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"Srimadbhagavadgita (Chapter 1: Arjuna Visha:da Yoga)" is a significant gift to humanity from the great epic Mahabharata. It is a timeless source of wisdom that provides essential life lessons and teachings. When we talk about "history," we refer to narrating factual events. It is a record of our past that helps us understand our present and shape our future. Whether we call it "history" or "itiha:sam" in Sanskrit, it serves as a valuable reservoir of knowledge. Sage Vya:sa, the author of the Mahabharata, has encapsulated the entire history of India within this epic. The contributions of countless sages and scholars have enriched our heritage in the form of these epics. They are often referred to as "pura:na:s," meaning ancient narratives, while "itiha:sam" denotes historical accounts. "Pura:na:" signifies something ancient, and it continuously evolves. It adapts and remains relevant, offering timeless principles such as "speak the truth, practice righteousness, honor your parents," which apply to all eras. These principles are not fixed but evolve with each generation. To convey these principles effectively, individuals with different perspectives and levels of understanding employ various narratives. To children, simple stories about animals like cows, goats, birds, and rabbits are shared. They find joy in stories with names of these animals. When narrated to children, these stories evoke laughter and happiness. As children grow, they appreciate slightly more complex stories, which still provide joy. However, the same stories may not resonate with adults. The language of crows and laughter of parrots are distinct. This is where the concept of storytelling adapts to the audience. To adults, the same stories may not appeal or make sense. Hence, it is essential to convey the underlying moral principles in a manner that suits their maturity and understanding. The crow's language and the parrot's laughter are distinct, but both serve the purpose. This flexibility allows us to convey the same moral principles differently to different audiences. This adaptability is the essence of our timeless narratives, both ancient and ever-evolving. They ensure that wisdom is accessible to all, regardless of age or understanding, and they continue to guide us through the ages.

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In this way, for the overall welfare of the human race, there are rules, ethics, and guidelines in place. Such guidelines are referred to as 'Pura:na:s'. Circumstances and characters might change with time but the underlying principles always remain the same. Pura:na:s expound on these principles. Maha:bhara:ta: and Ra:ma:yana: are not Pura:nic texts but are historic texts or Itihasas which record events precisely and chronologically and have been made to known to human race through the power of austerity of the sages who wrote them.

In Ra:ma:yana:, Brahma: appeared before Va:lmiki and relayed the entire epic. हसितम् भाषितम् च एव गतिर् या यत् च चेष्टितम् तत् सर्वम् धर्म वीर्येण यथावत् सम् प्रपश्यति: the four faced Brahma: declared that Sage Va:lmiki would be privy to the inner intentions and thoughts of all the characters in Ra:ma:yana. He commanded him to write the epic with this divinely blessed insight.

Mahabharata had a different background. It was narrated by Sage Vyshampayana: as a form of teaching to the mighty king Janamejaya who was overwhelmed by anger and was on the brink of destruction. This epic was written to show the king how destructive anger can be.

Sage Vyshampayana: showed how anger consumes and destroys everything, just like fire.

Duryodhana: and the Kaurava:s fell prey to anger and caused the overhaul of not only themselves but their entire clan.

Hence, Itihasas are texts that explain how our forefathers overcame their inner demons, and how those who fought their inner demons transcended them successfully and how those who didn't were ultimately destroyed.

The Pa:ndava:s also possessed great anger but it was channeled correctly. This is what the Kaurava:s lacked. With anger, selfishness compounded for Kaurava:s, while for the Pa:ndava:s, anger led them to increased love for Bhagavan. Hence, Pa:ndava:s were ready to obey Bhagava:n while the Kaurava:s were not ready to heed anyone's advice.

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It is human to experience anger and desire. The itihāsās teach us how to channel anger and desire in a way that benefits us and society. Veda Vyāsā has gifted mankind with Mahābhārātā, which is verily the gem of itihāsās, to demonstrate the defects and consequences of unrestrained anger. The Mahābhārātā is a large epic comprising of 1lakh number of verses. It is preceded by 250 introductory verses. Due to its large size of 1 lakh 250 verses, this great epic poem is called "bhārātā".

It is not practically possible for us to absorb the entire bhārātā to the extent that we may be able to implement the learnings in our lives. Hence, Sri Krishna incarnated to give us the essence of the Mahābhārātā along with the Vedas and Upanishads. All of Lord Narayana's incarnations fiercely aimed at making these truths known to us. Each of his incarnation aimed at delivering a distinct message.

For example, in the vāmanā avatāra, through seeking alms from King Bali, the Lord conveyed that mere contact with His feet helps one transcend the world. In Ramayana, Ahalya gained a form from her initial state as dust upon contact with Lord Rama's feet. Similarly, the Lord's feet help us recognize and remember our true Inner Being and re-identify ourselves so that we may return to a state of bliss.

It is therefore for the benefit of jivas that vāmanā made sure to encompass the entire earth and the skies while measuring their expanse with His feet. Rama roamed vast expanse of lands under the pretext of the search for Sita. However, some jivas still escaped contact with the Lord's feet hence were born again. Like a mother concerned for the wellbeing of her children, Lord Nayana had incarnated yet another time as Sri Krishna for our deliverance. However, should we not be ready to receive the message?

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The incarnation of Lord Krishna prepares us to listen, imparts the right method of asking questions and teaches us.. The great teachings he delivered in that incarnation are the Bhagavad Gita. We must strive to listen, practice, and understand these teachings. It is the divine guidance provided to humanity by Lord Krishna's grace.

Lord Krishna gave guidance to Arjuna. This is what the Mahabharata essentially offers us. It is referred to as the 'Fifth Veda', and conveys the essence of all Vedas. Although Vedas are believed to be infinite, Sage Vya:sa structured and compiled them into 1181 branches. However, today, only 9 branches remain. Studying it entirely is beyond our capacity, but we should strive to understand its essence. The important subject matter in it, what is directly applicable to us, and which we can practice, is the divine guidance of Bhagavad Gita from Lord Sri Krishna. To hear it, one must be worthy. Just hearing is not enough; one must practice the teachings.

Since his childhood Lord Krishna made many attempts to impart these teachings. But the individuals He came across were either adept at practice or at hearing, but not both. Lord Krishna would freely share wisdom in Gokul, and the children were very good listeners but were not able to practice the teachings.

He eventually moved to Mathura Nagar. In Mathura, during the Dvapara Yuga, he sought to tell the kings how to attain greatness. There were great personalities like Bhishma and Drona among them. They were qualified to practice the teachings but were not ready to listen to Krishna.

The perfect student is one who listens to the teachings and implements them in practice, and Krishna was on the search for such a student. He found this student in Arjuna after about 70 years of this search. He delivered the message of the Gita to the world through Arjuna.

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Those who questioned the worthiness of the Mahabharata for Bharata wondered, 'Is the scripture worth its weight in gold?' - No. It's not the weight of the book but the increase in wisdom and specialness it imparts that our ancestors always revered. Within it, it contains two (books). One is the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, and the other is the Shri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotra. Shri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotra consists of verses that, when added together, also form a valuable part. The Bhagavad Gita is like a gem among the seven hundred verses, encompassing everything necessary for human life.

Only showing it is not enough, right? Just as Arjuna, who heard it, was amazed. To create such a masterpiece for humans, the Bhagavad Gita came into existence. After imparting it to Arjuna, Lord Krishna's teachings, and when Arjuna, in turn, said, 'I will follow your words,'

To follow a teaching, the imparted knowledge must be established firmly and internalized. To internalize is to allow it to sink into the heart and not let the teachings stop at the level of the mind. At the purely mental level, there are potential pitfalls of the truth being lost with doubts or delusion. We are human after all, aren't we? Other creatures do something when told to do so and refrain from doing something when prohibited. It's only with the human mind that the opposite happens. It's therefore of primary importance that the teachings are absorbed into one's heart, beyond the mind.

After sinking into the heart, the teachings must be firmly established as the truth through the process of constant contemplation (Mananam). One must be ready mentally for the process of Mananam. The constant contemplation and eventual establishment of the teachings paves the way towards their practical implementation.

Listening to the teachings, inculcating the teachings firmly in one's heart, and following the teachings are the three necessary steps that one must be qualified to follow. Arjuna possessed the abilities to do all of these three. Thus he was chosen, the middle Pandava as he was, with two younger and two older brothers, as the first hand recipient of the Bhagavad Gita.

Mental strength is of utmost importance. The fruit of physical and material strength cannot benefit an individual if he has no mental strength. Therefore, the central theme of all spiritual knowledge is mental strength. "Nayam atma balahinena labhyo" – Mundaka Upanishad (3.2.4). Which means : what is worth knowing can never be known by the mentally weak.

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So we require a strong mind and heart. This is called the firmness of intention. Krishna preaches to Arjuna "हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ" Krishna preaches that weakness of heart is worthless and to be cast aside and that Arjuna must rise to action. Arjuna was qualified to receive this teaching hence Krishna chose him to be the recipient of the knowledge.

In general, one must never impart valuable knowledge nor give something of value to anyone who doesn't explicitly want it, desire it, recognize its true value, and ask for it. Giving unsolicited knowledge is misconstrued as madness and won't be taken in the right spirit ie as a sign of goodwill. It can be compared to a person who stands at the intersection of four roads and guides people on where to go with no one asking him for directions. Wouldn't such a person seem to be a bit off?

"Naaprushtah kasyachit bruyat" say the Shastras. Therefore, Lord Krishna orchestrated an event where Arjuna was bound to turn to Him for guidance, and was able to give the teachings of Bhagavad Gita for the world, since these teachings are timeless, can be followed regardless of the epoch and are of Dharmic value. therefore, this is the best of best of all spiritual texts. Spiritual knowledge must not make one shun one's worldly responsibilities and cut off from worldly ties and family in the name of Vairagya. Such so called knowledge is poison. While

providing spiritual knowledge, it makes one shirk one's duties, and such knowledge is not acceptable. Spiritual knowledge must make one carry out their duties perfectly. Practice of spiritual teachings must not be with haste and impatience but with thoughtfulness and clarity.

Bhagavad Gita is one such text that prepares a person to practice its teachings to their meaningful culmination. Arjuna played the role of the student in this setup where Lord Krishna made these teachings available for mankind

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“Sarve vya:sa: para:sara:” When imparting wisdom to another, we are capable of great teachings and take upon the roles of Vya:sa: and Para:sara:. However, when it's time to self-introspect and reflect on one's defects, we lack in directing these teachings towards ourselves.

Bhagavad Gita is basically a manual that teaches us how to practice the right principles. Arjuna knew the principles theoretically, but was unable to practice them, fallen as he was on his chariot at the time of war. Lord Krishna's message of the Gita transformed Arjuna's attitude from this initial state to one where he was sure of his intention to fight “Sthitosmi gata sandeha:.” Spiritual knowledge makes one ready to implement the following changes : distancing oneself from undesirable afflictions or addictions and drawing one closer to the wholesome. Bhagavad Gita, the text of 700 verses, can achieve both of these ends.

Lord Krishna probably delivered the message of the Gita to Arjuna over 3-4 hours, surrounded by 18 akshauhinis, with many weapons, instruments, warriors, and animals. What were they doing at this time? Were they quiet spectators? Listeners? Or did they cause noisy interruptions? If so, wouldn't they have drowned out the voices of Lord Krishna and Arjuna? How could the two have conversed then? These are natural questions to the reader.

In reality, Lord Krishna was “Yogeshwara:”, in possession of many powers. He used Yogic power to forcefully withdraw the senses of everyone else but Arjuna. Everyone and everything on the battlefield, except for Arjuna, were rendered still by Lord Krishna. The power to listen was given only to Arjuna at that time.

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Veda Vya:sa had offered the power for Dhritara:shtra to be a spectator of the war with remote vision. Having never witnessed the happy times, Dhritara:shtra did not want to be able to watch a gory war. He suggested that his trusted mantri Sanjaya: be offered this power instead.

Sanjaya: was given the powers of remote vision and audio by Veda Vya:sa:. Sanjaya was thus able to relay the happenings of the war field verbatim to Dhritara:shtra.

Thus we have received Bhagavad Gita, a text that confers upon the reader discrimination and turns him into a practitioner of Dharma. To be a practitioner, one must repeatedly contemplate

upon the teaching. To master the content of a subject, a student must repeatedly study it, so that it's possible to apply it once.

It is recommended to contemplate upon the Gita everyday to inculcate the interest to practice a teaching, even if it's not possible to implement it right away. It is our duty to study Bhagavad Gita.

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Bhagavad Gita is a boon given to mankind by Parama:tma: Sri Krushna: Himself. Arjuna received it as the representative of the human race. It is important to analyze the content of a message rather than the one who delivers the message. There are several speculations on whether Sri Krushna is man or god or Paramatma or a mere cowboy. “बालादपि नु भाषितम्” says the Ni:ti Sha:stra i.e. irrespective of the status or age of the messenger, a worthy message needs to be accepted and practiced.

Noone has denounced the Bhagavad Gita thus far. People from all races, nationalities, believers and non-believers alike have studied this text, interpreted them according to their psychological and philosophical leanings, and have acknowledged the superiority of this text.

It is appropriate to spread knowledge about the path of probity, while it is necessary to stop or at least attempt to stop any wrongdoing. If all attempts fail, one must at least leave the place where the wrongdoing occurs. Thus, one's disconnection from the wrongdoing must be underlined through behavior.

When Duryodhana and his allies stripped Draupadi publicly she prayed “श्री कृष्ण रक्षा माम् शरणागताम्”. It was her surrender to Krishna that saved her from humiliation. Paramatma noted with much anguish that Bhishma:, Drona:, and Karna: lamely watched this act of debasement being perpetrated against Draupadi, as did her five warrior husbands. These individuals had the power to stop it but did not. Hence Bhishma: died a prolonged and painful death, after having spent a month on a bed of arrows and slowly bled out. Drona:cha:rya also died a horrific death on the battlefield as did Karna. Kauravas, who were all mute spectators of the scene, had gory deaths during the Kurukshetra war.

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Pandavas, who were also mute spectators to this act of debasement were equal recipients to the wrath of Krishna. However, Krishna did not destroy them as that would render His devotee Draupadi a widow. So, Pandavas merely faced some troubles and obstacles in the war. Indeed, Krishna would have been pleased had Pandavas stopped the disrobing of Draupadi.

Krishna had the power to propagate the path of right action through His command and also had the authority to get everyone to implement His command. He therefore took it upon Himself to right the wrongs that the Kauravas inflicted on the world. This is the quality of a righteous person : let's for a second consider him to be one amongst us, and not Paramatma. He

exhibited the qualities of a truly learned man by teaching the right path of action to Arjuna and getting Arjuna to follow His teachings on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

In a healthy society, the learned and scholarly must impart values and righteousness. This is also true of households where irrespective of one's status, their wisdom gives them the right to correct the members of the family. Modern societies, and more commonly in metros or cities, are plagued with a sense of indifference. Indifference to the wrongs being committed by a neighbor or a family member is indeed dangerous.

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Sri Krushna could have easily been indifferent to the plight of his relatives and been steeped in the enjoyment of his wealth, companions, and possessions. He could have happily washed his hands off the war and his role as a charioteer when Arjuna refused to fight. Had Sri Krushna shirked his duty at this opportunity, the human race would have been steeped further in darkness. Instead, He took it upon Himself to show the path of righteousness to a society that's plagued with negativity and indifference.

Bhagavad Gita is a text that makes its readers execute their duties. It is a text that is meant to be implemented practically, and is not a purely theoretical philosophical treatise that provides intellectual entertainment.

Vedic texts that are meant to be obeyed and implemented are called Shastra:. It originates from the word "Sh:anam" which means "order". Just as a citizen abides by the rules and guidelines laid out by the ruling government in a country, one is to adhere to the Shastras, the essence of which is given in the Bhagavad Gita.

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Arjuna did not claim to have attained detachment from worldly activities thus forfeiting all action but instead surrendered thus to Sri Krushna at the end of Bhagavad Gita : करिष्ये वचनम् तव (I will do as you say). Paramatma's promise in the Bhagavad Gita is that if the jivatma lives righteously as per the code of conduct laid out for him the shastras in present life, his afterlife will be taken care of by the Supreme. All species but the human one have no conception of afterlife, and live perfectly in the current world. Human beings on the other hand abuse and exploit other beings in their present lives, their sights being set on the afterlife. This is unacceptable.

If we are supposed to behave in a way that is beneficial to other beings, should this be based on our intellectual understanding, or our knowledge? Our relatively short life spans are insufficient to understand, in totality, what benefits mankind. Moreover, what is beneficial to one may not be so to the other.

At times, what causes pain and misery in the short term benefits one in the long term, just like a painful medical treatment ultimately benefits the patient. Such circumstances are called “shreyas”.

On the battlefield, Arjuna demurred from inflicting pain on his friends and families that stood as his opponents from across him.

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Sri Krushna urged Arjuna to let go of his attachment to his bodily connections (relatives), and punish those wrongdoers. One may wonder, “is it befitting of paramatma to spur one towards violence?”.

When a criminal is incarcerated, the hope is for him to shift towards better ways when he rejoins society upon the completion of his sentence. Similarly, Sri Krushna urged Arjuna towards the path of “shreyas” i.e. what ultimately benefits the human race in the long term.

Sha:stra contains instructions meant for the benefit of mankind. Instead of analyzing the sha:stra with our limited intelligence, we must obey the dictates of Sri Krushna who has conveyed the contents of the Sha:stra in Bhagavad Gita. These dictates do not urge one towards indifference or negligence of their worldly duties.

The greatest path of righteousness is to allow one’s humanness to shine through, and to coexist with other species. There is no need to explicitly hanker after godliness, and must not succumb to their base animal instincts either. Indeed, gods seek the person who can perfectly execute his role as a human being.

There are several examples of individuals who have lived true to their stations in life that were recipients to the favors of gods whenever they encountered obstacles in their paths. These stories are mentioned in the Upanishads. Sri Krushna sought out Arjuna and not the other way around.

Arjuna is called “Gudake:sha”. “Guda” can mean “sleep” or “laziness”. Arjuna is one who has conquered both of these, hence has acquired the name.

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Sri Krushna, on the other hand, is called Hrishikesha which means controller of the senses of all beings. Thus, He was able to control the senses and movement of all the beings on the battlefield while during the Bhagavad Gita.

Conquering over sloth and sleep, and with restraint in worldly matters, we may be able to perfectly execute our duties. Understanding of philosophical principles ensures a knowledge of Veda:nta. Thus, one may be able to walk the righteous path towards Dharma. Sri Krushna sought to impart this understanding to Arjuna who was already “Guda Kesha” to spur him towards the path of Dharma.

Sorrow arises when one strays from the path of righteousness (Dharma) to the path of material acquisition (Artha). Sha:stras and Veda:nta texts do not denounce wealth and material abundance, but denounce greed and craving for it.

The great sage of the 14th century Veda:nta Desika turned down an offer from his contemporary Sage Vidyaranya to have a position of authority in the empire's court. Thus Desika followed the path of Dharma.

King Janashruthi was a generous donor that gained a great radiance due to his abundant acts of charity. Magnanimous as he was, he also had a huge ego. This king was familiar with the language of the birds. To teach him a lesson, the gods Indra and Agni appeared in the form of birds and flew about the tree under which the king was resting. The first bird exclaimed, "Watch out! There is a great radiance below the tree : we might get burnt up in the flames if we fly over it", to which the other bird dismissively said, "Oh! That's nothing, I know of a greater radiance elsewhere..." The king then realized that he wasn't the greatest of all donors, and there was indeed someone better.

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King Janashruti realized that the said person was a mere cart driver and sought to understand what the latter's source of radiance was. When we encounter those with greater talents, we must treat them as examples, rather than get jealous of them. When we encounter those with fewer resources or capabilities than us, we must help advance them, just as a doctor would a patient, instead of poke fun at them. The king was greedy to possess whatever the cart-driver possessed so that he could reach the same status and tried to woo him with messages of gifts of wealth, positions, and even his own daughter's hand in marriage. The cart-driver firmly refused all these favors. Finally, the king himself went to meet the cart-driver. When the cart-driver refused to meet him, the king cried in sorrow and frustration. Out of sympathy for the king, the cart-driver met him and imparted teachings about the principles of the Upanishad, thus correcting the king's thinking.

What we must understand from this story is that when one hankers after wealth, fame, positions of power, and possessions one's path is sure to stray from that of righteous conduct, and sorrow ensues. When one does not desire these worldly affectations, he automatically gains them in due course, without being enslaved to those who are in a position to grant them, while in fact those individuals would become submissive to such a person who exhibits restraint in worldly desires.

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Wealth, fame, and positions are like cuckoos that look attractive and breezily roam the gardens. We desire capturing them generally. When we chase these birds in the garden, we might trip over stones or thorny bushes and hurt ourselves, and also drive the birds away. If, on the other hand, we focus on our duty in the garden these birds generally fly to us and perch themselves on our backs and shoulders by themselves giving us pleasure and happiness. Enjoying material benefits is not necessarily wrong but to hanker after them perceiving them to be the ultimate goal is. Bhagavad Gita teaches us that one must pursue one's duties and not get deterred by obstacles or distracted by pleasurable by-products.

Bhagavad Gita is not merely a text on Bhakti and Vedanta. Had it been a text on Bhakti alone, Chapters 9 and 12 would have sufficed. In the Uddhava Gita, Uddhava expounded on the nature of Bhakti to the Gopikas : to love, desire, serve, and worship Bhagavan alone, and that everything else is unnecessary.

However, Bhagavad Gita is a text that expounds on the duty of a human being and is a manual on how to channel one's tendencies towards executing one's duties. Thus, it is also a practical text of Vedanta.

Sorrow and grief are natural to the human condition. The Bhagavad Gita leads one to victory from these states of sorrow. Desire for fame and reputation is all but natural.

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This text helps one deal with the desire, channel it appropriately, embrace one's humanness, and verily makes the god descend to the individual practicing it. Every branch in the Gita is a precious gem.

Arjuna qualified to be the recipient of the Bhagavad Gita since he had the eagerness to receive the teaching and the determination to implement it. As such, no other qualification is really required.

Arjuna's molding into being a worthy audience requires some background though. The Pandavas, although righteous, were never really ready to receive teachings or further their knowledge on Dharma through advice from others. To orchestrate a situation where this was possible, Sri Krushna incited Duryodhana to conduct the Ra:jasu:ya ya:gam. Sri Krushna delegated roles and responsibilities in the ceremony and accepted a few for Himself as well. On the day of the ceremony which had a widespread attendance, there was a question of who would receive the Agra pu:ja i.e. offerings and respects as the most superior one. Since Bhi:shma was the most senior one, he was consulted with this query. Bhi:shma embarked on a beautiful discourse that expounded on the wondrous qualities of one who is fit for worship. He illustrated the qualities of Bhagavan in Paramapadam and how He would descend in vyu:ha form. He pointed to the large-eyed Sri Krushna as the Paramatma incarnate in Vibhava form, their very relative. This greatly pleased Sri Krushna.

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Sri Krushna hoped to share His wisdom thus fulfilling the purpose of His incarnation after receiving homage at the Agra pu:ja. However, eager as everyone was to worship Him, they weren't ready to listen to what He had to say.

It is customary that wealth and wholesomeness of thought are largely incompatible. Unless there is a driving force supremely powerful such as Sri Krushna, one who has amassed much wealth generally faces a deterioration in the thought process. Dharmara:ja himself, never considered inviting Sri Krushna to the game of dice against the Kaurava:s. Nor did Sakuni, who was a family elder. The outcome of the event would have been different had Sri Krushna been present. Sri Krushna did not want to go uninvited. Finally, when the Pa:ndava:s lost their wealth and when Draupadi surrendered to him when she was on the verge of losing her honor, He appeared at the game of dice as her savior. Relieved as Draupadi was that her status of "pativrata" was not lost, she was not really ready to listen to Sri Krushna's words of wisdom either.

Sri Krushna decided that only if the Pa:ndava:s were to lose their kingdom and wealth would they be mentally attuned to receive wisdom from the Supreme Lord. Therefore, they went on a 12-year old long exile, having lost all material possessions.

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During the Pa:ndava:s exile in the forest, Sri Krushna encouraged Duryodhana to send the great sage Durva:sa and his 300 disciples to the hermitage of the Pa:ndava:s. The Pa:ndava:s lived off the food generated from the Sun-borne vessel "Akshaya pa:tra:" during their exile. The vessel would generate food only from sunrise to sunset. When Durva:sa and his disciples reached the hermitage at around dusk, Dharmara:ja invited them to bathe and partake in dinner, unaware that Draupadi had consumed the final meal offered by the Akshaya pa:tra:. While the sage and his retinue were bathing, Draupadi fretted at the sage's imminent return and the consequences that the Pa:ndava:s would have to face due to this perceived potential blunder. She intensely prayed to Sri Krushna to save her, yet another time.

When Sri Krushna materialized at the hermitage, He requested to be served something to eat. Draupadi explained that the lack of any food was the very reason for her desperate cry of help to Sri Krushna. Sri Krushna asked her to look carefully at the Akshaya pa:tra: and asked her to serve Him the single morsel of food stuck to it. When she did, Sri Krushna willed satiety and contentment upon all beings in the world. Unexpectedly, sage Durva:sa and his 300 disciples retraced their steps after bathing and never visited the hermitage for the meal. Thus Draupadi and the Pa:ndava:s were saved. However, as is common of everyone who forgets the Supreme Lord during happy times, they forgot about Sri Krushna as soon as they were granted this relief. They neglected to seek advice on how to avoid giving false promises to people, which was the entire reason for them to have gotten into this situation in the first place.

At the end of the exile, Sri Krushna played the role of the negotiator between the Pa:ndava:s and the Kaurava:s. While the intention of each of the Pa:ndava:s was a message of peace,

Draupadi was intent on being able to tie her hair once again. When the Kaurava:s attempted to violate her honor at the court, Draupadi swore that she would tie her tresses only when Duryodhana's thigh is broken and Dusha:sana:'s chest is torn. Till then, she would remain with her hair left open since this is symbolic of inauspiciousness for a woman in those times. Sri Krushna convinced her that the purpose of his role as a negotiator is to ensure that her desire is granted. This shows that Sri Krushna instigated the war between the Pa:ndava:s and Kaurava:s. Had Sri Krushna, the Supreme Lord, willed it, He could have prevented the war from happening.

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On the other hand, Sri Krushna promised thus to Draupadi :

वदे ध्याहा हेमवान् सीर्ये पृथ्वी सकली भवेत् ।
सुपेतोयनिधि कृष्णे नमे वचो मोहम् भवेत् ॥

The oceans could dry up, the earth could shatter but I shall never go back on my word, as someone intolerant to dishonor meted out to a woman. His clear intention was to ruin, not facilitate, the negotiation between the Pa:ndava:s and Kaurava:s. Thus Sri Krushna willed and orchestrated the situation in the battlefield of Kurukshetra to impart the teachings of Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna so that the wisdom ultimately benefits the human race. This is the crown jewel of all Vedanta texts.

When Sri Krushna visited the Kaurava:s, Duryodhana extended a warm welcome to Him. He made sure that arrangements for Sri Krushna's meals were made at Bhishma's and Drona's homes, since the former was His grandfather and the latter a Brahmin. Thus, Duryodhana went to great lengths to make sure that Sri Krushna felt welcome and taken care of. However, Sri Krushna partook in meals at Vidura's home. Vidura, poor as he was, might have offered Sri Krushna mere fruit or perhaps fruit peel. Yet Sri Krushna sung praises of the sumptuous meal at Vidura's house with Duryodhana. Incensed, Duryodhana rebuked Sri Krushna thus "O large eyed one! How did you neglect to notice all of us eager to welcome you, and what made you go to Vidura's house, ignoring the rest of us?"

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Sri Krushna clarified that Duryodhana's offerings lacked ruchi i.e. taste and shuchi i.e. hygiene. The taste in an offering is the love with which it is made. The hygiene in a preparation is the lack of selfishness with which it is made. Besides, Sri Krushna pointed out, aren't they enemies? Is it customary or appropriate for an enemy to be offered meals or partake in them? These hostile words of Sri Krushna bear proof to the fact that he was in no way intending towards a peaceful negotiation. They deeply hurt Duryodhana to which he pointed out that the enmity only existed between Pa:ndava:s and Kaurava:s and as far as Sri Krushna is concerned, He bears the same

relationship to both parties. To this, Sri Krushna replied that the Pa:ndava:s are essentially his 5 pra:na: (life forces) and wanting to eliminate them is equivalent to wanting to eliminate His very life force. How can Duryodhana have any love towards Sri Krushna while wanting to eliminate His life force? Isn't that laughable, pointed out Sri Krushna.

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Duryodhana was a man who would have deigned to grant the Pa:ndava:s what they sought him for purely out of condescension. However, with the hurt that Sri Krushna's words caused him, he refused to grant the Pa:ndava:s who stooped so low to ask for 5 kingdoms, 5 cities, 5 villages, a village with 5 streets, or even a home with 5 rooms, a piece of land that would span the dimensions of a pin. Thus, Sri Krishna foiled the negotiation and the war was confirmed. Arjuna and Duryodhana had arrived at Sri Krushna's quarters to seek resources for the war. They arrived at the very same moment as Sri Krushna was resting but Arjuna sat at the Lord's feet while Duryodhana at His head. So, naturally, when Sri Krushna awoke to see Arjuna first. Arjuna was therefore given the chance to place his request first. Sri Krushna stated that he can provide an army of 10,000 soldiers or Himself as a source of consultation, while He will not personally engage in weaponry and warfare. Duryodhana dearly hoped that Arjuna wouldn't choose the army of 10,000. Duryodhana did not think he would require Sri Krushna's consultation. He already had senior members on his team : Drona, Bhishma, and so on. Much to Duryodhana's relief, Arjuna chose to have Sri Krushna on the side of the Pa:ndava:s.

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Arjuna, who was previously a man interested in multiplying wealth and kingdom, had a change in attitude and turned to Sri Krushna solely for Him. It is not easy for a devotee to ask Bhagavan only for His presence bereft of any other worldly gains and affectations. A devotee that has the strength and advancement to do so attains Bhagavan as well as the worldly and material gains. Devotees normally set limits on what they can attain by seeking specific outcomes from Bhagavan, and they may attain them only if they qualify.

Sri Krushna was supremely elated to hear Arjuna's request, to the extent that the Supreme Lord, dictator of the entire universe, agreed to be a charioteer to Sri Krushna. Bhagavan gives Himself entirely to the devotee that bows down in surrender to Him. Arjuna had a positive experience with Sri Krushna as a charioteer in the past, so had requested Him to play the same role during the Kurukshetra war.

Thus, Sri Krushna orchestrated a situation where he delivered the text of Bhagavad Gita to help Arjuna gain victory in the battlefield, and all of us gain victory in our daily lives. This text helps rid one of sorrow and carry out their duties in life.

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Sri Krushna prepared Arjuna to be a very good listener. A good listener must have humility and willingness to listen. This requires a higher quotient of sattva (quality of purity) in a person. Our philosophical texts have stated that when one mode is dominant, the other two are suppressed, of the three modes of nature.

We may be able to recognize the operative modes behind the feelings that arise in us.

Pleasantness, health, and bliss are caused by a dominating sattva mode (of purity). Desire, anger, selfishness, and ego are caused by rajas (mode of passion). Fatigue, lethargy, and sleep are caused by tamas (mode of ignorance).

It is difficult and rare to have sattva as the dominating mode, especially with our modern lifestyles. Therefore, sattva must be carefully nurtured and inculcated through conscious effort.

Great souls try to bring out the sattva in others.

Since Arjuna already had a higher quotient of Sattva in him, Sri Krushna tried to further suppress the other two modes to make him the perfect recipient of a 700 verse long treatise. A true well wisher continues to advise and guide the other person in the right direction and never gives up doing so. This is why Sri Krushna delivered 700 verses of the message of the Gita till Arjuna finally said “karishye vachanam tava” i.e. “I will do as you say”. At this point, Arjuna’s mode of sattva became dominant, after having listened to the Bhagavad Gita in its entirety.

To reap the similar benefit, we need to understand the meaning of the shlokas, the method in which they were delivered, and how they might benefit us in our daily lives, while also being aware of situations that might deter us.

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The text starts with “Dhrutara:shtra uva:cha”. Dhrutara:shtra was blind, not only physically but also spiritually. He could be entirely blamed for the anger and rajas in Duryodhana to have gone unchecked. Out of deluded attachment to Duryodhana, Dhrutara:shtra was never able to reprimand the latter’s ways either during childhood or adulthood. Any attempts were frequently met with blackmails of suicide or angry outbursts from Duryodhana. However, Duryodhana was like the barking dog that never bit. If only Dhrutara:shtra had raised his voice to match Duryodhana he could have controlled his son.

In reality, Dhrutara:shtra was an individual who was well versed in Dharma. When Sri Krushna had visited the court of the Kaurava:s for negotiation, when the evil foursome were going to bind Him, the Lord showed his Universal Form. He granted only Dhrutara:shtra the vision to behold the Universal Form, with the hope that Dhrutara:shtra might at least then stop his sons from any further evil. After the divine sight of Sri Krushna’s Universal Form, Dhrutara:shtra wanted to see nothing further in the material world and returned the gift of sight to Sri Krushna.

However, his heart was closed. Dhrutara:shtra was thus internally blind, that stopped him from doing the right thing even after having received the gift of vision.

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Upon the Pa:ndava:s victory in the war, Dhrutara:shtra wanted to hug Bhi:ma under the pretext of expressing his love. Bhi:ma thought that this Dhrutara:shtra's genuine intention but Sri Krushna saw through real motives, and sent a statue of Bhi:ma instead. Dhrutara:shtra hugged the statue so tightly that it shattered into pieces. Such was his physical strengthened despite being ripened in old age. However, he was deluded with spiritual blindness. Dhrutara:shtra thus stands for the ignorance and darkness in every individual and Bhagavad Gita starts with his name.

The first question posed by Dhrutara:shtra to Sanjaya comprises the first shloka of the Bhagavad Gita :

dhṛitarāśhtra uvācha

dharma-kṣhetre kuru-kṣhetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ

māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāśhchaiva kimakurvata sañjaya

Dharma-kṣhetre - The land of dharma ; Kuru-kṣhetre - where Kauravas inhabit ;

samavetā - together ; yuyutsavaḥ - in order to fight ; māmakāḥ - my people ;

pāṇḍavāśhchaiva - and the Pa:ndava:s ; kimakurvata sañjaya - what did they do, Sanjaya?

This question strikes us as preposterous and Dhrutara:shtra's small-mindedness is on display in this verse. He wondered if the Pa:ndava:s succumbed to their true nature, and if due to the influence of Kurukshetra, which was a land of righteous action, and if they called the war off. Kurukshetra was a place that spurred one towards righteous action and was capable of doing so even with Kaurava:s. It was a place where one's inner tendencies, be it fierceness, love or righteousness were multiplied multifold. Therefore, to understand the situation on the battlefield, it is important to understand the states of mind of the key characters involved.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

Arjuna Visha:da Yoga

Nature is capable of causing both states of peace and restlessness in a person through the modes of purity (sattva), passion (rajas), and ignorance (tamas). From sattva arises bliss, from rajas desire, and from tamas lethargy. Sattva is ideally the dominant mode since it is the most conducive towards the constant remembrance of Bhagavan, and the world is best seen through the lens of sattva. In the first chapter of the Gita, Arjuna stands for sattva, Duryodhana for rajas, and Dhrutara:shtra for tamas. The Bhagavad Gita contains teachings for all the three category of individuals with the aforementioned qualities.

The Gita begins with the mention of Dhrutara:shtra as a metaphor for life beginning with darkness. One progresses from the tamas state of inner blindness and ignorance to the rajas state of harboring desires solely for oneself, and eventually to aiming for the good of society. Dhrutara:shtra's question was posed to Sanjaya who was a great person. They were both classmates but were at very different levels of knowledge, therefore Sanjaya played the role of the deliverer of the message while Dhrutara:shtra received it in this circumstance. Dhrutara:shtra once asked Sanjaya why there were differences in the levels of their knowledge.

ma:ya:m na seve bhadram te na vrutha: dharmam-a:care |

shuddha-bha:vam gato bhaktya: sha:stra:d ve:dmi jana:rdanam ||

Sanjaya explained that he never performed acts of charity for ostentation, he was not deceitful, never sought refuge in ma:ya:, and never performed wasteful rituals. He emphasized on his inner purity, belief in Bhagavan, and constant remembrance of the sha:stra:s. His lack of deceit leads to inner purity, which in turn leads to good action. Good action arises in one belief in sha:stra:s which increases belief in and devotion towards Bhagavan. Thus, he is able to view the world through the lens of devotion to Bhagavan. Viewing the world through this lens, he is able to see the world for what it actually is. He stated that Dhrutara:shtra did not overcome the first hurdle of deceit so could not progress to the subsequent stages and was in a state of inner blindness.

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The preposterousness of Dhrutara:shtra's initial question to Sanjaya is noteworthy : "kimakurvatha?" i.e. "what are they doing?". To cite an example, it is more appropriate to inquire of a person who has visited a restaurant "what did he eat?" rather than "what did he do?" since it must already be obvious that he ate. Shouldn't it have been obvious to Dhrutara:shtra that the Pa:ndava:s and Kauravas are engaged in a bloody war?

Dhrutara:shtra wonders if the Kurukshetra, due to its ability to multiply one's innate tendencies, was able to do that for the sattva in Pa:ndava:s and the rajas in Kaurava:s. It's clear from his question that he was hoping for Pa:ndava:s to forfeit the kingdom and demur from fighting the war, and for the Kaurava:s to have greedily snatched this windfall without the trouble of a war. After all, Dhrutara:shtra would have been elated at that outcome and surprisingly considered it a possibility despite knowing Sri Krushna, whose true nature he was aware of, was guiding the Pa:ndava:s.

Furthermore, that he referred to the hundred Kaurava:s as ma:maka: (my people), implies that he considered the Pa:ndava:s to be outsiders. This narrowmindedness is indicative of the darkness (tamas) in Dhrutara:shtra.

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Whom Dhritarashtra considered to be “mine”, all hundred of them were annihilated in the war. The Pandavas whom he considered to be outsiders, but whom Sri Krishna accepted as His own, thrived and gained victory. The essential message here is that one must behave and act in a manner that he is taken into the fold of a good person. No attempts must be made to win over bad people, and all efforts must be made to distance oneself from such people. This is one of the morals of Mahabharata. Sri Krishna in fact denounced the Kauravas as enemies as He'd declared to Duryodhana

dvisad-annam na bhoktavyam dvisantam naiva bhojayet. “One should not eat an enemy's food or feed an enemy.”

The Kauravas had a battalion of 18 akshauhinis, while the Pandavas had 7. Besides, the most senior and reputable warriors and gurus were present on the Kauravas' side. Yet, victory favored Pandavas due to their satvik nature. Qualities and tendencies are not immediately obvious to the eye but are latently lurking around inside us, and cause tangible results and events when triggered. It is important to suppress tamas (ignorance) with the guidance of preceptors and seers.

Dhritarashtra did turn to Sanjaya who played the role of the seer here. Sanjaya delivered the gist of his message in the last shloka.

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*yatra yogeshvarah krishno yatra partho dhanur-dharah
tatra shrir vijayo bhutir dhruva nitir matir mama 18.78*

This was Sanjaya's reply, about 690 shlokas after Dhritarashtra's initial inquiry in the first shloka. Sanjaya had made an attempt to deliver the truth to Dhritarashtra who was steeped in tamas and had made no attempt to call a ceasefire or correct Duryodhana. Individuals who have tamas are not prepared to recognize the truth and correct course. Bhagavad Gita is a text that shows one the path from darkness to light by prescribing a Dharmic course of action. While Dharma does not seem to have immediate benefits, it is for one's ultimate welfare. The symbolism of beginning with Dhritarashtra's question is to indicate this journey from ignorance to the path of Dharma. While all of us have the three modes of nature and qualities latent in us, which may manifest as good thoughts (satva), anger and desire (rajas), and lapse of reason and logic (tamas), we must be able to channel these qualities appropriately into the path of Dharma to overcome them.

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There are three types of people. Those who misunderstand their bad qualities, those who recognize and try to correct themselves, and those who refuse to even acknowledge them. The third type is a reaction due to tamas to one's own shortfalls.

In response, Sanjaya tries to expose Duryodhana's vulnerability in a hope that Dhritarashtra would ask the Kaurava:s to retreat from their very own downfall.

sañjaya uvācha

dr̥ṣhvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ duryodhanastadā

āchāryamupasaṅgamyā rājā vachanamabravīt (2)

“*pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ*” describes the discipline Duryodhana had perceived with which array of Pandava:s, whose army was less than half the size of his own, was spread out in front of him. This created insecurity in Duryodhana.

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At the beginning of this text, both Duryodhana and Arjuna experience sadness. Duryodhana's sorrow was out of selfishness, while that of Arjuna's was out of a genuine concern for the welfare of others. Everything that Duryodhana saw around him, the Paṇḍava:s, the Kaurava:s, and his Guru himself caused insecurity and sadness in him. It's natural to turn to one's guru at times like these, which Duryodhana did as well. Sanjaya narrates this, referring to Duryodhana as ra:ja: (the king).

If only Duryodhana took a moment to notice the size and quality of his own army, he might have felt a sense of contentment and confidence. Since his dominant quality was rajas, he was more focussed on the opponent, and the jealousy burnt inside him like a fire. People with dominant rajas lose sight of the fact that Bhagavan gives each one of us a fair share.

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However, Duryodhana refused to acknowledge the stalwarts such as Bhi:shma: and Drona on his side. He refused to acknowledge the strengths of his own army.

Sha:stra: instructs one to approach the Guru during times of sorrow but with the proper attitude. Here, Sanjaya shows how Duryodhana viewed Drona with an eye of suspicion. Duryodhana's words to Drona betray his mistrust of his Guru. He was convinced that Drona sided with the Paṇḍava:s secretly. Thus, Duryodhana's sorrow drove him further into delusion and destructive thoughts due to his rajas. Arjuna's sorrow, on the other hand, made his enmity towards his relatives disappear while his heart melted due to his sattva. One's sorrow has different effects on people, depending on their dominant inner qualities.

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Duryodhana's sorrow betrayed his state of delusion. For the 12 years that Duryodhana ruled as king, he operated with perpetual insecurity and harbored a sense of inadequacy. Out of fear that his people would perceive him as an unfit or cruel king, he performed acts of charity and gave many empty promises. This is another quality of rajas, that makes one promise and donate over their capacity purely for the sake of ostentation. Thus, the 12 years of rule contributed to heightening Duryodhana's delusion. Due to the inherent defects in these thoughts, the acts of charity that he performed didn't contribute to his betterment.

In reality, Duryodhana had highly capable, wise, and experienced counsel on his side. However, his state of mind was not conducive to heeding their precious advice.

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Mundaka Upanishad declares "tasmai sa vidva:n upasannaya samyak prasha:nta-citta:ya samanvita:ya" prescribing the manner in which a disciple must approach his Guru i.e. with even-mindedness. Duryodhana was however triggered by insecurity and suspicion that both Bhi:shma and Drona secretly favored the Pa:ndava:s. He did not have the humility to get feedback or advice from Drona but approached him as a king "ra:ja vacanam abhravi:t". Thus, his rajas manifested and stood in the way of him reaping the benefits of receiving his guru Drona's instruction.

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Duryodhana harbored this suspicion ever since Drona and Bhi:shma swore to not kill the Pa:ndava:s. Duryodhana resented that these gentlemen whom he sheltered and fed were being insubordinate towards him, and were taking undue measures to get him to change his ways. Duryodhana failed to recognize that they had a genuine desire to change him for his own well-being. Sanjaya reported to Dhritara:shtra that a very perturbed looking Duryodhana addressed Drona thus :

*paśhyaitām pāṇḍu-putrāṇām āchārya mahatīm chamūm
vyūḍhām drupada-putreṇa tava śhiṣhyeṇa dhīmatā*

He ordered Drona to behold the Pa:ndava:s army with its general , Drupada's son. It is noteworthy that he didn't refer to Drushtadyumna by his name, but rather as Drupada's son, and as Drona's student. He elaborates that Drushtadyumna exhibits much intelligence. This is an indirect insult at his Guru, suggesting that the disciple outshone the guru. It is alright to praise the guru with the disciple but not the other way around.

Bhi:shma and Drona have endured many of Duryodhana's verbal insults since they swore to safeguard the throne of the Kuru dynasty. The occupant of the throne was of less relevance than the throne itself.

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Referring to Drushtadyumna as Drupada's son, Drona's student, and as intelligent were an intentional use of words intended to hurt Drona.

Drupada had sought redemption for being insulted by Drona and performed a sacrifice for which, as a boon, he was granted two children Draupadi and Drupada. The purpose of Drupada's birth was to annihilate Drona. Duryodhana points out in this verse that Drona being well-aware of this, accepted Drupada under his wing and trained him in the very warfare that would lead to his own destruction. The Upanishads have declared that a fit and honorable guru must deliver knowledge when approached by a qualified student with humility. We know of the guru of the asura:s Sukra:cha:rya giving the knowledge of Sanji:vani: mantras to Kacha, the son of the guru of the Devas Brihaspati.

Duryodhana found this foolhardy on Drona's part however. He viewed everyone and everything through the lens of fear and insecurity and couldn't believe Drona's naivete. This is the quality of Rajas assisted by Tamas.

Just as Drona's anger against Drupada might have started receding, Duryodhana rekindled it by mentioning the name of his guru's nemesis in this verse.

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Kalidasa defines that the perfect guru is able to make a nobody into a great soul that is fit to be worshiped by everyone, just like a sculptor can bring out the beauty in an object and cause awe in people's hearts. While Duryodhana recognizes this quality in Drona by quoting the examples of Ekalavya and Drushtadyumna, he resents the fact that he himself has not benefited in similar ways. In reality, Drona had never shown favoritism towards any particular student. Just like the sun's rays reflect differently in every medium, each of Drona's students were able to grasp the teachings to different extents. Duryodhana's heart was filled with jealousy and resentment due to his rajasic nature. This effectively blocked the guru's teachings from entering his mind and heart.

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Rajas makes a person cruel towards everyone around him : family, friends, and well-wishers. Thus, Duryodhana was in a state of eternal conflict. Rajas makes a person selfish, and sorrow doesn't cleanse such a person's heart. Duryodhana was calculative of how he can milk the maximum out of his preceptor and everyone else even while being steeped in sorrow. At this point, intimidated by the array of the enemy's army and its general Drushtadyumna and resenting Drona's perceived favoritism towards the Pa:ndava:s, Duryodhana continues :

*atra śhūrā maheshhvāsā bhīmārjuna-samā yudhi |
yuyudhāno virāṭaśhcha drupadaśhcha mahā-rathaḥ || (4)*

He names every warrior in sight. This indicates that he fails to take stock of his own resources and hasn't yet recognized the warriors on his own side.

A satvic person acts in a manner that is in accordance with needs of the future as well as learnings from the past. A rajasic person looks ahead and wants to do things in haste, paying no heed to the past. A tamasic person is ever mulling over the past and about how much he has lost out.

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Duryodhana's rajas also made him heed to the advice of others and further made him boss over them. This rajasic quality leads to perpetual misery and struggle.

To Duryodhana's eyes, all the warriors on the enemy front looked as mighty as Arjuna and Bhi:ma. He names Vira:ta and Drupada in this verse. It might be that Pa:ndava:s had immense strength, but Duryodhana's insecurity made him perceive everyone on the enemy front as equally powerful warriors who were out to harm him in particular.

He feared Arjuna's skill at the craft of warfare. Bhi:ma had sworn to breaking Duryodhana's thigh, tearing Dussa:sahna's chest, and crushing all the Kauravas, so he struck fear in the heart of Duryodhana.

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Duryodhana goes on to count 23 of the warriors in the 4th, 5th and 6th verses :

*atra śhūrā maheṣhvāsā bhīmārjuna-samā yudhi
yuyudhāno virāṭaśhcha drupadaśhcha mahā-rathaḥ
dhṛiṣṭaketuśhchekitānaḥ kāśhirājaśhcha vīryavān
purujit kuntibhojaśhcha śhaibyaśhcha nara-puṅgavaḥ
yudhāmanyuśhcha vikrānta uttamaujāśhcha vīryavān
saubhadro draupadeyāśhcha sarva eva mahā-rathāḥ*

He includes the children of the Pa:ndava:s, the Upapa:ndavas, who were barely out of their adolescence under the category of "maha:ratha:". There are three grades of warriors : ratha:, ardharatha: and maha:ratha:. Maha:ratha: are of the highest grade and skill. It is unknown if all of these individuals belonged to that class, but Duryodhana's insecurity certainly made him perceive them that way.

A good warrior is supposed to recognize the strengths of his own as well as the enemy's army. Duryodhana however has forsaken his people, and has gone all out in praising the opponent. This is as inappropriate as a man respecting women of the society but abandoning his own wife and mother, or as someone following the righteous order of the world while rebelling against the code of conduct laid down by his own country. Duryodhana's pride and ego has led him to show no solidarity towards his own army and people.

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On his own side, Duryodhana could only name 7 warriors, in an attempt to downplay the greatness of his own army and thus insult his guru Drona.

*asmākaṁ tu viśhiṣhā ye tānnibodha dwijottama
nāyakā mama sainyasya sanjñārthaṁ tānbravāmi te*

He goes on to name them beginning with Drona (bhava:n) :

*bhavānbhīṣhmaścha karṇaścha kṛipaścha samitiñjayaḥ
aśvatthāmā vikarṇaścha saumadattis tathaiva cha*

7 is considered to be inauspicious, especially in the Telugu language since “seven” and “cry” are homonyms. In fact, Duryodhana did woo several great warriors over to his side. One such example was Sa:lya who initially preferred to be on the side of the Pa:ndava:s. Why was Sa:lya not mentioned in this list? And the others that Duryodhana wooed? Almost, as if Drona might have gestured to ask if there are really only 7 warriors that are noteworthy, Duryodhana follows up in the next verse :

*anye cha bahavaḥ śhūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ
nānā-śhastra-praharaṇāḥ sarve yuddha-viśhāradāḥ*

Duryodhana refrains from naming all the great warriors in on his army but instead refers to them as “and the others” (anye cha). He does mention that they are skilled at warfare and have arrived at the battlefield giving up their lives for his sake

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Indeed this is an inauspicious utterance. Duryodhana could have said that the warriors were ready to give their lives up for him, but to say that they have already let go of their lives? Besides, he also recognizes their skill in warfare yet feels convinced that their deaths are imminent?

Bhagavad Gita is like a mirror that clearly shows us our defects, without additions or editions. It is our responsibility to use this text to take stock of our current states and better ourselves. Contentment is a rare quality. Ambition is acceptable as long as God is treated as the refuge and as the one who grants everything that the seeker wants to achieve. Arjuna desired the kingdom and welfare of everyone and turned to Sri Krushna. Duryodhana went against the word of Sri Krushna, and his guru, deserted his family and army and eventually caused his own and their destruction.

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In Chapter 11, when Sri Krushna reveals His Universal Form, He advises Arjuna : mayaivaite nihata:h pu:rvam eva nimitta ma:tra bhava savyasa:chin. Sri Krushna willed to destroy the Kauravas the day they debased Draupadi publicly. Arjuna is merely an instrument to kill the

Kaurava:s who were effectively already destroyed by Sri Krushna. Sri Krushna willed that Arjuna enjoys the glory and praise of a warrior so that His devotee Draupadi is pleased. It's possible that Duryodhana instinctively perceived the doom awaiting his side of the battlefield and pronounced his warriors as having left their lives behind for his sake.

Duryodhana mentions that his warriors were well-versed in a variety of different weapons ("na:na shastra praharana"), but this is not really a qualification. A jack of all trades, and master of none is one who is not well-respected. One who can go into intricate depths of a particular subject is more respected for his expertise. Breadth isn't key, depth of knowledge and skill is key.

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The Pa:ndava:s were masters in the skilled use of one weapon. Arjuna was invincible while wielding the bow and arrow, Nakula the sword, Bhi:ma the mace, and Dharmara:ja the specter. Duryodhana points out here that his army has a general knowledge of all weaponries, betraying his dissatisfaction at their lack of expertise in any one of them.

*aparyāptam tadasmākaṁ balaṁ bhīṣhmābhirakṣhitam
paryāptam tvidameteṣhāṁ balaṁ bhīmābhirakṣhitam (11)*

Duryodhana refers to his army as being under the protection of Bhi:shma. He feels that this army is slowly slipping away from him and will soon abandon him. He seems to underestimate the prowess of Bhi:shma who was a valorous warrior that even Sri Krushna had failed to take down on Day 11 of the Kurukshetra war. On the day, Sri Krushna witnessed the efficiency with which Bhi:shma destroyed the Pa:ndava:s and also noted the lukewarm response from Arjuna. Frustrated, Sri Krushna who had previously vowed to not use a single weapon during this war, deployed His Sudarsana against Bhi:shma and pounced on him. Bhi:shma was elated at this and addressed Sri Krushna in the following Stuti : "sva nigama mapaha:ya mat pratigñā: mṛtamadhikartumavapluto rathasthaḥ | Dhṛtarathacaraṇo abhyaya:ccaladgur haririva hantumibhaṁ gatottari:yaḥ".

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Bhi:shma states that as long as he has his bow, Sri Krushna would not be able to harm him. However if Sri Krushna commands Bhi:shma to lay down his bow, he would do so and get finished off by the Supreme Lord.

Bhi:shma had taken an oath to provoke Sri Krushna into wielding a weapon despite His own oath to not even touch one during the Kurukshetra war. Bhi:shma had taken this oath on the day when an elated Duryodhana reported to him that he won an army of 10,000 while Arjuna merely chose Sri Krushna over strength in numbers. When Bhi:shma rebuked Duryodhana for this choice since Sri Krushna's prowess can outdo any number of soldiers, Duryodhana relayed Sri Krushna's oath to not hold any weapon but to play the role of a consultant. Duryodhana felt that they had no dearth of senior members who are able to give solid advice on the side of the Kaurava:s. Bhi:shma sympathized with Duryodhana for his naivete and took an oath then to make Sri Krushna violate His own. The Supreme Lord does not ever want to see His devotees

lose or get humiliated, while He is ready to face insults in the bargain for their sake. Hence, Sri Krushna went back on His word so that Bhi:shma may fulfill his oath.

Once, when Bhi:shma claimed that he would finish off the enemies' side, Duryodhana alleged him of bearing feelings of allegiance towards the Pa:ndava:s. Bhi:shma repudiates this allegation thus “shaktoham dhanushekena nihantum narvapa:nnavan”

Usually, warriors would carry backup weapons while heading to a war just in case that their primary weapons get damaged during the war.

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Bhi:shma declares that he can finish off the Pa:ndava:s and Sri Krushna with a single bow and no backup. This is after all the Bhi:shma who challenged and won against his guru Parusara:ma. However, Bhi:shma had no desire to challenge Sri Krushna and wanted no part of such a victory.

Duryodhana states in verse 10 that his large army feels mostly powerless (*aparyāptam tadasmākaṁ balam bhīṣhmābhirakṣhitam*), while the enemy's side seems intimidating (*paryāptam tvidameteṣhām balam bhīmābhirakṣhitam*). By using “idam” which in Sanskrit means “here”, Duryodhana perceives the opponent quickly advancing towards them in an intimidating fashion.

Duryodhana states that his army is under the protection of the general Bhi:shma, however, he does not say the same for the enemy. Instead of stating that they are under the protection of their general Drushtadyumna, he mentions Bhi:ma's name. Bhi:ma is irrelevant in this context. In situations of negotiation or diplomacy between warring factions or countries, only members of the same rank meet with each other. A general meets with another general, a minister with another minister. Therefore, stating the name of an individual other than the general in this verse is inappropriate. Duryodhana could have still chosen to use the name of Dharmara:ja , the eldest one, or Arjuna, the greatest warrior, or Sri Krushna, the one running the show. Him choosing to mention Bhi:ma here betrays his cowardice and fear and that he has lost all sensibility.

Bhagavad Gita helps us recognize our own defects and work at bettering them through the portrayal of these characters. Where our qualities seem similar to the characters on the side of the evil, we must actively work towards eliminating them.

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We must also try to emulate the qualities of the characters on the side of the good. Chapter 1 of the Bhagavad Gita presents to us three types of people :those with no discrimination as represented by Dhritara:shtra, the arrogant as represented by Duryodhana, and those who yearn to better themselves, represented by Arjuna. Those filled with pride and arrogance are of a suspicious nature and are filled with insecurity in regard to all situations and people. In reality,

there is nothing that God has created which is bad. Every situation that is presented to us can be used to better ourselves or for our own downfall. Poison in the right quantities can be a medicine while rice in inappropriate quantities can lead to one's death.

Thus Duryodhana confided in his Guru the day before the beginning of the Kurukshetra war. Bhi:shma vowed to not fight against his grandsons the Pa:ndava:s. Duryodhana was forced to comply with Bhi:shma in this regard to retain him on the side of the Kauravas. Under Sakuni's advice to keep Bhi:shma as the general despite his vow, Duryodhana decided to war the Pa:ndava:s along with Karna and the others.

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On the side of the Pa:ndava:s the only oath taken was by Bhi:ma to single handedly annihilate the Kaurava:s, tear open Dussa:sana:'s chest and drink his blood, and break Duryodhana's thigh with his mace : “Nuyōdhanam imam pāvam hanhāismi gadayā yudhi Śiraḥ pādēna cāsyāham adhiṣṭāsyāmi bhūtalē. Vakṣa śūrasya nirvānya paruṣasya durātmanah

'Duślāsananya rudhiram pāsyāmi mrgarāḍiva”

It's against Dharma of warfare to hurt one's thigh, but it was Bhi:ma's righteous duty to fulfill his vow.

Duryodhana contrasts Bhi:shma who vowed to not hurt the Pa:ndava:s against Bhi:ma who has taken an oath to ensure a horrific end to the Kaurava:s and concludes that his side of the army is aparya:ptam i.e. unfit and inept, while pointing out that the enemy's side is parya:ptam i.e. sufficiently abled. While Dhritara:shtra silently listened to everything Sanjaya relayed, his son lacked this quality. Thus Duryodhana did not even pause a moment to listen to what his guru Drona might have had to say. This is a standard quality of one who does not seek to improve oneself.

Furthermore, he had the gall to issue the following order :

ayaneṣhu cha sarveṣhu yathā-bhāgamavasthitāḥ

bhīṣhmamevābhīrakṣhantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi (11)

The guru is the one that must issue orders to the student but things seem to be reversed in this situation. Duryodhana, in his anger, has lost all sensibility.

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Kruddhah paapam na kuryaat, eeh kruddho hanyaad gurūnapi kruddhah paruṣayā vācā narassādhūnadhiṣṭē” is a verse from Neeti Shastra. One who is angry knows not how to behave with one's guru, mother, or father.

Verse 11 underlines the narcissism of Duryodhana as a leader, just as only delegates the responsibility of giving support to Bhi:shma to his team, while he wants to be at the forefront of everything else. Veda Vya:sa illustrates the dangers of being a person who wants to hog all credit and visibility through his portrayal of Duryodhana.

From afar, Bhishma has been noticing the dialog between his grandson Duryodhana and Drona. He can sense that Duryodhana's strength is faltering and that he feels demotivated and weak. While Bhis:hma's heart fills up with compassion at the compromised state of Duryodhana, he is also increasingly worried that Drona might react in anger to everything that is being said to him. Bhis:hma although of a ripe age, had great prowess and wanted to induce some spirited energy into the obviously demotivated Duryodhana. He issues a loud war cry and blows his conch in response to Duryodhana's words acknowledging his position as the king. Sanjaya thus reports :
tasya sañjanayan harṣham kuru-vṛiddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ
siṃha-nādam vinadyochchaiḥ śhaṅkham dadhmau pratāpavān (12)

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It is customary for the general of an army to issue a war cry to indicate readiness to begin the war. While the Pa:ndava:s were in no haste to do so, since Bhis:hma blew his conch, as is customary, the rest of the army of Kaurava:s followed suit.

tataḥ śhaṅkhāśhcha bheryaśhcha paṇavānaka-gomukhāḥ
sahasaivābhyahanyanta sa śhabdastumulo 'bhavat (13)

However, since all of the Kaurava:s blew their conches, played their kettledrums and a variety of other instruments at the very same time, the resulting sound was cacophonous and thunderous, resonating across the sky. The undisciplined nature of Duryodhana, the leader, results in indiscipline amongst his people. The way the Kaurava:s issued war cries illustrates their lack of discipline and coordination.

In contrast, the Pa:ndava:s who had sought refuge in Sri Krushna. Keeping aside the matter of Sri Krushna being the Supreme Lord, He was of great discipline and a methodical nature. We observe this being played out in the way the army of the Pa:ndava:s were lined up systematically in order.

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It is the Pa:ndava:s duty to respond to the war cries from the Kaurava:s. Although Drushtadyumna was the general of the army, he never perceived himself to be the foremost member. Therefore, the entire army deferred to Sri Krushna to blow his conch first. *tataḥ*

śhvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau
mādhavaḥ pāṇdavaśhchaiva divyau śhaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ (14)

Sanjaya describes that there is a beautiful chariot drawn by white horses in which there were Ma:dhava and Arjuna. Ma:dhava blew His divine conch. Usually when warriors with high energy hear war cries, it arouses feelings of happiness in them. But the sound of Sri Krushna's conch struck fear in the hearts of the Kaurava:s

We don't know if the Kauravas had names for their conches, but Sanjaya outlines the names of the conches of the Pa:ndava:s. Even in modern times, we tend to name our homes, vehicles, and even pens that are dear to us. Similarly, the Pa:ndava:s named their conches.

pāñchajanyam hṛiṣhīkeśho devadattam dhanañjayah

paunḍram dadhmau mahā-śhaṅkham bhīma-karmā vṛikodarah (15)

Sanjaya outlines the names of their conches in verse 15. Besides, he refers to Sri Krushna as “Hrishikesha” - a name that bears much relevance to this chapter, which we will address later. To be noted that the conches were blown in reflection of the hierarchy of the individuals' statuses and in sequence. Unlike the Kaurava:s, the conches were blown only one at a time, with each warrior waiting for the previous one to get done. After Sri Krushna blew the Pa:nchajanya, Arjuna blew his conch Devadatta.

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Next up was Bhi:ma, referred to as “vrikodarah” meaning wolf in this verse. He is likened to a wolf due to voracious appetite and strong digestion. Due to his digestive abilities, all of the food that Bhi:ma ate got converted to strength. His conch was called Paundram. Bhima possessed no object that was soft and gentle and his conch was accordingly sturdy and emanated a strong sound.

anantavijayam rājā kuntī-putro yudhiṣṭhirah

nakulah sahadevaśhcha sughoṣha-manipuṣhpakau (16)

Dharmara:ja, a sattvic man, soft and patient in his ways. He blew his conch Ananta Vijayam only after Bhi:ma. Nakula then blew his conch Sughosha and Sahadeva the Manipushpaka.

Sahadeva, being the youngest, was also probably the most luxurious and might have had pearls adorning his conch.

Every conch's sound represented the warrior's nature and their names arose from the qualifications of their owners. For example, Sri Krushna's conch was named Pa:nchajanya because He had slayed the demon Panchajanya and took possession of his conch.

Warriors were identified and recognized from the sounds of their conches. For example, Rukmini Devi recognized the Pa:nchajanya and expected Sri Krushna's arrival at her wedding scene. During the incognito phase of their exile, Arjuna was recognized by the sound of his conch Devadatta.

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The Pa:ndava:s blew their conches in sequence and with their sounds emanating from different directions, their coordinates were known to the Kaurava:s. Sanjaya then recounts the names of the great warriors who followed the Pa:ndava brothers in blowing their conches :

kāśhyaśhcha parameshhvāsaḥ śhikhaṇḍī cha mahā-rathaḥ

dhrīṣṭadyumno virāṭaśhcha sātyakiśh chāparājitaḥ (17)

drupado draupadeyāśhcha sarvaśhaḥ pṛithivī-pate

saubhadraśhcha mahā-bāhuḥ śhaṅkhāṇdadhmuḥ prīthak prīthak (18)

The great warriors Shikhandi, Drushtadyumna, Virata, Drupada, Satyakish and so on sounded their conches separately and in sequence (“prīthak prīthak”). They did this to slowly build up the fear in the Kauravas in a crescendo fashion while also trying to demonstrate their discipline. Such a display was possible because they had Sri Krushna on their side.

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The Paṇḍava:s extended sounding of conches likely stirred feelings of inadequacy and jealousy in the Kaurava:s. Although outnumbered, the Paṇḍava:s strategy of blowing their conches in sequence caused so much fear in the hearts of the Kaurava:s that their hearts were shattered as declared by Sanjaya to Dhritara:shtra :

*sa ghoṣho dhārtarāṣṭrāṇāṃ hṛidayāni vyadārayat
nabhaśhcha prīthivīm chaiva tumulo abhyanunādayan (19)*

Dhritara:shtra being blind in his ways didn’t hasten to have his sons retreat from the war even then.

A question that might arise is : why did the sound of the Paṇḍava:s conches not strike fear amongst themselves? When we see something we love, the love only compounds and when we see something we abhor, the hate increases and herein lies the answer to that question.

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On the other hand, when we see or hear something associated with someone abhorred, it causes agitation. Since the Kaurava:s were against Sri Krushna, every conch that was sounded from the Paṇḍava:s reminded them of Him, causing them much distress. The very same sounds caused happiness and comfort in the hearts of the Paṇḍava:s.

The weapon’s held by Srimanna:ra:yana: such as the conch and discus and the bow and arrow of Ra:ma are beheld as decorative accessories that help protect the beauty of the Lord by devotees. These weapons aren’t viewed as a means to cause destruction by devotees. In non-believers however, the weapons cause fear and insecurity, as they did to the demon Ma:ri:cha:

In ancient times, jewels were worn to safeguard the eyes, nose, neck, hips, waist, feet, and so on, not to flaunt them or to be ostentatious about one’s wealth. It’s a shame that in modern times, the prevalent belief is that flaunting one’s body increases one’s appeal. Adorning of a bindi on one’s forehead is also to protect one from the potentially harmful gaze of people.

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Re-visiting shloka 14, this is the essence of the Bhagavad Gita. Understanding this verse amounts to understanding the text in its entirety :

*śhvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau
mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaśchaiva divyau śhaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ (14)*

Sanjaya describes the chariot drawn by white horses in which Ma:dhava: and Arjuna are situated just as they were about to blow their conches. Sanjaya does not describe the other chariots. This is worth analyzing.

The Upanishads and Sha:stra:s teach us deep, spiritual truths. Subtle as the messages are, they are not immediately evident to the casual reader. Usually, engagement with the text happens through the storyline and plot by which morals are imparted to the seeker. With further study and rumination, the subtler messages are only obtained to those who perform a deeper analysis.

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There are key “password” -like phrases sprinkled throughout the Bhagavad Gita that unlock greater meanings. One such key phrase is in Chapter 1 Shloka 14 *śhvetairhayairyukte*. The Bhagavad Gita is known to be the essence of all Veda:s which were classified by Veda Vya:sa into the Rig, Yajur, Sa:ma, and Atharvana Veda. Under the Yajur Veda are Krishna Yajur Veda and Shukla Yajur Veda. Every Veda has thousands of branches and sub-branches. Our sense organs relay information to us through sight, sound, touch, and smell. Since the strength of our sense organs falter with time and disease, they are not a reliable source of information and cannot be treated as the ultimate source of knowledge. These are known as pratyaksha prama:na in Sanskrit. “Aksha” means sense organ or “indriya” and “prati” indicates what’s front and center. We possess another sense organ internal to us : our minds (manas). It is through our minds that we make inferences and draw conclusions about B based on A.

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These are called as anumana prama:na in Sanskrit. These are imperfect tools of knowledge as well. We don’t always draw the right conclusions. We may mistake the morning mist to be smoke indicative of a fire.

The Veda:s acts as a prama:na (means of knowledge) that transcends what our senses and inferences offer. No modern scientific theory can explain many wonders that we witness in the material world, such as : why do the abundant and crashing waves suddenly recede?, what causes lightning in the sky?, why do we see a halo around the moon?, what makes the winds blow? How does the sperm from a male that enters a female cause life to grow in her body? How do tiny seeds give rise to tall and magnificent trees?

Veda:s bear the answers to all these questions that even modern science has failed to answer. Veda:s are known to be “apaurusheyam”

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“Purusha” means the ji:va or soul that inhabits the body “puri”. It could be the body of a man or of a woman. Works written by purusha:s are “paurusheyam” and have the following inherent defects (1) a case of mistaken identification on various issues named “bhra:nti” in Sanskrit (2) inability to recognize aspects of an issue correctly named “prama:da” in Sanskrit (3) exaggeration or distortion of facts named “vipralambha” in Sanskrit (4) the inability to sufficiently express experiential entities such as anger, happiness, or the taste of sweetness named “ashakta” in Sanskrit.

The Veda:s are devoid of these defects. The word “Aum” which consists of three syllables A+U+M can be likened to the seed of a tree. The seed has in a latent form the entire tree, its wondrous flowers, fruit, leaves and so on.

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Similarly, everything that we witness in the manifest world as well as the Veda:s are present in a latent form in the seed of the Aum. They have been systematically synthesized from the Aum during the process of creation. During the time of dissolution i.e. pralaya, the physical world dissolves into the Veda:s, the Veda:s dissolve into the three mantras or utterances i.e. “Bhu::”, “Bhuva:” and “Suva:”. The utterances get absorbed into the three syllables of the Aum. The syllables of the Aum then dissolve into a single letter “a” and this marks the dissolution of the entire universe.

During “srishti” or creation, the reverse happens. From the letter “a”, the “aum” is synthesized, the three syllables out of which the utterances “Bhu::”, “Bhuva:” and “Suva:” are synthesized. From every utterance, the Ga:yathri Mantra is formed. Out of every alphabet in the Ga:yathri, the Veda:s are formed out of which the entire universe is manifested.

The name of an object is merely a sound meant to identify it, but doesn’t convey what the object truly is. The Veda:s have infinite numbers of sounds that are identified with different objects. The process of dissolution and creation is similar for both sounds as well as the objects.

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Just as a tree sheds leaves, dies, is burnt down, and eventually is converted to coal, the material universe is susceptible to a process of dissolution where it gets absorbed into water which then transforms into fire. Fire transforms to wind which in turn transforms to ether. Beyond ether, matter transcends into an unmanifest or abstract (“avyakta” in Sanskrit) state. From the unmanifest or abstract, it enters an indestructible and unalterable (“akshara” in Sanskrit) state. Further to this, matter then enters a state of magnificence (“mahat” in Sanskrit). The state of indestructibility (akshara) unites with “tamas” (the mode of darkness) which then gets absorbed into the state of Supremeness (“para tattvam”).

tamaha pare deve eki bhavati i.e. all the dissolved material objects that are in the form of tamas become inseparable with the supreme, while not unifying and becoming one with it : thus declare the Cha:ndogya and other Upanishads. In this state, there remains only the single alphabet “a”. This highly sentient and intelligent principle which holds the entire existence is called “a:vara” in Sanskrit. The process of creation starts with genesis from this seed (bi:ja) state a:vara. It is impossible to decipher the contents of a:vara until the process of synthetic creation begins and its contents which have been present in latent form begin to manifest.

Sri Krushna has declared in the Bhagavad Gita that during Pralaya all objects dissolve unto him and during Srishti, all manifestation begins from Him. Therefore, Sri Krushna is the highly intelligent sentient principle that holds the entire universe. Sri Krushna is what remains when nothing can be seen, and nothing can be heard. He is the alphabet “a” that remains.

What motivates Sri Krushna to begin the process of creation? There is certainly no one else around when the entire universe is in a latent state of a:vara. However, Bhagavan has a quality of sympathy and consideration which is due to Ma Lakshmi, the Universal Mother, who prompts Bhagavan to create the beings that are held within Him so that they may be able to relieve themselves of their Karma. Just like a mother convinces the father to not punish their errant children, Ma Lakshmi prompts the creation of the universe.

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Ma Lakshmi can't bear witnessing the suffering of ji:vas and Bhagavan can't bear witnessing the suffering of the Universal Mother. Therefore, the nameless formless ji:vas are rendered forms such as gods (“devata:s”), human (“manushya”), four-legged animals (“tiryak”), and inanimate objects (“stha:vara”) by Bhagavan.

Bhagavan's actions thus depend upon the gracious Universal Mother and is therefore called “Ma:dhava”. The Veda:s does not name Bhagavan since naming Him is impossible but states that He is the one who is always alongside Ma Lakshmi. Thus, Purusha Sukta names Bhagavan as the cause of the entire universe, the thousand headed one “sahasra shi:rsha purusha”. Sri Krushna is the incarnation of Srimanna:ra:yana: and had revealed his Universal Form (Vira:t ru:pa) that confirms what's stated in the Veda:s. In Chapter 15 of the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krushna declares “*vedais cha sarvair aham eva vedya:*” Thus, Sri Krushna, the very personification of the Veda:s imparts the teachings to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, and helps him execute his duties.

The essence of the Bhagavad Gita is verily that when we place the entire burden and responsibility in the hands of Bhagavan, victory is ensured and we may live our lives fearlessly. This is conveyed metaphorically in Chapter 1 Shloka 14.

The shloka describes a chariot drawn by four white horses. There are also two adjectives used in this verse “ Why was the color of horses described (*śhvetairhayair*), of what relevance is the color of the horses on a battlefield? An adjective “mahati” meaning glorious is used to describe such a chariot. In this chariot are situated two individuals.

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“Hayam” is the entity that runs something. Veda:s which directs one’s intellect is “hayam”. Veda:s are pure and devoid of the defects of distortion, exaggeration, and inexpressibility of experiences. White is the symbol of purity. The four white horses in this verse represent the four Veda:s which are of utmost purity.

The “Aum” defers upon an individual many intellectual capabilities and represent the four Veda:s.

The chariot mentioned in this verse, “Nandaghosha”, is one that guarantees victory to the riders. Arjuna rescued this chariot from the burning Kha:ndava forest. “Nanda” is one who defers happens and “ghosha” is one who cries aloud.

There was a brahmin who lost his children as soon as his wife beget them. He plead to Arjuna for help. Arjuna promised that he would help the brahmin man and give his life up in he fails. Arjuna had the habit of going all out in giving his word since he was confident of Sri Krushna’s ability to step in to make things go right. When the Brahmin’s wife was pregnant, Arjuna created a cage with his arrows to protect her child. However, the child was lost as soon as born.

Just as Arjuna was going to enter a sacrificial fire, in accordance to his word to kill himself if he failed, Sri Krushna came along to take Arjuna on the Nandaghosha chariot to a constellation and parked the chariot there. Sri Krushna stated that Arjuna could not go further and must wait in the chariot. The lord retrieved the seven other babies and returned.

Arjuna was deeply impressed with the chariot and Sri Krushna’s charioteering skills. It can be imagined that Sri Krushna rode tens of thousands of miles within a span of a day, from sunrise to the point that he returned with the seven lost babies. Even rockets of modern times burn away when they go faster than an escape velocity of 25,000 miles per hour.

Indeed it was Vaikuntham or Parama Padam that Sri Krushna took Arjuna to in Nandaghosha, and this incident is recounted in Maha:bha:rata.

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Just like how the Nandaghosha protected its riders through all the worlds, the Aum protects those in this, higher, and nether worlds. There are different types of ji:va:s. Those like us, who are bound by karma, and others who have gained liberated called mukta:s. There are yet another type of ji:vas who are in the eternal presence Bhagavan, and they are termed “nitya su:ri”. The Aum protects all types of ji:va:s, containing as it does, the entirety of the Veda:s. There are many theories and debates on the significance of Veda;s, but we try to expound what Veda Vya:sa’s intention is here.

Aum consists of 3 syllables A+u+m. “A” represents the causeless being Parama:tma, who is the cause of everything else. According to Pa:nini’s Su:tras on Sanskrit Grammar “A iti Bhagavato Na:rayaana prathama abhidha:nam” i.e. Nara:yana is the same as “A”, the cause of all beings. “M” represents the ji:va, the result of Srimanna:ra:yana:’s creation. Sankhya: Sha:stra describes the body which houses the ji:va as having 24 entities. The ji:va is essential to the body without which it is a corpse, so the ji:va is the 25th entity. The body has 5 elements : earth, fire, water,

air, and ether. They have associated qualities i.e. smell for earth, taste for water, form for fire, touch for air, sound for ether. The body has 5 jna:nendriya:s to recognize these 5 elements, and to apply the elements into action, there are 5 karmendriya:s. The 21st entity is the mind “manas”, the 22nd is the intellect “buddhi”, the 23rd is the Ego “aham tattva”, and the 24th is the natural root cause “prakriti” in the form of a seed. All these constitute the body.

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Each of the 25 entities are represented by 25 alphabets, classified in groups of 5. The last alphabet “maka:ra” represents the ji:va. “Ma” is an onomatopoeic word used to represent the ji:va. Sanskrit has several such onomatopoeic words where the sounds of the syllables are meant to convey the nature of the entity that they describe. For example, ether is represented by “ka”, air by “ga” to stand for “gacchati” which means that it is in eternal movement. “Ma” stands for knowledge “matjna:ne matavabodhane”. Of the 25 constituents of the body, only the ji:va has knowledge and is sentient. Ji:va is what makes the body feel and experience and renders it the knowledge to use its faculties. “U” represents the relationship between Paramatma and ji:va. The ji:va only belongs to Srimannarayana who in turn guides and runs the ji:va in the appropriate path. Srimannarayana and the ji:va are as inseparable as the lamp and its light and the flower and its aroma.

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“U” in Aum represents the eternal connection between Srimannarayana and ji:va. The clue in Shloka 14 is the Sri Krushna is represented by “Ma:dhava” which means “the husband of Lakshmi”. The Purusha Sukta declares Srimannarayana as the “lakshmipati:”. “Sriman” means “one who is with Sri”. The ji:va is represented as the “**pra:jnavan**” or the one who has knowledge.

Sri Krushna and Arjuna have the close relationship of brothers-in-law, to represent the intimacy between the Paramatma and the ji:va. They are situated in the Nandaghosha chariot which represents the Aum. Both the paramatma and ji:va are of equal importance, just as both the syllables “a” and “m” are equally essential to the Aum. The conches held by Ma:dhava and Arjuna represent these syllables.

Upanishads compare the Aum to a conch, but also to a bow in some other places. In the latter occurrences of the comparison, the ji:va is likened with an arrow, “**pranavo dhana:sarovya:tma:**”. Ma:dhava and Arjuna sound their conches to make their inseparable relationship known. We need to recognize their inseparability, as well as the equally important significance of the Paramatma and ji:va.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

Arjuna Visha:da Yoga

Veda is an other worldly sound that reached mankind as something eternal and transcendental in nature. The essence if all veda:s is contained in “Aum”. When “Aum” is treated as a single alphabet, it represents Paramatma which contains all ji:va and insentient things. Such a treatment of “Aum” is called “samhita:kriti”. When split, Aum” which contains three syllables : “A” which stands for Parama:tma, “m” that represents the ji:va, and “u” the inseparable relationship between them both, and this treatment is known as “asamhita:ka:ram”.

The Sha:stra provides prescriptions on how to enunciate the Aum. The time taken to pronounce the syllable of Aum is called “ma:tra:ka:lam”. Pronouncing the Aum with one, two, or three such time units (ma:traka:lam) have different significations.

It is our duty (ji:va’s) to understand the Aum. We do not operate independently and have not landed this birth and body by choice. Every effect has a cause. We have come to be due to a cause that goes beyond our birth parents. The cause that runs everything in nature is Parama:tma. Aum familiarizes us with Parama:tma and enlightens us on why we have been given these bodies, to enjoy and experience our karma. Parama:tma has a supreme knowledge that is larger in scale than what the ji:va possesses. Parama:tma helps the ji:va by lending this knowledge and running the show for the ji:va housed within the body. It is unknown since when exactly this relationship between the ji:va and Parama:tma formed. Sha:stras do not have any answer for this, but it is stated that due to His Divine Grace and utmost sympathy, the Parama:tma helps the ji:va.

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Aum thus communicates the intimate relationship between Paramatma and ji:va where one needs the other for their happiness, as well as their innate natures. “Atma” means “all-pervading”. The ji:va is also a knowledgeable entity that pervades the body entirely. It is the principle of ji:va that renders every part of the body aware, conscious, and sentient. While a ji:va housed in one body cannot control the ji:va housed in another one, the Parama:tma that pervades everything and everywhere has total control over all ji:va’s.

Aum is thus expounded upon in Shloka 14 by Veda Vya:sa. One must examine why Sri Krushna is referred to as “Ma:dhava” in this shloka. Why not “Govinda”? “Ma:dhava” means “Lord of Lakshmi” i.e. Srimannarayana. Narayana and Lakshmi are not individuals but are Principles that pervade the universe. Narayana is the Supreme Principle which is a compound of all names and forms that exist.

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The world can be recognized by the Principle of Na:ra:yana Tattva that pervades it. We recognize Parama:tma by His quality of love and sympathy for all beings. Only such a Na:ra:yana is worshiped. In Sanskrit, “lakshma” means sign. Lakshmi, the ever-accompanying spouse of Na:ra:yana is the personification of His love and sympathy. The couple is also called Dhava - M:adhava. The relationship of a husband and wife goes beyond most other relationships in the physical plane. A husband and wife ideally put their partner’s needs before their own. In a family, the wife provides compassion and empathy while the husband provides structure and discipline. When these two essential facets go missing, such a family is sure to meet its downfall.

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The entire creation is dependent on such a relationship between Dhava and Ma:dhava:. The knowledge that ji:va possesses must make him want to know Parama:tma better. Such a ji:va, represented by “m” in the Aum, is called “pa:ndava:”. Knowledge (jna:na) must make one want to progress towards Supreme Knowledge (para jna:na) but not knowledge about insentient entities of nature. In fact, the only true knowledge is that about Parama:tma, declare the Sha:stras. To know someone better, we must love them, and the love is established based on a relationship. Thus, we are able to even give our lives up for those we love, such as our parents, siblings, and so on. The Sha:stras and Chapter 9 of the Bhagavad Gita spell out the following relationships that exist between the Parama:tma and ji:va (a) pita: Parama:tma is the Father, the cause of the entire universe and we are amongst His family and are His children (b) rakshaka: Parama:tma is the protector of all beings and the only One that can truly protect us by giving us what we need and ridding us of what we do not need.

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© sheshi : He is the substratum or basis of all sentient beings and insentient objects and pervades each one of them in an inseparable way (d) Bharta : He is the bearer of all beings equally, like a husband bears his wife and takes care of her (e) Jneya : He is the object of a ji:va’s knowledge. The knowledge (jna:nam) that a ji:va possesses makes him restless and gives movement. The ultimate goal of this knowledge and all movement and effort of the ji:va needs to be towards Parama:tma who is the jneya (f) Swa:mi : He is the owner of all insentient objects and sentient beings (g) A:dharam and A:dheyam : There are countless galaxies and celestial bodies in this universe, which are in constant motion, and do not collide with one another. Parama:tma is the basis of this divine order.

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(h) A:tma : He is the indweller within each one of us, and our bodies are like clothing for the Parama:tma, therefore He is known as A:tma (i) Bhokta : He is the one who experiences and enjoys everything. He is the reason that we have a feeling of fullness or satiety after eating or drinking anything. Without His acceptance not a drop of water can enter our bodies.

Given the intimate ninefold relation that exists between Parama:tma and jiva, we must be able to love Him very deeply and dearly, once firm belief is established in the relationship. Like how we pine for our loved ones, even for those who may not be blood relations, out of firm belief in a connection or relationship with them, we must be able to feel the same way, and even more, for Parama:tma. If we firmly believe in the connection and love Him dearly, He will surely protect us. Arjuna had such a firm belief, therefore became the recipient of Sri Krushna's protection. This quality is represented by "A" in "Aum"

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Such a relation between Parama:tma and jiva has been expounded beautifully using dvi vachanam in the Sloka 14.

It is difficult to establish firm belief in something we claim to know. For example, we claim that God is everywhere but apprehend entering a dark room for fear of any danger. And at that moment, our belief in God has reduced just a bit. There are many other such instances. Once, Drona taught all of his students a simple Sanskrit lesson "Krodham Tyaja" (abandon your anger). The next day, he quizzed the eldest of his students Dharmara:ja on the lesson to which the latter replied that he did not learn the lesson. Drona was taken aback since it was a simple four syllable lesson. Bhisma was able to repeat the lesson perfectly but Dharmara:ja still insisted that he did not learn it well enough to repeat it. Arjuna was able to perfectly repeat the lesson as well, and Dharmara:ja still failed to do so.

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Duryodhana: and the 99 other brothers of Dharmara:ja were also able to repeat the simple lesson perfectly, and Dharmara:ja was still unable to. An infuriated Drona whacked Dharmara:ja and finally the latter declared that he learnt the lesson "Krodham Tyaja". For Dharmara:ja to know if he truly understood the lesson, he must have been in a situation where he conquered his anger. Thus, he would know if he truly understood the lesson, and not just the words superficially. Since he felt no anger towards Drona and caused no uprising or rebellion against his teacher, he knew for sure that he learnt the lesson. The guru, on the hand, only knew the words superficially.

Thus, we only believe in God superficially. When we visit a temple, we perform various rites and rituals to the idol there but if we firmly believe in God's presence in the idol, we would have a genuine conversation with Him, inquiring about His comfort and so on.

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Would we not inquire if He has eaten well, if He has slept well, if the priest is taking good care of Him? However, we even offer food very half-heartedly to God. If even a piece of fruit goes missing in the dozen that we take for offering, we would stop worshiping such a God.

By understanding and believing in the message of Aum we understand our relationship with God and the ways in which He can protect us. Arjuna had no counter-weapon for many of the weapons that were aimed towards him during the battle of Kurukshetra. Yet, Sri Krushna protected Arjuna, and stood in the way of any harm. He even changed day to night to protect Arjuna's clan. He blessed Arjuna with materialistic pleasures like status, wealth, and family as well as other-worldly gains such as a place in heaven. All of this was because of Arjuna's faith in Sri Krushna, the Parama:tma.

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We only tend to believe in God if he extricates us from circumstances of the world and places us in a different dimension. However, what we truly require God to do is to keep us happy in our current circumstances, and to prevent us from reaching nether worlds such as Hell that is spoken of in the Veda:s upon death.

The belief that a ji:va must have in Parama:tma is represented by Aum and is symbolized pictorially in Shloka 14 where the white horses represent the Veda:s. Sri Krushna declares towards the end of the Bhagavad Gita "ma:m ekam sharanam vraja" which essentially encapsulates the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita, that if we are to surrender our troubles to Parama:tma, He will take the burden upon Himself.

Sanskrit is a wonderful language that when learnt properly, can be used to decode secrets. The word "ata:" is used to represent whenever a new section begins.

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"Tu anta atha:" says the Amarakosha on "atha", which is a section demarcator. Upon the usage of "atha", a new theme or section begins. Thus far, we have witnessed the sadness of Dhrutara:shtra who asks Sanjaya to relay the incidents of the battlefield and the sorrow of Duryodhana who turns to his guru Drona. Duryodhana's sorrow continues while the Pa:ndavas sound their conches. The natural next step must be the shooting of arrows which the soldiers seemed poised to do. However, strangely, Arjuna, an adept warrior who knew perfectly well the positions of all the warriors on his own and the enemy's side asks to be taken to a spot where he may behold their positions, and this marks the beginning of a new section.

*atha vyavasthitān dṛiṣhṇvā dhārtarāṣhṇrān kapi-dhwajāḥ
pravṛitte śhastra-sampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavaḥ
hṛiṣhikeśhaṁ tadā vākyam idam āha mahī-pate (20)*

arjuna uvācha

senayor ubhayor madhye ratham sthāpaya me 'chyuta (21)

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It's possible that Arjuna lifted his bow to shoot his first arrow but just as he was going to, he had a sudden desire to have his chariot between the two armies. There he beheld the sight of the warriors, ready as they were to fight. Arjuna had as much arrogance and ego as Duryodhana but was different from the latter since he never threw his weight around Gurus and elders and was ready to heed their advice. Arjuna's ego is evident from the order he threw at his charioteer Sri Krushna. Even modern day rickshaw drivers may not tolerate such a tone from their customers. Arjuna, a mere ji:va, knowing the Parama:tma status of Sri Krushna issued such an order. This is rooted in the ignorance and ego of the ji:va.

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The ji:va occupies a small space within a room. Many such rooms constitute a home, which is a part of a neighborhood, then a city, a state, a country, the continent, and the planet. The planet is part of a Solar System that's a part of a galaxy. This entire creation is called "anda". The Parama:tma, purely through His Divine Will (Sankalpa) has created countless such anda:s. As the Upanishads declare "tadaikshyata bahusya:m praja:yeya"

Due to His unstoppable and overflowing mercy and compassion, the Parama:tma incarnated amongst ji:vas in human form to help guide them. He adopted the human form so that we may feel a sense of love and familiarity towards Him. Arjuna knew all of this yet issued the order to Sri Krushna in verse 21. We will see in verse 24 how perfectly Sri Krushna follows the orders. Indeed, if we believe in Parama:tma, He would come to us, be in our vicinity and do as we bid Him to do, verily like a servant would.

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Sri Krushna is called "Hrishiksha" which has an very important meaning in Chapter 1. Arjuna explains that he needs to be aware of the positions of all the warriors on his side so he may call upon their help when needed :

yāvadetān nirīkṣhe 'haṁ yoddhu-kāmān avasthitān

kairmayā saha yoddhavyam asmin raṇa-samudyame (22)

He also explains that he needs to note the positions of the enemies so he may be able to attack them :

yotsyamānān avekṣhe 'haṁ ya ete 'tra samāgatāḥ

dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddher yuddhe priya-chikīrṣhavaḥ (23)

He refers to the enemies side, which also had good and just people but were in support of Dhritara:shtra, a person of low morals and defective intellect. Anyone who seeks refuge in a bad person also becomes bad, hence they are referred to as “durbudhe:” in Shloka 23.

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In shloka 24 Sanjaya elucidates how perfectly Sri Krushna carries out Arjuna orders.

sañjaya uvācha

evam ukto hṛīṣhīkeśho guḍākeśhena bhārata

senayor ubhayor madhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam (24)

He calls Arjuna :”Gudakesha” and Sri Krushna as “Hrishikesha” here. **Amarakosha says “nidra:lase guda:ka:sha”**. Gudakesha is one who has conquered sleep. Sanjaya has chosen this adjective (visheshanam) for Arjuna to show that he is the perfect recipient for the message of the Gita that is imminent. Arjuna has conquered fatigue, tiredness, and all his senses. “Hrishikesha” stems from the word “hrishikam” which means indriya or sense organ, which causes “harsha” or delight. When the eye beholds something or the ear hears something, it the objects are recognized and cause delight to the ji:va.

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We may think that we control our sense organs but don’t they fail us one day? Eyesight and hearing grows weaker, our limbs may stop functioning and we may lose taste. Parama:tma controls the sense organs from behind the ji:va and helps the ji:va use the sense organs. Parama:tma is also able to control the movement, inhalation, exhalation and every aspect of all other ji:vas. One ji:va has only limited control over his own senses and none over that of another ji:va.

Poised as the warriors were to begin the war, how was it possible that Sri Krushna and Arjuna could engage in conversation in the middle of the battlefield?

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Would they twiddle their thumbs or go to sleep when the 700 shloka long Bhagavad Gita took place for about 2-3 hours? Wouldn’t they have been impatient to start fighting? Wouldn’t the elephants have cried, horses neighed, and wouldn’t the voices of Sri Krushna and Arjuna have been drowned out by the clanking of swords? Yet they heard each other perfectly well, and so did Sanjaya who was relaying the scene to Dhritara:shtra. How was this possible? The answer to this lies in referring to Sri Krushna as “Hrishikesha” repeatedly in Chapter 1. Sri Krushna controlled everyone’s senses so that all of nature came to a standstill when the Bhagavad Gita was on-going. He first started with controlling Arjuna’s senses, but planting a desire in him to be

positioned between the two armies. He also created another calamitous desire in Arjuna, which we will learn about in the next section.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

Arjuna Visha:da Yoga

Bhagavad Gita is a great spiritual text that demonstrates God's prowess and man's relative incapability. People have varying degrees of arrogance and overconfidence in their own abilities. Arjuna was no exception to this. Yet Sri Krushna mentally prepared Arjuna to be the recipient of this message so that it ultimately benefits humankind. Arjuna had the instinct to act based on instruction, had the moral confusion that led him to question his actions before the war, and such a combination made him the perfect candidate. Sri Krushna didn't choose Bhi:shma to hear the message since he was already knowledgeable and wouldn't have been ready to listen. The Gopikas wouldn't have been the right candidates as they wouldn't have known how to implement the instruction. Dharmara:ja was a peaceful and patient person who wasn't very action oriented and would have lacked the impulse to act on Sri Krushna's instructions. Furthermore, Dharmara:ja had clarity in his mind on him fighting the war which Arjuna lacked. Veda Vya:sa confirms that the Bhagavad Gita ultimately benefits humankind. Arjuna had beseeched with Sri Krushna to accept him as a student.

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At the end of the war though when they returned home, Arjuna demanded that Sri Krushna carry out his duty as a chauffeur and hold the door open while he alighted from the chariot! What a change in attitude of Arjuna before and after the Gitopadesh! There was a day when Sri Krushna, many years after Kurukshetra war, decided to test Arjuna on the Bhagavad Gita while they were together at Dwaraka. When asked to repeat any one of his favorite shlokas, Arjuna was not able to say even a single one. Indeed, the entire message of the Bhagavad Gita evaporated from Arjuna, since he received the message through one ear and surely released it from the other! Isn't there a Telugu saying "chadavamundu kaakarakaaya, chadivina tharuvaatha keekarakaaya"? Perhaps hearing the Bhagavad Gita prompted him to fight the war, out of fear of the Universal Form that he beheld, but with that stopped any effect it had on Arjuna.

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Sri Krushna, although frustrated with Arjuna, did not express his anger since he did not want to cause pain to his sister Draupadi, who was Arjuna's wife. Therefore he gave the essence of the Bhagavad Gita once again to Arjuna at the time, in the Maha:bha:rath. Bhagavad Gita is like an umbrella that protects us from torrential rains or like a floatation device that saves us from a deluge of sorrows and dangers that the age of Kali is fraught with. Sri Krushna wanted to deliver the message using Arjuna as an instrument and pretext to humankind that is drowning in the sorrow of the Age of Kali. Sri Krushna is also called "Achyuta" since he has handed us over this form of protection. "Chyuta" is one who lets slip, and He is called "Achyuta" since He never lets his devotees slip away or fall into the wrong path, not even for a second.

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Therefore, Arjuna refers to Sri Krushna as "Achyuta" in the shloka where he commands his charioteer to take him between the two armies. Bhagavad Gita makes it known how effectively, manifestly, and with what immediacy Sri Krushna is there for his devotees. When Durvasa Maha:rishi visited the Pa:ndava:s during their exile, along with his 300 students, Draupadi panicked as it was past sunset and her akshaya pa:tra could not generate any food to feed the guests. When she called upon Sri Krushna, He appeared before her and asked her to double check the Akshaya Pa:tra since there might be at least a morsel stuck to it. Draupadi probably perceived this as a slight, since she might have prided herself on how well she was able to wash dishes. Isn't this a skill as well? We also come across people who wash dishes in such a way that all the left-overs are well preserved. Sri Krushna wanted to rid her of this pride as well. Thus, He also tries to rid devotees of whatever little pride they have in their skills and abilities, like a gardener prunes the uneven ends of plants.

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Draupadi did find a morsel, which Sri Krushna ate. In the satisfaction He found in the morsel consumed, Sri Krushna willed that everyone become satisfied. At that moment, Durva:sa decided that he no longer desired to eat and returned without paying a visit to Draupadi's home for a meal, thus saving her in the nick of the moment. In reality, Draupadi might have been meticulous in cleaning the dishes, however, the morsel of food appeared in response to Sri Krushna's bidding when He asked her to look for it.

Similarly, when Arjuna wanted to be placed between the factions, his intention was to make strategic evaluations on how to play offense and defense. Sanjaya beautifully shows how Sri Krushna, who is 'Hrishikesha' brought about a change in Arjuna's thought in this verse :

*bhīṣhma-droṇa-pramukhataḥ sarveṣhām cha mahī-kṣhitām
uvācha pārtha paśhyaitān samavetān kurūn iti (25)*

Actually, the job of a charioteer is not one that requires excellence or has room for one to demonstrate much skill. In fact, because of the way that the warrior and charioteer are positioned in a chariot, there's no chance for them to engage in conversation either. Moreover, not everyone plays fair so the warrior must be continuously alert and on the watch for arrows heading towards him in all directions. He can't be inattentive for even a second so cannot chat with his charioteer.

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The warrior would indicate with his feet to the charioteer the direction in which he must be taken. If tapped with the left foot, the chariot is steered left, right for right, and when tapped with both feet, front. Sri Krushna, who is also called Pa:rthaSa:rathy felt no embarrassment at playing this role for his devotee and had no qualms with the entire world witnessing this astounding scene. Similarly, He played the role of a postman when he carried a letter on behalf of the Pa:ndava:s to the Kauava:s during the negotiation. Therefore Sri Krushna is also called Pa:ndava Dhu:ta.

In Shloka 25, Sri Krushna commands Arjuna thus “*pārtha paśhyaitān samavetān kurūn iti*” i.e. “behold your Kuru relatives here, Pa:rtha”. At this point, Arjuna started seeing his relatives differently. Just like a magician makes us believe we see and feel many things that are not truly happening, Sri Krushna, who is also called a magician or Ma:ya:vi made Arjuna feel a whole host of feelings as soon as He used the word “pasya”. Arjuna started seeing things very differently at this point.

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Ma:ya is also Prakriti (nature) which is under the control of Parama:tma therefore He is named Ma:ya:vi. Upon the command “pasya” or “behold”, Arjuna who had previously called the enemies “durbudhi:” i.e. those with flawed and immoral intellect, now has had a sudden shift in perspective :

*atrāpaśhyat sthitān pārthaḥ pitṛīn atha pitāmahān
āchāryān mātulān bhrātṛīn putrān pautrān sakhīms tathā (26)
śhvaśhurān suhṛidaśh chaiva senayor ubhayor api*

He sees preceptors, fathers, uncles, brothers, sons, nephews, and friends on the enemy's side. How is this appropriate i.e. for a warrior to have these notions on the battlefield. Did he not know of their relations to him up until this point. Sri Krushna caused this sudden shift in perspective. The Upanishads say “karmana: kani:ya:nesha hyevainam sa:dhukarma ka:rayati tam” i.e. when one is interested in bettering oneself, Parama:tma makes it happen by driving one's thoughts and actions in the right path. On the flip side, when one loses sight of right and wrong and pays no heed to the other's advice, Parama:tma ensures his downfall by making him do wrong things even further “yamanva:nuneshatyasha evainamasa:dhukarma ka:rayati tam yamekhyo:

lo:kaekhyo:”. Parama:tma is not like a cowherd that obviously drives in one way or another, but does it subtly by inducing changes in our intellect.

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“yam tu rakshitumichchanti buddhya: samyo:jayanti tam”. Sri Krushna sends people good advice through various channels. He did the same for both Arjuna and Duryodhana. The difference between them is that Arjuna heeded the advice while Duryodhana did not due to the latter’s evil nature. Here, Arjuna responds to “*atrāpaśhyat sthitān*” and sees the enemy front in a different light and his heart filled with mercy.

Just like a coin has a value and form, we have values, our bodies, and relationships. It is important to preserve our values. Duryodhana did not attempt to do this while Arjuna saw his relatives for every angle and perspective, as prompted by Sri Krushna “ pasya eta:n samaveta:n kuru:n”. Arjuna’s heart which was previously filled with hatred, reacting to the enmity with his relatives, was now filled with mercy and compassion, in reaction to the bonds that he had formed with them. The question is : are both of these viewpoints appropriate?

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One feels sorrow (visha:da) either when they lose something that they love or gain something that they don’t desire. In this case, Arjuna’s sorrow is due to the loss of his relations in the impending war and the gain of the kingly comforts which was unwelcome to him while living in utter loneliness.

“Mardana:t gunavarthanam” : it is during times of sorrow that one is ready to listen to and think about what’s beyond the mundane. With everything going in Arjuna’s way till now, he was never forced to analyze what’s of true value. We see that people read Garuda Pura:nam which expounds on death, the state of the soul, heaven, and hell when they lose their loved ones. They are less likely to read or hear these works at other times. When we lose someone that we love, we realize that something more powerful was at play, that rendered our efforts, medicines, and treatments ineffective. It is at times of sorrow that the heart melts and is most pliable to receive deep truths and wisdom that gets ingrained in a form of a seed (bi:ja).

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The seed is likely to bear fruit when an appropriate circumstance arises in the individual’s life. Arjuna is a valorous warrior. He earned the weapons like the Pasupati out of his sheer effort and hardwork. He has been waiting for an opportunity to demonstrate his skill and valor for a long time now. The stage is set for him to do so in the Kurukshetra battlefield. However, he is now plagued by an untimely emotion of mercy and compassion towards the enemy. Sri Krushna is

the cause for this. The rule goes, “**appasta: kasyachit bhru:ya:t**”. I.e. one is to impart wisdom only when asked.

Sri Krushna has been waiting for Arjuna to ask for the message of Bhagavad Gita. Time is ticking and the war is about to begin. Sri Krushna hastened to alter Arjuna's perspective, to create a situation ripe for Him to deliver the Bhagavad Gita, the very purpose of His Incarnation.

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When Arjuna was in the guise of Brihanala:, he played the role of a charioteer to Uttara Kuma:ra. Uttara Kuma:ra wanted to flee from the war, struck with fear when he saw the horses neigh, charging elephants, and ferociously fighting soldiers. He expressed his dismay at how the true scene at the battlefield was so different from the still sculptures of the war that decorated his palace. Arjuna then taught him bravery and sent him to fight. But Arjuna wasn't such a coward. It did not befit a warrior of his pedigree to feel sympathy. Untimely sympathy amounts to cowardice. Just like joviality in a situation that requires seriousness is highly inappropriate. Arjuna's enmity towards the Kauravas has receded in his mind and their familiar connection has come to the forefront, and this is because of Sri Krushna shining the light differently on the characters arrayed on the battlefield, causing Arjuna to feel many new emotions.

*tān samīkṣhya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvān bandhūn avasthitān
kṛipayā parayāviṣhṭo viśhīdann idam abravīt (27)*

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Sri Krushna also rendered the others on the battlefield immobile and unable to experience any emotion at the same time. Arjuna had done something similar when he used the sammohana astra during the war between Uttara Kuma:ra and the Kaurava:s.

Both Duryodhana and Arjuna have pride and ego. Duryodhana's ego prompted him to issue an order to his guru Drona and retreat without hearing any advice in return. Arjuna had similarly issued an order to Arjuna to take the chariot between the armies but he was ready to take advice and instruction on how to behave. This is due to Arjuna's satvic nature.

Sorrow (visha:da) causes three things to happen (1) the heart that is hardened softens and allows a new knowledge or emotion to dissolve.

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(2) it makes the heart move or flow from its initial stance (3) it changes the form of the heart entirely. “Gati visharana avasa:daneshu” is the description given to the “shad” root of visha:da in Sanskrit.

Sorrow makes one seek out someone, either good or bad. Since Duryodhana sought Dhritara:shtra, the blindness and delusion led to his destruction. Arjuna and the Pa:ndavas sought Sri Krushna and this led to their upliftment.

Arjuna's senses have been under the spell of Sri Krushna right from the verse where it is said "pa:nchajanyam hrishikesham". The last time that Arjuna spoke to Krishna, he called the enemies "durbudhe:". Let's see how his words have altered ever since, after being struck with a sudden wave of compassion and sympathy for the enemy.

It is customary that people look for omens and signs before embarking on an important undertaking. Cats, Brahmins, and sneezes are all given special meanings.

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God is a grand orchestrator of events and sends us omens to indicate the imminence of either auspicious or undesirable happenings. We are not to hate the omens themselves but treat them as indications of what is to come, and perform corrective actions accordingly. Arjuna similarly saw omens and signs :

vepathuś cha śharīre me roma-harṣhaś cha jāyate

gāṇḍivam sramsate hastāt tvak chaiva paridahyate (29)

na cha śhaknomy avasthātum bhramatīva cha me manaḥ (30)

Arjuna confesses here that as he gazes upon his kith and kin on the enemy's frontlines, his body gives way and his senses have become weak

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His mouth has dried up and his body is burning up in a fever like manner. He has goosebumps, not the kind when one feels elated but the kind one might feel during times of utter terror. He feels weak and dizzy and his limbs have given up. He can no longer stand and his bow, the Ga:ndiva has fallen. This bow is very dear to Arjuna. When Dharmara:ja once spoke ill of the Ga:ndiva, Arjuna was about to attack him. He had to do a 1-year corrective action (pra:yaschitam) to erase the sin of attacking his elder brother. With an unsteady mind and faltering spirit, he addresses Sri Krushna thus :

nimittāni cha paśhyāmi viparītāni keśhava

na cha śhreyo 'nupaśhyāmi hatvā sva-janam āhave (31)

In referring to Sri Krushna as Keshava, Arjuna intends to convey his disbelief at what he is feeling, when the very cause of all creation and destruction is right there with him.

Arjuna refers to Sri Krushna as Keshava here. "Ka" refers to the four-faced Brahma and "eesha" to Rudra. During Sri Krushna's Kailasha Ya:tra, Rudra said the following :

"trayah keshina itya:di shrutau dharmaikamu:lake |

ko:brahmeti sama:khya:tah i:so:ham sarvadehina:m |

ava:ntara:msha sambhu:tau tasma:t keshava na:mav:an !

iti harivante vya:sa munina: variki:rtana:t |”

“Do you know why your name is Keshava? Brahma is “Ka”, and I, the controller of all beings is “eesha”. Both of us reside in Your body, O Krushna, and we manifest in the world through You, hence Your name is Keshava!”

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Arjuna in disbelief that he is encountering bad omens when the cause of all creation and destruction is right there with him, forgets that these omens cannot harm him in the presence of Sri Krushna. He declares “*na cha śhreyo ’nupaśhyāmi hatvā sva-janam āhave*”, that he does not foresee any good coming from killing his kith and kin and that he does not want to enjoy any material fruit from such a victory.

Arjuna who had misjudged his position as independent from Sri Krushna has returned to his real state of subjugation to the word of the Supreme Lord, due to his sorrow. We will explore what sorrow does to a person through the example of Arjuna in the upcoming verses.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

Arjuna Visha:da Yoga

Just as one does not enjoy coconut pulp along with the shell, the heart needs to be pure and softened to accept teachings. Arjuna’s heart has, till this point, been filled with the dirt of rajas, causing ego, pride, and ostentation in him. Sri Krushna has begun the cleansing act in Arjuna’s heart, by causing him sorrow. In his sorrow, however, Arjuna betrays his foolishness in Verse 31 “*hatva: svajanama:have*”. He wants to forego the benefits of winning a war against his relatives. While it is not righteous to kill outside of a war, ending lives within a battlefield is in adherence to Dharma:. Overcome by sympathy, Arjuna betrays his foolishness :

*na kāṅkṣhe vijayaṁ kṛiṣhṇa na cha rājyaṁ sukhāni cha
kim no rājyena govinda kim bhogair jīvitena vā (32)*

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Arjuna no longer wants to fight a war and gain material benefits from such a victory. He expresses in Verse 32 that if he were to kill everyone in this war, there would be no people left to rule over. With no one around, whom can he share his material abundance with. Is such a life of loneliness worth living? Is there a point to opulence with no near and dear ones to share them with?

Arjuna's mistaken notion here is that he needs to fight the war to win over the kingdom or something material, while the true purpose of the war is to right the wrong and establish Dharma. Just like a doctor needs to carry out a surgical procedure without carrying guilt for cutting open a patient's body, this war needs to be fought to right the wrongdoers.

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A doctor amputates a limb to save the rest of the body since the patient is his primary focus, not the fees or the benefits he gets for performing the procedure. His duty is to use his education and training to save the patient. Similarly, Arjuna was supposed to use his training in the craft of warfare to save the land of the evil rulers who were spreading sins and wrongdoing. His primary focus should have been to eradicate evil entirely from the land, not the material benefits he would reap from doing so. In fact, he would also be doing the Kaurava:s a favor by destroying them in the war as anyone who dies fighting a righteous war is bound to reach higher worlds. Sri Krushna reminds Arjuna of this duty and corrects his wrong perspective.

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Like Arjuna, many of us embrace sympathy at inappropriate times and fail to do our duty. This is borne out of ego. Out of ego, Arjuna denounces the fruit of the war thus : “kim bho:gaiḥ ji:vite:na va: kim no ra:jye:na go:vista”. Both our lives and material experiences are given to us by Paramatma. When we adopt a cow, don't we decide how much to feed it and how to take care of it? Similarly, the Paramatma decides what it is that we ought to enjoy and gifts us accordingly. It is not in our place to refuse abundance that comes from Paramatma. Moreover, Arjuna may decide to give away the kingdom won from the war, but his primary duty is to fight the war and eradicate evil. Furthermore, Arjuna declares :

*yeṣhām arthe kāṅkṣitaṁ no rājyaṁ bhogāḥ sukhāni cha
ta ime 'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṁs tyaktvā dhanāni cha (33)*

Arjuna expresses that those with whom he ought to enjoy the kingdom have gathered here, having given up their lives. Why is he worried about killing those who have already given up their lives? Interestingly, he uses the word “tyaktva” which translates to “having given up” instead of using “tyaktum” which translates to “in order to give up”.

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Even Duryodhana had used the very same expression to describe his army at the beginning of the chapter. Both Arjuna and Duryodhana are filled with arrogance, it seems.

When Vibhishana failed to change Ravana's ways, he abandoned Lanka to seek refuge in Rama. Upon defeating Ravana, Rama gifted the kingdom of Lanka to Vibhishana since he

proved his eligibility by trying his very best to change Ravana and abandoning him when he failed. Arjuna's attitude should have been the same : to try his best to change Duryodhana's ways or eradicate his rule altogether. The people of Duryodhana's kingdom were suffering and getting harmed under his rule. It was both Arjuna's right and duty to protect them. What happens to the kingdom is secondary. His ego however filled his mind up with all kinds of doubts. His elder brother, Dharmaraja also had many warm feelings for Duryodhana, but had no doubt whatsoever that he would need to fight the war.

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The Pa:ndava:s had rights to the kingdom, just as much as the Kaurava:s did. After serving their exile, Dharmara:ja tried various peaceful methods to earn their share back, but they went in vain. He therefore conceded to a war being the natural and righteous solution. Dharmara:ja had great love for his younger cousin Duryodhana. When a Gandharva named Chitraratha once defeated Duryodhana and captured him, all the Pa:ndava:s except for Dharmaraja rejoiced at this. Dharmaraja however chided them saying that the 105 of them (100 Kauravas, 5 Pandavas) must remain united against outsiders irrespective of conflicts that might exist amongst them. He convinced them to save Duryodhana. Yudhishtira earned his name as Dharmaraja because he heard, ingrained, and practiced Dharma which he learnt from his Guru. Arjuna attended the very same classes but we are not sure if he was dozing off or chatting with his neighbor, because we see him plagued with all kinds of doubts on the battlefield. Dharmaraja was ready to fight the war as a righteous solution and outcome to past events and efforts. Arjuna, on the other hand, had feelings of sympathy and love that were highly inappropriate for the situation.

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As inappropriate as a doctor refusing to perform surgery on his patient out of sympathy. "Kshatra:t tra:yate iti kshatriyah:" i.e. a Kshatriyah is one who saves people from their troublemakers who may even be their own kith and kin. Rama says in the Ra:ma:yana: "kshatriyaih dha:ryatae cha:po na arta shatto bhavediti". Why are rulers conferred upon with authority? A real ruler or leader is one who rids his people of their troubles, but not one who looks to milk the maximum out of his subjects.

Arjuna's knowledge and vision was however clouded by sympathy. This was borne out of the murk of false identification and ego that was in his heart. Since Sri Krushna is Hrishikesha, he was going to create a stirring in Arjuna's heart to rid it of the murk, so that pure knowledge can follow. Gazing upon his opponents, Arjuna says :

*āchāryāḥ pitarāḥ putrās tathaiva cha pitāmahāḥ
mātulāḥ śhvaśhurāḥ pauṭrāḥ śhyālāḥ sambandhinas tathā (34)*

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All Arjuna can see is his family on all sides : uncles, cousins, grandparents, friends, nephews.

*etān na hantum ichchhāmi ghnato 'pi madhusūdana
api trailokya-rājyasya hetoḥ kim nu mahī-kṛite 935)*

Arjuna refers to Sri Krushna as Madhusu:dana in this verse i.e. the killer of the Rakshasa Madhu. This is Arjuna's way of taking a dig at Sri Krushna, implying that while He killed enemies and Rakshasas, expects Arjuna to kill his very own family. Is Sri Krushna to blame here? Wasn't it the Pa:ndavas and Kauravas that decided to go to war? Didn't Arjuna ask Sri Krushna to place the chariot between the armies?

Arjuna shows his ignorance steadily, "eta:n na hantum iccha:mi" i.e. he is ready to die at their hands. Let them bear the sin of destroying him but he does not want to fight them.

When under the influence of any extreme emotion such as anger, love (attachment), and sympathy one is said to lose all reason. Anger can make one destroy, love can make one lose their identity, and sympathy can change one from foe to ally. Sympathy with good intentions is wholesome but when borne out of ignorance and false ego is not helpful to anyone.

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Arjuna wants nothing to do with ruling the three worlds, leave alone this Earth, killing his family.

*nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana
pāpam evāśhrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ (36)*

Arjuna takes another dig at Sri Krushna, referring to Him as "Jana:rdana", the slayer of enemies. In contrast, Arjuna finds himself in a situation where he is forced to slay his family. He calls the Kaurava:s "a:tata:yinaḥ" i.e. those that have committed 6 types of sins. He declares that their destination is hell in any case, and killing them would send him to the very same hell. Thus, Arjuna reveals his sense of doership and enjoyership of the fruit of the war. Sri Krushna systematically rids him of this false ego.

The Dharmasha:stra declares that such sinners must be killed immediately upon sight "a:tata:yina ma:ya:ntam hanya:deva avicha:rayan". This is the definition given for "a:tata:yinaḥ" : "agnido: garadasshaiva shastro:nmatto: dhana:pahah kshetra da:ra harashcheta:n shadvidha: na:tata:yinaḥ"

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Such a criminal commits the following offenses :

- "agnidah" i.e. sets someone's house on fire. The Kauravas lured the Pandavas into a house and set it on fire
- "Garadah" i.e. one who poisons someone's food. The Kauravas tried to poison Bhima's food

- “Shasto:nmattah” i.e. one who holds potent and poisonous weapons capable of large scale destruction while being incapable and unqualified to put them to good use. We also see, in modern politics, that peaceful nations regulate the development and deployment of nuclear weapons by other countries which are likely to cause mass destruction to the world.
- “Dhana:vah” one who steals wealth
- “Ksheta da:ra haraschaika:n” one who grabs one’s wealth or one’s wife

Although the Pandavas lost in the game of dice they need not have mutely spectated Draupadi getting stripped publicly. As per the rules of Dharma, they could have slayed the Kauravas. They have gathered now to war against the above misdoings spelt out by the Dharmasha:stra, all of which had been perpetrated by the Kaurava:s. How appropriate is it for them to retreat from the war at this time, at the nick of the moment? Wouldn’t the world have labeled them as “cowards” if they did?

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“*pāpam evāśhrayed asmān*” declares Arjuna. Overcome with sorrow, an egoistic person speaks inappropriately, without considering the circumstance or the recipient of his words. Thus, Arjuna has deteriorated to the same state as Duryodhana was in, unable to seek or heed to reason and advice from others, and making decisions beyond their authority.

*tasmān nārḥā vayan̄ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrān sa-bāndhavān
sva-janān̄ hi katham̄ hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādhava (37)*

“*Tasma:t*” i.e. therefore, due to the aforementioned reasons, Arjuna decides that it wouldn’t befit them to kill the relatives, and that the Pandavas would incur sin if they did so. In reality, Arjuna didn’t have an accurate idea of sin or heaven or hell which were merely formulations in his mind. This wasn’t for him to decide either, as the general, Dharmara:ja, and so on were ready to fight.

*yady apy ete na paśhyanti lobhopahata-chetasah
kula-kṣhaya-kṛitam̄ doṣham̄ mitra-drohe cha pātakam̄ (38)*

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Arjuna concludes that the Kauravas lack the purity and softness of heart to see their evilness of their ways, and they have been blinded by ego. Thus, Arjuna, takes a moral high stand and positions himself as someone with the wisdom and purity of heart here. Out of his ignorance, he also preached to Sri Krushna Himself, that they must not engage in a war since they are not blinded similarly.

In reality, the only greedy person on the side of the Kaurava:s is Duryodhana as neither did he enjoy wealth nor did he allow others to.

Sri Krushna had remained silent all along, allowing Arjuna to express his fears on how the clan and the entire world would deteriorate if the family split into warring factions on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

People are born with certain abilities and follow practices in accordance with their families and upbringing. Accordingly, they have a certain set of duties and responsibilities in the world.

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A goldsmith's family has been trained for ages to mold jewelry out of gold. Similarly, religious and worldly activities must be carried out in accordance to one's family, clan, and race i.e. "Dharma". An action is in accordance with Dharma if it doesn't reap immediate reward but is for the greater good over the long term. If the Dharma of a race is to wage a righteous war, it must be done despite the resultant loss of lives from such a war. Arjuna pointed out that the war would lead to the destruction of the clan and would amount to betrayal of his friends and well-wishers. Due to his misplaced sympathy he failed to realize that the Kauravas perpetrated the betrayal to start with. They had promised land to the Pandavas upon their return from the 13-year long exile however reneged on that promise.

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*katham na jñeyam asmābhiḥ pāpād asmān nivartitum
kula-kṣhaya-kṛitam doṣham prapaśhyadbhir janārdana (39)*

Arjuna declares "asma:bhiḥ pa:pa:d asma:n nivartitum", i.e. "why should we, who know righteousness, resort to destroying our own clan". By using the word "we", he puts himself and Sri Krushna in the same cadre. Arjuna was no coward like Uttarakumara but misplaced sympathy had made him lose all reason. Out of a moral high stand that was false and born out of his ego, he refused to destroy the enemy.

Ra:vana also did not want to kill Si:ta out of deep affinity for her. His affinity was born out of lust which was not in accordance with Dharma. Had the desire been in accordance with Dharma, Ra:vana's love would have been wholesome.

Similarly, Arjuna's sympathy with the wrong side made him classify an action of Dharma as the opposite :

*kula-kṣhaye praṇaśhyanti kula-dharmāḥ sanātanāḥ
dharme naśṭhe kulam kṛitsnam adharmao 'bhibhavaty uta (40)*

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Arjuna points out the path of Dharma and Adharma that lies ahead before them. Dharma, an upward hill climb, requires guides and preceptors and few venture on that path. Adharma, on

the other hand, is an easy path that's much treaded upon and leads to one's negative spiral to rapid downfall. "Kula kshaye pranashyanti", Arjuna lays out his concern here that in engaging in the war, he'd destroy the elders that would be responsible for guiding the entire clan towards the timeless path of Dharma. In so doing, he would be responsible for making the path of Dharma disappear from the view of humankind, forcing them to tread upon the path of Adharma. To be noted, that Arjuna used the word "pranashyanti" which means "totally disappear" instead of the word "adarshanam" which means "hard to see". He concludes that his engagement in the war would be responsible for forcing humankind into Adharma. Out of ignorance, Arjuna failed to realize that it is becoming to destroy a wrongdoer who may or may not be someone that is good and moral.

*adharmābhibhavāt kṛṣṇa praduṣhyanti kula-striyaḥ
strīṣhu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇa-saṅkaraḥ (41)*

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The war would kill all men and society would be filled with women, old people, and children. With the primary breadwinners killed, women would have to do their best to feed mouths in their family. A woman is normally a lot less selfish and capable of going to greater lengths to provide for her family. Selfish and unrighteous people might exploit women and show them false hopes in return for practices and actions that are not in accordance with Dharma. They might convince women to resort to unwholesome means to provide for their families, in the event that their husbands are no longer around to carry out that duty.

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The responsibility of the betterment of a family lies with a woman. Women have the magnanimity to share the learnings from their experiences with their spouse, children, siblings, and parents. When a man gains some knowledge, he uses it solely for his own improvement. Women having dealt with a variety of characters within the family fold have an experiential wisdom on what is the righteous course of action. The sage Aṣṭamā had concluded at the end of his works on Dharma that if one were to have any doubts on the Dharmic course of action even after reading his works, one must consult the women at home on what to do. The family is a unit of the society. Arjuna hence stated "strīṣhu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate" that once a woman falls on the wrong path, so does the entire race.

*saṅkaro narakāyaiva kula-ghnānām kulasya cha
patanti pitaro hy eṣhām lupta-piṇḍodaka-kriyāḥ (42)*

Arjuna showed his concern about those in the pitru loka (ancestral world) in this verse. Their sustenance is obtained from the "pinda" and "śārḍha" procedures done by qualified people. If unqualified people perform these rituals and procedures, it brings the souls from the ancestral world down to the bottom.

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Arjuna wanted no part of war that causes misery to himself, to everyone around him, and to the souls in the ancestral world. Thus his sympathy, grief, and sorrow manifested through his words which showed that he had some knowledge of certain concepts. He was aware of race, the righteous conduct that befits different races and clans, of higher worlds such as the ancestral world, and of how some souls reached those worlds. From what he said thus far, it is also clear that he was aware of the practices such as pinda and sha:rdha that were offered to souls in the higher world. However, there seemed to be a lack of clarity or preciseness in his knowledge of these concepts. Furthermore, he seemed to be unaware of what the Veda:s had to say about the body, the jiva:tma, and the parama:tma.

When we read the first chapter, we may have various questions crop up in our minds about these concepts as well. We may wonder if the said ancestral worlds truly exist or were they mere figments of someone's imagination. Do the rituals prescribed in the Veda:s actually feed and communicate with the souls in the ancestral world. Some of these things may not make logical sense to us. However, the Sha:stras are a set of injunctions commanding us on what is to be done and what is not to be done. They also prescribe various remedial measures if the prohibited path is treaded upon or the recommended path is avoided. The Sha:stras provide no explanation or reasoning for these prescriptions and injunctions. If we decide to only follow practices that we can rationalize with, that would be flawed on our part. Our ancient sages have sought to explain the Sha:stras through their intuition and wisdom. We shall seek to gain further understanding of the same.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana!

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Chapter 1 of the Bhagavad Gita introduces the concept of ja:ti or varna i.e. breed or classification. Every being is born with innate and unchangeable characteristics that are part of its inherent nature. This is known as ja:ti. A mustard seed can never be changed into a cumin seed, even though how it tastes can be changed by adding various other spices and ingredients to it. Similarly, humans of similar inherent characteristics belong to the same ja:ti or varna which may be used interchangeably. Every sect is further classified into kula or race, based on how people behave and what type of practices they follow. Within a race of people, leaders emerge and lay down rules and codify the tastes and behaviors of people, thus forming mata or religions. Therefore, ja:ti, kula, and mata (breed, race, and religion), although used interchangeably, have subtle differences in the meaning.

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While one's ja:ti or breed can never be changed, one may attempt to change their kula, or race, and the Dharma that is to be followed as per one's Dharma's. If one earns the skills and

qualifications necessary to switch races it may be done. This is much like switching between jobs, sectors, or unions. One's kula or race dictates the means they use to earn a livelihood and what type of practices they follow. If one's skills and tendencies are not aligned with a race that they are already part of, they may find an alternate race that is in better alignment. This leads to their own benefit and to the benefit of those others. On the flip side, if one were in a race that is in utter misalignment to their tendencies and qualifications, it leads to everyone's downfall, including that of the individual themselves.

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As one changes their livelihood, their responsibilities also increase. We see examples of this in history. Drona:charya, born a Brahmin, could not sustain himself through Vedic practices. So, he forayed into the line of administration and warfare. Similarly, Potana engaged in business related activity since study and literature was not able to sustain him. With this change in livelihood, also comes a steady decline in skill. A child that grows up in a farmer's family gets repeated exposure to and thus gains skill in farming practices. Someone who gets into the line of farming later in life can never do it quite as well nor can delegate or manage farmers well enough as he might lack the expertise and experience needed to know what it takes to plough a field. It's unfortunate that modern society craves white collar jobs and skill based professions have become things of the past. Thus, with the change in one's livelihood and race, there has been a decline in the overall ability of society to engage in a profession.

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One must honor their own livelihood and race. Living in accordance with this is "kula dharma". When one does not conform to "kula dharma", their practices become ineffective. Some charlatans may try to sell black magic, mantras, or other wrong practices giving the public false hopes of making their practices more effective. When women and vulnerable pockets of society fall prey to such charlatans, such a society becomes hellish to live in. We hear about how women are by far the worst affected in war struck societies. Arjuna showed his concern and grief about such a possibility back then. With ineffective ritualistic practices being done for souls in the ancestral world, those souls are made to fall into such a hellish world as well. We base the belief of the existence of higher worlds on DharmaSha:stras. Our probes and satellites have not been able to investigate the existence of worlds and life beyond the farthest reaches of the cosmos.

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Until we can disprove the existence of higher worlds, let us accept what the Dharma Sha:stras say about them. These texts talk about hell, ancestral worlds, and heavens. These are meant for souls to experience joy and sorrow. The practices of those who live in this physical world reaches those in the higher worlds. Every other species except for humans experience a steady improvement in the state of their being. Plants and animals live as per their Dharma. Humans, on the other hand, resort to deceit and selfishness, and forget about the greater good, leading to the decline of their state.

As part of practicing our dharma, we are indebted to our parents who have given us this body. To show our gratitude towards our parents, we must offer pinda (rice and water) to those departed souls. This needs to be done as a necessity even if it's hard and unpleasant like drinking a bitter concoction or climbing a steep mountain.

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It is customary for individuals to get skeptical about the rituals and practices that are meant for departed souls. "How do we know where the dead have gone?", "How are we to know that feeding a cow or a crow is equivalent to feeding the departed soul?", they might want to rationalize. As per the Dharma Sha:stra, the departed souls are fed when we feed cows or crows in the physical world through procedural mantras. The procedures must be adhered to without one's editions, additions, or analysis.

While using a postal service, we deliver our letters into a post box. The letter ultimately reaches the recipient. Did the post box have magical powers? Did the postman have any knowledge of the contents of the letter or of the recipient? Imagine that we aren't pleased with the appearance of the post box, and create our own box, decorate it with sandalwood and flowers, and place it at home since the walk to the government endorsed postbox is too long and inconvenient. Would dropping our letters into our own post boxes get them delivered? No! Similarly, we don't need to analyze how pleasing the cows and crows are, to our aesthetic or rational senses.

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Just like telegrams send messages through sounds and characters, our mantras are carried over to the higher worlds through the powers of nature. When we play a MP3 file that's stored on the microchip on our computers, sounds emanate due to the ASCII characters being decoded. If we meddle with the ASCII code and add even a single slash or asterisk, the file gets ruptured and the audio is not played. Similarly, mantras are not to be altered.

One may wonder if the rituals of pinda are wasteful for departed souls that have attained mukti or have been reincarnated into other births. If the souls have gained mukti, they do not require any such rituals, however, our offerings are not wasted as they reach the other souls in the ancestral world. If the departed soul has reincarnated into another body, the offerings help them

in their new lives and births. If no one is a recipient to these rituals, it returns as a blessing. Therefore, these practices never go to waste.

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Thus Arjuna exhibited his interest in and knowledge of Dharma Sha:stras to Sri Krushna. Furthermore, he continued :

*doṣhair etaiḥ kula-ghnānām varṇa-saṅkara-kāraakaiḥ
utsādyante jāti-dharmāḥ kula-dharmāś cha śhāśhvataḥ (43)*

Arjuna expressed his concern that those who partake in the war would be responsible for the downfall of society and will likely go to hell for this reason.

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*utsanna-kula-dharmānām manuṣhyānām janārdana
narake 'niyataṁ vāso bhavatītyanuśhuśhruma (44)*

Arjuna's sorrow has intensified by now. He has lost sight of the truth which is : Sri Krushna's goal is the establishment of Dharma and obliteration of those who stand in the way. The Lord's goal was not to help Arjuna win a kingdom. Arjuna was merely a tool for Sri Krushna, like a scalpel in the hand of a surgeon. He was supposed to have no preferences for the outcome, just like a knife cuts wherever it is used. Arjuna's instrumental role was to restore Dharma, which is ageless and timeless i.e. "sana:tana". People often misunderstand "sana:tana" to mean "old". However, this word is explained in Sanskrit as "sada: asti nana:tana" i.e. something which is always there. Like the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we tread upon. Individuals may experience these elements differently and in varied quantities, but the elements remain unchanged.

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Similarly, the Dharma remains timeless and constant while the capabilities and qualifications of those who practice the Dharma might change. Sri Krushna's goal was to protect the timeless Dharma. "Dharmanyaha prabhuh achyutah", is said in Sri Vishnu Sahasrana:mam. Dharma consists of a commonly agreed upon set of dictates that are for the greater good of society. The practices of Dharma originate from ancient times, "a:cha:ra:vrahavo dharmā:" it is said about Dharmic practices.

Bhagavan ensures to protect and propagate Dharma. Even if society reaches a state where Dharma is not practiced, the knowledge still remains, in seed-like form. They cause trees of knowledge to grow at appropriate times, one planted.

Unaware of Sri Krushna's goal, Arjuna voiced opinion that they were sinning by partaking in the war :

aho bata mahat pāpam kartum vyavasitā vayam

yad rājya-sukha-lobhena hantum sva-janam udyatāḥ (45)

Arjuna uses “vayam” instead of “aham”, putting himself and Sri Krushna under the same category. This was a great flaw on his part.

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The Pa:ndavas were accustomed to hardships, having spent twelve years in exile in the forest, and one year in incognito. They had no interest whatsoever in winning a kingdom or property from the Kaurava:s and would have been just as happy continuing to live in the forest. However, they stood at the battlefield of Kurukshetra, primed to fight, due to the wrongful means by which the Kauravas seized what rightfully belonged to the Pa:ndava:s. Sri Krushna's goal was to right the wrong.

Almost as though Sri Krushna said to Arjuna “do you really think the Kauravas, ready as they are to tear you apart, are going to let you go if you want to declare a ceasefire now?”, Arjuna asserted :

yadi mām apratīkāram aśhastram śhastra-pāṇayah

dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyus tan me kṣhemataram bhavet (46)

Arjuna was ready to die unarmed at the hands of the enemies, the Kauravas.

Just like a thief is punished, not out of personal hatred for the thief, but to prevent such wrongful actions from continuing, and so that society is not damaged, the Kauravas who wrongfully seized the Pa:ndava:s' property deserved punishment. Arjuna had lost sight of this.

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The punishment needs to be proportionate to the magnitude of the wrongdoing. Ancient monarchs and kings were expected to have such a sense of justice. We have now reached such a downtrodden state, that it is considered inhumane to punish or issue a death sentence on those who perpetrate the greatest crimes, such as burning someone alive.

Sri Krushna had such a sense of justice however Arjuna was stubborn to not partake in any form of attack or offensive against the enemy, with his declaration “aprathi:ka:ram asha:stram”. He was not even eager to defend himself against their attacks. Sri Krushna tried convincing Arjuna that the enemies were similar to mosquitoes, further angered by attempts to swat them or further strengthened by repellents used against them. They were only likely to attack with heightened force.

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Arjuna concludes that it would be more wholesome for him to passively receive blows from Dhritara:shtra's side "*dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyus tan me kṣhemataram bhavet*". Sri Krushna was listening in amazement. Arjuna used the word kshemataram, which in Sanskrit indicates the comparative degree (kshemam, kshemataram, kshematamam being the three degrees of comparison). At this point, it is necessary to recount a story.

There was once a successful businessman who ran a shop. However, someone else opened a business in close competition with him. The businessman closely tracked the activities and strategies of the competition. He heard one day that the competition closed shop. The businessman was convinced that everything that his competitor did was for profit. He learnt that the competitor was meditating under a tree so the businessman followed suit. After a few days, God appeared in front of the competitor. The competitor questioned God if His first appearance was here or with the businessman. God convinced the competitor that since he was the first one to begin the meditation, he was granted the first sight of God. The competitor requested God to appear in front of the businessman and ask him why he was also meditating under the same tree.

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God holds high standards for His devotees only until He makes an appearance before them after which He magnanimously grants everything that He is asked for. So God fulfilled the competitor's request and went to the businessman to ask him what he wanted. The business confirmed his suspicion that God indeed appeared in front of the competitor first. The businessman asked God to go back to the competitor, grant his desire and give the businessman double of that. God did as requested and appeared once again in front of the competitor and reported the businessman's request. The competitor thought hard about what he could wish for that would destroy the businessman's profit. So he asked God to remove one of his eyes, so that this would result in the businessman losing both of his eyes.

Arjuna's negative attitude seemed similar to that of the competitor in this story. He did not want to fight, and he did not want the enemy to have the privilege of fighting a war of Dharma. One might wonder if Arjuna was resentful of the Kauravas reaching the similar abode of heaven, having died on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, fighting a noble war, after everything they put the Pa:ndava:s through. Arjuna's attitude seems like he did not want the Kauravas to experience the glory of the war.

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The rules of Dharmic warfare dictate that someone who flees the scene of the war, or is unarmed or surrenders is not to be attacked. Not adhering to the rules of Dharmic warfare ensures that one reaches hell. Arjuna much rather would have Kaurava:s engage in unrighteous

war, leading them to hell (“kshemataram”), than fighting a righteous war with them and have both parties go to heaven (“kshemam”). Even if the Kaurava:s did not attack the Pa:ndava:s, Arjuna was ready to let them enjoy the kingdom, and was perfectly fine with returning to the forest, were they not accustomed to hardship anyway? Arjuna’s attitude was as ridiculous as a doctor who would not amputate a patient’s infected limb out of sympathy. Wouldn’t the doctor be committing the horrific sin of allowing the infection to spread to the rest of the patient’s body? Arjuna’s duty here was to eradicate the evil at the source before its influence spread far and wide.

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Arjuna had forgotten that what he perceived to be better or “kshemataram” would in fact lead him to hell since he was refusing to perform his duty. Sanjaya, in seeming astonishment, declared :

sañjaya uvācha

evam uktvārjunah sañkhye rathopastha upāviśhat

viśṛjya sa-śharam chāpam śhoka-saṁvigna-mānasaḥ (47)

Arjuna , most unceremoniously, dropped his bow and arrow, and plonked down in the chariot, ashen-faced and looking clearly shattered.

One’s duty whether at the workplace, or at the sacrificial fire, is to follow the directives of the superior. Any losses or gains from doing the assignment go to the superior, not the employee. It was Sri Krushna who wanted to establish Dharma here, and Arjuna’s role was to just do as told. However, Arjuna, out of his free will misunderstood the concepts of Dharma and was going against Sri Krushna’s directive. One can imagine how this might have angered Sri Krushna.

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To recap, both Duryodhana and Arjuna felt sorrow, but Duryodhana’s was out of cowardice and lack of confidence in his own abilities. Arjuna’s sorrow was out of confidence in his abilities to destroy the enemy if he chose to. His sorrow was based on misplaced sympathy and a feeling of affinity, friendliness, and empathy to people whom he considered to be family but were in fact his enemies, and who did not reciprocate his feelings, and were spreading evil. Thus he lost sight of Dharma. Luckily for Arjuna, however, he was ready to heed Sri Krushna’s advice.

Duryodhana, steeped in sorrow, lacked this quality when he approached Drona:cha:rya. Thus, we get to hear Bhagavad Gita, as Sri Krushna brings Arjuna back to the correct path of Dharma. Thus, the first chapter is called Arjuna Visha:da Yoga. The first step towards the betterment and evolution of an individual is sorrow or Visha:da. Ancient sages have expanded upon why this is the case, which we will consider in the upcoming pages.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

Arjuna Visha:da Yoga

The Bhagavad Gita, in total 18 chapters, are divided into 3 parts of 6 chapters each. Each part is called a shatka. The first shatka i.e. 6 chapters talk about the ji:va. We use the terms ji:va and atma interchangeably. It is the knowledgeable entity that inhabits the body and pervades every bit of it, in fact, a:tma means “to pervade”. The external body that comprises of the five elements arose due to our individual karmas, causing differences between all of us. Within each of us the a:tma that is the same for all. The parama:tma helps the ji:va operate within the body. The ji:va enlivens the senses. Even if sense organs fail, the jiva:tma remembers the experience of having used those senses (indriya:s), because of the jna:nendriya:s. Once the a:tma leaves the body, all records of past experiences and remembrances from the sense organs are lost. The first shatka of the Bhagavad Gita explains why the ji:va has appeared, its properties, and purpose in this birth.

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The next shatka i.e. chapters 6-12 expand on the Parama:tma, His auspicious qualities, and how we are to worship Him. For about the first ten chapters, Sri Krushna did all the talking and Arjuna was listening, but we can't tell for sure if he was truly grasping the teachings. In Chapter 11, when Sri Krushna revealed his Universal Form, a shaken Arjuna pleaded with the Lord to revert to His original and pleasant demeanor and also promised that he would do as told (i.e. fight the war). After reverting to His original form, Sri Krushna spoke about how easy it is to love Him in Chapter 12.

Every chapter was laid out by Sri Krushna for Arjuna as a sa:dhana or tool (upa:yam). These are guidelines instrumental in helping us reach our goals. The opposite of upa:yam is apa:yam i.e. what deters one from the goal and misleads them.

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The Vedas expand on means by which Parama:tma is obtained but not in a way that's immediately accessible to us. Sri Krushna incarnated just to lay out these means as “yoga” in every chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. The root of “yoga” is “yuk” i.e. to sit with oneself. The word “yoga” has many meanings. It means to be ready, to be deserving, whatever is done being seated is also yoga, as well as a:tma sa:ksha:tka:ram. In the Bhagavad Gita, the word yoga mainly refers to upa:yam i.e. tool or means of attainment.

At the end of every chapter, there is a line “om tat sat iti bhagavad gita:su upanishadsu brahma vidya:ya:m yoga sha:stre sri krushna:rjuna samva:de ...” This text has three qualifiers here (a)yoga sha:stra. A text that gives injunctions on how to attain Parama:tma. Something that commands also can punish when one does not follow the commandment. The first chapter is

arjuna visha:da yoga. Sorrow or visha:da is the first step towards attainment since it helps one get rid of the inner murk of selfishness, false identification, arrogance, and ego. This is a necessary step before attempting to absorb higher truths.

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Sorrow makes all inner defects regurgitate out. Even though Arjuna, Dhrutara:shtra, and Duryodhana felt sorrow, this chapter is called Arjuna Visha:da Yoga. At the end of every chapter, it is referred to as a conversation between Sri Krushna and Arjuna. We will shortly see why this is the case. The other two qualifiers for the text are (b) brahma vidya © Upanishad.

Everyone seeks happiness but seek it through transient worldly means. The true meaning of happiness i.e. a:nanda is explained in Taittiriya Upanishad in A:nandavalli.

In adolescence or childhood, there is insufficient knowledge of true happiness. In middle and old age, even though there is knowledge, the body lacks the strength to pursue it. It's between ages 25-35 that one can be most effective on the path to attain true happiness.

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According to the Taittiriya Upanishad, human happiness is the ability to feel a huge appetite, digest various types of food, have wealth, power, and loving relationships. It is very difficult to attain this type of happiness as we don't see the coexistence of all favorable circumstances as a loving family, status, wealth, and health in a person's life. If hypothetically such a happy person existed, if we are able to assemble 100 such people, and squeeze the happiness out of 100 such people, that is the happiness of a gandharva. The happiness of gandharva:s amount to that of a karma devata. If we repeat the process with 100 karma devata, it gives the happiness of aja:na devata. As we continue the process, we gradually get the happiness experienced by a deva gandharva, devata, Indra, Brihaspati, and Chaturmukha Brahma. If we extracted the essence of the happiness felt by 100 such Chaturmukha Brahmas would we get Brahma:nandam? No.

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The magnitude of such happiness is immeasurable. The Upanishads have thus tried to define pure happiness. Such happiness is a property of Parama:tma who is the only One that can give us lasting joy. All other worldly happiness is just a temporary relief to a sorrowful or troublesome situation. Consumption of food and drink is meant to re-fuel the body, and not an experience of true happiness. The body is a wonderful machine with five elements. The outer shield is of the earth element, the softness of which is due to heat and water. Inside the body, sounds are

produced and there is empty space. When any one element depletes, the alarm signals of the body sound, making one hungry or thirsty.

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The need for water indicates the increase in the fire element in the body. The body's alarms go off since an increase in heat is not healthy. This shows up as thirst. When the earth element depletes the feeling of craving for this element to be refilled shows up as hunger. We cannot literally eat earth, so we consume foods born from the ground. As is customary to human race, we tend to pollute everything that is pure so we add a bunch of ingredients to the vegetables and consume them. We do everything we can to spoil pure milk and give those coffees and teas fancy names, don't we?

Thus, we fulfill the needs of our senses, so that they can continue to operate well, and call that happiness. All we are doing is responding to the alarms these senses give out when they are under the threat of malfunctioning.

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Happiness (sukha) corresponds to the body and bliss (a:nanda) is that of the ji:va:tma. A:nanda can only come from Parama:tma. If we turn to nature (prakriti), which is insentient and has no knowledge (achetana), we only derive qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas. We cannot derive a:nanda (True Bliss) from nature. A:nanda can only come from knowledge and intelligence (chetana). Parama:tma is called "rasaghana:" i.e. the pure essence of A:nanda or bliss. The ji:vatma gets illuminated with intelligence when the quality of knowledge or intelligence (chetana) is not suppressed but instead nurtured in us.

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The Upanishads compare Parama:tma to sweet candy or rock salt. Mixing these ingredients into our food changes and enhances its taste altogether. Similarly, more the ji:va:tma mixes with and steepes itself in the thought of the Parama:tma, the more it gets illuminated with Bliss. This is just an example, however, and shouldn't be taken literally. Rock salt or sweet candy are insentient objects and reduce in quantity with more use, but the bliss of Parama:tma remains intact irrespective of how many jiva:tmas drink off the spring of His Bliss.

Like water flows, and air blows, the inherent nature of the ji:va:tma is to chase the knowledge and bliss of the parama:tma. Any knowledge that does not illuminate the ji:va with the bliss of parama:tma is futile.

Performing pooja rituals, mantras, going on pilgrimages, and so on increase the feeling of association with Parama:tma, but may not help achieve the inner feeling of ji:vatma being steeped in the bliss of Parama:tma.

One must not however discard these practices then. In reality, when the ji:va is immersed in Parama:tma, this will be made apparent by the person's behavior. The light of a lamp or the fragrance of a flower can never be obstructed or hidden.

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True love manifests itself through both word and action. A mother generally loves her children, and this shows through both her words and actions, not mere lip service. She would jump to protect her children, despite the harm and loss it might cause her, not passively watch her children getting hurt or give them instructions from a distance on how to save themselves. Such behavior shows that there is no true love.

Similarly, our Bhakti towards Parama:tma would naturally get exhibited in various ways. Our ancient sages have firmly instructed that we must continue to practice religious rituals even if the inner feeling of alignment with or immersion into Parama:tma is not felt. With time, and with consistent practice, this feeling will get inculcated. The method to inculcate this feeling is constant remembrance of the names of Parama:tma, meditation on His form, nature, and qualities, continuous recollection that the ji:va is part of that Parama:tma, while living in peace and harmony with nature and one's surroundings. The focus needs to be Parama:tma, not the insentient nature. Focussing on nature (prakriti) leads to misery and sorrow.

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The soul's search for happiness has been since time immemorial. The Upanishad's and all of Paramatma:s incarnations have been to instruct embodied souls on how to access permanent bliss (nitya:nanda). Such bliss is defectless (maha:nanda). Since the Bhagavad Gita also details the procedures and means to attain such Bliss, it would be befitting to call the text Brahma Vidya and Upanishad. Everything in nature is constantly changing, the form, nature, smell, texture and color of every living and non-living being is susceptible to change. Accordingly, the reactions and emotions they trigger in us constantly changes. Change is innate to nature, just as flow is to water.

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Therefore, it would be incorrect to rely on objects of nature for lasting bliss, either due to their change or due to the changing reactions they cause in us. Yet, we need to transact in the ever changing world since we are of nature. The food, water, and air that provide us sustenance, the ground we walk on, the bodies that we inhabit are of nature. It would be foolish to claim that we

have nothing to do with an ever changing world. Therefore, the key lies in transacting with the world with the type of attitude an employee of a bank would have towards the deposits and withdrawals made at the bank. He is neither elated at deposits nor saddened by the withdrawals since the money is not his. He does not refuse to transact with the money either. Doing so, or on the flip side, stealing the money, both would get him fired. With doing his duty, he is able to earn a salary and support himself and his family happily.

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The body is like the cash counter, the ji:va like the employee, and the people and various other experiences are like the cash withdrawals and deposits here. The point of the cash counter is to transact with the cash, not merely to sit idly. Similarly, as long as we inhabit the bodies, we need to carefully and intentionally transact with others, and undergo experiences, remaining mindful that the body is a means (upa:yam) and not the end or goal (upe:yam). To cite another example, imagine buying a beautiful car and not using it lest its tires get worn away. Imagine wiping down such a car everyday, gloating over how beautiful it is, and then walking to work. What's the point of such a beautiful car? Furthermore, imagine buying a car beyond one's means and skipping meals to repay the loan on that car. Going to great lengths to secure and care for one's body and external experiences alone is a similar type of foolishness.

If we approach our experiences as embodied souls with a combination of dutifulness and detachment as would an exemplary employee at a company, our steady progress as ji:va:tmas is possible, just like such an employee would get promoted. Thus we may progress from human (manushya) to god (deva) and finally to the status of Parama:tma. Yet, we keep repeating the old patterns and fall back in the wheel of Samsa:ra.

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The body is to be used as a means to attain lasting happiness and Sri Krushna appeared in the world to instruct ji:vas on how to do this. It is our duty to understand how to do this, having gained bodies as ji:vas. The purpose of the Veda:s is not to isolate one from society, make one shirk their duties, or negate the world and its experiences. The means to happiness prescribed in the Veda:s helps one live in harmony with others.

Taittiriya Upanishad says, "**raso:vaina:h rasaghyeva:yam labva: nante bhavati**" i.e. we crave happiness that is original and pure. The smell of original sandalwood is called "sugandhi ", but the smell of fake sandalwood, albeit pleasant, is merely "sugandham".

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Just like the sandalwood that possesses the aromatic odor (Sugandha) is known as sugandhi, when a ji:va possesses a:nanda (bliss), he is called a:nandi or the blissful one. Such bliss is from Parama:tma who is also referred to as Brahma. Brahma means “big” or “great”. Since this word has no prefix, Brahma here refers to the largest entity in every possible facet and aspect. Brahma is the one that grows and also confers expansion and growth upon ji:vas. By recognizing this quality of Brahma, the ji:va derives bliss.

As far as worldly transactions go, the ji:va needs to filter and distill the experiences and sense objects artfully.

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This process of purifying our experiences is done through the power of thought. The first type of thought is to make an offering of all of our experiences to Parama:tma, just as we would with a piece of fruit at the altar. With this offering, everything is purified. Secondly, we can perceive that everything that we consume through any of our senses is an offering to the Parama:tma within us and is only done to keep the machinery of the body going.

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We need to put every experience, beginning from inhaling to consumption of sweets through this process of transformation with our thoughts. Thus, the body is prepared and transformed and is made into a befitting instrument in the quest for Eternal Bliss. Just like iron is molten and transformed into sophisticated surgical instruments, the body and mind need to go through much transformation and evolution, and we are not supposed to use them as is, at the instinctive level without the said filtering. Sri Krushna offers the different means by which this transformation can be achieved in every chapter. We have already seen that chapter 1 is Arjuna Visha:da Yoga, the second is Sa:nkhya Yoga, the third Karma Yoga, fourth A:tma Samyama Yoga, fifth Jna:na Yoga, sixth Akshara Purushotamattva Yoga, and so on. Bhagavad Gita not only teaches but commands us on how to use these tools, hence is called Yoga Sha:stram. We will delve deeper into why Bhagavad Gita is also called Upanishad and Brahma Vidya in the upcoming section.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:
Arjuna Visha:da Yoga

“Sarva sha:stra mayi gi:ta” Bhagavad Gita contains the essence of all spiritual, scientific, and worldly knowledge. This text verily contains the essence of all Upanishad. Several ancient sages have written commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. They were generally less focused on the story line and more on the spiritual content. These sages saw everything in nature as a vehicle for Parama:tma, be it a body of an animal or a plant. They perceived every element of nature to be a god (fire, water, and so on). Thus, they inculcated a sense of purity in their perception.

The stories in ancient scriptures do not need to be analyzed as such, however, their deeper meaning that is capable of rendering us with true knowledge needs to be the focus. Scriptures were never used purely for entertainment and story-telling purposes but always came with a sizable dose of spirituality. That being said, the commentaries were not dry and dense and lacking in lightness. The ancient sages always mixed the story-telling artfully with the spirituality, rendering content that gave the reader much joy and light-heartedness. The 9 attitudes (“nava rasa”) are the right means for one to attain joy.

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For instance, we come across comedy in the Ra:ma:yana in scenes involving Kumbhakarna and Shu:rpanakha:. After getting her nose and ears cut by Lakshmana, Shu:rpanakha goes running to Ra:vana and describes the brothers, despite her pain, as men of great strength and attractiveness. This strikes us as a bit amusing.

It is essential to recognize the Parama:tma behind comedy, fear, romance, anger, and other emotions, for life to be wholesome. Only engaging in emotions, losing sight of their basis would lead to downfall in one's life.

There was a highly educated man who went boating. As is customary with people that have many degrees and qualifications, this man loved to talk. He quizzed the boatman on why a piece of stone sinks but the boat is able to stay afloat. The boatsman didn't know, he didn't study Physics, the poor guy!

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The educated man looked up and saw gray clouds forming in the sky. He quizzed the boatman on how clouds were formed, which the latter didn't know either. So he gave a lecture on the process of evaporation and condensation. The educated man declared the boatman's life wasted, indeed he didn't know the principles behind his very livelihood. The boatman felt very humiliated.

Shortly after, it started raining heavily, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The boatman asked the educated man if he knew how to swim, because they had gone too far into water, and his old boat wouldn't survive the 6-7 mile back to the banks in this turbulent weather. Alas, the educated man couldn't swim. The boatman laughed and said that he knew this one skill that

was essential for his livelihood. The educated man, despite the extent of his theoretical knowledge, didn't have this practical skill for saving his own life.

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Spiritual knowledge has a similar significance in our lives. Without spiritual knowledge, and a sound foundation on the ji:va's purpose, and the way to live in accordance with higher truths, other specializations and know-hows are wasted. While there is no need to demean or trivialize other bodies of knowledge, it needs to be built on a sound foundation of spiritual knowledge. This is why children are made to learn various shlokas like Krishna:shtakam, Ra:ma:shtakam, and so on.

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The foundation of spiritual knowledge is relevant to the human species alone. Animals and birds live in harmony with nature. They don't transform or modify what is originally offered by nature. Humans have the intelligence to do this.

A human being can be likened to a computer. The visible portions (flesh, bones, muscle, etc.) are the hardware and the knowledge that the human possesses is the software. The software is usually much more expensive than the chassis and parts of a computer. Like a computer can't create but can be used to analyze, the human ji:va can use his knowledge to become an ever blissful soul (a:nandi).

Take the example of a man who goes to a railway station to board a train for an intended destination. Upon reaching the platform, he finds that there is much crowd waiting to board the same train. Off at the next platform, he sees an empty train. He thinks it might be much more pleasant to be in that train, and crosses over, boards the train and relaxes. The train has started moving.

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The foolish man's time, energy, and money have thus been wasted. Similarly, ji:vas need to use their bodies in accordance with the desired destination of eternal bliss. The practices must be followed methodically and systematically, even though hard, to prime the body towards such a worthy destination.

There is no guarantee whatsoever that the ji:va is conferred with the same human condition and birth again. There is every chance of more degenerate conditions occurring in future births. To prevent this, and to ensure progress in the state of the ji:va:tma, the Bhagavad Gita is an instruction manual.

Bhagavad Gita can be translated as “Song of God”. Talking at length on a topic is hard for the speaker, as well as as for the listener. Songs are always well received by individuals of all ages. “shishurve:tti vashurve:tti ve:tti ga:narasam phanih”

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Even plants and animals get healthier with the sound of music. They yield better fruit or higher quantities of milk. Bhagavan has therefore given us this beautiful song of Bhagavad Gita.

This text is also called Upanishad. “Upanishad” can be split as “upa-nishidya” i.e. when a qualified student sits close to his Guru and acquires all the knowledge relevant to his external and internal conditions. The qualification for such a student is his eagerness to learn. Spiritual truths must not be taught to someone who is uninterested or does not have the ability to digest it.

Upanishads belong to the second part of the Veda:s. The first part of Veda:s dealing with the karma of the body, and the practices needed to attain happiness in this and other worlds is called “Pu:rva Bha:gam” or “Karma Bha:gam”. The second part of the Veda:s instructs on how the ji:va can attain the highest bliss and is called “Jna:na Bha:gam” or “Uttara Bha:gam”

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Upanishad can also be split as “upa” - near “ni” - completely, and “shad” to obliterate.

Upanishads blast away at our ignorance, blow it to bits, and washes it away with the waters of self-knowledge. Arjuna asked Sri Krushna since when did ji:va have this ignorance. With no attempt to time it, Sri Krushna replied that the ignorance is “ana:di” i.e. beginningless. Shad is a root word which also means “to attain” in Sanskrit. Therefore, the Upanishads rid those who seek refuge in them of ignorance and replace it with the right knowledge.

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Yet another meaning of the word shad is “to mix”. Upanishads thus contain teachings (“updesham”) that helps the ji:va attain and get mixed into the bliss of Parama:tma. These have been concisely summarized by Sri Krushna in the 700 shlokas of the Bhagavad Gita.

When children are enrolled in school, they have little interest in studies. Through a well-crafted syllabus, the level of engagement and involvement of children is increased in their studies.

Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita lays out a plan for us, who are merely interested in the material enjoyments of life, to get gradually more involved in the spiritual aspects so that we get ultimately propelled to attain the Bliss of Parama:tma.

Duryodhana's elders once quizzed him, worried at his lack of moral compass, whether he knows not what's righteous and what's not. Duryodhana affirmed his knowledge of Dharma however stated that he had no interest in practicing it.

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Nor was he inclined to discontinue the practices of adharma. "Ja:na:mi dharma na cha me pravrittihi Ja:na:myadharma na cha me nivrttihi"

We are in a similar state as Duryodhana. The Upanishads help move us from this state towards Parama:tma.

The purpose of Veda:nta is not to pronounce the world as substanceless, transient, meaningless, useless, and to be disposed of. Such theories are referred to in Telugu as "metta veda:ntamu". The point of Veda:nta is to tell a person about himself, the purpose of his birth, and how to live to achieve his purpose.

"Veda" means "to be known" and "antam" can mean the end, beautiful, or goal. Veda:ntam can be interpreted as the part of the Veda:s towards the end, or the most beautiful part of the Veda:s or that which contains the the goal of all Veda:s.

Not all knowledge is beautiful. Veda:nta is beautiful because it leads us to the bliss of Parama:tma.

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"Antam" can also mean the ultimate. Veda:ntam thus has knowledge knowing which nothing else remains to be known. The following questions are answered in the Upanishads (1) Who am I ? (2) Who is driving me? (3) Why is He driving me, what is the fruit of attaining Him? (4) What are the means by which He may be obtained? (5) What are the obstacles on my path to obtain Him and how can I get rid of them?

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Parama:tma is the source of all knowledge. Parama:tma grants us this knowledge from afar. For example, the rivers are the source of all water. It's from the rivers that water evaporates, forms clouds, and falls as rain. It's from the rivers that water is fed through pipes to the taps in our homes. The energy of the water reduces as it flows through the different avenues and reaches the final destination. The energy of water is very high in rivers, but not so in the glass which we are about to drink from. Similarly with the quality of the presence of Parama:tma.

When we see someone who is clothed, we can infer that there is a body behind those clothes. Behind the body is a ji:va, and behind the ji:va is a Parama:tma. However, there are so many

obstacles to us recognizing the Parama:tma in every being, such as its appearance, qualities, and behavior.

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The Pu:rva Bha:gam of the Veda:s prescribe practices (karma) to appease demigods, and talk about the Parama:tma behind the ji:va of the demigods. Although this path ultimately leads to Parama:tma, it is a very drawn out procedure and many who set out on this path may not sustain until they ultimately reach Parama:tma. Upanishads (or Veda:nta) zoom into aspect of Parama:tma, giving a direct experience and visibility of Parama:tma, as though He is right near us i.e. “upa” + “nishannajnya” (sitting right near us). Thus, these texts provide an intimate working knowledge of the form and nature of the Parama:tma in a direct manner.

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Every name used for the text of Bhagavad Gita is meaningful. Nowadays, we give names to books and movies that are least indicative of their content. That's not the case with the great text of Bhagavad Gita. In fact, Sri Krushna did exhibit his various emotions beginning with sadness at Arjuna's defeatist attitude till elation when Arjuna began to show signs of realization in a song, thus the name.

The next name for this text is “Brahma Vidya”. We have already seen that Brahma is one which grows and makes the other grow. Vidya is the tool by which Brahma can be obtained. Brahma can mean the body, which grows in shape. Brahma can mean nature. Sri Krushna declares down the line in the Bhagavad Gita “Mama yonirmahadbrahma” i.e. “the source and root of this ever changing nature if Brahma and that is Mine”. Ji:va is also called Brahma, Sri Krushna says “aksharam paramam brahma”. The ji:va grows with knowledge, and also makes the body it inhabits grow.

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Parama:tma who is the most magnificent of all and also confers expansion is called Brahma. The word Brahma is best used for Parama:tma than for any of the other aforementioned entities.

For instance, we call Srimannarayana by the name Bhagava:n. “Bhagava” means one who has the following six auspicious qualities : (1) Jnana - knowledge (2) Shakti - power (3) Bala - strength (4) Aishwarya - prosperity (5) Vi:rya - bravery (6) Tejas - sovereignty. “An” means to be devoid of. Srimannarayana is thus devoid of bad qualities and possesses auspicious qualities.

However, we also refer to many sages as Bhagava:n, for example Valmiki Bhagavan, Veda Vyasa Bhagavan and so on. This is because any one of those six qualities are dominant in these individuals.

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With increase in one's talent or skill, they may be referred to as God or Goddess in the field of their specialization. This is only because some of God's greatness has accumulated in these individuals. This does not mean that they are really Gods and Goddesses. When referring to sages and saints, we must never call them "Bhagava:n" alone i.e. their name must always be present as prefix such as "Va:lmiki Bhagava:n" and so on. Only Sri Krushna Parama:tma can be called Bhagava:n.

In the Bhagavad Gita, when others speak, their names are mentioned. For instance "Arjuna uva:cha", "Sanjaya uva:cha", etc. When Sri Krushna speaks, it is said "Bhagava:n uva:cha", not "Sri Krushna uva:cha".

Similarly, the word Brahma can only be used for that Parama:tma who is responsible for the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the entire universe.

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Brahma Vidya gives us knowledge about that Divine Entity that transcends everything and everyone, which is the greatest and which has the capability to confer splendor to ji:vas. Bhrgu once asked his father Varuna about Brahma. How does one recognize Brahma, how does one contemplate on Brahma? Varuna replied

"yato va: ima:ni bhu:ta:ni ja:yante, yena ja:ta:ni ji:vanti, yatprayantyabhisamvishanti, tadvijijnAsasva, tad brahma iti"

yato va: ima:ni bhu:ta:ni ja:yante - That from which all ji:vas originate

yena ja:ta:ni ji:vanti - By whom the existence of these beings is possible

Yatprayantyabhisamvishanti - To whom all beings return upon dissolution

Brahma provides the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of all beings. There are 32 Brahma Vidyas in the Upanishads which are succinctly presented in the Bhagavad Gita.

The entire existence is a wheel of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. Ji:vas crave freedom from this wheel of existence. They cannot break free by their own will and volition. The Brahma Vidya provides tools for them to do so.

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When we ride a ferris wheel, we may hate the ride, but we cannot jump out of it, nor can we pray to the compartment that we are seated in to stop the ride. Our only resort would be to try to

communicate with the operator of the ferris wheel so that he may help us safely alight from the ride. Brahma is like the operator of the ferris wheel with the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe under His command. Potana's poem "evaniche janinchu jagamu" also expounds on these aspects of Brahma.

The 32 Brahma Vidyas are Upa:sana Kriyas or methods of worship that are to be carried out with love and care towards Brahma. Bhagavad Gita expands on these methods of worship so it is called Brahma Vidya.

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Humans exhibit one of the three modes of nature predominantly i.e. sattva, rajas, or tamas. Arjuna's dominant quality was sattva. Hence his sorrow led to the betterment of the entire race. Duryodhana, being dominated by Rajas, was cowardly and suspicious of his own people. Dhritara:sthira was tamasic and blinded by ignorance. "shata:ntha:h ku:pam pravishanti" i.e. if one follows a blind person, one stumbles. Hence, the first chapter is named after the sorrow of Arjuna, as Arjuna Visha:da Yoga, and not after the sorrow that the other two protagonists exhibited.

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Duryodhana had the attitude of wanting to fight for wealth, while Dhritara:sthira assumed that the good-natured Pa:ndava:s would not fight. He assumed that the kingdom would be the Kauravas' to take and rule for another 12-13 years without any effort. This is the epitome of tamas.

Arjuna's sorrow led him to get concerned about betterment of those in this and higher worlds. We may also use such satvic sorrow as a tool for the progress of our jiva:tma.

Jai Srimanna:ra:yana:

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Sanatkuma:ra had opened up a new school and had advertised that he was looking for students. Much to his surprise, Sage Na:rada came to the school to learn even though he knew enough to be a teacher. He knew all the Vedas, Shiksha, Vya:karana and A:gama. However, he knew only the mantras by heart and wasn't fully aware of their meanings. Sage Na:rada said, "maddhavede:va:smi na:tmavit shrutahye:va me:" that he knows nothing about the A:tma and wants to learn more about it. When Sana:tkumara, feigning innocence, inquired why Sage Na:rada was eager to learn about the a:tma, Sage Na:rada replied "tarati shokham a:tmavit". The knowledge of a:tma helps one cross the deep and ominous waters of sorrow.

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This shows us that sorrow is a necessary predecessor to knowledge of a:tma. Sorrow occurs when one is impeded from getting what they want or obtains what is undesirable. People may claim that they love others, their possessions, or money, but the truth of the matter is that they love themselves the most. They are ready to spend any amount of money to save their own lives. They are ready to let go of any relations that they don't deem to be beneficial for them. The general belief is that a mother's love is supreme and runs even deeper than the love between a man and woman. However, we see this on a decline these days, with women prioritizing their self-image and beauty over children. They have stopped breast feeding their children as a result. This vanity has spread even to Bha:rat from western nations.

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During youth or times of good health and success, one may identify oneself with their beauty, strength, wealth, status, and prosperity. When they become old, diseased, and decrepit, they want freedom from the very same body that previously gave them intense pride and pleasure. Even individuals with some spiritual advancement often seek freedom from their bodies. Thus, people are able to realize their separateness from their bodies, especially during times of hardship.

The people surrounding a dead body say "he has passed away". Even those with no belief in the soul say this, meaning that there was something inside the body that enlivened it, which is not in the body any more.

People love their souls the most, and want to rid themselves of even their bodies, if they cause them trouble.

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During times of sadness, one fondly recollects happy times of the past and longs for this once again. He goes as far as to say "I wish I die so that I may gain some happiness". Although such words are dealt out in ignorance, it comes from a place of sincerity and knowledge of an original self that the person once experienced. This original self is the a:tma, the experience of which one craves once again. He wants to rid himself of the obstacles on his path stopping him from the pure original happiness he once felt. A:tma vidya or knowledge of the a:tma helps one attain such bliss eternally. Knowing that sorrow is the first step towards this attainment, one can embrace sadness and not feel eager to rid themselves of it. This sorrow makes one realize the pettiness of bodily pursuits and the worthiness of the inner soul.

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There was a king named Raghugana who wanted to learn Vedanta. The Upanishads say “vijna:na:rtham gururme:va akhabigaccheth”, that one must seek out a Guru for knowledge. So the king went to the forest where he heard was a great saint. Being a king, he set out on a palanquin to the forest, to learn Veda:nta from the saint. One of his attendants carrying the palanquin got injured. The rest of the three attendants looked for a replacement in the nearby town. They found a well-fed looking man under a tree and called out to him. The man didn't respond. So they went near him to get his attention. The man, seemingly spaced out, was looking at a distance. The annoyed attendants dragged the man by his neck and made him carry the palanquin.

They continued on the journey. The king felt the unsteady sway of the palanquin and yelled at his attendants to walk steadily. They replied that the new guy, unaccustomed to carrying a palanquin, caused the disruption to their rhythm. Expecting to see a thin and frail man, the king peeked out to see a well-fed robust newcomer to his retinue.

Thoroughly annoyed, the king addressed the new guy, and inquired with words dripping with sarcasm, if he lost a few pounds or aged a few years because of carrying the palanquin for a few minutes and if that is why he is swaying madly.

Much to the king's chagrin, the man quizzically looked at him and asked, surprised, “Carrying the palanquin? I am not doing anything of that sort.”

The king said “You fool! Not only are you not good at this job, but you also speak a bunch of nonsense!”

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The man replied, “The ground carries the feet, the feet carries the legs, the legs the waist, the waist the chest, the chest the neck, the neck the head, the head the palanquin in which you are seated. There is no connection between you and me”.

The enraged king jumped out of the palanquin and thundered, “Do you know who I am?! I am the King Raghugana and you speak to me this way!”, he said pointing to himself with his chest. The man replied, “Are you your chest? You point to your chest saying that that's you. Are you your hand? You use your hand to point”.

Hearing this, the king slapped his own head in frustration.

The man continued, “Are you your head? You slap your head thusly!”.

The king's frustration heightened and he stomped his foot on the ground.

The man inquired, “Oh, are you your foot?”.

When the king had no reply to any of these queries, the man asked “Which one of these things are you? If you are none of these things, who are you?”

The king was saddened that he didn't have the wisdom to give this man an answer.

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The man laughed and said, “hamityatranipudo: bhu:tva: chintaya pa:rthiva!” i.e. “you sought a lesson on Veda:nta when you know nothing about yourself!”.

The king fell on the man’s feet and inquired if he was the wise sage that he was originally seeking. The man replied that his name was Jada Bha:rata and proceeded to give the King Ragughana all knowledge of the a:tma.

Thus, the king’s sorrow and worry led him to gain knowledge. The phase of gain knowledge is usually preceded by a realization of the greatness of what one is missing by not knowing the a:tma, an intense sorrow due to this, and yearning for the knowledge of the soul.

Arjuna was very confident of his worldly success, which Duryodhana and his father lacked. But Arjuna felt intense apprehension at the state of the souls in this and higher worlds, if he proceeded to kill all of his relatives.

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As a ruler, his emotions were misplaced. Dharmara:ja was well aware of his rights and had no doubts that he had to fight for his property and kingdom. There is no sin in self-defense.

We frequently encounter situations that cause inner conflict in us, leaving us wondering if we must let go, or fight for our rights, and for what rightfully belongs to us. The righteous thing to do is to stop the perpetrator from robbing us of what is rightfully ours, so that they don’t repeat the crime against someone else, and so that no one else repeats the same mistake with us.

Don’t we celebrate the independence day of nations and hail freedom fighters? It is our duty to protect our land, property, and country against unrighteous attempts to grab or invade them.

Such defense should not be viewed as violence.

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This concludes Arjuna Visha:da Yoga. The second chapter is Sa:nhkya Yoga. Arjuna’s sorrow continued even in the second chapter. It is customary for people to feel sorrowful for different reasons. Every sorrow seems more insurmountable than what was previously experienced. A person also feels that no one else in the world probably experiences as much sorrow as he does. The same thing happened with Arjuna as his sorrow escalated to new levels. Veda Vya:sa demarcated a new chapter since Arjuna began to wonder how he may be able to hurt his dear grandfather Bhi:shma and guru Drona.

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In Chapter 1, we only hear Sri Krushna say “pashya!” to Arjuna. In Chapter 2, Sri Krushna starts His teaching with “kutastham kashmalam idam” and continues to try to rid Arjuna of his sorrow till Chapter 18 Verse 26 where the Lord says “ma: shuchaha”.

“ajjah sukhama:ra:dhyah dukhatarama:ra:dhyate vishe:shajah- ajna:nini:” - It is possible to make a totally ignorant or a fully knowledgeable person happy.”naram ravma:pi naram na rajyayati” It is impossible, even for the four-faced Brahma, to make a person with half-baked knowledge happy. Such people also tend to be obstinate.

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Arjuna was in a similar position of having half-baked knowledge. He spoke as though he knew everything about righteousness. He was in no position to realize his lack of knowledge. So Sri Krushna needed to go on for 18 chapters to teach Arjuna. By Chapter 10, Arjuna seemed convinced but not totally, so Sri Krushna reveals His Universal Form in Chapter 11. Yet Arjuna needed convincing for 7 more chapters!

Take the case of Yudhishtira. He had love and respect for his elders and relatives. Yet, he faced no inner conflict in regard to the war. Hence he is called “sthira” or firm, and had complete knowledge of Dharma. Arjuna, on the other hand was plagued with doubts and was second guessing his initial decision to war the Kaurava:s.

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Dharmara:ja had instructed Bhi:ma to save Duryodhana from a Gandharva who had captured and kidnapped him. He chastised the elated Pa:ndavas, saying that their family should not suffer at the hands of anyone outside of the family, irrespective of the equation the five Pa:ndava:s shared with the hundred Kaurava:s. Such was the quality of Yudhishtira’s Dharma, yet he was at the battlefield ready to fight the righteous war.

As Arjuna’s sorrow totally obliterates his sense of justice and reasoning, we will see how his sorrow gained specificity and intensity in Chapter 2 and how Sri Krushna began to rid him of his doubts.

Om tatsaditi shri:madbhagavadgi:ta:su upanishatsu brahmavidya:ya:m yo:gash:astre:
shri:krushna:rjunasaMva:de arjunavisha:dayo:go: na:ma prathamо dhya:yah
Jai Srimanna:ra:yana

