

MAHABHARATA – Part 17

(Bhishma Parva – First Four Days of War)



Do you remember what happened at the end of the last lesson? Yudhisthira took the blessings of his gurus, even though he was about to fight with them. As soon as Yudhisthira returns to his chariot after seeking blessings from Bhishma, Drona, and others, he proceeded to announce to everyone present, "This is not an ordinary war. This is a Dharma Yudh (War for Righteousness). If there is anyone in this camp who thinks that the Kauravas are right, then they should feel free to go there. If there is anyone from Kauravas who thinks we are right, we welcome them to our camp if they want to join our ranks." At that time, to everyone's surprise, Yuyutsu, the son of Dhristarashtra by a lower caste woman, left the Kaurava camp and joined the Pandava camp. (He could be called the 101st son of King Dhristarashtra). Duryodhana was disgusted, but helpless. The conches and trumpets were blown on both sides to announce the commencement of the war.

In the very forenoon of the first day's battle, the Pandava forces suffered very heavily. In whatever direction Bhishma's chariot moved, it was like the dance of the destroyer. He literally cut a blood-red path through the fear-stricken Pandava legions. Abhimanyu could not bear this and he attacked the grandsire. It became a confrontation between the youngest and the oldest. In that fierce duel, the young Abhimanyu shot at least nine arrows which pierced Bhishma, who exclaimed: "Indeed, a worthy son of Arjuna!" Bhishma did not like the war or the Kauravas, but felt obligated to fight for them since he was living and working under King Dhristarashtra.

The Kaurava warriors made a combined attack on the brave youth but he stood firm against all of them. He parried with his own all the shafts discharged by Bhishma. One of his well aimed arrows brought the grandsire's palm tree flag down. Great was the grandsire's joy, seeing the valor of the young hero. Unwillingly, he had to use his full strength against the boy. Several Pandava warriors arrived to relieve Abhimanyu. Two sons of Virata, Uttara and Sveta, lost their lives in trying to protect him. This was followed by a great attack on the Pandava army by Bhishma. The Pandava forces suffered greatly on the first day of the battle. Dharmaraj was seized with apprehension, and Duryodhana's joy was unbounded.

The second day, Dhristadyumna took measures to avoid the repetition of the previous day's onslaught. But Bhishma once more broke through the Pandavas' formation. Arjuna succeeded in driving him back. He wielded his Gandiva bow admirably. In another sector, a fierce battle took place between Drona and Dhristadyumna, who was badly wounded but who retaliated with great vigor. His bow was broken and his charioteer was killed. Then he took up the mace and when Drona's arrows brought down the mace, he took up his sword. At this crucial moment Bhima arrived to help him and took him away in his chariot. Kalinga forces tried to intervene, but Bhima slaughtered a number of them. When Bhishma rushed to help the Kalinga forces, Satyaki's arrows brought down his charioteer.

The horses of Bhishma's chariot broke wild and bolted, carrying Bhishma away from the battlefield.

As the sun set, it was the end of the day's battle. Duryodhana's confidence in Bhishma began to shake. He had thought that under Bhishma's leadership war would end in a day or two with the total destruction of the Pandava forces. On the second day, the Kaurava forces suffered heavy losses.

On the third day Bhishma arrayed his army in an eagle formation and he himself led it while Duryodhana and his forces protected the rear. The Pandavas too arrayed their forces with skill. Arjuna and Dhrishtadyumna decided in favor of a crescent formation of their army so as to more effectually cope with the eagle formation of the enemy's forces. On the right horn of the crescent stood Bhima and on the left Arjuna, leading the respective divisions.

Bhima and his son, Ghatotkacha, attacked Duryodhana's division and in that day's battle the son appeared to even excel his great father in valor. Bhima's shafts hit Duryodhana and he lay in a swoon in his chariot. His charioteer hurriedly led the chariot away from the battle. This created panic in the Kaurava forces. Bhima took advantage of the confusion and caused havoc among the fleeing Kaurava forces. Only with difficulty, Drona and Bhishma could succeed in restoring confidence. Meanwhile, Duryodhana also arrived to lead his forces.

Duryodhana accused Bhishma of being too kind towards the Pandavas. Bhishma smiled and said, "You rejected my advice when you decided on war. I tried to prevent the war but, now that it has come, I am fulfilling my duties by you with all my might. I am an old man and what I am doing is quite my utmost." Thereafter the grandsire moved about like a whirling firebrand. Krishna then said to Arjuna: "Now is the testing time to see that you do not flinch from duty. You have taken a pledge and you must fulfill the same." When Krishna felt that Arjuna's heart was not in the battle, he lost his temper. "I shall kill Bhishma myself if you do not do that," said Krishna. He got down from the chariot, took up his discus and rushed towards Bhishma. Bhishma was not perturbed at all; rather he welcomed to be slain by Krishna, for thus would he be glorified in the three worlds. Arjuna jumped down from the chariot and entreated Krishna to come back. Thereafter, Arjuna attacked the Kaurava forces furiously and thousands were slain by him. Everyone remarked: "Who can equal Arjuna?" So marvelous was Arjuna's prowess that day.

On the fourth day, Bhima was the hero. He wounded Shalya and Duryodhana. When fourteen brothers of Duryodhana rushed at him, Bhima stood like a rock undisturbed and easily killed eight of them in a short time. The remaining six fled away in terror. Towards the evening one arrow of Duryodhana hit Bhima on his chest and he reeled and almost fainted. His son, Ghatotkacha, rushed to his help and fell furiously on the Kaurava forces,

which were unable to stand against his onslaught. “We cannot fight this rakshasa today” said Bhishma to Drona. “Our men are weary. It is nearing sunset and the might of the rakshasa grows with the darkness. Let us deal with Ghatotkacha tomorrow.” The grandsire ordered his army to retire for the night. Duryodhana sat musing in his tent, his eyes filled with tears. He had lost many of his brothers in that day’s battle.

Listening all this through Sanjay, Dhritarashtra exclaimed: “Sanjay, every day, you give me nothing but bad news of my men being slain and my son being defeated. I cannot stand it any more. What stratagem can save my people? How are we going to win in this fight? Indeed, I am full of fear. It seems fate is more powerful than human effort.” Sanjaya said in reply, “King, is this not all the result of your own folly? Of what avail is grief? How can I concoct good news for you? You should hear the truth with fortitude.”

“Bhima is going to kill all my sons,” Dhritarashtra said. “I do not believe there is anyone with prowess enough in our army to protect my sons from death. Did Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and Aswathama look on unconcerned when our army fled in terror? What indeed is their plan?” Saying thus, the blind old king burst into tears. Sanjay tried to calm him by saying, “The Pandavas rest on the strength of a just cause. So, they win. Your sons are brave but their thoughts are wicked. Therefore, luck does not favor them. They have done great injustice to the Pandavas, and they are reaping the harvest of their sins. The Pandavas are not winning by charms or magic incantations, they have strength. Friends advised you, but you discarded wise counsel. Vidura, Bhishma, Drona, and I tried to stop you in your unwise course, but you did not listen and you went on. Duryodhana asked Bhishma the same question last night as you put to me now, and Bhishma gave the same answer as I give you.”

Thereafter, whenever Sanjay related the happenings of the great battle, Dhritarashtra only burst into tears and lamented, unable to bear his grief.

Questions:

- 1) Who are the Kauravas? How many are they? How are they related to the Pandavas? What was Yuyutsu’s relationship to the Kauravas?
- 2) What gave Bhishma, the grandsire, great joy on the first day? Why?
- 3) Why did Bhishma fight with the Kauravas and not the Pandavas?
- 4) Do you remember the Commander in Chief of the Pandava army?
- 5) Who was Drona? Who had a “close call” with Drona? Who saved him?
- 6) What was the name of Bhima’s son? Was he human? On which day did he seem to excel his father?
- 7) Who gave “motivational talks” to a warrior on the third day?
- 8) Why was Duryodhana crying the night of the fourth day? Who’s fault was it that he was crying?
- 9) How could Sanjaya tell the King what was happening in the battle?
- 10) What did Sanjaya say when the King could not understand why his sons were losing?

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

**Panchananabja Bhava Shanmukha Vasavadyah
Trivikramadi charitam Vibhudas stuvanti
Bhashapathih Patathi vasara suddhimaarat
Seshadri sekhara vibho thava Suprabhatham (6)**

All the deities Gods from Brahma, Shiva, Shanmukha and others are praising your TriVikrama avathara, Brhaspathi, the Saint Guru of Devas is reading out the Panchangam (almanac). O Lord! May this morning be glorious

**Eeshatrapulla saraseeruha narikela
Poogadrumadi sumanohara palikanam
Aavati mandam Anilassaha divyagandhaih
Seshadri Sekhara Vibho tava suprabhatham (7)**

O the Mighty Lord who dwells in the Serpentine Hill of Seshadri! The morning scene is beautiful with the tossing of water lillies, coconut trees and transplanted young paddy fields. The morning breeze is blowing smoothly, carrying these pleasant fragrances, wishing a very good morning to you.

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

Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson

I L A S N

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M E E Y N

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L Y O L F

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O C S T R E

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E G F I R

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E R C T E C N S

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H C C N O

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R C F E O

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O V R L A

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P T M R E E

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Coloring Exercise

