

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Global Dharma for the Third Millennium

Translation and commentaries compiled by Parama Karuna Devi



Published by Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Center,
Jagannatha Puri Dhama, Orissa, India

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Introduction

satyam eva jayate

This edition of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is aimed at washing off centuries of confusing cultural superimpositions that have been enforced in a systematic way over the original Vedic knowledge by the influence of invading hostile cultures.

It is compiled at a particular time in history when Hindustan (India) and its original culture (Hinduism) are facing the unique opportunity of regaining their legitimate cultural and spiritual leadership role at global level, after a very long period of oblivion and impotence.

For the first time since the early invasions of Arab Muslim marauders into the Greater Indian territory not long after Islam was founded, and over 50 years after the British Raj left India, Hinduism does not need to modify and adapt its culture and knowledge in order to please the foreign invaders and thus enable its survival, because at global level there is a growing interest and support specifically for those very ideals and ideas that characterize India's original culture and knowledge in the purest form.

It is the time of the Hindu Jagruti movement.

True Hinduism has the intrinsic power to be the Global Dharma for the new Millennium, because it is open, inclusive, tolerant, and incredibly deep in meaning and knowledge, capable of reconciling all theoretical differences and absorbing many different perspectives in a most harmonious non-dualistic way, into a complete, consistent and logical wider picture, favoring cultural diversity and a great variety in iconography and hagiography, and thus allowing the greatest possible freedom of religion. It offers a personalized access and progressive programs, addressing and accommodating each degree of personal development and field of interest for each individual.

It is the most suitable ideology for today's world because it teaches a healthy wholistic approach to life, sustainable development, respect for women and children, respect for animals and nature, and true social cooperation. Its modernity and the scientific value of its scriptures have been recognized with awe and admiration by the greatest scientists and researchers of this contemporary age and have made it extremely popular among the intellectual elites of Western countries.

Unfortunately, the invasion and domination by foreign cultures that were declaredly hostile to the original Hindu tradition have greatly damaged the cultural and spiritual infrastructure of Indian society, even infiltrating deeply into the collective subconscious and creating serious and dangerous misconceptions that have come to be considered as an integral part of the Hindu/Indian tradition and culture.

Practically all the problems lamented in Hindu society are in fact due to the cultural superimposition of alien concepts and beliefs, and can be solved automatically by returning to the original knowledge presented by the genuine Vedic literature, and separating it from the detrimental and incompatible foreign ideas that have accumulated in the centuries, hiding the true radiance of Sanatana Dharma.

Because although Hinduism welcomes into its fold all good and auspicious ideas

irrespective of their provenance (*aa no bhadrah kratavo yantu visvatah, Rig Veda*), these need to be compatible with the universal and eternal principles of Dharma - truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, self-control, tolerance, personal progress, cooperation, and so on. All these principles are described in *Gita* as *sat* ("good") as opposed to *asat* ("bad").

The original compilers of Vedic literature had very clear ideas about what is good and what is bad, and expressed their direct vision in a great wealth of texts that are all perfectly compatible to each other, and with any other text or teaching that expresses the universal and eternal principles of good.

Thus the choice should not be between *desi* ("national") and *videsi* ("foreign"), but between good and bad - *sat* and *asat*. To become able to make this choice, we need first of all to understand the difference between *sat* and *asat*: this is precisely the subject discussed in *Bhagavad Gita*, also called the *sadhana prasthana*, the most practical of the *prasthana traya* - the three most important reference authorities on Sanatana Dharma.

When we are able to recognize *asat* concepts, thanks to the precise descriptions and explanations of *Gita*, we can localize them in the general beliefs of the people (*laukika sraddha*), explore their origin and trace the history of how they became superimposed to the *sat* concepts, to be able to make the proper choices in life.

This process is called *viveka*, the work of discriminating intelligence.

The commentaries of this edition of the *Bhagavad Gita* is characterized by a comparative study of religions on the particular concepts expressed in the text.

The original Vedic approach expressed in *Gita* is thus compared to the general beliefs created over a long period of abrahamic influence either directly or indirectly - that is, either according to the abrahamic dogma enforced on society or as a reaction against them, but working on the same faulty paradigms.

The ideologies directly in pursuance of the abrahamic dogma are (in order of political power) the various Christian churches, the Islamist movements, and Zionism.

They are called abrahamic because they all recognize Abraham as their founder, and share the same basic concepts and beliefs - exclusive political and clerical monotheism, special privileges for a chosen people against all others, domination over nature and resources, patriarchalism, and so on.

The ideologies that developed as a reaction against the three abrahamic sects are Communism, Atheism, Scientism, Consumerism, etc. Although apparently opposite to the abrahamic system of beliefs, they are based on the same fundamental assumptions and therefore their approach is also similarly flawed. As it is said, it is not possible to solve a problem by applying the same concepts that caused the problem in the first place.

We immediately need to clarify that our purpose is not to create bad sentiments against the people who are considered Christians, Muslims or Jews. Rather, we are talking of different ideologies, of their absolute and universal value in terms of the ethical principles of *sat* and *asat*, and their compatibility with the Vedic approach.

Strict adherence to ideologies in theory and practice is called fundamentalism, but strict adherence to one's principles is not a bad thing, provided the principles are not contrary to ethics. Should a honest person be afraid to be considered a "honesty fundamentalist" if he stands on his principles by refusing to steal, bribe, cheat or tell lies?

And even more important, will the choices of such individual be favorable or unfavorable

to social harmony and progress?

On the other hand, will social harmony be favored by the "political correct" silence on the negative results of the choices of individuals following an opposite ideology - an ideology based on *asat* ideals?

These are the questions that each one of us needs to ponder on.

Our proposition is that the problem with fundamentalism is when the ideology is unethical, so the more one is faithful to it, the more dangerous he becomes for society.

The majority of the people considered Christians, Muslims and Jews are "moderate" or better, non-politicized. They identify with these definitions mainly because they were born in those communities, but they simply concern themselves with the maintenance of their families, their honest professional occupation, and have no problems in getting along well with their neighbors - irrespective of their creed, caste, color etc. Some may even be good and sincere people that honestly try to improve their own character and life by developing love for their fellow human beings and for God as the creator of everything and everybody. These people often believe their duty is to help others out of selfless charity, and they painstakingly work to make a world a better place.

From the teachings of their religion, they take only what is compatible with their good conscience and natural sense of ethics, and they do not care about the rest - or believe it's somehow "symbolic" and it should not be interpreted literally.

So what's the problem with the abrahamic ideology?

Unfortunately, such moderate Christians, Muslims and Jews are not the ones that become recognized as the official authorities and spokespersons for the religion they belong to, and are generally considered "non-practicing" members or "laymen".

It is the fundamentalists that naturally take power within these religious structures by their determination and aggressiveness, by manipulating and exploiting the good sentiments of more lukewarm members who supply funds and votes in elections, as well as a general support to the faulty basic concepts they have been educated to consider valid, true and normal.

Any progressive or ethical movement in the opinion of such moderate abrahamics is actually irrelevant in regard to the dogma and policies, of which they are usually more or less unaware or informed. For example, the concept of reincarnation is today embraced by a majority of the population in western countries - traditionally influenced by Christianity - yet the official position of Christian theology has always been very contrary to it, to the point of persecuting it very actively as a blasphemy with the capital punishment when the Church had sufficient power on the State.

But while a majority of people in the abrahamic-influenced countries are now taking their distance from the official religious dogma thanks to the development of literacy and higher ideals of free thinking, the religious hierarchies and their fundamentalist followers are becoming more determined to enforce their ideologies by all means, even against basic ethical consideration.

There are many examples we could quote from the public declarations of officially recognized religious authorities in the abrahamic traditions, and even from their canonic (i.e. officially recognized) scriptures, but that is not the purpose of this book.

The purpose of this book is to study and understand what *Bhagavad Gita* really says, and to help its student to put its teachings into practice: the need of the hour.

Each chapter of *Gita* bears the title of a definition of Yoga:

1. Arjuna visada yoga: the yoga of Arjuna's grief
2. Sankhya yoga: the yoga of analysis and enumeration
3. Karma yoga: the yoga of action
4. Jnana yoga: the yoga of knowledge
5. Sannyasa yoga: the yoga of renunciation
6. Dhyana yoga: the yoga of meditation
7. Vijnana yoga: the yoga of applied knowledge
8. Taraka brahma yoga: the yoga of liberating spiritual existence
9. Raja guhya yoga: the yoga of the supreme secret
10. Vibhuti yoga: the yoga of powers
11. Visva rupa darsana yoga: the yoga of contemplation of the universal form
12. Bhakti yoga: the yoga of devotion
13. Prakriti-purusha-viveka yoga: the yoga of understanding nature as distinct from the personal principle
14. Guna traya vibhaga yoga: the yoga of differentiating between the gunas
15. Purushottama yoga: the yoga of the Supreme Person
16. Daivasura sampad vibhaga yoga: the yoga of differentiating between the characteristics of the divine and the demoniac personalities
17. Sraddha traya vibhaga yoga: the yoga of differentiating between the three forms of faith
18. Moksha yoga: the yoga of liberation

Chapter 1. Arjuna visada yoga

Usually the first chapter of *Gita* is rather overlooked by scholars, who consider it a mere introduction to the actual teachings explained by Krishna in the subsequent chapters.

However, an attentive reading of this chapter will help us understand the crucial difference between material compassion and spiritual compassion, and the application of *Gita* to our personal life - thus going from philosophy to experience, from theory to practice, from speculation to experience.

Frustration in materialistic life is the first step in the journey of Self realization. Unevolved people just tread on in life like animals do - only concerning themselves about eating, sleeping, mating, defending themselves and their families, procuring comforts, possessions and social power. They experience joys and sorrows but they are unable to rise above them.

The transcendental presence and guidance of Krishna transforms grief and frustration in a powerful vehicle to seek and obtain the proper knowledge of Reality that will liberate us from the cycle of births and deaths.

Everyone of us stands on the battlefield of life, inside the chariot constituted by our body, and like Arjuna we should turn to our dearest friend, the Antaryami Paramatman, for instruction and guidance.

The Kauravas represent the bad tendencies of human beings (our own and those of the

people around us), centered around material identification and attachments - the arrogant and selfish Duryodhana - and always try to usurp our good understanding and motivations, represented by the Pandavas.

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच ।

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca ।

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ ।

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥ १-१ ॥

māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata sañjaya ॥ 1-1 ॥

dhritarashtra: Dhritarastra; *uvaca*: said; *dharma-kshetre*: in the place/field of dharma; *kuru-kshetre*: in the place/field of Kuru (Kurukshetra); *samaveta*: assembled; *yuyutsavaḥ*: desiring to fight; *mamakah*: mine (my people); *pandavah*: the Pandavas (the people of Pandu); *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *kim*: what; *akurvata*: did; *sañjaya*: o Sanjaya.

Dhritarastra said:

"O Sanjaya, what did my sons and Pandu's sons (my people/supporters and the people/supporters of Pandu) do, after they assembled in the sacred place of Dharma, the battlefield of Kurukshetra, ready to fight?"

Dhritarastra is the old regent king of Hastinapura, father of Duryodhana; he is sitting in his palace and asks Sanjaya to describe to him what is happening on the battlefield.

Sanjaya is Dhritarastra's secretary, and *Bhagavad gita* is narrated by Sanjaya to Dhritarastra in the form of a dialogue.

For the brief background stories and symbolic meanings of the persons mentioned in this chapter, please see the appendix.

Dharma kshetra is not only a place of pilgrimage but also a place where one performs one's religious duty (*dharma*). For a *kshatriya*, a battlefield is the Dharma kshetra because it is his religious duty to protect the kingdom and the citizens (*praja*, including also the animals) from those who can harm them.

Kshetra means "field" or "land" and specifically applies to the territory protected by a *kshatriya* or *kshetra-pa*, a definition from which the ancient Persian word "Satrap" derived.

Mamakah pandavah caiva: already in the first verse we clearly see the reason why the battle needs to be fought. Dhritarastra is seriously afflicted by a dangerous form of spiritual blindness, a fundamental dualistic delusion that he has transmitted to his sons. For him and his "bad-minded" (*durbuddheh*, 1.23) son Duryodhana, who deliberately caused the conflict, it's all about *aham mama*, "me and mine", or the *ahankara* and

mamatva, the root causes of ignorance and suffering.

For Dhritarastra the throne is just a personal possession, the instrument of his selfishness and egotism, by which he and "his own people" can best exploit the subjects and the resources of the kingdom for their own gratification and vainglory, without any consideration for the welfare of the people. This mentality is clearly described as *asuric* (demoniac) in *Gita* (16.13-15).

No king has the right to consider the kingdom as his own property, to do whatever he wants with it. Actually, a king should sacrifice everything - including his own personal family - for the benefit of the kingdom and the *prajas*.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।

dr̥ṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ duryodhanastadā ।

आचार्यमुपसंगम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥ १-२ ॥

ācāryamupasaṅgamyā rājā vacanamabravīt ।। 1-2 ।।

sañjayah: Sanjaya; *uvaca*: said; *drishtva*: seeing; *tu*: but; *pandavanikam*: of the Pandavas; *vyudham*: the deployment of troops; *duryodhanah*: Duryodhana; *tada*: then; *acaryam*: the teacher; *upasangamya*: approaching; *raja*: the king; *vacanam*: speech; *abravit*: spoke.

Sanjaya said:

After observing the Pandava army arranged in a strategic position for the battle, the king (Duryodhana) approached the *acharya* (Drona, the teacher of military arts) and spoke to him as follows:

Duryodhana is the eldest son of Dhritarastra, appointed by his father as the King of the Kuru dynasty.

Drona is the teacher of weaponry who trained all the Kuru princes, not only the sons of Dhritarastra but also the five sons of Pandu.

Acharya: this title is given to the best teachers; with time and the degradation of the varnas into castes, it came to be passed on like a family name without consideration for actual qualifications, just like Gosvami, Pandita or Panda, Vairagi, Dvivedi, Trivedi, Chaturvedi, etc.

The word "*raja*" used here indicates that Duryodhana has already advanced his claim to the throne; Yudhisthira and Dhritarastra are called *raja*, too.

At the level of a symbolic interpretation of the story, Duryodhana is the conditioned soul (the king of the city of the nine gates) who, observing the variety of arrangements

exemplified by the Pandavas (symbolizing the religious persons and spiritual traditions in this world), directly approaches a teacher for guidance. Although Vedic scriptures have various levels of interpretation (including very subtle ones), the literal meaning also remains valid.

पश्यैतां पाण्डुपुत्राणामाचार्य महतीं चमूम् ।

paśyaitāṁ pāṇḍuputrāṇāmācārya mahatīm camūm ।

व्यूढां द्रुपदपुत्रेण तव शिष्येण धीमता ॥ १-३ ॥

vyūḍhāṁ drupadaputrena tava śiṣyena dhīmatā ॥ 1-3 ॥

pasya: look; *etam*: this; *pandu-putranam*: of the sons of Pandu; *acharya*: o teacher; *mahatim*: great; *chamum*: army; *vyudham*: strategic arrangement; *drupada-putrena*: by the son of Drupada; *tava*: your; *sishyena*: (by) disciple; *dhimata*: intelligent/wise.

"O *acharya*, look at this strategic arrangement of the great army of the sons of Pandu, organized by your very intelligent and wise disciple, the son of Draupada.

The intelligent disciple of Drona mentioned in this verse is Dhristadhyumna, Draupadi's brother, brother in law and ally of Arjuna.

Vyuha is a strategic arrangement of troops used in *kshatriya* warfare; many *vyuhas* of different shapes are recorded in the Vedic literature. Specifically, the *vyuha* chosen by Dhristadhyumna for the beginning of the battle is the one called Vajra, "the lightning", in response to the Garuda or "eagle" formation of the Kauravas.

In the Vajra *vyuha*, where swiftness of attack is paramount, the front line is armed with short-range weapons while the archers come in the second line.

In the Garuda *vyuha*, the kings marched at the head, the horsemen protected the wings, and the elephants formed the outer line of the body. Bhishma rode his chariot in the middle of the formation, as if seated on the eagle.

This verse suggests that the proper use of intelligence/intellect and foresight has a paramount importance in the understanding of life - both material and spiritual levels - because without the proper application of *dhi* (thinking) everything becomes difficult.

There are three basic principles in practical life and work: 1. information, 2. communication, 3. strategy (or planning). These apply to all enterprises, from daily household chores to the highest level of exchanges with the spiritual teacher about transcendental realizations.

अत्र शूरा महेष्वासा भीमार्जुनसमा युधि ।

atra śūrā maheṣvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi ।

युयुधानो विराटश्च द्रुपदश्च महारथः ॥ १-४ ॥

yuyudhāno virāṭaśca drupadaśca mahārathaḥ ।। 1-4 ।।

atra: there; *sura*: hero; *maha ishu asa*: very great archers; *bhima arjuna-sama*: equal to Bhima and Arjuna; *yudhi*: in the battle; *yuyudhanah*: Yuyudhana; *viratah*: Virata; *ca*: also; *drupadah*: Draupada; *ca*: and; *maha-rathah*: the great Maharatha warrior.

"There are great warriors (*maha-ratha*) who are extremely skilled bowmen (*maheshvasa*), of the same valor in battle as Bhima and Arjuna, such as Yuyudhana, Virata, and Draupada.

Bhima and Arjuna are the two most powerful among the five sons of Pandu; Arjuna is the friend of Krishna, the protagonist of the *Bhagavad gita*.

Yuyudhana, also called Satyaki, is a member of Krishna's family; in Dvaraka he is Krishna's charioteer and a very famous archer and warrior.

King Virata is Arjuna's ally, and the father of Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son. He brought an akshauhini of warriors and was killed by Drona during the battle.

Drupada is the king of Panchala, sometimes called Yajnasena. He had a quarrel with his old childhood friend Drona, so he performed a *homa* with the purpose of getting progeny that could avenge the offenses he had received from Drona and the Pandavas (Arjuna was sent by Drona in a raid against Drupada). From the sacrificial fire both Draupadi and Dhristadhyumna were born, and both were instrumental in the destruction of Drona and the Kurus.

Maha-ratha is a particular title of honor conferred on *kshatriya* warriors, who are so proficient and valiant in battle that they can engage or direct 10,000 ordinary warriors, or their valor was 10,000 times greater than ordinary warriors.

The name of the ancient Maratha kingdom, that was defeated in rather recent times by the British army, derives from such title.

धृष्टकेतुश्चेकितानः काशिराजश्च वीर्यवान् ।

dhr̥ṣṭaketuścekitānaḥ kāśirājaśca vīryavān ।

पुरुजित्कुन्तिभोजश्च शैब्यश्च नरपुंगवः ॥ १-५ ॥

purujitkuntibhojaśca śaibyaśca narapuṅgavaḥ ।। 1-5 ।।

dhrishtaketuh: Drishtaketu; *cekitanah*: Chekitana; *kasirajah*: the king of Kashi; *ca*: and; *viryavan*: great heroes; *purujit*: Purujit; *kuntibhojah*: Kuntibhoja; *ca*: and; *saibyah*: the son of Sibi; *ca*: and; *nara-pungavah*: great leaders of men.

"There are also other great heroes and great leaders of men such as Drishtaketu, Chekitana, the king of Kashi, Purujit, Kuntibhoja and the son of Sibi."

Duryodhana lists the generals that command the 7 *akshauhinis* of the Pandava army: Drupada, Virata, Dhristadyumna, Shikhandi, Satyaki, Chekitana and Bhima.

Dhrishtaketu is son of Dhristadyumna, nephew of Draupadi and Arjuna, grandson of Draupada. He will be killed by Drona.

Another Dhrishtaketu was also present on the battlefield, the son of Sisupala king of the Chedis and friend of the Pandavas, who brought an *akshauhini* battalion to Kurukshetra; after the war his sister married Nakula.

Chekitana: member of Krishna's family, famous archer in the Yadu's army.

The king of Kashi: Kashi is another name of Varanasi or Benares. This king must have been the successor of Sudakshina, who had been burned to ashes by the Sudarshana chakra on the occasion of his war against Dvaraka, Krishna's kingdom. The enmity of Sudakshina against Krishna had originated when Sudakshina's father had taken sides with Paundraka, the king of Karusha, when Paundraka had challenged Krishna to battle claiming that he, and not Krishna, was an *avatara* of Vishnu. In the battle that had ensued, both Paundraka and Sudakshina's father had been killed.

Purujit: one of the great warriors on the battlefield.

Kuntibhoja: foster father of Kunti and maternal grandfather of the Pandavas, he was fighting on their side.

Saibya (the son of king Sibi): one of the great warriors on the battlefield.

युधामन्युश्च विक्रान्त उत्तमौजाश्च वीर्यवान् ।

yudhāmanyuśca vikrānta uttamaujāśca vīryavān ।

सौभद्रो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्व एव महारथाः ॥ १-६ ॥

saubhadro draupadeyāśca sarva eva mahārathāḥ ।। 1-6 ।।

yudhamanyuh: Yudhamanyu; *ca*: and; *vikrantah*: mighty; *uttamaujah*: Uttamauja; *ca*: and; *viryavan*: heroic; *saubhadrah*: the son of Subhadra; *draupadeyah*: the sons of Draupadi; *ca*: and; *sarva*: all; *eva*: *maha-rathah*: great chariot warriors.

"There are also the mighty Yudhamanyu, the heroic Uttamauja, the son of Subhadra and the sons of Draupadi. All these are Maharatha warriors (fighting from their own personal chariots)."

Yudhamanyu: prince of Panchala, he is a relative of Draupada and ally of the Pandavas.

Uttamauja: famous general in the army of king Draupada.

Saubhadra: Abhimanyu, the only son of Subhadra and Arjuna. Subhadra is Krishna's sister, foster daughter of Vasudeva. She is actually the daughter of Yasoda and Nanda in Gokula and Vasudeva carried her back to Mathura into Kamsa's prison when he exchanged baby Krishna, leaving him in Gokula in her place.

As Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva, was in Gokula at that time in the house of Nanda for shelter and protection, it is sometimes said that Subhadra was actually born from Rohini like Balarama, and not from Yasoda.

All these relations also have a deep symbolic meaning that should be studied later on.

Subhadra was married by Arjuna with Krishna's help and against Balarama's will, who had arranged her marriage with Sisupala. Arjuna kidnapped Subhadra while she was visiting a temple before proceeding to her marriage, on the marriage day. Actually Subhadra had fallen in love with Arjuna already because for 4 months Arjuna had stayed incognito in the Yadu's palace disguised as a *sannyasi*, and he had long and affectionate interactions with Subhadra, to whom he had disclosed his real identity.

Draupadeyas: the sons of Draupadi from the five Pandavas - named Prativindhya, Srutakirti, Srutasoma, Satanika and Srutasena.

Draupadi is also a very symbolic character, whose story contains a lot of esoteric meanings. She is worshiped in many places of India as Durga, she marries Shiva taking a particular form to suit each of the various forms of Shiva; in the court of Virata she is the maidservant of the queen, associating the various secondary forms of the Mother Goddess with the cooperation with the highest form of the Mother Goddess, the original Mother. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi is the daughter of king Drupada of Panchala, and therefore she is also called Panchali. She married Arjuna and his brothers. While they were in exile incognito, Arjuna went to the *svayamvara* of Draupadi and was the one who came up winner in the very difficult archery test. When he returned home with Draupadi, his mother Kunti thought that the "wonderful jewel" Arjuna had brought home was some ornament, and told him he had to share the treasure with his brothers. So it was that Draupadi became the wife of all five Pandavas. She had five sons, one from each husband. All the five sons of Draupadi were killed by Asvatthama in their sleep after the end of the Kurukshetra war; for this dastardly act Krishna proclaimed him to be a non-brahmana but merely a *brahma-bandhu* (relative of a *brahmana*) and sentenced him to be disgraced for eternity – it is said Asvatthama is still alive.

अस्माकं तु विशिष्टा ये तान्निबोध द्विजोत्तम ।

asmākaṁ tu viśiṣṭā ye tānnibodha dvijottama ।

नायका मम सैन्यस्य संज्ञार्थं तान्ब्रवीमि ते ॥ १-७ ॥

nāyakā mama sainyasya sañjñārthaṁ tānbravāmi te ॥ 1-7 ॥

asmakam: our; *tu*: but; *visishtah*: various; *ye*: those; *tan*: them; *nibodha*: please know; *dvijottama*: o high among the twice born; *nayakah*: captains; *mama*: my; *sainyasya*: of

the army; *samjñartham* :to understand; *tan*: them; *bravimi*: I explain; *te*: to you.

"O illustrious twice-born, I am now going to tell you about the various great generals that lead the warriors in our army."

Twice born (*dvija*) refers to a person who has been recognized as specifically trained and sufficiently qualified to belong to one of the three higher *varnas*, i.e. *brahmana*, *kshatriya* or *vaisya*. The "second birth" is given by Guru and Veda, while the "first birth" is given by one's seminal parents.

The "first birth" by itself is not sufficient in regard to one's qualifications to belong to a particular *varna*, therefore a "second birth" is required; without such "second birth" one simply remains a *sudra*, or a non-qualified laborer at the service of more qualified members of society. Vedic scriptures clearly teach *anmana jayate sudra*, "by birth, everyone is born a sudra", *samskarad bhaved dvijah*, "through samskara (ritual purification) one becomes a twice born", *veda-pathad bhaved viprah*, "by reading the Vedas one becomes a *vipra* (scholar)", and *brahma janati iti brahmanah*, "*brahmana* is one who knows Brahman (spirit)".

भवान्भीष्मश्च कर्णश्च कृपश्च समितिञ्जयः ।

bhavānbhīṣmaśca karnaśca kṛpaśca samitiñjayaḥ ।

अश्वत्थामा विकर्णश्च सौमदत्तिस्तथैव च ॥ १-८ ॥

aśvatthāmā vikarnaśca saumadattistathaiva ca ।। 1-8 ।।

bhavan: your grace; *bhishmah*: Bhishma; *ca*: and; *karnah*: Karna; *ca*: and; *kripah*: Kripa; *ca*: and; *samitinjayaḥ*: unvanquished; *asvatthama*: Ashvatthama; *vikarnah*: Vikarna; *ca*: and; *saumadattih*: the son of Somadatta; *tatha*: also; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and.

"Besides your grace there are Bhishma, Karna and Kripa, never vanquished in battle, as well as Ashvatthama, Vikarna and the son of Somadatta."

Bhishma, originally called Devavrata, was the only surviving son of Santanu and Ganga. The name Bhishma means "terrible" and refers to the vow he took to facilitate his father's second marriage. When Ganga left Santanu the king fell in love again, with Satyawati, the daughter of a fisherman, who agreed to the marriage only on the condition that the eldest son of the king would never claim the throne for himself or for his own descendents. Still the greedy fisherman was not happy with such a promise, and he suggested that maybe Devavrata's descendents would not accept to honor such agreement, so Devavrata vowed never to marry and never to have children.

For a powerful *kshatriya* of Devavrata's caliber this was a terrible vow not only for his own personal life, but for the benefit of the kingdom as well - and in fact it had terrible consequences. Although Bhishma never married nor had any child, he is considered the Grandsire of the Kurus due to the care and affection he gave to all the descendents of his

brothers, to the point of showing undue leniency for the mischievous plans and activities of Duryodhana and his brothers.

Karna: the greatest warrior on the battlefield and the staunchest ally of Duryodhana, he is the great tragic hero of the *Mahabharata*. Karna was born from the Sun God Surya and Kunti before her marriage and his mother abandoned him, keeping the secret on his birth. He was raised by a chariot maker and his wife, Adhiratha and Radha, who took him for their own son, but in spite of his affection for them Karna was like a young royal eagle raised in a family of ordinary chickens. Duryodhana was the only one who offered him help and consideration, raising him to the rank of *kshatriya* royalty by appointing him as the king of Anga (Bengal, Orissa, Madras), when during the *svayamvara* of Draupadi Karna was declared ineligible to participate because of his family of origin.

This determined the direction of his life, making him the loyal supporter of Duryodhana and the sworn enemy of the Pandavas, and also had a strong influence on the general events, as without Karna's support, Duryodhana might not have had the guts to declare open war against the Pandavas.

Kripa, “test-tube” son of Saradvana Rishi and the Apsara Janapadi. His twin sister Kripi married Drona. He survived Kurukshetra and became the preceptor of Parikshit.

Ashvatthama: the son of Drona and Kripi. Duryodhana is careful to mention Kripa and Asvatthama, close relatives of Drona, in a place of pride within his list of the warriors, hoping to bank on Drona's material attachments.

Vikarna: one of the sons of Dhritarastra, he was the only one who spoke in defense of Draupadi when she was insulted in the assembly of the Kurus.

Soumadatti: the son of Somadatta, Bhurishrava; Somadatta was Duryodhana's ally and Bhurishrava allied with the Pandavas. Somadatta was a relative of the Kurus (being the son of Bahlika, brother of Santanu).

King Pratipa, the descendent of Kuru, had three sons: Devapi (who could not ascend the throne because of a serious skin disease, so went on to become a Rishi), Bahlika (who renounced the throne and went to maternal grandfather's kingdom) and Santanu (who became king). The kingdom of Bahlika was allied with Duryodhana and was famous for its horses and because its inhabitants did not follow the Vedic rules.

Several other non-Vedic kingdoms participated to the war of Kurukshetra, such as the Nishadas, Pulindas, Andhakas, Khasas, Sakas, Tanganas, Kambhojas, Yavanas, Paradas, Kalingas, Amvasthas, Pishachas, Barbaras, Mlecchas, Trigartas, Sauviras, Daradas, Malavas, the Salvas. Within the Bahlika regions were the two non-Vedic kingdoms of Madra and Anga. Shalya (brother of Madri the second wife of Pandu) was the king of Madra and Karna was made king of Anga by Duryodhana..

अन्ये च बहवः शूरा मदर्थे त्यक्तजीविताः ।

anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ ।

नानाशस्त्रप्रहरणाः सर्वे युद्धविशारदाः ॥ १-९ ॥

nānāśastrapraharaṇāḥ sarve yuddhaviśārādāḥ ॥ 1-9 ॥

anye: others; *ca:* and; *bahavah:* many; *surah:* heroes; *mad:* of me; *arthe:* for my gain; *tyakta:* have left; *jivitah:* lives; *nana:* various; *sastra:* weapons; *praharanah:* equipped; *sarve:* all; *yuddha:* in battle; *visaradah:* experienced.

"Many other heroes are here, all ready to sacrifice their life in battle for my sake. They are well equipped with many different weapons and they are all expert in combat."

Here Duryodhana clearly expresses his ideas about the reasons why he and his allies entered the war - as well as the ideals on which his entire life is built.

Mad arthe means "for my gain": there is no doubt that Duryodhana is only motivated by his personal gain, by selfish considerations of *aham mama* ("I and mine") or *ahankara* (false material identification) and *mamatva* (material attachment), that are the very roots of ignorance and delusion.

Duryodhana does not fight for the benefit of the kingdom, to defend and protect the *prajas*. He has no concern about dharma. He only fights for his own sake, to obtain more power and advantages for himself, and similarly he surmises that all the heroes who are fighting on his side are only interested in his getting more personal power by eliminating the virtuous Pandavas. Such action will be performed by the sheer use of material force, weaponry and military skills.

The fact that all these great heroes have already prepared themselves to lay down their own lives for his sake only makes him even more arrogant. He sees them as mere instruments for his lust for power, to be gambled on the battlefield in pursuance of his personal victory.

अपर्याप्तं तदस्माकं बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम् ।

aparyāptam tadasmākaṁ balaṁ bhīṣmābhirakṣitam ।

पर्याप्तं त्विदमेतेषां बलं भीमाभिरक्षितम् ॥ १-१० ॥

paryāptam tvidameteṣāṁ balaṁ bhīmābhirakṣitam ॥ 1-10 ॥

aparyaptam: without measure; *tad:* that; *asmakam:* our; *balam:* forces; *bhishma:* by Bhishma; *abhirakshitam:* well protected; *paryaptam:* limited; *tu:* but; *idam:* this; *etesham:* of these; *balam:* forces; *bhima:* by Bhima; *abhirakshitam:* well protected.

"Our forces are immensely numerous and perfectly protected by Bhishma, while the army of these others (the Pandavas) are limited and well protected by Bhima.

Bhima (not to be confused with Bhishma) is the second of the five Pandava brothers, born from Vayu and Kunti; in the *Mahabharata* he talks to Hanuman who calls him "brother". Bhima married Draupadi like his other brothers, but he also married the *rakshasi* called Hidimbi and Sisupala's sister Kali.

These two marriages are an interesting feature because they connect Bhima with a fierce

and savage aspect that reminds us of the terrifying all-devouring aspect of Shiva (Bhairava) worshiped by various non-aryan populations. *Rakshasas* are certainly non-aryans, but also the people of the kingdom of Chedi are non-aryans following tribal traditions.

Hidimbi's son Ghatotkacha used his *rakshasa* powers to support the Pandava army at Kurukshetra, and Kali's son Sarabha became the king of Chedi.

Duryodhana's army is described as consisting of 11 *akshauhinis*, while the Pandavas had only 7 *akshauhinis*. One of such *akshauhinis* is said to consist of 21,870 chariots carrying *maharatha*, *atiratha* and *ratha* warriors, plus the same number of war elephants, 65,610 horsemen and 109,350 foot soldiers.

It is calculated that the total number of the combatants at Kurukshetra was around 4 millions.

अयनेषु च सर्वेषु यथाभागमवस्थिताः ।

ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgamavasthitāḥ ।

भीष्ममेवाभिरक्षन्तु भवन्तः सर्व एव हि ॥ १-११ ॥

bhīṣmamevābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi || 1-11 ||

ayanesu: in the various strategic positions; *ca*: and; *sarveshu*: all; *yatha-bhagam*: as assigned; *avasthitah*: positioned; *bhishmam*: Bhishma; *evabhirakshantu*: should protect; *bhavantah*: your good selves; *sarva*: all; *eva*: certainly; *hi*: however.

"Now all of you, from your respective strategic positions, should certainly give protection and support to Bhishma, from all sides."

In a battle formation, the general in command is always supposed to remain in the center, while the other generals are positioned in the various relative directions called *ayanas*, such as east, west, south, north, from which they support the center.

On a symbolic level, this verse highlights the need to properly understand one's priorities in life, and to center all other concerns around the primary duty of self realization.

Duryodhana's diplomatic and political abilities are evident in this verse. He is always trying to manipulate people banking on their emotions, weaknesses and attachments, pitting one against the other, flattering and stinging them in turn, all the time calculating how he can use everyone for his own selfish advantage. This is the clearest evidence that he is not at all fit to sit on the throne and therefore he should not have power over the kingdom. The protection of Dharma requires his elimination. Sometimes foolish misinformed people say that the war of Kurukshetra was not different from the Islamic "holy war" or the Christian crusades because it was fought "for the purpose of Dharma". Such people have no idea what Dharma really is about.

तस्य सञ्जनयन्हर्षं कुरुवृद्धः पितामहः ।

tasya sañjanayanharṣam kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ ।

सिंहनादं विनद्योच्चैः शङ्खं दध्मौ प्रतापवान् ॥ १-१२ ॥

simhanādam vinadyoccaiḥ śaṅkham dadhmau pratāpavān ॥ 1-12 ॥

tasya: his; *sañjayanam*: increasing; *harsham*: the emotion; *kuru*: of the Kurus; *vṛddhah*: the eldest; *pitamahah*: grandfather; *simha*: lion (like); *nadam*: sound; *vinadya*: vibrating; *uccaiḥ*: loudly; *sankham*: the conchshell; *dadhmau*: blew; *pratapavan*: the powerful.

"The elder of the Kurus, the valiant grandfather (Bhishma), blew his conchshell that vibrated very loudly like the roaring of a lion, giving joy to Duryodhana."

The blowing of conches invokes Sri (auspiciousness and beauty), as well as Vijaya (victory), Bhuti (power), Dhruva (determination) and Niti (morality), while it drives away all bad things and bad influences.

For a Kshatriya, his sankhanada, the sound of his war conch, announces the beginning of his sacred duty of standing up in battle to defend Dharma.

This same tradition was found in other non-abrahamic cultures having access to seas or oceans; in fact the conch can be considered the simplest and most natural form of musical instrument, mystically uniting various the elements of the universe - water from its origin, earth because of its hardness and weight, air and ether because of its penetrating sound, whose echo seems to remain permanently inside its fold.

Blowing conchshells in Vedic culture is considered an announcement of some important event, such as the beginning of an *arati* or ritual ceremony or worship in the temple, etc.

Conches are also used to contain consecrated water for the bathing of the Deities, especially Vishnu. However, the conchshell is not used to bathe Shiva.

The conch in itself, and more specifically the type found in the Indian ocean, called *Turbinella pyrum*, is considered a very auspicious symbol representing Lakshmi or Sri, the Mother Goddess of beauty, wealth, and good fortune - due to its beauty, natural luster, purity, strength and inalterability, and due to its association with water.

It is said that Lakshmi was born from the ocean, like the conchshell.

The term *harsham* is connected to excitement, as in *roma harshana*, the standing of the hair on the body when some strong emotion is felt.

Bhishma blows his war conch to reassure his grandson of his support, as he could understand from Duryodhana's speech to Drona that he was uncertain about the result of the war and therefore he was trying to use all its diplomacy to goad his supporters into battle. Bhishma wants Duryodhana to know that he is not offended by what he said, because Drona's silence in front of Duryodhana's increasingly arrogant speech does not bode well. Bhishma is also concerned that the other generals in their army might become offended or doubtful about the battle, so he blows his conchshell to bring back everyone's mind on the task at hand.

The blowing of the conchshells is the signal for battle: by initiating the attack, Bhishma

takes upon himself the responsibility of the aggression against the Pandavas.

ततः शङ्खाश्च भेर्यश्च पणवानकगोमुखाः ।

tataḥ śaṅkhāśca bheryaśca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ ।

सहसैवाभ्यहन्यन्त स शब्दस्तुमुलोऽभवत् ॥ १-१३ ॥

sahasaivābhyahanyanta sa śabdastumulo'bhavat ॥ 1-13 ॥

tataḥ: then; *sankhaḥ*: conchshells; *ca*: and; *bheryaḥ*: large drums; *ca*: and; *panava*: smaller drums; *anaka*: smaller drums; *go-mukhaḥ*: large trumpets; *sahasa*: together; *eva*: certainly; *abhyahanyanta*: were sounded; *sah*: that; *śabdah*: sound; *tumulah*: tumultuous; *abhavat*: became.

"Then there was a tumultuous sound from the simultaneous playing of *sankha* (conchshells), *bherya* (large drums), *panava anaka* (smaller drums) and *go-mukha* (trumpet)."

Besides the conchshells, various other musical instruments were adding to the tumultuous sound announcing the imminent battle.

A *bherya* is a very large one-sided drum, with an iron body on which a buffalo skin is stretched. A *panava* is a smaller drum, double-sided; it has a body made of iron or wood, and goat or sheep skin at both ends. An *anaka* (also called *mridanga*) is still smaller, barrel-shaped and double-sided (one side is smaller than the other); the body is made of baked clay or wood (preferably jackfruit wood), with multiple layers of goat skin at both ends, with a rim of stronger buffalo skin.

A *go-mukha* is a kind of trumpet/horn shaped like the face of a cow, resembling a kind of short funnel; at present its use has become very rare.

ततः श्वेतैर्हयैर्युक्ते महति स्यन्दने स्थितौ ।

tataḥ śvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau ।

माधवः पाण्डवश्चैव दिव्यौ शङ्खौ प्रदध्मतुः ॥ १-१४ ॥

mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaścaiva divyau śaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ ॥ 1-14 ॥

tataḥ: then; *svetaih*: white; *hayaih*: horses; *yukte*: yoked; *mahati*: great; *syandane*: chariot; *sthitau*: situated; *madhavaḥ*: Krishna; *pandavaḥ*: Arjuna; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *divyau*: divine; *sankhau*: conchshells; *pradadhmatuḥ*: sounded.

"At that time Madhava (Krishna, the husband of the Mother Goddess) and Pandava (Arjuna, the son of Pandu) also sounded their divine conchshells, from their great chariot pulled by white horses."

Madhava: one of the names of Krishna, meaning “the husband of Mother”, intended as the Mother Goddess.

Pandava: one of the names of Arjuna, meaning “the son of Pandu”.

This great chariot described in the verse was given to Arjuna by Agni. The Mahabharata explains that as Duryodhana was not willing to give up the capital of the kingdom Indraprastha, the Pandavas decided to make a capital of their own and chose Khandava, a wild forest at a certain distance from the populated region. Arjuna dedicated the forest to Agni, the personification of fire, and pleased by this act of devotion, Agni presented him with the wonderful chariot and with special horses that would never become tired or be wounded by ordinary weapons. The color of the horses (white) symbolizes *sattva*.

The four white horses are called Balahak, Megha, Shaibya and Sugriva.

Agni personally asked Varuna for the Gandiva bow and presented this, too, to Arjuna.

On the cleared land of Khandavaprastha the Pandavas built a magnificent city with the help of Maya Danava and the wealth donated by the many kings who accepted Yudhishthira as the lawful emperor and supported the Pandavas.

Crazed with envy, Duryodhana plotted the famous dice game in such a way that Yudhishthira could not decline to participate, and through false dice he caused the Pandavas to lose everything. Sometimes people criticize Yudhishthira for gambling his capital city and even his own freedom and the freedom of his wife and brothers, saying that it was immoral to gamble his wife like chattel, and compare him to the ordinary degraded sudra gamblers who are ready to stake everything for the mere excitement of the game because they are addicted to the adrenaline rush and to the illusion of easy money.

Such foolish and superficial critics, being *sudras* themselves, are unable to understand the mind of a genuine *kshatriya* - who only lives for the protection of the *prajas*.

A *kshatriya* is constantly ready to stake his own life and indirectly his family in every battle, every day of his life, and his family know this very well. Yudhishthira, the son of Dharmaraja, chose to stake his own person first, and then his own family, in the bloodless attempt to eliminate the danger posed by Duryodhana to the entire kingdom. If Yudhishthira had won the match, Duryodhana would have been forced to back down and acknowledge defeat, just like in an ordinary clash on the battlefield - only with less traumatic consequences for the kingdom.

The *kshatriya* spirit is manifested in bravery in the face of a challenge.

Arjuna and the other Pandavas had tried everything they could to avoid this war, but the determination of Duryodhana and his father Dhritarastra thwarted all their efforts. Duryodhana even had the audacity to try to make Krishna a prisoner when he volunteered to go to the palace in Indraprastha to negotiate a peace agreement. To the requests of the Pandavas to have at least one village where the citizens could take shelter in their protection, Duryodhana scornfully replied that he would not allow them even the land sufficient to plant a needle.

Now that the military encounter has become inevitable, Arjuna and Krishna blow in their conchshells to show that they are not scared by the tumultuous noise made by the Kaurava army. But there is a difference: the conchshells of Arjuna and Krishna are called divine, whereas Bhishma's conchshell is an ordinary one, and so are the other conchshells of the Kauravas.

Some unfortunate people believe that the Pandavas are the villains of the Mahabharata or at least ordinary individuals, but with such judgment these critics demonstrate their total lack of understanding for Dharma.

पाञ्चजन्यं हृषीकेशो देवदत्तं धनञ्जयः ।

pāñcajanyaṁ hr̥ṣīkeśo devadattaṁ dhanañjayaḥ ।

पौण्ड्रं दध्मौ महाशङ्खं भीमकर्मा वृकोदरः ॥ १-१५ ॥

paunḍraṁ dadhmau mahāśaṅkhaṁ bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ ॥ 1-15 ॥

pañcajanya: Panchajanya; *hrishikesah*: Hrisikesha; *devadattam*: Devadatta; *dhanañjayah*: Dhananjaya; *paundram*: Paundram; *dadhmau*: blew; *maha*: great; *sankham*: conchshell; *bhima*: fierce; *karma*: activities; *vrika*: wolf; *udarah*: bellied.

"Hrisikesha (Krishna) blew into (his conchshell) Panchajanya, Dhananjaya (Arjuna) (blew) into (his conchshell) Devadatta, and the wolf-bellied (Bhimasena) hero of formidable deeds (blew) into the huge (conchshell) Paundram."

Hrisikesha: one of the names of Krishna, meaning "the Lord of the senses". Not to be confused with Rishikesha, of "the Lord of the female Rishis", that is one of the names of Shiva Mahadeva, after whom the city of Rishikesha, in the Himalayan foothills, is named.

Dhananjaya: one of the names of Arjuna, meaning "conqueror of wealth"; the name refers to the campaign by which Arjuna traveled in various regions to collect funds from allies in order to build their new capital Khandavaprastha and perform the Rajasuya yajna.

The description *bhima-karma vrikodarah* refers to Bhima or Bhimasena the son of Pandu, who was famous for his insatiable hunger, his powerfully built body and his formidable deeds. The word *bhima* means "fierce, terrible, powerful, formidable".

Among the five Pandavas, Bhimasena is considered the wildest and is associated with non-aryan traditions.

The Panchajanya conchshell has a very interesting story. According to *Hari vamsa* (89:15-17) Krishna killed an *asura* who had taken the form of a whale, and from the bones of this *asura* all the conchshells were created:

pancha-jane daitya-visishe bhavah pancha-janyah

pancha-jano nama daityah samudre timira-rupa asit

Panchajanya is also a name given to a particular type of conchshell that naturally contains a smaller one; the one worshiped in the Chamundesvari temple in Mysore contains two more.

According to the *Skanda-purana* the best conchshells are found in Kusa-sthalis such as Rameshvaram, Sri Lanka, Chennai, and Jagannatha Puri.

The other conchshells mentioned in connection to the Pandavas are also characteristically found in holy pilgrimage places: the Deva datta is found near the Tamraparni river (Sangamesvara temple), the Paundra is found where the river Kaveri joins the sea, the

Ananta vijaya near Dvaraka (Somanatha temple), the Su ghosha in the Sankha tirtha on the banks of the Yamuna (Vrajamandala), the Mani pushpa in Agni tirtha in south India (Ramesvaram).

These are all sacred conchshells, worthy of being worshiped.

अनन्तविजयं राजा कुन्तीपुत्रो युधिष्ठिरः ।

anantavijayaṁ rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhirah ।

नकुलः सहदेवश्च सुघोषमणिपुष्पकौ ॥ १-१६ ॥

nakulah sahadevaśca sughoṣamanipuṣpakau ।। 1-16 ।।

ananta: endless; *vijayam:* victories; *rajah:* the king; *kunti:* of Kunti; *putrah:* son; *yudhishtirah:* Yudhisthira; *nakulah:* Nakula; *sahadevah:* Sahadeva; *ca:* and; *su:* good; *ghosha:* sound; *mani:* jewel; *pushpakau:* blossoming.

"King Yudhisthira, the son of Kunti, (sounded his conchshell) Anantavijaya, and Nakula and Sahadeva (sounded their conchshells) Sughosha and Manipushpaka."

Yudhisthira means "one who remains firm in battle".

Yudhisthira is the eldest of the five Pandava brothers, born from Kunti and Dharmaraja (Yamaraja). In Vedic civilization, seminal birth is not considered more valid than adoption - both the material type and the spiritual type.

The spiritual type of adoption is discipleship, by which a person chooses to enter the *kula* ("family") of a Guru. In India there is still a legal option in court and identity documents for one to use his/her spiritual name as legitimate legal identity and to state "disciple of" instead of "son of".

Kunti, too, was an adopted child. Her father Surasena (who was also father of Vasudeva the husband of Devaki and father of Krishna) gave her in adoption to his dear friend Kuntibhoja who was childless. So she became known as Kunti, although she is also treated by Krishna as his respected aunt; Krishna often addresses Arjuna as Kunti-putra, "son of Kunti".

The name *putra* means "son" and is said to refer to the traditional duty of sons (and daughters, hence *putri*) to offer oblations to their departed ancestors so that their souls can obtain benefits.

Sometimes the comparison is made with a similar word, *mutra*, that means "urine". The *shastras* say that there is a great difference between *putra* and *mutra*, although they appear to come from one's body in a similar way.

To be a real *putra* one must be worthy of such definition.

Yudhisthira is called raja, "king", because he successfully performed the Rajasuya yajna and was recognized as such by a great number of people, not only by the kings and other great *kshatriyas* who became allies and paid him tribute, but also by great numbers of subjects who flocked to Khandavaprastha abandoning Indraprastha because of the bad

governance of Duryodhana.

काश्यश्च परमेष्वासः शिखण्डी च महारथः ।

kāśyaśca parameṣvāsaḥ śikhāṇḍī ca mahārathaḥ ।

धृष्टद्युम्नो विराटश्च सात्यकिश्चापराजितः ॥ १-१७ ॥

dhṛṣṭadyumno virāṭaśca sātya kiścāparājitaḥ ॥ 1-17 ॥

kasyah: (king) of Kashi; *ca*: and; *parama*: great; *ishu asah*: archer; *sikhandi*: Sikhandi; *ca*: and; *maha*: great; *rathah*: chariot; *dhrishtadyumnah*: Drishtadyumna; *viratah*: Virata; *ca*: and; *satyaki*: Satyaki; *ca*: and; *apara*: by no others; *jita*: vanquished.

"The great archer the king of Kashi, Maharatha Sikhandi, Drishtadyumna, Virata and Satyaki who was never vanquished in battle,"

Maharatha Sikhandi is the son/daughter of Drupada. The story of Sikhandi is very interesting. Originally called Amba, she was the daughter of the king of Kashi and sister of Ambika and Ambalika, who became the wives of Vicitravirya, the brother of Bhishma. When Bhishma took the terrible vow renouncing the kshatriya duty of marrying and having heirs who could take care of the kingdom, neither his step mother Satyawati nor his father Santanu expected that neither of the future children born of the new marriage would be unable to give a descendent to the dynasty. Chitrangada (also called Chitraratha) was killed when he was still very young and Vichitravirya also died young soon after his marriage before being able to beget sons. It is said he was afflicted by tuberculosis and a weak heart, so it is possible he was impotent, too.

As Vicitravirya was not fit to win himself a wife through the traditional *svayamvara* system, intended to test the valor and strength of the aspirant, it was decided that Bhishma would go in his stead to represent the dynasty. The powerful and radiant Bhishma won all the three daughters of the king of Varanasi (Kashi), but during the journey to Indraprastha the princesses came to know that they were not going to marry their hero Bhishma, but his weakling brother Vicitravirya. Ambika and Ambalika somehow digested the news as there was no other option but accepting their fate, but Amba had previously been attracted to Salva, one of the *kshatriya* kings that had participated to the *svayamvara* and had been defeated by Bhishma.

With Bhishma's permission, Amba ran off to marry Salva, but the proud kshatriya could not bear the idea of being "second choice" or forget having been defeated by Bhishma in public, so he sent Amba back to the hero who had won her. Amba then pleaded with Bhishma to marry her and save her from the shame of having to return to her father's house, but Bhishma had taken the terrible vow. Amba went to Bhishma's teacher Parasurama begging for help and Parasurama instructed Bhishma to marry Amba, as a *kshatriya*'s *dharma* demands that he gives shelter to anyone who asks for it. Bhishma chose to honor truthfulness over all other considerations, and Amba started on a desperate revenge mission, going to each and every *kshatriya* of the land, begging them to avenge

her honor by killing Bhishma, but nobody dared to challenge the powerful hero. Finally, Amba approached Shiva Mahadeva. After a long and severe penance, she obtained the boon of becoming a great warrior herself, able to personally kill Bhishma to avenge herself. Shiva instructed her to become the son of king Draupada, and she did. It is likely that she did not take another seminal birth but she was rather accepted in adoption by Draupada and started to dress, behave and train like a man, because when she finally faces Bhishma in the battle, Bhishma will refuse to fight against her "because she is a woman".

Not that women warriors could not fight on battlefields at those times - but certainly Bhishma remembered the anguish of young Amba and the circumstances where her hatred had developed. He felt a deep sense of compassion and sympathy for her and personal guilt for having caused so much pain, so the idea of hurting or even killing her in a fight, too, was intolerable for him.

Drishtadyumna is the son of Drupada and brother of Draupadi; both were born from the sacrificial fire in the ritual performed by Drupada to get a descendent that could destroy Drona. Virata is the father in law of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. The Pandavas remained incognito at his court for one year, during which Arjuna had taught dance and other arts to princess Uttara, the young daughter of Virata, and developing a deep relationship of friendship and trust with her. At the end of the incognito period, Arjuna resumed his normal identity as a powerful kshatriya warrior and Virata asked him to marry his daughter, but as Arjuna had developed a parental and friendly relationship with the very young Uttara, Arjuna suggested that she married his own son, Abhimanyu.

Satyaki, also called Yuyudhana, is a famous warrior from the family of Krishna. He accompanied Krishna in the fight against Banasura and also on the occasion when Krishna went to Indraloka to get a Parijata plant for his wife Satyabhama.

Apara jitah means "not vanquished by others".

द्रुपदो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्वशः पृथिवीपते ।

drupado draupadeyāśca sarvaśaḥ pṛthivīpate ।

सौभद्रश्च महाबाहुः शङ्खान्दध्मुः पृथक्पृथक् ॥ १-१८ ॥

saubhadraśca mahābāhuḥ śaṅkhāndadhmuh pṛthakpṛthak ।। 1-18 ।।

drupadah: Drupada; *draupadeyah:* the sons of Draupadi; *ca:* and; *sarvasah:* all; *prithivi:* of the earth; *pate:* protector; *saubhadrah:* the son of Subhadra; *ca:* and; *maha:* great; *bahuh:* armed; *sankhan:* conchshells; *dadhmuh:* blew; *prithak:* separately; *prithak:* separately.

"Drupada and the sons of Draupadi, and the mighty-armed son of Subhadra – all of them, o Lord of the Earth, blew into their own conchshells."

Also the other great warriors of the Pandava army proceed to announce their presence on the battlefield and their willingness to stand to the side of their allies.

Three generations of warriors are present on the battlefield - from king Draupada to his

grandsons, the sons of his daughter Draupadi. The sons of Draupadi are the direct heirs to the throne, as Draupadi is the queen recognized by the *rajasuya yajna*. Subhadra is Krishna's sister. Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadra and Arjuna, is mentioned together with the highest ranks of royalty on the Pandavas' side. In fact, the son of Abhimanyu, Parikshit, will ascend the throne when the Pandavas retire. The expression *prithivi pate* means "o protector of the Earth", and is meant to remind Dhritarashtra that a king's only concern should be the protection of the kingdom and the Earth in general.

स घोषो धार्तराष्ट्राणां हृदयानि व्यदारयत् ।

sa ghoṣo dhārtarāṣṭrāṇāṃ hṛdayāni vyadārayat ।

नभश्च पृथिवीं चैव तुमुलोऽभ्यनुनादयन् ॥ १-१९ ॥

nabhaśca pṛthivīm caiva tumulo'bhyanunādayan ॥ 1-19 ॥

sah: that; *ghoshah:* sound; *dhartarashtranam:* of the (sons/supporters/allies) of Dhritarashtra; *hridayani:* the hearts; *vyadarayat:* shook; *nabhah:* the sky; *ca:* and; *prithivim:* the earth; *ca:* and; *eva:* certainly; *tumulah:* tumultuous; *abhyananadayan:* resounded.

"That tumultuous vibration shook the hearts of the sons of Dhritarashtra, reverberating into the sky and upon the earth."

Here we see that only Dhritarashtra's supporters are affected by the mighty sounds of the conchshells and other musical instruments. In spite of their superior numerical strength, they are clearly afraid because their cause is selfish.

Gita will explain how freedom from the fear related to material identification and attachments and from karmic bondage can be attained only by those who act out of duty only, to serve Dharma by supporting the progress of the universe - protecting the good people, destroying the evil doers, and establishing the ethical principles that constitute the eternal norm of the universe.

From Sanjaya's description in these verses, it is evident that he disapproves Dhritarashtra's and Duryodhana's plans that led to the war, and that all his respect and admiration go to the divine personalities of Sri Krishna and Arjuna, and the virtuous Pandavas.

अथ व्यवस्थितान्दृष्ट्वा धार्तराष्ट्रान् कपिध्वजः ।

atha vyavasthitāndrṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajaḥ ।

प्रवृत्ते शस्त्रसम्पाते धनुरुद्यम्य पाण्डवः ॥ १-२० ॥

pravṛtte śastrasampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavaḥ ॥ 1-20 ॥

atha: then; *vyavasthitan*: positioned; *drishtva*: seeing; *dhartarashtran*: the (supporters) of Dhritarashtra; *kapi*: the ape; *dhvajah*: the flag; *pravritte*: getting ready; *sastra*: weapon; *sampate*: to launch; *dhanuh*: the bow; *udyamya*: taking up; *pandavah*: the son of Pandu.

"O king, positioned in his chariot bearing the flag of Hanuman, the son of Pandu (Arjuna) saw the sons and supporters of Dhritarashtra. He readied his weapons for battle and picked up his bow, then he spoke these words to Hrishikesha (Krishna)."

Kapi-dhvaja is one of Arjuna's many names, as his banner bears the effigy of Hanuman, the great Vanara warrior that fought at Rama's service. It is important to understand that the definition of "monkey" does not refer here to an ordinary monkey, because Hanuman is not an ordinary monkey, just like Garuda is not an ordinary bird.

The greatest warriors carried a flag with their personal emblem, so that they could be easily recognized and only people who were at the same level of skills and strength, or were well aware about the possible outcome of the clash, would face them in the fight. This ethical sense of warfare is the characteristic of the dharmic *kshatriyas*, who only fight against willing and suitable opponents.

Hrishikesha, the particular name by which Krishna is called to in this verse, means "he who can control the senses", and at a more symbolic level refers to the Paramatma, the "soul of the soul", whose direction should drive the white horses of our purified senses to pull the chariot of our body on the battlefield of life.

The chariot itself is a powerful symbol, with the horses, the wheels, and its various parts.

हृषीकेशं तदा वाक्यमिदमाह महीपते ।

hṛṣīkeśaṁ tadā vākyamidamāha mahīpate ।

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये रथं स्थापय मेऽच्युत ॥ १-२१ ॥

senayorubhayormadhye ratham sthāpaya me'cyuta ॥ 1-21 ॥

hrishikesam: to Hrishikesh; *tada:* then; *vakyam:* speech; *idam:* this; *aha:* said; *mahi:* of the Earth; *pate:* o Lord; *arjunah:* Arjuna; *uvaca:* said; *senayoh:* the armies; *ubhayoh:* the two; *madhye:* in the middle; *ratham:* chariot; *sthapaya:* position; *me:* for me; *acyuta:* Achyuta.

then he spoke these words to Hrishikesh (Krishna).

Arjuna said: "O Achyuta (Krishna), station the chariot (in the middle of the battlefield) between the two armies,"

Achyuta literally means "infallible", or "one who does not fall down", "one who is not affected by time, space and circumstance" and refers to the Lord, who never falls into illusion and ignorance even when he appears in this world to execute his mission. Similarly, all those who take shelter in the Lord, accepting him as their all in all, become *achyuta*, part of the transcendental "family" or Gotra of the Lord, beyond all material identifications of birth or social position.

Arjuna is asking Krishna to take the chariot in front of the two armies in order to assess the situation and face the inevitable clash.

Krishna accepted the position of Arjuna's charioteer to help his friend when the war was declared. On that day both Duryodhana and Arjuna had gone to see Krishna to ask for his assistance; Duryodhana had reached first and as Krishna was sleeping, he had sat at his bed head. More humbly, Arjuna chose to sit at the feet of Krishna's bed, so when Krishna opened his eyes, he saw Arjuna first and asked him what he wished to get from him for the upcoming war - either the powerful army of Dvaraka or Krishna himself, who would not be carrying weapons or engaging in the fight. Duryodhana was worried because the first choice was offered to Arjuna, but with immense relief he saw that Arjuna chose Krishna, so he could secure Krishna's mighty army for himself.

Thus Krishna became Partha-sarathi, the charioteer of Arjuna.

यावदेतान्निरिक्षेऽहं योद्धुकामानवस्थितान् ।

yāvadetānnirikṣe'haṁ yoddhukāmānavasthitān ।

कैर्मया सह योद्धव्यमस्मिन् रणसमुद्यमे ॥ १-२२ ॥

kairmayā saha yoddhavyamasmin raṇasamudyame ।। 1-22 ।।

yavad: as far as; *etan:* these; *nirikshe:* I will look at; *aham:* I; *yoddhu:* to fight; *kaman:* desiring; *avasthitan:* gathered/arrayed; *kair:* with whom; *maya:* me; *saha:* with; *yoddhavyam:* I am to fight; *asmin:* in this; *rana:* battle; *samyudame:* in the strife.

"so that I can see these people who have taken position here desiring the war, the persons against whom I will have to fight in this battle.

The word yavad means "up to", "as far as", "as long as", both in terms of space and time. Arjuna is clearly specifying in his request the purpose of the move, so that the chariot can

be directed in the best possible way.

Arjuna's request expresses a lingering disbelief at the idea that so many people had openly taken the side of Adharma in the impending war, to the point of desiring to fight against him and the Pandavas on the battlefield.

So he wants to look in their eyes to find out for himself how determined they are, and how much passionate they are for a fight that has the only purpose of serving the selfish and arrogant schemes of Duryodhana.

Good people always expect others to have the same ethical mentality, especially when they think of their own family members, friends and teachers. When we find out that they have actually chosen Adharma - for one reason or another - it is a great shock.

The word *kaman*, "desirous", is plural, and hints at the great number of the fighters.

According to the ethical code of the *kshatriya* warriors, a battle can be engaged only with eager combatants, who are of similar valor and strength and carry similar weapons and are on the same situation - both fighters should be on chariots, or on horses, on elephants, or on foot. A victory obtained by attacking an enemy that is in an inferior position, who is distracted, unprepared to fight, would be as disgraceful as losing the fight.

With this quick inspection of the armies, Arjuna is thus mentally preparing a list of the people he will have to face in the battle, to kill them or to be killed by them.

योत्स्यमानानवेक्षेऽहं य एतेऽत्र समागताः ।

yotsyamānānavekṣe'haṁ ya ete'tra samāgatāḥ ।

धार्तराष्ट्रस्य दुर्बुद्धेयुद्धे प्रियचिकीर्षवः ॥ १-२३ ॥

dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddheryuddhe priyacikīrṣavaḥ ।। 1-23 ।।

yotsyamanan: those who will fight; *avekṣhe*: I see; *aham*: I; *ye*: them; *ete*: these; *atra*: here; *samagataḥ*: gathered; *dhartarastrasya*: of Dhritarashtra; *durbuddheh*: the evil-minded; *yuddhe*: in the fight; *priya*: affection; *cikirsavah*: who wish.

"I understand that those who have assembled here are determined to participate to this war and will fight to please the evil-minded son of Dhritarashtra."

Dhritarashtra was Pandu's elder brother, but as he was born blind he was considered unable to take proper care of the kingdom, so Pandu ascended the throne.

Physical blindness does not automatically disqualify one completely from all activities; one can have eyesight problems or other physical handicaps and yet be knowledgeable, wise, and capable of performing some kind of useful work to earn a livelihood instead of relying on charitable assistance from others. But a king's job requires the full functionality of all senses and a bodily strength and dexterity that is greater than the average, in order to successfully counteract all internal and external threats to the well being, safety and progress of the *prajas*.

If it is unwise to grant a car driving license to a blind person, just imagine how much more dangerous it would be to have a blind person driving an entire government.

Unfortunately, shortly after he ascended the throne, Pandu had a hunting accident in which he involuntary killed a Rishi, and he was cursed to die without being able to generate an heir. Therefore he retired to the forest with his two wives Kunti and Madri, determined to engage in severe austerities to expiate his crime, hoping that in such a way he might be able to counteract the curse removed.

Pandu's absence certainly gave Dhritarashtra the chance to get some power, with the help of Bhishma and others, who initially must have been mostly concerned about keeping the kingdom in working order until a really qualified heir was produced.

Pandu's hopes rose again as Kunti was able to have five good sons by a powerful mantra that called great Devas (Yama, Vayu, Indra, and the Asvini Kumaras) to father children for her husband.

Dhritarashtra's wife Gandhari also became pregnant at the same time of Kunti.

Gandhari's brother Shakuni was probably the one who most encouraged Dhritarashtra's hopes of getting his own son on the throne, especially if he was born before Pandu's first son. When Kunti gave birth first, Gandhari's dream of attaining the prestigious and powerful position of the Emperor's mother vanished. In terrible frustration and anger, she beat her own belly so hard that she had a miscarriage and the fetus came out prematurely as a shapeless lump of flesh. This was certainly not a good sign - the mother evidently had some psychological problems and the atmosphere in the entire family was not exactly dharmic and conducive for the proper training of a selfless protector of the kingdom.

Family attachments came into play again and Vyasa was called in to save the poor aborted baby and to fulfill the prophecy by which Gandhari would have 100 sons. So the lump of flesh was expertly divided into several containers and 100 test-tube babies were born.

The great patience and leniency of their elders led Dhritarashtra and Gandhari to think that it was fully legitimate for them to cut all kinds of corners and even go against the laws of nature and ethics in order to fulfill all their selfish ambitions. It was at that time that Dhritarashtra decided that his eldest son Duryodhana would become the king, no matter what it would take.

Dhritarashtra had hoped that the sons of Pandu would remain in the forest and out of Duryodhana's way, so when Pandu died and the boys came to Indraprastha with their mother Kunti, a long series of evil schemes was hatched to kill the young Pandavas before they became adults. All assassination attempts failed, but the only person who helped the Pandavas at that time was Vidura, and even so he had to do it secretly, because the entire court supported Dhritarashtra's schemes.

We would expect the main plotters to remain devoid of any sense of justice or compassion for the innocent young Pandavas, but not even Bhishma raised a finger to stop the mischief, simply because he was too materially compassionate and affectionate to the poor blind Dhritarashtra and his very spoiled sons. There was no consideration for the benefit of the kingdom in the entire story, just sentimentalistic favoritism.

This tendency is also visible today in many people and even in governments that sentimentally choose to give preference and priority to disabled persons or persons of backward origin just because of their handicaps, rather than helping capable, dedicated and qualified candidates that would deserve a better opportunity on consideration of actual merit and for the greatest benefit for society at large.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

एवमुक्तो हृषीकेशो गुडाकेशेन भारत ।

evamukto hr̥ṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata ।

सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये स्थापयित्वा रथोत्तमम् ॥ १-२४ ॥

senayorubhayormadhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam ॥ 1-24 ॥

sanjaya: Sanjaya; *uvaca*: said; *evam*: thus; *uktah*: spoken; *hrishikesah*: Hrishikesha; *gudakesena*: by Gudakesha; *bharata*: o descendent of Bharata; *senayoh*: the armies; *ubhayoh*: the two; *madhye*: in the middle; *sthapayitva*: placing; *ratha*: chariot; *uttamam*: excellent.

Sanjaya said:

"O descendent of Bharata, hearing those words from Gudakesha (Arjuna), Hrishikesha (Krishna) took the wonderful chariot between the two armies."

In this verse Sanjaya addresses Dhritarashtra as "descendent of Bharata", hinting that in order to be worthy of his illustrious ancestor, Dhritarashtra should have behaved much better. Bharata was a great king, after whom ancient India was named.

Arjuna and Krishna are eternal companions and always travel together - just like they are now sitting on the same beautiful chariot. They are the Supreme Guru and the Supreme Personality of Godhead, also known as Nara and Narayana.

One is called Gudakesha ("master of sleep") and the other is called Hrishikesha ("master of the senses"), to illustrate the importance of conquering laziness and inertia in the process of attaining control over the senses.

Many people think that in order to control the senses and to eliminate material identifications and attachments, one should stop working altogether, give up all activities and duties, as in a sort of endless vacation where the valuable opportunity of human life is wasted without any material or spiritual benefit.

Krishna will clearly and abundantly explain that it is not so.

Material *sattva guna* that is not supported by active and selfless work and by a truly transcendental consciousness will inevitably slide into *tamas*. Therefore mere abstention from work just makes one a parasite of society and leads to conscious or subconscious engagement in detrimental activities, such as gossiping, talking about irrelevant topics, meddling into other people's affairs and lives, playing politics and power games at various levels, and pursuing subtle or not-so-subtle sense gratification.

A mendicant *sadhu*, a *sannyasi*, does not engage in ritual worship or other ordinary duties, but this does not mean that he is free from all responsibilities. On the contrary, one should renounce ordinary duties only to be able to engage fully and selflessly in the active service to the Supreme and Universal Good

भीष्मद्रोणप्रमुखतः सर्वेषां च महीक्षिताम् ।

bhīṣmadroṇapramukhataḥ sarveṣāṃ ca mahīkṣitām ।

उवाच पार्थ पश्यैतान्समवेतान्कुरुनिति ॥ १-२५ ॥

uvāca pārtha paśyaitānsamavetānkurūniti ।। 1-25।।

bhishmah: Bhishma; *dronah:* Drona; *pramukhatah* in front of; *sarvesham:* all; *ca:* and; *mahi:* of the Earth; *kshitam:* chieftains; *uvaca:* said; *partha:* o son of Pritha (Arjuna); *pasyaitan:* observed; *samavetan:* gathered; *kurun:* the Kurus; *iti:* thus.

In front of Bhishma, Drona and all the chieftains of the Earth, he said, “O son of Pritha (Arjuna), all the Kurus that you have observed are assembled here”.

The wonderful conversation between Krishna and Arjuna that constitutes *Bhagavad gita* is purposefully spoken in the middle of the two armies so that not only Arjuna, but Bhishma, Drona and all the chieftains who were assembled there will be able to hear Krishna’s meaningful instructions.

Arjuna and the Pandavas consider Bhishma and Drona are their most respectable elders, worthy of worship. Such is the respect commanded by Bhishma, that at the beginning of the battle Yudhisthira will calmly remove his own weapons and armor and walk fearlessly to the opposite front with folded hands to offer his homage to the Grandsire and ask his permission to engage in the battle.

Bhishma is the seniormost member of the dynasty, the Grandsire that has single-handedly taken care both of the family and of the kingdom without ever attempting to enjoy the privileges of kingship for himself. He has clearly shown that he is extremely renounced, as well as immensely powerful in personal strength and valor. Bhishma is also not an ordinary person, even if he plays that part in the particular *lila* of the *Mahabharata*. In fact he is one of the 12 mahajanas, the greatest spiritual authorities in the history of the universe, together with Brahma, Narada, Shiva, Yama, Kumara, Kapila, Svayambhuva Manu, Prahlada, Janaka, Bali and Vyasa (*Bhagavata Purana*, 6.3.20).

Drona is the Guru that taught martial arts to all the royal princes - both the Pandavas and the sons of Dhritarashtra - therefore Arjuna owes him total obedience and respect.

According to etiquette, in the presence of such elders one is expected to be submissive and humble, accepting whatever order or punishment they may decide to give, but here both Bhishma and Drona are standing between Arjuna and Dharma, defending the evil schemes of Duryodhana and his father.

Krishna already knows what bothers Arjuna, and does not hesitate to take the position of the teacher even in front of such great personalities that apparently are his elders, too.

So he calls Arjuna "son of Pritha" (Kunti) to remind him that they are cousins, close relatives and not just friends of the same age, and that Arjuna should make his mother proud by behaving bravely and in accordance to Dharma.

By choosing to use the expression "the Kurus" to refer to the supporters of Dhritarashtra

and Duryodhana, Krishna is making an ironic remark. Both the sons of Pandu and the sons of Dhritarashtra are descendents of the famous king Kuru, but Dhritarashtra has chosen to claim such great ancestry exclusively for himself and his sons, on the false pretext that Pandu was not the "real father" of the Pandavas, although in Vedic society there is absolutely no difference between a seminally generated child and an adopted one. With this verbal jugglery Dhritarashtra was attempting to deny the legitimate rights of the Pandavas to the throne, but Krishna turns the joke back against him. Dhritarashtra's sons may be descendents of Kuru, but the Pandavas are much more than that: they are the valiant sons of whom Pandu was extremely proud, but they are also manifestations of the most powerful Devas of the universe.

तत्रापश्यत्स्थितान्पार्थः पितृनथ पितामहान् ।

tatrāpaśyatsthitānpārthaḥ pitṛnatha pitāmahān ।

आचार्यान्मातुलान्भ्रातृन्पुत्रान्पौत्रान्सखींस्तथा ॥ १-२६ ॥

ācāryānmātulānbhrātr̥nputrānpautrānsakhīmstathā ॥ 1-26 ॥

tatra: there; *apasyat*: he saw; *sthitān*: standing; *parthaḥ*: the son of Pritha (Arjuna); *pitṛin*: fathers; *atha*: as well as; *pitāmahān*: grandfathers; *acāryan*: teachers; *matulan*: maternal uncles; *bhrātr̥in*: brothers; *putran*: sons; *pautran*: grandsons; *sakhin*: friends; *tatha*: as well.

"The son of Pritha (Arjuna), saw there standing (on the battlefield) fathers, as well as grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, nephews, friends,"

Vedic civilization gives great importance to family as the building block of society, because it is in the family that a child is nurtured with love and affection, constant care, and the emotional feelings that will determine his/her future perspective on him/herself, others, the world and life itself. The first period of one's childhood, starting with conception and pregnancy, is usually the most influential - both in a positive and negative sense - for absorbing the basic foundations of ethical behavior, personal motivations, the general understanding of knowledge and reality, and the life example of those who live around us and become our role models.

Matulah is the maternal uncle. Contrarily to what some people think, traditionally mother's family members and especially mother's brothers, have a great importance in the life of a child. The relationship between brothers and sisters used to be very strong, and it is still celebrated in the popular festival called *raksha-bandhan*, by which the brother solemnly takes the responsibility to protect his sister from all dangers.

Bhrātr̥in or "brothers" also includes cousins, as the Vedic family mentality tends to have all children living together without discriminations about who is the father or mother of each single child. On the other hand, seniority is considered extremely important; so a first born has more responsibilities towards his/her siblings, and therefore is entitled to more respect.

Arjuna's concern is not just about his own relationship with the people he sees, because in that case he would not mention "fathers" or "grandfathers" or "uncles", as neither Pandu nor Vasudeva or Surasena (or even Vidura or Dhritarastra) were present. Therefore we cannot say that Arjuna's sadness comes from his own material identification and attachments: what horrifies him is not the imminent loss of his dear kith and kin, but the extent of the madness and damage for the entire kingdom and for the entire planet that Duryodhana has brought about because of his stubborn selfishness and arrogance.

All the warriors positioned on the battlefield in both armies for that fratricidal war were related to each other by friendship or family ties, and Arjuna understands that their hostility is due not to personal reasons or incompatibility of interests, but is simply caused by the determination of Dhritarastra's son, who has manipulated them in a way or another to force them into such a deadly predicament.

All those people were just instruments that will have to clash against each other because of someone else's choices, and they are not really responsible for the disaster they will cause and suffer.

The worst thing that one can do is taking action without understanding the import of the future consequences of such action, for oneself and for others, and for the entire world as well. Foolish people think that their responsibility ends with the completion of the action they have decided to take - getting the job done, whether it is securing an income for their family, putting food on the table, cleaning up their own house, taking a vacation, or purchasing some consumers' goods. They prefer not to think about the exploitation and destruction of resources or the various other types of damages caused by the company that employs them, for the sufferings of the innocent animals that are killed in the process, for the pollution and degradation of the environment, for the destruction of cultures, or any other disaster that will be triggered by the consequences of consequences - such as global warming, widespread psychological imbalances, and a general rise of Adharma. But the price will have to be paid, sooner or later.

In this verse and in the next, Arjuna is called "son of Pritha" and "son of Kunti" to emphasize the fact that he considers himself one of the many children of Mother Earth (Prithvi), who is affectionate to all her progeny. Just like the Lord is the father of all creatures, Earth/Nature is their mother.

श्वशुरान्सुहृदश्चैव सेनयोरुभयोरपि ।

śvaśurānsuhṛdaścaiva senayorubhayorapi ।

तान्समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान्बन्धूनवस्थितान् ॥ १-२७ ॥

tānsamīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvānbandhūnavasthitān ।। 1-27 ।।

कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत् ।

kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo viṣīdannidamabravīt ।

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् ॥ १-२८ ॥

dr̥ṣṭvemaṁ svajanaṁ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam ॥ 1-28 ॥

svasuran: fathers in law; *suhridah*: well wishers; *ca*: and; *eva*: certainly; *senayoh*: the armies; *ubhayoh*: the two; *api*: also; *tan*: them; *samikshya*: seeing; *sah*: he; *kaunteyah*: the son of Kunti (Arjuna); *sarvan*: all; *bandhun*: tied to each other; *avasthitan*: placed.

Fathers in law and well-wishers (facing each other) in the two armies. The son of Kunti (Arjuna) saw all those people tied to one another by ties of affection, positioned there (for the battle).

The word *suhridah* is usually translated as "well wisher", in its most literal sense, because it refers to a person who has very good sentiments for us in his/her heart and wants us to be blessed with all good things, even if s/he is not our relative or friend in the ordinary sense. The word *bandhu* refers to loving ties, to a close relationship that unites people intimately, either on the level of friendship or on the level of family relations. In either case, there is a strong and sincere affection involved, and not just some superficial kinship based on social obligations and conventions.

Not all family relationships can be categorized as such. Sharing the same blood is not a guarantee that two people will have true affection for each other, or even just understand or like each other. History and stories from all cultures witness to that, and of course the bad influence of Kali yuga, the age of quarrel and falsity, can only make things worse. Of course we can still have affection and care for a friend or relative that has different qualities and inclinations from us, even considerably.

Love and affection depend on emotions, and can be shared between people who are different from each other. Husband and wife, for example, may not be able or inclined to engage in the same type of activities, but they find happiness in each other's company anyway just because they love and care for each other. Similarly, a parent will love his or her children, even when they are babies and they have not manifested any qualities yet. However, these emotional ties can somehow be missing, especially in case of persons who have a bad nature and are incapable of loving - persons who prefer to hate, envy, despise or fear others, or are so selfish that they have no concern for others and see everyone just as an instrument to be manipulated and exploited in order to get some personal benefit and gratification for oneself.

This can be found even in the most intimate relationships - parents and children, children

and parents, husband and wife, wife and husband, and siblings. In this case, according to the Vedic tradition, we are not expected to remain faithful to such relationships if they lead us away from Dharma and towards degradation and misuse of the opportunity of human life. Of course everybody has defects and everybody can make mistakes, so we should allow ample opportunities to our next of kin so that they can understand better and reform themselves. We should not abandon a person who depends on us just because of some disagreement or even some occasional fighting, and especially we should not blame others for not being what we imagined and expected them to be.

कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत् ।

kr̥payā parayāviṣṭo viṣīdannidamabravīt ।

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvāca ।

दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् ॥ १-२८ ॥

dr̥ṣṭvemaṁ svajanaṁ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam ।। 1-28 ।।

kripaya: by compassion; *para:* supreme/transcendental; *ayavishtah:* pervaded; *vishidan:* lamenting; *idam:* this; *abravit:* said; *arjunah:* Arjuna; *uvaca:* said; *drishtva:* seeing; *imam:* these; *sva:* own; *janam:* people; *krishna:* o Krishna; *yuyutsum:* in a fighting spirit; *samupasthitam:* present.

was overwhelmed by a great compassion, and spoke these pained words.

Arjuna said

“O Krishna, after seeing all these kinsmen, assembled here ready to fight against each other (in this fratricidal war),”

Arjuna’s compassion is called *kripa para*, “a transcendental compassion”, because he is aware of all the results of the impending disaster, not only in this life but also in future lives. His compassion is not merely material, but spiritual as well.

Also, he is not only concerned about the fate of the warriors that are present on the battlefield, but about the future of their families, of society and the kingdom, and the world in general.

Vishada, or lamentation, gives the name to the first chapter of *Bhagavad gita*: Arjuna Vishada Yoga. Some commentators dislike this title, arguing that "lamentation" has nothing to do with yoga - otherwise all the people in the world, including the less evolved and uncultured, would have to be considered very advanced yogis. Such reasoning shows a serious lack of understanding, not to speak of the lack of respect demonstrated towards the shastra. A truly intelligent person is humble and always questions his/her own understanding first, whenever contradictions or irrelevant points seem to appear in the

genuine shastra.

The first step in the journey of spiritual realization starts with the understanding of the reality of sorrow in life: this material world has been designed to be temporary, plagued by ignorance and sufferings, so that the frustration generated by the friction between its characteristic nature and the soul's aspirations for eternity, knowledge and bliss can cause a crisis of consciousness. This is why suffering has been engineered as the main ingredient of this world - as caused by one's own body and mind (*adhyatmika klesa*), by other living entities (*adhibhautika klesa*) and by the natural forces controlled by the archetypal personifications (*adhidaivika klesa*).

Evolution is always triggered by a crisis. When everything is well, people tend to slack down and become complacent and lazy, while challenges and tests help us to learn and improve ourselves. Some students hate and dread the time when exams come, but the crisis of the impending trial spurs them to put an extra effort in their studies, especially in the earliest stages of one's education, when the spontaneous taste for knowledge has not developed yet..

In his compassion, Arjuna is teaching us by playing the role of the conditioned soul who is overwhelmed by lamentation and confusion, but we should not think that he is really under the power of ignorance. Whenever a great transcendental personality descends in this world, a drama is organized to illustrate the teachings that need to be imparted on mankind.

Another famous *avatara*, the Buddha, centered his entire teaching plan on the understanding of suffering, by explaining the Four Noble Truths:

1. the Truth of suffering: the world is full of suffering; life that is not free from passion and desire is always heavy with suffering because in this world everything is temporary and imperfect
2. the Truth of the cause of suffering: undoubtedly the cause of suffering is found in the desires of the body and in the illusions of the mind
3. the Truth of cessation of suffering: if we can eliminate the attachment to desires and passions, suffering automatically ceases
4. the Truth of the cessation of the cause of suffering: in order to attain this level of detachment from desires and passion, one must follow the Noble Eightfold Path: Right vision, Right thinking, Right speaking, Right behavior, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right awareness, Right dedication. Which, in other words, means serving Dharma as taught in Gita.

सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति ।

sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṁ ca pariśuṣyati ।

वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥ १-२९ ॥

vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jāyate ।। 1-29 ।।

sidanti: faint; *mama*: my; *gatrani*: limbs; *mukham*: mouth; *ca*: and; *parisushyati*: is drying completely; *vepathus*: trembling; *ca*: and; *sarire*: body; *me*: my; *roma harshah*:

hair standing on end; *ca:* and; *jayate:* becomes.

"I feel my limbs losing their strength and my mouth drying up. My body is trembling and my hair is standing on end"

In this verse we find the clear description of a very powerful emotion that causes visible physical symptoms. There are many negative and positive emotions that have such an effect, both on the material and the spiritual level - including the highest level of transcendental ecstasy known as *mahabhava*. An apparently pitiable condition in devotional service may appear to be distressing to the inexperienced student, but the feelings of the devotee in this pitiable condition are actually ecstatic.

Because of the agitation of the *pranas* in the body, normal breathing is disrupted (temporarily suspended, slowed down, or fastened considerably), the energy drains from the limbs sometimes to the point of losing external consciousness, hair stands on end and the skin can have goose pimples or rashes and eruptions, the eyes and/or the mouth widen uncontrollably, the muscles contract to the point of partially retracting limbs into the body, the voice falters or babbles or disappears altogether. There can be a sudden fever, crying cold or hot tears (respectively for joy or anger/sorrow), hot or cold perspiration (respectively for relief or fear), a change in the color of face and sometimes even body and hair, reddening and itching sensation in the eyes, and even foam at the mouth. They are expressed in 31 emotions as disappointment, lamentation, humility, guilt, fatigue, intoxication, pride, doubt, apprehension or fear, intense feelings of attraction, madness, forgetfulness, disease, confusion, death, laziness, inertness, bashfulness, concealment, remembrance, argumentativeness, anxiety, thoughtfulness or moroseness, endurance, happiness or jubilation, eagerness, haughtiness, envy, impudence, dizziness and alertness.

The feelings of disappointment are caused by inner conflict when one is forced to behave in a way that is contrary to one's desires and expectations - specifically, to perform an action that is perceived as unethical, detestable, forbidden, or dishonorable.

Lamentation (as in Arjuna's case) is a stronger feeling and is experienced in a very difficult situation, especially when one's purpose of life is questioned or endangered, when there is no way out of an impending disaster, or when one feels guilty in some way. Fear is certainly one of the emotions that can cause such symptoms, but in Arjuna's case it is not fear for himself, but fear for the far-reaching consequences of the war for the kingdom and the entire world. It is fear for the global disaster, born from the compassion for an immense amount of sufferings that could have been avoided if Duryodhana had been more reasonable.

There is not one single word, in the original text of *Gita*, from which we can draw the conclusion that Arjuna's mind is disturbed by the fear of losing his own life. The previous verses have clearly expressed his horror for a very unjust situation where people were forced to fight against their dearest friends and relatives, and no mention was made about Arjuna's own personal danger.

The next verses will repeat the same concerns. Arjuna does not see any good coming from this war, where people who are supposed to be affectionate to each other and to cooperate for the progress of society, will instead kill each other. In fact, Arjuna clearly and repeatedly states that he prefers to sacrifice his own life, to die without even trying to

defend himself, rather than becoming responsible for such a disastrous massacre. Verses 37 and 38 of this chapter clearly say that Arjuna knows that the assembled warriors are not aware of the consequences of the battle for their own families and for society in general.

Some commentators offensively argue that Arjuna has sunk so deeply in his hysterical fears and delusion that he is saying exactly the opposite of what he really thinks. If this were true, Krishna at least would have detected the lie and corrected Arjuna, telling him very clearly that he was actually just fearing for his own life.

On the contrary, in verses 35 and 36 of the second chapter Krishna clearly states that only superficial and envious people would think or insinuate that Arjuna is a coward. Showing fear for one's own life while facing a battle is the greater disgrace for a *kshatriya* and demonstrates his total lack of qualification, and this is obviously not Arjuna's case.

The subsequent instructions offered by Krishna to Arjuna are also in accordance with the nature of Arjuna's feelings as clearly expressed by him.

गाण्डीवं स्रंसते हस्तात्त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते ।

gāṇḍīvaṁ sraṁsate hastāttvakcaiva paridahyate ।

न च शक्नोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ॥ १-३० ॥

na ca śaknomyavasthātum bhramatīva ca me manaḥ । । 1-30 । ।

gandivam: Gandiva (the bow); *sraṁsate:* slips; *hastat:* from the hand; *tvak:* the skin; *ca:* and; *eva:* certainly; *paridahyate:* is burning; *na:* not; *ca:* and; *śaknomy:* I am able; *avasthatum:* to remain; *bhramati:* is confused; *eva:* certainly; *ca:* and; *me:* my; *manah:* mind.

"(my bow) Gandiva slips from my hand and (I feel) my skin burning.
I cannot keep my stand any more and my mind is confused.."

Gandiva is the name of Arjuna's famous bow. It is said it was made by Brahma himself and gifted to Arjuna by Agni the Deva of fire, as a token of gratitude when Arjuna offered him the Khandava forest, full of medicinal herbs. On that occasion, Agni also offered the famous Chakra to Krishna.

In this verse, Arjuna mentions some more of the physical symptoms of his strong emotions. The burning sensation of the skin seems to be particularly important, because it shows that the temperature of his body has risen - more likely a result of anguish and anger than of fear, that usually tends to lower the body's temperature.

Arjuna is not ashamed to confess that his mind is confused and doubtful, and that the inner conflict is sapping his energies. Confusion is generated when the mind is contemplating a choice between two possible courses of action but is unable to decide which way to go. Both options appear to be equally unfeasible or painful, or leading to very similar consequences. In this situation, simultaneous impulses pull the will power in opposite directions, creating a tension that can become unbearable; the stress can be

much more exhausting than any hard work, even if nothing is accomplished in the process.

निमित्तानि च पश्यामि विपरीतानि केशव ।

nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava ।

न च श्रेयोऽनुपश्यामि हत्वा स्वजनमाहवे ॥ १-३१ ॥

na ca śreya'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanamāhave ॥ 1-31 ॥

nimittani: cause of suffering/instrument; *ca*: and; *pasyami*: I see; *viparitani*: opposite; *kesava*: O Keshava; *na*: not; *ca*: and; *sreyah*: good result; *anupasyami*: I see; *hatva*: by killing; *sva-janam*: one's own (family and friends); *ahave*: in battle.

"O Keshava (Arjuna), I see (great) cause of sufferings in front (of us) /mere instruments turned one against the other. I do not foresee any good coming from killing one's own (friends and relatives) in a war."

In this verse Krishna is called Keshava, "the killer of the Keshi demon", to indicate that he can destroy the demons of doubt and confusion. Keshi was one of the *asuras* who became allies of Kamsa and went to Gokula Vrindavana to try to kill Krishna in his childhood. Another meaning of Keshava is given as follows: Ka refers to Brahma, Isha refers to Shiva, and *van* or *vati* means "that gives power to", indicating that Krishna is none other than Vishnu himself. Depending on the context, the name Ka is sometimes used also to indicate Vishnu, Yama, Garuda, or the atman. In this way, the name Keshava can come to convey a great number of meanings.

The words *nimittani viparitani* may be interpreted in two different ways: a) cause of suffering and b) instruments turned against each other. In this verse the two meanings reinforce each other beautifully, creating a double-entendre.

What really troubles Arjuna is the fact that the warriors on the battlefield are forced to fight against each other, forgetting their mutual affection. In the *kshatriya* code of honor, fighting is a religious duty when it is aimed at protecting oneself and one's dependents from the attack of evil aggressors.

It is said that, after death, the warriors killed in a righteous battle attain the same exalted position of the *sannyasis* who engaged in yoga. However, the act of killing does not give the same result of being killed: even the righteous killing of aggressors in a fair battle involves a sinful reaction, therefore the *kshatriyas* must perform purification rituals and distribute charity and do other good deeds. If killing a criminal that is engaged in a violent act and a hostile invader is a sin, how more serious will be the karmic consequences of killing people who are fundamentally good, and have been forced to gather on the battlefield in a way or another.

Svajanam or "one's own people" indicates the natural hesitation that a good person feels about fighting against his own people – members of one's family, one's lineage, one's

community, one's country, one's culture, one's ideology, one's religious tradition. In ordinary circumstances loyalty to these forms of kinship is advisable because it fosters mutual support, encouragement and cooperation, but such considerations are relative and not absolute. We should never forget our real nature and purpose of life, because when we forget them, we become prisoners of the temporary material perception. Identification and attachment with such groups are considered expanded forms of selfishness and delusion and one should not hesitate to give them up for the defense of Dharma. Krishna calls this hesitation and material identification as "weakness of the heart".

न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च ।

na kāṅkṣe vijayaṁ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṁ sukhāni ca ।

किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा ॥ १-३२ ॥

kiṁ no rājyena govinda kiṁ bhogairjīvitena vā ।। 1-32 ।।

na: not; *kāṅkṣe:* I desire; *vijayaṁ:* victory; *kṛṣṇa:* o Krishna; *na:* not; *ca:* and; *rājyaṁ:* the kingdom; *sukhāni:* the joys; *ca:* and; *kiṁ:* what; *no:* to us; *rājyena:* with a kingdom; *govinda:* o Govinda; *kiṁ:* what; *bhogair:* with the pleasures; *jīvitena:* with life; *vā:* even.

"O Krishna, I do not desire victory, nor the joys of/or a kingdom.

O Govinda (Krishna), what is a kingdom to us, what are the pleasures of/or life itself,"

The name Krishna is explained as having different meanings.

One is "black", and refers to the dark complexion of Krishna's body, compared to a blue lotus. Another is "attractive", as deriving from the root *karsh*.

In the previous verses, Krishna has been addressed with a series of meaningful names:

* Madhava (14, 37), to mean that he is the consort of the Mother Goddess

* Hrishikesha (15, 21, 24), to mean that he perfectly controls the senses

* Acyuta (21), to mean that he is never diminished by any position

* Keshava (31), to mean that he can destroy the demon of doubt

In this verse Krishna is called Govinda, "he who knows and protects earth, the cows and the senses of the living beings" - as the word *go* has all these meanings.

This name refers to the healthy and *dharmic* enjoyment of the pleasures of this world against the greedy and *adharmic* lust for possession and domination that leads man to commit heinous crimes and cause the degradation of society and unnecessary sufferings to everyone.

Similarly, in verses 36, 39 and 44 Krishna will be called Janardana, "he who animates the people", to associate the healthy pleasures of life with life itself and the pursuit of happiness. Another implication of the use of this name consists in remembering that Krishna is he who inspires people into action.

The name Madhava, used in verse 14 and again in verse 37, implies that being the husband of the Mother Goddess, Krishna is the father of all living beings and therefore he

cares for their happiness and protection, because they are his family.

The name Madhusudana, used in verse 35, means “the slayer of demon Madhu”, and also implies the idea that Krishna can destroy all inauspiciousness.

In this verse, Arjuna clearly states that he is not interested in any personal benefit that may come from victory in the battle - not even in victory itself. So many times he has already demonstrated that he is fully renounced, although he is faithfully committed to performing all his duties - to the family, to the kingdom, to society at large.

He has come to the battlefield because that his duty is to protect the kingdom and the people - but what will the benefit be, if everybody gets killed?

येषामर्थे काङ्क्षितं नो राज्यं भोगाः सुखानि च ।

yeṣāmarthe kāṅkṣitaṁ no rājyaṁ bhogāḥ sukhāni ca ।

त इमेऽवस्थिता युद्धे प्राणांस्त्यक्त्वा धनानि च ॥ १-३३ ॥

ta ime'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇānstyaktvā dhanāni ca ॥ 1-33 ॥

yesham: of them; *arthe*: for the sake; *kankshitam*: is desired; *no*: by us; *rajyam*: kingdom; *bhogah*: pleasure; *sukhani*: joys; *ca*: and; *te*: them; *ime*: these; *avasthita*: situated; *yuddhe*: in battle; *pranan*: the life; *tyaktva*: giving up; *dhanani*: the riches; *ca*: and.

"when those for whose sake we desire (such good things as) kingdom, pleasures and happiness, all these (people) who are positioned here are going to sacrifice their life and possessions, the teachers, the fathers, the sons, as well as grandfathers,"

Vedic civilization is organized according to the principle of *para upakara*, or "living/working for the benefit of others". In this way all individuals work to sustain one another, generating a positive sense of cooperation, affection and support - the fundamental principle that is also called Dharma.

The natural tendency of the soul is to serve, to do something for others - either as a social occupation, or in one's personal dealings especially with family, friends, etc. The underlying principle is reciprocation - the recognition of the care and affection that other people have lavished upon us since birth, and of our debt towards them and our duty towards the next generations.

This ensures that each individual is very well taken care of, because all the members of society and family can do much more for each individual much more than what s/he would be able to do for him/herself. For this purpose, a role in society is assigned according to the *guna* and *karma* of the individual's body and mind.

However, excessive identification with one's body and mind (*ahankara*) creates self-centeredness and selfishness - where "self" is mistakenly perceived as the body and mind. Then the natural tendency to serve is transferred to what is perceived as the benefit of one's body and mind, with the endless pursuit of one's own sense gratification at the gross and subtle levels. In this way all individuals work against one another, generating a

negative sense of competition, envy and hostility - that are the opposite of the fundamental principle called Dharma, and are therefore called Adharma.

A folkloristic story of rather recent origin within the New Age movement gives a similar message by offering an explanation about the difference of "heaven" and "hell". A man is visiting both, and he notices that in both cases there are lots of people sitting at a banquet, with a great table filled with all types of wonderful foods. And in both cases, people have very long spoons that it is impossible to use to feed oneself.

The difference is that in heaven people enjoy by feeding each other across the table, while in hell people insist in trying to get the spoon each into their own mouth and they quarrel among them, snatching one another's spoon to try and see if the neighbor's spoon will work better than one's own.

Now, we need to go one step beyond this, because this image of heaven and hell is nothing more than the conditions of human society in this universe, because of the different perception of the meaning of "self".

In a hellish society, "self" is believed to be the material body and mind.

In a heavenly society, "self" is perceived as a healthy and active member of the *varnashrama dharma*, that performs his/her duties without concern for one's personal advantage but as a natural service to the Virat Purusha, the Universal Form of God described in the *Purusha sukta*, and whose bodily limbs constitute the different members of society.

At the transcendental level, the "self" is realized as the Supreme Brahman, of whom all the *jivatmas* are parts and parcels. This vision raises us beyond the duality of this world and integrates our vision of all existences in the greater understanding of things, both material and spiritual.

For the practical purposes of living in this universe, we need to move from the hellish mentality to the heavenly mentality in order to support the maintenance of the universe, but in order to attain liberation we need to situate ourselves on the transcendental awareness.

The term *tyaktva*, "giving up" as referred to the life and possessions of the warriors gathered on the battlefield obviously does not mean that they are already dead or fallen into extreme poverty, and therefore some commentators find exception to the expression used in the verse.

However, it is a fact that a true *kshatriya* must go into the battle in a spirit of total renunciation, giving up all attachments to one's wealth and even to one's life, otherwise the thoughts about these will create the fear of losing them, and fear is the last thing that a *kshatriya* can entertain while on the battlefield, and not only out of considerations of personal honor. Fear distracts, paralyzes and robs one of intelligence, strength and wisdom, and triggers foolish actions that will seriously endanger not only the success of the battle but even one's own life for which we fear.

आचार्याः पितरः पुत्रास्तथैव च पितामहाः ।

ācāryāḥ pitarāḥ putrāstathaiva ca pitāmahāḥ ।

मातुलाः श्वशुराः पौत्राः श्यालाः सम्बन्धिनस्तथा ॥ १-३४ ॥

mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pautrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinastathā ॥ 1-34 ॥

acaryah: teachers; *pitarah*: fathers; *putrah*: sons; *tatha*: also; *eva*: certainly; *ca*: and; *pitamahah*: grandfathers; *matulah*: maternal uncles; *svasurah*: fathers in law; *pautrah*: grandchildren; *syalah*: brothers in law; *sambandhinah*: bound by ties (of affection); *tatha*: also.

"teachers, fathers, sons, as well as grandfathers, uncles, fathers in law, nephews, brothers in law, relatives and friends bound by reciprocal relationships"

Family is certainly very important for the progressive development of the individual and of society as well. The school of life is all about relationships, how we deal with each other, how we relate with each other, and how we love and support each other, how we learn to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good and to give up our selfish attachments. However, this applies to the ideal family life, that is governed by dharmic principles. On the other hand, the materialistic tendency towards adharma that is found in conditioned souls can easily transform family life into a dark hellish hole (*andha kupa*), as explained by Prahlada in *Bhagavata purana* (7.5.5).

The sense of bodily identification and material attachment grow from the physical attraction between man and woman - called *hridaya granthi*, the "knot of the heart" (*pumsah striya mithuni-bhavam etam taylor mitho hrdaya-granthih ahuh*, 5.5.8). As explained by many great souls, including Kapila (3.26.2) and Rishabhadeva (5.5.14), this knot must be cut by applying knowledge. In the absence of proper knowledge, ignorance thrives, and ignorance causes people to mistake *dharma* for *adharma*, and *adharma* for *dharma* (18.32). Thus, instead of becoming a support for the progress of the individual and society, family can become the cause for disaster.

Many people seem to believe that the highest religious principle in Hinduism consists in being attached to family relationships and social conventions beyond all other considerations.

For these people, even the basic principles of religion - truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness, justice, etc and the teachings of the genuine *shastra* - are expected to take a back seat to favor blind obedience and respect for one's family elders and for teachers or social authorities, no matter how senile, ignorant or degraded. *Gita* certainly does not support such a vision. Rather Krishna will scold Arjuna for contemplating the very idea. The same reasoning applies to the "family of the guru", or *gurukula* - loyalty to one's spiritual lineage is certainly good, but it should never become more important than loyalty to dharma and the proper cultivation of knowledge.

Another important point is that we should realize that our affinities for relatives are... "relative" and only pertain to the gross body. Physical DNA has no relevance in the matter of intellectual, moral, cultural, or spiritual affinity, and although it is true that the

environment and the stimulation received within the family can greatly influence a mind, we can easily verify that sometimes people are really too different and there is nothing that can be done to bridge the gap even between different children of the same two parents.

एतान्न हन्तुमिच्छामि घ्नतोऽपि मधुसूदन ।

etānna hantumicchāmi ghnato'pi madhusūdana ।

अपि त्रैलोक्यराज्यस्य हेतोः किं नु महीकृते ॥ १-३५ ॥

api trailokyarājyasya hetoḥ kiṁ nu mahīkṛte ।। 1-35।।

etan: these; *na:* not; *hantum:* to kill; *icchami:* I desire; *ghnatah:* being killed; *api:* even; *madhusudana:* o killer of Madhu; *api:* even; *trailokya:* the three worlds; *rajyasya:* of the kingdom; *hetoh:* cause; *kim nu:* what (to speak of); *mahi krite:* for the earth.

"O Madhusudana (Krishna), for all of them I can never wish the fate of killing or being killed, even for the purpose of the crown of all the three worlds, what to speak of this planet only."

Madhusudana means "killer of Madhu". Madhu was an *asura* (a demoniac personality) that appeared at the beginning of creation and attacked Brahma, thus threatening to disrupt the proper development and progress of the universe. Awakened by Brahma from his creative sleep, Vishnu solved the problem by killing the *asura*.

In this verse, Arjuna mentions the name of Madhusudana to express his mixed feelings. It is true that Vishnu, the supreme Dharma, killed the *asura* that constituted an obstacle to the path of progress of the universe - but the warriors gathered on the battlefield at Kurukshetra are not *asuras* or demons: they are just confused and misguided family people. On the other hand, the *asura* Madhu is considered a personification of the negative influence of doubt and confusion, therefore indirectly Arjuna is already asking Krishna to kill his doubts and confusion.

Ichhami means "I desire/wish". Arjuna is clearly saying that, if he could have it his way, he would like everyone to live peacefully and progressively, cooperating and working for the benefit of the kingdom, without having to kill or be killed.

The incredibly valuable opportunity of the human form of life is not meant to be thrown away because of some stupid attachment to things that are very temporary anyway - properties, position, power to control, and so on.

The purpose of human life is to progress from ignorance to knowledge - from the material to the spiritual, from the temporary to the permanent, from the illusory to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality: *asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor ma amrtam gamaya* (*Brhad aranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28).

This can be done by seeking the knowledge of Brahman: *athato brahma jijnasa* (*Brahma/Vedanta sutras*, 1). When we have such an important and urgent task in front of

us, why should we waste our greatest opportunity by playing war and trying to control kingdoms? Even worse than that, the warriors supporting Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra are fighting against dharma, therefore they are not only making the huge mistake of throwing away their own valuable lives, but they are also accumulating bad karma, and this may further delay their future progress.

Some foolish people think that Arjuna was scared about losing one's life or losing the battle to a numerically superior enemy, but the situation is much more serious.

He clearly said - and he will say again - that he is ready to die at any time, but his heart is heavy with the compassion of seeing all these people who have forgotten the real purpose of life.

निहत्य धार्तराष्ट्रान्नः का प्रीतिः स्याज्जनार्दन ।

nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrānnaḥ kā prītiḥ syājjanārdana ।

पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान्हत्वैतानाततायिनः ॥ १-३६ ॥

pāpamevāśrayedasmānhatvaitānātātāyinaḥ ॥ 1-36 ॥

nihatya: killing; *dhartarashtran*: the (supporters of) Dhritarashtra; *nah*: our; *ka*: what; *prītiḥ*: benefit/pleasure; *syat*:(there) will be; *janardana* :o Janardana; *papam*: sin; *eva*: certainly; *asrayet*; will accept; *asman*: us; *hatva*: killing; *etan*: these; *atatayinah*: aggressors.

"O Janardana (Krishna), the killing of the sons of Dhritarashtra would not give us any pleasure or benefit/if the sons of Dhritarashtra are killed, we would not find any pleasure in the world any more. We will be stained by sin if we accept the killing of these (people, although they are) aggressors,"

Arjuna's words in this verse can be interpreted at two different levels. The most immediate is that Arjuna has no resentment or hatred towards the people fighting to support Dhritarashtra, and therefore he will not be happy to see them killed. He has already clarified that he is not interested in winning the kingdom, so there would not be any benefit from such deaths either.

Another level of meaning lays in Arjuna's deep compassion and sense of responsibility - that makes him think that the death of all these people will devastate his consciousness so much that he would never be able to find pleasure in anything again.

Atatayina means "aggressor". *Artha shastra* teaches:

agnido garadas caiva sastra-panir dhanapahah

kshetra darapahari ca shadete atatayinah

"One who attacks with fire, with poison, or holding weapons in hands, one who takes away (someone else's) wealth/possessions, land or wife: these are the six types of criminal aggressors."

In Vedic society everyone is implicitly authorized to defend himself and his family,

subordinates and property from such aggressors. Therefore there is no need for jails, lawyers or even judges or police like in the present faulty system that is very prone to judicial mistakes and abuses, unable to prevent aggressions, and likely to produce even more degradation and violence as convicts are locked up in a very unhealthy and non-progressive situation - because the idea of the sentence is "punishment" by deprivation and mistreatment. The people who work in jails also develop a very unhealthy mentality. On the other hand, we know that prevention is the best cure, and most cases of violent aggressions are easily avoided when the criminal fears that the intended victim could be able to fight back effectively.

The principle of non-violence teaches that one should not attack others for one's own greed or lust or hatred, but makes provisions for legitimate defense that include not only one's self but also one's family and subordinates, home, possessions and land.

Legitimate defense must be proportionate in the use of force, but anyone who attacks with dangerous weapons deserves to be killed in combat. Also, one who attacks with poison or fire should be stopped at all costs even if this means killing the culprit caught in the act.

A thief, a kidnapper or a rapist is also an aggressor and the use of force - even lethal force - against such criminals is implicitly approved by Vedic dharma.

Contemporary non-vedic societies try to defend the "human rights" of criminals by limiting the provisions for individual self-defense and giving more powers to "professional police", but the system can easily be manipulated by clever, ruthless and cynical people and end up punishing the victims instead of the aggressors.

Kshatriyas have the duty to help those people who do not have sufficient strength or skill to defend themselves. Ideally, this is supposed to be the job of policemen, but according to the Vedic system a *kshatriya* is directly responsible for the protection and well being of the *prajas* of the land he surveys, and is also entitled to directly enjoy the service and respect of such *prajas*. The centralized system of police-judges-courts-government officers inevitably becomes overcomplicated, politicized, impersonal and unjust, favoring corrupt and manipulative people rather than honest, responsible and brave ones.

And in extreme situations, it favors the development of "alternative government organizations" such as the various kinds of mafia, where the "boss" replaces the king.

According to the Vedic system, every village or neighborhood should have a king that is capable of protecting the *prajas*. A king needs to constantly patrol the kingdom and to be readily accessible to all the subjects who have any complaints. This becomes possible when there is a sufficient number of local kings, as it was the norm in Vedic times.

The role of the emperor, or "king of kings" was to help the local *rajas* or kings who accepted his protection, not to appoint or demote them or interfere with local governments in any way, unless of course a local king would become *adharmic* and his subjects approached the emperor for protection. The word *papam* is translated as "sin", but it does not have the exact same meaning of the English word, that is influenced by Christian semantics. The Vedic meaning is more about feelings of responsibility for a bad action, expecting bad consequences, and contamination of the consciousness.

तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान्स्वबान्धवान् ।

tas mānnār hā vayaṁ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrānsvabāndhavān ।

स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥ १-३७ ॥

svajanam hi katham hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādharma ॥ 1-37 ॥

tasmat: therefore; *na*: not; *arha*: is befitting; *vayam*: to us; *hantum*: to kill; *dhartarashtran*: the (supporters) of Dhritarashtra; *sa-bandhavan*: together with their dear (relatives); *sva-janam*: one's own people; *hi*: certainly; *katham*: how; *hatva*: by killing; *sukhinah*: happy; *syama*: we will be; *madhava*: o husband of the Mother.

"therefore it is not befitting for us (to cause) the killing of the supporters of Dhritarashtra along with their friends and relatives. O Krishna, how it is possible to find happiness when our friends and relatives are killed?"

The word *arha*, "befitting", conveys a meaning of honor and nobility, moral superiority, compassion and benevolence, and is often used in prayers when addressing a divine personality to beg for forgiveness or help. People who have a saintly character and a compassionate heart are always ready to forgive and sometimes even to forget, or even tolerate the bad behavior of others without taking offense. After all, each and every person in this world is a child of the Mother Goddess, and children are easily forgiven because they do not easily understand the bad consequences of their actions. Sometimes parents have to be a little hard with their children when circumstances require it, but they are never happy about that, and before thinking about a punishment they should extensively try all other options. As always, prevention is better than cure. Arjuna is still hoping against hope that the supporters of Dhritarashtra could be made to see reason and convinced to return on their disastrous decision to fight. The expression *sva-janam* does not refer only to Arjuna's relatives, but also to the relatives of Dhritarashtra's supporters, who will kill their own people or be killed by their own people - such a horrible act, that the mighty warrior Arjuna, who faced so many battles and bravely stared in death's face so many times, cannot tolerate the very idea.

यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभोपहतचेतसः ।

yadyapyete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah ।

कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रद्रोहे च पातकम् ॥ १-३८ ॥

kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣam mitradrohe ca pātakam ॥ 1-38 ॥

yadi: if; *api*: even; *ete*: these; *na*: not; *paśyanti*: see; *lobha*: by greed; *apahata*: stolen; *cetasah*: consciousness; *kula*: family; *kshaya*: destroying; *kritam*: action;

dosham: fault; *mitra*: friends; *drohe*: becoming hostile; *ca*: and; *patakam*: sin.

"Even if these (people) cannot see (such fault) because their mind is confused by greed, it is (still) a grave mistake to destroy one's own family, is a sin to turn against one's friends."

Arjuna knows that the supporters of Dhritarashtra are temporarily blinded by greed (their own greed or the greed of their lieges) and therefore remain unable to realize the extent of their disastrous mistake. More explanation about this mechanism will be given by Krishna later (2.62-64) and again (3.36-43) on the request of Arjuna: "what compels a person to commit sins, even without desiring it?"

The key factors for sin as described by Krishna as *kama* and *krodha*: *dhyayato visayan pumsah sangas tesupajayate sagat sanjayate kamah, kamat krodho 'bhijayate*.

Kama is desire for possession and enjoyment of the objects of the senses, while *lobha* is the addiction to such desire, that creates an increasing insatiable need for this feeling of possession and enjoyment. Since it is insatiable, frustration naturally ensues, and from frustration, a blinding anger arises. Arjuna is a good-natured, sensible and self-disciplined person, who has been well trained to honor Dharma, and knows how to regulate himself in the matter of *kama* and *krodha*. Therefore he can objectively observe the behavior of Dhritarashtra and his sons, and correctly put the finger on the root of the problem.

Realizing that these people are blinded by greed and lust, he rejoices in the fact that he is not suffering from the same disease, and he reasons that those who have a clear vision should not commit the same mistake of those who are blind.

The term *droha*, "turning against", is used to describe the ungrateful behavior of one who becomes unjustly hostile towards persons who have benefited him in the past - such as loving parents, benevolent relatives, expert and sincere teachers, and so on.

Arjuna is mostly thinking about Bhishma and Drona, who have been affectionate and benevolent to him as a child, and that, by their aggression on the battlefield, seem to have totally forgotten about Dharma and common sense. By forcing him to fight against them, Bhishma and Drona are implicitly stating that they approve Arjuna's fighting against them and even killing them in battle - something that is against ethics as well as against the sacred bond of gratefulness.

Again, the concept of "sin" mentioned here (*patakam*) is different from the Christian concept.

कथं न ज्ञेयमस्माभिः पापादस्मान्निवर्तितुम् ।

katham na jñeyamasmābhiḥ pāpādasmanñivartitum ।

कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्विर्जनार्दन ॥ १-३९ ॥

kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣaṁ prapaśyadbhirjanārdana ॥ 1-39 ॥

katham: how; *na*: not; *jneyam*: known; *asmabhiḥ*: by us; *papat*: from crime; *asmat*: these; *nivartitum*: to stop; *kula*: family; *kshaya*: destruction; *kritam*: action; *dosham*:

faulty; *prapasyadbhih*: by those who see; *janardana*: o Janardana.

"O Janardana (Krishna), how could we, who see (things as they are), not know how to stop these (people) from (committing) the sin of destroying their families?"

Arjuna's despair goes very deep, and takes him to questioning Krishna himself and his mission. The word *asmabhih*, "by us", in fact includes Krishna who is sitting with him on the chariot, also ready for the battle.

Many intelligent people become atheists or agnostics after observing all the injustice and sufferings that characterize life in this world, and argue that, if God is there and is omnipotent and benevolent to his creatures, he should not allow such things to happen. This, however, is mainly due to the incorrect idea of God that has been presented by the abrahamic faiths on the basis of the texts they consider their sacred scriptures and of the direct and consistent example of their religious leaders in history.

Contrarily to the abrahamic concept, according to the vedic concept questioning the existence of God or God's ways is not considered as blasphemy or an offense.

In the Vedic vision, clearly expressed in *Gita*, God does not judge anyone and does not punish anyone, does not favor anyone and does not expect any sectarian allegiance from anyone. The same opportunities are offered to all living beings, who are responsible for their own evolution along a great number of reincarnations, in which they can learn how to deal with the basic rules of the game - action and reaction, *dharma* and *adharma*, progress and degradation. Believing or not believing in God does not make any difference for the effect of one's actions. One can become free from karma not by "believing in God" but by becoming selfless and dutiful, and by observing the fundamental and universal principles of dharma: truthfulness/honesty/sincerity, compassion/benevolence, cleanliness/purity of heart/detachment, and self-discipline. So what's God's role in the universe? Why does the Divine incarnate and descend into this world?

Later on (4.8) Krishna will explain that the Divine mission in this world is to protect the good people, destroy the evil doers, and establish the correct information about the universal principles of *dharma*.

Arjuna already knows that, because he is an eternal companion/emanation of God, and therefore he wants Krishna to explain why such a mission could not be accomplished without causing so much suffering to people who are fundamentally good or innocent, like the children of the families that are going to be destroyed in this war.

Why couldn't Krishna stop the nonsense in some other way? Why didn't he change the minds of Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana, making them see sense?

कुलक्षये प्रणश्यन्ति कुलधर्माः सनातनाः ।

kulakṣaye praṇaśyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanaḥ ।

धर्मे नष्टे कुलं कृत्स्नमधर्मोऽभिभवत्युत ॥ १-४० ॥

dharme naṣṭe kulam kṛtsnamadharma'bhivhavatyuta ।। 1-40 ।।

kula: family; *kshaye*: in the destruction; *pranasyanti*: become destroyed; *kula*: the family; *dharmah*: the (traditions of) ethical principles; *sanatanah*: eternal; *dharme*: in the dharma; *naste*: destroyed; *kulam*: the family; *kritsnam*: completed; *adharmo*: adharma; *abhibhavati*: becomes; *uta*: it is said.

"When a family is destroyed, the eternal religious principles of the family are destroyed (too), and when *dharma* is destroyed the entire tradition goes lost and turns into *adharma*."

The *sanatana dharma* of the *kula* or family does not refer to the occupational duties in society (which would be called *sva-dharma*) but to the eternal, universal and fundamental religious principles such as truthfulness, compassion, cleanliness and self-control. It also refers to those religious and ritualistic duties - such as *samskaras* and *karmas* - that help all the family members to keep their consciousness on the sattvic level, and that must be performed continuously. Such activities require the direct and indirect cooperation of all family members, and especially of the bread-winners of the house who must collect the required materials for the rituals as well as the life necessities for the entire family.

A fratricidal war like the one that is going to start at Kurukshetra will deprive many families of all active males, leaving their women and children unprotected to fend and care for themselves. This creates a very awkward situation because women are forced to carry a very heavy burden - the demanding duties of motherhood and the basic chores of daily life - materially and spiritually, as they also must take care of the daily house rituals - plus the responsibility of earning a livelihood for themselves and their children and ensuring protection from external threats as well, which ordinarily should fall on the males in the family. Such burden can become intolerable especially for those women called *sadhya vadhu*, i.e. ordinary girls who simply aspired to marry and settle as housewives and mothers.

When the task of following the universal and eternal principles of *dharma* becomes problematic due to very difficult circumstances and unfortunate compromises are forced on people who must resort to questionable actions just to survive, *adharma* gradually becomes prominent until it is considered the norm in the family and then in society. This particularly applies to women, who in normal times are protected and cared for, without being required to fend for themselves or to face hardships. Women are the guardians of *dharma* in the family just like the *brahmanas* are the guardians of *dharma* in society, precisely because/when they are respected and protected, and all their needs are taken care of. *Brahmanas*, too, can easily fall and become degraded when they are not properly protected and supported, and when they are forced to fend and care for themselves and to protect themselves.

Women by nature are very inclined to religion and *dharma*, as well as to religious rituals and celebrations as social functions, and they are the first natural teachers for all. All teachings – spiritual and religious as well as ethical and practical – received in early childhood are critical for a person's subsequent education and training, therefore women should also be facilitated in the study of scriptures and philosophy as much as they are able and willing to learn, also with the aid of the stories (*Puranas* and *Itihasas*) that were specifically compiled to facilitate this learning.

अधर्माभिभवात्कृष्ण प्रदुष्यन्ति कुलस्त्रियः ।

adharmābhibhavātkṛṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyaḥ ।

स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु वार्ष्णेय जायते वर्णसङ्करः ॥ १-४१ ॥

strīṣu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṅkaraḥ ॥ 1-41 ॥

adharmā: adharma; *abhibhavat*: becomes; *krishna*: o Krishna; *pradushyanti*: become faulty; *kula*: family; *striyah*: the women; *strisu*: in the women; *dushtasu*: bad; *varshneya*: o descendent of Vrishni; *jayate*: is born; *varna*: varna; *sankarah*: confused.

"O Krishna, when adharma becomes predominant the women of the family become compromised, and when the women become bad, O descendent of Vrishni (Krishna), an unqualified progeny is born."

When the eternal and universal principles of religion become weaker and compromised in a family or tradition because of the disappearance of the protectors and providers, women (like *brahmanas* in society) become the easiest target for exploitation and their degradation and sufferings can create a new generation that is not capable, willing or ready to uphold *dharma*.

The definition *dushta stri* or "bad woman" is often misunderstood in a society that does not respect women, to mean a woman who does not submissively accept the adharmic behaviors, teachings or orders of degraded males. In a male-dominated society women become mere objects of exploitation or possession, and are denied all authority and space for action about *dharma*, although by nature they are more inclined to dharma, religion and spirituality than men.

When religious/spiritual knowledge and all the religious rituals are properly taught and observed, the women of the family do not become corrupt or "bad".

The definition *varna sankara* does not refer to illegitimate children begotten outside the conventional marriage or in "mixed caste" marriages, but includes all children who take birth in an unfavorable environment where women are not protected, respected and supported appropriately, and who therefore grow up insecure, scared and confused.

In the early stages of life – from conception to adolescence – children consider themselves and are considered by others as an extension of their mothers. If their mothers suffer from low self-esteem, ignorance, meanness or a narrow mentality, the children will tend to develop similar subconscious characteristics.

Such psychological problems may aggregate to cause serious inferiority complexes that may also manifest as false superiority complexes, as in the case of the smallest dogs who feel the need to bark the loudest. Individual psychological imbalances also spread into the community and society at large, creating a hellish way of life. When women suffer anxiety, doubt, and concern for their safety and the safety of their children, they can become ruthless and forget the principles of religion in order to ensure their personal

benefit at the cost of the sufferings of others. Children born from such mothers are more vulnerable in their ethical and spiritual principles, and when they become ruthless, too, they turn family and society into a hellish place where *adharma* feeds itself in a vicious circle. Arjuna calls Krishna "descendent of Vrishni" to highlight the fact that Krishna himself honored the ancestors of his family.

सङ्करो नरकायैव कुलघ्नानां कुलस्य च ।

saṅkaro narakāyaiva kulaghñānām kulasya ca ।

पतन्ति पितरो ह्येषां लुप्तपिण्डोदकक्रियाः ॥ १-४२ ॥

patanti pitaro hyeṣām luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ ।। 1-42।।

sankarah: confused (progeny); *narakaya:* hellish; *eva:* certainly; *kula:* family; *ghnanam:* the killers; *kulasya:* of the family; *ca:* and; *patanti:* fall down; *pitarah:* the ancestors; *hi:* certainly; *esham:* of them; *luptah:* abandoned; *pinda:* pinda; *udaka:* water; *kriyah:* the duty.

"These confused (descendents) create a hellish situation both for the family and for those who have destroyed the family. Also the forefathers suffer, because the offerings of food and water are neglected."

According to the *karma kanda* of the *smriti*, the descendents of a family have the duty to remember their ancestors during their daily rituals and to offer them oblations of consecrated food and water so that they can remain in the higher planets called Pitriloka to enjoy a heavenly life, or at least get a good reincarnation.

Pinda means "lump/ball" and is a type of food consisting in balls of cooked rice that must be prepared by the wife of the head of the family or obtained from a Vishnu temple.

This traditional ritual is called *Sraddha* and it is performed on three occasions:

1. in the period immediately after the death of the family member, and specifically on the 10th, 11th and 12th day after death
2. every year on the anniversary day of death, and
3. every year during the *Pitri paksha*, especially the 13th and the 14th day called *Mahalaya*

Some commentators believe that this verse disqualifies "illegitimate children" born of mixed caste marriages from offering oblations to the ancestors, but they forget that in Vedic culture there is no such thing as "illegitimate child", as there are several types of marriage and they are all considered lawful. The distinction usually made about *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages, by which the union of a man of a lower *varna* with a woman of a higher *varna* is considered inauspicious, is also only a relative indication and it should not be taken as an iron rule. It is a fact that a woman who is more qualified than her husband can feel frustrated and diminished in performing duties and living in an environment that are below her, but it is also said that women are a category to themselves, and do not belong to any specific *varna*.

Another observation is that traditionally oblations can be legitimately offered also by adopted children and by other family members such as nephews or grandchildren. Also, the idea of "mixed caste" does not make much sense because it confuses caste (a false racist concept introduced by non-Hindu invaders of India) with *varna*, the actual vedic concept. What is more important, such classification into castes gives no consideration to *guna* (personal qualities), *karma* (performance of duties, both social/occupational and religious) and *samskara*, but is simply based on birth in a particular genetic line. Even more important, such commentators disregard the meaning of the word *luptah* in the present verse, that is not compatible with their explanations. *Luptah* means that the oblations (*pinda* and *udaka*) are neglected or stopped, not that they are performed by unqualified persons: this means that the family members do not care any more for the traditional rituals, because the new generations are confused about *sanatana dharma* and neglect or totally give up the *samskaras* and *karmas*. The reason of such neglect is directly connected to the destruction of the family, or the absence of capable and responsible men who care for, provide for and protect the women and children of the family through a *dharmic* occupation. In such circumstances, the traditional and prescribed rituals are neglected because of the pressing needs of mere survival. This unfortunate situation can actually be observed even within the so-called high castes of traditional Hindus, who have no knowledge of the *shastra*, do not perform the traditional rituals as prescribed, and hardly remember the names of their ancestors for whom they are expected to offer oblations.

दोषैरेतैः कुलग्नानां वर्णसङ्करकारकैः ।

doṣairetaiḥ kulaghnānāṃ varṇasaṅkarakākārikaiḥ ।

उत्साद्यन्ते जातिधर्माः कुलधर्माश्च शाश्वताः ॥ १-४३ ॥

utsādyante jātīdharmāḥ kuladharmāśca śāśvatāḥ ।। 1-43 ।।

doshaiḥ: by faults; *etaiḥ*: by these; *kula*: family; *ghnanam*: killer; *varna-sankara*: generation of unqualified children; *karakaiḥ*: those who make; *utsadyante*: are devastated; *jati-dharmah*: the dharma of birth; *kula-dharmas*: the dharma of the family; *ca*: and; *sasvataḥ*: always.

"The wrong actions of those who kill the family create a generation of confused/unqualified persons, and this devastates the continuity of the family dharma, inherited by birth and tradition."

The adult males of a family are expected to provide and protect, and to offer by their example a direct living reference for the proper execution of the duties of the family and of the community - and this applies to all professional occupations. The training of an individual for his duties and responsibilities, as well as for the general understanding of the purpose of his activities, starts from early childhood. Each individual naturally has particular tendencies and capabilities, but much can be improved by training and

education, and especially with the emotional motivation that comes from the encouragement and support from family members.

The expression *varna sankara* means "confusion of *varnas*". Contrarily to the opinion of some commentators, it does not refer to the "intermingling of castes". In fact, all the *varnas* are meant to be very much united, just like the various parts of one's body, and closely cooperating and interacting with one another. There can be no segregation of *varnas* in a civilized society. Segregation can only apply to those groups of people who do not accept to live in a civilized society and do not follow the prescribed rules for the general population, so by their unclean or aggressive way of living they can become a nuisance or a danger to civilized persons. These particular groups of people are called *chandalas* and *mlecchas*, and they are considered to be outside the *varna* system because they eat everything without any consideration of cleanliness or compassion, do not take bath or clean their clothes and houses regularly, produce foul smells, get up and sleep at improper times, make excessive noise and disturbances without caring for the peace of others, and have other unpleasant, aggressive and unhealthy habits.

However the four *varnas* - *sudras*, *vaisyas*, *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas* - need to live side by side and work together constantly - something that we could certainly call "intermingling". The head cannot function without being closely connected to the arms, the stomach and the legs.

In fact, the *brahmanas* are expected to be the guides, teachers and purifiers of all the other *varnas* - if they do not "intermingle" with them, how will this guiding, teaching and purification take place?

However when there is confusion one is unable to understand the difference between the functions of the head and the functions of the arms, the functions of the belly and the functions of the legs. Then, for example, we will have arrogant, ignorant and foolish "*brahmanas*" who have no idea of what Brahman is - they rather believe that bodily identification is the highest principle of religion, and see no problem in compromising on ethical principles for the sake of a salary or income. Or "*kshatriyas*" who never expose themselves to any danger on the battlefield, drop bombs on innocent civilians by pushing a button, take pleasure in torturing and exploiting defenseless people, and have no idea of how to tell innocent people from criminals. This happens because the correct understanding of the duties, characteristics and qualifications of each *varna* has become confused, and because the *samskaras* and *karmas* are neglected. Then the entire society inevitably becomes populated by *sudras* - unqualified and irresponsible people who always try to work as little as possible but want more money - higher salaries, pensions etc - as well as special benefits, name, fame, and social position. *Sudras* can easily be recognized because they need to be constantly told what to do and be taken care of by employers, otherwise they will only be able to make a mess of everything.

It is particularly interesting to note the explicit distinction presented in this verse between *jati* dharma and *kula* dharma, indicating respectively the duties of a person born in a particular family and the duties of a person who joins a particular family (in the sense of tradition). These two are specifically defined as different from the *varna dharma*.

In the Vedic logic there is not much difference between a child generated seminally and a child or adult that is adopted into the family, or even a disciple who is accepted in the family of the Guru (*guru kula*). The only difference is that a child seminally born in a good family has received more benefits from the *samskaras* that begin even before birth,

and therefore he has more duties/responsibilities towards the *kula*. Of course, this consideration comes to naught when the traditional purification rituals of the life cycle (*samskaras*) and the other regular religious *karmas* (Deity worship, observance of festivals, *homa*, study of scriptures, charity, purification of the food, offerings to the ancestors, honest and productive work within one's occupational duties, etc) are not performed properly, regularly and with the required understanding and consciousness – this is why it is said that in Kali yuga everybody is born a *sudra*. Even among the staunchest defenders of the orthodox *karma kanda* tradition, it is very difficult to find someone who is actually following the system as they should. The key to a happy and progressive family life is the proper level of consciousness of the women. When women are properly respected and protected, and all the religious rituals are properly observed, very good souls will be attracted to take birth in the family and even ordinarily good souls who may take birth there will be educated and purified according to the scientific process of psychological imprinting (*samskara*). These qualified children are a real asset to society.

उत्सन्नकुलधर्माणां मनुष्याणां जनार्दन ।

utsannakuladharmāṇāṁ manuṣyāṇāṁ janārdana ।

नरके नियतं वासो भवतीत्यनुशुश्रुम ॥ १-४४ ॥

narake niyataṁ vāso bhavatītyanuśuśruma ।। 1-44 ।

utsanna: spoiled; *kula-dharmanam*: the dharma of the family; *manushyanam*: of the human beings; *janardana*: o Janardana; *narake*: in hell; *niyatam*: always; *vasah*: reside; *bhavati*: becomes; *iti*: thus; *anu*: always; *susruma*: we have heard.

"O Janardana (Krishna), we have always been told that those men who cause the degradation of the family values end up living in hellish conditions forever."

The expression *anu susruma* is a reinforced form of *susruma* ("we have heard") and conveys the concept of a repetition of an important teaching.

We need to understand that the concept of *naraka*, usually translated as "hell", is quite different from the apparently similar concept in the abrahamic perspective.

Abrahamics believe that God takes pleasure in punishing those who fail to obey his orders and the orders of his priests, and that such punishment must be as painful, cruel and humiliating as possible, and extended forever in time.

Such eternal hell is pictured as situated in a particular place in space, although nobody seems to know exactly where. Some believe it is deep underground within this planet, others believe it could be in some other dimension, but in any case they all agree that it is a place where "sinners" are tortured mercilessly.

In our daily experience we see that sometimes mild physical punishment may be useful in correcting a bad habit that has proved impervious to all other solutions, when an

individual (animal or human) is too stupid, stubborn or degraded to understand reason, but since in the abrahamic concept there is no second chance and no possibility of eventually getting out of hell, such tortures do not have any usefulness because they are not aimed at teaching or reforming and there is no hope of improvement or redemption. So it's just endless torture for the mere sake of inflicting pain - sadistic cruelty.

On the contrary, according to the Vedic system the idea of *naraka* is not eternal and does not involve any deliberate torture as punishment - it simply refers to a very unpleasant condition of life, that can indeed be experienced on this planet itself and in this lifetime.

The purpose of such difficult life conditions is to help the individual to understand the sufferings he has inflicted on others so that he will not repeat the same mistake.

Ultimately the goal is to become detached from material identification and from the idea of possession and enjoyment on the material level, so that it becomes possible to turn one's mind and aspirations towards the *sattvic* and then the transcendental level.

Similarly, the Vedic concept of *prayascitta* is originally different from the abrahamic idea of penance in atonement for one's sins. While abrahamic believe in the intrinsic value of suffering in itself, and prescribe the mortification of the human nature, Vedic culture considers suffering something bad to be avoided, and celebrate the human body as a gift and a temple of the divine. Therefore *prayascitta* is all about positive actions of purification, charity, and personal evolution that can counteract the mistakes committed in the past.

Unfortunately, during abrahamic dominations and invasions of India in the last few centuries, many non-Vedic ideas have percolated into the collective Indian mind and now may even be considered by some as original Hindu beliefs. In some cases even the scriptural texts may have been tampered with and manipulated, usually by non-Hindu scholars who were deliberately trying to destroy Vedic culture.

The teaching of "Indology" in Europe was originally established with the precise purpose to preach Christianity "among the pagans". William Carey (1761-1834), the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society, was the pioneer of the Christian missionary scholarship in oriental studies. Max Mueller was commissioned by the East India Company to translate the Rig Veda into English by misinterpreting the Vedic literatures. He wrote:

"India has been conquered once, but India must be conquered again and that second conquest should be a conquest by education... the ancient religion of India is doomed."

Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899), author of a Sanskrit-English dictionary that is still extremely popular, stated in his address at Oxford University where he was Boden Professor of Sanskrit: "so as ...to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian religion... Brahmanism must die out. When the walls of the mighty fortress of Brahmanism are encircled, undermined, and finally stormed by the soldiers of the cross, the victory of Christianity must be signal and complete."

It is now up to us to undo all this damage and restore the proper understanding of Vedic knowledge and civilization.

अहो बत महत्पापं कर्तुं व्यवसिता वयम् ।

aho bata mahatpāpaṁ kartuṁ vyavasitā vayam ।

यद्राज्यसुखलोभेन हन्तुं स्वजनमुद्यताः ॥ १-४५ ॥

yadrājyasukhalobhena hantum svajanamudyatāḥ ॥ 1-45 ॥

aho: alas; *bata*: how weird; *mahat*: great; *papam*: sin; *kartum*: to do; *vyavasitah*: are determined; *vayam*: us; *yad*: due to; *rajya*: kingdom; *sukha*: happiness; *lobhena*: greed; *hantum*: to kill; *sva-janam*: one's own people; *udyatah*: trying.

"Alas, how amazing! We are going to commit such a great sin ourselves, trying to kill our own friends and relatives, out of greed for the happiness of the kingdom."

Sukha means "happiness" as well as "well being".

Arjuna has already stated very clearly that he has no desire to gain the kingdom, so this new statement can seem contradictory. In fact it is not, because there are two levels of meanings in this verse. The happiness of the kingdom, *rajya sukha*, is not simply the happiness and well-being one gets from ruling over the kingdom, but it is the happiness and well-being of the subjects as well.

Certainly Dhritarashtra and his supporters are motivated by the gross and selfish greed for owning and controlling the kingdom, and they demonstrate the ordinary meaning of the statement of this verse. However, Arjuna's mind is much deeper and the perception of the future sufferings is pushing him to a more critical and extensive examination of the action and its consequences. So even the second and deeper meaning of *rajya sukha*, referring to the happiness of the subjects in the kingdom, also carries negative consequences in front of the death of so many family men.

Procuring happiness and well-being to a group of living entities by creating sufferings for another group of living entities is considered an uncivilized way of life, comparable to the lifestyle of hunters and dacoits. The more society is able to work on a win-win situation for all the living entities concerned, the more civilized and advanced it is considered. A good example is a non-violent agricultural society where the diet of the general people consists of fruits, leaves, milk (obtained with non-violent methods) and grains/seeds dropped by the plants after attaining maturity.

Even so, vedic civilization is so deeply ethical and considerate that it recognizes all levels of responsibility, including the mild and unavoidable violence that is inherent even in a vegan and raw food diet, in the simple act of walking and cleaning and lighting a fire, because all these basic requirements for life involve a certain degree of suffering for plants and insects, and even for other living entities who will be left without the food that we consume.

Rather than choosing a denial of life, like those who believe that it is meritorious to starve oneself to death or pluck out one's hair to protect lice, Vedic civilization teaches that by accepting one's rightful share of the good things of life one contracts a debt towards the universe, and such debt must be repaid by actively and selflessly working for

the benefit of all creatures. This is the basis of the concept of dharma: active cooperation in "supporting" society, the community of all living entities, the planet and the universe at large.

यदि मामप्रतीकारमशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।

yadi māmāpratīkāramaśastraṁ śastrapāṇayah ।

धार्तराष्ट्रा रणे हन्युस्तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥ १-४६ ॥

dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyustanme kṣemataraṁ bhavet ।। 1-46 ।।

yadi: if; *mam:* me; *apratikaram:* without opposing; *asastram:* without weapons; *sastra-panayah:* holding weapons in hand; *dhartarashtra:* the (sons/supporters) of Dhritarashtra; *raṇe:* in the battle; *hanyus:* they may kill; *tan:* they; *me:* me; *kshemataram:* better; *bhavet:* will be.

"If I was going to die unarmed and without fighting back, killed in battle by the (sons/supporters) of Dhritarashtra who yield weapons, that would be better for me."

Arjuna's despair in front of the imminent disaster of the war has reached the deepest possible point. He is ready to offer himself as a willing victim to the bloodlust of Dhritarashtra and his supporters, if this could somehow satisfy them and convince them to call off the battle.

An important factor in the determination of Dhritarashtra and his supporters in pursuing the war is the personal hatred of Duryodhana for the Pandavas and especially for Arjuna. Such hatred has no legitimate or justifiable reason, but it is just due to envy and frustration because in spite of all the assassination attempts and the other forms of persecution that Duryodhana tried to destroy the Pandavas, they still lived and prospered because of their personal qualities and character.

Therefore Arjuna hopes that by offering himself as the sacrificial victim to such hatred, the determination of Duryodhana and his supporters may weaken and he may feel happy enough to let everybody else go.

Again, this verse is the evidence that Arjuna is not scared at all by the impending battle and he does not fear for his life - on the contrary, he is ready to have himself slaughtered and humiliated in public, if this can save so many lives.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

sañjaya uvāca ।

एवमुक्तवार्जुनः सङ्ख्ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।

evamuktvārjunaḥ saṅkhye rathopastha upāviśat ।

विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्नमानसः ॥ १-४७ ॥

visṛjya saśaraṁ cāpaṁ śokasaṁvigna mānasaḥ ॥ 1-47 ॥

sañjayah: Sanjaya; *uvaca:* said; *evam:* like this; *uktva:* said; *arjunah:* Arjuna; *sankhye:* on the battlefield; *ratha:* the chariot; *upastha:* the seat; *upavisat:* sat back; *visrijya:* abandoning; *sa-saram:* with the arrows; *capam:* the bow; *soka:* lamentation; *samvigna:* distressed; *manasah:* mind.

Sanjaya said:

After speaking these words, Arjuna who was on his chariot on the battlefield fell back on his seat abandoning his bow and arrows, his mind overwhelmed by anxiety and sorrow.

Soka samvigna manasah refers to the lamentation and distress of the *manas*, the conscious mind that constitutes the lower self, and with which most people identify. A self-realized person like Arjuna knows that the mind and the body are just instruments that we use to perform our duties in this world, yet he feels the suffering and anxiety of the mind. It is not that a liberated person does not feel any more pain or anxiety: he is simply not vanquished by them, and because he does not yield to the temptation of solving a problem by applying some unethical remedy (that would create more bad consequences for the future) his sufferings will soon come to an end.

Therefore Krishna will say later (2.14) that sufferings are temporary and that one should face them by applying tolerance. This does not mean that we should abstain from trying to solve the problem - it means that a dharmic solution should be applied, and that boils down to doing one's duty. For example, the protection and care of one's body according to ethical principles constitutes one of the basic duties of the living entity, but such protection might become contrary to the ethical principles, as in the case of a *kshatriya* who neglects the protection of the *prajas* in order to save his own skin.

Of course, people who identify with the mind and the body perceive the sufferings of body and mind in a much overwhelming way, because they do not see anything else, and their suffering also creates a great fear.

The word *visada* (depression) is another synonym that gives the title to the first chapter of Gita.

Actually a crisis like the depression faced by Arjuna before the battle of Kurukshetra constitutes a very good opportunity and an inspiration to seek the answers to the great questions in life, therefore *visada* is actually a part of the process of yoga.

A crisis may be necessary to push a person to enter a process of re-evaluation of his/her

life and values. We know that when everything goes well, people are not inclined to think about the purpose of life, as they automatically surmise that life is meant to enjoy, be happy, and just forget about everything else.

On the other hand when things get tough, when there is imminent danger, loss or suffering, people start questioning themselves about the purpose of life, real priorities, right choices and the best thing to do. One starts to think about the future, life after death, and the higher realities, and can find the determination to make the required changes in his habits and behaviors. We do not need to create a crisis in order to progress in life and self realization: such crisis will come by themselves.