

# Not a Real War

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Tyrone:** Dear James, I read the *Baghavat Gita* years ago and was very put off by it. In fact I think I turned away from Vedanta at that time largely because of it. I just read it again (in your excellent translation) and had the same reaction. My problem is with the morality it espouses.

Arjuna is loathe to murder a lot of excellent men for no good reason, and Krishna says, in essence: "Go ahead. You aren't really responsible anyway, and besides, do you want to be embarrassed?"

While I can see how the insights of Vedanta could be used to arrive at such a conclusion, that is hardly a moral system to attract most people! Further, Vedanta could just as easily be used to support the idea that it doesn't matter what one does, one way or the other, as ultimately there is only one self anyway. Or one could say that the realization that there is only one self ought to lead one to universal compassion. Or even, if the "doer" is the *vasanas*, why are you asking moral questions at all, as the matter is out of your hands?

What I am saying is it seems to me that morality is always relative, conditional. And since the self is NOT relative or conditional, to apply that perspective to questions of morality is fallacious. So why does the *Gita* continually do so? It leads to many contradictory stances in the work, often within the space of a few sentences.

Given that, why is it held in such esteem as the ultimate expression of Vedantic principles? It seems to me to be very far from that. Frankly, it strikes me as a complete mess, trying to wed the irrational and flagrantly immoral social structures of traditional Indian society with a philosophy that actually does not support them at all.

Thoughts?

**James:** Hi, Tyrone. The problem is that you are taking the story literally. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a scripture on *dharma* and liberation. The story is just a dramatic device to illustrate the relationship between action and liberation. The idea is that if you do not take care of business here, you are not fit for liberation. It has nothing to do with killing or morality. Everyone is presented with existential crises which are very difficult to face. So they are tempted to try to escape them either by denying them – the worldly route – or transcending them – the spiritual route. The *Gita* is saying that neither works. You have to face them and work them out according to your nature and this will prepare your mind to understand who you are because it will no longer be agitated and become contemplative. Krishna tells Arjuna the direct solution, self-knowledge. Remember, Arjuna did not solicit this war, it was thrust upon him, and when he does not understand instructs him in the right attitude toward getting the kind of mind that is capable of enlightenment, *karma yoga*.

The war is symbol of the conflict that takes place in every human heart between what is expedient and what is right. We appeared here one fine day at the behest of a much greater power than ourselves, and we are expected to respond appropriately to what that power sends

us. If we don't, we will suffer. Arjuna does not respond appropriately, because he is sentimental.

The point of the *Gita* is that the results of your actions in the battlefield of your life are not up to you. If you understand that and act appropriately, you will attain success in your chosen field.

The only killing that needs to take place is the killing of ignorance. I hope this has been helpful.

~ Love, James