

Satsang with Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Arjuna's grief ¹

Question

Swamiji, would you please discuss the difference between the grief of Arjuna and the sadness of a normal person?

Answer

Arjuna's grief was born of conflict between his affections and the call of duty. On one hand, he found that he had to fight against people whom he knew and respected, people who were connected to him, either by blood or because they were friends and acquaintances.

The fight came as result of two factors—revenge and duty. The revengefulness that Arjuna felt when he came to the battlefield went away when he looked at the enormity of destruction involved. Arjuna knew there would be a lot of destruction on his own side and, because he hoped to win, he expected the destruction on the other side to be total. In order to win, he has to destroy the entire army of his opponent. Arjuna's estimation of the outcome was purely pragmatic. And with this view he was expected to begin the battle.

Arjuna knew very well that Duryodhana would not retreat. Duryodhana was definitely not the type, even if such an action were conceivable, which in those days it was not. He would fight until the end, until the last man. Arjuna knew the total destruction of other side would mean the destruction of his own teacher,

Drona, as well as Bhishma, the highly respected, grand old man of the family. This was Arjuna's problem.

The problem was further compounded for Arjuna because there was a call of duty involved. Duryodhana had usurped the kingdom that the Pandavas were supposed to rule. Arjuna's eldest brother, Dharmaputra, was the king, even though he was in exile. It was his duty to protect the *dharma*, along with his brothers, the crown princes. Duryodhana has flouted the *dharma*, in every way he could. However one looks at Duryodhana's actions, even those of his childhood, they had always been questionable. Certainly in the recent past he had behaved in ways which were quite improper.

Given this situation, what choice did Arjuna have? None. Arjuna had to fight. It was his call of duty and duty has nothing to do with one's affection. Therefore, because of Arjuna's affections were in conflict with his duty, there was grief. If we have placed ourselves in a situation where we have to destroy each other, there is definitely grief. This is grief of a normal person who is mature enough to appreciate what his or her duty is, but who, at the same time, has simple human emotions.

Arjuna's grief did not remain grief. It became something quite different. First, he broke down and, then, going beyond war, kingdoms, *dharma* and *adharma*, he wanted to know the meaning of it all. Arjuna was an accomplished person who lived a life of moral integrity. He did not need to prove himself to anyone. Arjuna's grief was the grief of the person who is mature and who does not seem to have any control over the situations of his or her own life. Arjuna wanted to avoid the fight because of the destruction involved, but he could not—a very sad situation indeed.

His grief led him to the appreciation of a certain fundamental human problem. Therefore, he asked for the knowledge that would resolve this problem. Arjuna's grief was unlike the grief of depression, for instance. Depression is born of anger, childhood anger. There is no such thing called current depression. Anyone who is depressed is definitely so because of childhood anger.

Something that happened in an adult life yesterday does not really cause depression. Depression comes because of a build-up of anger from childhood onwards. Therefore, anger is the cause of depression and the anger itself is caused by some kind of deep pain. When this pain, in the form of hurt, guilt, and various other things, builds up, depression comes.

Depression was not Arjuna's problem. Arjuna's problem is one wherein the realities have to be understood properly. The problem has to be addressed in two ways. First, it has to be dealt with at the level where it occurs and it also has to be dealt with cognitively.

Arjuna's problem was more an ethical, moral, and spiritual problem. Of course, all problems have some emotional content. That is why they are problems. Problems, other than the one Arjuna was dealing, are all emotional problems. Here, while the problem is also emotional, morality is predominant, not emotion. In fact, the difference between these two kinds of problems depends on whether emotion or morality predominates, both factors being connected to the self.

In depression, the self is also involved, since depression implies a certain estimation of myself, which is not true. Therefore, one can solve the problem fundamentally if one can address and understand it. The problem we are discussing here, Arjuna's problem, can and must be solved fundamentally.

Arjuna had to re-evaluate his thinking completely. Cognitively, he had to change both vision of himself and the world, as well as his notions about death and destruction. Everything had to be re-examined.

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