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The Struggle Within

ROBERT PUTHOFF

REL 2320: NonWestern Religions, Spring 2018

Nominated by: Dr. Sharon Showman

Robert Puthoff is a Wright State University student from St. Henry, Ohio who is studying Mechanical Engineering. He completed an internship at Crown Equipment Corporation in New Bremen, OH and saw the relevance for the international corporate world of this particular religion class. He has always been interested in what we gain from examining inner thought and monologue. Given his recent diagnosis of depression and anxiety disorder, his work on this paper has revealed new meaning.

Robert notes:

I hope whoever reads this takes away that you need to stay true to yourself. Anything you do in your life will have some reaction, but try and focus on how your actions can better your life, or the lives of your loved ones.

Dr. Showman notes:

In *The Struggle Within*, Bob seeks to understand basic teachings for Hindus in *The Bhagavad Gita* and then ambitiously seeks to apply some of those lessons to his own life as a college student. Bob is one of the few students who chose to read *The Bhagavad Gita*, which speaks to his ability to challenge himself academically; in addition, he also uses one of the class's textbooks to help him decipher key elements of the story. Bob's leap from *The Bhagavad Gita* into his own life experience is a tribute to his ability to look at his life and to write about it using Hindu teachings as a way to explore it and change it.

The Struggle Within

The Bhagavad Gita is a part of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata. The translation I read is by Eknath Easwaran. *The Bhagavad Gita* is the story of a prince named Arjuna and his inward struggle to fight or not to fight in battle. Along the way, Arjuna is counseled by Lord Krishna, who in Hinduism is the deity that represents compassion and love. The entire story revolves around metaphors for real people going through everyday struggles, and it serves as a guide to those practicing Hinduism as to how they should lead their lives. The aspects of the Bhagavad Gita I will be touching on are the battle within (the struggle to know one's dharma), how to fulfill one's dharma, and The Field and The Knower. Throughout this reflection paper, I will use the teachings of Krishna and try to apply them to stories from my life and then use the teachings to see how I can change my future.

The first aspect I would like to discuss is the element of the battle. The battle is between two sides, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Arjuna is brought to the battle by Krishna, but as they approach, Arjuna realizes that he has family and friends on both sides of the battle. As they get closer, Arjuna also sees that his side does not have the overwhelming majority of participants as he had thought initially. With these realizations, Arjuna desponds and throws down his weapon because he no longer wishes to go into battle. Krishna advises him to push on and engage in the battle, saying, "One believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain ... As one abandons worn-out clothes and acquires new ones, so when the body is worn out a new one is acquired by the Self, who lives within" (Easwaran 90). This quote leads me to think of the battle as a metaphor for a person's inner battle. Krishna is telling Arjuna to do what he must do, to follow his dharma, but this is difficult for Arjuna because of how it will affect others in his life. He feels the outside pressure to not hurt the people around him. Krishna is telling Arjuna that, in the end, it does not matter since the body is merely mortal but the soul endures. These mortal issues should not hinder Arjuna from defeating evil and restoring good. Everyone--at some point in their life--has felt a pressure like this, a pressure to do what the people around them think that they should do instead of doing what they think it right for them. The example in my life that relates to this is when I was initially choosing my college major. When I first went to college, I wanted to study physics. I enjoyed physics and was good with mathematics, but my mother insisted that I study something

with better job prospects. I gave into that pressure and eventually chose engineering. Can I say either path is definitively the correct one for me? No, but the outside pressure did influence my decision-making process. Now that Krishna is telling Arjuna to follow his dharma, the next question is how does one follow one's own path?

In Hinduism, dharma is one's duty to fulfill social and religious obligations in life (Morgan 38). Krishna tells Arjuna that, as a warrior, not engaging in the battle would be a violation of his dharma. On the subject of following one's dharma Krishna says, "Seek refuge in the attitude of detachment and you will amass the wealth of spiritual awareness. Those who are motivated only by desire for the fruits of action are miserable, for they are constantly anxious about the results of what they do. When consciousness is unified, however, all vain anxiety is left behind" (Easwaran 94). To me this quote is saying that one should not be worried with the results of what we must do; suffering comes when the person is fixated upon only the results. I think that Krishna is also trying to say that material attachment is not helpful when following your dharma. In a different chapter in the book, I also found this quote from Krishna "It is better to perform one's own duties imperfectly than to master the duties of another. By fulfilling the obligations he is born with, a person never comes to grief. No one should abandon duties because he sees defects in them. Every action, every activity, is surrounded by defects as a fire is surrounded by smoke" (262). I felt that this was applicable to the section about following one's dharma because it teaches that each person has his/her own path. Moreover, each person's path is unique and that he/she should not try to follow someone else's dharma. It is better to try to follow your path and fail than to follow someone else's and succeed. This quote also highlights that, along this path, mistakes will be made, and that it is okay to make those mistakes. Fire produces smoke, but does that mean that the fire is not doing what it is supposed to be doing? To me this whole section is a reminder to be comfortable and confident with your essential self. You do not need to strive to be someone else or to try and be anything that you are not. It also speaks to me about the success in failure; just because someone fails at something does not mean that he/she is bad, or that he/she is a failure. To me, failure is a teaching moment, and it is what you learn from that failure, and how you apply it to better yourself, that can turn a failure into a success.

Finally, I wish to speak about the section called “The Field & The Knower.” The field represents the human body and the sense that it has, while the mind, or soul, is the knower. Krishna makes it clear that there is a distinction between the body and the soul. Krishna also speaks how the soul should only pursue the Self, which is the Brahman, and that to seek anything else is “ignorance.” Krishna says, “In this field arise desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, the body, intelligence, and will” (217). Krishna then explains how the truly free understand the field and can find the distinction between the soul and the body. To me this section alludes to the idea that wisdom is greater than physical prowess. The only way to transcend life and become one with the Brahman is through wisdom, and the path of ignorance is one of suffering. I believe that this is very applicable in modern times given the way people strive for beauty more than knowledge. Do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with being beautiful or being in very good physical shape, but the issue arises when that is your main or only objective in life. The brain is a very powerful tool, and I think it needs constant development. I think Krishna is saying that people should not worry themselves with vanity but to follow one's path towards oneness with Brahman.

Through reading *The Bhagavad Gita*, I have learned somethings I hope to take with me into the future. First, I would like to focus on how the decisions I make--no matter the choice I make--will affect the loved ones around me. I cannot dwell on this matter, because whatever path I take there will be people close to me that will support, or oppose my decision. Through the teaching of Krishna, I now know that I must do what is right for me, and the rest will figure itself out. The second teaching I will try to utilize in my future is not to fear failure. I transferred to Wright State University after being on the brink of being academically dismissed at The Ohio State University. Since then, I have been fearful of failing again, but I think that every failure is a chance to learn something new. I will never get those years and money back from my time in Columbus, Ohio, but the lessons I learned through that failure will stick with me forever. The main lesson I learned is that I need balance in my life. Overdoing anything has negative results for me, including positive things like studying. In addition, not paying attention to an aspect of my life may be damaging. Between school, work, family time, and trying to maintain a social life physical exercise was something I had disregarded. I do agree though that the attainment of physical fitness should not be driven by vanity, but should be a more noble cause. I believe that I

should try to maintain a better physical shape to prolong my time of acquiring wisdom. Obviously, there are too many teachings in *The Bhagavad Gita* for a person such as myself to follow, but these were a few of the teachings that I believe will stick the most with me.

Though *The Bhagavad Gita* may be a fable, this does not take away from its teachings--in my mind. People will take away different things, but it does have something for everyone within its pages. Through the teachings of the battle within, how to fulfill one's dharma, and The Field and The Knower, I think I will be a better person. Everyone is Arjuna, but Krishna will not always come. We must decide for ourselves what to do.



Works Cited

Morgan, Diane. *The Best Guide to Eastern Philosophy and Religion*. Renaissance Books, 2001.

The Bhagavad Gita. Translated by Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, 2007.