



भगवत् गीता Chapter 1 Volume 6

तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं, धार्तराष्ट्रान् स्ववान्धवान् । स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥	1-37
यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभोपहतचेतसः । कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रद्रोहे च पातकम् ॥	1-38
कथं न ज्ञेयमस्माभिः पापादस्मान्निवर्तितुम् । कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्भिः जनार्दन ॥	1-39
कुलक्षये प्रणश्यन्ति कुलधर्माः सनातनाः । धर्मो नष्टे कुलं कृत्स्नम् अधर्मः अभिभवत्युत ॥	1-40
अधर्माभिभवात् कृष्ण प्रदुष्यन्ति कुलस्त्रियः । स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु वार्ष्णेय जायते वर्ण सङ्करः ॥	1-41
सङ्करो नरकायैव कुलघ्नानां कुलस्य च । पतन्ति पितरो ह्येषां लुप्त पिण्ड-उदक क्रियाः ॥	1-42
दोषैरेतैः कुलघ्नानां वर्ण सङ्कर कारकैः । उत्साद्यन्ते जातिधर्माः कुलधर्माश्च शाश्वताः ॥	1-43
उत्सन्न कुलधर्माणां मनुष्याणां जनार्दन । नरके अनियतं वासो भवतीत्यनुशुश्रुम ॥	1-44
अहो बत महत् पापं कर्तुं व्यवसिता वयं । यद्राज्य सुख लोभेन हन्तुं स्वजनमुद्यताः ॥	1-45
यदि मां अप्रतीकारं अशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः । धार्तराष्ट्राः रणे हन्युः तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥	1-46
सञ्जय उवाच	



एवं उक्त्वा अर्जुनः संख्ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।
विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्गमानसः ॥

1-47

इति श्रीमद्भगवत् गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां
योगशास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुन संवादे
अर्जुन विषाद योगो नाम प्रथमोऽध्यायः ॥

Arjuna is in an extraordinary situation. He suddenly finds himself under the spell of मोह – sadness, sorrow and suffering, caused by delusion and infatuation – meaning – incapacity of the mind to discriminate between सत्यं and मिथ्या– Eternal Truth and transient appearance, and also the inability of the mind to extricate itself from the bondage created by the thought स्वजन – one’s own people – the confusion created by the word धर्म – duty in his particular circumstances, and the uncertainty created by the impending युद्ध – the act of war.

As a result of this situation, Arjuna is pouring out words of penetrating anguish, to Sri Krishna sitting by his side. Sri Krishna is listening to Arjuna’s words of self-pity , self-condemnation, self-denial and self-escapism from his natural duty at this time and place.

Sri Krishna is still listening, and Arjuna continues:

तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान् स्वबान्धवान् ।
स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥

1-37

Arjuna tells Sri Krishna:

The sons of Dhritarashtra – the Duryodanas – are indeed आततायिनः - the worst sinners; they are fit to be killed according to नीति शास्त्र - the laws of the state. But धर्म शास्त्र – The law of धर्म – is superior to all laws of the state, and the law of धर्म is absolutely inescapable. According to धर्म शास्त्र, the one who destroys one’s own family is even a greater sinner. That is what I will be, if I participate in this war. No, that should not be allowed to happen, we are धर्मवन्तः we are rooted in धर्म. Therefore,

तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान् स्वबान्धवान् ।

Therefore, it does not befit us to kill the sons of Dhritarashtra along with other relatives;

स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा, सुखिनः स्याम-माधव? O! Krishna, how can we be happy killing our own people? Further



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यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभ-उपहत चेतसः ।

कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रद्रोहे च पातकम् ॥

1-38

You may say that we were all forced into this war inspite of our best efforts to avert this war; there is really no choice, but to fight – I understand that argument. But still, यद्यपि – though that is the case, we must realize that these Duryodanas do not see the great sin in destroying families, and also in cheating friends and relatives, because their minds are overpowered by लोभ – greediness. लोभ उपहत चेतसः - mind over-powered by लोभ – greediness.

Greediness means incapacity to give up something which you enjoy even though that does not legitimately belong to you. लोभ is a terrible disease – that is why the Upanishad says: मा गृधः कस्य स्थित् धनं – never covet what belongs to anyone.

Continuing, Arjuna says: “Just because Duryodana did something wrong, he does not cease to be my cousin. Duryodana was not born a criminal; he became a criminal because of his thinking. Because he is overpowered by लोभ – greediness – he is not able to see his own sinful actions; that, however, is his problem. What about us?

कथं न ज्ञेयं अस्माभिः पापात् अस्मात् निवर्तितुम् ।

कुलक्षय कृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्भिः जनार्दन ॥

1-39

O! Janardana – O! Krishna, we who see clearly the consequences of the sinful actions, involving the destruction of families – why are we not withdrawing from this sin?

How is it that we - who should know better – are blindly entering into this पाप कर्म – sinful action – without enquiry? This war is for the protection of धर्म. But the very धर्म which we want to protect will be in danger when these क्षत्रिय families are destroyed. These families whose natural duty is to live धर्म, to maintain धर्म, and to enforce धर्म – if these families are destroyed, धर्म also is as good as destroyed.

Therefore, even from the point of view of protection of धर्म, it is wrong for me to get into this war. Frankly, I doubt whether धर्म can survive this war, because:

कुलक्षये प्रणश्यन्ति कुलधर्माः सनातनाः ।



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धर्मं नष्टे कुलं कृत्स्नम् अधर्मः अभिभवति उत ॥

1-40

When all the able bodied men in the family are destroyed, the ancient and well-rooted values, traditions, duties and occupations of the family are also destroyed. Further, when the people who practice, maintain and protect धर्म are lost, in what is left of the family, अधर्म – impropriety in conduct will certainly set in, grow, and govern overwhelmingly. Absence of धर्म is not the real problem; in the absence of धर्म when there is nobody to set the example – अधर्म – impropriety in action will grow spontaneously, and govern daily life overwhelmingly.

अधर्मं अभिभवात् कृष्ण प्रदुष्यन्ति कुलस्त्रियः ।

स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु चार्ण्यं जायते वर्णं सङ्करः ॥

1-41

अधर्मं अभिभवात् – when अधर्म – impropriety and lawlessness grow thrive and govern society, all kinds of crimes also grow, thrive and govern society; and wicked people get into positions of power and influence in society. Consequently,

कुलस्त्रियः प्रदुष्यन्ति – the women in the royal and क्षत्रिय families – they are now widowed, they are left to take care of themselves, they have to deal with wicked people, in power and influence, in society, and in order to survive in this अधर्म–controlled society, they find themselves tempted and forced to yield to impropriety in conduct for self-preservation. When that happens, जायते वर्णं संकरः - confusion arises as to identity and duty in society – which means, the children born to such women become confused about their identities and duties. Right attitude towards duties can be developed, only when duties are well-defined.

If there is confusion about one's duty, duty-consciousness cannot take roots in the person; hence, there will be no particular effort to develop the right attitude, and code of right conduct in daily life. Under such circumstances, only selfishness will grow and thrive, in a person's mind.

Extending this line of thought, Arjuna continues:

सङ्करो नरकायैव कुलघ्नानां कुलस्य च ।

पतन्ति पितरो ह्येषां लुप्त पिण्ड-उदक क्रियाः ॥

1-42

दोषैः एतैः कुलघ्नानां वर्णसङ्करकारकैः ।

उत्साद्यन्ते जातिधर्माः कुलधर्माश्च शाश्वताः ॥

1-43



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उत्सन्न कुलधर्माणां मनुष्याणां जनार्दन ।
नरकेऽनियतं वासो भवति इति अनुशुश्रुम ॥

1-44

इति अनुशुश्रुम Thus we have heard – It is all common knowledge – what is that?

Arjuna is now referring to certain Vedic rituals which are held in high esteem by the society, as something very beneficial - as मोक्ष साधनं – as an aid for spiritual progress for both the living and the dead ones. These rituals are पिण्ड क्रिया and उदक क्रिया – श्राद्ध कर्म and तर्पण कर्म – the ritualistic offering of food and water to dead ancestors. These rituals serve to remind us constantly of one's identity and one's duty in society, and also keep both the individuals and the society ethical, moral and spiritual.

The spiritual progress of the living ones affect also the spiritual progress of the dead ancestors, just as the prosperity or adversity of children affect the mind and mood of the parents. Referring to this common knowledge, Arjuna says:

When the children become confused about their family identities and social duties, they do not care to perform these important vedic rituals; and, consequently, life becomes simply नरक एव – a hell, both to them and their ancestors, who brought about the destruction of the family by participating and dying in this war.

Not only that, for all the क्षत्रियs assembled here to fight and die in this war, including myself, participation in this war is a दोष कर्म – a blame-worthy deed; because it gives rise to वर्ण सङ्करः - confusion in the minds of future generations, as to their duty in society. By this confusion, the age-old जाति धर्माः, कुलधर्माः च – the values, traditions and occupations of the community as a whole, as well as the individual families – they are all उत्साद्यन्ते – uprooted, totally destroyed.

People whose lives are so uprooted, are self-condemned to a life of hell forever – नरके अनियतं वासः – they are self-led to a life of नरक – unhappiness forever – इति अनुशुश्रुम – thus, we have heard – this is common knowledge, in our upbringing – so says Arjuna.

We must understand this statement about “common knowledge” properly in terms of Upanishads. Upanishads do not say that if you do not perform certain rituals, you will go to hell; again, Upanishads do not say that if you inter-marry you and your children will go to hell.



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But, the Upanishads do say that if you entertain confusion and wrong notions about your identity, and your duty to yourself, such confusion and wrong notions will cause unhappiness for you; you must learn to overcome such confusions – that is the knowledge which is built into our entire value system – and that is why it is common knowledge.

Arjuna continues:

अहो बत महत् पापं कर्तुं व्यवसिता वयं ।
यद्वाज्य सुख लोभेन हन्तुं स्वजनमुद्यताः ॥ 1-45

Goaded by this craving for the kingdom and its comforts, we have come here, उद्यताः prepared, and व्यवसिताः determined, स्वजनं हन्तुं – to destroy one's own people; अहो बत – what a terrible thing to do! What a stupid thing to do! Concluding Arjuna says:

यदि मां अप्रतीकारं अशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।
धार्तराष्ट्राः रणे हन्युः तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥ 1-46

If the sons of Dhritarashtra, fully armed, choose to kill me, unresisting and unarmed that will be far better for me – that will be a blessing for me (क्षेमतरं भवेत्).

Arjuna is suffering from चिषाद – which means मोह and शोक together – a mind overpowered by delusion, and intense sadness, sorrow and distress. Being so, Arjuna has been pouring out his thought and feelings spontaneously to Sri Krishna, and in this process, he feels thoroughly exhausted, has lost his fighting mood, and has accepted a sense of total resignation. He feels so drained in energy that he could not even stand any more.

"Should the sons of Dhritarashtra, with weapons in hand, choose to kill me, unresisting and unarmed in the battle-field, that would indeed be far better for me. That would indeed be a blessing for me" – so he feels, and so he says to Sri Krishna. So saying, he sank to his seat in the chariot.

Depicting this scene, Sanjaya says:

सञ्जय उवाच
एवं उक्त्वाऽर्जुनः संख्ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।
विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्रमानसः ॥



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So saying, Arjuna sank to his seat in the chariot, abandoned his bow and arrows, and was looking up to Sri Krishna with a mind naturally incapacitated by शोक – overpowering sadness.

इति श्रीमद्भगवत् गीतासु उपनिषत्सु
ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुन संवादे
अर्जुन विषाद योगो नाम
प्रथमोऽध्यायः ॥

Thus ends Chapter 1 of भगवत् गीता which is called अर्जुन विषाद योग – the शोक and मोह – the sadness and delusion – of Arjuna.

The शोक of Arjuna is also our शोक. Let us briefly reflect on the शोक of Arjuna. Here मोह is the ailment and शोक is its symptom, and विषाद is the expression for मोह and शोक together. Such विषाद constitutes the overriding problem, common to all human beings; and, the solution to this problem is the key to real human happiness. Now, the question is – why and how विषाद i.e. मोह and शोक landed in the mind of Arjuna suddenly at this time?

Even long before Arjuna entered the battle-field, he knew all about the presence of his relatives and friends in the war front, and all about the morality and consequences of war. The decision to enter into this war-action was a deliberate one, both for Arjuna, and for everyone else involved.

Arjuna came into the battlefield only for fighting, and for no other purpose. War-activity is not new to him. Till just a few minutes ago, he was in excellent spirits, and in the fighting mood, natural to his upbringing and disposition. That being the case, why and how did विषाद – मोह and शोक – landed in the mind of Arjuna at this time – suddenly, unsought, unexpectedly, and unnaturally?

The answer is: we do not know; Arjuna does not know either; only Sri Krishna knows – which means that मोह and शोक landed in the mind of Arjuna suddenly at this time only by the Grace of Sri Krishna – in His Infinite Wisdom.

We do not know the cause of Arjuna's विषाद, but we do know the result of Arjuna's विषाद. It is only because of Arjuna's विषाद, we have भगवत् गीता today – which not only uplifted Arjuna from his predicament over 5000 years ago, but also it has since then uplifted countless human beings from their own मोह and शोक predicaments from time to time; and,



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undoubtedly, The भगवत् गीता will uplift every one of us from our own मोह and शोक predicaments; if only we are ready for the भगवत् गीता Knowledge and Teachings, just as Arjuna is right now.

How is Arjuna right now?

There is something extraordinary about Arjuna's मोह and शोक. Arjuna got into this mood, in the very company of Sri Krishna – and in the company of Sri Krishna only; there is no one else by his side at this time.

Having got into this mood by the Grace of Sri Krishna Himself, he unburdened all his emotions – all his दुःख – all symptoms of मोह – at the very feet of Sri Krishna. In all his painful and penetrating words of despair, there is only Sri Krishna; within the past few minutes, he has called out Sri Krishna 11 times – Krishna, Kesava, Govinda, Madhusudana, Janardhana, Madhava, Varshneya, etc., Arjuna's words of pain, despair and resignation are simply an expression of Arjuna's total surrender to Sri Krishna, at a time of human suffering.

This scene of Arjuna's suffering is the Upanishadic teaching of this Chapter, to every one of us. Even before any मोह and शोक lands on us, let us be in the company of Sri Krishna and Sri Krishna only – in the form of one's own इष्ट देवता.

When मोह and शोक unsought, unexpectedly, and unnaturally - land on us, let us still be in the company of Sri Krishna, and hold on to Sri Krishna only. Let us pour out, and empty out, all our emotions – in thought, word, and deed - at the feet of Sri Krishna, and look up to Sri Krishna - and Sri Krishna only for relief and guidance.

When we do that – and we can do that through कर्म योग, ध्यान योग, भक्ति योग and ज्ञान योग – when we do that properly, the विषाद – the मोह and शोक - the cause of our pain and suffering – will vanish; how? just as it came – by the very Grace of Sri Krishna – by the very Grace of परमेश्वर.

The sequence – or the order in which मोह and its symptoms set in, and then disappeared from the mind of Arjuna, is also a matter of Upanishadic Knowledge. As we have seen in this chapter, मोह and its symptoms set in the mind of Arjuna in six distinct steps in the following order:

1. Arjuna orders Sri Krishna to do something (सेनयोः उभयोः मध्ये रथं स्थापय मे अच्युत)
2. He sees his own relatives and friends in the battlefield, (दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण), and



doubts set in;

3. He loses his balance in judgment (भ्रमति इव च मे मनः)
4. अहंकार takes hold of him (I don't want this; I want this, etc.)
5. He loses his memory - the substance of all his past Vedic education - as to what is मोक्ष साधनं, what is conducive to gaining true Happiness, etc.
6. Finally मोह completely takes hold of his mind and बुद्धि (शोक सं विग्र मानसः)

After the Gita - Upadesa - the Teachings of Sri Krishna in the next 17 chapters – मोह and all its symptoms totally disappear from the mind and बुद्धि of Arjuna, exactly in the reverse order - which means - that which came last disappears first, as Arjuna says in verse 73 of Chapter 18:

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिः लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादात् मया अच्युत ।
स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥ 18-73

नष्टो मोहः - The मोह - the ailment has disappeared

स्मृतिः लब्धा - I have regained my memory - now I realize what is मोक्ष साधनं

त्वत्प्रसादात् - By your Grace my अहंकार is gone; hereafter there is no question of what I want or I do not want; I do what is left for me to do - that is all (तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः - as the Upanishad says)

स्थितोऽस्मि - Firmness in my judgment is now restored, which means my mind is clear and बुद्धि is firm

गतसन्देहः - doubts have vanished from my mind and buddhi

करिष्ये वचनं तव - I will do as you say. Krishna - you will guide me at all times.

That is the effect of गीत-उपदेश. It is this effect which translates into Peace and Prosperity in daily life. The means of gaining such Peace and Prosperity is the subject matter of the next 17 chapters. We will take up Chapter 2 next time.