



Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc.
4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6
ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

भगवत् गीता Bhagvad Gita Chapter 1 Volume 3

श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता - प्रथमोऽध्यायः
अर्जुनविषादयोगः

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥

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धृतराष्ट्र उवाच Dhrtarashtra said: Dhrtarashtra, the blind king, addressing his specially appointed reporter Sanjaya, asked him this question.

सञ्जय O! Sanjaya

धर्म क्षेत्रे – In that holy place – Land of धर्म – namely

कुरुक्षेत्रे – in Kurushetra – the battle field

समवेताः - gathered together

युयुत्सवः - eager to fight

मामकाः - my people – my sons and their supporters

पाण्डवाः च एव – and similarly, the Pandavas and their supporters

किं अकुर्वत – what did they do?

O! Sanjaya, in That Holy Place of धर्म – the Kurukshetra battle field, my people – my sons and their supporters and also the Pandavas and their supporters gathered together, eager to fight, what did they do?

This question opens our Great Scripture, The भगवत् गीता, which itself forms a small part of our Great Epic, namely the महाभारत. Among our Scriptures, The भगवत् गीता is an extraordinary one, because it is a श्रुति within a स्मृति, and hence it is both a स्मृति and a श्रुति.



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Smriti means, that which has to be remembered to draw lessons from, and Sruti means Upanishadic Knowledge which has to be listened to, understood, appreciated and absorbed in full – not simply to be remembered.

In our tradition, महाभारत is an इतिहास which qualifies to be Smriti. इतिहास means history fit to be remembered.

महाभारत and रामायण are such great histories of human events, whose lessons we must always remember; because unless we learn the lessons of these histories, history with all its pains, sorrows and conflicts will surely repeat itself.

महाभारत and रामायण are such great historical events whose lessons have everlasting value to the entire human society. We need not, and we should not, make judgements on the characters involved in these historical events, but we must learn the lessons of history, in order to form, and reform, our own lives, so that we may do what is proper, and avoid what is improper in our own daily lives.

The overriding lesson of our Smritis is just this:

However powerful one may be, अधर्म – improper action whether it is in thought, word or deed – अधर्म – improper action, can never win – can never lead to happiness; it will surely lead to self-degradation, more misery and more unhappiness.

On the other hand, however difficult the immediate situation may be धर्म – proper action will always protect us from all fears and all dangers and it will ultimately lead us to success, prosperity and happiness.

Therefore, धर्म – proper action – with proper attitude and dedication should be our overriding code of conduct at all times. That is indeed the lesson of history – our Smritis – the महाभारत and the Ramayana which we must always remember.

Now, what is proper action, and what is improper action?

This is a perennial question, even for a thinking person; everyone needs help to find answer to this question at different stages of life. Ultimately this question has to be answered by one's own self, and it is best answered only in terms of Upanishadic knowledge on the nature of action itself, and the awareness of its role in the overriding purpose of life, and the level of maturity of the person concerned.



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That is why we need the help of both the Smriti and the Sruti, to guide our daily life both as a community and as individuals. Fortunately, the भगवत् गीता is a harmonious blend of Smriti and Sruti in ONE which makes it unique among Scriptures.

It is this unique feature which makes the भगवत् गीता as ब्रह्मविद्या and also योग शास्त्र – the very essence of all Upanishadic knowledge, as well as the sure unfailing practical and immediate guide for right conduct in every situation for everybody at all levels of maturity.

As योग शास्त्र – as a guide for right conduct in everyday life the words of the भगवत् गीता are simple, straight and unambiguous, clearly within the grasp of our organs of perception and action. On the other hand, as ब्रह्मविद्या, the words of the भगवत् गीता remain so far reaching in scope, that the Upanishadic knowledge on the Nature of Existence and Goal of life is imparted only through a variety of pointers and by successive stages of upliftment through self endeavour in terms of recognition, awareness, maturity and experience.

Consequently, it is not enough that we simply remember the words of the भगवत् गीता; we have to try to understand, appreciate and absorb the knowledge contained in them, in order to realize total fulfillment in life which is indeed the mission of the भगवत् गीता Upanishad which is the essence of all the Vedas and all the Upanishads. Fortunately, we have in the भगवत् गीता the very best Teacher, Sri Krishna Himself, to help us understand, appreciate and absorb His Teachings.

All Upanishadic Teachings and hence the Teachings of The भगवत् गीता – are valid for everyone, in every situation. Naturally, they were valid for Arjuna in his particular situation in the context of महाभारत. When properly understood, they are valid to-day, and everyday, for everyone of us in our own particular situations.

It is the Mission of the भगवत् गीता to help us uplift ourselves to a higher order of human existence, and help us realize the best in our own selves, and enjoy the company of the best in ourselves. With this vision of the unique nature and the unique mission of the भगवत् गीता, let us together seek the Grace of Sri Krishna, and read the Gita verses and reflect on their content starting again from the very first verse.

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मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किं अकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥

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Dhritarashtra said: O! Sanjaya, in That Holy Place – धर्मक्षेत्रे – in the battle field at Kurushetra, my people (मामकाः) my sons and their supporters and also the पाण्डवस and their supporters, when they gathered together eager to fight, what did they do?

Let us reflect on this verse briefly. Dhritarashtra enquires; Something has prompted him to make this enquiry. He asks Sanjaya "what did they do in the battle field?"

Please note the past tense here – किं अकुरुत - What did they do?

Obviously, they fought in the battlefield; why did Dhritarashtra ask this question now; 10 days of war are already over. Dhritarashtra chooses to ask this question now; why?

Something extraordinary must have happened in the battlefield which prompted Dhritarashtra to ask this question now.

Something extraordinary did happen. Just a few minutes ago Dhritarashtra heard that the venerable and unconquerable Bhishma – the Commander-in-Chief of the Kaurava army – had fallen incapacitated in the battlefield. That Bhishma in whose well known strength and power, Dhritarashtra had built up in his mind all his hopes for the eventual victory of his sons – That Bhishma has now fallen in the battlefield incapacitated. Dhritarashtra was obviously terrified and frightened by this event.

How did this happen? What did the armies do in the battlefield which could bring Bhishma down? That is Dhritarashtra's question.

The sequence of events and the details of events that took place in the battlefield each day – who fought against whom in the different sectors of the battlefield, what was the strategy used by the armies on both sides – who won, who lost – all of which ultimately brought Bhishma down on the 10th day of battle – all these events are described in detail in the महाभारत.

But these details do not form part of भगवत् गीता, they are just part of Smriti and not Sruti.

Another event – which was even far more extraordinary than Bhishma's fall did happen in the battle field – which Dhritarashtra did not know, and that was the conversation between Arjuna and Sri Krishna just prior to the onset of hostilities.

It is this conversation, which had extraordinary effects, not only on the outcome of the महाभारत war, but also on the lives and culture of generations of human beings for thousands of years since the महाभारत war.

Sanjaya now reports to Dhritarashtra the sequence of events leading to this conversation



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and the full details of this conversation between Arjuna and Sri Krishna. This report in its entirety constitutes the भगवत् गीता.

Since Dhritarashtra's question is part of भगवत् गीता, his question also has an Upanishadic meaning, which we must understand. भगवत् गीता is both part of महाभारत, as well as a complete Upanishad in itself.

As part of महाभारत, it involves different personalities in different situations; but, as a complete Upanishad, भगवत् गीता involves only one person - and that is one's own self and no one else. This must be understood.

This means that the different personalities mentioned, and the different situations described in the भगवत् गीता reflect only the different aspects of one's own self, in one's own situation at any time. Consequently, Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya, the Kurushetra battlefield, the Kauravas, the Pandavas, Arjuna, Sri Krishna, and all the other names mentioned in the Gita indicate only the different aspects of one's own personality in every day life.

With this understanding, let us read the opening verse of the भगवत् गीता again:

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच
धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।
मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किं अकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच - Dhritarashtra said. That, in itself, is a great and welcome event; this is a moment of Divine Inspiration for Dhritarashtra to say what he said, and that opens the भगवत् गीता. Whether Dhritarashtra said this or not, the महाभारत war would have progressed as it did; but, the fact that Dhritarashtra said what he said at this moment, brought out the भगवत् गीता for the benefit of humanity.

The nominal king, Dhritarashtra, has been spiritually blind and powerless all these years; however, progressing in his own way, at this moment, by the Grace of God, he reached a state of sufficient maturity, by which he got awakened to the reality of his own situation at this time. This spiritual awakening, naturally and immediately, prompted Dhritarashtra to institute a process of self-enquiry - enquiry within himself, about his own self.

Essentially, the enquiry is: "What is it because of which I am, what I am, at this time?"

"I have now become aware that the negative and positive tendencies in me have been



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merrily fighting with each other all the time, to gain supremacy over my faculties of thought and action; in this process, these opposing tendencies have forced me to do different things at different times; as a result of all of which, today, the worst news has come to me from the battlefield, and I find myself in a terrible state of distress and helplessness. What did cause this situation?"

"Obviously, I am not in command of myself, but I want to know what exactly did these negative and positive forces in me, fighting with each other all the time, what did they do, to bring about this hopeless and fearful situation?"

So was the enquiry of Dhritarashtra.

This enquiry was addressed to Sanjaya - now who is this Sanjaya? Sanjaya is the specially appointed person to report to Dhritarashtra, confidentially and faithfully everything as it happens in the battlefield.

Now, what is it in one's own self, which can confidentially and faithfully report to oneself all that happened in one's own thoughts and actions? That is only one's own consciousness which is the ever present witness to all of one's thoughts and actions.

In terms of भगवत् गीता, in the process of one's own self-enquiry, Sanjaya is one's own consciousness. This process of self-enquiry starts with the spontaneous realization of the nature of this body and its purpose in life. The enquiry starts with the word:

धर्म क्षेत्रे - In that holy place - in that land of धर्म

क्षेत्र means a holy place - a place which brings out the highest and the best in you, in terms of action, attitude, and dedication. For any person, the holiest of all places is one's own body - because it is the only one, which is capable of holy actions. Holy action means, proper action - action in accordance with धर्म, which is the only means for gaining the ultimate goal of life - namely freedom, happiness and total fulfillment - which is मोक्ष.

Any action which takes you closer to मोक्ष is धर्म - proper action; any action that takes you farther away from मोक्ष is अधर्म - improper action. A live body is always engaged in actions - कर्म - whether that कर्म is धर्म, or अधर्म. As a holy place, as a धर्म क्षेत्र, this live body is concerned only with धर्म - proper action. To be a धर्म क्षेत्र, is the ONLY purpose of this live body.

When this body is a धर्म क्षेत्र, it is also a कुरु क्षेत्र- which means - कर्म क्षेत्र - A holy place of



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action. It is a holy place of action only because it is a place for holy action. Only when the action is holy, this body is कर्म क्षेत्र; otherwise, it will simply be a कर्म इन्द्रिय- an extraordinary instrument of action.

As a कर्म इन्द्रिय - as an extraordinary instrument of action, this body goes on producing actions and reactions, which cannot stop even when the body instrument wears out; and, consequently, one never gains total fulfillment in life.

But, as a कर्म क्षेत्र, as a धर्म क्षेत्र, this body can produce actions without reactions, which means total fulfillment can be gained in life. मोक्ष can be gained in this very life - long before this body wears out and falls.

That is the difference between कर्म क्षेत्र, and कर्म इन्द्रिय.

Thus the process of self-enquiry in the भगवत् गीता starts with the spontaneous realization of the nature of this body, and its purpose in life. Now the enquiry continues:

धर्म क्षेत्रे कुरु क्षेत्रे - In this body - which includes this physical body, mind and intellect, what about it?

समवेता युयुत्सवः

समवेता – gathered together, coexist

युयुत्सवः- Merrily engaged in the festivity of fighting

उत्सव means a festival wherein everybody is naturally merry, they are in their natural selves, engaged in activities according to their own natural tendencies.

Here, in one's own self, the fighting is between two opposing types of tendencies, with which everyone has been growing up. These two types of tendencies are referred here as मामकाः and पाण्ड्याः

मामकाः refers to egoistic tendencies rooted in the notion of मम – मम notion; मम means "my" or "mine" - this is mine, my right, my power, my property, etc. This मम notion always translates into action propelled by राग and द्वेष - intense likes and dislikes governed by spiritual ignorance (अज्ञानं); such ignorance born actions pull one in the direction of अधर्म - improper action and hence the मम tendency constitutes a powerful negative force in oneself.



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On the other hand, the पाण्ड्य tendency is of the opposite type, and it gives rise to actions typically characterized by the actions of अर्जुन, the middle of the five पाण्ड्यs. अर्जुन is an upright man of powerful action, and his actions are always governed by धर्मपुत्र, भीम, नकुल, and सहदेव- which means: Arjuna's actions are always governed by धर्म - propriety, भीम - fearlessness, नकुल - total absence of selfishness, and सहदेव - God Consciousness. Consequently, the पाण्ड्य tendency is a powerful positive force pulling one in the direction of धर्म - proper action leading to मोक्ष - total fulfillment in life.

The मामक and पाण्ड्य forces are in everyone, to different extents. There is a continuing war going on in every person, within oneself, between these two forces, and a person's behavior at any particular time is an expression of the power and disposition of these two forces in oneself at that time. Now the self-enquiry is:

किं अकुर्यत - What did they do?

What did these two opposing forces do to my body, mind, and intellect, as a result of which I find myself that I am what I am today? That is the question.

A time comes in the spiritual life of every person, when one asks this question to oneself. It is only at that time, भगवत् गीता becomes a Scripture for uplifting oneself. It is That Scripture, which we have started reading today.

We will continue next time.