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### Gita

In our world, an incredible amount of dramas have played out on its surface for millenia, times so remote as to no longer qualify as real. Perhaps our brains are wired to perceive the present alone as truth and the past a mere illusion. In a very distant past, in what we would perhaps refer today as an unenlightened, more primitive human race, a body of works was recorded into the timeless written word that spoke of the understanding mankind had uncovered about the primal phenomenon that constitutes our human experience: consciousness. Among the holy books of our kind, such as is the Bible and the Qur'ān—in the Bhagavadgītā, “believed to be the most translated text after the Bible today (Rao 1),” we will find hidden within it a story, about a mortal man who in a moment of doubt meets the Creator of all existence: Lord Krishna. This is the timeless story that has powered the lives of millions of human beings throughout history, among them, powerful leaders and warriors of our modern world.

The Bhagavad Gita is itself part of the great hindu epic, the Mahābhārata, which itself is part of the main four bodies of work that conform Śāstras — the sacred writings of Hinduism (Campbell 96).

Its location within the Mahabharata itself is worthy of notice. Consider the Gita as a story within a story. The Bhagavad Gita is found halfway through the Mahabharata at the climatic point of the epic where a battle of cosmic proportions is about to take place. In the battlefield, Prince Arjuna, a mortal man, is about to enter into battle with his own kinship, cousins and uncles, who now pose a threat to his kingdom. Arjuna is known for his insurmountable warrior skills but despite all his

knowledge and strategies he find himself unable to go to battle overcome by his weaknesses: fear, doubt and grief.

In every epic, it is said, every hero comes to a point in his journey from where he may not return, a point where he realizes a final decision must be made (Campbell 64). It is in this moment that the hero will need superhuman strength which he may be unable to get from himself and the supernatural aid—the spiritual guide—will appear (57). In many epics, they take the form of wise wizards, or spirits, but in the Bhagavad Gita, it is Krishna himself, the God of all creation and realms, who comes to the aid of Arjuna in his moment of doubt.

In *The Bhagavad Gita as a Living Experience*, Arjuna is described as “a prominent hero of the Mahabharata, comparable in his importance to Homer's Achilles.” In the midst of battle to retake his own kingdom, he is paralyzed and unable to take action as he realizes the battle he is about to fight, will kill many in his family on both sides of the battlefield.

Enter Krishna, who delivers Himself a message to Arjuna about the proper world-view he must adopt. The story develops as a conversation between the two of them in a dialog format.

In the chapter titled “Selfless Service” in *Bhagavad Gita* we can appreciate the nature of this talk and the natural language in which it is written:

ARJUNA

1        O Krishna, you have said that knowledge is greater than action; why then do you ask me to wage this terrible war?

2        Your advise seems inconsistent. Give me one path to follow to the supreme good.

SRI KRISHNA

3        At the beginning of time I declared two paths for the pure heart: *jnana yoga*, the contemplative path of spiritual wisdom, and *karma yoga*, the active path of selfless service.

4        He who shirks from action does not attain freedom; no one can gain perfection by abstaining from work. (98).

The conversation continues and Arjuna continues to voice his fears and concerns. Little by little Krishna dispels each of his illusions until he gets to see clearer the nature of the world. When he gets to a point where he feels strong enough to know the ultimate Truth, he asks Krishna to show him his true Nature and Self from where all being and living things originate. Krishna takes Arjuna in an intensive psychedelic cosmic vision of his divinity going pass time and space to the ultimate realm of existence (*Bhagavad Gita* 183); where Arjuna is able to see the blinding light of His glory and unable to withstand the experience, begs Krishna to resume the humanoid form he assumed to relate to him:

ARJUNA

45        I rejoice in seeing you as you have never been seen before, yet I am filled with fear by this vision of you as the abode of the universe. Please let me not see you again as the shining God of gods.

46        Though you are the embodiment of all creation, let me see you again not with a thousand arms but with four, carrying the mace and discus and wearing a crown. (190).

On this mythological story, Krishna assures Arjuna that those who die in this world do not cease to exist. That no one is mortal but all are in an endless cycle of birth and rebirth until they realize the ultimate truth and ascend to being in his presence, in the realm of all existence. A promise of immortality with personal autonomy. Meaning that instead of the merging of consciousness with the One, each individual can exists as a separate entity in his presence. The ultimate state of being.

When Arjuna understands the nature of things, he has been finally persuaded through a long and patient conversation with God to lose his fear and engage into action at which point the action in the epic of the Mahabharata continues and Arjuna goes on to wage the most violent and destructible war he has ever fought.

The battlefield in this story is a metaphor for the mind, and the battle is towards regaining mastery of our domain—our senses. Krishna counsels Arjuna to believe in his own truth and warns him of giving in to sensual pleasures which are an illusion and a hindrance to *dharma* (*Bhagavad Gita* 102).

In our modern world, the Bhagavad Gita has been the subject of profound insight by some of the most exemplary members of our society such as Mohanda Ghandi, a spiritual and political leader in India, who believed that “as man's beliefs become more enlightened, the meanings, which people attach to certain words also become more enlightened. (Klausen 185).” This was said in regards to the interpretation that the Gita is a book advocating physical war, a common misconception based on its martial plot.

The Gita has also found many followers among people in a position of leadership, who find parallels in their personal story to that of Arjuna when he was faced with a difficult and uncertain decision. But it is easy to project these qualities only onto men who run large armies and organizations, freed nations, or discovered scientific truths about the Universe and forget that the Bhagavad Gita is a story for the Arjuna within each human being.

Krishna reassures Arjuna that all work a person undertakes must be made for the sake of the work itself and not the reward that it may bring. For that entails a lost focus of its purpose may breed insecurity, fear and failure. His words for all that seek to follow his advise:

On this path effort never goes to waste, and there is no failure. Even a little effort towards spiritual awareness will protect you from the greatest fear. (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:40)

An entire essay could be written on the interpretation and meaning of one verse or chapter alone of the Bhagavad Gita. It is a book that has driven many to seclude themselves from the world in order to engage actively with it and understand its timeless truths, among them American poet and

philosopher Henry David Thoreau (*The Bhagavad Gita*). The result seems to always be an expansion of awareness in the reader and a new found courage to engage with the challenges of life. The realization that this is the battlefield in which each of us is a warrior and must wage the war to win himself.

Sri Aurobindo, and Indian philosopher and guru is quoted in *The Bhagavad Gita as a Living Experience* saying “The Word has power—even the ordinary written word has power... If it is the Word itself—as in certain utterances of the great Scriptures, Veda, Upanishads, Gita, it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual and uplifting impulse, even certain kinds of realization.” Certainly this is a work which must be experienced on a first-person basis in order to appreciate its magnitude in simplicity and wisdom. A text worthy of study and appreciation for its poetic value alone, with the power to incite spiritual transformation.

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