

Bhagavadgita on ethics

The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek word 'ethikos'. It refers to one's moral character and the way in which society expects people to behave in accordance with accepted principles. Business ethics is the code of good conduct that a business adheres to in its daily dealings both with other businesses and with customers. Most philosophers conclude that ethical failure occurs because of lack of character. Virtuous people will live ethically. Therefore, we need to think about the desired virtues and how one can develop those virtues.

Aristotle's virtues for the city state included prudence, justice, courage and self-restraint. Christians added faith, hope and love. Over time, a number of others were added – compassion, generosity, empathy, hospitality, modesty and civility. In the month of Magha (December) 5,000 years ago, on the battlefield at Kurukshetra just before the start of Mahabharata war, Krishna outlined to Arjuna a system of ethics that has withstood the test of time In the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna tells Arjuna not only how to build character but also the root cause of ethical failure and how to avoid it.

Krishna outlines 26 qualities of a gentleman – to be merciful, obedient, truthful, equitable, saintly, magnanimous, mild-mannered, clean, simple, charitable and peaceful He should have surrendered to God and not be greedy or possessive but remain steady and determined, free of the six bad qualities, not gluttonous, sober, respectful, humble, grave, compassionate, friendly, eloquent, expert and concise. It is easy to give a list of positive qualities that we can all agree upon. Yet even though hundreds of trainers work day and night to teach people good character, when it really matters, people's character still fails.

Why? Krishna answers in chapter three, verses 37 and 38: "O Arjuna, it is lust later transformed into wrath, which is the all-devouring sinful enemy of this world. As fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror is covered by dust, or as the embryo is covered by the womb, the living entity is similarly covered by different degrees of this lust". To maintain good character, we must overcome kama, that is, lust or selfish desire. Most people think kama means just sexual craving, but it simply refers to an overwhelming desire for anything, such as lust for power.

Greed, dishonesty and corruption are all byproducts of lust. To be happy, successful and well situated, the Gita says, one must control lust Gita's solution to

the ethical failure and downfall of corporations and society and family is controlling the senses with spiritual strength. Ethics is linked to spirituality. For the last century or more, western businesses separated work and spirituality. Kurukshetra was also about mind control. Every one of us, whether as manager or employee, is fighting his own battle, his own Kurukshetra.

The Gita can help us to learn to regulate our senses, control our minds and gain spiritual strength. The Gita is as fresh in insight and as relevant today as it was 5,000 years ago. If only every manager, administrator, politician, employee, worker and others pick a copy of the Gita and spend a few minutes daily reflecting on its message, one can experience the positive transformation. Who doesn't wish to be disciplined, to achieve home-work balance and bring peace and harmony in a secular environment? (Arun Gupta, Speaking Tree, 5-1-11).