

By Pila Mulligan

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna's teacher Krishna is acting as Arjuna's chariot driver awaiting a great battle of Arjuna and his brothers versus their cousins. Arjuna says he does not want to fight, but Krishna explains to Arjuna that karma has brought them to this point and proceeds to explain life and human nature to Arjuna. The Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata, a Hindu classic telling the whole story of the extended family arrayed for battle at the start of the Bhagavad Gita.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata>

<http://www.bhagavad-gita.us/>

On the topic of dharma (like most philosophical concepts) there are many views, analogous to the reports of the blind men sent from their village to examine an elephant at the traveling circus -- each one believing what he has felt. This is where the ideas of myth and religion arise. So far, humans have not been able to collect a single story that satisfies everyone as to everything. We all have available these great religions, but we are left to fill in at least some blanks with our own personal mythology, our own analysis of the elephant of life and human nature. Myth is a positive term here, it is a collection of information about truth or reality or god.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma> (Law or Natural Law, as in the natural order of things)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma_%28Buddhism%29 (Universal Law of Nature, teachings of the Buddha applying this law to the conduct of human life, phenomenon or its properties.)

In religions we have avatars such as Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Mohamed, Pele (a Hawaiian volcano diety) and others populating the field, and their views are so brilliant that to their followers these avatars live on in the lives of their chelas, and in realms of the spirit as is part of the story of most religions. However we consider these great avatars, they left messages that guide huge numbers of people, that inform their followers with guidelines for life. To me, dharma is manifest in the experience of applying such guidelines, whether from the religions, the avatars or your own wisdom: give up desire, do unto others, worship Allah, respect the volcano ... and see what happens, then you are observing dharma. This is distinct from karma in that it is not a macro-experience defining our life. We see dharma in more sublime aspects of life and human nature, such ethics.

In my personal mythology, it is unfortunately misleading how some popular views define karma as having an element of justice or an evaluation of worth with rewards for being good. To me karma is a macro-experience that reveals our life. If there is a realm where good works bear fruit, it is in dharma, a smaller field of experience where we learn about human nature by trial and error.