

Yoga Philosophy corner.

Reflections on The Bhavagad Gita chapter 1 and 6,

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Dear fellow Iyengar Yogis,

We are living in morally trying and nationally and internationally conflictual times. We see frequent reports of violence and struggles for resources, while key leaders demonstrate lack of friendliness, maitri (YS), lack of compassion, karuna (YS), and lack of adherence to truth, Pramana (YS), and truthfulness Satya (YS). How do we now find our way?

Our path of Classical Yoga, as coined by the sage Patanjali, tells us that we must proceed on the path of yoga with persevering effort, Tapas (YS) and we must balance this effort with Self reflection and reflection on the ancient scriptures, svadhyaya. So let's turn to the ancients in our tradition for insight and guidance.

The Bhavagad Gita is in the middle of the Maharata text of 100000 verses from the 5th century. The setting is a confrontation between 2 sets of cousins: the Kurus and the Pandavas. The main Character Arjuna is part of the Pandavas, Edwin Bryant said: "the good guys." There is a real chrisiline here, Arjuna is one of the chiefs of the Pandura army, his requirement is to fight and kill Bhima. They are great warriors confronting each other, a Maharata is a warrior who can take out 10000 foot soldiers ... And there are many other heroes (1.verse 9) ... All skilled in battle. The uproar was tremendous (l.v. 13). Krishna blew his Panchajanya, Arjuna blew his Devadatta, while Bhima, terrible in action, blew the great conch horn Paundra (1.15), supreme archers, great warriors (1.17); the noise burst asunder ... The sky and the earth to resound (1.19). Then Arjuna 'Raised his bow as the clash of weapons began'(1.20).

Arjuna then spoke these words to Krishna: Oh Lord of the earth, Cause my chariot to stand in the middle between the two armies, Imperishable One (1.21). Though 'having come together wishing to do service in warfare (1.23) Arjuna says: 'having seen my own people Krishna, desiring to fight, approaching (1.28) my limbs sink down, my mouth dries up, my body trembles, and my hair stands on end (1.29), the bow falls from my hand, my skin burns, I am unable to remain as I am, and my mind seems to ramble (1.30). I perceive inauspicious omens, oh Krishna, and I forsee misfortune in destroying my own people in battle (1.31). I do not want victory or kingship, Arjuna say; I do not desire to kill (1.35), ..we are not justified in killing the sons of Dhritarashtra, our own kinsmen (1.37), how, having killed our own people, could we be happy, Krishna?' (1.37). Because of the ascendancy of lawlessness, Krishna, the family women are corrupted, when women are corrupted' social order collapses (chapter 1 verse 41).

Arjuna refuses to fight, and finally ' ... Sat down upon the seat of the chariot, throwing down both arrow and bow, with a heart overcome by sorrow' (1.47) this is the end of book 1: the despondency of Arjuna.

Arjuna stops at the place of high activation of a samscara. When samscaras are activated impulses are high. In Bengali Baba's commentary on the Yoga Sutras 1st Pada Sutra 18 on the fifth samadhi, he tells us to pause, to 'practice cessational cognition, (which) has the end of habitual potencies ... (and) cessation of all operations, ... (this) restraint of the mind which has the end of the habitual potencies, is the Ultra-Cognitive Spiritual Absorption. Arjuna practices this 'cessational cognition' as he put down his weapons. He stops fighting with others in the world, and refuses to kill his kinfolds. He turns inside instead (Chapter 6).

When we are in a place of severe conflict with impulses to harm, we need to pause and go deep inside our felt experience to observe our own system at its depths. An Ancient Vedic text tells the story: The elixir of life is on the bottom of the sea. We need the Gods and the Demi-gods in order to get to the elixir: God on one side, and the Demi gods on the other side with snake in hands between them. They drop the mountain into the ocean and churn up the ocean. The Gods cheated the Demi Gods out of a deal, as the turtle went to the bottom of the sea for the elixir of life. Reflecting on the meaning of this myth: We need to turn towards ourselves and make friends with your bad sides, create real relationships and collaborations with them, witness and resolve internal dilemmas, tame our deep impulses and have them become your allies.

The yoga sutras tell us in sutra 1.18 to pause when samscaras are activated, pause and wait till the activation comes to an end, then choose course of action, (viramapratyahara abhyasapurvah samskarasesah Anyah (YS I.18). This is such an important skill and habit to learn for the yogi, that it was given a whole sutra to itself, and is named as a fifth samadhi, pretty important!

To ever get there Pratyahara is key: To put our weapons down, be still, and begin to look inward, to draw the senses near their source. Here we self reflect (svadhyaya) from a witness place of consciousness, in the spaciousness of vijnanamaya kosa the body of intelligence and buddhi witness awareness, with its lightness guided by the element of air and ether. What we witness is the realm of manas consciousness which is influenced by the senses and the elements of earth, water, and fire erupting. This is a level and form of consciousness which is ignorant of spiritual truth (Avidya), and is characterized by egoism (asmita), attachments to the pleasurable (raga), and aversion to the unpleasant (dvesa), and this manas consciousness is plagued by anxieties with seeds in fear of death and disintegration (abhinivesah). The impulse driven manas consciousness dominates at the level of annamaya kosa (the muscular Skeletal body), pranamaya kosa (core and organic body), and at the level of manomaya kosa (The mental body the psychological body) (o'bannon).

The Bhavagad Gita Book VI: The yoga of meditation

The key to cultivating our consciousness and making it favorably disposed, serene and benevolent, the yoga sutras say in sutra 1.33, is to firmly establish maitri friendliness, karuna compassion, mudita joy and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively. The Bhagavad Gita elaborates in chapter VI verse 5: "One should uplift oneself by the Self, One

should not degrade oneself; for the Self alone can be a friend to oneself, and the self alone can be an enemy of oneself.” Sutra II.17 in the yoga sutra of Patanjali explains how this is.

II.17: drastrdrsyayoh samyogah heyahetuh

The cause of pain is the association or identification of the seer (atma) with the seen (Prakrti) and the remedy lies in their dissociation.

My friend and third psychotherapy master trainer here in the US: Richard Schwartz Ph.D. developed Internal Family Systems Therapy. He discovered when working with anorexic and bulimic adolescents, that manas consciousness shows up with parts which act in typical ways when a samsara is activated: Activation of a samsara happens when a denied, repressed or otherwise exiled distressing and overwhelming experience from the past gets activated and triggered. This can be after years of having been stored in the tissues of the body and lodged at the ground of emotional and somatic memory. When such triggering happens this is pre-conscious and typically causes impulses and cravings, with the real reason for this activation remaining below the radar of conscious awareness. The individual is only aware of such activation when, in the conscious realm. Firefighting protective mechanisms erupt, such as cravings and impulsive urges (shopping, eating, raging and misuse of power, sexting, drinking, telling lies, controlling food, over working etc). This is a pre-consciously activated attempt of the body-mind to move the erupted exiled material back into the the somatic realm where it was buried. The issues then remain in the tissues and cause unnecessary suffering. These mechanisms are often harmful personally and relationally, especially when used in extreme doses. On the level of manomaya kosa the mental body and cognitive thinking consciousness we have habitual potencies which attempt to manage our experience. managing patterns such as these thoughts: ‘Don’t go there, it is water under the bridge’, ‘don’t think about it and it will disappear’, ‘shut up and do something else and it will go away,’ or shaming and overpowering of ourselves or others, or ridiculing or otherwise harming of others. Such managing protective mechanisms may work temporarily to ward off unpleasant material. Though long term managing and firefighting solutions to dilemmas are typically harmful interpersonally and relationally.

To work with one’s inner system there is a need to un-blend the Self from prkrtti (prakriti?) manifestations of the three kinds of parts: exiled experiences, firefighting impulsive parts, and cognitively managing and distorting parts. There is a need for the consciousness to move into a vijnanamaya level and form of consciousness of witnessing one’s own manas driven reactions and not act out extreme and impulsive reactions. As instructed in YS sutra II.17 we need to un-blend the Self so we can tame our impulsive parts and call back our ‘internal puppies.’ To do this we need to develop the habit of pausing when activated, then internally witness, and wait for the deactivation of the samsara. Then we may be able to speak FOR our experiences with calmness, intelligence, and integrity, as opposed to speaking THROUGH our experiences and hereby throw our emotions onto others with distortions and lies. Speaking of our emotions and experiences implies calmness, collectedness and Self leadership. This is a level of buddhified awareness and intention adhering to principles of truth and integrity. We may have to wait and pause when activated, and interview ourselves about what is up, what is making this so

important to us, before we dialogue with others about our distress. This Self lead buddhified form of consciousness embodies qualities of spiritual maturity, compassion, kindness, and willingness to promote and participate in beneficial processes towards inner and interpersonal healing and wholeness.

In IFS psychotherapy and other mindfulness based forms of psychotherapy the practitioner teaches the client how to un-bend this self and how to work with their own parts guided by the therapist. This witness consciousness, also called Self energy, becomes the most significant source of self-healing, just like classical yoga and Patanjali tells us in the Yoga Sutras, and just like the Bhavagad Gita elaborates on in Chapter 6 the book of meditation.

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