



TRISĠOKĪ-GĪTĀ
A YOGIC SPIRITUAL
INTERPRETATION *of the* GĪTĀ



SARVAMANGALA FOUNDATION

Translation by Āchārya Vidyābhāskar

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SARVAMANGALA

त्रिश्लोकीगीता

Triślokī-Gītā

A YOGIC SPIRITUAL
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VIṢṆU, ALL-PERVASIVE AWARENESS

The Gītā's teacher Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu's incarnation.

Sandstone Sculpture, Punjab, ca. 900-1099 @ Metropolitan Museum of Art

त्रिश्लोकीगीता

Trislokī-Gītā

A YOGIC SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION of the GĪTĀ

The first chapter of the Gītā uses symbolic language such as ‘the sound of the conches piercing the hearts of the evil sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra (the blind king)’, ‘the sound of the conches resounding between the earth and the sky’, ‘the white horses’, ‘placing the chariot in the middle between the two armies’, and many more.

Such language points to what yogis recognise as the typical start of the ‘yogic process’: a transformative process which, on the level of mind, involves increasing Awareness and a struggle with the kleśas, the afflictive emotions – as well as, on a subtle body level, the activation of the nāḍīs or channels. It is very common for starting yogis to experience sounds – humming or ringing, the sound of bells or flutes and especially conch-like sounds (in more intensive phases of meditative absorption) as the nāḍī system becomes active. This coincides with a sudden greater and more vivid Awareness of the kleśas and the need to find a way to overcome them.

Forced by a greater Awareness of the kleśas to see their negative consequences, the beginner yogi is now compelled to seek strategies to overcome them. Prior to starting the yogic process, the correlation between the kleśas and saṁsāric suffering was not evident. Life’s

experiences transpired relatively unconsciously, like in a hypnotic state. Now that the yogic process has set in, the correlation between negative afflictive emotions and suffering becomes suddenly increasingly clear and vivid.

As part of this process, the duḥkha-jñānas (insights into suffering) set in, where the commencing yogi is faced with feelings of despair and pointlessness, seeking a way to escape the impending struggle. That the first chapter of the Gītā symbolises this phase of the onset of yogic insight is abundantly clear in Arjuna’s desire to give up, to escape. Even the symptoms skilfully described by the Gītā authors (“mouth drying up”, “a trembling in the body”, “weakness”) correlate with some of the actual yogic experiences undergone during this phase.

The symbolic language of the bow dropping is evident: the bow represents meditative attention (samādhi), as is even indicated in some Upaniṣad verses. It is common in the yogic process for meditative attention to slack completely during the phase of the duḥkha-jñānas. Only once equanimity sets in, does vigour come back. The Gītā’s main themes are around ‘sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā’ – ‘making pleasure and pain equal’ – ‘sthita-prajña’, ‘stable in wisdom’ – which indicates that the Gītā’s main teaching is to meditatively seek achieve equanimity.

The Gītā itself offers numerous ‘hints’ at how to interpret itself. Here are just a few:

- Kāma (desire) and krodha (anger) as the actual enemy to be defeated
- Several lists of the kleśas divided into ‘āsurī sampat’ (‘demonic quality’ versus the ‘daivī sampat’ (divine quality).
- Jñāna (Awareness) as the greatest purifier and as the fire consuming karmas – a theme that comes to visionary expression in the 11th chapter vision: Kṛṣṇa’s wrathful form is described as already having consumed the adversaries (this corresponds to the meditative experience of “the kleśas being naturally consumed by Awareness when recognised”, “nothing needs to be done but to trust and rest in Awareness; this itself dissolves the kleśas” – this corresponds to Kṛṣṇa’s instruction by taking refuge in him one realises that the adversaries are automatically destroyed. The yogic process is then experienced as something natural, ‘predestined’, the mind’s attention being a mere ‘nimitta’, a ‘mere instrument’, in this process – and not actually ‘in control’ of the process).
- The chapters following the 11th seem to serve as a ‘commentary’ on the preceding chapters, providing them with more structure (lists of the kleśas and the like).
- The Gītā itself hints at the yogic process of utkrānti, which accelerates the necessity to face the kleśas – in two places.

- Obviously, there are innumerable other symbolic points. Kṛṣṇa (Awareness in its true nature) as the charioteer of the process, while not forgetting that Arjuna has to raise his bow (i.e. samadhi, attention) and actually face the kleśas, not avoid or escape them --- this describes the skillful conjunction of connecting with absolute Awareness while maintaining concentration and insight into the kleśas. This, too, is hinted at by the Gītā itself providing the very simile of the “senses being like horses, the discerning mind like the charioteer” --- in a very skillful way the text gives the code to uncode itself.

On a larger macro-level, the Gītā is embedded in the Mahābhārata, the main transformative hero of which is actually ‘Yudhiṣṭhira’ (‘stable in the fight’), the crown prince. According to Lahiri Mahasay’s yogic notes, he represents the element of ‘space’, whereas the other Pāṇḍavas represent wind (Bhīma), fire (Arjuna, his name Dhanañjaya being a well-known name of Agni, as explained in the Amarakośa), water (Nakula) and earth (Sahadeva). It is Yudhiṣṭhira who ascends to the realm of light (svar-ga) at the end of the story – in the process of ascending to the summit of the Himalaya (which represents the path to complete enlightenment), the other Pāṇḍavas fall off (like the kleśas falling away from pure Awareness). In fact, Yudhiṣṭhira specifically identifies the kleśas as being the reason for their falling (Bhīma due to greed, Arjuna due to pride, etc.).

This corresponds to the yogic experience of the kleśas falling away from space-like Awareness that has remained stable in the fight against the kleśas, and thus dissolves into the clear light.

As is known from āgamic texts, the kleśas have a subtle connection with the five elements – the dissolution of the kleśas coincides with the return of their elements to their ‘original state’. This is reflected in the Mahābhārata conclusion that the other Pāṇḍavas, too, have ascended to the realm of light (“they are already there, only Yudhishtira didn’t know this”), but Yudhiṣṭhira initially experiences them as dwelling in hell, whereas the Kauravas (the actual kleśas) are experienced as being in the realm of light.

Yudhiṣṭhira’s boundless compassion compels him to be with his brothers (the Pāṇḍavas) in hell, where they describe his presence as being ‘like nectar’. It is only when he decides – like the Buddhist bodhisattva – to remain forever in hell in order to be a source of relief for them, that the entire illusory display dissolves and the Pāṇḍavas (the elements) and the Kauravas (the actual kleśas) are both experienced as dwelling in the realm of light. This represents the return of saṁsāric experience and its causes to the clear light. It represents the yogic experience of the complete transformation of the kleśas and the elements back into the clear light, realising ‘they were always there’ and ‘it was all an illusion’.

The Gītā is to be understood on the backdrop of this narrative of complete transformation.

The “story-within-a-story-within-a-story” format of the Mahābhārata can easily be applied to the Gītā as representing a story within a story within the overall the Sāṁkhya story of Puruṣa becoming free from Prakṛti, which again is very openly described in the Gītā itself.

A further hint at this interpretation is the Kālacakra-Tantra, a later text which in great and intricate yogic detail describes a battle situation as being symbolic of the struggle against the kleśas and the inner winds (prāṇas).

Thus, the Gītā teaches the intricacies and essential instructions required to pass through the transformation process successfully – its primary teaching being the importance of achieving equanimity vis-à-vis all impermanent experiences that come and go (āgama-apāyinaḥ anityāḥ, sukha-duḥkhe, lābha-alābhau etc.) during the yogic process by cultivating non-attachment and devotion to Awareness (representing by Kṛṣṇa, who in the course of the Gītā describes himself as Awareness itself, as ‘sarvasya cāham ḥṛdi saṁniviṣṭaḥ’, ‘I dwell in the heart of all’, and describes himself to be like space unaffected by clouds, which are typical yogic descriptions of Awareness); the Gītā’s other main instruction is for the yogī not to shy away from the struggle against the kleśas (“fight, o Arjuna”) but to continue till the śāśvata-pada (the eternal state) is achieved.

It is only on such a backdrop that the Gītā’s call to fight makes sense in light of the Gītā being a Yogaśāstra rooted in Ahimsā.

The Gītā skillfully switches between descriptions of the ‘outer’ field of Dharma, outer enemies and adversaries, outer society falling into disarray, and the ‘inner’: the wavering mind, the yogic process related to utkrānti at the time of death, the inner opposition of the āsurī saṁpat (the kleśas) versus the daivī saṁpat (compassion etc.), descriptions of or allusions to Awareness (jñāna), alongside more

Āgama-like descriptions of a visionary Deity experience (the 11th chapter vision) – this is, as the Kālacakra-Tantra and its commentaries indicate, because the outer and the inner cannot be separated. They are a co-dependent (sahaja, sahabhāva). Outer conflict is not random. It is directly related to the kleśas.

Thus, dissolving outer traumas is directly linked with dissolving inner conflicts.

The yogic notes on the Gītā written by the 19th century Yogi Lahiri Mahasay go to the extent of giving a direct meaning to each of the 100 Kauravas as related to kleśas – and he is probably quite right in doing so, since even the Sanskrit names clearly are kleśa-related (the ‘double’ meanings are evident in dur-yodhana (hard to fight), duḥśāsana (hard to rule), durmukha (evil face), duṣkarṇa (evil ears), ugrāyudha (terrible fight), raudrakarma (cruel action), etc. In contrast, the five Pāṇḍavas – the elements, the yogic body, assailed by the kleśas – are the children of the Vedic gods.

In the Mahābhārata context, the 100 Kauravas are the children of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who happens to be blind and whose wife Gāndhārī (in Tantric texts, Gandhari is even the name of a nāḍī) has made herself blind, too – a blind king is ruling the kingdom and his 100 evil sons have taken over and are assailing the Pāṇḍavas (the five elements) – the yogic symbolism is evident: the body of the aspiring yogī is ruled by ignorance, whose children are the 100 kleśas, which are assailing the five elements: Awareness in its energetic manifestations as the five cakras. The symbolic role of grandsire Bhīṣma, the son of Gaṅgā (the

Gaṅgā being the Suṣumnā or middle channel in Tantric texts), can also be further explored in this context.

Sharpening meditative attention – Arjuna picking up his bow again – is the only way forward, by trusting completely in the self-liberating nature of Awareness: Kṛṣṇa, whose very nature is Jñāna. One can trust in the process that the kleśas are spontaneously consumed by Awareness: this is symbolically presented by the 11th chapter vision, where everything is consumed by the Kālāntaka fire which Kṛṣṇa’s wrathful form embodies.

Needless to say, a true symbolic meaning does not preclude actual external events that form the basis of a “yogic transformative narrative” that then correlates with real events. The Kālacakra-Tantra after all was composed in direct response to actual Islamic invasions, using the very trauma of those invasions as a simile for the kleśas afflicting the mind.

Likewise, the Gītā can be seen as the product of an earlier stage of “yogic transformative narratives” – prior to a period when in Āgama texts like the Kālacakra the full scale of yogic symbolic meanings came to expression. Similarly, there are many other “yogic transformative narratives” in Puranic literature – the Gītā being an exceptionally prominent one today due to its skillful blending of the narrative with actual yogic instructions.

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥ १ ॥

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca

dharma-kṣetre kuru-kṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ |

māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś caiva kim akurvata sañjaya || 1 ||

dhṛtarāṣṭraḥ = Dhṛtarāṣṭra – uvāca = he said – dharma-kṣetre =

on the field of Dharma – kuru-kṣetre = on the field of the Kurus –

samavetāḥ = assembled – yuyutsavaḥ = wanting to fight – māmakāḥ

= my (children) – pāṇḍavāḥ = the Pāṇḍavas (the children of Pāṇḍu) –

ca = and – eva = indeed (emphasis) – kim = what? – akurvata = they

did – sañjaya: o Sañjaya

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said:

O Sañjaya, assembled upon the field of Dharma, the field of the Kurus, eager to fight, what did my children and the Pāṇḍavas do?

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king, represents the blind mind, the mind swayed by ignorance of our true nature, who now rules the entire kingdom.

What are the children of ignorance? The kleśas, the afflictive emotions. The main kleśas are obsessive desire (rāga, kāma) and aversion (dveṣa, krodha). Desire means to want something (for example, a particular state of mind) intensely, to be attached to it. Aversion means not to want something (for example, a particular state of mind) and to reject

it. Related to the kleśa of desire is the kleśa of greed and pride (wanting to be better than others). Related to the kleśa of aversion are the kleśas of anger, irritation, agitation, anxiety, envy/jealousy (not wanting others to have something is a form of not-wanting).

From these two states basic states of ‘obsessive wanting’ and ‘obsessive not-wanting’, thus innumerable other kleśas arise. Symbolically, the children of Dhṛtarāṣṭra are said to be one hundred in number. Even the lists of their names indicate that they are indeed symbolic representations of kleśas: dur-yodhana (“hard to fight”), duḥ-śāsana (“hard to rule”), duḥ-karṇa (“bad ears”), dur-mukha (“bad mouth”), raudra-karma (“cruel action”), etc. These one hundred ‘negative’ qualities represent the innumerable negative afflictive states arising from ignorance, from the blind mind ruling the kingdom of the aspiring yogī’s body.

The five Pāṇḍavas on the other side are the children of the Vedic gods Dharma, Vāyu (wind), Indra and the Aśvin twins. They represent the five elements of space (Yudhiṣṭhira), air (Bhīma), fire (Arjuna), water (Nakula) and earth (Sahadeva).

In the Āgama system, the physical and subtle body is made up of the five elements. Their presence in the body is symbolised by the five cakras proceeding upward from the lowest at the base of the spine (earth), to the root of the sexual organ (water), the belly (fire), the heart (air) and the throat (space).

When the five elements are in their true nature, when they are expressions of absolute wisdom, they represent the five qualities of enlightenment:

The wisdom of truth itself, ‘the bare non-conceptualising Awareness’, which is the basis of the other four aspects of enlightenment. This is related to the element of space.

The wisdom of ‘mirror-like Awareness’, which is free of dualistic thought and ever united with its content, like a mirror is never separated from its reflections. This is related to the element air. Air pervades everything.

The wisdom of the ‘Awareness of sameness’, which perceives and achieves the commonality, the one essence, of all phenomena, both positive and negative. This is related to the fire element. Fire consumes everything, both the positive and the negative.

The wisdom of ‘investigative Awareness’, which perceives the specificity, the uniqueness of all phenomena and states. This is related to the water element. Water covers everything and infuses it with its quality.

The wisdom of ‘accomplishing activities’, the Awareness that spontaneously carries out all that has to be done for the welfare of beings, manifesting itself in all directions. This is related to the element earth. The earth holds and supports everything. Similarly, compassionate wisdom supports beings in their desire

for liberation.

The above is a description of the five elements in their true nature as qualities of enlightenment. However, the first śloka describes the five elements (the five Pāṇḍavas, headed by Yudhiṣṭhira, who represents space-like Awareness) as being in a struggle with the kleśas (the 100 evil sons of the blind king). What is this struggle?

When a person is not enlightened, the innumerable afflictive emotions arising from blind ignorance (confusion) are in a constant struggle with the elements of the body.

This means that one’s inner experience will always fall prey to disharmony. As long as the blind mind remains the ruler of the sphere of the body, the aspiring yogī’s inner experience will continue to be assailed by the children of ignorance: the kleśas. In such a condition, there can be no permanent contentment or satisfaction. Although there may be temporary happiness, the mind will always be disturbed by something. The kleśas will come back again and again in very tangible forms, or in subtle forms.

This is the case for all beings without exception. However, when a person commences a path of yoga or meditation, this becomes even more evident, because the person becomes more aware. There are many types of meditative approaches. Some methods may be more effective while being more intense, whereas other methods may seem slower but safer.

It is the experience of all meditators that once any serious meditative system is engaged with, while there is some peace and clarity in the beginning, after a while the struggle with the kleśas begins. Without guidance, a meditator may see this as a reason to give up, or they may think their meditation practice is wrong, or that they are following a wrong path altogether.

Yet it is, in fact, a sign of good meditation practice that the meditator becomes aware of the innumerable ways the kleśas are active in the deeper layers of his or her mind. These kleśas are the very source of all discontentment, not just in one life, but across many life-times.

Not resolving obsessive desire and aversion inevitably leads to an entire army of further negative emotional states. These lead to problematic situations in this life as well as innumerable karmic entanglements that continue over several life-times.

Thus the root of all problems are really the kleśas, the children of ignorance: the blind mind.

The Gītā starts at a point where an aspiring yogī begins to recognise this. The initial reaction is that one is faced with the army of kleśas. Thinking that the kleśas are part and parcel oneself (one's own "kith and kin", whom one does not want to harm), the commencing yogī wants to give up, avoid them, escape them, "let them have the kingdom". He mistakenly thinks that it is better not to engage in a struggle at all, as engaging in such a struggle would lead to disharmony. In the life of the meditator, this means that the aspiring meditator thinks it is

better not to meditate, it is better to distract oneself with shopping or watching movies, or in a new relationship, or some other way to distract oneself of what has become painfully evident: that there are negative emotions in the mind.

The entire teaching of the Gītā is a subtle instruction and a call to face and stand up to the kleśas, but without becoming negative or upset, without being further drawn into their entanglement. You cannot dissolve the kleśas by letting the kleśas take over. You cannot overcome hatred with hatred. Enmity cannot be overcome with enmity. Only with non-enmity can it be overcome. This is the meaning of the teaching of equanimity (samatva), which the Gītā addresses again and again from different angles.

The first chapter lays the groundwork – the outer symbolic situation – for resolving the inner conflict with the kleśas. This mirrors our ordinary life, too. In ordinary life, it is in the outer situation that our inner kleśas come to expression. It is mainly in outer situations – conflicts with parents, loved ones, bosses, husbands or wives, girlfriends or boyfriends, ex-girlfriends or ex-boyfriends, and real enemies – that our own inner kleśas come to expression.

By setting an outer scene – a battlefield scene – the Gītā skillfully shows that the inner kleśas are first to be found primarily in outer external experiences. Only when outer experiences become dissatisfactory and painful does the mind look inward to the solution: resolving the inner negative emotions.

Their resolution is never merely an outer struggle but an inner resolution: equanimity. This becomes crystal-clear in the course of the Gītā.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।

आचार्यमुपसङ्गम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥ 2 ॥

sañjaya uvāca

dr̥iṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ duryodhanas tadā |

ācāryam upasaṅgamyā rājā vacanam abravīt || 2 ||

sañjayaḥ = Sañjaya – uvāca = he said – dr̥iṣṭvā = having seen – tu = but (change of tone) – pāṇḍava-ānīkam = the army of the Pāṇḍavas – vyūḍham = arrayed, arranged – duryodhanaḥ = Duryodhana – tadā = then – ācāryam = the teacher – upasaṅgamyā = having approached – rājā = the ruler – vacanam = a speech – abravīt = he spoke

Sañjaya said:

Having seen the Pāṇḍavas’ army arrayed, the ruler Duryodhana approached the teacher and spoke the following words.

The teacher is Droṇācārya, who was teacher to both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas.

It is important to dwell on the figure Duryodhana for a while. Who is Duryodhana, ‘the one who is hard to fight’? A relentless fighter, he represents the kleśa of pride (māna). This kleśa does not allow the mind

to see things as they are. It seeks power and dominance over others, not yielding any space to anyone but itself, generating ever greater divides, ever more solid duality.

Duryodhana is the first-born of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, His mother Gāndhārī has intentionally blinded herself with a blindfold – so as to be blind like her husband Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Unable to conceive, she is granted a boon by the sage Vyāsa. Through this, she becomes pregnant. However, her pregnancy is unnaturally long. Frustrated by rumours that Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas, is about to give birth, Gāndhārī beats her own womb.

After two years of pregnancy, Gandhari finally gives birth to a dark piece of lifeless flesh, as hard as an iron ball, which was certainly not a baby. This symbolises the kleśas born from blind ignorance in their supta or undifferentiated state, a state as inflexible as iron.

Gāndhārī is devastated, as she had expected a hundred sons to be born by the blessings of the sage Vyāsa. She is about to throw away the piece of flesh when Vyāsa appears and tells her his blessings are never in vain. He asks Gāndhārī to arrange for one hundred jars to be filled with ghee. He tells her that he will cut the piece of flesh into a hundred pieces and place them in the jars, which will then develop into the one hundred sons that she so desired. Gāndhārī tells Vyāsa that in this case she would also like a daughter. Vyāsa agrees, cuts the piece of flesh into one hundred and one pieces, and placed them each into a jar. After two more years of patient waiting the jars are ready to be opened.

The first jar contains Duryodhana. Born shortly after Yudhiṣṭhira, he grows up to have a difficult temper, always besting others at everything. He envies the powerful Bhīma and later practices fighting against an iron statue of Bhīma. He is known to indulge in song and drink, and to be ruthless in his lust for power. After tricking them out of their rightful possession with the help of his trickster uncle Śakuni, Duryodhana is not ready to gift the Pāṇḍavas even five villages.

By her austerity, his mother Gāndhārī has gained the power of siddhis. Later in the Mahābhārata battle, she asks Duryodhana to stand naked in front of her in order for her to lift her blindfold just once and confer upon him the power of invincibility. This succeeds only partially, since he keeps his middle region and thighs covered with a cloth.

In the final fight with Bhīma, through Kṛṣṇa's advice, Bhīma defeats Duryodhana by striking his thighs with a mace. Kṛṣṇa employs trickstery to overcome trickstery. This was in response to Duryodhana having humiliated Draupadī, the wife of the Pāṇḍavas, by telling her to sit on his thigh.

The Mahābhārata embeds stories within stories within stories – to show how complex the innumerable entanglements of karma are.

Duryodhana – the kleśa of pride – is almost invincible. He represents the greatest kleśa to be recognised and dissolved. When all his ninety-nine brothers have already been slain, he is still alive and plotting. It is relentless pride which keeps the mind in Saṃsāra, wishing to be better than others and to dominate them.

Pride can take extremely subtle forms. Even though it seems to be eradicated on the surface, it may sink down into depths of the mind and still be active. This is symbolised by the story of Duryodhana continuing to live at the bottom of a lake after the Mahābhārata battle is over.

Now back to the Gītā itself. Duryodhana approaches Droṇācārya, who served as teacher to both the Pāṇḍavas (the 'good side') and Kauravas (the 'evil side'). Through the entanglements and twists of fate, because of his own allegiance and indebtedness to the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Droṇācārya is compelled to fight on the side of Duryodhana.

This symbolises the following: When it is not under the guidance of Awareness as wisdom, when it is guided by unresolved anger (as the story of Droṇa will show), even great skill just becomes a tool used by pride and ignorance. Sometimes even good meditators do so only because they want to be better than others, more special than others, or they want to use the insights gained from meditation to reshape their identity and impress others.

Thus, the kleśa of pride can make even excellent qualities its unwilling servants: great skill (Droṇācārya) when driven by unresolved anger – and tremendous yogic energy (Bhīṣma) when it is not integrated. We will explore this in greater detail later.

पश्यैतां पाण्डुपुत्राणामाचार्य महतीं चमूम् ।

व्यूढां द्रुपदपुत्रेण तव शिष्येण धीमता ॥ ३ ॥

paśyaitāṁ pāṇḍu-putrāṇām ācārya mahatīm camūm |
vyūḍhām drupada-putreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā || 3 ||

paśya = behold, see – etām = this – pāṇḍu-putrāṇām = of the sons of Pāṇḍu – ācārya = o teacher – mahatīm = great, vast – camūm = army – vyūḍhām = arranged, organised – drupada-putreṇa = by the son of Drupada – tava = your – śiṣyeṇa = by the student – dhīmatā = by the intelligent

O teacher, behold this vast army of the sons of Pāṇḍu, arranged by the son of Drupada, your intelligent student.

More about the teacher Droṇācārya must be understood so as to realise the Mahābhārata's skillful way of embedding stories within stories within stories: these altogether represent the infinitely complex web of Samsāric entanglements that take place within us and outside us simultaneously.

In his childhood, Droṇa had a best friend by the name of Drupada, the crown prince of the southern part of Pañcāla, one of the kingdoms of ancient India. They studied together under the tutelage of the sage Bharadvāja, who was Droṇa's own father. As a youth, Drupada assures Droṇa that once he becomes king, he will share half of his kingdom with Drona. This can be understood as a promise: "There will be no duality." While Drupada becomes a king after the death of his father, Droṇa lives a life of poverty. After some time Droṇa approaches

Drupada for help. Now conscious of the difference of status between them, Drupada refuses to acknowledge Droṇa's friendship and shuns him, calling him a beggar. The story represents duality.

Many years later, Droṇa is employed by Bhīṣma to train the Kuru princes: the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas are his dedicated students. His favourite student of all is Arjuna.

At the end of their education and training in martial arts, archery and the like, Droṇa demands that as a thank you for their training, the princes should defeat and capture Drupada, his arch enemy. Firstly, all the one hundred Kauravas together attack Drupada, but Drupada is so skilled himself that he defeats all of them. Then the five Pāṇḍavas led by Arjuna overwhelm Drupada, binding him in ropes and bringing him to Droṇa.

Droṇa sets Drupada free but retains half of the kingdom that had been promised to him. Humiliated, Drupada seeks vengeance but he realises that he cannot match Drona's might. So Drupada performs the Putrakāmeṣṭi fire ceremony to beget a son who would slay Drona. From the fire of the yajña, a pair of twins is born: a boy Dhṛṣṭadyumna and a girl, Draupadī. Dhṛṣṭadyumna, too, becomes a student of Droṇa, one of his best and most intelligent. Years later, Draupadī becomes the wife of all the five Pāṇḍavas. In part, the Mahābhārata battle is the ultimate result of the humiliation she suffers at the hands of the Kauravas when Yudhiṣṭhira (symbolising space-like Awareness) loses his kingdom and even his own brothers and finally his wife in a game: a game of dice. In the first phase of the battle, the one which the Gītā begins with,

Dhṛṣṭadyumna is appointed as the army chief. On the 15th day of the battle, Dhṛṣṭadyumna beheads his own teacher Droṇa.

The narratives around Droṇa represent unresolved anger as a root-cause of duality. Anger, which is simply a stronger form of aversion, reinforces duality at every step. Even though Droṇa has attempted to ‘share half of the kingdom’ – which was Drupada’s original promise – he has achieved this only through force and humiliation. Nonduality cannot be achieved when one kleśa humiliates another. Drupada himself also symbolises pride. It was his pride – thinking himself to be above Droṇa in status – that let the original friendship fall apart. Yet Droṇa’s unresolved anger in response to pride does not overcome pride. It only reinforces it. Humiliated pride breeds only tension and vengeance.

In the first phase of the Mahābhārata battle, the son of Drupada now heads the Pāṇḍava army, whereas Bhīṣma – about whom we will hear a lot more – heads the Kaurava army. Incidentally, Bhīṣma too will later be overcome only through the actions of another child of Drupada, Śikhaṇḍī, whose story is possibly the most fascinating in the Mahābhārata.

With this complex web of connections looming, the text now has Duryodhana, the kleśa of pride, address Droṇa, and referring immediately to Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the son of Droṇa’s arch enemy Drupada who will be destined to slay Droṇa.

Many readers simply skip over these verses, not perceiving the dramatic irony of this moment. The third verse of the Gītā already hints at a highly complex dynamic: The son of Drupada, Droṇa’s arch enemy, whose only purpose in life is to slay Droṇa, is heading the opposite army. And yet that very Dhṛṣṭadyumna is Droṇa’s own intelligent student. Humiliation’s vengeance, after all, is the student of anger.

In conclusion: The Gītā’s essential instruction is to achieve the equanimity (samatva) of the mind by establishing it in wisdom, rooted in Maitrī (well-wishing for all) and Karuṇā or Dayā (compassion). This is not merely an artificial outer enactment or performance, however. It is accomplished through meditation, by observing the arising and ceasing of experiences, and by merely witnessing the results of good and negative states – by merely witnessing them, the mind is led by Awareness itself and can finally take refuge in it. With such clarity, the mind can then truly face the kleśas and dissolve them.

PRAYER to GODDESS SARASVATĪ to
INCREASE *our* INTELLIGENCE



GODDESS SARASVATĪ, THE SANSKRIT LANGUAGE PERSONIFIED

Ancient Nepali Painting of Goddess Sarasvati © Himalayan Art Resources

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ॐ नमस्ते शारदे देवि काश्मीरपुरवासिनि ।
त्वामहं प्रार्थये नित्यं विद्यादानं च देहि मे ॥

oṃ namaste śārade devi kāśmīra-pura-vāsini |
tvām ahaṃ prārthaye nityaṃ vidyā-dānaṃ ca dehi me ||

Om Obeisance to you, O Goddess Śāradā,
You who are like the Full-Moon in Autumn,
You who dwell in the Region of Kaśmīr!
I ever beseech you: Grant me the gift of knowledge!

