

## The Yoga of Dejection

by Satyanarayana Dasa

We all have suffered from temporary phases of dejection at some point in our lives. Dejection overwhelms us when the unexpected transpires over the expected, when the bad overcomes the good, and when the evil visits us instead of the righteous. Being human, it is very normal for us to have expectations from people and things around us. Expectation amounts to longing, yearning, desire, craving, or lust. Likewise, failure to attain the expected begets dejection, sadness, sorrow, morosity, gloom, and depression. The ancient Hindu scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita are potent forces of knowledge and philosophy that can guide us in wiping out the root cause of dejection in order to live a happy, sanctimonious and noble life. Bhagavad Gita, arguably the most concise and systematic book of religion, ethics, philosophy and metaphysics ever written, delves deeply into the vexing intricacies of sorrow and grief. In itself it is but a single part of the Mahabharata, an astonishing tapestry of ancient Vedic history and philosophy told through the lives of several generations of the great Kuru Dynasty.

### The Backdrop

Let me offer you a few drops from the huge ocean of knowledge that is Bhagavad Gita before we move on to discuss the Yoga of Dejection element ingrained in it. Bhagavad Gita is a discourse between Shri Krishna and his warrior disciple Arjuna, shortly before Arjuna takes part in the great war of Mahabharata on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Because the Gita was not written as an independent book, the characters, settings and circumstances mentioned in it are similar to the preceding episodes of the Mahabharata. The first chapter of Bhagavad Gita is called the “Yoga of Dejection”. It depicts a picture of the blind King Dhritarashtra sitting on his throne and enquiring about the latest happenings at the battleground of Kurukshetra from his charioteer Sanjaya, who has the ability to see distant objects through his divine eyes. Seated inside the palace, the King comes to know that the battle is about to begin. Warriors from both sides stand facing each other. The Kauravas are led by King Dhritarashtra’s eldest son, Duryodhana and the Pandavas are led by the eldest son of Pandu, Yudhishtira. Pandu’s other son, Arjuna, the greatest archer, too is poised to take the challenge and stands on his chariot driven by Lord Krishna.

As Arjuna sees all his kinsmen—sons, brothers-in-law, cousins, teachers (Bhishma, Dronacharya and others)—standing arrayed in battle, he says to Lord Krishna, “My limbs fail and my mouth is parched, my body quivers and my hairs stand on end; the Gandiva (his bow) too slips from my hand. I do not wish to kill them even for the sake of the kingship of the three worlds. It is a great sin to kill my teachers and relatives. If I kill them, I shall be called the slayer of the family and will go to hell”. Arjuna is overwhelmed with grief and dejection. He throws away his bow and arrows and sinks down

on the seat of his chariot. He shares his predicament with Lord Krishna. The rest of Bhagavad Gita is an elucidation of Krishna's response to Arjuna's despondency. This is the backdrop on the basis of which we shall try to find an answer to our own dejection.

### **Yoga and the Cause of Despondency**

There are several reasons for calling Arjuna's despondency yoga in the first chapter of Bhagavad Gita, which is appropriately entitled Visada Yoga, or the 'Yoga of Dejection'. Krishna says that four types of people surrender to him: the distressed, those who desire wealth, the inquisitive, and those who know the Absolute Truth. Of the four types of pious people who approach the Lord, the largest group belongs to the category of the distressed. So, in this sense, the distress which serves to bring one closer to the Lord is also considered yoga. Here, Arjuna symbolises the distressed and the desperate man. The word yoga is defined as, "a means". Arjuna's despair acted as a means that led him to the ultimate solution of the problems of his life and, therefore, it is rightly termed as 'yoga'. Yoga also means "union with the Supreme Soul". Because he approached Krishna when he was in despair, Arjuna received the Lord's mercy and attained union with him.

This is in contrast with lesser persons taking to drugs or other diversions when overpowered by dejection. They only become weaker, more delusional and degraded, and in this way, waste their life. According to Bhagavad Gita, the cure for the debilitating plague of dejection, which is a mental affliction, lies in the ability to free oneself from material attachments by adopting the spiritual path. In the Gita, Krishna acts like a psychiatrist and guides Arjuna towards a resolution to his dilemma by teaching him how to detach himself from *maya* (bodily love and affection). Those who take to the spiritual path alone can expect to live a life without fear from dejection. They, however, face many trials and afflictions as they attempt to detach themselves from material life. If one remains within the grip of material attachment, one cannot function on the spiritual path. One falters like Arjuna—he began to shiver at the thought of losing everything material, and his mind became confused and conflicted.

He wanted peace but needed to fight and shed blood to attain it. He got torn between these two affinities, and the attachments that he held so dear presented obstacles to his progress. The same is the case with King Dhritarashtra, whose attachment for his sons had blinded him from seeing their mistakes and their ineligibility to ascend the throne.

### **Overcoming Duality**

Bodily attachment always results in duality. Whenever there is love based on physicality there must be hatred, because liking automatically implies dislike for anything that is in discord with the object of love. Therefore, in the material world, love also implies hatred, and attachment indicates repulsion, as these two are always found together. For this reason, Krishna advised Arjuna to abandon material attachment. Although Arjuna argued that it was not proper for him to fight his elders, he was not actually worried about killing Bhishma or Dronacharya. Arjuna's real problem was that he was faced with the prospect of killing his attachments. Even Arjuna took a long time to understand this point. For a while, Arjuna did not understand why Krishna insisted on fighting for his rights. It may appear that Arjuna was a non-violent man and that Krishna was trying to incite him to

inflict violence upon his teachers. This, however, is a superficial understanding held by those who are also bound by their material attachments.

Arjuna's material attachment was the real cause of his dejection, and one who has such attachments cannot be non-violent. He will be violent towards only those who come in the way of his attachments. Therefore, non-violence in a materially-attached person will always lead to self-motivated violence somewhere in the future. That is why Lord Krishna rejected Arjuna's seeming non-violence. Without understanding this fact, Arjuna's arguments appear quite sensible, and Lord Krishna's reply seems irrelevant. The same duality can be seen in the case of King Dhritarashtra as well. He was obsessed with the word, *mamaka* ("mine"), that signified his mentality. He had divided his sons and the Pandavas into two opposing groups although they all belonged to one family and grew up together. Because of strong attachment to his sons, he referred to his sons as "mine". Therefore, the attitude of "mine and yours", or "friends and enemies", creates hatred and envy which, in turn, gives rise to duality.

### **Overcoming Attachment**

In order to remove the material attachment that impedes the living being's spiritual understanding, Bhagavad Gita says that matter and spirit are different. From the very beginning, Krishna told Arjuna that he was not the body, but Arjuna failed to see the relevance of that knowledge to his predicament. He thought, "Why is Krishna stressing that I am not this body? I am pointing out the impropriety of killing my kinsmen, and he responds by saying, "The soul never dies...?" Arjuna did not understand the connection between his question and Krishna's response. Therefore, Krishna had to speak on a level that Arjuna could grasp. Only after the fifty-third verse of the second chapter, did Arjuna realise, what Krishna was actually saying. So Dhritarashtra and Arjuna were blinded by the same condition—material attachment. In our spiritual life too, we are confined by the same infirmity and we have to give it up, otherwise we will not make progress. The basic principle that must be followed in one's pursuit of happiness is that spirit is beyond the body, and the spirit is what we really are, regardless of whether one follows *bhakti marga*, *jnana marga* or *yoga marga*.

People coveting and endeavouring for peace and happiness, but attempting to grasp them materially are merely chasing a mirage, which recedes ever further as we strive to approach them. Therefore, *bhakti* or devotion is the surest and easiest process by which one may realise the Supreme Soul and escape the vitiating cycle of dejection. This can be followed by anyone who understands that the self is distinct from the body, and who reposes faith in the Almighty to attain lasting peace and happiness.