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# THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHAPTER I

AS A PREEMINENT TREATISE ON YOGA, the renowned Bhagavad Gita speaks both pragmatically and esoterically to embrace the broad spectrum of human seeking that has for generations sheltered itself in the counsel and solace found in the verses of this beloved scripture. It cites not only the practical application of spiritual principles required of the aspirant, but also the consummate expression of those principles as realized by the advanced yogi.

In modern books, the Introduction usually gives the reader a general idea of the contents; but the Hindu scriptural writers of ancient India often used the first chapter instead to indicate their purpose. Thus the opening chapter of the Bhagavad Gita serves as an introduction to the holy discourse that follows. But it does not merely set the scene and provide a backdrop, to be lightly perused as insubstantial. When read as the allegory intended by its author, the great sage Vyasa, it introduces the basic principles of the science of Yoga and describes the initial spiritual struggles of the yogi who sets out on the path to *kaivalya*, liberation, oneness with God: the goal of Yoga. To understand the implied truths in the first chapter is to begin the yoga journey with a clearly charted course.

My revered guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar—himself a *Jnanavatar*, incarnation of wisdom—taught me the hidden meaning in just a few significant verses from the first Gita chapter. “You now have the key,” he said. “With calm inner perception, you will be able to open this scripture to any passage and understand both its substance and its essence.” It is with his encouragement and by his grace that I offer this work.

## “WHAT DID THEY?”—SURVEY OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD

### VERSE 1

*dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca  
dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ  
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś caiva kim akurvata saṁjaya*

***Dhritarashtra said:***

***On the holy plain of Kurukshetra (dharmakshetra kurukshetra), when my offspring and the sons of Pandu had gathered together, eager for battle, what did they, O Sanjaya?***

THE BLIND KING DHRITARASHTRA (the blind mind) enquired through the honest Sanjaya (impartial introspection): “When my offspring, the Kurus (the wicked impulsive mental and sense tendencies), and the sons of the virtuous Pandu (the pure discriminative tendencies) gathered together on the *dharmakshetra* (holy plain) of Kurukshetra (the bodily field of activity), eager to do battle for supremacy, what was the outcome?”

The earnest enquiry by the blind King Dhritarashtra, seeking an unbiased report from the impartial Sanjaya as to how fared the battle

Metaphorical significance of Dhritarashtra’s question

between the Kurus and the Pandavas (sons of Pandu) at Kurukshetra, is metaphorically the question to be asked by the spiritual aspirant as he reviews daily the events of his own righteous battle from which he

seeks the victory of Self-realization. Through honest introspection he analyzes the deeds and assesses the strengths of the opposing armies of his good and bad tendencies: self-control versus sense indulgence, discriminative intelligence opposed by mental sense inclinations, spiritual resolve in meditation contested by mental resistance and physical restlessness, and divine soul-consciousness against the ignorance and magnetic attraction of the lower ego-nature.

The battlefield of these contending forces is Kurukshetra (*Kuru*, from the Sanskrit root *kṛi*, “work, material action”; and *kṣetra*, “field”). This “field of action” is the human body with its physical, mental, and soul faculties, the field on which all activities of one’s life take place.

It is referred to in this Gita stanza as Dharmakshetra (*dharma*, i.e., righteousness, virtue, holiness; thus, holy plain or field), for on this field the righteous battle is waged between the virtues of the soul's discriminative intelligence (sons of Pandu) and the ignoble, uncontrolled activities of the blind mind (the Kurus, or offspring of the blind King Dhritarashtra).

Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra refers also, respectively, to religious and spiritual duties and activities (those of the yogi in meditation) as contrasted with mundane responsibilities and activities. Thus, in this deeper metaphysical interpretation, Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra signifies the inner bodily field on which the spiritual action of yoga meditation takes place for the attainment of Self-realization: the plain of the cerebrospinal axis and its seven subtle centers of life and divine consciousness.

Competing on this field are two opposing forces or magnetic poles: discriminative intelligence (*buddhi*) and the sense-conscious mind (*manas*). *Buddhi*, the pure discriminating intellect, is allegorically represented as Pandu, husband of Kunti (the mother

of Arjuna and the other Pandava princes who uphold the righteous principles of *nivritti*, renunciation of worldliness). The name Pandu derives from *pand*, "white"—a metaphorical implication of the clarity of a pure discriminating intellect. *Manas* is

♦  
*Two opposing forces:  
inclinations of the lower  
mind vs. soul  
discrimination*

allegorically represented as the blind King Dhritarashtra, sire of the one hundred Kurus, or sensory impressions and inclinations, which are all bent toward *pravritti*, worldly enjoyment. *Buddhi* draws its right discernment from the superconsciousness of the soul manifesting in the causal seats of consciousness in the spiritual cerebrospinal centers. *Manas*, the sense mind, the subtle magnetic pole turned outward toward the world of matter, is in the pons Varolii, which physiologically is ever busy with sensory coordination.\* Thus, *buddhi* intelligence draws the consciousness toward truth or the eternal realities, soul

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\* The pons Varolii is a part of the brain stem—situated above the medulla and centered below the two hemispheres of the cerebrum—connecting the cerebrum, cerebellum, and medulla. Small in size (1 x 1 x 1½ inches), it contains the ascending sensory and descending motor tracts that connect the brain to the rest of the body. These tracts travel through a dense network of nerve cells, called the reticular formation, whose function is to arouse to activity the rest of the brain and to regulate the twenty-four-hour cycle of sleep and waking. The pons Varolii contains a particular structure, the locus coeruleus ("blue place")—a small, concentrated cluster of cells containing norepinephrine, a chemical substance that stimulates the mobilization that prepares the body for action. This structure is involved in arousal, dreaming, sleep, and mood.

consciousness or Self-realization. *Manas* or sense mind repels the consciousness from truth and engages it in the external sensory activities of the body, and thus with the world of delusive relativities, *maya*.

The name Dhritarashtra derives from *dhṛta*, “held, supported, drawn tight (reins),” and *rāṣṭra*, “kingdom,” from *rāj*, “to rule.” By implication, we have the symbolic meaning, *dhṛtam rāṣṭram yena*, “who upholds the kingdom (of the senses),” or “who rules by holding tightly the reins (of the senses).”

The mind (*manas*, or sense consciousness) gives coordination to the senses as the reins keep together the several horses of a chariot. The body is the chariot; the soul is the owner of the chariot; intelligence is the charioteer; the senses are the horses. The mind is said to be blind because it cannot see without the help of the senses and intelligence. The reins of a chariot receive and relay the impulses from the steeds and the guidance of the charioteer. Similarly, the blind mind on its own neither cognizes nor exerts guidance, but merely receives the impressions from the senses and relays the conclusions and instructions of the intelligence. If the intelligence is governed by *buddhi*, the pure discriminative power, the senses are controlled; if the intelligence is ruled by material desires, the senses are wild and unruly.

SANJAYA MEANS, LITERALLY, *completely victorious*; “one who has conquered himself.” He alone who is not self-centered has the ability to see

<p>♦</p> <p><i>Symbolism of Sanjaya: impartial intuitive self-analysis</i></p> <p>♦</p>	<p>clearly and to be impartial. Thus, in the Gita, Sanjaya is divine insight; for the aspiring devotee, Sanjaya represents the power of impartial intuitive self-analysis, discerning introspection. It is the ability to stand aside, observe oneself without any prejudice, and judge accurately. Thoughts may be present without one’s conscious awareness. Introspection is that power of intuition by which the consciousness can watch its thoughts. It does not reason, it feels—not with biased emotion, but with clear, calm intuition.</p>
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In the *Mahabharata*, of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part, the text of the Gita is introduced by the great *rishi* (sage) Vyasa bestowing on Sanjaya the spiritual power of being able to see from a distance everything taking place over the entire battlefield, so that he could give an account to the blind King Dhritarashtra as the events unfold. Therefore, one would expect the king’s enquiry in the first verse to be in the present tense. Author Vyasa purposely had Sanjaya narrate the Gita dialogue retrospectively, and used a past tense of the verb (“What *did*



they?”), as a clear hint to discerning students that the Gita is referring only incidentally to a historical battle on the plain of Kurukshetra in northern India. Primarily, Vyasa is describing a universal battle—the one that rages daily in man’s life. Had Vyasa wished merely to report the progress of an actual battle that was taking place at the moment on the field of Kurukshetra, he would have had Dhritarashtra speak to the messenger Sanjaya in the present tense: “My children and the sons of Pandu—what *are* they doing now?”

This is an important point. The timeless message of the Bhagavad Gita does not refer only to one historical battle, but to the cosmic conflict between good and evil: life as a series of battles between Spirit and matter, soul and body, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, health and disease, changelessness and transitoriness, self-control and temptations, discrimination and the blind sense-mind. The past tense of the verb in the first stanza is therefore employed by Vyasa to indicate that the power of one’s introspection is being invoked to review the conflicts of the day in one’s mind in order to determine the favorable or unfavorable outcome.\*

## EXPANDED COMMENTARY: THE BATTLE OF LIFE

FROM THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION to the surrender of the last breath, man has to fight in each incarnation innumerable battles—biological, hereditary, bacteriological, physiological, climatic, social, ethical, political, sociological, psychological, metaphysical—so many varieties of inner and outer conflicts. Competing for victory in every encounter are the forces of good and evil. The whole intent of the Gita is to align man’s efforts on the side of *dharma*, or righteousness. The ultimate aim is Self-realization, the realization of man’s true Self, the soul, as made in the image of God, one with the ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-new bliss of Spirit.

The first contest of the soul in each incarnation is with other souls seeking rebirth. With the union of sperm and ovum to begin the formation of a new human body, a flash of light appears in the astral world, the heavenly home of souls between incarnations. That

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\* This symbology explains why, even though Sanjaya had been given the power to perceive and describe the events at the same time they were happening, he did not narrate to Dhritarashtra the Gita discourse, which preceded the battle, until ten days of fighting had already taken place. (*Publisher’s Note*)