

18. The malaise and the cure

ARJUNA had fought many battles, but he had never experienced any sorrow or attachment then. In the Mahaabhaaratha war, however, the same Arjuna felt that those ranged against him were his own uncles, grandparents and teachers, and he became despondent. He was the victim of the bondage of 'myness' and of his attachment to his kith and kin.

When Krishna set out on His mission of peace, Arjuna was keen on waging war with his cousins, the Kauravas, and he tried to persuade Krishna to see that His peace mission would not succeed. Arjuna pleaded with Krishna with all the strength he could command, "Krishna, this issue cannot be settled by negotiations. The Kauravas won't agree to any compromise. Why talk words of peace? They will never accept them. Let us not indulge in this mission! Will the arrogant lot agree to our proposals? Why do you waste your efforts, Krishna?"

What was the reason for Arjuna's attitude at that time and later, on the battlefield? When he did not see his enemies face to face, his attitude was impersonal. But once he beheld his opponents on the battlefield, he saw them as relatives, teachers and friends, his eyes were clouded and he became dizzy. He said, "Krishna, I won't be able to fight. I am laying down my armour."

Ignorance of Arjuna is responsible for his anguish

When Krishna heard these words, He was very angry and rebuked Arjuna: "This weak-mindedness is unbecoming in a renowned warrior like you, 'esteemed as an unrivalled hero. You seem to be suffering from timidity. The battle is about to be joined. Preparations for the war have been on for the past three months. If you had shown this hesitation in the beginning itself I would never have taken on this task. But, after securing the help of our allies and kinsmen and assembling them and their forces, if you withdraw from the fray, you are false to the dharma (right action) of a true *Kshathriya*. You are appearing as a faint-hearted poltroon. Coming generations will jeer at your cowardice. You are known by the name Arjuna. Remember the meaning of this name."

Arjuna means sacredness and purity. Ignorance of himself was the only reason for the anguish which overcame him. Being fully aware of the nature of this particular disease, Krishna prepared Himself to treat it. Krishna could have straightaway taught "*Bhakthi Yoga*," "*Karma Yoga*" and "*Nishkaama Yoga*," to Arjuna. He did not do so. In fact, Krishna started speaking only in the second chapter. The first chapter of the Geetha is devoted to the narration of the grief and anguish of Arjuna. Krishna allowed him to have his say. Krishna began his teaching: from the 11th verse of the second chapter. Until then, Krishna listened with extreme patience to everything Arjuna said. Then He asked Arjuna, "Have you said all you had to say?" Arjuna was silent. Krishna told him, "The malady of weak-mindedness is afflicting you. I know how to cure it. I'll do it. Your ignorance is responsible for this attachment and infatuation." Then He instructed Arjuna in "*Saankhya Yoga*" (the path of jnaana).

Distinguish between the eternal and the transient

"*Saankhya Yoga*" enables one to distinguish between the eternal and transient, '*Aathma*' and '*an-aathma*.' It implies the awareness of the basic truth, but a person suffering from ignorance, how would he be able to understand *Aathma* and *an-aathma*? Still, when a patient is in great danger, the doctor has to see that he gets out of danger. Afterwards he can undertake the regular treatment. Unless the patient is saved from danger, other remedies will be futile. When a person

is drowning, we have to first take him out of the water to the shore and then offer the necessary treatment. We don't start the treatment while the person is struggling frantically. So Krishna gave Arjuna at the outset a strong injection of courage to save him from sorrow and dejection. He explained the principle of *Aathma and an-aathma* to him. "Arjuna, with fear you will not be able to accomplish anything. Don't give way to fear; you are the fearless *Aathma*. It is only in that state of *Aathmic* awareness that I can make you achieve victory."

In truth Krishna is '*Aathma*,' Arjuna is caught in the '*un-aathma*' ignorance. Krishna said, "I would like to explain things related to you and Me. Let us suppose that I were to become you, and you were to become Me. If I were to become you, I would also become weak-minded, but it is impossible for such weakness to enter Me. On the other hand, if you want to become Me, then you have to follow Me!" Then Arjuna said, "Swaami, I will follow your command implicitly." After instilling courage into Arjuna, He directed him to enter the battle.

Body, mind and intelligence are temporary agents

Krishna said: "Arjuna, you think that these people are your relatives and friends. But, consider this :who is a relative? Who is the body? Who is the Indweller? All bodies are like bubbles on water. You and I and these friends and relatives have been in existence in many previous lives. Body, mind and intelligence are all temporary agents. They are like the clothes we wear and discard. They are inert. Why develop such a close attachment to these things, subjecting yourself to sorrow and infatuation! Do your duty: all the honour and other things due to you as a prince, will be showered on you. On the battlefield, there can be no room for faint-heartedness. You can't play two roles at the same time when one role is opposed to the other. Now you are on the battlefield and have come to fight. So, *FIGHT!*"

In the very opening verse of the Geetha, we find Dhritrashtra asking Sanjaya: "Sanjaya, what are my people doing, and what are the Paandavas doing on the battlefield of Kurukshethra, which is a Dharmakshethra?" It is a place where sacrifices are performed. The children of "*Kuru*" used to play on that very field. Therefore it is called *Kurukshethra*. Sacred and auspicious acts had been done on that very spot. So it is *Dharmakshethra*, as well.

Our body itself may be called a *Dharmkshethra*. For, when a child is born, it is pure and without blemish. It is not a victim yet of any of the six 'enemies of man'-- anger, greed, lust, egotism, pride and jealousy. It is always happy. It cries only when hungry. Whoever fondless, king or commoner, saint or thief, child is happy. The child's body is not affected by any of the three gunas (innate qualities) and is a *Dharmakshethra*. As the body grows, it begins collecting qualities such as jealousy, hatred and attachment. When these evil tendencies develop the body becomes a '*Kurukshethra*.'

Identification with body and senses leads to tragedy

The battle between the Paandavas and the Kauravas did not last more than 18 days, but the war between good and bad qualities in us is waged all through life. *Rajo guna and Thamo guna* (qualities of passion and inertia) are associated with the ego and the sense of 'mine.' The word *Paandava* itself stands for purity and *saathwik* nature. *Paandu* means whiteness and purity. The children of Paandu, the five Paandavas, were pure. The war between the Paandavas and the Kauravas signifies the inner war in each of us--the war of '*Saathwa guna*' against the other two *gunas*, *Rajas* and *Thamas*.

Answering Dhritharaashtra's question, Sanjaya said, "Why do you ask me what they are doing? Since they have all gathered for war, they are of course fighting." There is, however, an inner meaning to the question. This is to be found in his use of the word *Dharmakshethra*. Dhritharaashtra hoped, "My children are bad and wicked, but since they have entered the Field of 'Dharma' (Dharmakshethra), it is possible their minds may be transformed into good."

"*Dhritharaashtra*" means one who considers things which do not belong to one as one's very own. He is not the body; but he owns it. He is not the senses, but he derives pride in owning them. A person who considers the kingdom which does not belong to him as his own, is a "Dhritharaashtra." Every person of Dhritharaashtra's lineage identified himself with the body and the senses that led to the tragedy.

Consequences of acting without foresight

Among the Paandavas, there were some who were superior to Arjuna in some respect. Dharmaraaja, the eldest brother, was more serene. Why then was the sacred Geetha not taught to him? In terms of physical prowess, Bheema was a much stronger person. Why was it not directed to Bheema? Why was it taught to Arjuna? Dharmaraaja was the embodiment of *Dharma*, no doubt. But, he did not have the foresight to visualise the ravages of war. He did not consider what the consequences of his action would be. He became wise only after the event. Bheema had enormous physical strength and valour, but he did not have enough intelligence. But, Arjuna had foresight. He told Krishna, "I would rather be dead than fight against these people, because, if I should win, it would be at the cost of putting them to death and causing much suffering." In contrast to this, Dharmaraaja waged the war and when he lost his kith and kin, he sat down in gloom regretting all that had happened!

The need for the relationship of guru and disciple

When one acts without foresight, one has to repent for the consequences of the indiscriminate action. This was the case with King Dhasharatha. In the war between the gods and the demons, he fought on the side of the *Dhevas*, taking Queen Kaikeyi, the daughter of the king of Kashmir with him. She was well-versed in the art of warfare. It was Kaikeyi who taught the strategy of war and the art of archery to Raama. While Dhasharatha was engaged in the battle, one of the wheels of his chariot was about to come off as the linchpin of the axle had come out. Kaikeyi saved the situation by using her finger as a pin to hold the wheel in position. After the end of the battle, Dhasharatha noticed that Kaikeyi's hand was bleeding profusely. Seeing her plight and realising her courage and sense of sacrifice, Dhasharatha told her, "Kaikeyi, you ..can ask from me two boons." He did not specify what type of boon she should ask of him or when. He promised these boons without any thought of the consequences. Kaikeyi asked for these boons later, at a time which was advantageous to her but disastrously mortal for him!

Krishna considered Arjuna as the fittest person for imbibing the Geetha. Arjuna foresaw the aftermath of the war and that was why he shied away from the fight. He knew the consequences would be terrible. Only a pure heart can feel sorry for something even before the event takes place.

Krishna and Arjuna were inseparable companions for seventy-five years, because Arjuna's was a pure heart. Although they had lived together for so long, Krishna had not instructed Arjuna, because during all that period Arjuna was moving with Krishna as his brother-in-law. He was conscious only of the family relationship. The moment Arjuna surrendered and accepted

discipleship, Krishna stood forth as his teacher. If we really desire to acquire higher knowledge from some one, it will be possible only when there is the relationship of guru (preceptor) and *sisya* (disciple).

Develop the capacity to face adverse situations

When Arjuna told Krishna, "You are my father; you are my mother; you are my teacher; you are my wealth and my everything," surrendering himself completely to Krishna, then only did Krishna reply: "You are my disciple; you do my work; do everything for Me and I shall take care of you."

While dealing with "*Saankhya Yoga*" Krishna taught Arjuna how to surrender totally to His Will. Krishna freed Arjuna from the sense of identifying his body with the *Aathma* (the indwelling Divine Spirit). As long as that overwhelming body-consciousness persists, we will not be able to practise any spiritual discipline of *Dharma Maarga*, *Karma Maarga* or *Bhakthi Maarga*. In fact, attachments pollute the heart. Without cleansing the heart of these impurities, it is not possible to fill it with holy feelings. "*Arjuna*," said Krishna, "you are steeped in body-consciousness. Cast off that delusion, then only will I be able to fill your heart with wisdom and bliss."

Ignorance is the most important cause of sorrow. "Have you yearned for God, for Dharma? When you cry out for God and for *Dharma*, the yearning becomes *yoga saadhana* (spiritual effort). You clamour for a number of things, but when there is a decline in 'Dharma,' you must cultivate courage. You must develop the capacity to face adverse situations. Today you should have immense courage and unshakable determination. Avoid blind and foolish courage. One should have the capacity to discriminate and behave in accordance with the time, place and circumstance. Here and elsewhere, you should always have courage in your heart and the determination needed to accomplish the task." Thus did Krishna exhort Arjuna.

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The word, Vishnu, means 'That which pervades everywhere', the Omnipresent.

When people are told about an idol of Vishnu, they laugh and condemn it as foolish. But, when we desire to drink the ambrosia that the all-pervading Vishnu is we require a spoon, a cup or a vessel.

The idol is only such a contrivance, by which it is possible to consume the bliss. The cup can be of any shape or design; the joy consists in the nectar that it is able to convey to the person who is thirsty and anguished. Raso vai sah---God is ambrosia, sweet, sustaining, strength-giving. You can imbibe Him through a cup, shaped as Nataraja or Durga or Krishna, or Linga, or Ganesha, or Christ or any other Form that will arouse the ardour and satisfy the agony.

Sri Sathya Sai