

— 2 —

A Prescription for *Yoga* and Power in the *Mahābhārata*

James L. Fitzgerald

The translated text that follows—a small treatise labeled “Prescription for *yoga*” (*yogavidhi*) in many of its original manuscript sources (chapter 289 of Book 12 of the *Mahābhārata*, thus “*Mahābhārata* 12.289)—is a remarkable presentation of *yoga* taken from among the many philosophical and religious texts found in the vast Indian epic *Mahābhārata*. This introduction to it will proceed by describing the immediate context of this text—the two speakers in it and a neighboring treatise that helps us understand better the point of this “Prescription for *yoga*”—and the broad trends of ancient Indian intellectual history that define its teaching generally.

The Immediate Setting

BHĪṢMA'S INSTRUCTIONS OF YUDHIṢṬHIRA

In this text, the fading, soon to die, warrior-sage Bhīṣma, the patriarch (“grandfather”) of the Kuru Bharatas, is instructing his young kinsman, Yudhiṣṭhira (“son of the Bharata King Pāṇḍu,” who is addressed sometimes as Bhārata and as “bull of the Bharatas”; Yudhiṣṭhira is also occasionally addressed with two names based on two of his mother’s names, “son of Kuntī”—at stanzas 16, 34, and 56—and “son of Pṛthā”—at stanzas 24 and 27). Yudhiṣṭhira has recently won a horrific and tremendous war that should usher in a new era through his rule across the entire known world. Bhīṣma’s instructions to the new king all deal with problems that troubled the new king, problems of knowing and understanding “right action” (*dharma*) in relation to some of the critical issues of the times—problems such as “How can kingship itself, with its inherent violence and opportunism, be understood to be right action?” Or, “How can the ancient forms of religion (ritual worship of the various Gods, the killing of

animals in some of these rites, the pursuit of life in heaven after a single, unique life) be reconciled with new religious ideas that presume that people live in chains of rebirths determined mechanically by the aggregation of all a person's past deeds, good and bad alike, and among which any and all deeds of violence and injury are the very worst?" The time when the various instructions collected here were composed is roughly between 200 BCE and 300 CE. The selection translated here, 12.289, likely dates from near the end of this long stretch of time.

**THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*'S RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS
AMIDST THE CURRENTS OF THE ERA: *DHARMA*, *MOKṢA*, *YOGA***

The particular portion of Bhīṣma's instructions from which our selection comes is called the "Section on *mokṣadharmas*" (read further for explanations of both of these words). This section is a collection of various texts from the brahminic tradition that present sermons and treatises on the various forms of behavior that are both normatively good (prescribed as laws or duties) and also supposedly good for a person's welfare after death (that is, they are *dharma*s, the right things for a person to do; the word *dharma* embraces both those senses of "good action," being obligatory and being beneficial in the next life). These texts also present different important teachings that pertain to a person's ultimate welfare in life and beyond death (in this part of the *Mahābhārata* the word *dharma* may also, at times, refer to an "important truth or teaching" that entails some particular form of ultimately beneficial behavior). All of these sermons and treatises on various *dharma*s are presented against the backdrop of new teachings that became very prominent in northern India after 400 BCE in the mouths of various teachers such as the Buddha, teachings that argued that human beings were plagued or "bound" in various ways and needed to free themselves—from the general suffering of life (*duḥkha*), from the mechanical action of the aggregation of past deeds (*karman*, Anglicized as karma), and from the possibly endless chain of personal rebirths (*saṃsāra*) that is powered by the energy of one's karma. These new doctrines came frequently to use the word *mokṣa* (a word that comes from a verb-root that signifies to "let loose," like an arrow from the string of a bow, or "get loose," as in escape from danger or a bad situation) and related words like *mukti* and *mukta* to describe the various forms and degrees of these liberations.

These teachings regarding the fundamental misery of the human condition, the mechanical bondage of karma, and the chain of rebirths seem likely to have arisen from social and cultural milieus that were not Aryan and brahminic (see Bronkhorst 2007). The fundamental Vedic religious ideas of the

Aryan brahmins were predicated upon the idea that people might engage in various rituals (worshipping the Gods) and other forms of good action (*dharma-karman*) that would make the world reasonably comfortable and secure—the world was not a locus only of suffering in their eyes. And while they understood human actions to have ethical qualities and corresponding good or bad consequences for their agents, they did not envision their deeds as a life-long accumulation that mechanically determined their futures, nor did they think that persons were incarnated in a succession of bodies. In ancient times, brahmins did develop ethical themes by which some individual persons conceived of “immortality” and the “beatitude” (blessedness, perpetual perfect bliss) of union with the impersonal source-reality of the universe (*brahman*), but these ideas are fundamentally different from the ideas of liberation from suffering, karma, and *saṃsāra*. In a slow process that took several centuries, the two different worldviews intermingled, and the differing notions of the highest good (gaining immortality or the beatitude of union with *brahman*, on the one hand, and Escape or Absolute Freedom, on the other) came ultimately to be regarded as more or less synonymous. Once the non-brahminic ideas of *mokṣa* started to circulate and gain prominence, brahminic thinkers began appropriating parts of them into brahminic religious themes, especially in the centuries after 300 BCE, in some of the younger *Upaniṣad* texts and passages. Many of the texts of the *Mahābhārata*’s “Section on *mokṣadharmas*” are likewise appropriations of these ideas to greater or lesser degrees, and they represent attempts to fit these alien ideas together with continuing brahmin respect for the Gods, the Vedas, and ritual action.

Exactly where the ideas and practices that came to be labeled “*yoga*” fit into these developments is obscure (see Bronkhorst 1986, 1993; White 2009; and Eliade 2009). Those ideas and practices focus emphatically upon individual persons, particularly the human body and the mental structures that operate within the body, and especially upon the breathing that obviously powers both the body and its conscious structures. This focus makes those practices seem quite distinct from the early Vedic forms of brahminic religion which are centered upon the many Gods that control the world surrounding human beings, who live in various kinds of corporate groupings, as do the Gods. But whatever sociocultural background these practices had when eventually they made their entrance upon the stage of Indian religions in historically visible times, they served both the brahminic quest for beatific union and non-brahminic quests for liberation equally well. These practices typically called for withdrawal from the world of everyday life (renunciation, *saṃnyāsa*), affiliation with a preceptor, emphasis upon control of the body and the breath, and control of the mind by withdrawing consciousness from sensory objects and fo-

cusing it tightly for long periods of time on a single point of support (different phases or degrees of meditation: *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, *śamādhi*). The changes such regimes of “psycho-somatic technology” would effect in persons lent themselves to different metaphysical interpretations, a fact that made this a “psycho-somatic technology” that seems to have been regarded as effective by many different schools of thought across more than two millennia of Indian intellectual history.

It is also important to understand that these practices were not always nor everywhere labeled “*yoga*.” *Yoga* is a Sanskrit word that came to be applied—primarily in the Hindu brahminic traditions—to some parts of this broad tradition of asceticism and praxis at some indeterminable point in time, and the word *yoga* applies some interesting ideas to it. *Yoga* is an ancient word signifying “hitch up” or “harness” draught animals to a wheeled vehicle or the blade of a plow, and the like, or “yoke” a pair of such animals together for such work. It would be interesting to ponder the ways in which this idea might fit, and in turn, be modified through its referring to and describing the various alterations of behavior, manipulations of the body, regulations of breathing, and arresting of mental activities that are characteristic of “*yoga*” (see the metaphor of the chariot at *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.3–8). We cannot launch such an exploration here, but I will mention that central themes of the “harnessing” metaphor involve a graded continuum between different kinds of entities: lower-level, powerful entities or creatures (often the senses and/or parts of the body) that must be conquered, tamed, directed, regulated, or controlled by the higher-level entities (layers of the Mind). The higher-level entities are regarded as naturally closer to the ideal state of reality, however that is conceived. The harnessing theme is apt for the project of bringing the higher strata of a person into control over his or her lower strata, for this metaphor imports the notions of “traces,” “reins,” “lines of control” running from the higher entity to the lower (ideas such as *yamas* [“reins; restraints”] and *raśmis* [“traces, lines, reins”]). The work of David White has shown the wide applicability of these motives (White 2009).

Another relevant theme implied in “harnessing” is that the person in control harnesses the lower-order being or entity for some purpose, for some enterprise or work. This aspect of *yoga* is highly relevant to a number of discussions of *yoga* in the *Mahābhārata*, especially those involving a divine *yogin*, such as Kṛṣṇa presents himself to be in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and as Nārāyaṇa is more implicitly presented at the end of 12.289, as you will soon see. Again, this is a theme of *yoga* that has been illuminated by David White’s recent work. As he has shown, this theme of *yoga* stands in some tension with the theme of seeking *mokṣa*, and the practice of *yoga* described in our text here does face in both directions—toward the active use of *yoga* powers in the

world even though Absolute Liberation is within reach, and, too, toward Absolute Liberation, *mokṣa*. Having described broadly the power and strength the *yogin* acquires and the way in which the *yogin* can make use of any and every entity in the known universe (in stanzas 58–62), the text remarks (actually earlier, in stanza 41) that the *yogin* may, at will, take up the “highest, or final, *yoga*” and gain *mokṣa* straightaway.

THE “PRESCRIPTION FOR YOGA:” CHAPTER 12.289 OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

The text at hand represents a relatively late and highly developed stage in this history. It offers a glimpse of a well-developed tradition of reflection and praxis on body and mind that on its face is directed toward freeing a person in different ways—Absolute Liberation, *mokṣa*, and, by merging with the Supreme God Nārāyaṇa in the end, beatitude. At the same time, its *yoga*-harnessing can be, and is, directed toward the development of very high degrees of power and control within the phenomenal world for as long as the *yogin* may wish. And finally, this text presents all of this as a self-conscious “School” of thought (a *darśana*, a “View” of important matters of reality and knowledge) to be known as the “Yoga” School, which I render here with the deliberately verbose “The School of Mastery by means of *yoga* harnessing.” (I write “Yoga” when I believe the text refers to this school, and “*yoga*” when the word refers to generic forms of *yoga*.)

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE “PRESCRIPTION FOR YOGA”

As is so often the case with the instructional texts in the *Mahābhārata*’s “Section on *mokṣadharmas*,” there are a number of currents running through this text. It is worth emphasizing that it is a teaching on liberation—liberation from the bondage of karma, which entails ultimately liberation from rebirth in the created world and liberation from all that is not the highest God Nārāyaṇa. But what is highly distinctive about this text is its emphasis that the *yogin* breaks these bonds with the strength (*bala*) he accumulates through *yoga* praxis. Through *yoga* he becomes as powerful as a God, and the text applies to him the word for God, *īśvara* (“powerful, mighty, one who has the ability to control entities that are below him”), that came to replace the older Vedic word for God, *deva* (“a bright, shining being” of “the bright realm,” the *div/dyu*, the sky). Of course the successful *yogin* who becomes an *īśvara* is not *the* Supreme God, the Supreme Powerful One, the *parama-īśvara*, who was *never* bound by karma, who has been the original source and final end of the entire universe from time without beginning (either Viṣṇu or Śiva, eventually). As pointed out above, the successful *yogin* who becomes an *īśvara* according to 12.289 is

said to merge into such a *paramēśvara*, Nārāyaṇa, finally (stanza 62). (At the time 12.289 was composed, the theology of Viṣṇu had not developed fully; ultimately Nārāyaṇa came to be understood as one particular way of conceiving of the *paramēśvara* Viṣṇu.)

The presentation of *yoga* between stanzas 11 and 56 is dominated by the idea of strength, *bala*, and fortitude of will. (The following paragraph, ending with the quotations of stanzas 28 and 39–41, is a quotation and adaptation of a close description of the teachings of 12.289 from a paper of mine that discusses this text in a more technical way. See Fitzgerald 2011: 194–97.) This *bala* is the power to break out of all forms of bondage (stanzas 11–23); it is the ability to enter at will into all other beings (including the Vedic Gods and the ancient seers of the Veda), the ability to withstand the power even of an angry Yamadeva, the Lord of the Dead, to make many thousands of clones of one-self and act in diverse ways in each and every one of them, and to have complete control over all forms of bondage (stanzas 24–28); it is the fortitude to hold the mind fixed in difficult “Holding Meditations” (*dhāraṇās*, stanzas 29–41 and 54–55); it is the might to overcome various internal temptations and infirmities (such as lust and laziness) (stanzas 47–49); and it is the perseverance to adhere to the path of *yoga*, which is never easy (stanzas 50–53). Besides the great powers mentioned above, what one is said to gain through *yoga* is to “get back to ‘That Place’ (a general reference to Absolute Reality, in stanza 10) when those afflictions (the five afflictions of passion, error, affection, desire, and anger, stanza 11) are all gone” (stanza 12)—“spotless, [they] go the propitious way that goes farthest” (stanza 14)—and, of course, *mokṣa* (at stanzas 13, 18, 28, 31, 35, and others). At one point (stanza 42), Yudhiṣṭhira interrupts to ask what foods the *yogin* eats to gain strength and Bhīṣma discusses foods and fasting for several stanzas (43–49). In stanzas 50–53, Bhīṣma offers an extended statement regarding how terribly difficult and challenging the path of *yoga* actually is.

An apt summation of this Yoga exposition is contained in *ślokas* 28 and 39–41 (which I present in slightly simplified translations):

Certainly the powerful yogin, who has complete control over the bonds that hold him, has at his disposal the absolute power to escape them at will. [289.28]

A yogin who concentrates intently in great formal observances focused on his navel, head, heart, etc., perfectly harnesses his subtle self with the Self. [289.39–40] Having burned off his past deeds good and bad, his wisdom spotless, he may, if he wishes, take up the highest yoga harnessing and quickly get Absolutely Free. [289.41]

Yoga Paired with Sāṃkhya

As happens frequently with presentations of *yoga* in the *Mahābhārata* (see Fitzgerald 2011: 185, n. 2), the presentation in 12.289 is paired with the presentation of another developing *darsana* tradition, called “Sāṃkhya,” which I gloss as “The School of Total Knowledge.” (The paired description of Sāṃkhya occurs in the immediately following chapter of Bhīṣma’s instructions of Yudhiṣṭhira, 12.290.) In the texts of the *Mahābhārata*, at least, the school of Sāṃkhya and the school of Yoga appear to share the same vision of what exists in the world and how persons are constructed: both are committed to understanding the world and persons in terms of a “stack” or “ladder” of levels of being that all descend from some common source entity, often by each lower entity emerging from the prior one through a process of progressive coarsening or thickening, until the densest and most opaque of the material elements [earth] is reached. Though there is not unanimity about the dating of all relevant textual passages, I believe “Sāṃkhya,” as the name of an intellectual theme or method, was unknown in India until about the turn of the Common Era, when it appears in a number of places in the *Mahābhārata*, in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, and in Aśvaghoṣa’s account of the life of the Buddha. The term appears on the scene rather suddenly, and it represents a newly conceived and articulated version of the method of liberation that had been developing up until then in connection with the traditions of *yoga* praxis and reflection (see Schreiner 1999). The goal of Sāṃkhya is to achieve a radical (and “*mokṣa*-conferring”) disaffection from the world, a radical purging of egocentrism and desire from one’s taken for granted understanding of the world with oneself in it. This disaffection, called *vairāgya* (a dissociation from life’s motivating stimuli at the visceral level of a person’s being), is effected by the *systematic, enumerative contemplation of the entire system of the world*. The word Sāṃkhya signifies “comprehensive intuition,” or “all-gnosis,” and its cognates signify “enumerate, know the whole of some complex entity by itemizing and totaling every component of it.” The connection between the ideas of enumeration and summing up and taking a complete grasp of a thing is obvious. It seems that in the “Sāṃkhya revolution,” different intellectual motives emerged and converged within old traditions of reflection upon the makeup of the world and persons and the effecting of Escape or beatitude by means of *yoga*-control. And I would suggest that basic Buddhist ideas—of freeing oneself from suffering, karma, and rebirth that embrace both intellectual “re-visioning” of the world and oneself; the cultivation of wisdom, *prajñā*, through “Insight meditation”; and the psycho-somatic quieting of the entire body-mind organism (the

cultivation of *śamatha* through trance-meditation)—played an important role in this “Sāṃkhya revolution.” This convergence of motives and themes prompted some thinkers to argue for a “gnostic” approach to *mokṣa*, one that de-emphasized those aspects of *yoga* that were concerned with mastering and using entities in the world by exercising acquired yogic power in the fashion of a God, a Lord, an *īśvara*. That is to say, 12.289 here would seem to represent exactly what the new Sāṃkhya was turning away from.

The issue of precisely what prompted the separation of an emphatically gnostic tradition from the older tradition of *yoga* is complex and we cannot go into it any further now. It is also true that this separation made some teachers, or members of their audiences, nervous, for a frequent theme of the joint presentations of Sāṃkhya and Yoga in the *Mahābhārata* is that they are both equally effective and both lead to the highest good. Such an argument seems highly understandable in the case of a splintering development that wishes to carry away with it as many of the advantages of its origin as may prove possible. Such an argument is also highly plausible in this particular case, for, as the offspring of the *yoga* tradition, the epic forms of “Sāṃkhya” very much resemble the basic teachings of *yoga*. It is precisely over the issues of power and lordship (being an *īśvara*) that they part company from *yoga*. I would end by suggesting that the Sāṃkhya emphasis upon intellection does not rule out Sāṃkhya “knowers” making use of *yoga* harnessing as a component of their exhaustive, enumerating, intellectual apprehension of the universe, as described in 12.290. In that text they do not suggest that they make use of *yoga*, but they do attribute the teachings of their school to a powerful “master” (*īśvara*) of *yoga* harnessing, Kapila.

I will close my discussion of this pair of texts, in which our “Prescription for *yoga*,” is set, and thus of my introduction to 12.289, by returning to the theme of the Supreme God Nārāyaṇa, with whom the *yogin* merges when he chooses to exit the universe definitively (stanza 289.62). The Sāṃkhya presentation too emphasizes that Nārāyaṇa is the highest principle of the universe, and the successful Sāṃkhya knower too enters Nārāyaṇa, in the end. Each of these presentations concludes with a series of stanzas in a more ornate poetic form than is typical in the *Mahābhārata*, and these concluding series of stanzas develop the connection of each school of thought to the theology of Nārāyaṇa. The successful *yogin-īśvara* ultimately assimilates himself to the God Nārāyaṇa and becomes a controlling agent of *yoga* harnessing identical with God Himself. In the case of Sāṃkhya, these concluding stanzas claim that the Sāṃkhya system of thought is an embodiment of the God Nārāyaṇa Himself, an embodiment he manifests at the beginning of each cycle of creation and re-absorbs at the end of each cycle.

A final practical note: My translation of 12.289 rests upon two alterations of

the printed Sanskrit text of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*. First, the editor of the Critical Edition pointed out a typographical error in his printed text at 12.289.17a, where the text was corrected to *sūkṣmāḥ*, which I have rendered here as “puny.” The text as printed did not connect the word *sūkṣma* with the “birds trapped in a net.” Second, as may be seen from the stanza numbers printed in my translation, I have rearranged the order of a verse or two between 289.58 and 62, moving 61cd to the head of the sentence, immediately following 57. I did this for the sake of the clarity of the English translation.

The selection translated here is from pages 1583–91 of *The Śāntiparvan [Part III: Mokṣadharmā, Being the Twelfth Book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India]*, edited by S. K. Belvalkar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1954). This book is volume 15 of *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited*, 19 vols., edited by V. S. Sukthankar, S. K. Belvalkar, and P. L. Vaidya (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–66). The present introduction and translation have been excerpted from *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 8 (The Book of the Peace, Part Two), translated, edited, and annotated by James L. Fitzgerald (University of Chicago Press) ©2011 The University of Chicago Press. All rights reserved.

Suggestions for Further Reading

There is a small core of English-language scholarship that has investigated *yoga* in the *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*) firsthand and in a way that stays close to the often less than clear texts. Progress in charting all the details has been slow, so older works are still of use, though they have been superseded in some of their details over time. I proceed through this small set in chronological order. Edward Washburn Hopkins, “Yoga-technique in the Great Epic,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 22 (1901): 333–79, is still worth study. A revisionist work in its day is the now classic piece by Franklin Edgerton from 1924 that lays out some of the fundamental “theological” ideas of Yoga and Sāṃkhya (by “theological” I refer to any absolutely fundamental claims, whether involving anthropomorphic beings or not): “The Meaning of Sāṃkhya and Yoga,” *American Journal of Philology* 45:1 (1924): 1–46. Next is V. M. Bedekar’s survey, “Yoga in the Mokṣadharmaparvan of the Mahābhārata,” contained in a volume celebrating the philosophical investigations of the great German expert Erich Frauwallner, *Beiträge zur Geistesgeschichte Indiens: Festschrift für Erich Frauwallner, aus Anlass seines 70. Geburtstages*, ed. Gerard Oberhammer (= *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sud- und Ostasiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie* 12–13 [1968], 43–52). In 1999, Peter Schreiner asked, “What Comes First (in

the Mahābhārata): Sāṃkhya or Yoga?" (*Asiatische Studien: Études Asiatiques* 53:3, pp. 755–77) and, after a systematic investigation, concluded that *yoga* is anterior to Sāṃkhya in the *MBh* by every important measure. Next is John Brockington's comprehensive survey, "Yoga in the Mahābhārata," in *Yoga: The Indian Tradition*, ed. David Carpenter and Ian Whicher (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), 13–24. Last, another work that is not a survey: my own forthcoming examination and discussion of the important pair 12.289 (translated above) and its Sāṃkhya companion 12.290 in "The Sāṃkhya-Yoga 'Manifesto' at MBh 12.289–290" (in *Battles, Bards, Brahmins. Papers from the Epics Section of the 13th World Sanskrit Conference*, ed. John Brockington and Peter Bisschop [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011], 185–212).

Two important discussions of the "philosophy" or "theology" of the *MBh* generally treat *yoga* as well. Angelika Malinar's comprehensive examination of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (*The Bhagavad Gītā: Doctrines and Contexts*) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) ranges across the entire *MBh* and treats various questions of *yoga* in the *MBh* at length, since *yoga* is such a centrally important concept in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Produced a century earlier was chapter 3 ("Philosophy in the Epic") of E. W. Hopkins's often splendid *Great Epic of India* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901). Unfortunately, Hopkins's comprehensive listing of doctrines found in the epic has as one of its purposes to argue that the text is disjointed, a point which he exaggerates here in an objectionable way.

The above works are confined to the *Mahābhārata*. There are some important works that deal with *yoga* in the *MBh* against the background of the broader development of *yoga* in India. First among these is the now classic work of Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press). Originally published in French in 1954 and in English translation in 1958, it was re-issued in 2009 with an introduction by David White, the general editor of the current volume. David White's *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) addresses the development of *yoga*, including *yoga* in the *MBh*, from the important, too long neglected perspective of *yoga*'s concerns with bodies and powers that control bodies in the material world.

Finally, while there are many accounts of the development of the non-brahminic traditions of India and of the asceticism and meditation that are important within them, three of the works of the prolific historian of Indian philosophy Johannes Bronkhorst are directly germane to what we find in the *MBh*. Two detailed examinations of texts he produced were his study, *The Two Sources of Meditation in Ancient India* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986) and his 1993 book, *The Two Sources of Indian Asceticism* (Bern: Peter Lang). Growing out these two works and other arguments in the history

of Indian philosophy which he has developed is an argument put forward in his recent book that the religious history of ancient India must be understood in terms of the mixture of the brahminic Vedic tradition with a quite different religious culture most evident in the Magadha region of eastern India: *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

A Prescription for yoga and Power in the Mahābhārata *Mahābhārata* 12.289.1–62

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

As you know everything, grandfather, please tell me the difference between the School of Total Knowledge and the School of Mastery through *yoga* harnessing. Truly, all is known to you, most excellent of the Kurus. [289.1]

Bhīṣma said:

Brahmins of the School of Total Knowledge praise total knowledge, and those of the School of Mastery through Yoga Harnessing praise yoga harnessing. They each proclaim the superiority of their own position with reasons that advance their own side. [289.2]

O enemy-withering King, the consummate experts of yoga harnessing declare the excellence of their side with arguments such as “How can anyone who is not a powerful Lord become Absolutely Free?” [289.3]

On the other hand, perfect brahmins of the School of Total Knowledge all make this argument: “Obviously, there is one and only one way to become Absolutely Free upon leaving the body: One becomes thoroughly detached upon coming to know *all* the pathways through the experiential realms of this world.” Men of profound wisdom declare this School of Total Knowledge to be “The Theory of Absolute Freedom.” [289.4–5]

Each of them countenances the reasoning on his own side as an apt and beneficial statement, and surely men like yourself, who assent to men of learning generally, must countenance the thinking of the learned here. [289.6] Those in the School of Yoga Harnessing rely upon reasons that are directly evident to the senses, while those of the School of Total Knowledge teach the conclusions of a tradition of systematic inquiry and instruction. Yudhiṣṭhira, my son, both of these are doctrines regarding fundamental reality, [289.7] and both are doctrines regarding knowledge, and both are esteemed by men of great learning. When they are carried out according to their prescribed teachings, either

one ought to lead one on the course that goes to the farthest place. [289.8] The degree of cleanliness involved in each of them is the same, and so too their kindliness toward other beings, and their adherence to special vows. But, blameless one, their theories are different. [289.9]

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

If their vows, cleanliness, and kindliness are the same, grandfather, how are their theories different? Tell me this. [289.10]

Bhīṣma said:

Using yoga harnessing initially to eradicate absolutely the five afflictions of passion, error, affection, desire, and anger, they reach That, the highest reality. [289.11] Just as big fish break through a net and get back to the water again, those who use yoga harnessing get back to That Place, the highest reality, when those afflictions are all gone. [289.12] In the same way, just as strong animals break a snare and get free of all their bonds and make a clean getaway, [289.13] so, king, strong men using yoga harnessing cut through the bonds that come from greed and, now spotless, travel the propitious way that goes to the farthest place. [289.14] But other animals that are weak perish in those snares, king, no doubt of it; and men perish too unless they use the power of yoga harnessing. [289.15] O son of Kuntī, when feeble fish are caught in a net they perish, and so do men practicing yoga harnessing when they are weak. [289.16] O tamer of your enemies, puny birds trapped in a net perish, while the strong ones get out; [289.17] so it is with men held by the bonds of their past deeds who practice yoga harnessing: The weak perish and the strong get free. [289.18]

O mighty one, a weak man practicing yoga harnessing is like a faint, weak fire that goes out when heavy logs are laid upon it. [289.19] But after a wind blows upon that fire and makes it powerful again, it might quickly burn up the entire earth. [289.20] In the same way, when a man practicing yoga harnessing has become powerful, his Fiery Energy blazes mightily and he can scorch the entire world like the sun at the time of the world's end. [289.21]

Just as a feeble man gets swept away by a river's current, so a weak man practicing yoga harnessing is helplessly swept away by the objects of sense. [289.22] And just as an elephant stands firm against the current of a river, so too he who has acquired the power of yoga harnessing forces the many objects of his senses to part and flow around him. [289.23]

Men practicing yoga harnessing who are mighty Lords filled with power from the harnessing enter at will into Progenitors, Seers, Gods, and the elements, son of Pṛthā. [289.24] Neither Yama, the Lord of the Dead, nor the End-Maker, Time, when he is enraged, nor ferociously aggressive Death—none of these, king, exercises power over the man who practices yoga harnessing—that man has unlimited energy. [289.25] O Bull of the Bharatas, a man practicing yoga harnessing might, after he has acquired power, take on many thousands of identities and wander the earth in all of them. [289.26] With one, O son of Pṛthā, he might betake himself to the sense objects, while he might perform severe asceticism with another; or he might draw them back into himself again, as the sun does the rays of its energy. [289.27] Certainly, king, the powerful man practicing yoga harnessing, who has control over the bonds that hold him, has at his disposal the absolute power to escape them at will. [289.28]

So, lord of peoples, I have told you the powers there are in yoga harnessing. Now I shall tell you some of its finer points to illustrate it to you further. [289.29]

Lord, bull of the Bharatas, hear, as illustrations, some of the finer points regarding the holding of one's mind in concentration. [289.30]

As a careful bowman hits his target when he concentrates, so a man practicing yoga harnessing who is perfectly under control reaches Absolute Freedom, no doubt of it. [289.31]

As a man carefully carrying a pot full of oil can mount a stairs with it, if he puts his mind unwaveringly on that pot and keeps his mind under control; [289.32] so, king, a man practicing yoga harnessing, who has lashed himself tightly, holding himself motionless, makes himself so spotless he looks like the sun. [289.33]

O son of Kuntī, as a pilot who concentrates intently guides his ocean-going ship swiftly into port, [289.34] so, king, he who knows the fundamental principles of the world and has engaged in concentration of his Self by means of yoga harnessing, reaches a position that is very hard to get to, once he leaves this body behind. [289.35]

O bull among men, as a charioteer who has harnessed fine horses and concentrates intently takes his bowman directly to the intended spot, [289.36] so, king, a man practicing yoga harnessing who concentrates in the Holding-Meditations reaches the highest place directly—just as an arrow that goes straight to its target when released. [289.37]

A man practicing yoga harnessing who stands without moving after making himself enter into his Self, gains the place that never decays—just as a man who stands without moving in order to spear fish gains an evil place. [289.38]
 O warrior of immeasurable courage, a man practicing yoga harnessing who concentrates intently in great formal observances focused on these spots—his navel, his neck, his head, his heart, or his chest, or his two sides, or his sight, touch, or smell—perfectly harnesses his subtle self with the Self. [289.39–40]
 Having burned off his past deeds good and bad, his wisdom spotless, he may, if he wishes, take up the final yoga harnessing and quickly get Absolutely Free. [289.41]

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

What sorts of things does a man practicing yoga harnessing take for his foods—and which ones does he remove—in order to gain strength, Bhārata? Please tell me this. [289.42]

Bhīṣma said:

A man practicing yoga harnessing who is committed to eating seeds and the mash left after pressing oil-seeds, and who is also committed to avoiding oils, gains strength. [289.43]

O tamer of your foes, a man practicing yoga harnessing who eats rough barley and is pleased with that food alone over long periods of time cleanses himself and gains strength. [289.44]

A man practicing yoga harnessing who, for periods of fortnights, months, or across the varied seasons of the year, wanders about from cave to cave, drinking nothing but water mixed with some milk, gains strength. [289.45]

O lord of men, a man practicing yoga harnessing who fasts continuously for an entire month is completely cleansed and gains strength. [289.46]

King, these exalted men overcome cold, heat, and rain; and desire, anger, and fear as well; also sleep, shortness of breath, and the penis, the objects of the senses, [289.47] apathy—so difficult to conquer!—and terrible craving, all the sensations of touch, and laziness—so difficult to conquer!—O most excellent of kings. [289.48] Then, their passions gone, those very wise exalted men illuminate the subtle self with the Self by way of the sublimity of their meditations and recitations. [289.49]

This path of brahmin sages is held to be very difficult to traverse; no one travels on it comfortably, O bull of the Bharatas. [289.50] Only a youngster could

easily fly down a path dotted with robbers through a terrible forest abounding in snakes and lizards, where there is very little water and it is hard to move about because there are pits and many bramble-thickets, and most of it is dense, unbroken woods or stands of trees burned up in forest fires. [289.51–52] So if a brahmin gets onto the path of yoga harnessing and finds it comfortable, then he should get off of that path, for tradition teaches that he must have many faults. [289.53]

O lord of earth, a man practicing yoga harnessing finds it very easy to stand on the sharpened razors' edges of Holding-Meditations, but those whose minds are not properly formed find it very difficult to stand on them. [289.54] And, son, Holding-Meditations that have been disrupted lead men along a course that is no good, like ships at sea without captains. [289.55] But, O son of Kuntī, one who stays in the Holding-Meditations as prescribed, gets Absolutely Free of death and birth, and pleasure and suffering too. [289.56]

Arisen in diverse learned traditions, this has been declared among those of the School of Mastery through Yoga Harnessing—but it was among brahmins that the whole of the supreme method of control through harnessing was definitively fixed. [289.57]

The fact is, exalted one, a man practicing yoga harnessing should enter into and then fuse with [289.61cd] That, the Highest, The Mighty All, *brahman*; then the Lord Brahmā, then the favor-granting Viṣṇu, Bhava (Śiva), the God Dharma, the six-faced God (Skanda), the six majestic sons of Brahmā, [289.58] the Attribute that is noxious Darkness, the Attribute that is tremendous Energy, the Attribute that is pure Lightness, the highest Originary Matrix, Complete Attainment, the Goddess who is the wife of Varuṇa (that is, the element water), all of Fiery Energy (the element fire), the vast and mighty firmness (the element earth), [289.59] the spotless moon amidst the stars, the All-Gods, the serpents, the ancestors, all the mountain peaks, the terrific oceans, all rivers, clouds, forests, [289.60] elephants, mountains, the throngs of Yakṣas, the quarters of the sky, the throngs of Gandharvas, and men and women. [289.61ab] Thus vast and tremendous, his body that Mighty All, he gains Absolute Freedom shortly afterward. [289.61d]

King, this account focused upon this God of tremendous power and thought (that is, the successful yogi) is splendid! Transcending all mortal practitioners of yoga harnessing, this one acts, his body that Mighty All, his soul the supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa. [289.62]