

The Yoga of Arjuna's Dejection

Chapter 1 (1 of 2)

I have been teaching the Bhagavad Gita off and on since 2001 and I would like to have this be the conclusive summary of the gist of the Gita. What is the Bhagavad Gita? It is a scripture that came from India. Its origins were not written. They were chanted. And to this day the Gita is kept intact through rote memorization and chanting. It was translated into Sanskrit somewhere around 1500 BC and was converted into English in the early 1800s. It was a powerful influence in the Transcendental Movement that occurred in the US with Ralph Waldo Emerson and others just from reading the English translation of the Gita.

(1:47) As you all know, my spiritual awakening happened spontaneously and what was very clear to me when it was occurring was that I wasn't doing anything, that something was happening to me. It became clear that what I was experiencing was a natural process, something we all go through whether we know it or not. It has a beginning, a middle and an end in the same way that a seed planted in the ground first has to emerge from the seed as a root, striving without knowing it is striving in the darkness and the mud, until it breaks through the surface and then experiences the dimension of air and sun and warmth and cold and a whole new paradigm opens up. So we are all in a maturation process. We are all seeds that have sent out shoots and have been growing over lifetimes in the Hindu tradition, maturing and developing. There will come a point when our development is sufficient that we begin the last stage of the journey we are all on.

We are all consciousness. That is what we are. We are not our personalities. We are not who we think we are. We are not our story. We are not our memory. We are not our body. We are not our moods or our feelings or our thoughts. Those are only a byproduct of you as consciousness getting tangled up with matter. When you come on the return journey this entanglement of you as consciousness becomes disentangled over time and you recover who you actually always were.

We are all born into life in the middle of things. Our parents are not enlightened. People don't know who they are. We are born in the middle of our families and culture and circumstances. We come out of childhood taking everything for granted, not knowing what we are taking for granted because we didn't know anything else. So we walk into life in the middle of the story.

And that is why I want to spend this first session giving you a perspective of where you are in the story, where you are in your own journey of consciousness (see diagram). This diagram reflects the culmination of both my own experiences and the understanding of my own experiences that has come over time. And I have been able to put what has happened to me spontaneously and naturally into a structure and with languaging. I am indebted to the Bhagavad Gita for giving me a large enough frame for being able to contextualize my

experiences, and to my teacher, Sri Atmananda, for having demonstrated what I was engaged in and giving me clarity when I didn't know what it was that I was experiencing.

(5:50) The Gita has 18 chapters; it is a small book that describes the last leg of the journey of consciousness. The book of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part is called the Mahabharata. It describes the whole journey of consciousness. I am going to point to this briefly before we go into this first class.

Consciousness emerged from a quiescent state I call the Sat. It was expressed as a radiance, as a seeking, that arose from that quiescent state in order to know itself, to experience itself, to wake up. This caused it to descend into matter, into the dimension of existence and become identified with it, to identify itself with rock, with mineral, with element, with vegetable, with insect, with fish, with animal, and eventually with us. This process of consciousness descending and then becoming entangled and engaged created a more and more sophisticated development of our consciousness, which we now call our intelligence or our mind. We developed a body, then a vital, and then a mind. And out of the mind, human beings reaching the end of the maturity of physical evolution, developed self-aware intelligence, the ability to choose and take actions different from our programming in nature, which is run by instinct. We still carry much of that instinct.

Man in his self-awareness is basically an intelligent animal, but still an animal run by instincts and needs, cravings, wants, and fears, and the urge to survive and succeed. In human beings we begin a different journey in evolution to become more and more subtle, less and less animal, and more and more what we would call human. The refinement of the human consciousness comes over lifetimes and lifetimes. We become more and more free of our identification with our mind, with our body, our impulses, our instincts, and we disentangle ourselves from this ancient embeddedness in consciousness with matter. We are all a product of a current of which we are an individual expression of consciousness getting entangled with matter and becoming less and less entangled until who we are as consciousness wakes up.

At this transition (see chart) we begin an ascending journey returning back to our original condition, but this time with self-awareness, with the ability to know, choose, think, and act. This last stage of the journey is what the Gita describes. We are going to talk about this transitional part today. In the Gita it is called the Yoga of Dejection. It is when consciousness begins to shift from its investment in its identification with matter to its investment with identification with itself. The Gita describes stages of the journey, including the return to the original state. It even goes further and describes the state of consciousness where we return back into the evolutionary process to assist other human beings to evolve out of it. So the journey of the Gita shows a state where we come to the first realization—the realization that we are consciousness.

(10:14) To become stable in the knowing that we are not our thoughts but are that which has thoughts, we are not our feelings but are that which has feelings, we are not our body but are that which has a body is a process. That state of realization, where it becomes real for you, occurs about the first third of the journey. It's not always true for everyone.

Sometimes it may not occur until the tail end of the journey. But mostly the Gita is describing a more average awakening process where we wake up to ourselves as consciousness as more real than our identification with our memory and our story and our body and our life.

The second state is when this consciousness begins to merge with the universal principles of consciousness that as individuals we only have a piece of. As we merge into the universal principles, much bigger forces start working in our system. Our human vehicle has to be transformed, expanded, made more capable of being able to absorb and accept these increased energies and experiences that come when we move out of our individual identification into our universal identification. We eventually wake up to consciousness no longer as an individual but as consciousness that exists everywhere all at once. This is the state of Oneness, of God-merger, or realizing ourselves as the Universal. We step out of our individual identity into our universal identity. That is what becomes real for us.

In the Vedic tradition it is the "I am That" state, the state where I am that which pervades everything. I am the God that is everywhere. I am the all-pervading awareness in truth. Eventually this state completes in a process where the consciousness merges with its origin. This is a complete, utterly indescribable state. In the Gita it is the fifteenth chapter and in this state most souls end their journey. Out of this state a few souls will come back into the world to manifest that complete integral wisdom into their personality, into their body, into their emotions, into their minds, and become a vehicle for this universal force to work through the person's individual form. These are the great teachers.

(13:04) Every one travelling on this journey carries much more force, much more consciousness, much more love, knowledge, and presence than an ordinary human being. When the journey has begun we become a radiation of the truth and oneness that pervades existence. We become a channel for the force of truth consciousness which is what we are seeking to be channels of. This expresses itself always as what is real, as the state of truth and love. The Hindu word for that is Satchitananda. This is the current. As it disengages from its identification with matter, it flows freely and powerfully through each individual person. This is the source of all spiritual experiences that occur as it moves to the place that is beyond all experience. That's the context. That's where we are starting this story.

Now let's get into the first chapter. When you study the Bhagavad Gita, before we do the talk, read and preferably write that chapter to connect yourselves with the things that stand out for you.

(16:17) The Bhagavad Gita is a story, but the story is an analogy of the journey. This was revealed thousands of years before the birth of Christ. It was really a very human story about a warrior, Arjuna, who was at the start of a battle with his charioteer, Krishna. Arjuna is the seeker. Krishna is the divine guidance that exists within each of us, the divine person that exists within each of us that we begin to access.

The beginning of the journey is a battlefield. Arjuna is aligned with those on his side, the Pandavas, against his cousins and relatives, the Kuruvas, that are on the other side. The

opening scene of the Gita is a conversation that is occurring from the opposite side, about the battlefield, describing the scene. This battle is an analogy between the dark and light forces within each of us. The dark forces are those associated with what I call the error of evolution. The process of matter creating vehicles suitable for consciousness to evolve in was a process of trial and error. A lot of species came and went in the process of developing a human body and a human system. So what we have and what we wake up into is a body that is a byproduct of an evolutionary process that was there as part of the original intent of the creation.

When we wake up in a body we are still very much affected and identified with ourselves as our body, our emotions and our thoughts, memories, experiences, preferences, attractions, and repulsions. When consciousness begins to awaken, it has to move out of that identification and there will be this movement of consciousness returning to itself which is the movement to light, to truth, to good, to love, or it will be those movements counter to that, the movements to darkness and ignorance, to comfort and pleasure, to the habit of the body, to that mechanism of survival and success. These are the two forces the Bhagavad Gita is pointing to.

((19:20) Although described as an outer battle, and we will address the analogy in the story to some extent, the analogy is really this struggle between our old habit of who we thought we were and this new state of being that has yet to articulate or become fully conscious. It can be a very torturous period, especially at first. The awakening process, which the first chapter points to, is not just occurring in the mental plane, the emotional plane, nor even the physical plane. It is occurring at the level of consciousness. The soul can no longer be held in matter in the way it has been. Spirit can no longer believe or tolerate its bondage in matter. Dejection is when the soul of us, the consciousness of us, the core quality that we are, wakes up to its bondage. It becomes aware of its suffering, its inability to find fulfillment in its usual forms of fulfillment of our human life and it has a longing for something greater, something higher. The mind and emotions and body may not know this, but in this moment of awakening a process is set in motion just like a caterpillar that suddenly builds a cocoon. It is a natural movement that occurs. Understanding the natural stage can allow you to collaborate with it. This is the whole premise of the Gita.

Understanding the Gita, even just intellectually, will assist you in preparing to collaborate with a process that has already started. Everyone in this room has gone through this or is going through this. Dejection is not a one-time deal. It often happens with fits and starts; it tries to awaken and then collapses. Like waking up from a deep sleep, you are so torpid and taken over in slumber and sleep, that waking up can be a struggle. So dejection is a process. It comes, tries to awaken and then collapses. This process continues all the way up until the soul comes to the self and then the dejection that occurs beyond that point is of a different order. Everyone is engaged in this process of awakening and you don't know always what it is that is awakening. You don't know what's wrong, just that something is wrong. You just know you want to get out of it; you want to come out of whatever it is that's wrong.

So the first part of the Bhagavad Gita is about this initial emerging. The cocoon, having reached sufficient readiness, begins to dissolve in order to become a butterfly. So it is the

beginning of this dissolving. Ask the caterpillar how it feels and it would probably bitch and complain like many of you do. "This hurts. I don't want to do this. How can I make it stop? Give me some pills. Let's get drunk. Give me some friends, another project, another job, another relationship, anything but this." It is a state of dis-ease. Ignorance is a state of not knowing you don't know. Waking up from ignorance is the beginning of learning you don't know, usually by thinking you know and then finding out that you don't know. In the world this process is not as painful. But in the process of transformation, this disengagement of consciousness from its identification with matter can be very disturbing and distressing.

(24:34) Let's read the verses in Chapter 1, Arjuna Vishada Yoga, The Yoga of Arjuna's Dejection. We will go through this chapter in a broad sweep. We will look more into the overview of the picture.

Dhritarashtra said:

1. Tell me, Sanjaya, what did my sons and those of Pandu do after gathering at the field of Kuru, the field of Dharma?

Sanjaya said:

2. Seeing the army of the Pandavas arrayed for battle, King Duryodhana approached his teacher Drona and spoke thus:

3. O Master! Behold this vast army of the Pandavas. Your talented pupil, Drupada's son, has marshaled this army for the battle.

4. In this army there are mighty heroes and archers like Yuyudhana, Virata, and Drupada. Each of them can be compared with Bhima and Arjuna in battle.

5. Dhrishtaketu, Chekitana, the valiant king of Kashi, Purujit, Kuntibhoja, and Shaibya, the best among men, are also there.

6. Moreover they have other great and might warriors like Yudhamanyu, Uttamauja, the son of Subhadra, and the sons of Draupadi.

7. O best among the twice-born, I will now tell you the names of our distinguished generals.

8. Foremost amongst us are myself, Bhishma, Karna, also Kripa, the ever victorious in battle, and there are others like Ahswatthama, Vikarna, and the son of Somadatta.

9. There are also many other skilled warriors equipped with various weapons and missiles who have risked their lives for me.

10. This huge army of ours under the command of Bhishma is quite strong, while the other side led by Bhima also appears to be adequate.

11. Therefore, all of you remaining in your respective positions must protect Bhishma on all sides and on all fronts.

(27:17) This is the introduction to the Bhagavad Gita. It sets the place and the circumstances. Verse 1 describes the field of Kuru, the field of dharma. This is the field of action, the field of engagement, of struggle, of effort—the field of trying. The field of dharma means that it is through this action that the true path is discovered. It is through the struggle and through the effort and ordeal that how we are to live, how we are to be, and how are we to collaborate with this process becomes apparent to us. This is the context.

Without struggle and effort nothing changes. When it is all good and smooth and easy and everything is going well then you are not growing, you are not disengaging, and you are not evolving. You are in this zone in which this current sense of self that we call ego, this interface between spirit and matter, is comfortable with what it has come to. It has come to some skill from previous effort and struggle. There is sufficient understanding, skill and capacity to be with your current circumstances. That is why they seem comfortable. These are the rest zones. These are the periods in life in which many people try to stay in for their whole lives, avoiding any pain or suffering if possible. As soon as it starts hurting we take some medication and we try to make it better because we think that the solution to life is this idea of happiness, which isn't true happiness. It is a temporary pause in the battle where we try to avoid anything that would remind us we are at battle. We take claim to those things around us that keep us comfortable. We try to stay secure.

(30:02) Sorry, it doesn't work like that. It didn't work like that in animal life: striving, avoiding being eaten, and eating to survive. Every day was an uncertain principle. A good day for a lizard is to get home without being eaten. It is a dog-eat-dog reality. Look at nature; it is bestial and cruel. At any moment any of us could die or be harmed or be diminished in ways that we can't imagine. We put this away from ourselves, we pretend it is not there, we build houses, we create societies, governments, and ideas about who we are and how the world is so we don't have to be present with this ultimate vulnerability that being identified with a body creates.

Bodies get born, they live, they get old and they die. So you might say life is a terminal disease and we are pretending that it is not. We don't even want to have the conversation or be reminded of our vulnerability and our temporal existence and the death sentence we all carry with us. We pretend we don't die. This is true in one part of us, but not as the individual ego. So we live in striving to avoid effort; yet effort is the only way we evolve. It is true in nature and it is true in each one of us human beings. Why doesn't evolving just go on naturally? It is because of all the past habits of previous stages of evolution. So we come from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood to mature adulthood into old age. These are all stages. It's always a transition, leaving behind what we thought we knew and becoming that which is yet to be fully known.

Every human being is engaged in a natural evolutionary process. We are in a dream to think that it doesn't continue. It's not realistic to think there is a whole different paradigm when you die than the one that has brought you to your death. It is all part of the same

movement. Ask a shoot from a seed, "What's the world?" It will reply, "It's dark, it's dirty, it's muddy. I don't know anything. It's a lot of effort. I hit stones and rocks and I don't know where I am going." It is struggle and effort and it only knows when it has broken through the surface and then there is a complete different paradigm.

(34:04) The plant doesn't have a human mind so it doesn't resist the next stage where the shoot grows stronger and it starts to put out leaves and matures and is vulnerable to wind and animals that will determine whether it survives or not. It doesn't resist like we resist. That is the curse of self-awareness. We keep thinking it could or should be different. We don't understand why it is the way it is so we constantly seek to control things so they won't change. We create these tremendously effective blockages to our own natural evolution and we call that pain and suffering. We attribute that pain and suffering to other people in our lives, to our circumstances, to our current state of health, to the weather rather than know we are simply in a process of resistance that is beyond us and that will eventually win.

When we awaken we can go smoothly or we can go kicking and screaming. But the torrent is going to take you in the same direction whether you like it or not. There is a lot less pain when you quit resisting it, or quit trying to change it or make it smoother or make it more comfortable. So when you are engaged within you with that which is invested in the old ways, invested in keeping the ego intact, invested in keeping what you have identified with as important, the issues you've made about who you are or the stories you've created about how the world is and what is possible and what is not possible, then you suffer. When you are invested in all these parts, thinking that is me, then you become the belief; you become the story. To have someone question your belief or question your story is an act of war. "Who do you think you are to question my belief?" Or you feel someone has overtaken you and you are lost and confused and crushed.

In many ways the analogy in the Gita is true. We are all in a process that is a battlefield even if our minds think it is good now. "I have a house and money. I am protected; they can't get me here." That will last for only a while. You will not survive this journey. Who you think you are as an ego will not survive, just like a child's ego could not survive being a child when it left the sandbox and became an older child. We have each let go of our old stuff, but often this is a turbulent period. This stage of the Bhagavad Gita is speaking of the battle of emerging from a previous paradigm, a previous way of seeing the world, a previous way of seeing yourself, into a new way that is not yet formed, that has not yet articulated itself.

(38:08) Who is standing in this battlefield? There are the Kuruvas who represent the forces of darkness. I call them the forces of inertia, or *tamas* and *rajas*, that are either clinging or resisting, trying to control or change. These are the forces that exist within each of us that want to resist or control change. These are the Kuruvas. When the soul has reached this stage in the development of consciousness it is a very sophisticated consciousness. This is not an ordinary human being just drinking beer, getting by, watching TV, screwing their husband or wife, having kids and getting through life pretending they are not going to die, and always surprised when it happens. It's not that anymore; you are alert. There is a problem here. "How do I live, how do I be, what is the purpose to this whole thing?" So we

begin a quest. We have been seeking, trying to find what is real and true, developing our minds, stopping taking actions that create pain, and now we start taking actions that create more and more harmony, cooperation, and understanding.

By this point the human intelligence has reached a certain maturity. It might not just be mental. Some people come to this in their heart, they come with an empathetic capacity to feel what it is like for other people; not just what is good for them, but empathetic relationship to the world around them. These are the artists, poets and writers, the people that have sensitivities that are much more felt than mental. It can be both in your intelligence, in your understanding of the nature of the world and how to function, or it can be in your heart which becomes more and more open, more and more capable of receiving. Either of these are signs that the soul has reached a certain state of maturity. That which has held us contracted begins to relax; that which has kept us locked in our identification with matter begins to lose its ability to hold us.

We don't know this is happening, we just feel better when we are sitting in nature instead of striving to get more and more of what we think we need or what we want. We read certain materials about the higher possibilities of consciousness, about cooperation among societies, and we become uplifted. We talk about making the world a better place and we open up to a sense of purpose beyond our selves, our little egos, our family, our community, our religion, and our country.

(41:42) We become more and more expanded in this process. Even though the ego is still getting identified, "I am a Democrat, I am a Republican," it is still in a larger context than the individual ego at home with the kids, the wife, the job, and the money. This expansion in the broadness of the context is also an indication. With this broadening of this paradigm comes an increase in your consciousness. You are becoming more aware and becoming more responsive to what you become aware of than when you weren't aware of it. You become more engaged in that new expanded awareness and you find a place to be in that new expanded awareness. "I am going to fight for the good." You take a position on a broader point of view.

As the awareness expands you become more responsible. As you become more able to respond, you grow into that new paradigm. As you take on responsibility in that expanded paradigm it becomes established for you, and then the next paradigm starts opening up. This is how human beings evolved from their little tribe to the village to medieval cities to publication and communication, to enterprises, to cities and countries and to where we are now.

There has been an evolution in the collective consciousness. We become more and more aware of it and partake of it as our own consciousness expands. We take a position, we vote a certain way, we feel we can make a difference, and we participate. This is what happens to consciousness as it reaches the end of its maturity in its human identification. It starts taking on causes, it starts looking to be a good person, to have integrity, to keep promises, to do the right thing, to stand up for truth, to protect the weak, to help those in need. This is a natural process. We become idealists; we create a sense of morals and ethics.

These are the forces being described in detail in the Gita that are on the opposing side. Being a better human being, being even a noble and admirable human being, even a great human being, is still being a human being. It hasn't begun the true transition where consciousness begins to take its attention away from identification with everything around it and begins to turn its attention on its own nature. Turning your attention from who you are as a person, as your story, your thoughts, your ideas of the world and yourself that are outward-oriented, like your wife, your family, and your job, and starting to turn your attention in, you become more and more aware of what it is that assigns meaning and value and identity. This process is a struggle and effort.

(45:48) The first twelve verses of the Gita set the circumstances of the Gita. It lets you know that this is not just about happiness and harmony and cooperation, how to get along with people and feel good. It is about a struggle to move into the correct relationship to what is actually true, true beyond even the human paradigm, beyond even the human relationship, to what is lasting, what is eternal.

Dejection is that point of transition from the vantage point of what it feels like. You could say it feels like shit. We will talk about the symptoms of dejection and how to recognize it in yourself and what is the nature of this state of dejection. To give you a taste, dejection always thinks it is too much, it thinks it can't do it, it thinks it is impossible to bear because it is so habituated to being small. It doesn't know how to be large. It thinks it can't be large, it has to make itself large, it has to make itself different, but in fact it is a natural process. It is something we surrender to, not something we do. So the nature of dejection is that you experience your vulnerability, you experience being outside your comfort zone. You experience being overtaken but you don't know why. That's a preview. We will talk about it at our next class.

(48:58) Question: Do we have to be successful in the world, either in this lifetime or a previous lifetime, becoming rich or famous, before we reach the dejection and go on the path?

Answer: Good question. How long does it take that particular ray of consciousness to become painfully aware of how bound it is? I believe we all have a colored ray, a ray of consciousness that gets invested with matter that has different capacities that change as we go through the process of evolution. But mostly we all complete the human journey proportionally to our ultimate dharma. Some people have to reach a much more accomplished stage in the human development because their purpose is much greater after their realization. For others, it is simply to come to the truth of who they are so the training or necessity for that kind of exposure is not as great. This is predetermined from the beginning. It came with the characteristic of the ray. It is essential to the nature of the soul and then it takes shape as time goes on through the evolutionary process and finds its avenue in each of us. These rays are endless, trillions, and each ray has its own unique vibration. That is why each of us has a unique vibration, why each snowflake is different from every other snowflake. We all have a different purpose and capacity. It is not us who determines that.

Question: From the human to the return path, is there a distinct point when you know you've turned a corner?

Answer: From the evolutionary stage into the return journey, you are the last to know. It is like someone who is asleep and is beginning to wake up and they are stirring and shuffling around. Someone observing them will say "this person is trying to wake up," but the person who is asleep is still asleep. So when you become aware you are asleep, you are actually awake, or in the first stages of the awakening process. When you first wake up and you don't see anything but then you realize you are in a bed and it is time to get up. This is the process, so you don't know. Someone else can see it. A woman who has had a child can recognize the stages of another woman by being with her. So too, the only one who can know is one who has gone through the journey. They can assist you in trying to wake up, and suggest you don't run after another relationship or get drunk or suggest you try this or that. We call this spiritual guidance.

(52:53) Question: In describing the painful natural bodily process of coming to the self when you can't know what's going on, what you said is a slightly different interpretation of the advaitic interpretations. Ramana said it is like trying to go through samsara thinking you are a body, or like a person trying to cross a river on the back of an alligator. His simple solution, like most Indian gurus, is an intellectual solution, "you are not a person, just get clear you are not a person." So you are not a person going through this awful journey waiting to transform.

Answer: Let's stop there. I have to restate what you said. Basically the question is, "Is it necessary to go through all this suffering without knowing you are suffering?" And the answer is that you are going to go through the suffering whether you know it or not. But if you know it, if you can intellectually contextualize what's happening to you, it's easier. Suffering is mostly resistance. Suffering is, "I don't want it this way." When we give that up, and if you have a context for the process, it makes the suffering more palatable, we let it do its work. Like the caterpillar that has to surrender to its own dissolving. The only difference is that we can resist it, which is the curse and the blessing that each self-aware being has—we can choose, and that is why it hurts. OK, that's enough.