

Sri Bhagavad-Gita
The Honey-Elixir for Humanity



01: Arjuna Vishāda Yoga
Arjuna's Despondency as the Turning-point

(Learning Through Conversation)

Prior reading of earlier chapter is recommended

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01: Arjuna Vishāda Yoga Arjuna's Despondency as the Turning-point



§ Chapter 01

After reciting the prayer with Aiya, I was visualizing in my mind as Aiya continued to narrate.

“You now see the palace of Hastinapur. There is the blind King Dhritarashtra seated; next to him is Sanjaya. The sudden surge of anxiety in King Dhritarashtra is evident as he has summoned Sanjaya to narrate what is going on at the distant battlefield, the Kurukshetra. Till now, the King was not overly interested to hear the updates from the battlefield, because, on one side, he was dreading on the possibility of tragic-news about his own children and on the other side, he had a strong view that as long as mighty Bhishma is alive, nothing would happen to his children. But Bhishma is now fallen and the news has reached the King. It is the tenth-day of the war and the King is very worried about his children and fearing, he asks Sanjaya to narrate all that has happened so far, starting from the first day of the war, and continue to what happens from now on.”

Aiya continued.

“Perhaps already knowing the potential of this situation, earlier Sage Vyasa has granted a special power to Sanjaya, a pious charioteer of the King, for able to witness distant events at the battlefield and also narrate with a full understanding of the state of mind of those in the battlefield. Now we are going to witness what Sanjaya is narrating to the King and through his narration we also see what has happened and what is going on at the battlefield.”

With that introduction, we immersed in the grand vision.

We saw the palace of Hastinapur and the worried looks of King Dhritarashtra. Sanjaya standing next to him, was staring into the distant sky, where the scenes of Kurukshetra, the battlefield appeared.

§ The Battlefield



We witnessed King Dhritarashtra asking Sanjaya.

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca .

dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata sañjaya (1.1)

sañjaya uvāca .

dr̥ṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṃ vyūḍhaṃ duryodhanastadā
ācāryamupasaṅgamyā rājā vacanamabravīt (1.2)

paśyaitāṃ pāṇḍuputrāṇāmācārya mahatīṃ camūm
vyūḍhāṃ drupadaputreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā (1.3)

“Asked Dhritarashtra: In the field of righteousness called Kurukshetra, O Sanjaya, what are my sons and Pandavas, assembled and excited to fight, doing? (1.1);

Spoke thus Sanjaya: Upon seeing the many battle formations of the Pandava’s army, King Duryodhana approached his teacher and uttered these words (1.2);

O great teacher, look at the military might of the army of Pandu's sons, marshalled by your intelligent disciple and son of Drupada. (1.3)."

Aiya told me.

"Look, Duryodhana is so envious and vengeful that his guru Drona has a long held affinity towards Pandava, now swayed by the rage, Duryodhana began to speak sarcastically to tease and hurt him, even though his guru is prepared to fight on his behalf".

We saw Duryodhana pointing to the rest of Pandava's army, lamenting out of fear.

atra śūrā maheṣvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi .
yuyudhāno virāṭaśca drupadaśca mahārathaḥ (1.4)

dhr̥ṣṭaketuścekitaṇaḥ kāśirājaśca vīryavān .
purujitkuntibhojaśca śaibyaśca narapuṅgavaḥ (1.5)

yudhāmanyuśca vikrānta uttamaujāśca vīryavān .
saubhadro draupadeyāśca sarva eva mahārathāḥ (1.6)

"Here in this army are great heroes and archers, as good as Arjuna and Bhima in fighting, like Yuyudhna, Virata and also the great charioteer, Drupada (1.4).

And there are valiant fighters like Dhristaketu, Chekitanu, King of Kasi, the powerful Purujit, Kuntibhoja and Saibya, the praise-worthy among men (1.5).

There are also the valorous Yudhamanyu, mighty Uttamauja, Abhimanyu the son of Subhadra and the sons of Draupadi who are all great charioteers (1.6)."

Perhaps realizing that the support of Drona is important, Duryodhana is trying to make it up by praising Drona and also his own army.

asmākaṃ tu viśiṣṭā ye tānnibodha dvijottama .
nāyakā mama sainyasya saṃjñārthaṃ tānbravīmi te (1.7)

bhāvānbhīṣmaśca karṇaśca kṛpaśca samitiñjayaḥ .
aśvatthāmā vikarṇaśca saumadattistathaiva ca (1.8)

anye ca bahavaḥ sūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ .
nānāśāstrapraharaṇāḥ sarve yuddhaviśārādāḥ (1.9)

aparyāptaṁ tadasmākaṁ balaṁ bhīṣmābhirakṣitam .
paryāptaṁ tvidameteṣāṁ balaṁ bhīmābhirakṣitam (1.10)

“But know, O the best of twice born, those the most distinguished amongst us in our army, such as (1.7);

You, Bhishma, Karna, ever victorious Kripa, Aswaththama, Vikarna and Somadatta’s son, who are the best combination for victory in any war, are there (1.8);

And innumerable other heroes too, willing to give-up their lives for my sake, armed with variety of weapons and missiles, mastered in the art of warfare (1.9).

Unlimited is our strength, well protected by our grandfather Bhishma, while insufficient is the size of the Pandavas’ army, although it is well protected by Bhima. (1.10)”

Aiya said “Notice how already defeated in mind Duryodhana is! In spite of having a larger army, he is afraid of Pandava being led by Bhima. Even with the protection of his army by mighty Bhishma, Duryodhana is fearful.”

“Aiya, Is Duryodhana a coward?”, I asked.

“Well, there is a great insight in this. No matter how rich and strong you are, if you are not in the path of righteousness, then you will not have the moral courage to face the challenges of life. The peace and self-confidence will erode when one is aware of one’s deviation from righteousness. Duryodhana many a times before had declared that he knew the difference between the right and the wrong but simply could not adhere to righteousness. Now we can see his fear as he has no moral courage. That is why we must always earn and preserve the internal peace and the moral courage; that is possible only when we follow the path of dharma.”

“Aiya, Why did Duryodhana call Drona as the best among the twice-born?”

“Well, the literal meaning of the word ‘*Dvija*’ is ‘twice-born’. In those days, the

followers of Sanātana Dharma considered that every human-child when born is a ‘*shudrā*’, until he or she takes a divine vow to follow certain life-style and the appropriate dharma. These are broadly grouped into ‘*Brāhmin*’ for those who dedicate their entire life for studying and propagating the scriptural code and moral value for the benefit of all and thereby leading a simple life, or ‘*Kshatiryā*’ who are prepared to die for the protection of others and therefore commit to the roles of administration and safeguarding of others, or ‘*Vyasyā*’ who commit to take-up activities for creating and transacting wealth for the welfare of all. Everyone who takes up such a divine vow through prescribed ceremony thus becomes the twice-born. Those who do not take up such specific role remain as ‘*Shudrā*’ by default assuming the role of helping all others. That is why Duryodhana calls Drona as the best among the twice-born. We will discuss this and the unfortunate abuse of such social order as we get a chance to hear from the Lord later.”

We watched as Duryodhana was speaking towards his army.

ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgamavasthitāḥ
bhīṣmamevābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi (1.11)

“All of you go and take up your assigned respective strategic places and protect Bhishma (1.11)”

Perhaps sensing the anxiety in Duryodhana, Bhishma began to sound his conch as Sanjaya explained.

tasya sañjanayanharṣaṃ kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ .
siṃhanādaṃ vinadyoccaiḥ śaṅkhaṃ dadhmau pratāpavān (1.12)

tataḥ śaṅkhāśca bheryaśca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ .
sahasaivābhyahanyanta sa śabdastumulo’bhavat (1.13)

“Then valiant Bhishma, the oldest among the Kurus and the great grandfather, blew his conch, roaring aloud like a lion, giving a boost (to Duryodhana) (1.12).

Then all at once, conches, kettle drums, cymbals, drums and horns were all blown suddenly resulting in a tumultuous noise (1.13).”

Sanjaya turned to the side of Pandava and narrated what he saw.

tataḥ śvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau .
mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaścaiva divyau śaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ (I.14)

pāñcājanyaṃ hr̥ṣīkeśo devadattaṃ dhanañjayaḥ .
pauṇḍraṃ dadhmau mahāśaṅkhaṃ bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ (I.15)

anantavijayaṃ rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ .
nakulaḥ sahadēvaśca sughoṣamaṇipuṣpakau (I.16)

kāśyaśca parameśvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī ca mahārathaḥ .
dhr̥ṣṭadyumno virāṭaśca sātyakiścāparājitaḥ (I.17)

“Then Madhava and the Son of Pandu (Arjuna) seated in a great chariot, drawn by white horses, blew their divine conches namely (I.14);

‘Panchajanyam’ by Hrisikesa, ‘Devadatta’ by Arjuna, ‘Paundram’ by Bhima, the voracious eater yet with lean stomach and performer of mighty deeds (I.15);

‘Anantavijayam’ by the King and Kunti’s son, Yudhishtira, ‘Sughosha’ by Nakula and ‘Manipushpaka’ by Sahadeva (I.16);

The holder of mighty bow, King of Kasi, the supreme archer, Sikhandi, the great charioteer, Dhristadyumna, Virata and the invincible Satyaki, blew their respective conches (I.17).”

Aiya touched my shoulder and said.

“Did you hear, Sanjaya used the term ‘Hrisikesa’ for Krishna. The term ‘Hrishikesa’ means one who controls the sense-organs. This war is the result of many senseless acts. Sanjaya who has the capacity to read the minds, knows that soon, Arjuna will be deluded, and attempt to take senseless action. Only the Lord, the controller of all senses could cure the delusion.”

We continued to watch.

Sanjaya has turned to Dhritarashtra and said.

drupado draupadeyāśca sarvaśaḥ pṛthivīpate .
saubhadraśca mahābāhuḥ śaṅkhāndadhmuḥ pṛthakpṛthak (I.18)

sa ghoṣho dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām hṛidayāni vyadārayat
nabhaśhcha pṛithivīm chaiva tumulo nunādayan (1.19)

atha vyavasthitāndrṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajaḥ
pravṛtte śastrasampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavaḥ (1.20)
hṛṣīkeśaṃ tadā vākyamidamāha mahīpate

“O Lord of the Earth! Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, Subhadra’s son and the mighty armed Abhimanyu also blew their conches (1.18).

That tumultuous noise shattered the hearts of the Dhritarashtra’s sons, making both sky and the earth resound (1.19).

There upon, watching the sons of Dhritarashtra thus arrayed, Arjuna is preparing himself for the battle, becoming ready to take the bow into his hands (1.20).”

I was intensely looking at Arjuna who, with the raised bow in his hand, was standing on the chariot that hoisted the flag bearing the symbol of Lord Hanuman.

Sanjaya addressed Dhritarashtra.

arjuna uvāca .
senayorubhayormadhye rathaṃ sthāpaya me’cyuta (1.21)

yāvadetānnirīkṣe’haṃ yoddhukāmānavasthitān .
kairmayā saha yoddhavyamasmin raṇasamudyame (1.22)

yotsyamānānavekṣe’haṃ ya ete’tra samāgatāḥ .
dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddheryuddhe priyacikīrṣavaḥ (1.23)

“O Lord of the world, Arjuna said these words to Hrisikesa, O Achuta, the infallible One, in between these two armies, please take my chariot and park such that I can have a clear view (1.21).

I want to see them all who are now here standing with the desire to fight and

with whom I have to fight in the battle that is imminent (I.22).

Let me also see all those who have assembled here to fight, wishing the welfare of the evil minded son of Dhritarashtra (I.23)”

Sanjaya turned to Dhritarashtra and said

sañjaya uvāca .

evamukto hr̥ṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata .
senayorubhayormadhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam (I.24)

bhīṣmadroṇapramukhataḥ sarveṣāṃ ca mahīkṣitām .
uvāca pārtha paśyaitānsamavetānkurūniti (I.25)

tatrāpaśyatsthitānpārthaḥ pitṛnatha pitāmahān .
ācāryānmātulānbhrātṛnputrānpautrānsakhīṃstathā (I.26)

śvaśūrānsuhṛdaścaiva senayorubhayorapi .
tānsamīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvānbandhūnavasthitān (I.27)

“O, Bharata, Addressed thus by Arjuna, Krishna stationed their excellent chariot between the two armies, positioned (I.24);

In front of Bhishma, Drona and all the great warriors of the world, so that Arjuna could see all the Kauravas (I.25).

There, standing between the two armies Arjuna saw his elders, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends and also (I.26),

Fathers-in-law and well-wishers across both sides of the armies. After seeing the kith and kin assembled there, Arjuna, (I.27),

was overwhelmed with compassion and said the following words with great sorrow.”

“Aiya, I pity Arjuna, it is indeed a terrible situation - to confront your own people”, I said.

“Yes, notice how earlier Arjuna has commanded his charioteer Krishna to take

a position for him to see the evil enemies and now, see what he is saying! To test Arjuna's resolve, how purposefully the Lord has stopped the chariot, just in front of those, against whom Arjuna has to prove his strength of character and the resolve!"

"What will happen now Aiya?"

"You asked me earlier how to identify the effects of *samsārā*. Here is the witness that is going to be on display in three parts. So watch carefully."

With closed eyes, I was listening to Aiya.

"The first trigger of *samsārā* is '*rāga*', the emotional attachment to others and the passion towards the objects of desire."

I interrupted "You mean the love we show to others?"

"No, there is a difference. *Rāga* or attachment is driven only by selfish-desires. It is all about seeking some personal gains; on the other hand, true love is all about the welfare to the person or object of love. Remember, love is always about giving unconditionally; But attachment is always about taking; it is conditional. That is why attachment always weakens us and deludes our intellect. With love, we become strong."

"Aiya, why suddenly Arjuna is falling in to the trap of attachment?"

"Attachment is kindled at various contexts. One is proximity. When the object of desire is near, the intensity of your attachment on the object will increase. Arjuna is now seeing many in the opposite side of the battlefield with whom he has deep emotional attachment. This is causing havoc to his otherwise clear mind and intellect. Without the right knowledge and clear intellect, taking the right resolve is not possible."

§ Arjuna's Delusion

We continued to watch.

kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo viṣḍannidamabravīt .
arjuna uvāca .

dr̥ṣṭvemaṃ svajanaṃ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam (1.28)

sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṃ ca pariśuṣyati .
vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jāyate (1.29)

gāṇḍivam sraṃsate hastāttvakcaiva paridahyate .
na ca śaknomyavasthātuṃ bhramatīva ca me manaḥ (1.30)

nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava .
na ca śreyo'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanamāhave (1.31)

“Said Arjuna, Seeing all these kinsfolk, O Krishna, assembled here in such a fighting spirit, (1.28);

All the limbs of my body are quivering and my mouth is becoming parched. My whole body is shivering, the hairs standing on their tip (1.29);

Gandivam, my bow, is sliding from my hand, and my skin is burning all over, nor I am able to stand properly as my mind is reeling (1.30);

I foresee extreme consequences, O Kesava. I am unable to see any positive good by killing my kinsfolk in this fight (1.31).”

Aiya said, “Now you see the second part of samsārā: ‘*shokā*’ or ‘grief’. It is the result of rāga. If there is attachment, there is bound to be grief. Can’t you see the dread and despair of Arjuna, reflected through his words? He is indeed afflicted by deep shokā ”.

“Aiya, is attachment the only cause of grief?”

“Indeed! Shokā is the mental agony resulting from rāga. When there is emotional attachment on an object, then there is anxiety and grief until it is acquired.

But when the object of desire is possessed, there is fear of losing and when lost, there is immense sadness. Since all objects are impermanent in nature, grief is therefore guaranteed as the result of attachment, so be aware, every attachment is a potential sorrow.”

“Aiya, how can we not have some level of emotional attachment to things that we love?”

“Well, do love but don’t be emotionally attached. I understand the inevitability of some level of emotional attachments in life. But be prepared for the potential grief that such attachments would lead to. Preparation means doing what is necessary even before the grief sets in.”

“Aiya, we don’t plan for grieving”- I said with some wonder.

“That is the problem! As we have attachments, we should also provision for potential grief from those attachments. Preparation to handle when grief strikes is important and such a preparation is possible only while we are joyful or at least free from distress.”

“I understand. But can we not look for the ways only after the grief strikes? That way we don’t need to unduly spoil the time of rejoice”

“No. Once you are affected by shokā, the third trigger of samsārā kicks in. It is called *mohā* or delusion. When the mind is laden with grief and despair, it’s intellectual faculty will also become clouded, soon losing the capacity to comprehend the situations correctly or take right decisions. So instead of escaping the grief, one will go deeper into more emotional attachments, dwell in self-pity and the lose of heart by taking only wrong decisions. So preparations is the key! One cannot be planning about digging a well when one’s house is already ablaze!”

Aiya stressed. “Listen to Arjuna who is afflicted by all these three triggers of samsārā.”

na kāṅkṣe vijayaṃ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṃ sukhāni ca .
kiṃ no rājyena govinda kiṃ bhogairjīvitena vā (I.32)

yeṣāmarthe kāṅkṣitaṃ no rājyaṃ bhogāḥ sukhāni ca .
ta ime’vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṃstyaktvā dhanāni ca (I.33)

ācāryāḥ pitarāḥ putrāstathaiva ca pitāmahāḥ .
mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pautrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinastathā (I.34)

etānna hantumicchāmi ghnato'pi madhusūdana .
api trailokyarājyasya hetoḥ kiṃ nu mahīkrte (I.35)

“I do not desire victory O Krishna, nor kingdom, nor enjoyment, of what use to us, O Govinda, the kingdom or the enjoyments or even the life (I.32)?

For whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyment and all the comforts, they are all here standing in the battle field, having decided to give up their lives and riches (I.33);

Teachers, elders, sons, and also grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and kinsmen, (I.34);

O Madhusudhana, even though they may wish to kill me, I do not like to kill them, not even for the sake of the three worlds; then what to speak of (doing it for) the earth (I.35)! ”

“Did you notice, Arjuna is calling Krishna with the name ‘Madhusudhana’! Krishna has earlier killed the demon Madhu and therefore known as ‘Madhusudhana’, the ‘Killer of demon Madhu’. Arjuna wants to indicate that he is not faced with such a simpler choice of fighting and killing a demon. He has to fight and kill his own kith and kin. By calling Krishna as such, Arjuna is telling that his ordeal is far greater and different than that of Krishna.”

“Aiya, what is wrong with Arjuna’s statement? To kill someone, that too your own friends and family is a gruesome act. Instead of that, why can’t he give-up and walk away? After all, nonviolence or *ahimsā* is the important moral compass in Vedas, is it not?”

“This is how a person with deluded intellect would create advocacy for escaping from the righteousness. Arjuna is now emotionally blackmailing himself that the attachment is supreme to what is right. Listen to him more to see his delusion.”

Aiya continued. “By the way, we must understand that in Sanātana Dharma, ‘ahimsā’ is not unconditional but only an obligation at times, and at some

context. It is a dharma to be adhered in certain conditions. For example, a doctor amputating the organ to save a life or a soldier killing the enemy to protect the land or a butcher taking a life to feed others may not be seen as following 'ahimsā', yet their act is not considered as violence as their motives are not evil. Similarly, although any war is a tragedy, the acts of those who are rightfully engaged in a war are not seen as violating the dharma“

We witnessed the narration by Sanjaya on what Arjuna was telling Krishna.

nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrānnaḥ kā prītiḥ syājjanārdana .
pāpamevāśrayedasmānhatvaitānātāyinaḥ (1.36)

tasmānnārhā vyaṃ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrānsrabāndhavān .
svajanaṃ hi kathaṃ hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādharma (1.37)

“By killing the sons of Dhritarashtra, what pleasure we will get. O Janardhana? Sin alone will befall us if we kill these aggressors (1.36);

Therefore it does not befit us to kill the sons of Dhritarashtra and all our relations. Certainly O Madhava, how can we be happy by killing our own people (1.37)!”

Aiya said, “Watch, now Arjuna is talking in first-person plural. He wants Krishna to have the empathy. This is how deluded mind will bring advocacy.”

I was keenly observing what Arjuna was saying.

yadyapyete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasāḥ .
kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ mitradrohe ca pātakam (1.38)

kathaṃ na jñeyamasmābhiḥ pāpādasmanivartitum .
kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ prapaśyadbhirjanārdana (1.39)

kulakṣaye praṇaśyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanaḥ .
dharme naṣṭe kulaṃ kṛtsnamadharmo’bhibhavatyuta (1.40)

“Even though they do not perceive, with minds lost to greed, the fallibility of destroying their own family and the disloyalty to their own friends (1.38);

But why should we, who know the sin of destroying the family, for the sake of

avoiding the sin, O Janardhana, turn away from this sin? (I.39);

With the destruction of the family, the order of the family (graha-dharmā) and the society (loka-dharmā) are lost. The whole family transforms itself into disarray and immoral conduct (adharmā) (I.40).”

I noticed that Arjuna started to talk about the potential calamities for the family and therefore eventually for the whole society.

adharmābhibhavātkṛṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyaḥ .
strīṣu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṅkaraḥ (I.41)

saṅkaro narakāyaiva kulaghnānāṃ kulasya ca .
patanti pitaro hyeṣāṃ luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ (I.42)

doṣairetaiḥ kulaghnānāṃ varṇasaṅkarakārakaiḥ .
utsādyante jātidharmāḥ kuladharmāśca śāsvatāḥ (I.43)

utsannakuladharmāṇāṃ manuṣyāṇāṃ janārdana .
narake niyataṃ vāso bhavatītyanuśūruma (I.44)

aho bata mahatpāpaṃ kartuṃ vyavasitā vayam .
yadrājyasukhalobhena hantuṃ svajanamudyatāḥ (I.45)

yadi māmāpratīkāramaśāstraṃ śāstrapāṇayah .
dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyustanme kṣemataraṃ bhavet (I.46)

“With the emergence of adharmā, O Krishna, women become impure. And when women fall into immoral ways of conduct, O descendent of Vrisni, admixture of castes takes place (I.41);

The violation of social fabrics leads to the destruction of family-values and also lead the family to hell. (As a result) The ancestors (in the heaven) also fall, as they do not receive the ritualistic offerings of food and water due to them. (I.42);

As a consequence from the misdeeds of these destroyers of family and order of the castes, the order (dharma) of the community and of the family are permanently destroyed (I.43);

O Janardhana, I have heard from others that those men whose destroy their

family order (dharma) would always dwell in hell (1.44);

Oh, how strange it is that we have got into this act of committing such a great sin, out of greed for enjoying royal pleasures, by trying to kill our own people (1.45)!

It is much better if the sons of Dhritarashtra, armed with weapons, kill me when I am unarmed and not in a mood to fight and take revenge (1.46)!”

Aiya said “Now you can see Arjuna is bringing all sort of arguments to justify his position. When we are grieving deeply, our intellect is deluded and certainly our sense of judgement will fail. The mind is also not conducive to take advice; instead the deluded intellect will only seek to escape. It will look for excuses and advocacy and support from others. Here Arjuna is bringing all sorts of rationale, for example, quoting on the plight of young wives and children who might be orphaned as the result of war and as a result, the risk of them following evil ways for their livelihood, thereby the morality of the society as a whole would tarnish etc. Thus pleading to Krishna, Arjuna is trying to convince himself and gain Krishna’s approval that the evils of war should now be totally accepted and the fighting to be avoided at all costs.”

“Aiya, would that not a great sacrifice by Arjuna and the war would have been averted?”

“The opportunities for taking such decisions have all long gone. This is no more a fight of Arjuna as a person. He is given a role to play to fight for the righteousness, and therefore it is not the personal whims of Arjuna that matter, but the performance of his role. Keep focus on our learning objective: how do we untangle from the emotional attachments and delusion risks, while performing what we rightfully own as our role.”

sañjaya uvāca .

*evamuktvārjunaḥ sañkhye rathopastha upāviśat .
viṣṭya saśaram cāpaṃ śokasaṃvignamānasaḥ (1.47)*

Said Sanjaya, “Saying thus amidst the battle field, Arjuna sat down in his chariot, distressed mentally by sorrow and dropping aside his bow and arrows (1.47)”

Aiya paused for a while and said, “What we have witnessed is the despondency of Arjuna, giving us the context to consider our own affairs of life, the very ordeals that we face to become the turning point for our progress. This we should contemplate before going further.”

I was waiting for Aiya to continue.

§ Turning Point

Aiya said.

“Can’t you see yourself in the context of Arjuna? How often are you confused in your decision making, weighed down by the burdens of grief and the underlying cause of emotional attachments? Do you see any parallel?”

“Yes Aiya, The bloody battlefield may not be an actual encounter in my life, hopefully not. But the anxiety, grief, despair leading to a confused state of mind, not knowing what is right and what is wrong, what decision to take etc. are quite common in all our lives. Is this the grip of *samsārā*?”

“Yes, this human problem is *samsārā* and reminding of this human problem is the purpose of the 1st chapter of Bhagavad-Gita. The bloody battlefield may not come in the same form in our lives but there are situations alike, requiring preparedness to be immune from the clutches of *samsārā*.”

“What do we do in such situations?”

“Do exactly what Arjuna is going to do! Surrender! Realize when your own capabilities are not going to help, seek the guidance of the able master, as the Guru and surrender to him.”

“But Arjuna did not ask the Lord for advice?”

“Yes, so far he is the one talking, exposing his deluded mind. Ironically, the confused mind and deluded intellect of Arjuna will steer Arjuna to seek the Guru. That is why the scholars have also named this first chapter of Sri Bhagavad-Gita as *Arjuna Vishāda Yoga*”

“I meant to ask you Aiya, what does it mean?”

“*Vishāda* means grief, *shokā* - the state of being physically and emotionally weak - sort of despondency. Here the word ‘*yoga*’ refers to the path, knowledge or the exercise. Therefore by *Vishāda Yoga*, the potential of converting our state of despair and grief to a path of progress.”

“Aiya, then don’t you think the title ‘Vishāda Yoga’ would be more generic and

appropriate, instead of specifically calling Arjuna Vishāda Yoga”, I asked.

“Good question! Samsārā grips all human-beings and therefore shokā is the default consequence for everyone. We have seen shokā comes from attachment, rāga and thus leads to many evils, particularly the delusion of mind, mohā. The inevitability of mohā is therefore given, when there is shokā. But if we can somehow avoid getting into mohā, by turning towards an escape from the root cause samsārā, that would be a great turning point. The path to perfection is called the ‘yoga’. The import of the title is that we all should use every situation in our lives as a turning point towards perfection and every experience as a learning curve.”

“Why then it is not called just Vishāda Yoga? But with the name Arjuna Vishāda Yoga?”

“Good question indeed. This turning point occurs internally within each of us based on our character and spiritual maturity. We are fortunate to have Arjuna in a deluded situation, showing the potency of converting his grief into a path of liberation. Arjuna’s grief when taken as the topic of contemplation, we understand the underlying grief, shokā and the cause, attachment - rāga. We are able to understand that converting the shokā to yoga is progress but dwelling in mohā is further entrapment into samsārā. If not Arjuna, who else offer the perfect context for the turning-point?”

Aiya paused for a while and said.

“Look, as we focus in the Gita, we should be concerned with the five characters who speak. Of course, Lord Krishna when he speaks, his words become Sri Bhagavad-Gita, so we revere Krishna as our Guru. Then there is Sanjaya, who narrates the whole Gita, seeing everything, including the thoughts and motives of others, yet remaining at a distance and unattached, So Sanjaya is like our consciousness and therefore to be listened to. That leave only other three who are all dwelling deep in samsārā.”

“Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and Arjuna, right?”, I asked.

“Yes. Do you see a parallel of you with the King Dhritarashtra?”

“No Aiya”, I said quickly as if I wanted to avoid any association with him.

“We need to understand the context of Dhritarashtra. After all, there must be a purpose why his name is mentioned in Sri Bhagavad-Gita, that too as the very first shloka”

“What Aiya?”

“King Dhritarashtra was physically blind. Unfortunately his wife Kantari, having overcome by ignorance and self-pity, had taken the vow to remain blind-folded too; thus instead of being a guide and a moral compass to her husband, Kantari’s delusion has rendered her life to be a blind leading the blind. Dhritarashtra’s fall into the deep pit of samsārā comes from his blind-attachment. Did you notice how he stressed the point ‘my children’ while asking Sanjayan. All along, his deep attachment to his own children and consequent actions as well as inactions out of delusion has eroded his sense of judgement. His morality and righteousness, although present in some form, had become so weak that he was forever falling in the wrong side of things.”

“Are you saying that the grief of Dhritarashtra is not offering a turning point to liberation?”

“When we are blinded by our emotions, we often let go our moral compasses just for the sake of those emotional attachments. When we thus give up righteousness, there is no sight of turning point from shokā to yoga.”

Aiya continued.

“We must see Dhritarashtra as the personification of the ill - ‘mamakāra’ - the emotional attachment as ‘my people, my object’ etc. Such weakness will turn one into a *tāmasic* person one who is introverted, depressed, fearful and shy of action, especially not doing the right-thing. So Dhritarashtra’s Vishāda cannot offer a lesson for us.”

“What about Duryodhana?”

“His was the other extreme of passion. His egoity (*‘madhā’*) and envy (*‘mācharya’*) boost and fuel his rage (*‘krodhā’*) - all adding and deepening his delusion, Predominantly, if Dhritarashtra is taken to represent the ill of ‘mamakāra’, then we can deem Duryodhana representing the ill of *‘ahamkāra’* - the vain ego. When there is such ego and delusion, one would even boast one’s ill qualities as inherent merits. Have you not seen some saying proudly ‘I am

short-tempered, I know everything etc. Delusion is so deep that they don't see a need for a turning-pint. Don't be fooled by other good qualities in such people. Duryodhana too had few good qualities. He was a good husband, a good friend and loyal to his own attachments. But what pushed him away from the righteousness was his ego. He was full of passionate actions, '*rājasic*' in character. When deluded, such actions will only push one further into the deep pits of samsārā. We will surely learn more about these tāmasic and rājasic qualities. For now, know that Duryodhana's grief does not offer a context for learning about the turning point to redeem from misery."

"Aiya, I submit that I have both mamkāra and ahamkāra like these too".

"We all have in some form or other! Don't worry, if we are able to recognise these follies, then naturally a need to move away from these will occur to us. Then we will surely seek to counter and balance these blemishes with goodness as it will prove to be the only way of cleansing ourselves. That's is why Arjuna is the only one who stands out. Others, even Yudhistrā who is knowledgeable and always remained as a follower of righteousness is not the one receiving the Gita directly from the Lord. It is because, no one other than Arjuna has reached the turning-point."

"Are you saying Aiya, the turning point is not possible even if you follow righteousness?"

"No, I am saying that the turning point is possible only when you recognize that you are trapped in grief and as the result of grief, you attain a particular state of mind that turns towards perfection. A change of heart needs the grace of God"

"So grief is a blessing...?"

"Yes, if you are able to understand the potentials that it offer."

"What is the state of mind that one should get to recognize the turning-point?"

"You will see, even Arjuna has not yet reached such a state of mind yet and that's why he feels defeated. Luckily, he has recognized that he is trapped in samsārā."

"Aiya, therefore recognition of Samsāra is the first step"

"Yes, The over arching Samsāra is found to be the issue to be sorted. The analy-

sis also showed that the problem is not a gross one to be solved by gross solution but subtle, as it is all about the mental approach to life; thus the requirement is for subtler techniques and knowledge which can only be gained from the Sad-guru, well versed in the scriptural knowledge. The sign of recovery is when one recognizes the need of help and the start of an intense search for the Guru”

“Aiya, Why then Arjuna did not ask directly to the Lord for the way out?”

“Well, it takes time. Arjuna so far has not approached Krishna as if Krishna is the Guru. To him, Krishna is a reverent friend and now the charioteer. Did you not notice that the Lord spoke nothing at all so far? Until Arjuna is ready to surrender to the Guru, Arjuna’s preparedness for learning the supreme truth is not done. Hopefully it happens soon”

“Yes Aiya, Krishna has not spoken so far”

“Yes, even in his silence, there is eloquence. Krishna is hearing the grief of Arjuna. In such contexts, the right thing to do is to give a sincere hearing. We need to learn such qualities. One should not give advice unless one is asked.”

I concurred in my mind.

“Aiya, I can’t wait to witness the transformation in Arjuna as a disciple and how the Lord imparts the words of wisdom”

“Yes, that is why Bhagavad-Gita is called the ‘*Moksha-Sāstrā*’ or the ‘guide to liberation’. The problem of Samsāra can never be solved by self-study of scriptures; it is only possible by total surrender to Guru. That is why Bhagavad-Gita must be studied under the Guru.”

“Are we going to find the teacher in the Lord, and the teaching in the Bhagavad-Gita?”

“Well, that is up to us. The foremost requirement is that we must recognize that we are trapped in samsārā. This recognition largely occurs when we are in a dire situation but it does not need to be so. Even when we are enjoying life, we must recognize the impermanence of such pleasures and grief that our attachments could lead to. Only when we realize that we are trapped in samsārā, we seek to be free.”

“When will such thirst for true liberation come to us? When will we see the Guru?”

Aiya looked at me intensely for a minute or so.

“Listen, the importance of the first chapter of Gita is exactly for triggering such a quest. Hereinafter, we have to take the words of Lord as the *Gita-Upadesam* as if it is imparted to each one of us. It is because the problem that Arjuna faces is common to all. But to see a Guru and to have the guidance requires certain ‘*yogyathā*’ or ‘qualifications’ like that of Arjuna. Before we start again tomorrow, please reflect on these requirements to become like Arjuna.”

“I don’t understand Aiya! *samsārā* is a human problem and the grief and delusion due to desires and emotional attachment apply to everyone. In that sense, I can easily see myself as Arjuna. I do have delusion like that of Arjuna.”

“Well, that is a good start. The most fundamental cause of *samsārā* is due to the delusion of ‘Self-identity’. We do not recognize who we really are. Each of us holds on to a personal identity, the ‘I’ and with emotional attachment to things that we consider our own – like ‘mine’. The errors in the self-identity known as ‘*ahamkāra*’ and the fallacy of ownership as ‘*mamakāra*’ are the common delusion that we all suffer. In that respect, yes, we are like Arjuna and deluded.”

I was listening.

“But there is another type of delusion which has elevated Arjuna to seek liberation. Do you realize that?”

“What is that Aiya?”

“Here the delusion of Arjuna is about the action that he has to do. He wants to be righteous in his action. That is very important. The desire to be virtuous and to do the right thing, combined with the delusion of not knowing what the right and righteous thing is in a way a blessing; such a delusion is a positive trigger to realize our helplessness and the necessity to seek noble guidance.”

“I understand Aiya. I too have such moral conflicts or ‘*dharma sangkatam*’ in discharging my duties sometimes. But never saw in such situations to seek a spiritual guru”

“Well, if you also have this type of delusion about choosing the righteous path, that is great. But then to convert such grief and delusion into a yoga or *sādhana* for greater knowledge, one needs certain important qualifications like that of Arjuna. Those qualifications are mandatory to receive supreme knowledge contained in the Vedas”

“What are these Aiya? What evidences are there that Arjuna had such qualities? Please explain”

“The foremost is called *Vivekā* – the discriminating intellect that one is able to apply to infer the nature of a thing – whether it is temporal or permanent. This requires learning as well as keen observation of all things around and also from life-experiences.”

“Are you talking about death?”

“I am talking about the temporal nature of things. All that we see and experience are not permanent. Everything that appears must disappear. What was not before, even though it is now, will not be in the future. Don't you see?”

“Of course Aiya! Such temporal nature is understood. But that is life and we only have to deal with what we have – temporal objects!”

“Sure, living necessarily involves transacting with temporal objects. But if temporal nature of things is forgotten while transacting, we invite undue grief and despair.”

“So what we should do Aiya?”

“*Vivekā* should lead to '*Vairāgyā*' or 'dispassion towards things that are temporal in nature'. Dispassion is not dislike or lack of interest in the things. It is the absence of emotional attachment.”

“Aiya, sometime we feel such *vairāgyā* when there is tragedy, such as when the loved ones depart the world. But then we recoup!”

“When we become unattached or dispassionate only because of such personal loss or some distress, then it is not *vairāgyā*, may be we can say '*vrakti*', a loss of interest on the thing. *vairāgyā* should be borne out of *vivekā* only.”

I was listening intently.

“Arjuna has a sharp discriminating intellect. He applies his *vivekā* and this shows how deeply he has analysed things. He also demonstrates *vairāgyā*. To him, the glories of being a King or all luxuries that come with it are impermanent. He is keen to give-up such pleasures, knowing their temporal nature. You can see many evidences for his *Vivekā* and *vairāgyā* in his appeal to Krishna. Although he is confused in what to do next, he has come to that delusion only after applying his *vivekā* and *vairāgyā*.”

After a momentary pause, Aiya Said, “You should always cultivate intellectual scrutiny of all things and life situations, and be dispassionate about things, even though you need to transact with those in carrying out your life’s duties.”

“Yes, Aiya, I realize that I have a long way to go to sharpen my intellect and upholding a dispassionate approach to things in life! Aiya, are these two the essential qualities to receive the supreme knowledge?”

“These two are fundamental. But when these are achieved, then it is possible to cultivate a set of six important character changes. These are to be intently monitored and nurtured”

“What are those Aiya?”

“See, even though you have *vivekā* to discriminate the true nature of things, it is not easy to develop *vairāgyā* especially when you are emotionally attached. But if you analyse, it is the ‘mind’ that fuels the desire and attachments. Therefore one should have ‘control of mind’ or ‘*kshamā*’ as it is known.”

“How done one control the mind Aiya?”

“Control is not stopping the mind from thinking. No one can do that. Here ‘control’ means ‘to regulate’ thoughts. The first *yoga-sutrā* of Sage Patanjali even defines yoga as the process of regulating thoughts: *yoga: citta vritti niroda*: Regulating thoughts is tuning the mind towards virtuous thoughts. This is possible with practice, firstly by nurturing good thoughts at all times; subjecting oneself in the company of virtuous and good people at all times is a great enabler. Yoga, *Japa* and such mental exercises also help to control the mind. One who controls the mind, remains forever as the observer of the mind. It is perpetual progress”.

“Aiya, I try to control my mind, for example, while doing meditation. But I am always distracted by everything around me. It is proving to be hard”

“Well, that is why to control the mind, you must first develop control over your senses. This second refinement is ‘*damā*’ or ‘sense control’. Sensory organs must, and are always expected to, do their job of bringing sensory-triggers and enticing the mind to engage in sensory objects. So, by ‘*damā*’, the muting of sensory organs is not inferred but the ability of the mind to filter or selectively ignore any or all such sensory pulses. So both *kshamā* and *damā* go hand in hand.”

“I understand Aiya. Such controls could be probably practiced at set times everyday, but as we have to earn a living and so engage in lots of actions, what happens then? “

“There is no conflict. In fact, with *kshamā* and *damā*, your control on the task on hand only improves. But, there is also a point in your question. One has to slowly but surely give up those actions that may dilute one’s spiritual purpose in life. Giving up such actions, even if that would mean giving up on some material comforts in life, is a great virtue. It is in fact, the third qualification, known as ‘*uparamā*’.”

“hmm... That would be a challenge. There is no issue with giving up tasks that are clearly evil but giving up tasks that we like, just because those do not promote our spiritual progress is tough”.

“Sure, granted. Krishna is going to tell us how to handle such tasks also. By a simple shift in our attitude, we can continue to do any necessary task – yet being spiritually focused.”

I was bit assured by those comforting words.

“What else we need Aiya, I remember you were saying six qualities”

“Yes, when you start developing these qualities, *kshamā*, *damā*, *uparamā* – you also have the need to show forbearance to all sorts of emotions – joy or grief. It is not that you should be insensitive to happiness or sadness, but you have to bear them and not be destroyed by those. A ‘balanced approach’ to all good and bad..... it is called ‘*titikshā*’. Having a composed posture, both internally and externally, irrespective of the situation is the mark of great spiritual progress. This is the fourth important quality.”

“And the fifth is?”

“The absolutely essential one to be a good student. It is called ‘*shraddā*’.”

“Shraddā means believing in what is said by the teacher, is it not?”

“No, belief is never a demand on the students but the commitment is. The term ‘shraddā’ refers to ‘the intensity of purpose’ and unwavering commitment to learning, especially when what is taught does not correspond to one’s own experience. When the teaching does not conform to your own experience or beliefs, if you do not have shraddā, you will give up the learning. If you have shraddā, you will accept what is taught is true but your capacity to understand the truth in the teaching is still incomplete. Therefore your focus to achieve the complete learning increases with shraddā”

“Aiya, what happens if Guru is teaching incorrect things? or if the Guru is fake? Such risk exists, is it not?”

“Possible! But shraddā is not used alone as it is always combined with vivekā. So in such unfortunate events, your search for an able teacher will continue. But there should be no loss to your shraddā.”

Aiya hastened to add.

“When you get these essential qualities of *Sishyā*, the moment you seek the Guru, you will find him, at once!”

I deposited those assuring words deep into my heart.

“What else I need to earn Aiya?”

“Well, if you are steadfast in these qualities, you are already a great spiritual aspirant. You will have pure mind, unwavering with the ability to focus on ‘anything for any long’, able to expand and comprehend any lofty thought. Such a ‘state of equipoise’ is called ‘*Samādānā*’, the ability to remain with tranquil mind. It is the sixth qualification.”

Aiya continued.

“Arjuna had all these qualities. By Krishna calling him as the one with the mas-

tery over sleep, Arjuna's control over his senses is inferred. His long penance, his ability to focus etc. demonstrate his control over his mind. Listen, it is time that we turn the focus on our selves; we should start searching for such noble qualities within us and if not, start developing such qualities; we need those to earn the supreme Guru for our spiritual pursuits”.

“Aiya, if Arjuna has all qualities, then why has not Krishna shown himself as his Guru? Why is Krishna letting Arjuna to suffer? If I earn all such qualities, what is the guarantee that the Lord will come as my Guru?”

“Well, Arjuna has all qualities. Yet he did not exhibit the last and the most important requirement”

“What is that Aiya?”

“That is the ‘desire for liberation’, *‘mumukshutvam’*. So far, Arjuna has only expressed his own views and some lofty ideals, only to avoid his rightful duty. He is yet to ask for a way out to be free”

“Will he ask?”

“He will! That will come only when he realizes that there is nothing he can do by himself and he needs help. This particular state-of-mind is the actual turning-point. When that happens, he will surrender and at the very moment, there will be the Guru”

I was completely still at the potency of what I hear so far

Aiya continued.

“But it is not easy. To give up ego and offer oneself totally to the mercy of the teacher requires a lot of spiritual strength. Our egoity is an impediment to take that bold step. Let us see what Arjuna will do”.

The night was gently folding as the rays of the Sun dawned in the East.

Aiya walked away with the promise to meet again the next night, to pursue our journey.

I simply could not wait!

om tatsaditi śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣatsu
brahmavidyāyāṃ yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde
arjunaviśādayogo nāma prathamo'dhyāyaḥ (1)



Thus ends the first chapter named the

'Yoga of Arjuna's despondency'

in the Upanishad of the divine Bhagavad-Gita , the knowledge of the Absolute

as the divine conversation between Arjuna and Lord Krishna.

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