

Prologue

The Bhagavad Gita has just two protagonists, a flawed human named Arjuna and a wise elder named Krishna. Their conversation is an ideal way to describe problems and offer solutions. They hold their discussion in the midst of a great war, symbolic of the pressures of life we all encounter.

In the buildup to the war, powerful interests have stripped Arjuna and his four brothers of their princely birthright, taken their lands, and banished them to a wilderness, while promising to permit their return in the distant future. When the time came to reclaim their legitimate station, they were treated as outcasts. They had to slip back into the royal city in disguise. When they made their claim, it was denied, and war was declared, along with threats to divest them of the last shreds of their dignity.

This is a magnificent image of the human condition. From birth we begin to compromise with our environment. Other people and institutions are to be placated, so we suppress our own desires in hopes of achieving peace and amity. We assume a social mask to obscure our naked face. Before long we have given up all our personal predilections and entered a wilderness of dissociation from our true nature. Religious tracts assure us of restoration only after death, and we try to believe them. These ruses may work for a while, allowing us to fit in to a pitiless society, but there is a vital urge in us that never stops trying to be actualized. It is in conflict with what is expected of us. We are taught that our vital urge is an evil to be done away with, but it feels like our authentic self. It seeks a means of expression. Expressing it is the reason we were born. The more it is suppressed, the more the pressure builds, until it explodes or is medicated away.

Arjuna and his brothers, the Pandavas, symbolize our authentic nature. In the face of greed and selfishness, symbolized by the Kauravas, they continually gave ground. Like well-behaved children they went along with every requirement, even allowing themselves to be cheated. And now they find themselves with

nothing, standing on a postage stamp-sized plot of land that is about to be taken from them.

We, too, have surrendered our legitimacy to external forces, for the most part unwittingly. The Gita addresses the crucial moment when we must wake up to our abandoned inner truth or spiritually die. Ordinary responses are to throw ourselves back into the futility of battle or run away and hide. Neither of these options allows for the expression of our finest abilities. Krishna is standing by to teach Arjuna how to extricate himself from this universal predicament, thereby demonstrating how each of us can reclaim our authenticity. It will be a long and fascinating process.

We intuitively sense that we are divine, princesses and princes who have been deposed from our thrones and banished to a wilderness of dissociation. Regaining our rightful place is a mystical, rather than a political, accomplishment. Escape won't do it, nor will fighting against the apparent usurpers. They suffer from the same malady that we do, so they couldn't restore us to our true nature if they wanted to. Petitioning or combating them is a waste of time. The Bhagavad Gita is a broad template of what really needs to happen to reacquaint us with our inner genius.