dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca

dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ

māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś caiva kim akurvata saṃjaya

**Kim akurvata saṃjaya**, **saṃjaya** or sanjay. **Kim** what, **akurvata** what happened? What happened and where? **Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre** **dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca** just for completeness **uvāca** is a past tense verb said, who said? **Dhṛtarāṣṭra**. So blind King **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** said to Sanjay, **dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre**, **kurukṣetre setre** means land or fields, **kurukṣetre** are the lands of the kurus. Kurus is the family the lineage, in fact you know that both the **pāṇḍavāś** and Kauravas are all in the lineage of King Kuru both sides of the families are cousins, how could they be from different sides, they can’t be from different kings they are all cousins so they are all descendents of Kurus, of course the convention is **Kaurava** means descendent of Kuru, one who is from a kuru, descendent of kuru is called **Kaurava**, the convention of course is only the sons of **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** are called **Kaurava**, the others are descendents of Pandu, of course Pandu is a descendent of Kuru, but the sons of Pandu are called **Pandava**.

So **kurukṣetre** on the land of the Kurus and the referring to the battlefield, in north India today there is a small town called **Kurukshetra**, I haven’t been there but I am told it’s a small town, by the way there is, if any of you are thinking archeologists have tried to find any kind of evidence of a great battle that took place in any place around **Kurukshetra,** so far they can’t find any artifacts or evidence doesn’t mean a thing, the fact that they can’t find evidence neither proves nor disproves anything anyway they are trying. So on that battlefield this is a battlefield where the Mahabharat yudha the eighteen days of battle took place, now that battlefield is called **dharmashetra, Kurukshetra** the field of the battle the battle field is called the **dharmashestra** field of dharma, interesting expression and significant also that it forms the first word of the Bhagavad Gita. Dharma first word of the Bhagavad Gita.

Whose words are these? These are Vyasa’s words, don’t think that Vyasa was taking, now this should have been in the introduction, but since we are into it, do you think that the Bhagavad Gita is a verbatim transcript of what was said, so here is Sanjay and **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** having a conversation, is this a verbatim sans transcript later we are going to be studying the dialog between Sri Krishna and Arjuna when we get there are we really reading a word for word transcription of what they said you know it’s very unlikely for several reasons. One is Sanskrit this style of Sanskrit was probably not a vernacular language this is a language of the scholars, the language of the marketplace and language of the palace, language of politics would have been something different. Sanskrit was a language of priests and scholars, second thing and perhaps the more compelling argument is all of these slokas, slokas means verse. Do people generally speak in verses? When you are talking to your friends do you generally speak in verses? Do you speak in verses like these that have eight syllables in a quarter or lines of eight syllables and in there is a meter, a poetic meter called **anushdo chandas** and in that poetic meter **anushdo** there is a pattern where every fifth syllable is short, every six syllable is long and the seventh syllable is alternating long short long short, so do you think you can speak fluently in true chandas and that to on a battlefield. Enough said, so what we are reading in the Bhagavad Gita are verses composed by Vyasa based on actual conversations, so whatever was the conversation between King **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** and Sanjay this is what form the inspiration for Vyasa, Vyasa we acknowledge as being sarvajna omniscient all knowing, so somehow he got all that information, he got the story so to speak and he wrote that down similarly whatever was discussed between Arjuna and Sri Krishna on the battlefield based on their actual dialog Vyasa writes these verses, alright.

So Vyasa then shows that the first word of the Bhagavad Gita should be dharma. Dharma has many meanings simply, the meaning in a current context is righteousness, dharma can also mean religion, dharma can also mean that which supports that sustains the universe, but in our context dharma means righteousness. The dharma, the Kuruksetra the battlefield is called a **dharmashestra** a field of dharma which leads us into a very challenging discussion that we must have and that is does Hinduism support war? Is war justified religiously, spiritually, morally? Was the battle of the Mahabharat justified morally, epically, spiritually according to dharma? Is there such a thing as a **dharma yudha,** a righteous war? And before we get in and this is a very important question we must deal with right now, before we do and just to show how challenging this is, long ago I remember teaching Bhagavad Gita perhaps for the first time and there was a young American student in the audience in the question answer time he, his question was a very challenging question, this young man knew something about Hinduism, he knew that Hinduism has a tremendous value for ahimsa non injury, in fact such a strong value for ahimsa or one of the primary statements about dharma is **ahimsa parmo dharmaha, ahimsa parma dharmaham** let me write that on the board it is such an important statement, I use Roman characters so everyone can read, **ahimsa** non-injury, **parmo dharmaha you know** I am translating **ahimsa** as non-injury not as nonviolence, often I hear it translated as nonviolence which perhaps is not the best translation. If I were to hurt you but not violently would that be okay, may be it would be better to translate it as non-injury. The reason it’s often translated as nonviolence of course is **ahimsa** was adopted by Mahatma Gandhi as a political strategy, as a political strategy you can call it nonviolent, it is a nonviolent political strategy, but we are not talking politics here we are talking about life, epics, religion so we will translate it here in this class as non-injury.

This statement the **parmo dharma** the main principle of dharma. The highest principle of righteousness is what? **Ahimsa**, this is a statement acknowledged as being a central principle of Hinduism, nearly all of Hindu epics including vegetarianism is based on this principle of **ahimsa**. Since it’s such a fundamental principle, now you can imagine this young man asking the challenging question yes, now yet since Hinduisms has such a tremendous value for **ahimsa** non-injury how can you justify this war? Because how many people are going to perish on that battlefield, if you workout the numbers that are given in the Mahabharat it ran to, if I remember right several hundreds of thousands that are said to have perished in that war. So how can war possibly be justified and this is I think a very important beginning, you can imagine someone who wants to be a little sarcastic, the man who asked this question was not sarcastic but if you wanted to be sarcastic one might say that the main, the most widely studied scripture in Hinduism Bhagavad Gita has Sri Krishna an incarnation of god telling Arjuna to go and fight and kill, not just fight and kill, kill your beloved great uncle Bhishma, kill your beloved teacher Guru Dhrona, kill your family Guru Kripacharya and all your cousins kill them all, so here is Sri Krishna an incarnation of god telling Arjuna to go fight and kill and kill all his beloved family members that’s it’s a sarcastic perspective, how can we handle this, how can we understand it in context.

We really need to understand what this battle was about and what it wasn’t about. There is a lots of misunderstandings, you know that, just in case allow me just to quickly summarize the opening chapter and a half which has Sri Krishna and Arjuna going out on to the battlefield in a chariot, Arjuna looks to the other side of the battlefield sees his beloved family members amongst his foes, he wasn’t thinking about this and when he sees his beloved family members among his foes Arjuna, to use a modern American expression Arjuna loses it, he falls apart emotionally, he starts trembling he drops his bow, he is shaking he cry, he ends up by the end of chapter one he falls to the seat of his chariot weeping he is so upset. Now what happens in chapter two is Sri Krishna has to encourage Arjuna to get up and fight and starting in chapter 11, I am sorry starting in chapter in verse 11 of chapter 2 Sri Krishna starts to encourage, in fact even before in the very beginning of chapter 2 Sri Krishna begins to encourage Arjuna to get up and fight, get up and fight, get up and fight, the remainder of the Bhagavad if you want to know the Bhagavad Gita as part of the Mahabharat, that is part of the story the message of the Bhagavad Gita in terms of the story is Sri Krishna has to encourage Arjuna to come out of his emotional turmoil stop crying get his acts together as they say and go and fight that really is what the entire Bhagavad Gita is all about in the context of the Mahabharat, so how do we handle this then Sri Krishna an incarnation of god telling Arjuna to go fight, go kill what kind god is that, that tells you to fight and kill and here we have to examine why this is so, why is it okay not just okay why was it necessary for Sri Krishna to tell Arjuna to go and fight. To answer this question we have to dispel some wrong, wrong conclusions, wrong information.

Have you noticed there is a lot of misinformation about Hinduism going around, I guess it’s always been that way, now a days with the internet it seems like whatever incorrect information is out there goes around much more quickly now, so internet of course is a great resource with lots of wonderful and helpful information, but there is a lot of misinformation that’s equally being disseminated by the internet and other and in other ways also and we are going to, we have to deal with two horribly wrong interpretations, horribly because it lead to some bizarre conclusions. One what you know and specifically we need to answer why did Sri Krishna tell Arjuna to fight and kill. One answer that is sometimes given is this. Arjuna is a **kshatrya** kshatryas are warriors, fighters, soldiers and because Arjuna was a **kshatrya** therefore he had to fight and kill, will you buy that? Just because someone is a **kshatrya**.

Today in Iraq there are plenty of soldiers trained by Saddam Hussein’s secret service, they are highly trained and they are scattered around and they are hiding out of course in certain places in Iraq, so do you think that since these warriors were so highly trained that therefore when they are setting these roadside bombs and killing innocent civilians, civilians and American service people do you think they are justified because after all they are doing their job they are trained as warriors they are doing what they are supposed to do, what a silly argument, but if you say that Arjuna had to fight the war because he was a **kshatriya** isn’t that the same silly argument? It is, Arjuna was a **kshatriya** he was a member of the warrior caste, fine, that’s not the reason however that he was told to fight the war, it’s a fact but it is not the justification for fighting the war. Then what is the justification? Then the other, there are two kind two misinterpretations here is one, the other one is equally prevalent, Arjuna had to fight to reclaim the kingdom that was unjustly taken away from them, they were cheated out of their kingdom, remember this dice game and the whole story mystery of the story, they were cheated. You know there is some old American comedy, it says we were robbed, they were cheated it’s a fact, so if you are cheated out of the kingdom then you have to fight to get it back. Now wait a minute, it means that through illegal means they were deprived of their possessions in this case real estate, it is **Kurukshetra** the kingdom **Hastinapur** there is a kingdom so they were deprived of **Hastinapur** the kingdom and of course then they have to fight to regain the kingdom that was taken away from them through unjust means.

Does injustice justify mortal combat and things get a little bit trickier now, what justifies loss of life? I was trying to I was with a group of teenagers, this is a fascinating discussion and with a group of teens trying to discuss the same thing and putting it in a context that teens can relate to. What would justify hitting of someone? If someone takes your school book does that justify clobbering the person when you meet him in the hallway and the teen says no, why? They took your property, yes then why does it not justify clobbering them you know it’s just a book correctly, correctly said it’s just a book, alright. So if land is taken away from you does it justify hundreds of thousands of deaths? How much is a life, is there a someway of parceling it out so many acres per person would you, would you come up with some, what justifies war, what justifies bloodshed. Is it really about the real estate, you know even in this country it’s not about, even when this country goes to war have you observed it’s not about real estate in general it’s only when underneath that real estate is oil. If there is oil in that real estate we don’t care, what kind of ethics is that and if you allow me just a quick editorial comment here this is, this country is a glory, the world’s sole remaining superpower, the economic giant in this world, the giant in terms of military power in terms of technology world leader why can’t this country be a world leader in ethics. We are a superpower military, military superpower, economic superpower, technological superpower, why not a moral superpower, why not an ethical superpower, why not it’s a shame that it has not taken place for reasons which we won’t discuss. So when is war justified, is war justified for real estate even a teenager said, hey it’s just a book, if someone steals your book you don’t clobber them if somebody steals x acres of your land it doesn’t justify lethal warfare and let’s be very clear, this was not a battle over real estate and to illustrate that, there is a one more story comes here.

Several days before the battle began **Yudishtara,** the eldest of the sons of Pandu turns to Sri Krishna and asks Sri Krishna to go as an emissary to try to negotiate a peaceful settlement, good thing to do, everyone is getting ready for war they are trying to avert warfare so Sri Krishna goes to the palace and he is going to negotiate with Duryodhana, pretty tough is that, so Duryodhana being the character that he was it was bound to be difficult. So Sri Krishna in attempting to negotiate with Duryodhana a peaceful settlement to this conflict says since truly speaking the entire kingdom belongs to the Pandavas sons of Pandu, but an agreement was made years ago to separate the kingdom in half, let us return to that agreement you take half of the kingdom and the Pandavas will take half the kingdom and by this half and half settlement and we can avoid this terrible war. Duryodhana said no way, I won’t agree to that.

Sri Krishna is in a position of negotiator, so negotiator has to have a strategy and some other, other fall back positions, so Sri Krishna suggests well if you won’t give them back half of the kingdom give them back a portion of the kingdom, a portion of the kingdom containing five villages, it’s a huge kingdom there were five brothers, five Pandora brothers, so give them back a portion of the kingdom having five villages they can each have their own village. Duryodhana refused flatly, Sri Krishna has to find another fallback position he says well if you won’t give them a portion of the kingdom of five villages give them, why don’t you give them one village with five palaces, each of the brothers can have their own palace they can live very nicely in that village, give them one village with five and you can keep the entire rest of the kingdom, Duryodhana refused once again.

Sri Krishna is running out of wiggle space bargaining space here, so he says well if you won’t give them one village with five palaces why don’t you give them, you know at the end of the negotiation the final one was why don’t you give them a little cottage with five rooms, just a little cottage with five rooms they can each have their own room and Duryodhana finally says I won’t give them five square inches won’t give them anything nothing. Now what have we to learn with this one thing you learn is don’t negotiate with a guy like Duryodhana he just and you heard recently this Bin Laden offering to negotiate with this country, so you can have, what kind of negotiation is that going to be and you cannot negotiate with such a person, so Duryodhana was such a person, but something else to be seen in that story is this, if it was a battle over real estate then why would Sri Krishna willing to negotiate away all the real estate. The very fact that Sri Krishna was willing to give all the real estate up and just keeping one little cottage with five rooms keep that back for the Pandu sons that shows it was not a battle over real estate, whether it had oil or not it’s not about real estate, therefore why was Arjuna told to fight, not because he was **kshatriya,** he was a **kshatriya,** not because he had to reclaim the kingdom that was rightfully theirs to restore that real estate that was not the reason. Why was Sri Krishna instructing Arjuna to fight? And the answer is the first word of the first verse **dharma,** to restore dharma. Hastinapur was being ruled over currently by the blind King **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** and his crown successor was his son Duryodhana these were two of the worst leaders one could ever have in any country or kingdom. **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** was physically blind, but his blindness is symbolic as well and the symbolism of his blindness. In American English we have this expression sometimes, when somebody is not very moral or ethical you would say he can’t see the difference between rights and wrong, you’ve heard that expression can’t see the difference between right and wrong. Dhritarashtra’s blindness certainly represents his inability to tell the difference between right and wrong, in fact as the story goes those of you who know the story well, whatever his son Duryodhana would ask for **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** would say yes fine whether it was right or wrong.

To put it in a funny modern context, can you imagine a child coming, a ten year old child coming to his father and say dad, can I have a beer? What is dad going to say, just because the son asks for it if it’s something wrong or harmful for the boy it’s not going to be given, but **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** would never say no whatever Duryodhana asked for was given, **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** couldn’t tell the difference between right and wrong and if the leader of the country can’t tell the difference between dharma and adharma how it would be living in that country you get the idea. Then who will be the next leader? Duryodhana. Duryodhana has sight, so Duryodhana can tell the difference between right and wrong between dharma and adharma good. Then what is the problem? Is one of the most hilarious statements of Duryodhana comes in the Bhagavad in the earlier in the Mahabharat, I don’t know a lot of verses but this one has stuck, because it’s hilarious, where Duryodhana says **dharmam jajanami nachame privithrihi adharmam jajanami nachame nivrithihi. Dharma jajanami**, **janami** I know, I know **dharmam,** I know what is right. **Nachame privithrihi,** but I have no inclination to do it. **Adharmam jajanami** I know what is wrong, **nachame nivrithihi** I have no inclination to avoid it. I know what is right I can’t make myself do it, I know what is wrong I can’t keep myself from doing it and he is going to be the next leader, this is a point. The leadership was horribly corrupt, when the leadership is corrupt we know the people of the kingdom were suffering.

It was to free the kingdom from this corrupt leadership, it was to free the kingdom from the forest of **adharma,** or to put it in a positive sense it was to restore **dharma** to the kingdom. So we are ready to answer now that question. Why that Sri Krishna tell Arjuna to go and fight and kill even, even though, yes it wasn’t and even though it was fighting and killing his own family members it was not because Arjuna was a **kshatriya,** it was not to restore the kingdom that was rightfully theirs, it’s not to reclaim the kingdom, it was simply put to restore **dharma** righteous leadership and now one final question. How is that dharma, when we define dharma and in terms of **ahimsa** non-injury doesn’t fighting that war cause so much injury, how can we call it a **dharmayudha** a righteous war and here we have a very specific definition of righteous war.

Yes the our definition is this, a war in which not to fight the war would cause more harm, if not fighting the war would cause more harm than fighting the war that war alone is a **dharmayudha**, if the consequences of not fighting are worse than the consequences of fighting. In modern history we see examples of both right, if we think back to World War 2 what would have been the consequences of not fighting World War 2, most of you know that this country was reluctant to enter into the war and it was only after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that this country finally entered the war, this country was vehement, people in this country we vehemently opposed to participating in that war. Suppose for whatever reason if this country choose not to fight even after Pearl Harbor would that have been a good thing. So World War 2 would be a great example of a **dharmayudha,** that is a war in which not to fight would have worst consequences than fighting.

Are all such wars **dharmayudhas**? No, a good counter example would be the war in Vietnam and again reasonably objective understanding of the war, of the war in Vietnam shows that it was a war fought for all the wrong reasons and it was certainly not a **dharmayudha**. What about the current war in Iraq? I let you draw your own conclusions, but how to justify that kind of war, it’s difficult, alright. So let us understand that this war of the Mahabharat was a **dharmayudha,** it was a battle in which if Arjuna fails to fight, by the way if Arjuna fails to fight they don’t stand a chance without Arjuna, he is the key to their victory it rests on Arjuna, if Arjuna leaves the battlefield the Pandavas will fail, they will be conquered. If Arjuna remains on the battlefield they will be victorious, stakes are incredibly high and what we will see in the next class is that in the midst of this crisis Arjuna has the most important decision of his life to make, fight or flight to use the expression and Arjuna having to make this important decision is overcome by emotions. That ever happen to you? You have an important decision to make and your emotions well up and start to perturb your thinking, distort your thinking. This is a serious problem, this is Arjuna’s problem and this is where we’ll, when we meet next time we’ll come back to verse 1 and then we’ll go, the verses in chapter 1 many of them will go fairly quickly through them since they are mostly telling story and then quickly will come to Arjuna’s dilemma and we will continue our study of Bhagavad Gita.

Very good, so the opening scene is not on the battlefield, but back at the Palace of **Dhṛtarāṣṭra**, **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** asks his blind, I am sorry the blind King **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** asks his charioteer Sanjaya what's happening on the battlefield as we explained last week, Sanjay has been given this power of Divya Drishti, he can see and hear everything happening on the battlefield and then he narrates all of those activities to the blind King **Dhṛtarāṣṭra**, in fact it's Sanjay’s narration that constitutes the next 699 verses of the Bhagavad Gita. So **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** asks the first verse, speaks the first verse and he says Sanjaya in the last word, Sanjay **kim akurvata**, what happened, kya Yuha, Kya Ho Raha hai? What's going on? And what's going on where? **Kurukṣetre,** on the **Kurukṣetre** on that battlefield. The name of the battlefield is **Kurukṣetre**, name of a city town actually in North India today and **Kuru** remembers a family name, so **Kurukṣetre** the land of the Kuru’s the, which is named for the battlefield.

**Kurukṣetre,** on that battlefield and there is a synonym for that battlefield **dharmakṣetre** that battlefield which is called a **dharmakṣetre,** the field of battle is a field of dharma, **dharmakṣetre** literally field of dharma. Notice that the word **dharma** then becomes the very first word of the Bhagavad Gita. Do you think that’s accidental? Hardly. So here **Vyasa,** remember **Vyasa** as the author of the Mahabharat is also now the author of the Bhagavad Gita, so **Vyasa** wants to point our minds right at the very outset to the fact that this battle is not a battle to restore the kingdom, it's not a battle over real estate, we talked about all this in the last class, we said **dharmakṣetre,** we said **dharmayudha** a righteous battle, a righteous battle is not for the sake of real estate, a righteous battle is not for the sake of restoring or here comes the politics. A righteous battle is not necessarily to establish democracy in another country, who says democracy is the best form of government and you can ignore my comments entirely, but they are going to keep coming, that the point is, is that this battle was not for the sake of reestablishing the Pandavas as rulers of the kingdom, it wasn’t that they were, they were unjustly deprived of their leadership and rulership of that kingdom, or that they wanted to regain the kingdom, or regain the real estate no matter how rich the real estate was, we spend half the class talking about the fact that this was a battle to restore **dharma**, that’s the simplest way of putting it.

A **dharmayudha,** a righteous battle is one that’s fought for the sake of restoring dharma, when **adharma** spreads throughout the land, people suffer therefore this war had to be fought to set aside, to wipe out that **adharma** to reestablish dharma, therefore the battlefield is called a **dharmakṣetre** field of dharma.

So **dharmakṣetre** **kurukṣetre** on this field of battle the **kurukṣetre** which is a field of **dharma**, he says **kim akurvata**, what was going on? What did they do? Who was there on that battlefield? Who was present on the battlefield? **Māmakāḥ** mine, **māmakāḥ** those who belong to me. **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** is speaking, so he is referring to all of his sons, remember 100 sons are there on the battlefield of **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** many others also. So **māmakāḥ** those who are of mine, my sons, my 100 sons **pāṇḍavāś caiva,** and the **pāṇḍavāś** so the sons of his half brother **Pandu**. So his sons are there on the battlefield, his nephews the Pandavas,sons of Pandu are there on the battlefield and they are gathered, they are **samavetā** **aha** gathered literally, they are gathered there together on the battlefield and are they gathered there, pardon me for a bad joke. Are they gathered there to have a picnic? Hardly **yuyutsavah**, they are all **yuyutsav,** **yuyutsav** means those desiring to fight **yudham itchuhu eti yuyutsu,** those who are present for the sake of fighting, they are eager to fight, they’re all highly trained warriors are gathered together ready to fight. So **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** says **kim akurvata saṃjaya,** Sanjay what did they do, my sons and the sons of Pandu gathered there together on the battlefield ready to fight, what did they do? So with this first verse **Dhṛtarāṣṭra** opens the Bhagavad Gita and **saṃjaya** response.