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### **The Message of the Bhagavad Gita**

Arjuna is worried about entering the battle and destroying his own family, so Krishna begins by explaining five reasons why Arjuna should not be troubled by this. Essentially Krishna shows Arjuna why he will not get bad [karma](https://www.ancient.eu/Karma/) from taking part in the [war](https://www.ancient.eu/war/).

The first reason Krishna mentions is that because *atman* (the self) is eternal, it is a mistake to think that one can actually kill someone. What actually happens is that people are sent to the next stage of reincarnation.

[Krishna speaking] “One believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain. You were never born; you will never die. You have never changed; you can never change. Unborn, eternal, immutable, immemorial, you do not die when the body dies.” (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:19-20)

Another reason why Arjuna should fight is because of honour and duty, also referred to as *dharma* or cast duty. Arjuna is a member of the warrior class; the battle is the very reason of his existence. It is not sinful to fulfil your duty in life.

The third reason Krishna gives is that inaction is impossible. Withdrawing from battle is in itself a conscious decision; not choosing is still a choice. This is in a way a criticism of some world-views, such as asceticism, which claim that leaving everything behind is inaction: Withdrawing from society is always a deliberate act.

Another reason given by Krishna is that the source of evil is not in actions, but in passion and desires, the intentions behind the actions. This brings the dialogue to the last reason.



[Krishna manifesting his full glory to Arjuna](https://www.ancient.eu/image/1417/)

The fifth and last reason is that there are ways to act where we can do what we have to do without getting bad karma. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna explains three ways.

The first way is *Jnana yoga* (the way of knowledge). This idea is based on the *Upanishads* and holds that life and death are not real. Selfhood is nothing but an illusion. All we see are manifestations of the oneness. Once we realize that the oneness is behind all things, we can escape the bad karma from acting.

[Krishna speaking] “I am ever present to those who have realized me in every creature. Seeing all life as my manifestation, they are never separated from me.” (*Bhagavad Gita* 6:30)

The second way is *Bhakti yoga* (the way of devotion). This in an idea developed in great detail in [Hinduism](https://www.ancient.eu/hinduism/) and holds that our actions can be dedicated to Krishna by surrendering our will to him, and he will take upon himself any bad karma.

The third way is *Karma yoga* (“the way of action” or “the way of works”). The idea behind Karma yoga is acting without attachment; in other words, to act without being so concerned about the outcome of our actions. According to this view, if we act in such a way as not to get attached to the fruits of our actions, we can be more effective. Sometimes emotions like fear, embarrassment, or anxiety can interfere in the outcome of what we do.

[Krishna speaking] “Neither agitated by grief nor hankering after pleasure, they live free from lust and fear and anger. Established in meditation, they are truly wise. Fettered no more by selfish attachments, they are neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad. Such are the seers." (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:56-57)

[Krishna speaking] “Thinking of objects, attachment to them is formed in a man. From attachment longing, and from longing anger grows. From anger comes delusion, and from delusion loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of understanding, and from the ruin of understanding he perishes.” (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:62-63)

Each of these three ways to act without getting bad karma is suitable for different people or castes. Priests would follow the way of knowledge; peasants, merchants and commoners might be inclined to the way of devotion; warriors would identify themselves with the way of action. Finally, Arjuna decides to obey Krishna by engaging in the battle and in the end the Pandavas regain control of the kingdom.

**Introduction**

Circa 3000 BCE, cousins went to war over who would inherit a kingdom. Because the dispute was within a large, ancient family, the opposing armies comprised relatives, teachers, leaders, and friends. Arjuna was a master archer and renowned warrior—he was the one who would lead his side to war. His childhood friend Lord Krishna agreed to be Arjuna's charioteer. As Arjuna charged into battle, he became greatly dismayed, seeing so many people he loved on both sides of the valley. In an act of compassion, Lord Krishna froze time. There, in the chariot on the battlefield, with the armies before and behind them, the instruction of the Bhagavad Gita takes place, in the form of an open discussion between Arjuna and the great god Krishna.

Said Arjuna:

“I do not wish to kill my relatives, spiritual leaders, and friends, even though they stand ready to kill me. I desire neither victory, nor pleasure, nor kingdom. For what is the use of a kingdom, or enjoyment, or even life when all those for whom we desire kingdom, enjoyment, and pleasure are here in this battle, ready to give up their lives?

Lord Krishna replied:

The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. There was never a time you or I did not exist, nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future. The Spirit is neither born nor does it die; it is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. After the death of the body, the Spirit is reborn in a new body until Self-Realization is attained. Death is certain for the one who is born, and birth is certain for the one who dies. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable but pray for Self-Realization that you may be at peace.

Simply do your duty to the best of your ability without becoming discouraged by the thought of the outcome, which may be success or failure, loss or victory. You have control over your actions, but no control or claim over the result. Fear of failure, from being emotionally attached to the fruit of work, is the greatest impediment to success because it disturbs the equanimity of the mind. A farmer is responsible for working his land, yet has no control over the harvest. But if he does not work his land, he cannot expect a harvest! By doing your duty, you will not incur Karmic bondage.

Seek this knowledge, this discipline, Arjuna. There are many paths to Me, to enlightenment and freedom . . .

One is truly enlightened who:

— Does all work as an offering to God, abandoning attachment to the result

— Enjoys sensual pleasure with mind and senses under control

— Sees one and the same Spirit in all beings, looks at a learned person, an outcast, or an animal, with equal eye, and can feel the pain and pleasure of others as one's own

— Neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant, nor grieves on obtaining the unpleasant, and is tranquil and equanimous in pleasure and pain, in fulfillment and disappointment, in honor and disgrace

— Finds happiness in the Supreme Being, rejoices the Supreme Being within, is illuminated by Self-Knowledge and remains ever steadfast with the Supreme Self

— Acts beyond personal selfish motives

— Has neither attachment nor aversion for anything

— Has discovered the joy of spiritual knowledge, and whose mind is in union with God.

Such a person is not bound by Karma though engaged in work, maintains equanimity whatever occurs, and attains eternal bliss.

Therefore, let your mind be ever absorbed in Me, O Arjuna, remain unattached to the outcome of your actions, and go forth to do your duty, knowing the Spirit is deathless and eternal.”

1. Why is Arjuna hesitant to fight in the war?

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2. What is duty?

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3. How does one truly get enlightened? (List two ways)

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4. Who is Krishna?

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5. What is the caste system?

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6. List the five caste system in order and what they are.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_