

Finding Peace Amidst the Battle  
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The Bhagavad Gita (“Lord’s Song”) is one section of the grand Indian epic, the Mahabharata. Composed over many generations, the Mahabharata is a treasure of Indian history and philosophy. Considered a sacred scripture, it has inspired many generations, even into the West.

In the story, one of the five sons of King Pandu, the Pandavas, lost the kingdom in an unfair game of dice. Upon returning after their thirteen-year exile, their cousins, the Kauravas refused their rightful claim, and a fierce battle ensued, with the outnumbered Pandavas gaining justice after just eighteen days. Symbolic of the ultimate battle within the human psyche, the Mahabharata sets the stage for allegory, and expounds on truth for all ages. In the Bhagavad Gita, one of the Pandavas brothers, Arjuna, is counseled by his charioteer, who happens to be an incarnation of the God Krishna. Arjuna, a virtuous and peaceful man, is despondent by the fact that he is about to engage in violent conflict with his own friends and family. Overwhelmed by grief and doubt, he is ready to give up the battle.

At a pivotal point, Krishna teaches Arjuna that true peace comes from within, regardless of circumstance. He explains that life in this world requires action, and that forsaking one’s duties does not constitute true religiosity. Rather, be in the world but not of it, he advises; perform the right actions for the world’s welfare, rather than one’s own, renouncing the fruits of one’s labors. Nothing ever really dies, and even violence may be necessary in certain circumstances. By following one’s heart and engaging in the highest possible moral action while developing non-attachment to any rewards, one’s actions become purified, and freed of any resultant karma.

Never dismissing life off-handedly, the Gita stresses that worldly ideas of judgment do not see the bigger picture in context, the divine reality that encompasses all points of view. In order to come to this insight, one must be devoted to cultivating steadfast concentration on the divine in all things, where the truth of the Self is experienced as all-encompassing. Only then can one transcend all viewpoints, and find freedom from the bondage inherent in the desires and workings of the world. Submersed in the Absolute, one finds inner joy, light and rejoicing. One finds everlasting peace.