

MAHABHARATA – Part 16

(The Kurukshetra War Begins)



All the peace efforts made by the Pandavas to find an alternative for the war failed. The preparations for war by the Pandavas and the Kauravas started in a big way. Intensive discussions and arguments started to choose the commander-in-chief on both sides.

Bhishma was chosen as a Commander for Kaurava army. Bhishma, the grandsire of both Pandavas and the Kauravas had agreed to be the Commander of the Kaurava forces, but he was equally attached to the Pandava princes since childhood. On taking over the charge, he made one point very clear to Duryodhana: "The sons of Pandu are as dear to me as you are and I will not kill any one of them. In fulfillment of my promise to you, I shall lead the army and discharge my duty. Tens of thousands of warriors will daily fall by my arrows on the battle field. This war has not had my approval. Short of killing the Pandavas, I will discharge all my obligations sincerely." Duryodhana was not happy with Bhishma's statement of not killing Pandavas in the war, but knew Bhishma was invincible in the war. Since Bhishma and Dronacharya could not be defeated, he was confident of victory.

Duryodhana requested Bhishma to state and explain the strength of both the camps. Bhishma talked about Dronacharya, Kripacharya, Shalya, and others as Maharathas and Athirathas. Maharathas and Atirathas were the highest level of warriors – they, all alone by themselves, could kill thousands of ordinary warriors. But he insulted Karna, who he did not like, and said he was not even a Ratha. Bhishma said "This friend of yours is harsh and boastful. I don't consider him to be even Ratha. He always runs from a duel. He has also given away his Kavacha Kundala. He is cursed by my Guru Parasurama, and also by the Brahmin." Karna was very angry at Bhishma's words, and took an oath not to fight in the war as long as Bhishma was alive.

In the Pandava camp, various suggestions were made as to who should command the Pandava forces. Names of Virata and Drupada were also suggested but finally Dhrishtadyumna, son of Drupada and brother of Draupadi, was chosen as the Supreme Commander. The Kauravas had eleven Akshauhinis of army, while the Pandavas had only seven. Each Akshauhini consisted of 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses, and 109,350 foot soldiers.

The warriors on both the sides met and agreed to honor certain traditional rules of war. Everyday the battle was to end at sunset and thereafter the hostiles could meet freely like friends. Single combats took place only among equals. For example, a fight could be between two chariots or two horsemen or two mace-holders. A horseman could attack only a horseman and not a foot soldier. Those who left the field or retired were not to be attacked. Those who surrendered out of fear were not to be attacked. It was considered sinful to slay one who was disarmed or who was retreating or who had lost his armor. No arrows were to be directed towards the non-combatants.

A night before the commencement of the battle, Saint Vyasa offered to bestow eyesight to Dhritarashtra, if he wanted to watch the war. Dhritarashtra, however, shuddered at the very idea of watching the killing of kith and kin with his own eyes. However, he expressed willingness to hear about the events of war from a reliable person. Vyasa granted inner sight to Sanjaya. Thus the account of war from the beginning to the end has been given in the words of Sanjaya as he related the events to Dhritarashtra.

On the evening before the commencement of the battle, Duryodhana sent Shakuni's son, Uluka, as a messenger, with individual messages to all the Pandava brothers and Krishna, reminding them of the oaths they had taken some fourteen years before, and to fulfill them on the battle field. It was challenge thrown to the Pandavas with a warning that they were all going to be killed and that they should be ready to meet their Maker soon. Back was delivered the reply that they would do what they had sworn earlier to do.

While Duryodhana was so confident that the war will be over in a day or two with such an invincible commander as Bhishma, Yudhishtira spent a sleepless night, being unhappy at the thought of killing his own kith and kin: "I suffered thirteen years of exile to avoid the bloody war. How will we fight to kill those elders whom we have honored all these years?" Krishna and Arjuna comforted him: "The war has been forced upon us. There is no going back. We have no option."

Next day at dawn, both armies of Pandavas and Kauravas were assembled by the commanders on the vast plains of Kurukshetra. Meanwhile, Arjuna asked Krishna, who had agreed to become his charioteer, to drive the chariot to the open space in between the two hostile camps. Arjuna surveyed the two sides and he saw his kinsmen and friends on either side ready to fall upon one another. He was deeply moved and spoke to Krishna: "I seek neither victory, nor kingdom, nor any worldly pleasures. What pleasure shall I enjoy after slaying my own kinsmen?" he dropped his celestial bow and sat down in a depressed mood.

This was the occasion when Lord Krishna delivered his famous sermon which, in the Hindu scriptures, is known as Srimad Bhagavad-Gita. When Arjuna made a sudden resolution to retire from the combat, he confided his thoughts to Krishna, who revealed himself to Arjuna in his celestial splendor and commanded him to do his duty which was to fight for the rightful cause, no matter what might befall on his or others.

Arjuna thus confided his thoughts to Krishna: "When I behold my kinsmen all arrayed in lines of battles preparing for the deadly fight, my limbs weaken, my blood dries up, tremor shakes my body, hair upon my skin bristle with fear, all my body burns as if with fever and my mind whirls round. I cannot stand upright and cannot hold the Gandiva."

Krishna's philosophical and theological discourse given to Arjuna is acknowledged by all, as one of the supreme treasures of human literature of all times and of all civilizations. The gospel of devotion to duty without any attachment or desire of reward has shown the right way of life to all mankind. The Bhagavad-Gita is a long sermon, divided into three sections, each containing six chapters.

Krishna's main emphasis was on Action; "Perform all necessary acts, for action is better than inaction. None can live by sitting still and doing nothing. Yet, in working, never work for compensation and return. Let the Act's motive be in the Act itself."

After long instructions Krishna revealed His real self to Arjuna: "Let thy heart and thine understanding be fixed in me. Think thou on me, have faith in me, and worship me and thou shall come to me and I am in them. I am the same unto all creatures; there is none hateful to me and none dear. Those who hate me are consigned to evil births."

When Arjuna saw the celestial vision (Vishwaroop) of Lord Krishna, he bowed his head and folding his hands in reverence, said "I see thee, O Lord, revealed in forms of infinite diversity. I see thee like a mass of purest light, flashing its luster all around. O eternal one, I behold your glory. My conscience is clear and I will do thy bidding and fight without questioning and without fear."

Now everything was ready for the battle to begin. At that tense moment, both armies saw with amazement Yudhishtira all of a sudden, put off his armor, cast aside his weapons and, descending from his chariot, proceeded on foot towards the Commander of the Kaurava forces. Everyone wondered at this strange behavior of Yudhishtira. Arjuna and his brothers feared that perhaps Yudhishtira, in a weak moment, had decided to make peace at any terms. They ran up to him to enquire what he was going to do. Yudhishtira, just immersed in his thoughts, proceeded on. The people in Duryodhana's camp thought that Yudhishtira had got frightened after seeing the vast armies of the Kauravas and was approaching Bhishma to sue for peace.

Yudhishtira went straight through the armed forces of the enemy lines, and reached the chariot of Bhishma. There, bending low and touching Bhishma's feet in reverence, he said: "Grandsire, permit us to commence the battle. We seek your blessings before beginning the fight." Bhishma replied: "Fight and you will have victory. I am not free and am bound by my obligations to the king. Your cause is just and you cannot be defeated." Next, Yudhishtira approached his Guru Dronacharya and sought his blessing as well. He also approached Kripacharya and Shalya, his uncle, for obtaining similar blessings. Thereafter he returned to the Pandava camp.

The battle began.

Questions:

- Do you remember what the two curses on Karna were?
- Was it a good sign for the Kauravas that Karna would not fight until Bhishma was dead? Is this called unity or disunity? Which is better, unity or disunity if you want to complete a task?
- Who was Sanjaya and what did he do?
- What is the scripture called which is the discussion between Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield?
- Why did Duryodhana sleep well the first day of the battle?
- Why did Yudhisthira hardly sleep at all? Was he worried about losing the battle?
- Why did Bhishma fight with the Kauravas instead of the Pandavas?
- What did Yudhisthira do before the battle began?
- Why did he touch Bhishma, Drona, and other's feet? What did this mean?
- Whose army was bigger, with more and better warriors – the Kauravas or the Pandavas? How much bigger?

Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam

Kousalya supraja Rama poorva sandhya pravarthathe
Uttishta Narasardula karthavyamdhaivamanhikam (1)
Uthishtothishta Govinda Uthishta Garuda dwaja
Uthishta Kamalakantha trilokyam mangalam kuru (2)
Matahassamastha jagatham MaduKaitabareh
Vaksho viharini manohara divya murthe
Sriswamini sritha jana priya dana seele
Sree Venkatesa dayite tava suprabhatham (3)

**Tava Suprabhatamaravindalochane
Bhavatu prasanna mukha chandramandale
Vidhi Sankarendra vanithabhirarchite
Vrisha saila natha Dayite Dayanidhe! (4)**

O Devi! A fine morning to you whose eyes are like the petals of a lotus and the bright face of the full moon; the consorts of Brahma, Sankara and Indra pay their respects to you. The ocean of mercy! Dear to the Lord of the Vrishabadri!

**Atryadi sapta rishayah samupasya sandhyam
Akasa sindhu kamalani manoharani
Aadaya Padayugam archayitum prapannah
Seshadri sekhara vibho tava suprabhatham (5)**

O resident of Sehadri! the seven holy rishis(saptharshis) headed by Atri, having performed their morning sandhya, are at your feet offering beautiful lotuses and the waters of heavenly rivers.

Please receive their humble offerings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucSm8aB_Mz0

Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson

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Coloring Exercise

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