

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

CHAPTER ONE:

THE YOGA RELATING TO ARJUNA'S DESPONDENCY

1) Translation: Dhritarashtra said: Tell me, O Sanjaya, what my war-like sons and those of Pandu are doing now that they have gathered at Kurukshetra, the field of religious activities?

Comment: Although Dhritarashtra was blind, he was still anxious to know about the preparations that are being made for the impending war. He asked his minister, Sanjaya, to inform him about the proceedings. Our attention is drawn to the fact that the war is about to happen in a righteous place (Dharma Kshetra), implying that Dharma (righteousness) is put to the test by adharmic (unrighteous) forces.

2) Sanjaya said: After looking at the Pandava army arrayed in proper formation, Prince Duryodhana went to his preceptor Drona and said:

3-6) Behold, O Master, this mighty army of the sons of Pandu which has been arranged into appropriate position by Dhristadyumna, the son of Drupada, your talented disciple.

Here are mighty archers, equal in warfare to heroic Arjuna and Bhima, Yuyudhana, Virata, Drupada,

Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana, and the heroic King of Kasi, Purujit, Kuntibhoja and Saibya, the best among men; and indeed the courageous Yudhamanyu, the brave Uttamauja, Saubhadra and the sons of Draupadi – all of them are great chariot-warriors.

Comment 2-6: Sanjaya related to the King how Duryodhana spoke to Drona about the formation of the Pandavas' army and drew his attention to the great and valiant warriors who were supporting them.

7) Know also, O the best of the twice-born, all those who are our distinguished chiefs, the leaders of my army; I mention them for your information.

8) Your venerable self, Bhishma, Karna, Kripa the victorious in encounter, as well as Asvatthama, Vikarna and the son of Somadatta.

9) There are other heroes also who are well trained in warfare and equipped with manifold weapons and missiles and are ready to lay down their lives for my sake.

10) Multitudinous is our army under the command of Bhishma, but meagre is theirs marshalled by Bhima.

11) Now all of you, position yourselves in your respective divisions and by all means protect Bhishma alone.

Comment 7-11: He then quite cleverly compared his supporters with those of the Pandavas and concluded that his army far outnumbered theirs. The implication is that his army was more powerful and the outcome seemed to be clear in his mind! The protection of Bhishma was important because if he were killed the result could be different! He seems to rely heavily on Bhishma in the impending battle.

12) In order to cheer up Duryodhana, Bhishma the mighty grandsire, the oldest of the Kurus, now roared like a lion and blew his conch.

Comment: Bhishma already knew in whose favour the war would end but gave Duryodhana a false sense of victory by challenging the Pandavas.

13) Then suddenly there was a terrific noise as conchs and kettledrums, tabors, trumpets and cow-horns blared forth,

Comment: The entire army responded in support to Bhishma, making Duryodhana feel confident.

14) Then Madhava and Pandava who were seated in their magnificent chariot yoked to white steeds, gracefully blew their Divine conchs.

15) Panchajanya was blown by Hrishikesa, and Devadatta by Dhananjaya. Vrikodara of terrible exploits blew his great conch Paundra;

16) The King Yudhishthira, son of Kunti, blew Anantavijaya; Nakula and Sahadeva blew Sugosha and Manipushpaka.

17) And the Ruler of Kasi, an adept archer and Sikhandi the great chariot-warrior, Dhrhtadyumna and Virata and Satyaki the invincible;

18) O Ruler of the Earth! Drupada and the sons of Draupadi, and the mighty armed son of Subhadra, all of them blew their own conchs as well.

19) Filling the earth and the sky with reverberation, that turbulent sound shook the hearts of the sons of Dhrtarashtra.

Comment 16-19: But the powerful noise from the Pandavas' army was far more than they expected. At that moment it was expected that all the supporters of both sides had assembled and the Pandavas having a smaller army might have felt vulnerable!

20) Looking at Dhrtarashtra's host positioned and ready to fight, Pandava, whose chariot's flag carries an emblem of Hanuman, lifted his bow and spoke these words to Krishna.

21-22) Arjuna said: Place my chariot, O Achyuta, between the two armies so that I may observe those who are eager to fight that stand here, with whom I must wage this war.

23) I wish to recognize those who gather here to please the evil-minded son of Dhrtarashtra in battle.

Comment 20-23: According to tradition, Hanuman did not go to Vaikuntha with the Lord but remained on earth to protect the devotees. At a meeting between him and Arjuna he learnt about the impending war and promised to support him. The emblem on the banner is symbolic of his presence. When Arjuna realized that the war had become inevitable, he wanted to have a good look at those who were supporting him and those supporting the evil Duryodhana.

24-25) Sanjaya said: After placing the best of chariots between the two armies facing Bhishma and Drona and all the rulers of the earth, Hrishikesa spoke, "O Partha, behold all the Kurus gathered here together."

Comment: This is the first time Krishna is speaking in the Bhagavad Gita. As a great Teacher, He did not question Arjuna's decision but simply obliged him. 'All the Kurus' means both sides of the Kuru clan.

Arjuna has an idea of the warriors who would support both sides. But seeing all those who are arrayed on both sides has a great impact on him.

26) Then Partha saw in both armies paternal uncles, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, cousins, sons, grandsons, comrades, fathers-in-law and benefactors.

27) When the son of Kunti saw those kinsmen in their positions, he was filled with sadness and spoke with heartbreaking compassion.

Comment 26-27: Quite naturally he becomes conscious of his loving relations and when he sees some of the most respectable persons in the family involved in the war, this makes him very sad.

28) Arjuna said: O Krishna! Seeing my kinsmen who have gathered here eager to fight, my limbs fail me and my mouth dries up.

29) My body quivers and my hair stands on end. This Gandiva bow slips from my hand and my skin burns all over.

30) I am unable to stand; my head swirls as it were; and O Kesava, I see only adverse omens.

Comment 28-30: He was very disturbed by what he saw. He could clearly see the damage the war would cause. Usually he would fight with others without giving it a thought. But this battle is quite different. It involves near and dear ones. That made it very painful. Even if the whole world is seen as one family, that would not avoid wars. Wars are caused by injustices and unfairness that are practised by one against another.

31) I do not think any good can be achieved by slaughtering of kinsmen in battle. O Krishna, I do not crave for victory or empire or even pleasures.

32) What is the good of a kingdom to us or enjoyment or even life, O Govinda?

33) Those for whose enjoyment and pleasures we should seek a kingdom, they stand here in battle, ready to give up their lives and property.

Comment 31-33: Success in the war depends on Arjuna and he is aware of that. But he has taken it very personally and drew his conclusions which are based on attachment and sound family values. Clearly, one should find happiness in making sacrifices for

the benefit of the family – that is the norm. But the dilemma is that the others did not share these values. And Arjuna is confronted with a situation which is difficult to resolve.

34) In both armies Partha saw teachers, fathers, sons as well as grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and other relatives.

35) I would rather be killed, O Madhusudhana, than try to slay them even for the sake of domination over the three worlds, not to speak of this earth.

Comment 34-35: He was deeply touched when he saw those revered ones with whom he would have to fight. He is mentally prepared to be killed by them rather than fighting them.

36) What delight can we derive, O Janardana, by exterminating these sons of Dhrtarashtra? We shall only commit sin by slaying these villains.

37) We should therefore desist from slaying the sons of Dhrtarashtra our kinsmen. O Madhava! How can we be happy after killing our own kinsmen?

Comment 36-37: They may be criminals but one thing should be remembered: they are our cousins! Arjuna's conclusion is based on family tradition but he seems to ignore the traditional values that sustain the entire family.

38) Although there are those whose understanding, tainted by greed, see no guilt in exterminating a family or no crime in hostility to friends,

39) Why should we who see evil in the destruction of a family, not desist from such a sin, O Janardana!

Comment 38-39: Those who are ignorant may be excused for

committing a wrong. But those who commit it wilfully are really the guilty ones. How correct! In the world there have always been good and evil people. But when those who are supposed to be good commit evil deeds, then Dharma is said to be on decline. Because instead of protecting Dharma, they indulge in destroying those values that sustain Dharma. But is that so in this case? Arjuna seems to think that it is.

40) When there is a decline of a family, its time-honoured customs and sacred rites perish, and then immorality overtakes the entire family.

Comment: Heritage consists of traditional customs and sacred rites. With the degeneration of its basic values nothing remains to sustain the society. The sense of sacredness also disappears with it and life becomes a pursuit of pleasure. Society then indulges freely in habits that are contrary to principles that once sustained the family.

41) With the growth of impiety, O Krishna, the family-women become unchaste and when women are corrupted, O Varshneya, social admixture is the result.

Comment: Arjuna stressed that when women, who are the support of the family, become corrupted there is no longer respect for the social laws that once maintained moral conduct in the society.

42) Hell is certainly the lot of the family and the family-destroyers through the disintegration of caste values; for, they are responsible for the fall of their ancestors, being deprived of the cakes and libations offered to them.

43) The everlasting caste-virtues and the family-merits get ruined because of the caste-confusion created by the bad deeds of the family-destroyers.

44) We have heard, O Janardana, that hell is certainly the long

lasting abode of the men whose family religious practices have relapsed.

Comment 42-44: As a result of the social disorder (caste-confusion) and neglect of family values, the ancestors would suffer because their descendants would lose faith in the rituals related to offerings made to them. It is believed that without receiving those offerings the ancestors will be in everlasting hell. This remembrance of the ancestors helps to maintain social stability.

45) Because of greed to enjoy the pleasures of a kingdom, we are now about to commit a great sin by killing our kinsmen.

46) If the sons of Dhritarashtra should slay me with the weapons in their hands while I remain unresisting and unarmed in the battle, that would indeed be better for me.

Comment 45-46: In conclusion, Arjuna maintained that to fight this war just for the sake of a kingdom would be a grave mistake. If by sacrificing his life that could be avoided, it would be better. He is prepared to lay down his life if that would prevent the war.

47) Sanjaya said: After uttering those words and being overwhelmed with sorrow in the battlefield, Arjuna sat on the seat of his chariot and lay down his bow and arrows.

Comment: Sanjaya continues to narrate to Dhritarashtra what is happening and he must have been happy to know about Arjuna's attitude towards the war. He must have thought that Arjuna's final decision of laying down his arms would mean that the war has ended and his sons would live happily as inheritors of the Kingdom.