fact about most events. But the folklore has overcorrected, and the text does not require the overcorrection. The famous 1978 study comparing lottery winners and accident victims was small and is quoted far beyond what it showed. A 2020 analysis of Swedish lottery winners found that their life satisfaction stayed elevated for more than a decade, and adaptation to disability is real but partial. So the honest version is: most events fade faster than you expect, some do not, and the tradition's claim is not that nothing lasts but that the mind's relation to what lasts can change.

On the mechanics of that relation, a large pooled analysis of emotion regulation strategies found that reappraising the meaning of an event works reliably; suppressing its expression works poorly and costs you; distraction works for the moment and not beyond it; and the acceptance-based strategies were, at the time, less studied but not worse. Equanimity itself has been given a working definition in the contemplative science literature as an even-minded state toward experience regardless of whether it is pleasant, and there is some evidence, from small samples of long-term meditators, that what changes with practice is not the size of the emotional response but how fast it recovers. That would match the tortoise, which does not become armored; it draws in and comes back out.

The divergence is about route. Psychology's equanimity is an outcome of regulation. The Gita's is a consequence of seeing the self as not the field, the previous part's distinction, and the text's endpoint (2.72) is a settled state it names and psychology does not. Different roads to a similar place, and the second road claims to go further than the first can verify.

The practice. The pairs check, and the tortoise minute. When something lands hard, write which pair it belongs to: gain or loss, praise or blame, pleasure or pain, victory or defeat. Then write your forecast, as a number from one to ten, of how much it will matter in a week and in a year. Put a reminder in your calendar for both dates and check. Most people find their forecast ran high, and a personal record of your own overestimates is worth more than any study. The tortoise minute is for the moment itself: one minute with the senses drawn in, eyes closed, phone face down, no speech, the long exhale. Then come back out and deal with the thing. You are not avoiding it. You are meeting it with the limbs gathered.

Chapter 10: The Mind as Friend or Enemy

Lift yourself by yourself, the text says; the self is the friend of the self, and the self is the enemy of the self (6.5). The mind is a friend to one who has mastered it and behaves like an enemy to one who has not (6.6). Then the concession that makes the Gita more honest than most of what is written about the mind: the mind is restless, turbulent, strong, obstinate, and restraining it is like restraining the wind (6.34). Arjuna says this, and Krishna does not correct him. He agrees, and says it is done by practice and by release (6.35), the same two words Patanjali uses (Yoga Sutra 1.12).

The picture is a mind that, left alone, turns on its owner: replays the meeting, rehearses the argument, narrates the failure. Wherever it wanders, the text says, bring it back (6.26), and it will wander.

The research on how often, and at what cost, is the mind-wandering literature. In a large sampling study that pinged people through their days, minds were wandering in nearly half of samples, and people were less happy when wandering than when attending to what they were doing, even when they wandered to pleasant topics; the timing suggested the wandering came first and the unhappiness after. The mind, unattended, is an enemy in a measurable sense.

The research on turning it into a friend is newer and specific. Referring to yourself by name, or as “you,” while working through a difficult feeling, what the researchers call distanced self-talk, reduces emotional reactivity, and two high-powered experiments found it works across a range of emotional intensities and for people high in emotional vulnerability; a separate brain-record-

ing study found it does not carry the effort that other strategies demand. Simply naming the emotion in a word, affect labeling, reduces the brain's threat response and the felt intensity of the feeling. Both fit 6.5 exactly. A friend addresses you by name and tells you what you are feeling. The enemy speaks in the first person and does not name anything; it just runs.

Where the two part: the Gita's word is mastered. Psychology's is regulated. I have never met a mastered mind, including from the inside, and I take the text's own 6.34 as permission to aim for regulated and count that as progress.

The practice. Name and address. When the mind turns enemy, in a loop or a harsh commentary, do four things. First, name the feeling in one word. Second, switch person: use your own name or "you." "This is the third time you have replayed that meeting." Third, give the instruction you would give a friend, in one sentence. Fourth, return to what you were doing. Do not evaluate whether it worked. Run it every time, and let the pattern report itself over a month.

Chapter 11: Measure

Two verses in the sixth chapter are the Gita's whole theory of the body, and they are about quantity. Yoga is not for one who eats too much, nor for one who eats too little; not for one who sleeps too much, nor for one who stays awake too long (6.16). For the one who is measured in food and recreation, measured in effort in action, measured in sleep and waking, the practice removes sorrow (6.17). The word is *yukta*, joined, fitted, in measure. Four dials: food, recreation, effort, sleep. The text does not say less of each. It says measured, and it names both directions as failures.

That fourth dial is the one modern readers skip. "Measured in effort in action" is the Gita's own warning about overwork, and it is sitting in the middle of a text often read as a hymn to duty.

The research on each dial is large and the first book covered sleep and movement. What this chapter adds is the limits in both directions. A recent pooled analysis of sleep loss found that even modest restriction reduces positive mood and raises anxiety, and the effect is on the ordinary night, not only the extreme one. On effort, a joint analysis by the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization estimated that working fifty-five or more hours a week was associated with meaningfully higher deaths from stroke and heart disease than working thirty-five to forty; the data are observational and the association may not be causal, but it is the largest analysis of its kind. Research on recovery from work finds that psychological detachment during off-hours, not thinking about work, predicts wellbeing and next-day engagement more than the amount of time off does. The Gita's dial for recreation, *vihara*, is that detachment, and a feed is

not it, because a feed is not rest for the attention; it is attention spent elsewhere.

On food the text goes further and grades it by the three weathers: the sattvic food is nourishing and agreeable; the rajasic is too bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry, or burning, and produces pain; the tamasic is stale, tasteless, putrid, or left over (17.8-10). That is a cultural scheme, not nutrition science, and I keep the principle while dropping the list. The principle is that food leaves you in a weather, and the weather log from Chapter 3 will tell you which foods leave you clear and which leave you driven or dull, with more accuracy than any table.

The divergence here is small. Psychology and the text agree that the body is a floor. The text adds a claim psychology does not make: that measure is a condition for practice, not a benefit of it. You cannot meditate your way out of a body kept out of measure, and I have tried.

The practice. The four-measures audit. For seven days, log four numbers each evening: hours slept, hours worked, meals eaten sitting down without a screen, minutes of recreation that was not a feed. At the end of the week mark which dial is out of measure, and remember that too much counts as much as too little. Move one dial one notch. Not four. The first book's principle applies: one notch you keep beats four you abandon.

Chapter 12: Loss, Fear, and the Body You Will Leave

The Gita meets death in its second chapter and does not flinch. What knows the body is not born and does not die (2.20). The body is worn out and set aside like clothes (2.22). For the born, death is certain, and for the dead, birth; so do not grieve over what cannot be otherwise (2.27). Beings are unmanifest at the start and unmanifest at the end, manifest only in the middle; what is there to lament (2.28)? And, later, the counterweight: on this path no effort is lost, no step wasted, and even a little of this practice protects from great fear (2.40). The eighth chapter adds an instruction: what you dwell on at the end shapes what follows, so remember at all times (8.5-7). Patanjali names the same fear as the fifth root of suffering, *abhinivesha*, the clinging to life that runs even in the wise (2.9).

The functional reading is that death is the reference outcome. It is the one fruit no one has any claim on, and the text applies the same method to it that it applied to every smaller fruit: do what is yours, release what is not, and let the release change how you act now. The instruction to remember at all times is not morbid. It is the split ledger applied to a life.

On grief the text is blunt in places and I hold its bluntness at arm's length. Arjuna's grief is diagnosed as arising from misidentification with the field. That is one lens. A grieving person needs, first, to grieve, and the tradition's own compassion lives elsewhere in the text, in Krishna's patience with a man who has just refused to move.

The research needs a correction before it can help. For thirty years a theory held that reminders of death drive people toward defending their worldview, punishing outsiders, and clinging to their group, and hundreds of studies claimed to show it. In 2022 a preregistered replication across twenty-one laboratories, run with the original authors' involvement, could not find the classic effect under any condition, and a review of the whole literature found strong signs of selective reporting, with most studies underpowered. The popular claim that death anxiety runs everything underneath is not established. What is better supported, from a smaller literature, is that reflecting on one's own death in a concrete and personal way, as opposed to being primed with the word, shifts priorities toward intrinsic goals and toward other people, and raises gratitude. That is the direction the Gita points. On grief itself, the best longitudinal work finds that most people are resilient, that grief does not run in stages, that a minority develop a prolonged form that needs help, and that rumination is what prolongs it. Collections of what people say they regret at the end of life are consistent, and consistently relational, but they are collected anecdotes, not studies.

The divergence is the largest in the book. The Gita's answer to death is rebirth and an eternal knower. Psychology's is acceptance and resilience. I use the practice and hold the metaphysics open, as I have throughout, and I notice that 2.40 is the verse I return to, because it does not depend on the metaphysics: nothing done well on this path is wasted, whatever comes after.

The practice. The yearly rendering. Pick a date you will remember and, once a year, write one page. What would you want to have done by now if this year were the last. Who would you want to have spoken to. What work would you want to have offered, and to whom. Then choose the one item on the page that is actionable this quarter. This is not a list of wishes. It is a filter for the split ledger, and it works by subtraction. When grief is live, the tools are the tortoise minute, one person, and the field inventory, in which the body's grief goes on the left and is allowed to run there.

If grief stops you working, sleeping, or eating for weeks, or brings thoughts of not wanting to be here, that is When to Seek Help, and it comes before any practice.

PART FOUR: HOW YOU MEET OTHERS

Everything so far has been about the person acting. Almost all action lands on someone. The Gita is specific about speech and about the attitude to take toward each kind of person, and Patanjali supplies a fourfold method that the research has tested more than any other single practice in this book.

Chapter 13: The Four Qualities of Speech

One verse in the seventeenth chapter defines the discipline of speech, and it is a checklist. Speech that does not agitate, that is true, that is pleasant, and that is beneficial (17.15). Four qualities, and the order matters. The first gate is not truth. It is *anudveg-akaram*, not causing agitation. True and harsh fails the first gate. Pleasant and false fails the second. Pleasant and true and useless fails the fourth. All four have to pass, and the verse adds a fifth item, the recitation of texts, which I return to below.

The chapter before it lists the qualities of what the text calls the divine disposition: fearlessness, purity, steadiness, truth, absence of anger, gentleness, absence of malice, absence of pride (16.1-3), and their opposites: hypocrisy, arrogance, harshness, anger (16.4). Most of them are about how a person speaks.

The research on speech in close relationships is dominated by one observational program, and it needs both its finding and its caveat. Decades of coding couples' conversations found that a harsh opening, criticism aimed at the person rather than the behavior, contempt, defensiveness, and withdrawal predicted the relationship's decline, with contempt the strongest single predictor. The caveat: the famous claims of ninety-percent-plus prediction accuracy were derived after the fact on the data used to build them, and have been criticized on those grounds. The direction is well supported; the precision is not. The honesty research from the first book adds that telling fewer lies tracked with better relationships and better health, with the same caveats about self-report. And a pooled analysis of feedback interventions found that feedback improved performance on average but made it worse in about a third of studies, and the feedback that backfired

was feedback that addressed the self rather than the task. That is 17.15's first and fourth gates measured in a laboratory: speech that agitates the person and speech that does not help them are the two kinds that fail.

The fifth item, recitation, I read plainly. Some of what you say aloud each day should be words you did not compose, chosen for their quality. Reading a well-made paragraph aloud is a speech practice, and it recalibrates the ear.

The divergence: the Gita's discipline of speech is oriented toward *tapas*, purification of the speaker. Modern research is oriented toward the effect on the listener. They meet at the same four gates, and I find the tradition's framing steadier, because it does not depend on the listener's reaction, which is not yours.

The practice. The four gates. For one week, before any message or remark that carries a charge (feedback, disagreement, a request, a correction), run the four in order. Will it agitate beyond what the content requires. Is it true. Can it be said kindly. Will it help the person hearing it. If it fails one gate, rewrite until it passes, or do not send. Keep a count of the ones you did not send. The count is the practice; the messages you did not send are the ones you would have spent the week repairing.

Chapter 14: The Four Attitudes

Patanjali gives one sutra on other people and it is a complete method. The mind is made clear by cultivating friendliness toward the happy, compassion toward the suffering, gladness toward the virtuous, and even-mindedness toward the non-virtuous (1.33). Four attitudes, each matched to a kind of person. The Gita describes the same person from the outside: without hatred toward any being, friendly and compassionate, free of “I” and “mine,” alike in pleasure and pain, forgiving, content (12.13-14); the same toward friend and enemy, honor and dishonor (12.18); equal toward companion, enemy, stranger, relative, saint, and sinner (6.9). And it gives the rule under the rule: seeing the same in all, by the analogy of oneself (6.32).

The interesting pair in 1.33 is the second half. Gladness toward the virtuous, *mudita*, is the attitude toward people doing better than you, and it is the direct antidote to envy. Even-mindedness toward the non-virtuous, *upeksha*, is neither hatred nor participation. It is the attitude that lets you set someone down.

The research on the first two attitudes is the largest body of evidence behind any practice in this book, and it is real and modest. Loving-kindness meditation, which is 1.33 done as a sitting practice, has a medium effect on positive emotions in randomized trials against waiting lists, and the effect is stronger for practices focused on friendliness than for those focused on compassion. On life satisfaction, the effect found in before-and-after studies disappears in randomized trials, and against active comparison conditions the practice came out behind, so it raises positive feeling more reliably than it raises how satisfied you say you are with your life. On attitudes toward other people, the effect in

randomized trials is small. One more finding from this literature matters for anyone who works with suffering. Training people to feel with another's pain, empathy in the strict sense, increased their negative affect and activated the brain regions involved in pain; training them to wish the other well, compassion in the strict sense, reversed that and raised positive affect. Feeling someone's pain burns you out. Wishing them ease does not. Patanjali's word is compassion, and the research says he picked the right one.

The divergence: the Gita extends equal regard to enemies, and to saint and sinner alike, and psychology finds that empathy is parochial by default and expanding it takes deliberate training. There is a harder tension the text does not resolve and I will not resolve for it. The Gita is set in a war fought against people who have done wrong, and the man told to fight it is told to fight without hatred. Even-mindedness toward the non-virtuous is not indifference to harm. It is the refusal to let the harm-doer's state become yours. What that permits and forbids in action is a question the text hands back to the reader, at 18.63, and so do I.

The practice. The four-direction sit. Ten minutes. Bring to mind one person in each category. Someone who is happy: wish them well, and notice any grudging. Someone who is suffering: wish them ease, and notice the urge to fix, which is not the same thing. Someone whose success you envy: say, silently, that their success is good, and notice the resistance. That resistance is the practice; it is envy made visible, and it thins with repetition. Someone who has done wrong: set them down, without hatred and without excuse. Then one act toward the third category this week: say the congratulation you have been withholding, in words, to the person.

PART FIVE: FREEDOM IN ACTION

The Gita ends with a man standing up. Not sitting in stillness; standing, with his doubt gone, to act. This last part is about what surrender means in a text whose final movement is action, about the things that stop practice and how to tell them apart, and about arranging all of this into a day that a working person can keep.

Chapter 15: Surrender Without Passivity

The verse read as the Gita's summit is 18.66: abandoning all duties, take refuge in me alone; I will free you from all faults; do not grieve. Read alone, it sounds like an instruction to stop. Read in place, it cannot mean that, because three verses earlier Krishna has said something that changes its sense. Thus I have declared to you this knowledge; reflect on it fully, and then do as you wish (18.63). The god who has just given the whole teaching hands the decision back. And the text's last words from Arjuna are: my confusion is destroyed, my memory is restored, I stand firm, I will act as you say (18.73). Surrender in the Gita is what comes after full deliberation and before action. It is the release of the outcome, not of the work.

Patanjali's version is *ishvara pranidhana*, surrender to the divine, which he lists as a practice (2.1), as an observance (2.32), and as a route to the settled state (2.45). The first book treated it as the loosening of the illusion that you run everything. Here it does one more job: it is the thing that lets a person act under uncertainty without waiting for the uncertainty to resolve.

The research on acting under uncertainty comes from several directions. Acceptance and commitment therapy trains people to accept inner experience while acting on their values, and pooled analyses find it effective across a range of conditions, comparable to standard cognitive therapy. Intolerance of uncertainty, the tendency to find not-knowing itself unbearable, predicts anxiety across disorders, and treatments that target it directly work. The literature on religious coping finds that what it calls positive coping, a collaborative or surrendering stance toward the divine, is associated with better adjustment, while a punishing or abandon-

ing framing is associated with worse; the data are correlational and the direction of cause is open. And attachment research supplies a picture that fits the text closely: a secure base does not make exploration unnecessary; it makes exploration possible. Arjuna's refuge is what lets him pick up the bow. It does not pick it up for him.

The divergence: the text's refuge is a person, and the person is God. Psychology's refuge is a stance. I said in the first book that the warmth of being held goes missing in translation, and it does. What I add here is that the Gita itself supplies a secular residue in its own sequence: deliberate fully, choose freely, act, release. That sequence works without the theology. It works better with it, for those who have it, and I am not among them.

The practice. The close of day. Each evening, three lines. What was mine today, and did I do it. What was not mine, and am I still holding it; name the thing. Then the release, said or written: I have done what is mine; the rest is not in my hands. If something in the second line turns out to be yours to act on, it moves to tomorrow's left column. If it is not, it stays in the sentence, and the sentence is where you leave it.

Chapter 16: The Obstacles

Patanjali lists nine things that stop practice: illness, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, craving, wrong seeing, failure to gain ground, and instability once ground is gained (1.30), with their companions: pain, despair, trembling, and disturbed breath (1.31). The Gita adds a diagnostic for quitting that I have not found bettered. There are three ways to give up an action (18.7-9). Giving it up out of confusion is the dull kind. Giving it up because it is painful, or from fear of bodily trouble, is the driven kind, and the text says it earns nothing. Doing what should be done while giving up attachment to the result is the clear kind. Most quitting is the second kind wearing the clothes of the third: it hurt, so I stopped, and I called it a decision.

The text also answers the question every practitioner asks. What happens to the one who falls from the path (6.37)? No effort is lost; one is not destroyed; one takes up again where one left off (6.40-44). Secularly weaker and, I think, true.

The research on obstacles requires one demolition first. The idea that willpower is a fuel that runs out, that resisting one temptation leaves you less able to resist the next, was one of psychology's most cited findings and failed two large preregistered replications. "I ran out of willpower" is not a mechanism you should lean on. What is better supported: procrastination is emotion regulation, a trade of mood now for cost later, which is exactly the Gita's second kind of abandonment. Implementation intentions, plans of the form "when X, I will Y," raise the rate at which intentions become actions by a medium-to-large margin across nearly a hundred studies, and they work because they move the decision from the moment of temptation to a moment

of calm. A 2024 systematic review of habit formation found the median time to automaticity was around two months, the mean around four, and the range four days to nearly a year, with morning practices and self-chosen habits forming faster. And the original habit-formation study found that missing a single day did not materially damage the habit's growth, which is 6.40 measured.

The divergence: Patanjali's list begins with illness, and the first book's chapter on telling illness from signal applies without change. Some obstacles are medical, and no practice fixes a medical obstacle. The Gita's reassurance rests on rebirth; its secular form, that habit strength persists partially through lapses and that the return is easier than the start, is smaller and stands on its own.

The practice. Obstacle matching. When you stop a practice or a piece of work, before you restart, classify the stop. Which of the nine, and which of the three kinds of abandonment. Illness: treat it, and see the back matter. Dullness: the weather log, and sleep. Doubt: the 2.7 move. Carelessness or laziness: an if-then plan with a time and a place. Craving: remove the cue. Wrong seeing: the five-column review. Failure to gain ground, or instability once gained: shrink the practice to a size that cannot fail. Then restart at the size you can hold, and count the days you practice without counting the gap.

Chapter 17: The Manual as a Day

Nobody should do everything in this book, and I will say what the first book said: trying to guarantee you do none of it. But the pieces are designed to fit a day, and it helps to see where.

Morning. One word for the weather. One split of the day's main work into mine and not mine. One dedication line for the work that will take longest.

During. The four gates before any speech that carries a charge. The word "fruit" when you catch yourself watching the result. The tortoise minute when something lands hard. Name and address when the mind turns.

Evening. The five-column review if a result arrived. The four measures logged. The close of day, three lines and the release.

Weekly. Read back the field inventory and look for the item you keep treating as yourself. One four-direction sit.

Quarterly. The three functions, and one job-crafting move.

Yearly. The rendering.

Total: under fifteen minutes a day of writing, on days when you write all of it, which you will not. Choose three: one from the morning, one from the day, one from the evening. The rest are in the index for the season when they are the thing you need. What this arrangement does is not add practices to your life. Your life already contains work, results, speech, and people. It adds a moment of noticing at each of the places where they usually go unnoticed, and the noticing is where the room to change was all along.

Chapter 18: Begin

The Gita ends with an instruction to its own reader. Reflect on this fully, and then do as you wish (18.63). It is a strange way for a scripture to end, and I think it is the most honest sentence in it. The whole teaching, delivered, is handed back as a choice.

So: reflect. Then pick one chapter's practice, the one that meets what is loud, and hold it for a season. Do it consistently, and let go of how fast it works; that instruction has not changed since the first book, because nothing else takes without it. When you miss a day, take up where you left off. No step on this path is wasted (2.40). And when you have decided, stand up. The text does not end with Arjuna understanding. It ends with him acting.

Back Matter

When to Seek Help

Some of what looks like a practice problem is a medical one, and the first book's third chapter, Illness or Signal, is the fuller treatment. The short version for this book's territory:

If a decision has been frozen for weeks and is costing you sleep, appetite, or the ability to work, that is beyond a card.

If grief has stopped you working, sleeping, or eating for several weeks, or you are waking before dawn with the mind already running, get assessed.

If anger is turning into harm, to others or to yourself, or you are frightened of what you might do, that is not a chapter. It is a call.

If you have ever had a stretch of days needing almost no sleep, with racing thoughts and grand plans, tell a clinician before taking up any intensive practice.

If you are having thoughts of ending your life, treat that as the thing that cannot wait. findahelpline.com and befrienders.org will route you to your country's line. In India, Tele-MANAS is on 14416. Or go to an emergency department.

If you cannot tell whether you are in danger, that uncertainty is itself a reason to reach out.

Practice Index

The 2.7 move (Chapter 1): body in a line, long exhale, “I am confused about,” one person, a decision time within three days.

The Decision Card (front matter): for the frozen decision, in five steps.

The field inventory (Chapter 2): two columns, Field and Knower; everything you can write goes left.

The weather log (Chapter 3): clear, driven, or dull, three times a day, with inputs.

Map one chain (Chapter 4): eight links written backward from the regret; name dwelling when it starts.

The split ledger (Chapter 5): Mine and Not mine; name “fruit” and return.

The five-column post-mortem (Chapter 6): Situation, Doer, Instruments, Effort, Chance, summing to a hundred.

Three functions (Chapter 7): what people come to you for, what you would do unpaid, the overlap; one crafting move; one comparison named and stopped.

The dedication (Chapter 8): one line naming who the work is for; one sattvic gift a month.

The pairs check and the tortoise minute (Chapter 9): name the pair, forecast in numbers, check later; one minute with the senses drawn in.

Name and address (Chapter 10): one word for the feeling, your own name, one instruction, return.

The four-measures audit (Chapter 11): sleep, work, screenless meals, non-feed recreation; one dial one notch.

The yearly rendering (Chapter 12): one page, once a year, one actionable item per quarter.

The four gates (Chapter 13): does not agitate, true, kind, helpful; count the unsent.

The four-direction sit (Chapter 14): happy, suffering, envied, wrongdoer; one withheld congratulation said aloud.

The close of day (Chapter 15): what was mine, what was not, the release.

Obstacle matching (Chapter 16): which of the nine, which of the three; restart small; count the days, not the gap.

The Season Planner

A season is twelve weeks. Do not fill it. Run the general season below, pick one of the three seasons in the next section, or build your own from the index using one practice at a time and a two-week hold on each.

Weeks one and two: the weather log and the field inventory. You are learning to read the field before you act in it.

Weeks three and four: the split ledger, on every piece of work over an hour.

Weeks five and six: the five-column post-mortem, on every result that lands, wins included.

Weeks seven and eight: the four gates, on every charged message.

Weeks nine and ten: the four-direction sit, twice a week, and one withheld congratulation.

Weeks eleven and twelve: the close of day, and the four-measures audit in the final week.

At the end, keep the two that did the most work and drop the rest. Then choose a new season.

Three Seasons

The deciding season. For a life stuck in front of choices. Chapters 1, 2, and 15. The 2.7 move whenever frozen; the field inventory daily; the close of day nightly. Twelve weeks.

The working season. For a life spent working hard and reading results badly. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8. The split ledger and the dedication before work; the five-column post-mortem after; three functions once, at the start.

The holding season. For a life that lands too hard. Chapters 9, 10, 13, and 14. The pairs check and the tortoise minute; name and address; the four gates for the first month, the four-direction sit for the second and third.

Notes and Sources

Verse numbers are chapter and verse of the Bhagavad Gita unless marked YS (Yoga Sutras). Renderings are mine, made against the translations in Further Reading. Research is cited at the level of the claim made in the text; where a finding failed replication, that is said in the chapter and repeated here.

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A Note on the Sanskrit

Sanskrit terms are given without diacritics, in the spelling most readers will meet elsewhere. Verse references are chapter and verse of the Gita in the standard 700-verse text, and chapter and sutra of Patanjali. Renderings are my own plain versions, made against the translations in Further Reading, and they aim at the sense a practitioner can use rather than at literalness; where a rendering is contested, I have chosen the reading and said so in the chapter. *Dharma* is mostly left as it is, because “duty” is too narrow and “righteousness” too pious. *Daiva* is rendered by function (what no one controlled) with the theological reading noted. *Ishvara* is left as the divine.

Glossary

Abhinivesha: the clinging to life; the fifth root of suffering in Patanjali.

Abhyasa: steady practice; with vairagya, the method in both texts.

Anasakti: non-attachment, the Gita's stance toward the fruits of action; the term Indian psychology uses for it.

Anudvegakaram: not causing agitation; the first quality of disciplined speech.

Daiva: in the five causes of action, what no one controlled; also fate, also the divine.

Dharma: the right thing, one's role, the order of things; left untranslated.

Guna: one of three qualities or weathers: sattva (clear), rajas (driven), tamas (dull).

Ishvara pranidhana: surrender to the divine; in this book, the release of outcomes after full deliberation.

Karuna: compassion, toward the suffering.

Kshetra, kshetrajna: the field, and the knower of the field.

Lokasangraha: acting for the holding-together of the world.

Maitri: friendliness, toward the happy.

Mudita: gladness, toward the virtuous or the successful; the antidote to envy.

Sthitaprajna: one of steady wisdom.

Tapas: discipline that purifies; in Chapter 13, the discipline of speech.

Svabhava, svadharma: one's own nature, and the work that follows from it.

Upeksha: even-mindedness, toward the non-virtuous.

Vairagya: release, non-attachment; the second wing of the method.

Vihara: recreation, the movement of a life outside work; one of the four measures.

Yajna: offering; in this book, work whose motive sits outside the doer's account.

Yukta: measured, fitted, in proportion.

Further Reading

For the Gita: Laurie L. Patton's translation (Penguin Classics) for a plain, readable text; Winthrop Sargeant's word-by-word edition (SUNY) for anyone who wants to check a rendering; Gavin Flood and Charles Martin's translation (Norton) for the verse. For the Yoga Sutras: Edwin Bryant's edition with the classical commentaries, and Chip Hartranft's short translation.

For the psychology: Ethan Kross, *Chatter* (2021), on self-talk and distance. Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006), on forecasting. Michael Mauboussin, *The Success Equation* (2012), on reading results. Amy Wrzesniewski's papers on callings and crafting, listed above. Dharm Bhawuk, *Spirituality and Indian Psychology* (2011), for the tradition's own empirical program.

For the first book's ground, *The One Who Notices* covers the eight limbs, the safety chapter, the breath, and the mechanism of habit change that this book assumes.

On Tradition and Borrowing

Three things the Gita carries that this book sets aside, named so the setting-aside is visible.

The social order. The eighteenth chapter assigns kinds of work by hereditary class and calls that assignment natural. I have read *svadharma* through *svabhava*, one's own nature, and dropped the class. Many modern Hindu readers do the same; many traditional readers do not; and I do not want to pretend the text makes the move for me. It gives me the word; I make the move.

The theology. The Gita is a theistic text and its final teaching is devotion to a personal God. I have rendered devotion as a stance of release after deliberation. That is a real function of devotion and not the whole of it. The warmth of a refuge that is a person, not a stance, is lost, and I said so in both books.

The war. The text's setting is a battle, and it has been read as a justification for violence and, by Gandhi among others, as an allegory of an inner struggle with no outer war at all. This book takes neither reading. It takes the setting as the extreme case of having to act without controlling the result, and leaves the ethics of the battle itself to the reader, which is where the text, at 18.63, leaves them too.

What is borrowed is borrowed from a living tradition, which is still practicing all three of the things I set aside. The reader who wants the fuller thing knows where to find it.

How this book was made

The substance is my own: notes from years of practice with the Sutras, and from the years in which the Gita was the text I reached for when what I needed was not stillness but the ability to act. I used AI tools to help draft and organize those notes into prose, to check the research base, and to flag where a finding I had relied on had failed replication. I then edited the whole, checked every citation against its source, and removed claims I could not stand behind. Where a study is described at a strength lower than its reputation, that is deliberate. The errors that remain are mine.