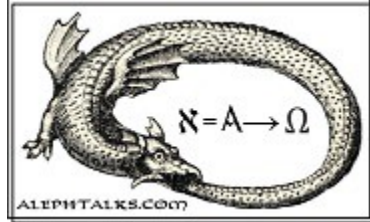


Mysticism: Where Science, Art, and Religion Meet

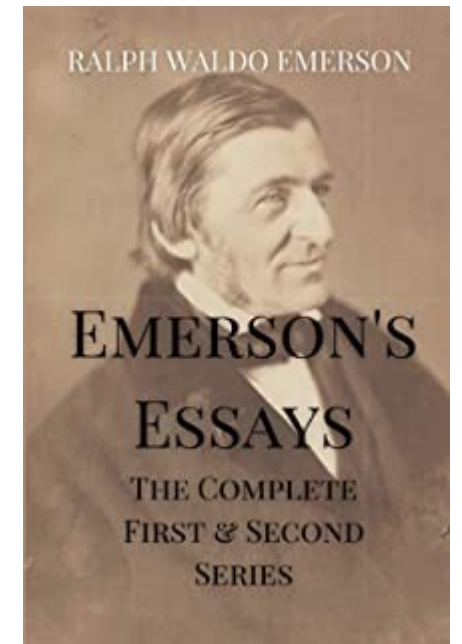
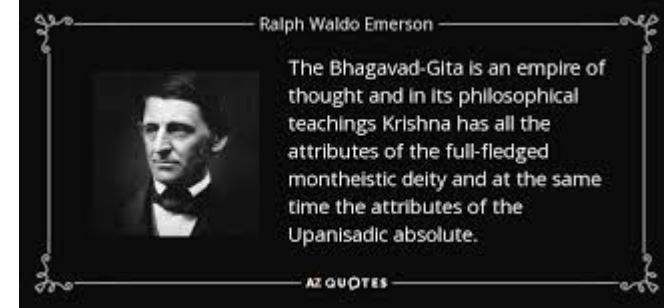


Subject Three
Ralph Waldo Emerson
The Bhagavad-Gita
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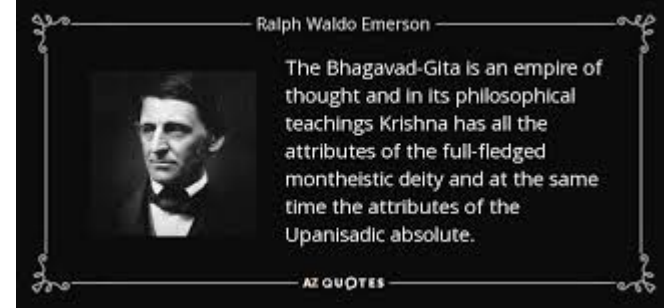


Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Bhagavad-Gita

- The Meeting of East and West
- Who Inherits the Mantles of These Crossing Stars
- The Turning of Emerson
- The Song of God in America
- Who is Krishna?
- The Tradition of Conscience – Needed more now than ever before.

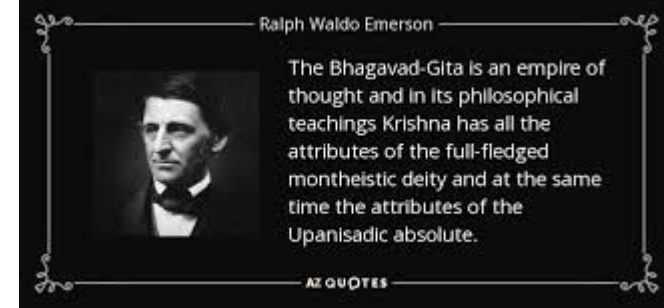


The Bhagavad-Gita



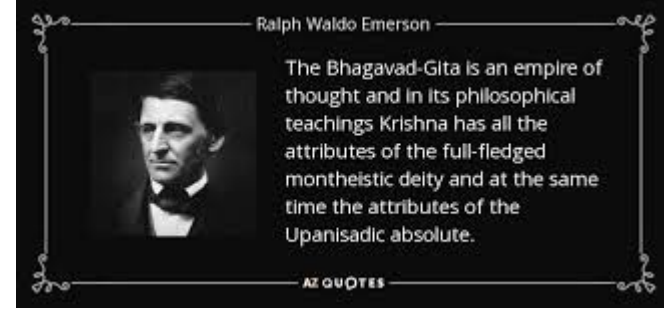
- The Bhagavad Gita forms a section of the sixth book of the Mahabharata, an important Sanskrit epic in the Hindu tradition that recounts a lengthy struggle and brief war between two sides of the Bharata family—the Pandavas and the Kauravas—over their kingdom of Hastinapura. The Gita recounts a dialogue in the moments leading up to the war between the Pandava warrior Arjuna and his charioteer and trusted advisor, Krishna, who turns out to be a worldly incarnation of Vishnu, a god who serves as the Supreme Being in many forms of Hinduism. However, Arjuna and Krishna’s dialogue is actually recounted through a frame story: Sanjaya, an advisor to Dhritarashtra (the Kauravas’ father and the blind king of Hastinapura), reports this dialogue to the king after the Pandavas have already won the war.

The Bhagavad-Gita



- In the first of the Gita's eighteen sections or discourses, Sanjaya describes the extensive Pandava and Kaurava armies that meet to fight on the "field of dharma." While the Kauravas have more men, the Pandavas seem to have the gods' favor, as they respond to the Kauravas' impressive conch horns with divine ones that shake the earth and sky. As Krishna drives Arjuna's chariot into the middle of the battlefield, Arjuna realizes that he cannot bear to kill his cousins, which he believes would destroy the dharma, or moral standing, of his entire family and poison any pleasure he might derive from victory. He lowers his weapon and begins to weep.

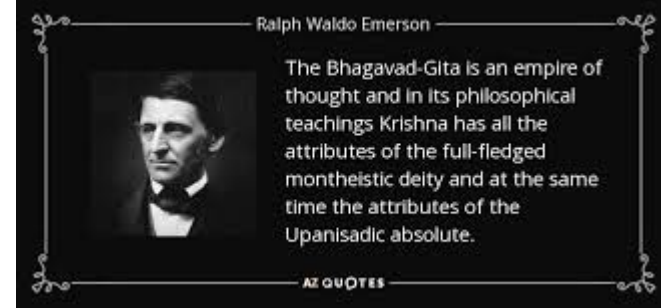
Emerson and the Gita



Emerson poetically expresses it in “Self Reliance,”

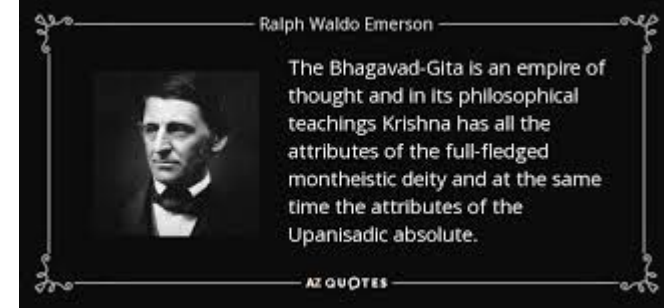
- “When a man lives with God, his voice will be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn.”¹
- Emerson proclaimed no anxiety of influence: the roses under his window, he declares in “Self Reliance,” make no reference to former roses or to better one.
- Emerson’s famous “transparent eyeball” passage in his inaugural essay “Nature” is taken almost verbatim from Coleridge’s description of entering a gothic cathedral, for Emerson, however, there was no a question of plagiarism or appropriation. Rather, he was assimilating what was germane in this moment, and he did likewise with the *Gita*. Emerson’s “originality” could, perhaps, accept overt textual influence without feeling contradiction or disturbance. His critic, Perry, on the other hand, complained that Emerson was rooted in a past that he tore down.

Emerson and the Gita



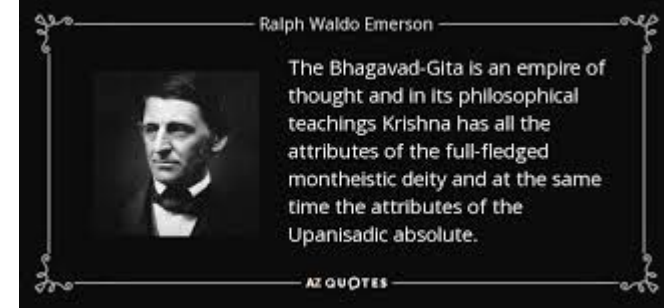
Emerson was certainly not rooted in the *Gita*, what to speak of its cultural past. In his now infamous line upon his first reading of the text, he called it “the much renowned book of Buddhism.” The *Gita*, however, only became a “book” by itself being appropriated out of the epic. The Mahabharata tradition that bequeathed the *Gita* to the world is vast and all containing (so it says), and literacy may be but a brief print-interlude between mega-layers of oral culture. Moreover, the *Gita* is more than this, for a text is as much a meeting of differences as it is a unified entity, and one thing that is clear in the *Gita* as we now know it, is that it is a compendium of various perspectives – samkhya, yoga, bhakti, monist and dualist philosophies.

Emerson and the Gita



- At least ten percent of its' vocabulary is of Buddhist derivation, and some call it "The Ecumenical Council of India," an attempt to reconcile everything and everyone. One can argue that in fact it would be nearly impossible to read the *Bhagavadgita* in its entirety, for would entail a reading of the entire Epic. And why should one be expected to? It is a hassle, it is problematic, and the ending does not fit.
- Arjuna may understand it all in the *Gita*, but by the end of the Epic he loses all of his power. Krishna knows it all in the *Gita*, but he is unable to avert a major holocaust, nor stem the greed of warring tribes.
- Only one man out of the mythical six hundred and forty million who fought at Kurukshetra is privy to what is actually happening on the battlefield (from a transcendentalist point of view, anyway). And that would have suited Emerson just fine, which may be one reason he liked the *Gita*. It could support his ideal of the solitary individual (minus Krishna of course), Arjuna, the one insightful mind among the ignorant, violent desire-driven mass of humanity heading for destruction in the fangs and maw of Vishnu.

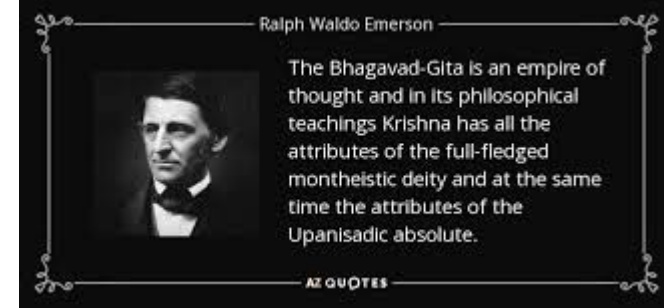
Emerson and the Gita



- Emerson took what he wanted to (or perhaps better yet, what he needed to) from the *Gita*, just as we all do. Things can become thorny, however, since allegiances to interpretive communities abound; from the theological, to the Indological, to the economic (perhaps Marx is always there on the background here in terms of the relationship of interpretive authority to private property and social organization). Both Emerson and the *Gita* are still with us, however, they still inhabit the cultural landscape (as well as the memory) of America and the discourse of various interpretive communities.
- Emerson, appearing as the icon of the individual, the harbinger of the “religion of the One,” saw America as the new holy land, one in which the individual could integrate the wisdom of many old worlds into the new.
- The *Bhagavadgita*, emerging out of the list of “oriental translations,” pumped up by Emerson, Thoreau and their ilk, became an emblem of a certain kind of wisdom as it eventually flowed into the somewhat popular esoteric fiction of Theosophy along with variant ideas about reincarnation. The same *Bhagavadgita* became an icon in an America that wanted a Hindu Bible and was appropriated by fundamentalist groups like Iskcon, while other translations of the *Gita* are taught in universities that still serve as arbiters of intellectual history.

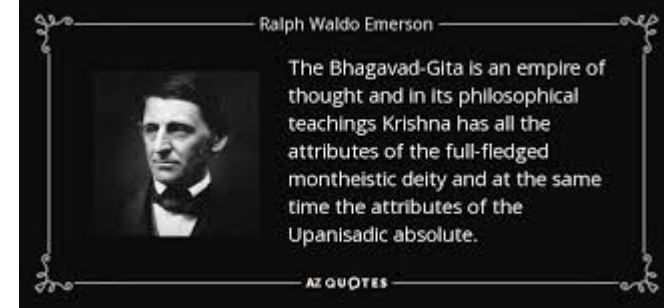
Emerson and the Gita

Who Inherits The Mantles of these Crossing Stars?



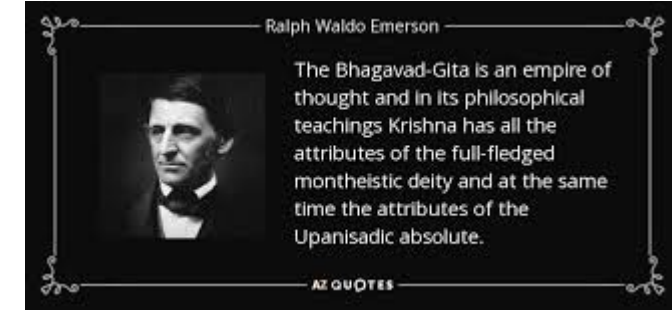
- What then may be at issue in Emerson's reception of the *Gita*? Perhaps one can say
- "tradition" in the struggle for definitions in a multicultural world. It was not that the "Sage of Concord" and his colleagues discovered the east; they made their east in order to remake the West, and a bouncing pizza effect, which was truly unprecedented, would lead them to remake one another. The "yoga" that transitioned to American for example (as De Michele had documented) was already influenced by Western esotericism, which in its turn was influenced by New England transcendentalists.
- Versluis remarks that "Asia grew on Emerson slowly," there are no references to Asia in his published works until 1841. Perhaps as Versluis contends, Emerson had to work his way past many prejudices to arrive at what one scholar called "a neo Vedanta that was an amalgam of German idealism and mystical Christian and Hindu concepts."⁵ More than likely, he was "simmering" as the junior Whitman later described himself.
- Emerson received the *Gita* through a lineage of political conquest and cultural acquiescence. The British thought it would make good politics to translate some brahminal texts, the brahmins acquiesced to the *Gita* since technically it was *smṛti*, not *śruti*, which was not to be shared with outsiders.

Emerson and the Gita



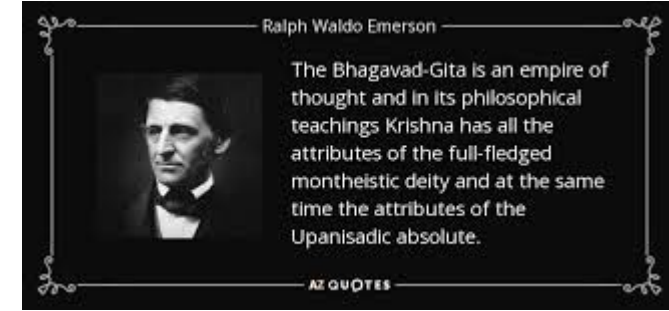
- Emerson had previously read what the Unitarians had to say about Ram Mohan Roy in the early 1820's and others. So even though Emerson published "The Oversoul" in 1841, before receiving the text of the *Bhagavadgita*, he certainly had secondary knowledge of some of its contents.
- In 1845 Emerson acquired his own copy of Wilkens' 1785 translation of the *Gita*, which he initially called in the now infamous aforementioned letter to Elizabeth Hoaror, dated July 17 1845, one of the moist renowned books of Buddhism.⁷ This was an honest mistake
- Emerson had nothing but praise for the *Gita* declaring: "It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered over and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.
- Note, how even in his first recorded response to the *Gita*, Emerson's focus is existential, on the "questions which exercise us," which to me separates him from the romantic, orientalist notion of the "wisdom of a pristine past." The *Gita* also made its way to Emerson through Thoreau, who eventually bequeathed to him his entire library of Asian texts.

Emerson and the Gita



- Emerson did not seek to promote the *Gita* among his fellow citizens, as he did with Whitman's work, probably because he thought that his fellow Americans would not be up to understanding it in its "native form." However, the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* served an Emersonian purpose: along with confirming his expanded, transcendental vision, they would serve as a hedge against the universalizing and absolutizing of Christianity.
- It was not that Emerson needed the *Gita* to develop his theories of the self or the oversoul. His self reliance and self trust could easily be traced back through Classical and European sources up to Goethe's self-cultivation and the Essays of Montaigne or even those of Ben Franklin. And theories of metempsychosis abounded in the Neo-platonic literature that Emerson was familiar with. I would imagine, however, that Arjuna was an inspiration to Emerson, who himself was a sort of Arjuna; not as in a story from thousands of years ago, or as a servant of a scriptural God, but as an advocate and model for the possibility of every individual to arise and hear the voice of Spirit:
- "If therefore a man claims to know and speak of God and carries you backward to the phraseology of some old moldered nation in another country, in another world, believe him not.

Emerson and the Gita

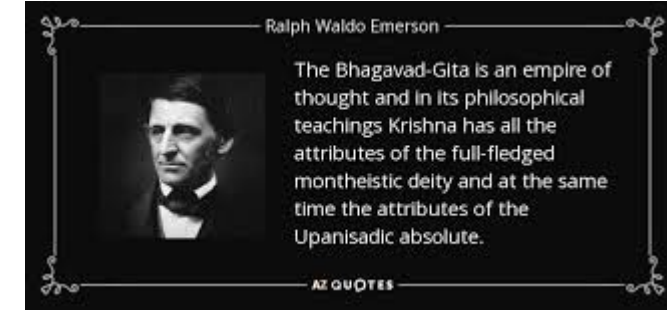


“Whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away—means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now and absorbs past and future into the present hour.”

Let us not mistake rhetoric for reality, however. Emerson struggled with his sense of, and debt to, a past that he valued enough to remake in the present. Emerson does a service, one could argue, by reconstituting the past through the sum of influences upon him, not in a straight line from Greece to Europe to the shores of the New World but by winding his way back through Persia, India, and China.

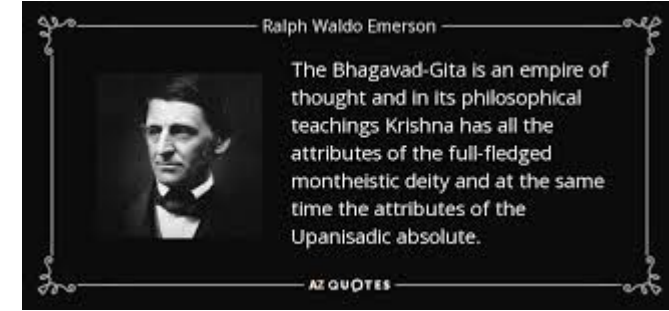
In a way, the “appropriation of the East” gave Emerson leverage, room to move, to create his own tradition as millions would after him.

Emerson and the Gita



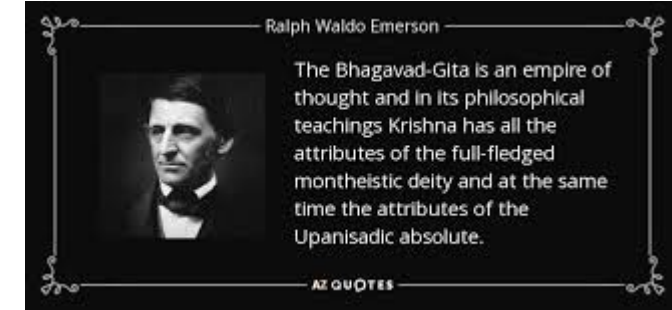
- Versluis argues that the Unitarian rejection of the church and its heretical embrace of progress led to the transcendentalists ultimately jettisoning Christianity entirely and affirming an “absolute religion universal religion
- But Emerson was more complex than New Age re-makers of the wheel. In the autumn of his life, as an overseer at Harvard University, he voted for compulsory chapel attendance, and his transcendentalist project of the “religion of humanity” did not prohibit him from being an abolitionist advocate willing to lose the union if the union maintained slavery.
- There are a series of stock answers that appear when considering Emerson’s relationship with his various predecessors. One may say that he had the ability to consider the spiritual writings of all ages without sacrificing the pure and immediate revelation of truth. One may say that Emerson came into contact with the very same universal truths as the ancients and could speak in a similar tone while still leading men to the “law of their own hearts.” More plausible, perhaps, is the idea that the Emerson texts were produced under a different set of assumptions (and perhaps a shared set) around influence and originality than are presently held.

Emerson and the Gita



- While the *Gita* itself does not condone slavery, the Epic takes it for granted.
- The *Gita* does promote a social system based on *varnas* that are evidenced by birth, something Emerson would have found abhorrent. Hence, Emerson's relationship with the "Wisdom of the East" had little to do with the romantic embrace of an older and wiser culture.
- There was an intuitive recognition of affinity between thought processes and perspectives. And this affinity allowed Emerson to "translate" the *Gita* from one context to another, a project that may be more delicate and difficult than the literal translation of a text.
- While an awareness of the aura of influence serves to cure one of the illusion of the solitary, individual author, the extended focus on the agonistic aspects of influence is a remnant of a Nietzschean, Adlerian world view that is unable to see beyond the purview of conquest and loss (which interestingly enough is exactly what Krishna tells Arjuna to do).
- Rather than worrying about "influence" or engaging in spineless academic comparisons, one might simply say of Emerson and the *Gita* that "They met," they met like two crossing stars each with their own trajectory, each with their own *karma*, in the ongoing flow of history.

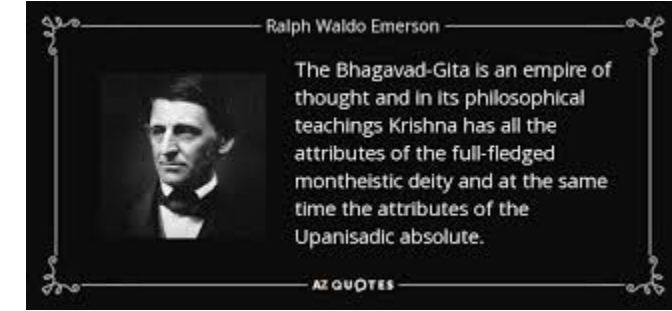
Emerson and the Gita



The Turning of Emerson

- In his Divinity School Address of 1838, Emerson dared his audience to love God without a mediator and to completely reject formal religion. This address, along with the opening salvos of “Nature,” is the Emerson that has endured, while the later more skeptical Emerson has faded further into the background. Emerson, “left the church, left the academy, and became Emerson.”
- How did he break away from his friends and kinsmen, as Arjuna was urged to do, and fight the battle he had to fight? He left the pulpit, but he did not burn his bridges with Unitarians.
- Emerson’s struggle for freedom is akin to Arjuna’s. They must both forge a path through the power dynamics and nuances of their particular communities. The teachings of Krishna, in the *Gita*, are clearly mediated through various communities, Buddhist, Samkhya, Yoga, Brahmanical, etc., and the seemingly contradictory statements attributed to Krishna can be seen as efforts to placate or incorporate variant communal perspectives
- What may often appear as an unmediated transcendental vision may be something else as well.

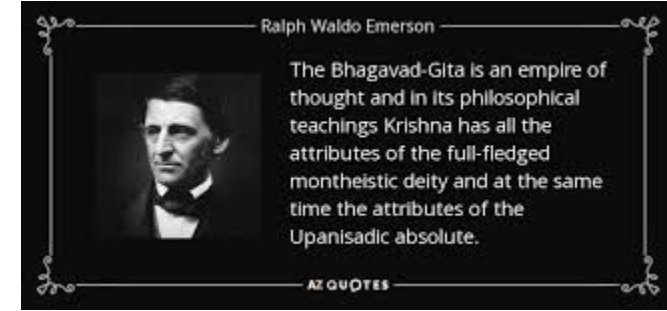
Emerson and the Gita



This is clear in the celebrated “transparent eyeball” passage in “Nature.” While arguing for an original relationship with the universe and a philosophy of insight as opposed to tradition, Emerson walks into the woods and declares:

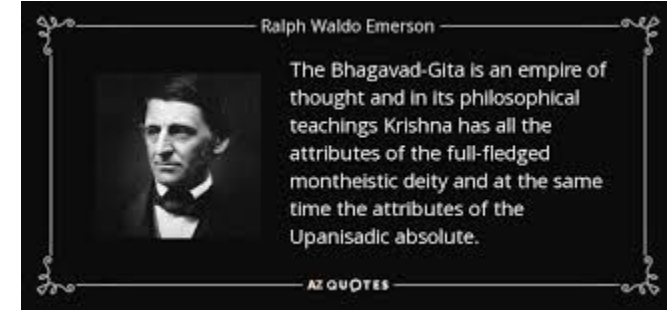
Standing on the bare ground, -my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing: I see all; the currents of the universal being circulate through me. I am a part or a particle of God.

Emerson and the Gita



- Emerson probably penned this *Gita*-like passage before ever reading the theophany in the eleventh book of the *Gita*, like a finally enlightened Arjuna, Emerson goes on to declare:
 - The name of the nearest friend sounds foreign and accidental; to be brothers, to be acquaintances, -master or servant, in then a trifle and a disturbance. I am a lover of uncontained and immortal beauty.
- His “cathedral” is the woods and his God is fashioned from his own amalgam-like insight. The over-soul doctrine, adopted through a conglomeration of German Romantic, Neo-Platonic, and Hindu sources will follow with Emerson forging a new language to fit his intuitions. It is not possible to fruitfully speculate to what degree the *Gita* helped open a way for that language, but the resonance of sensibility is unmistakable.
- *Brahma* is all too often and easily glossed over when discussed as an example of the “influence of Asia” on Emerson.

Emerson and the Gita



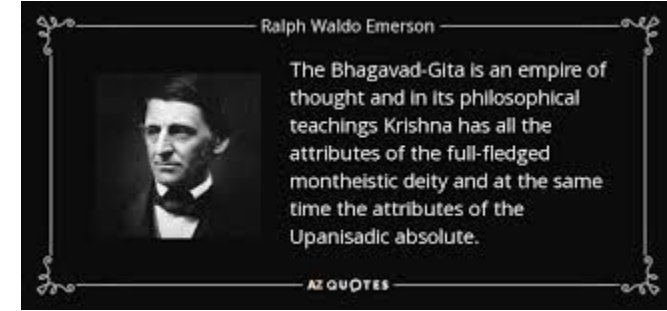
One might then ask, “How so.”

Emerson, like many intellectual Vedantins, resonated with *karma* and *jnana* yogas as “works” and “illumination,” but not, or much less, with *bhakti*.

His monistic disposition would lead him to focus on oneness over difference in his general consideration of the path of yoga, which for Emerson was the path of universal virtue.

Bringing the *Gita* into such a mix, however, immediately opens the field, makes this consideration more than a Western humanities or philosophical problem and casts it within larger global context. It legitimizes not only world religions, but a world that can no longer be narrowly limited to a few texts deemed appropriate by those who have refused to look outside the confines of their self-created container.

Emerson and the Gita



What is remarkable here is how far Emerson has come since his “renowned book of Buddhism” days. Not only does this little poem paraphrase the author of the *Kathopanishad* and the *Bhagavadgita* in cadence as well as in sensibility, taking on the first person voice

It communicates subtle aspects of the *Gita's* polemic, touches the sublimity of the seventh, tenth, and eleventh chapters, and interweaves monistic and dualistic strands of poetic discourse. The final line “Find me, and turn thy back on heaven,” takes a stab at the Christian heaven, but more overtly, it is evidence of Emerson’s resonance with the panoramic largesse of the *Gita's* divine landscape, and how opening to this landscape may allow one more room to move and breathe on the ground upon which one stands.

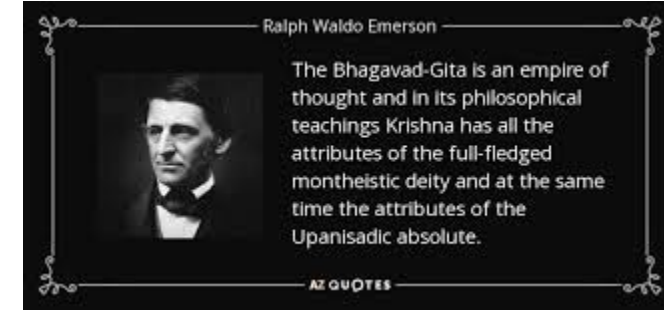
Emerson and the Gita

The Song of God in America

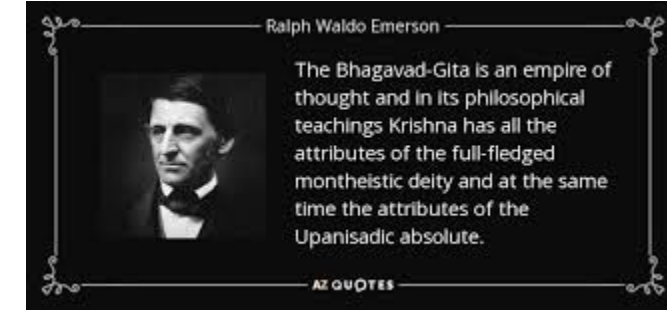
Suppose we take the *Gita* as the “the Song of God” (which need not obfuscate its being a small portion in the eighteenth chapter of the Great Epic

If Krishna is the strength of the strong, the taste of water, the fragrance of the earth, and the one behind the many, and if he descends in appropriate forms in age after age to restore the dharma, his incarnation into Concord, New England might look quite different than on the battlefield of Kuru.

- One might even suggest that the transformation of the work out of the Epic narrative it has been embedded in is part of its incarnational prowess. Somewhat like the apple, tulip, potato, and cannabis, the *Gita* may have embedded itself into the Epic like a seed in the earth in winter. And when the time is ripe, it takes a manageable and portably readable form that allows it to become a standard bearer of “Eastern wisdom.”
- Ironically, the *Gita* can be, and has been, taken to task, like Emerson, for an eclectic and unsystematic view of life, and yet it might very well be this humanistic aspect of the *Gita*; the fact that it is both a philosophical tract, a poem, and an exhortation to action, that has allowed it to be claimed by such diverse communities. The *Gita*'s emphasis on liberative action and its framing of knowledge within the context of action were also crucial, I would argue, in its embrace by the



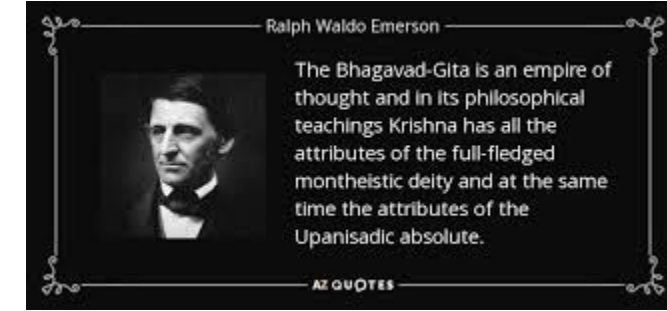
Emerson and the Gita



Absorbing the general atmosphere of the *Gita* was and is no small task

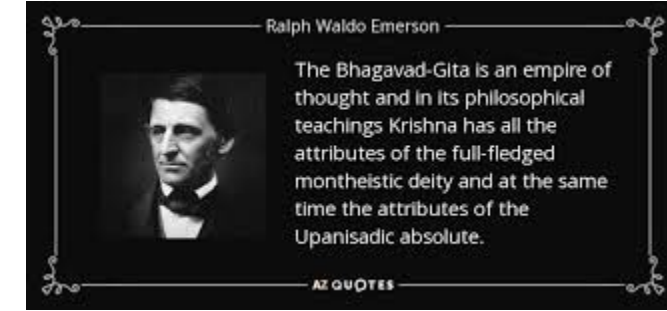
- Emerson was able to absorb the atmosphere of the *Gita* because he already lived in such an atmosphere
- Emerson's Neoplatonic readings and forays into German idealism prepared him for the *Gita*, but his ability to absorb its' atmosphere had as much to do with his inherent disposition and his willingness to follow it as it did to any literary tradition (or, in other words, his *samskaras*)
- Emerson's reception of the text is not merely a "romantic one," the focus and import of Emerson's reading of and meeting with the *Gita* is not just on his subjective apprehension of the text, nor about idealized notions of its grandeur, but like Thoreau, he is around his grappling with the existential issue of how shall I live my life

Emerson and the Gita



- Emerson absorbed the parts of the atmosphere that suited him.
 - Who really wants to take the caste system, even when whitewashed as *varnashrama* and divinely justified?
 - Who wants class ridden and sexist ridden paths of virtue (both institutionalized in the *Gita*, which does grudgingly allow for women and commoners to attain to divine status) condoned by absolute scripture? Emerson, who had his own issues to deal with in terms women's rights and liberties, nevertheless breathed the spacious atmosphere of the *Gita* and let go of its more stuffy aspects.

Emerson and the Gita



The issue of divorcing the text from its culture is often brought to the fore here. But who does memory belong to (*smṛti*)? And on what basis does a text belong to a community?

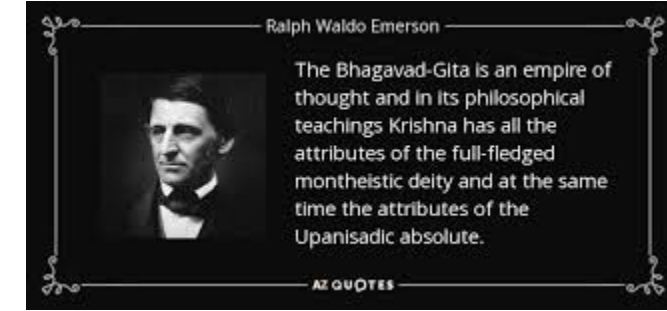
Would the righteous Ramachandra be acting dharmically if he followed scriptural exhortations about having lead poured into the ears of lower class persons who have heard the Vedas?

Who texts belong to are often based on power (the brahmins), but these relations are temporal (publishing rights). Texts might grow out of a certain historical moment, but like one's children, they take on a life of their own, go their own way, and forge their own destinies.

Ultimately, issues of authority, be they literary or scriptural, are intimately bound up in community.

We need more focus on what is actually important: not ownership or influence or minutiae (although these all have their place), but the very pressing issue of how shall we live. Arjuna had to decide whether or not to participate in a civil war; Emerson likewise had to decide between war and slavery and made a resounding decision. The fact that this decision echoes that of the *Gita* may or may not be happenstance, but it is an important resonance, because we too have decisions to make in face of wars hoisted upon us..

Emerson and the Gita



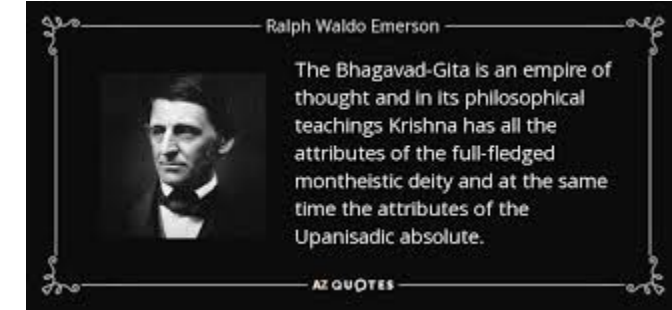
- The Song of God fits Emerson’s call to evolve ones personal dharma. The genius of the personal dharma in many ways prefigures Sartre and the existentialists, essence or not you havoc make your own existence be your own Krishna and not allow the authority of Krishna to be usurped by Churches or *sampradyas*, as the case may be.
- A significant question in this regard may be, “Will the cult of the self overturn society and plummet all into chaos?” This was a charge often hurled against the “heretical” Emerson, and it brings us to what may be the crux of the issue in contemporary interpretations of the *Gita*, “Who is Krishna?”

Emerson and the Gita

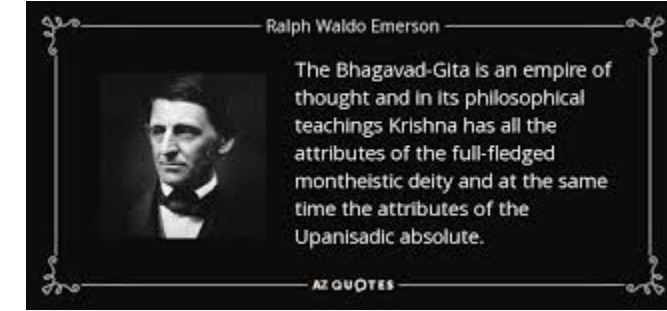
Who is Krishna

Arjuna sees Krishna as a friendly prince before he sees him as the supreme personal God. Throughout the Epic different people see Krishna quite differently, and if one is sensitive to issues of redaction: Is Krishna the one divinity in a specific human form, an aboriginal tribal hero exalted in later eras by Vaishnava editors, an avatar of Vishnu, or a historically significant warrior/prince?

Can one ever consider the Krishna of the *Bhagavadgita* apart from Arjuna? They are seen, after all, as the *nara-narayana*, human and divine perpetually linked together. Along with its convenient size, ecumenical outlook, and monumental scenarios, one often overlooked aspect of the *Gita's* promulgation in both contemporary India and America may be the transition into what could be labeled the "Age of Arjuna," containing the democratic ethos that extols the single man.



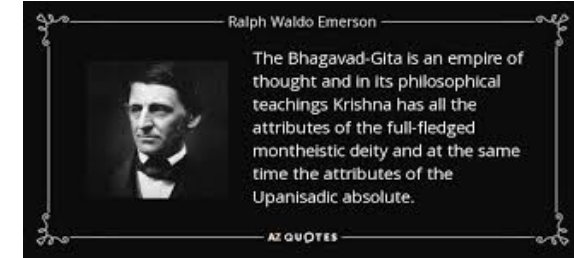
Emerson and the Gita



Among the six hundred and forty million soldiers said to participate in the battle of Kurukshetra, only one has the conscience and the courage to balk at the coming fratricidal slaughter. True, Arjuna's eldest brother, Karna, is offered an opportunity to stop the battle, and like Arjuna he might have some inkling of who Krishna is, but his own circumstances demand the war, as do Bhishma's, whose following of the letter of the law arguably caused the war in the first place.

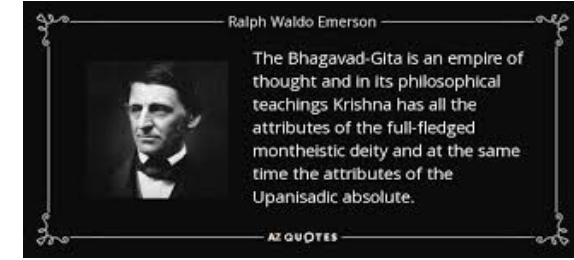
The focus on the individual as the moral arbiter of action and center of attention may be part of the "protestantization" of the *Gita*. Like Emerson, Aurobindo eschews the temporal *Gita* for a universal one. The fourfold *varnashrama* system, for example, is seen as "a rightly ordered expression of the nature of the individual being through whom, work is done.²¹ The outer Krishna becomes the inner voice.

Emerson and the Gita



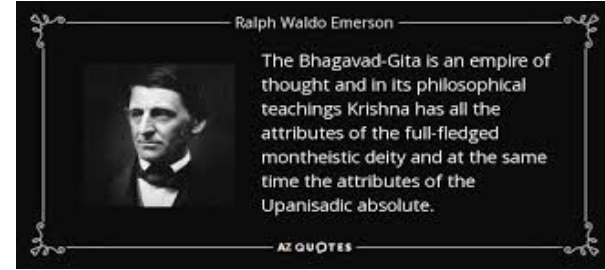
- T.S. Eliot, another significant Western reader of the Gita, mentions Krishna by name in *Little Gidding*, saying, “I think this is what Krishna meant.” Eliot’s move, casting the voice of Krishna in a poetic meditation on time and eternity that is largely informed by his Christian perspective, represents a different contemporary strategy.
- It casts the *Gita*’s voice, Krishna’s voice, as part of a universal wisdom that is congruent with the message of the Western savior. Arjuna wins the day. The focus of the world moves toward the individual and to the problem of aligning the individual with a higher will, with an absolute knowledge, in face of the loss of absolute systems of knowledge, of trust, and authority. Interpretive authority moves from the Brahmin priests, who in a sense abdicate their power by surrendering to the solitary man, the new Arjuna, before getting swept up again by nationalist tides, beginning with Auribondo, who in a sense puts these two sensibilities together, and on to Hindutva and the rest.

Emerson and the Gita



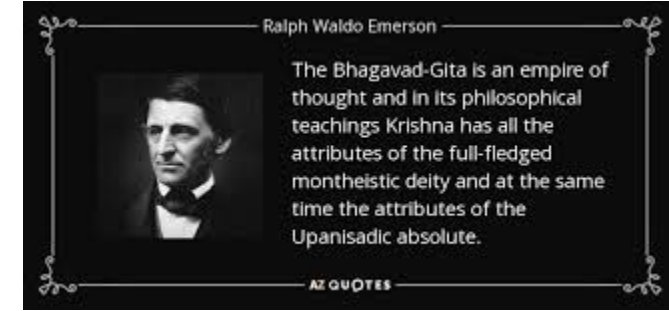
- The “ultimate” verse of the Gita, its final *upadesha*, *sarva dharman partiyjya mam ekam saranam vraja*, “abandoning all varieties of dharma surrender to me alone,” is clear and transparent in its giving final authority to the supreme being. Shankara, however, read this somewhat differently, and so did Emerson, Aurobindo, Gandhi, and even Kerouac, who went on a search as a Dharma Bum, for a missing father he would never find. One might ask, “How does Krishna reveal himself in a new different time and a different place?”

Emerson and the Gita



- The centrality of Krishna is not ubiquitous in Indian, even in classical Indian readings of the Gita, particularly the Vedantic reading that arguably carried the day and that is more aligned with contemporary universal notions of a perennial philosophy. Because of the Shankaras, (and the later Shivanandas and Maharishis), Emerson and those who followed him; theosophists and neo-Hindus, can let the person Krishna slide, much to the frustration and chagrin of both Krishna fundamentalists and Hindu fundamentalists.
- This overturns the paternal authority of dharma, a self that is a law unto itself and that seems to have much more in common with the *Gita's* sixteenth chapter's description of the asuric (demonic) nature than with any spiritual paradigm.
- However, it also gives rise to the Oversoul, a meta- historical self that confronts the assumed authority of linear history which is ultimately but the most plausible consensus narrative of those who hold cultural power.
- The move from time bound subject to the Oversoul slices through and exposes the narrative of time and progress for what it is; a narrative as opposed to an episteme, and this is significant. The fulcrum moving toward Arjuna is so strong however, that it becomes less and less conceivable, as it was to Emerson, that Krishna can be more than a particularized version of the Oversoul, one whose voice cannot contradict the voice of conscience which is his true voicing.

Emerson and the Gita



The Tradition of Conscience

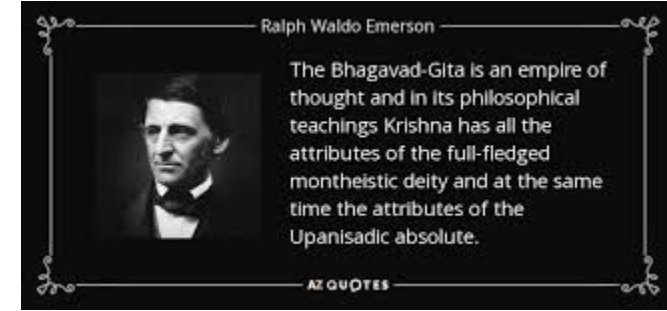
- Emerson did to some degree step out of the ethnocentric perspectives of his era and used the *Gita* to validate and spark his imagination. The *Gita* became one way out from under the thumb of the father, the church, the Boston Brahmins, but the last thing Emerson needed was a new father, a new church, and new Brahmins, hence his refusal to join the utopian Brooke Farm community.
- The *Gita* contributed toward Emerson's meta-historical ideal, as did Plato, Shakespeare, Goethe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Mme De Steal, and his contemporaries Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Whitman, Alcott, and others. Ultimately, Emerson's taking what suits him from the *Gita* is not much different than Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, or the Maharishi for that matter, showcasing the *Gita* to suit their theological agendas. The Bloomian argument that only the strong readings survive is suspect, simply because what is considered strong in one community might not be in another or in another period. Along with the "age of Arjuna," the key figure in this drama is Krishna of course. And how ironic that Krishna is an embarrassment to contemporary sensibility which is why the Bhaktivedanta fundamentalist reading of "The BhagavadGita as it is" remains highly marginalized. Krishna was an embarrassment to Emerson and his ilk, who preferred the vagaries of an open aired divinity to another personal God who would crack the whip. Any yet, Krishna remains as the puzzling narrator of the Gita, as well as its protagonist. Whether envisioned as an incarnation of Vishnu or valorized as the seed of love in everyone's heart (theosophy) or placed on a pantheon along with Christ, Buddha, and Sri Yukteswar (Self Realization Fellowship), it is not easy to write out the main character of the play.

9/30/2020

Is Mysticism Where Science, Art and
Religion Intersect? Lecture Three

30

Emerson and the Gita



Would Krishna, like Jesus, have left the visible world so conclusively if he knew what his followers would make of him?

Emerson opens a banquet of the past spreads the table widens the aperture of a common human inheritance.

Could anyone have imagined that the Gita would ultimately be integrated into the American experience through yoga soy chai lattes?

With Emerson, one might fall off of a cliff – Nietzsche did, carrying his copy of Emerson with him

With Krishna it is easy to become a subservient server of authority. Both paths have their pitfalls and both have their attainments. The dharma is lived. This is Yoga. And in Emerson's case yoga can only be the exercise of freedom, and Krishna can only appear as one's conscience