

This excerpt is from our 4th edition Bhagavad Gita, the hardcover Gita

## TWO BASIC PATHS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE WORLD

पुरुषः स परः पार्थ भक्त्या लभ्यस् त्व अनन्यया ।  
यस्यान्तःस्थानि भूतानि येन सर्वम् इदं ततम् ॥२२॥  
puruṣaḥ sa paraḥ pārtha bhaktyā labhyas tv ananyayā  
yasyā'ntaḥsthāni bhūtāni yena sarvam idaṁ tatam

**This Supreme Abode, O Arjuna, is attainable by unswerving devotion to Me, within which all beings exist and by which the entire universe is pervaded. (See also 9.04 and 11.55) (8.22)**

यत्र काले त्व अनावृत्तिम् आवृत्तिं चैव योगिनः ।  
प्रयाता यान्ति तं कालं वक्ष्यामि भरतर्षभ ॥२३॥  
yatra kāle tv anāvṛttim āvṛttim cai'va yoginaḥ  
prayātā yānti taṁ kālaṁ vakṣyāmi bharatarṣabha

**O Arjuna, now I shall describe different paths departing by which, after death, the yogis do or do not come back to the mortal or temporal world. (8.23)**

Verses 8.23-26 are considered to be the most mysterious and misunderstood verses in the Gita. What appears to refer to the auspicious times of departure of the living entity during death in verses 8.24 and 8.25, actually refers to the presiding deities of various astral planes during gradual passage of the soul after death. This is made clear in verse 8.26. It should be noted that one's final destination and the corresponding path leading to the destination has to be earned and may have nothing to do, directly, with the time of death. Eligibility to tread the path, and not the time of departure, as is sometimes commonly misunderstood, determines the path of departure.

Lord explains in verses 8.24-25 that there are two goals in life which people seek. These two goals are achieved by two different paths guiding the two types of seekers to their destinations. One is called the path of no return (verse 8.24), and the other is the path of return (verse 8.25). These two paths are renamed in verse 8.26 as the path of light and the path of darkness, the path of Moksha and path of coming and going, the path of the seekers of spirituality and seekers of materialism, path of the light of knowledge and of darkness of ignorance.

अग्निर् ज्योतिर् अहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।  
तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥२४॥  
agnir jyotir ahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṇmāsā uttarāyaṇam  
tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavidō janāḥ

**Passing gradually after death, through celestial controllers of fire, light, daytime, the bright lunar fortnight, and the six months of the northern solstice of the sun, yogis who know the Self attain supreme abode (and do not come back to earth). (8.24)**

The path of no return, described above, is also called the path of gods (Devayāna), the path of light of Self-knowledge, the northern path, the solar path, and the path of slow and gradual development (Krama-mukti), the ascending path of evolution. This path is blocked for the

ignorant and persons devoid of the necessary qualities such as austerity, abstinence, faith and knowledge. Those who have above mentioned qualities will walk this path. It is also said that this path is closed during the six months of southern solstice of the sun as mentioned in verse 8.25.

Following the path of spiritual advancement and knowledge on the earth, the individual soul advances to several higher and higher soul planes (five planes mentioned in verse 8.24) in the spirit world; finally reaching a level until it has developed enough to merge back with the Godhead where we came from.

Fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight and the six months of the northern solstice of the sun indicate deities presided over by the Sun. It is said in the Upanishads (ChU 4.15.05, BrU 6.2.15) that those who qualify for the northern path after death reach the celestial ruler of fire, light, from there to the celestial ruler of the day, from there to the celestial ruler of the bright fortnight, from there to the celestial ruler of the six months during which the sun travels northwards, from there to Sun, and from there to lightening. Then a Superbeing, created from the mind of Brahmā, comes and leads them to the world of Brahmā. Becoming perfect at each stage, they stay in the world of Brahmā till the end of the cycle of creation; at the completion of which they merge in Brahman together with Brahmā. Having reached Brahman, they do not return back to worldly life again. This is also called Brahm-Nirvana.

धूमो रात्रिस् तथा कृष्णः षण्मासा दक्षिणायनम् ।  
तत्र चान्द्रमसं ज्योतिर् योगी प्राप्य निवर्तते ॥२५॥

dhūmo rātris tathā kṛṣṇaḥ ṣaṇmāsā dakṣiṇāyanam  
tatra cāndramasaṁ jyotir yogī prāpya nivartate

**Passing gradually after death, through celestial controllers of smoke, night, the dark lunar fortnight, and the six months of southern solstice of the sun, the righteous person attains heaven and comes back to earth again. (8.25)**

The destination of righteous persons, who work to enjoy the fruits of their labor, is described in the above verse. Those who leave the world after spending their lifetime in doing good and performing rituals and worship to enjoy the results so accrued, travel by the southern path. This path is also called the path of darkness of ignorance, the path of return, the path of ignorance, the path of ancestors, lunar path and the path of materialism. This path is presided over by the Moon god, representing the world of matter and sense enjoyment. Those who qualify for this path, after death, reach the celestial ruler of smoke, from there to the celestial ruler of the night, from there to the celestial ruler of the dark fortnight, from there to the celestial ruler of the six months during which the sun travels southwards, and from there to heaven. Such yogis return to the mortal world, after enjoying heavenly pleasures for a period of time, when the fruits of their virtuous deeds are exhausted.

शुक्लकृष्णे गती ह्येते जगतः शाश्वते मते ।  
एकया यात्य् अनावृत्तिम् अन्ययावर्तते पुनः ॥२६॥

śuklakṛṣṇe gatī hy ete jagataḥ śāśvate mate  
ekayā yāty anāvṛttim anyayā'vartate punaḥ

**The path of light of spiritual practice and Self-knowledge and the path of darkness of materialism and ignorance are thought to be the world's two eternal paths. The former leads to salvation, and the latter leads to rebirth as human beings. (8.26)**

The path of transmigration may be included in the path of reincarnation, or it may be called the third path. The Upanishads describe this third path as the path of lower creatures, such as animals and insects. Unrighteous ones, who do not qualify for the two paths mentioned in verses 8.24 and 8.25, transmigrate into lower wombs, such as animals, birds, and insects (BrU 6.02.15-16). The immortal soul wanders endlessly through the ocean of transmigration, made up of 8.4 million different species of life on this planet. The good Lord, out of His sweet will known as “The Law of Grace”, bestows the precious gift of the human body that is like a raft to carry one across the ocean of transmigration (TR 7.43.02-04). Consider what we are is God’s gift to us, and what we become is our gift to God. It is also said that human birth, faith in God, and the help of a real guru come only by His grace. Our present life provides the opportunity for preparation for the next life. According to the activities in this life, one can either get a promotion or salvation, a demotion or transmigration, or another chance for salvation by reincarnating as a human being.

To whatever object one’s mind is set, to that goes one’s subtle and causal bodies with Karma attached to it. Thus, a person who has no desire or whose desires have been satisfied or whose only object of desire is the Self, is merged in Brahman even in this very life. This is called Jeevan-Mukti or Nirvana.

### **KNOWLEDGE LEADS TO SALVATION**

नैते सृती पार्थ जानन् योगी मुह्यति कश्चन ।  
तस्मात् सर्वेषु कालेषु योगयुक्तो भवार्जुन ॥२७॥  
nai'te sṛtī pārtha jānan yogī muhyati kaścana  
tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu yogayukto bhavā'ṛjuna

**Knowing these two paths, O Arjuna, a yogic practitioner is not bewildered at all. Therefore, one should be resolute in attaining salvation — the goal of human birth — at all times. (8.27)**