

MAHABHARATA – Part 18

(The Story of Shikhandi)



The Kurukshetra war continued. By the eighth day of the battle, 24 of the 100 Kaurava brothers had been killed the death. Duryodhana complained to Bhishma about his lack of will to win the war against Pandavas. This seemed to motivate Bhishma to try harder. The next day, Bhishma was extremely agitated and fought like he wanted to win the war that day. Bhishma killed thousands of soldiers on Day Nine.

In the battle, Arjuna faced Bhishma, but his heart was not in it. How could he try and kill his grandsire? This bothered Krishna, that Arjuna was not giving his full effort. Finally fed up with Arjuna's lack of effort, Krishna raised his Sudarshana Chakra weapon and proceeds towards Bhishma to kill him. Bhishma dropped his weapon and surrendered to die at Krishna's hands. Of all the warriors, Bhishma was one of the few that knew the real identity of Krishna. There is nothing he would have loved more than to die at the hands of God. Seeing Krishna act this way, Arjuna ran after Krishna and stopped Him. He apologized, and promised to give his full effort.

After the 9th day, Yudhishtira and the Pandavas realized that they would not win the war as long as Bhishma was alive. No one could defeat him. They knew that Bhishma had the 'Ichha Mrityu' boon from his father, meaning he could choose the time of his own death. Yudhishtira went to Krishna and sought His advice. Krishna encouraged Yudhishtira to go to Bhishma and ask him for a way to kill him. The Pandavas went to the enemy camp, and entered Bhishma's tent. Bhishma was happy to see them. The Pandavas greeted him with respect. Then Yudhishtira said, "We will not win this war as long as you are fighting this war. You blessed me to be victorious, but it looks like your blessing will go for nothing. If you want me to be victorious, please let us know how to vanquish you." Then Bhishma instructed them to use Sikhandiniandi as a shield.

The Story of Shikhandi

In a previous lesson, do you remember how King Shantanu married Satyawati, the fisherman's daughter? The Fisher King made Shantanu's son Devavrata vow never to get married and to have children. After that, Devavrata was called Bhishma. Shantanu and Satyawati had two sons, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. Chitrangada was killed in a battle with the Gandharvas. Young Vichitravirya was crowned the King and as he was a minor, so Bhishma ruled on his behalf until he came of age. When Vichitravirya became of marriageable age, Satyawati entrusted Bhishma with finding a suitable bride for Vichitravirya. The King of Kashi was arranging a Swayamvara according to the old Kshatriya practice for his three daughters Amba, Ambika and Ambalika to choose their husband. The daughters of Kashi were famed for their beauty. When Bhishma heard about it, he decided to go there and win a bride for the young Vichitravirya.

The Kings and Princes from all over the country were present in their best attires. When Bhishma reached there, all the assembled Kings and Princes thought he had come to take a

bride. When they saw he came for the brides the assembled suitors began to ridicule him. They did not know that he was there for Vichitravirya. "The wisest of the Bharata clan is not wise enough to realize he is old and has forgotten his own vow." This made Bhishma angry. He challenged all the Kings and Princes to a duel. He defeated them all. Taking the three princesses in his chariot Bhishma set off to Hastinapur. On his way to Hastinapur, Bhishma was intercepted by Salva, the King of Saubala. He was attached to the princess Amba. Salva was defeated in no time since Bhishma was an invincible warrior. Amba pleaded with Bhishma to spare Salva's life, so he let him go.

Arriving at Hastinapur with the princesses, the preparations for the royal wedding began. When everyone was assembled for the wedding, Amba addressed Bhishma mockingly, "You are the wisest of the Bharata clan and have read all the scriptures. I have chosen Salva as my husband. How can you marry me to someone else, when my heart is already given to another?" Bhishma agreed it would be improper. He took to Salva to get married. But unfortunately, Salva would not accept her. This made her very bitter and angry, as she felt Bhishma had ruined her life. Bhishma asked Vichitravirya to marry her, but he refused, saying she loved someone else. Amba asked Bhishma "Since no one has married me, it is your responsibility to take me as your wife." Bhishma apologized, but said he could not take Amba as his wife due to his vow.

After Bhishma's refusal, Amba became even more angry. She started to look for a warrior that could defeat Bhishma in battle and force him to marry her. Everyone was afraid of Bhishma. Finally, some ascetics advised her to seek the help of Parasurama, the ancient avatar of Lord Vishnu. He was known to be invincible in battle. She came to his forest ashram and told him her sad story. Parasurama had been Bhishma's guru. Parasurama was known to be sympathetic to women in distress, and he also had a very quick anger. He agreed to challenge Bhishma in battle and force him to marry Amba.

The great warrior Parasurama challenged Bhishma to a duel. For many long days they battled. Parsurama would send thousands of arrows at Bhishma, and Bhishma would respond with thousands of arrows back. No one had ever witnessed such a battle. They used "astras" against each other, which are like atomic weapons. For each astra there was a counter - astra. The two were evenly matched. Neither could defeat the other. Finally, Parasurama told Princess Amba "I have done my best. I cannot defeat him." And so he left.

After this, all the beauty and sweetness inside Princess Amba turned into hatred for Bhishma. She blamed him as the root for all her sorrows. She wanted to kill Bhishma. But what could she do? She was not a warrior. Even she had solicited the great Parasurama, and he could not defeat Bhishma! But she did know of one thing she could do. She could do TAPASYA. That means to practice austerities to get the grace of God. Tapasya is like this. If you ask your parents for something, they may or may not give. If you say, "I will no

longer play with my friends unless you give me something” they will probably laugh. But if you actually do what you say, you will get their attention! In the same way, people can practice austerities to get the grace of God. When God sees we are suffering so much, doing austerities, wanting to see Him, He takes notice.

Amba went to the forest, and for many years, lived a very difficult life, with very little food, shelter, or water, all the time praying to Lord Shiva. Finally, Lord Shiva appeared, and asked her what boon she wanted. She said she wanted to be able to kill Bhishma. Lord Shiva said she would kill him in her next life. She had so much desire to kill Bhishma that she built a big funeral pyre (fire) and jumped in to kill herself. Why? So she would be reborn sooner and get to kill Bhishma!

Amba was next born as King Drupada’s daughter. She remembered her past life and hatred towards Bhishma. This frightened King Drupada, as he knew Bhishma to be a powerful warrior. He sent her to the forest. The reborn Amba was confused. Why was she born as a woman, if she was meant to fight with Bhishma? Again, she started the practice of tapasya. This time, she asked for the boon to be turned into a man. She then became the man Shikhandi. Shikhandi was now a man, but Bhishma still considered him a woman. It was against Bhishma’s code of conduct to fight with a woman, which is why he advised the Pandavas to use Shikhandi as a shield when they fought with him. Bhishma would never shot his arrows at Shikhandi.

Questions:

Why did Bhishma drop his weapons when Krishna came to kill him?

Why did Arjuna stop Krishna from killing Bhishma?

What did Duryodhana do to motivate Bhishma and Krishna to motivate Arjuna?

Do your parents also give a complaint when they see you are not giving your full effort?

What is Krishna’s weapon?

What boon did Bhishma have from his father?

Do you remember what a swayamvara is? Which princesses had a swayamvara?

What was Bhishma’s vow, that the princes at the swayamvara thought he was breaking?

Does anyone remember who Bhishma was before coming to Earth?

What is tapasya? In this story, who practiced it? What did she do?

What is a boon? Who gave a boon in this story?

Is anger a good thing?

Do you remember who King Drupada was? What was his relationship with Drona?

Amba did tapasya twice. What were the boons she asked for?

Why did Bhishma advise the Pandavas to use Shikhandini as a shield?

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

**Unmeelya netrayugam utama Panjarasthah
Pathrava sishta kadaleephala payasani
Bhuktva saleelamatah Keli sukah patanthi
Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatham (8)**

O Venkateswara! The temple parrots are singing pleasantly after having tasted the fruits, payasa (a liquid Sweet offering) in your Pooja vessels and quenching their thirst; I pray for a good morning to you.

**Tantree prakarsha madurasswanaya Vipanchya
Gayatyanantha charitham tava Naradopi
Bhasha samagram asakrit kara chara ramyam
Seshadri Sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatham (9)**

With his melodious musical instruments Sage Narada is singing your endless stories, set to music and dancing to the enchanting music with lovely hand gestures, may this morning be beautiful.

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

Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson

D B E I R

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M L E A B

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C G E A R

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D S I H L E

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R P E Y

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T E L B T A

--	--	--	--	--	--

L D E U

--	--	--	--

T E A T R I

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C L K A

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T R B T I E

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Coloring Exercise



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