

CHAPTER SIX

The Bhagavad-Gita, Religion And God

The **Bhagavad-Gita**, literally, *The Song of God* is not **Sruti**, or scriptural teaching revealed to man by God, as are the *Upanishads*,

Just as Socrates stood before the 501 judges in the Supreme Court of Athens facing a choice between living *as he is* or dying *as others think he is*, so Arjuna stands on the Plain of Kuruksetra caught between *who he is* and *who he thinks he is*

literally, sitting beneath, or, sitting at the feet of the master. However, *The Song of God* is **Smriti** the teaching of prophets and saints whose purpose is to explain the God-given truths of the Hindu scriptures. The **Mahabharat** is the later, larger poem, *maha* being Punjab meaning big or great and *bharat*, meaning India. The **Bhagavad-Gita** is to the Hindu religious scriptures what the one hundred and fifty psalms, or songs of David, *The Song of Songs* and the various books of the prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah are to the *Old Testament*, that is, the **Pentateuch**, Greek for five books. The **Gita** is an epic poem, originally consisting of twenty-four thousand verses which then grew to some one hundred thousand verses and dates between the fifth and second centuries B.C., attributed to an Indian wise man, Vyasa.

The **Gita** has four speakers, King Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya, *Arjuna* and *Krishna*. King Dhritarashtra was the brother of King Pandu and succeeded to the throne of ancient India after Pandu's death; King Dhritarashtra adopted Pandu's five sons and educated them along with his own one hundred sons. Sanjaya is Dhritarashtra's minister and charioteer to whom Vyasa gives the psychic powers of clairvoyance so he might describe the battle to the blind king. *Krishna* is the divine incarnation of Vishnu, **Arjuna**'s chosen deity, Prakriti-Maya, or Ishwara-as-born to **Arjuna**; many compare Jesus Christ of the *New Testament* with **Krishna**, calling **Krishna** the Christ of India. **Arjuna** is the third of Pandu's original five children, the one chosen to fight the war declared against the Pandu family by Duryodhana, the leader and son of King Dhritarashtra's natural sons.

The scene is the battlefield of Kurukshetra and the discussion turns on the question whether or not **Arjuna** should wage war? This scene reminds us of Plato's *Apology* and Socrates. Socrates too walks upon a sacred courtroom battlefield whereon the Athenian prosecutors and he will wage a legal war to the death, one between who he is not, an atheist, a corruptor of youth and a traitor and who he is,

a believer, a seeker of truth and a loyal Greek. The opening scene finds **Arjuna** riding onto the sacred place of pilgrimage, about to be a battlefield, with his charioteer **Krishna** on a chariot. **Krishna** is the presence of **Brahman** to **Arjuna**, not unlike the "inner voice" speaking to Socrates. **Arjuna** too stands on a battlefield, but decides not to wage war, so **Krishna** must persuade him that the war he faces is not a physical but a spiritual war, not one which kills the body, but one which kills the soul.

Arjuna sees that the enemy are his kinspeople, his adopted brothers, the natural sons of King Dhritarashtra and he refuses to begin battle. **Arjuna**, after all, owes loyalty and thanks for his life and that of his brothers to the deceased King Dhritarashtra and his natural sons who adopted them. Again, we compare Socrates. He enters the Athenian courtroom and faces his fellow citizens, 501 of them as judges who will decide whether or not he deserves the death penalty because he has committed a capital offense against the Athenian laws which nurtured his Greek life. Socrates comments that the description of him and his actions depicted by the state's prosecutors left him confused because he did not recognize himself as described. **Arjuna** does not recognize that who he is different from whom he thinks he is.

A comparison of **Arjuna** of the *Gita* with Socrates of the *Apology* will help us understand. Just as **Arjuna** had **Krishna**, so Socrates had the "inner voice". Socrates faced his Athenian peers in the Athenian Supreme Court on the sacred plain of truth, just as **Arjuna** faced his foster family. Just as the politicians, poets and craftspeople limited themselves through their appetitive attachments to wealth, honor and reputation, so **Arjuna** limited himself by his passionate attachment to his adopted family. Both Socrates and **Krishna** define the human struggle to be between virtuous and vicious living. To live virtuously is to live according to nature and such a living is both free and immortal, without beginning or end. But, to live limited by wealth, honor, reputation or physical attachments is to be enslaved and mortal, with beginning and end.

The first "book" discusses **Arjuna's** reaction to his perceptions of the battlefield scene and his consequent reasons for not waging war; the subsequent seventeen "books" present **Krishna's** explanation of how and why **Arjuna** must wage a war which is not really a war. **Krishna** distinguishes between **Arjuna's mind as thinking** and **reality as being**. Understanding **Krishna** is as important as understanding **Arjuna**. If we assume **Krishna** is an *avatarana*, or an *incarnation* of the Divine within the world, then we may parallel **Krishna** with the "voice" which guides Socrates and the Pythian Prophetess who told Chaerephon Socrates

was the "wisest of men". **Krishna** counsels **Arjuna** to understand who he is in this confrontation with war against his foster family. Both Socrates and **Arjuna** learn that they are more than they thought themselves to be.

Arjuna looked at himself as a foster child, but he is more than merely a human born to King Pandu, more than a foster

The choice is: to live as we are or to die as a result of being who we or others think we are. So, the choice is to

child nurtured by King Dhritarashtra's family. Socrates also looked at himself as a Greek, foster child of the city-state Athens, nurtured by its laws. Both faced and reacted to what-is-not-right, what is unbalanced, namely, war and hatred versus peace and love; Indians call this **adharma**, literally, unrighteousness and the Greeks called this **adike**, literally, injustice, lack of balance. Both **Arjuna** and Socrates rejected these, but in this rejection sought **dharma**, literally, righteousness, or **dike**, justice, or balance. This is their common war, a human struggle. Both must enter this struggle, whether they like it or not, because this struggle defines human living, that is, to live honestly and justly, or to live dishonestly and unjustly. Humans enter this battlefield when they are born. Confucius stated this truth succinctly:

Man's very life is honesty, in that without it, he will be lucky indeed if he escapes with his life. (*Analects, Book VI, No. 17*)

Whether Indian or Greek, however we are born, we must learn that this very awareness and search for justice reveals that to be human means more than to be social, to be a citizen, to be wealthy, to be honored, to be accepted. We must avoid losing the **reality** of **who we are** in the appearances of what we possess **what people think** of us. First, to be human means to be who we are. But, this very fact that we are each unique, seeking more than what we can find within this human world because as unique we transcend this human world, means that to be honest is to be truthful, or more than human.

An Analogy to Assist Understanding

Life and growth within the womb is sterile, yet, with birth comes the struggle to survive, the strengthening

The **Gita** is a sacred poem, a myth; the opening scene is symbolic. A comparison will help our understanding of its meaning.

Let us close our eyes, as we assume the position and posture of a fetus developing within the amniotic fluid in the womb of the mother. Our carefree fetal life is

suddenly changed as contractive waves disturb peaceful development and the amniotic fluid drains away. We move down the birth canal, but fight this descent, just as any being would fight a change. Yet, muscular waves compel our downward descent. Our fetal soul finds itself carried by its bodily chariot into a world whereon the battle of life and death is waged. We new-borns confront a wave of bacterial forces, like us alive, but unlike us and we are frightened. Our fetal immune system mobilizes to fight. Momentarily our souls, like **Arjuna**, resist entering into this battle because both we and the bacteria are alike, living beings. How can our fetal souls conscience a war against living beings like ourselves? Yet, can we fetal beings survive except by killing, killing beings like us, plants and animals for a beginning, because living beings live off the death of others. But, is this not unjust, unbalanced, unrighteous?

Do we not as living beings resist death and seek to live? Yet, do we not have to kill to live,

The gift of life implies the struggle with death, unless, one is the source of life, that is, Yhwh, God, Brahmin and so forth.

even to eat, whether or not we wage war? Do we not have to fight to be ourselves, whether or not we are social? Humans, after all, are predators; indeed, they are parricides upon this host planet earth. So, how can living be just, balanced and righteous, if we describe living as what we do while we await death? Is not our living a futile effort to survive death by killing because we living beings' dependence upon death for survival? We hear e e cummings describe **Arjuna's** and Socrates' struggles in our twentieth century terms:

To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else - means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting. (*i six nonlectures, vi*)

The Pueblo indians provide us with a parallel viewpoint:

What can I tell you of life? It comes hard-earned and beautiful. It comes disguised and tricked. It comes with laughter too. What can I tell you about life? Nothing. My version of it is my own. It does not belong to you. Like trees, we have our common roots. But our growth is very different. (*Many Winters*, p. 56)

Contemporary biology and microbiology offer confirming, parallel examples. As a developed fetus, we are thrust from the sterile environment of the

womb into an environment saturated with bacteria. These bacteria attack us as new-born babies on the sacred plain of life, like the enemy phalanx attacked **Arjuna** on the sacred plain of Kurukahetra. If we had bacteria-scopes similar to the contemporary "night scopes", we would see this attack of these warm bodies as clearly as we can perceive any animal or human presence by its heat at night. We new-born have two avenues of reaction: first, we can "give in" to this bacterial attack, weaken and die. Or, we can use this bacterial attack to strengthen self and live.

If nature provides humans with an example of this struggle, then the cycle among Spring, Summer

The *Gita's* view of the struggle of life and virtue with death and vice is analogous. **Krishna** observes that **Arjuna** can react in two ways: first, he can "give in" to the war and act with passion, only to weaken and die -acting within the material realm of being. Or, **Arjuna** can use this war, act without passion to strengthen himself and live - acting within the spiritual realm of being. The choice belongs to **Arjuna** and the last twelve books of the *Gita* provide **Arjuna** with the method to practice the second, or alternative approach and live.

Another way to view **Arjuna's** dilemma is to consider the fact that the moment we humans are born the struggle of life with death begins. The fact is, however, that all humans are born into a world rooted in mortality, yet, seeking immortality, so the question becomes: how can life exist, generate and continue amidst mortality, or death? Every day we live brings us one day closer to death; indeed, we might say that we are born so that we may die. Perhaps living is merely what we do while we wait to die. Every seven years, for instance, the cells of a human body is replaced by new cells, something which we find replicated in the reptile kingdom wherein snakes grow new skin and shed the old as they live out their lives - a phenomenon because of which oriental cultures reverence reptiles as symbols of the eternal, that is, as beings in whom the transcendent presence of the Divine occurs.

This oriental view presents itself within the *Old Testament*, book *Genesis*, perhaps influenced by the Canaanites, as the Judaic rabbis symbolized the tempter "serpent", as a snake. Eve, literally "earth", the source of life on earth, yet, dependent upon Y-hw-h as the original life source is tempted by the snake, having the appearance of divinity. The reptile suggests that the "fruit" of the tree of knowledge of good and evil might relieve her of her dependence upon Y-hw-h and this "independence" might be the reason Y-hw-h forbade Adam and her to eat of this fruit. Now, imagine being confronted by a living being who seems to have the

divine characteristic of continuing life through shedding the skin of its previous life-stage, might not you also be "tempted"?

The struggle between life and death occurs in the battlefield of

Even the physical aspects of the chemical world witness the struggle of life with death. Elemental chemicals, such as oxygen and hydrogen struggle to exist separately, yet, sacrifice their individual-selves to become bonded in the compound water, a necessary and life-giving source, universally recognized throughout the mythic cultures as necessary for the access to spiritual life. Yet, the most obvious example of this struggle between life and death are the yearly seasons. Fall and winter bring the death of spring and summer; yet, spring and summer draw life out of fall and winter. Again, spring is the season of life, following upon the wetness of winter; then, the heat of summer dries up the life of spring, leading to the fall season, the death of most living being's ability to bring forth fruits of life.

*The Struggle Of Life With Death and **Gita***

If we look at **Arjuna**'s situation from the perspective of the *Old* and *New Testament(s)*, we confront the same struggle on the Jewish and the Christian religious plains. Take the *Old Testament* psalms of David as one example. David formulated his *Yahwist* religious songs around the thought patterns and myths of the neighboring Canaanites. He frequently conceives Y-hw-h in the trappings of the Canaanite chief God, **El**. **El** reigned over a circle of many gods and, although **El** was supreme, the other gods were unruly and frequently quarreled. The perpetual argument was rain and snow to the land, and **Mot**, God of death and of the world below who regularly took living beings through death. **Mot** reigned supreme in the hot summer whereas **Baal** won the battle during the winter; the struggle continued yearly because the seasonal cycle of life and death symbolized the spiritual cycle of life and death.

If living is nature's purpose, why must living beings struggle against

The *New Testament* Jesus Christ presents the same view of this struggle between life and death. On the one hand, Christ

tells His listeners that "I come that you may have life and have it more abundantly (*John*, 6:35; 10:10-11); on the other hand, this same Christ warns His listeners that unless they die to themselves, they can not live (*Matt.* 10:37-39; 16:24-28; *Luke* 9: 23-25; *Mark* 8: 34-38; *John* 12:25) At the same time Christ tells people He brings peace (*John* 14:1), He warns them that He does not come to the earth to bring peace, but the sword and division, even within family (*Matt.* 10:34-36). Neither

does the so-called Apostle of the Gentiles simplify the message, rather, St. Paul seems to reiterate **Krishna's** argument to **Arjuna**:

The Law, of course, as we all know,

The *way humans think* is not necessarily

is spiritual; but I am unspiritual; I have been sold as a slave to sin. I cannot understand my own behavior. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate. When I act against my own will, that means I have a self that acknowledges that the Law is good, and so the thing behaving in that way is not myself but sin living in me. The fact is, I know of nothing good living in me - living, that is, in my unspiritual self - for though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want. (*Romans*; 7:14-24)

The gift of life carries within it the seed-burden of death, so human living involves dying as its necessary corollary. *Book VII*, "Knowledge and Experience" quotes a statement by **Krishna** which seems to confirm the accuracy of the analogies used for these comparisons:

All living creatures are led astray as soon as they are born by the delusion that this relative world is real. This delusion arises from their own desire and hatred. But the doers of good deeds, whose bad karma is exhausted, are freed from this delusion about the relative world. They hold firmly to their vows, and worship me.

Men take refuge in me to escape from their fear of old age and death. Thus, they come to know **Brahman**, and the entire nature of the Atman, and the creative energy which is **Brahman**. Knowing me,

Does being alive require us to separate our obligation to live from

the world and the individual action. Even at the hour of death, they continue to know me thus. In that hour, their whole consciousness is made one with mine.

Dying, therefore, is a metaphor for living and vice versa. *Chapter XIII* provides an analogy. **Arjuna** seeks to learn about **Prakriti** and **Brahman**, the field and the knower of the field. **Krishna** calls the human body, as the dying element (as representative of the external universe) the field and the human soul, as the living element (as representative of the internal spirit) as the knower of the field:

The body is called the field because a man sows seeds of action in it, and reaps their

fruits. Wise men say that

To be living is to be self-living and to be self-living is to live according to

the knower of the field is he who watches what takes place within this body.

The conflict of life occurs on the physical level within the material realm. Death, for instance, occurs within the material realm. However, the human soul confers and seeks life and only the mind's concern for the outcome of human actions brings conflict into the spiritual realm. **Krishna**, therefore, observes that **Arjuna's** problem is one of attitude, his **way of thinking** about war, rather than the **way of being** of reality- again, remember the 13th Century A.D. Aquinas, warning the students of theology, within his famous *Summa Theologica*: "philosophy is not about what men say, but about the way things are". Thus, the conflict, even death is avoidable through detachment, a way of looking at the conflict, or an attitudinal matter, so the wise man works to bring himself into perspective by a spiritual detachment from the material realm in which the human being lives on this planet earth.

Arjuna looks out upon the sacred plain from his chariot and sees his kinsmen as the designated enemy and argues:

What can we hope from, this killing of my kinsmen? What do I want with victory, empire or their enjoyment? O, **Krishna**, How can I care for power or pleasure, my own life, even, when all these others, teachers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, sons and brothers, husbands of sisters, grandsons and cousins, for whose sake only I could enjoy them stand here ready to risk blood and wealth in war against us?

The **Gita** includes eighteen chapters describing the wanderings of **Arjuna** in searching for the holy grail of understanding the struggle facing him. Just as Juno guided Odysseus throughout the *Odyssey* to the home from which he was separated, so **Krishna** guides **Arjuna's** thinking about life to the understanding of how life is. The first chapter describes **Arjuna's** thinking, as he confronts the struggle of life with death on the sacred plain whereon he faces battle against the family who nurtured his life and that of his brothers. His thinking depresses him because such thinking seems to involve **Arjuna** separating his duty toward the origin of his life from his sacred duty to protect life.

Compare this apparent contradiction with Socrates within the *Apology*. Socrates tried to convince his fellow Athenians that the care and good of virtue and the soul did not mean that they could not pursue the goods of honor, reputation and honor, since if they cared for the goods of the soul all other goods would follow. Yet, the Athenians refused the distinction and accepted the separation as a necessary choice. **Krishna**, like Socrates now begins the journey with **Arjuna**, since the remaining chapters require “the discipline of exercise,” literally, *yoga*. This discipline of exercise begins with breathing, the activity characteristic of living beings. This activity of breathing is necessary in order to re-unite **Arjuna**’s thinking about reality with the being of reality since **Arjuna**’s human thinking about the way things are is not the same as the way things are; human thinking and the being of reality are distinct but are not separate and the humans who separate the two die without living. Breathing is the activity wherein spiritual living mingles with physical living, so *yoga* is basic discipline necessary for Hindu meditation. Indeed, breathing is the activity which body and spirit share, so breathing becomes the activity wherein both meet and achieve the unity which all living beings seek and where each living being may meet the source of life itself.

Actually, the basic meaning of *yoga* is union-with-the-self and when we compare this basic meaning to that of *nirvana*, we are able to understand the overall purpose of the *Gita*. The basic meaning of *nirvana* is extinguishing the flame of desire. Thus, the overall purpose of the *Gita* is that a human being achieve union-with-the-self who is the divine by extinguishing the flame of desire. Only then has each completely withdrawing from the body, or that which renders each person individual into the spiritual realm wherein all differentiation disappears in a unity with *Nirvana Brahmin*. This interpretation is consistent with the twofold differentiation between *manas*, the sense mind, involving the individual in desire and *buddhi*, the intellectual judgment, proper to the spiritual realm.

In addition, this interpretation is also consistent with a curious reference within *Chapter Five* of the *Gita*, namely:

Renouncing all actions of the mind, the sovereign embodied (soul) sits happily in the city of nine gates, neither acting nor causing action. The sovereign Self does not create agency (for the people) of the world, nor actions, nor the conjunction of actions with their fruit. But nature itself operates there. (Lines 13-14)

The reference is: “...in the city of nine gates...” The *Tao* refers to the ability of the wise to “...know the world without going out of doors...see the Way of Heaven

without looking through the windows...” within tone poem #47, that is, be united with “the source” without involvement within the so-called “objective” world. So, the *Gita* refers to the “city of nine gates”, that is, the nine orifices of the senses as well as the sexual organ openings of the body. Thus, union with *Nirvana Brahmin* is possible independently of the human body and its attendant sense perceptions and sexual pleasures. Yet, the curious thing is that woman has ten orifices, the tenth being the vagina, or the source of human life itself. Therefore, this withdraw from and, indeed, rejection of the body, even material reality itself necessarily reflects upon the Hindu negative view of woman herself! Of course, an alternative interpretation is that spiritual union is “sexless”, that is, results in a reunion with the source as no specific “gender” kind, namely, pure spirit whose reality is beyond sexual difference.

Now, the first requirement for **Arjuna** is the necessity to analyze his knowing as distinct from his acting and then to re-examine his knowing. (*Chapters II, III and IV*) This analysis leads him to choose between unselfish actions and selfish actions. (*Chapter V*) This choice means that we human beings see the difference between the fact that things can be distinct, but not separate one from the other. Such understanding permits humans to see different values attached to distinct actions without separating the values and thus without opposing the actions one to the other. **Krishna** now requires **Arjuna** to meditate so that he might develop this understanding and move from the level of human knowledge to human wisdom. (*Chapters VI and VII*)

To be harmonic, passionate, even inert are all possible as a result of

Now, the discipline of meditation (*Chapter VI*) leads **Arjuna** to understand that acting naturally or, as Socrates found acting virtuously is happiness and peace without regard to any fruits of such actions, including the approval or disapproval of peers. So, living itself is the purpose of being alive, regardless of our health or illness and such an understanding leads us to wisdom. (*Chapter VII*) Thomas Aquinas offers an interesting insight into the process and purpose of prayer (*Summa Theologia, II-II, q. 83, a.2; a.3, a.7, ad 12*), in this case, **yoga** meditation. The purpose of prayer, he says, is self-knowledge; prayer enables us to reflect on **how** and **who** we are in relation to a first principle as source of our being. Prayer for Aquinas, therefore, is the principal act of the natural virtue of religion and essentially productive of the virtue of humility (*Ibid., a. 15*). Prayer becomes a way the human breathes and re-unites self to one's first principle and cause. Self-knowledge, therefore, is the very purpose of all knowing and being oneself is the very end of all acting, including the action of living:

One should lift up the self by the self, one should not let the Self be degraded; for the Self alone is the friend of the self and the Self alone is the enemy of the self. For him who has conquered his self by the self, his Self is a friend; but for him who has not conquered his self, the Self becomes hostile, like an enemy. (*Chapter VI, ll.5-6*)

To focus on self-knowing is to be free from all desires and such a **yoga**, or discipline “destroys all pain”. (*Chapter VI, l. 17*) Lau-tzu identified such knowledge with being wise, indeed, with being enlightened, distinct from but one with **Tao**. Socrates also described such knowledge as both being human wisdom and being an instrument of God.

I am the strength of the strong which is free from desire and passion...And of all beings that are - the harmonious (*sattvic*), the passionate (*rajasic*) and even the inert (*tamasic*) - know that these are from Me alone. But I am not in them, they are in Me. (*Chapter VII, ll. 11-12*)

Chapter VIII stands as a practical, or *Gita* example of Eliade's book, *The Sacred and the Profane*.

Arjuna said: What is that *Brahman*? What is the supreme Self and action, O best of beings? What is said to be the material domain and what is declared to be the domain of the divine? (*Chapter VIII, l. 1*)

Arjuna now has come to the basic question, having now reached the self-knowledge and action resulting from the *yoga*, or disciplines of knowledge, action, knowledge, renunciation and wisdom re-uniting the self with its first principle through breathing. This chapter parallels the end of the *Apology*, wherein Socrates discusses the Athenians' fear of death as he describes his own view of death, having reached the wisdom of self-knowledge, prompted by the comment of the Pythian Oracle at Delphi. Socrates stands before his Athenian peers and views the two possible options which death presents to him. He looks upon death from the focus provided by that virtuous reality of wisdom of being human. *Krishna* describes a similar situation:

He who is disciplined by the *yoga* of practice and meditates on the supreme Person, his mind not straining after some other object, he reaches, O Partha, that supreme divine Spirit...At the time of death, with an unshaken mind, disciplined with devotion and the strength of yoga, placing the life-force (*prana*) between the eyebrows, he attains that supreme divine Spirit. (*Chapter VIII, ll. 8-10*)

Like **Arjuna**, we, now freed from that kind of thinking which separate us from our being, or as the fetus expelled from the womb, look about this world and see myriad plants, multiple animals, our kinsmen, all living, striving to avoid death. Our very birth, or living, occasions the necessity to kill, and consequent dying but our breathing re-unites us to life itself. All living beings of human experience, as we humans, must kill to eat and eat to live. *Death becomes the means whereby life as **the** end is sustained*. We see that dying is present within living itself. We learn to recognize the distinction without thinking about the separation. We, like Camus

relearn that we had the “habit of living before we had the habit of thinking”. Conflict vanishes and peace appears.

Indeed, we kill so that we can build homes, shopping centers,

Whereas the road to heaven is truthfulness,
the road to happiness is right conduct

possible only through self knowledge

highways. As Aristotle observes in the first book of his *Politics*: unlike other animals, however, humans kill other humans for reasons other than self-defense, food and protection of offspring, or, practically, in order to sustain life. This comment of Aristotle acknowledges the struggle which is life striving against death, yet, reflects on the business which many humans make out of war, raising it to the level of an end for which they live rather than a means necessary to sustain life. So we, as **Arjuna** react at first by saying "no, I will not engage in this warfare," since he, as we, take the here-and-now, historical, or secular viewpoint.

Yet, **Krishna** tells us through **Arjuna**: your duty, your responsibility is to live, thereby adding a sacred, or eternal viewpoint. Socrates, however, lived as a seeker, one questioning the knowledge others claimed as truth, looking for the meaning of wisdom. Yet, being himself, as a human questioning, Socrates was judged to be a criminal and condemned to death because his searching questions unbalanced his peers who were powerful and whose imbalance was uncomfortable with his question.

So, too **Arjuna** is unbalanced on the battlefield, uncomfortable with the prospect of waging war. Thus, if life is a battle between good and evil, appearance and reality, how can **Arjuna** live this life with **dharma** and reject this **adharma** he feels? The answer comes from the *Mahabharata*, the larger epic poem to which the **Gita** was added. Yudhisthira, the youngest of the five sons of Pandu is questioned by Dharma, the personification of duty and virtue:

"What is the road to Heaven?"

"Truthfulness" responded Yudhisthira.

How does a man find happiness?

"Through right conduct," answered Yudhisthira.

What must he subdue, in order to escape grief?

"His mind," said Yudhisthira.

When is a man loved?

"When he is without vanity," answered Yudhisthira.

Of all the world's wonders, which is the most wonderful?

"That no man, though he sees others dying all around him, believes that he himself will die," answered Yudhisthira.

How does one reach true religion?

"Not by argument, Not by scriptures and doctrines; they cannot help. The path to religion is trodden by saints," he replied.

Dharma was satisfied. He revealed himself to Yudhisthira. Then he brought the four brothers back to life.

The *Gita* and *Krishna* teach **Arjuna** and humans that living transcends dying and that divine life presents itself

through the act of dying, so we live through death - an interesting contention, particularly if viewed

***Krishna* explains that the human way of thinking, or attitude is the biggest obstacle to reality's way of being and**

within the context of Plato's *Apology*: notwithstanding the fact that Socrates drank hemlock, being condemned to death by a majority of 501 peer judges, history witnesses to the presence of Socrates, 2,500 years later, yet, no presence of any of the 501 judges! So, the *Gita* witnesses the fact that truthfulness and right conduct are the twin means to achieve the two ends of human living, happiness and life eternal. The *Gita* and *Krishna* likewise teach **Arjuna** and humans the one and only enemy is within, the human mind and it must be taught detachment and its limitations. This oriental message is analogous to the occidental message of Socrates. Nothing can harm the "good man," literally, the virtuous human being because to be virtuous is to be spiritual and this means to be eternal. Even Confucius underscored this fact, as he said:

...Man's very life is honesty, in that without it he will be lucky indeed if he escapes with his life. (*Analects* VI, 17)

Yet, this twofold means taught us by the *Gita* is really only one way through which human beings can achieve the holiness required to make us receptive to the Existence which is **Brahman**. Truthfulness and right action means to act in such a way that we live according to the way things are, without any passions, that is with detachment, literally careless of pleasure or pain, success or failure, rather than our accustomed way we think things are. This is why Dharma agrees that the human mind is the human being's and **Arjuna**'s biggest obstacle: the mind seeks an end, an outcome, a result, an answer, and end. (As did Eve, and Adam within the *Old Testament*.) Yet, this very "hope" vitiates the passionless action required by truth and demanded as being receptive to the Existence of **Brahman**. In other words, the human mind resents "dependence" through seeking control and resists "faith in the unknown" because it favors knowledge of the known.

The ***Bhagavad- Gita*** poem comprises eighteen chapters; these chapters move from the initial sorrowful reaction of **Arjuna** because of his perception of the combatants on the sacred battlefield to his conscious decision to "do your bidding". The following schema is provided to aid the reader understand the cosmology (the way the Hindu conceives the world to exist and the various mythic names through which the world is understood) of Hinduism as related to how the religious person achieves return to Existence as ***Brahman*** through "truthfulness" and "right action". Of course, the means through which "truthfulness" and "right action" are possible is prayer whereby we may realign our thinking with the "way things are" rather than the way we perceive them to be. Given the tendency of human beings to follow their reactions, or emotional responses to their perceptions, this way of prayer will include a way of conditioning the physical body through proper breathing and feeling called "yoga" so that the physical aspect of the human being may be realigned and compatible with the mental aspect of the human being.

(Existence) -- BRAHMAN --(Reality)			B
(Chaps. VII, XI, XV, XVIII)			R
Atman			A
(Brahman <u>as present in</u> the universe)			H
(Chaps. II and IX)			M
Ishwara			A
(Brahman <u>as related to</u> the universe)			N
Truth, Knowledge, Love, Justice and Mercy			
	A	S	
as creator	as present	as changing	P
Brahma	Vishnu	Shiva	O
(Chaps. VII and X)			W
(Krishna)			E
(Chap. XI)			

R

PRAKRITI-MAYA

(Atman as appearance to human beings-Ishwara as born in the world)
(Chaps. IV, XIII)

gunas

I

(Chap. XIV)

S

Sattwa

rajas

tama

A

R

(Chaps. III, VII, XVII, XVIII)

A

Five

A

Tanmatras

S

(the five elements of the world)

	sound	aspect	touch	taste	odors	
AIR	FIRE	EARTH	WATER	EITHER		
	hears	sees	feels	tastes	smells	

(Chap. VII)

P

O

W

E

R

manas

(receiving impressions from the senses for buddhi)

(Chap. I)

ahamkara

(the ego sense: I)

(Chap. II)

buddhi

(the faculty which distinguishes/classifies objects sensed)

(Chaps. II, VII)

mahat
(individual intelligence)
(Chap. IV)

samadhi
(the human being contemplates God as ***Brahman*** within)
(Chaps. V, VI, XII, XIII, XVIII)

The final words of the *Gita* are: "OM. Peace. Peace. Peace". The detachment taught through physical ***yoga***, thereby re-uniting physical and mental being through breathing, results in peace achieved in the "OM" of the Hindu mystic.

Gandhi's advice to a fellow Hindu who sought forgiveness because he had killed a Moslem child was to find a

Perhaps the foremost contemporary Hindu would be Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948), the lawyer turned leader of the independence movement in India from Great Britain. Yet, probably his most courageous act of leadership was his fast until the Moslems and the Hindus stopped the civil war that tore India apart in 1947 as the British left India. During this famous fast, a half crazed Hindu man came to Gandhi's bed and pleaded for help because "I am going to hell". Gandhi replied: "Only God can condemn a man to hell, so why condemn yourself to hell?" The Hindu shook with rage and shouted that the Moslems had killed his little boy so he took the first Moslem baby he found and smashed it against the nearest wall, killing it. Gandhi looked up at him and said:

There is a way out of hell. Many children have lost parents in this violence. Adopt a homeless boy the same age as your son. Only be sure that the boy is a Moslem and raise him in the Moslem way.

This is the kind of practical detachment and spiritual attachment which finds that peaceful forgiveness typical of the Hindu mystic. This is also an interesting wrinkle on Gandhi's Hindu advice to a fellow Hindu was his off-hand comment to a confidant, worried about the influx of occidental Christianity to oriental India: "Friend, if Christians really lived their Christianity, there wouldn't be any Hindus left in India". Of course, Gandhi, ***Krishna***, Socrates, even e e cummings are merely saying: be who we are because when we are ourselves, we are irreplaceable, united to our source and thus, can contribute our uniqueness in order to balance the scales of justice within a world wherein so many are unbalanced being other than they are. This battlefield in which we live presents *appearances as measures* of

reality and speaks names as meanings rather than messengers of meaning. Our battle consists in opposing our reality with those appearances and presenting ourselves as messengers of that meaning. If, however, we lose our breath, individual and unique as this breath is, then we lose our lives - and we have no one to blame but ourselves, since we have chosen to stop breathing.

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