

महाभारत & गीताध्यानं

MAHABHARATA & GEETA DHYANAM

*Prelude to the
Bhagavad Geeta*

"THE SANDEEPANY EXPERIENCE"

TEXT

28.0

Reflections by
SWAMI GURUBHAKTANANDA





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 **KAPWING**

Sandeepany's Vedanta Course

List of All the Course Texts in Chronological Sequence:

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A NOTE ABOUT SANDEEPANY

Sandeepany Sadhanalaya is an institution run by the Chinmaya Mission in Powai, Mumbai, teaching a 2-year Vedanta Course. It has a very balanced daily programme of basic Samskrit, Vedic chanting, Vedanta study, Bhagavatam, Ramacharitmanas, Bhajans, meditation, sports and fitness exercises, team-building outings, games and drama, celebration of all Hindu festivals, weekly Gayatri Havan and Guru Paduka Pooja, and Karma Yoga activities.

This series is an effort to promote the learning of Vedanta; it does not replace the Course, but hopes to inspire young people to spend two years of their life for an experience that is sure to make a far-reaching spiritual impact on their personal lives. Sandeepany is an all-round spiritual course that gives proper direction to the youth and to those approaching retirement. Hinduism is in dire need of a band of systematically trained teachers or Acharyas who can serve this Eternal Religion.

– The Author, 2nd October, 2018, Gandhi Jayanti Day

Om Namah Shivaaya!

Text
28.00



महाभारत & गीताध्यानं

THE MAHABHARATA

Prelude to the Bhagavad Geeta

& GEETA DHYANAM

Meditation on the Bhagavad Geeta

Reflections

by Swami Gurubhaktananda

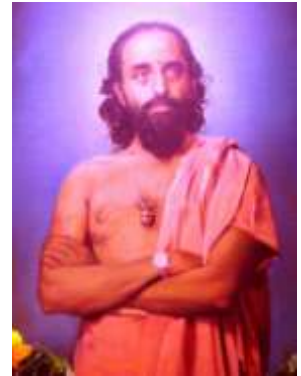
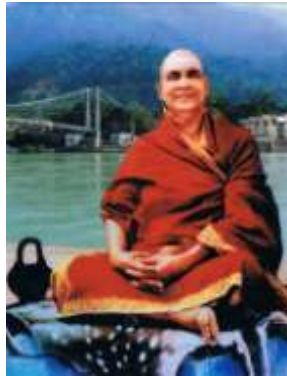
on the Series of 13 Lectures by **Swami Advayanandaji**

Acharyaji, 15th Batch Vedanta Course

at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Powai, Mumbai

Mahabharata: October 8th – October 18th, 2012 (10 Lectures)

Geeta Dhyanam: October 25th – October 27th, 2012 (3 Lectures)



Adi Shankaracharya

Swami Sivananda

Swami Tapovanji

Swami Chinmayananda

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About This Edition:

Web Edition:	21 st March, 2019, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Jayanti
Website:	Chinmaya International Foundation: www.chinfo.org
Series Title :	The Sandeepany Experience
Series Subject:	Vedanta & Supportive Subsidiary Texts

Declaration by the Author: *The material in this series is under inspiration of the Sandeepany Vedanta Course, but largely consists of the Author's reflections on the Course. He is deeply indebted to the Chinmaya Mission for its excellent presentation of the Course by their renowned and dedicated Acharyas.*

Personal Dedication

1. To my Parents, Smt Sharadaben & Sri Ratilalbhai Kapitan

who inspired me to study in life, to stick to the path of Dharma and pursue the highest ideals; and swamped me with their abundant Love;

2. To Pujya Sri Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj

the President of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India, who constantly encouraged and supported this effort;

3. To Pujya Sri Swami Tejomayanandaji (Guruji)

for his boundless vision and inspiration to create a vibrant organisation;

4. To Sri Swami Advayanandaji and Sri Swami Sharadanandaji

my Acharyaji and Upa-Acharyaji at Sandeepany, who imparted their bountiful knowledge and wisdom with rare selfless Divine Love, just as the Rishis of yore would wish to see them do.

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("Asi" Pada)

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Total No. of Discourses = 19 (incl. Introductory)

Total No. of Sections = 134

Total No. of Pages = 822 + (6x19) = **936**





THE START OF THE MAHABHARATA WAR:

Krishna and Arjuna blow their conches.

The story below gives the background to the Mahabharata War. By the time Sanjaya gives his report to Dhritarashtra in the First Discourse of the *Geeta*, the war was already in its tenth day, i.e. half the battle was over. Bhishma had fallen and Dronacharya was in charge of the Kaurava army.

MAHABHARATA

Prelude to the Bhagavad Geeta

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महाभारत

THE MAHABHARATA

(in 18 Episodes)

PRELUDE to the Bhagavad Geeta

Episode 1:

How the Writing Began

MAHA MEANS “big, great”; Bharata is India. This is the greatest story of India’s dynasties around the period 5,000 years ago when the Avatara of Lord Krishna took place. The story is of two sets of brothers, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Great War that was fought between them is the central theme of the epic. And central to the Great War is the spiritual dialogue contained in the *Bhagavad Geeta*.

The other great epic of Indian literature is the Story of Sri Rama or *Ramayana*, which historically took place even before the Mahabharata war. Rama and His three brothers were born in the Suryavamsha or Solar Dynasty, while the five Pandava brothers were born in the Chandravamsha or Lunar Dynasty. Both Sri Rama and Sri Krishna are Avatars of Lord Vishnu. Their purpose was to restore righteousness among the people of India at a time when there was gross abuse of terrestrial power and a reign of Adharma (unrighteousness) within certain kingdoms in the sub-continent.

Before going on to the story, it has to be said that this epic contains just about all the knowledge available at that time. Hence, besides being a story, it is also studded with information both secular and spiritual in content. On the spiritual side, it contains the lofty teachings encompassed in the *Upanishads*, weaved into the fabric of the book via the numerous Rishis and sages whose accounts appear in the book.

It is well said of the Mahabharata that what is in the epic may be somewhere else, but what is not in it will not be found anywhere else.

The author of this national epic is Sage Veda Vyasa, a sage of giant intellect and even greater vision. He did not have four hands and six eyes like the Deities, yet what he accomplished in his lifetime is phenomenal! Vyasaji’s Birthday is celebrated on every Guru Purnima Day. It is called Teacher’s Day as well, because he was the teacher of all humanity. Honour is given to his learning by calling the seat from which discourses are delivered as the “*Vyasa Peeth*”.

This introduction to the *Mahabharata* is very concise as it is only intended as a run-up to the *Bhagavad Geeta* which we shall study soon after it. Hence it only selects certain episodes of the voluminous book, those which pertain to the context of the *Geeta*.

Sri Vyasa had conceived something too vast for one individual. He needed a stenographer to write out the verses for him, while he would do the thinking. Lord Brahmaji suggested the name of Ganeshji. Lord Ganesha agreed but laid down a condition, “that he should not stop the writing.” Vyasa agreed but made a counter-condition, “that Ganesha should understand each word before he writes.”

Vyasaji started at once. Ganeshji was not even ready with his pen, so he broke off one of his tusks and started writing. And so it went on, like a tournament between the two of them – Ganesha and Vyasaji, a child and an old man, they made a good combination!

When it was all written down – all 100,000 verses – it was ready to be handed down to the generations to come. Vyasaji taught it to his son Shukha, who narrated it to Narada, Narada gave it to the Devas; Shukaji also taught it to the Gandharvas and Yakshas. And so the great story began to find its way among the people of sacred India.

Episode 2:

The Story of Bhishma

King Santanu had gone to the forest for a hunting expedition. There he saw a beautiful, bewitching maiden. Out came the question, “Would you marry me?” She was none other than Goddess Ganga but Santanu did not know that. She said she would marry him on condition that he should never ask her who she was, that he should never question her actions, and thirdly that he should never utter words that would pain her. Santanu agreed to all these conditions, and married her.

As time went by, child after child was placed into the Ganga, and Santanu was greatly grieved to see this but had to remain silent. Eventually when the 8th child was born, and was about to be consigned to Mother Ganga, it was too much for Santanu to bear and he burst out to question her heartlessness: “Stop! Who are you? And why are you doing this?”

The Goddess simply said, “My dear Aryaputra, it is time for me to leave you. My name is Ganga, I am Goddess Ganga.”

The babies were the Vasus who were cursed to be born as humans because they had tried to steal from Sage Vasishtha’s Ashram the Kamadenu cow, named Nandini, which could bestow anything one desired. Because they sought his forgiveness, Vasishtha said that when they are born they will die immediately and return to heaven – all except one of them, who will lead a glorious life and be worshipped by all.

Mother Ganga then took that eighth child away, saying, “I will educate him and return him to you.”

Some years later, one day when Santanu had gone again to the forest, he saw a young lad with radiant luster. He had caused the mighty Ganges to retreat by building a “Dam of Arrows” shot one after the other into the Ganga. Santanu was dumbstruck at the sight. He asked the boy, “Son, who are you?”

Gangaji appeared and said that the boy was his own son, that his name was Devavrata, and that none equalled him in the art of archery. She said he was the best in statecraft, and would make a worthy successor. From then on the King lived a plain life and observed Brahmacharya. Devavrata, too, lived like his father in intense austerity.

One day Santanu smelt a divine fragrance waft in his direction. He searched for the source and came upon a lady. He dearly wished to marry her. She said, "I am a fisherwoman. My father is the king of our community. I shall take you to him."

She took him to her father. The father placed a condition: "The son born to my daughter should become the king in due course." Santanu could not say 'Yes' because Devavrata was in line to be the King. With pain he went back to the forest.

Devavrata saw the sorrow on his father's face, and asked, "What is the matter, Father? Why are you so despondent?" The father told his son the whole story of his sadness. Devavrata went to the king of the fishermen and asked him, "Why do you not want to give your daughter to my father in marriage?" The king said, "You are the Prince, so my daughter's son will not be king." Devavrata then offered to turn down the kingship. The king asked, "But what about your children? You will marry and have children who will be like lions. They will stand in line for the kingdom." At once, without any hesitation Devavrata said, "No, I will not let children to be born from me, I will NOT MARRY, I will remain a Naishtik Brahmachari. Service to the nation is my Seva."

At that moment the skies were rent by the thunderous sounds of "BHISHMA, Bhishma, Bhishma!!! The skies poured forth flowers to honour such a great vow. Henceforth Devavrata became known as **Bhishma**, owing to his extraordinary vow of celibacy.

Episode 3:

Amba Seeks Revenge on Bhishma

Santanu married the fisherman king's daughter. Two sons were born from them, Chitrangada and Vichitraveerya. The former was killed in a battle with the Gandharvas, the latter became crowned as Prince. Bhishma himself brought up Vichitraveerya and trained him to be a capable king.

At the appropriate time, Bhishma went in search of a bride for Vichitraveerya. He organized a Swayamwara. The King of Kashi had three daughters, named Amba, Ambalika and Ambika. Bhishma told the King that he had come for brides for Vichitraveerya. King Shalva, who had already declared his affection for Amba, challenged Bhishma but did not say why. Bhishma defeated him and took all three sisters for Vichitraveerya. Just before the marriage, Amba confided to Bhishma, "I have something to tell you. My heart is with Shalva."

Bhishma then understood, and said, "I will arrange to send you to Shalva with all respect and honour." Amba agreed to go. Shalva said he could not accept Amba as he was honourably defeated by Bhishma. When Vichitraveerya came to know of this secret love for Shalva harboured by Amba, he refused to keep her. When Amba returned to Bhishma after

being refused by Shalva, Bhishma also refused to take her. The entire situation was thus changed for Amba. She lamented, “I have lost my honour. Now, no one will take me.”

Amba was furious and wild at the turn of events. She sought to take revenge on Bhishma. She meditated on Lord Subramanya, the Senapati (Commander-in-Chief) of the Devatas. Her vengeance was growing. Subramanya gave her a garland saying the one whom you give it to will be instrumental in destroying Bhishma. Amba took the garland and threw it towards Drupada’s palace, knowing that Drupada was very powerful. The garland fell on the entrance gate of the palace. Parasurama picked it and decided to challenge Bhishma, but was no match for him. Dissappointed and still burning with revenge, Amba went to the Himalayas and surrendered to Lord Shiva.

The Lord asked her, “What do you want, Amba?” Amba told her whole story. The Lord said, “In this birth nothing is possible. In your next birth you will succeed.”

Her vengeance was so strong that she at once jumped into fire and immolated herself. She was reborn as the daughter of a powerful King. When she could walk, she went into exile in the forest where she did intense Tapas and became transformed into a man and became known as Shikhandi. It was this Shikhandi who was used as a shield by Arjuna in his battle against Bhishma. Bhishma would not attack Shikhandi knowing that ‘he’ was a woman. Thus Arjuna was able to shoot the “bed of Arrows” that rendered Bhishma powerless, until Bhishma chose to leave this world.

Episode 4:

The Story of Vidhura

There was one Rishi Mandavya who had his Ashram on the outskirts of a city just where the forest began. He was engaged in Tapas, austerities, worship of the Lord and as a Rishi he spent most of his time in meditation.

The security guards of the King’s palace were in pursuit of robbers who had stolen some priceless jewels of the Queen. The robbers had come to this Rishi’s Ashram. They flung the bag of stolen jewels behind the Rishi who was in meditation and hid themselves in the trees.

When the guards came they looked at Mandavya Rishi. The chief guard asked the Rishi rudely “Did you see any robbers running this way?” The Rishi did not stir from his meditation. One of the guards then found the bag of jewels near him, and reported the find to the chief guard. He assumed that the Rishi must have been the boss of the thieves. They tried to shake the Rishi out of his prayer, saying, “You impostor! Don’t pretend to be meditating. We have caught up with you.”

When the King heard the guard’s report, he took it at face value and thought, “If Tapasvins wear sacred clothes and then rob the people secretly, that will make people lose faith. I should give this Rishi the most severe punishment.” He ordered that the Rishi be impaled – which meant slow, torturous death. The Rishi was placed on top of a sharp cone.

Slowly the word went around to the other Rishis. Mandavya found the pain intolerable. He went deeper into meditation and lost consciousness of his body, but survived despite the torture. He told the other Rishis he did not steal anything, but that it must be some Prarabdha Karma of his to suffer like this. The Rishis told the King it is a big mistake. The King begged for forgiveness. Rishi Mandavya did not blame the King as he had only acted in good faith. But he was upset why the Lord of Dharma would allow such a thing to happen.

He met with Lord Yama and asked him for what crime of his he had to suffer so much. Lord Yama told him that when he was still a child of 3 years or so, he used to play violently with ants and killed many of them. The sage then became angry with Lord Yama saying that at that age a child is exempt from Karma because it cannot understand right from wrong. Yama admitted his error. The sage then said, "For this mistake there is a remedy. You will have to take birth as a human being on earth. That is your punishment."

Yama, the Dharmaraj, then took birth as Vidhura, the son of Ambalika, who was married to Vichitraveerya. He was a towering adherent of Dharma, and played a key role in standing for righteousness during the Mahabharata War.

Episode 5:

The Story of Queen Kunti

Sura was Sri Krishna's grandfather. So, his daughter, Pritha, was Krishna's aunt. She was given for adoption to King Kuntibhoja. Hence Pritha became known as Kunti.

One day, Durvasa came to Kuntibhoja's palace. The King asked Kunti to take care of the sage. Kunti served him so well that Durvasa gave her a boon before leaving. She got the boon of being able to get a child from any Deity just by praying to that Deity.

Kunti was still quite young when one day she playfully thought she would try out her boon. She prayed to the Sun-god. At once she had to bear His child. A rather frightened Kunti placed this child in a basket and released it into the Ganges River. A peculiar characteristic in the child was that it was born with a golden earring and Kavacha (shield). One Radha picked up the basket from the river and named the child Radheya (*raadheya*). He was also called Karna, meaning "one with an earring".

Kunti later got married to King Pandu who was one of the sons of Vichitraveerya. King Pandu also married Madri. Pandu became King eventually as his brother Dhritarashtra was blind and could not take the throne. Kunti bore three sons to Pandu using her boon. Praying to Dharmaraja, she begot ***Yudhishtira***; from Vayu Devata she gave birth to ***Bhima***; and from Indra she bore ***Arjuna***. Madri gave birth to ***Nakula*** and ***Sahadev***, who were the Ashwini Kumars. These were the five PANDAVAS.

Duryodhana was born a year after Yudhishtira, to the blind Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra eventually had a hundred sons who were the KAURAVAS.

Episode 6:

The Young Princes Grow Up Together

The Pandavas and Kauravas grew up together, being cousins in the same household. They played together, studied together, ate together, and had many, many fights together from childhood.

A common childish prank of Bhima was to irritate Duryodhana and Duhsasana at every opportunity. Little Duryodhana was mortally afraid of his cousin Bhima who was of his own age. From that early age the two grew up to dislike each other. Duryodhana had wickedness running in his blood. While still a youth, he planned with his brothers one day to kill Bhima so that he will be king one day. He knew Bhima liked food, so he planned to poison his food. Bhima ate the food heartily and became drowsy.

In that condition Duryodhana and his brothers tied him up with creepers and put him into the river to drown. Snakes started biting Bhima. The poison from their fangs acted as an antidote to the poison he had drunk. Bhima became even stronger than before. After a few days Bhima returned and narrated to his mother what had happened. From that day Kuntidevi was always wary of the actions of the Kauravas. "Be very careful of your cousin's evil designs," she warned them. Vidhura was the only other person that knew this.

A side-incident of note at this time was that Dronacharya had befriended King Drupada. The latter one day promised half his kingdom to go to Dronacharya at a later date. Dronacharya married Kripa and had a son named Aswathama of whom he was very fond.

As Dronacharya was living the life of a very poor Brahmin, Kripa asked him to go to his friend Drupada for some financial help. There was hardly any milk to give to Aswathama. When Drona went there, Drupada disowned his friendship. "Who are you?" he asked Drona. "I am your friend, don't you remember me?" replied Drona. "Friend? Friendship is between equals," came Drupada's hurtful reply.

Drona left with the thought, "I will teach him a lesson."

One day the Pandavas were playing ball when it fell into the water. Yudhishtira's ring also fell in. They could not find a way to take it out.

At that time Dronacharya happened to pass by. He said, "I know a way to pull the ball out." Yudhishtira said, "Sir, if you take this ball out of the water we will get you a good meal." Drona then put many pieces of *kusha* grass together end to end, making a string of grass, as it were, and took the ball out, to the amazement of the boys. Then he took even the ring out using his bow and arrow. The boys fulfilled their promise, and asked him, "Who are you, sire?"

"Go to Bhishma and tell him what has happened just now. He will tell you who I am," said Dronacharya, still not revealing his identity. To shorten the story, Dronacharya was appointed as the trainer for the Pandavas and the Kauravas to teach them the art of archery. Thus began another joint activity. As fate had it, it sowed further seeds of enmity between them.

An exhibition to display the talents of his students came up. Dronacharya enrolled some of his bright students, among them Arjuna. At the exhibition, young Arjuna excelled. He was told he was the best.

Just then a radiant warrior stepped in and said, “O Prince, don’t be arrogant. I will prove myself to be better than you. Duryodhana was delighted at this challenge – here was somebody who dared to challenge Arjuna! Drona said to the warrior, “Arjuna is a Prince. A Prince can be challenged only by another prince. Tell me whose son are you?” The new youngster had no reply; indeed, he did not know himself whose son he was. He could not take up the challenge.

Duryodhana saw a cunning opportunity in this situation. He called the young, radiant youth to himself, and offered to make him the King of Angad, a part of the kingdom belonging to the Kurus. Whilst the Pandavas thus looked down upon the new arrival, and Bhima even began taunting him. The sun was setting. It was time for all to depart. Duryodhana took the new youth among them with him in his chariot. Indeed, a friendship was struck that day that had far-reaching effects for the Pandavas.

That youth was none other than Radheya (Karna)!

Episode 7:

The Development of Karna

From that day, Karna had sold his soul to Duryodhana.

Duryodhana’s desire to get rid of the Pandavas never left him. Years later when the princes were no longer boys, but had grown into young men, Duryodhana’s plotting mind was at work again on a very big scheme...

The complexity we see in the Mahabharata makes the Ramayana look very simple. In the Mahabharata the characters are very complex. No one is a totally bad person, nor is there anyone who is totally good. In this regard Duryodhana was once sent out to find a single *good* man and Yudhishthira to find a single *wicked* man. Both returned in failure! This is when their Acharya knew the hearts of the two.

A good man will always see some good in another, and a wicked man will always see wickedness in another.

Karna always had to live with the stigma of having a “low birth”. The Mahabharata brings out the irony of such distinction by placing the child of the Sun-god into this category. The drama that unfolds as a result brings tears to the eyes of any reader of this epic. Karna’s story is a story of the interplay of irony and fate.

No teacher would take Karna as a student, as he was known to be a poor Brahmana boy. Karna heard of Parasurama’s hatred for Kshatriyas, and decided to go to him as a student. Seeing such a radiant youth and hearing of his birth, Parasurama accepted him.

Parasurama had in mind that Karna, being a Brahmana, would fit in well with his own plans to bring the might of the Kshatriyas to the ground. So he trained Karna well in the art of archery. He also trained him in the use of divine weapons, including the Brahma-Astra. As Parasurama’s faith in Karna increased, he went on teaching him more and more skills.

One day Parasurama was resting blissfully in the forest with Karna as his pillow. The Acharya was fast asleep. A bedbug attacked Karna right on the lap on which Parasurama was sleeping. It started burrowing deep into the flesh of Karna. Blood began oozing out, but brave Karna would not budge, for fear of awakening his Guru. Eventually it was the flowing blood that woke Parasurama up.

When Parasurama got up and saw what was happening to Karna, he looked straight into the eyes of his student and said, “Tell me, who are you? Tell me the truth about your parentage. A Brahmana cannot bear such pain as you are bearing. Who are you? You are a Kshatriya, are you not?”

Karna had to speak the truth now, and tell of his own ignorance of who he was. Parasurama was angry that he was not told the truth at first. He cursed his brilliant student that when he would most need to use the Brahma-Astra, he will not be able to remember the Mantra for it. This actually happened when Karna was facing Arjuna in the Mahabharata battle. Such are the ways of destiny.

Episode 8:

The “Wax Palace”

The Mahabharata characters, as we have seen, are intensely complex. Good is interwoven with the bad, in every character. What is the difference then between the Kauravas and the Pandavas? It was not ***Weakness***; they both had that. It was ***Wickedness***.

The Kauravas, apart from their human weaknesses were at core very *wicked*. There was undeniable vulgarity about their ways; they had no respect for righteousness, fair play, justice, common decency, and so on. They could be as vile as demons are. The Pandavas on the other hand always had an undercurrent of truthfulness and nobility at their core, which they never gave up. They never bartered this spiritual wealth for anything mundane and cheap. Yudhishthira was a personification of justice, never wanting to harm another.

Weaknesses are excusable; Wickedness is punishable.

Dhritarashtra should never have ascended the throne, since he was blind. As soon as Yudhishthira had come of age, the King should have handed over the kingdom to him, the rightful heir. But perversity prevented him from acting in that spirit. Vidhura was one person who held to the very end that there should never be any compromise with the Kauravas. He had seen enough to come to that conclusion. And, in retrospect, how right would he have been!

The day came when Duryodhana came to Dhritarashtra with a plot firmly hatched in his mind. It was a day when the Kauravas were completely overtaken by wickedness.

Duryodhana had planned to stage a huge Shiva Utsava (festival) in Varnavata, a place deep in the jungles. He confided to his father that he planned to build a palace there for the Pandavas’ comfortable stay. He would build it out of combustible materials and then burn the Pandavas alive. Alas! attachment to his son made Dhritarashtra agree. Shakuni,

Duryodhana's maternal uncle was the master-mind of the plot, none being so cunning and crafty as him in this art.

Yudhishtira was a simpleton in comparison to these seasoned thugs. He knew not the 'ways of the world'. He even listened to Dhritarashtra who said, "Take your mother, too. I hear Duryodhana has made a beautiful palace for all of you to stay in comfort. The palace is to be named 'Shivam', after the festival."

Vidhura was alert to what was being planned. He secretly referred to this plot when he said to Yudhishtira, "When the forest burns, everything burns with it, but the rat which burrows and the porcupine escape unharmed."

Yudhishtira understood. He planned accordingly. He could trust Vidhura implicitly.

When they moved into the palace, it was not for leisure – they worked without sleep. During the day they placated the Kaurava spies who were plentiful around the palace. At night they got busy with the tunnel through which they would escape the inferno and get to the safety of the nearby forest. Think of how much Mother Kunti had to endure for the sake of her sons! Think of what mind Dhritarashtra had to have knowingly sent her also to her doom! It staggers one's imagination to see the ingenuity of treachery!

The password among the Pandavas was "When the forest is burning, the rat escapes by burrowing." Vidhura sent experts to assist the Pandavas. They gave the password. Work began on the construction.

The Pandavas were always accompanied by Purochana, the main spy stationed to take 'care' of the Pandavas' needs. They knew that he was only waiting for the opportune moment. On the day before the planned date, the Pandavas fed the Kauravas sumptuously, and themselves set the whole palace alight through Bhima. Bhima carried Mother Kunti on his shoulder. All of them escaped through the tunnel. The Kauravas were taken by surprise, and those who were stationed there as 'hosts' to the Pandavas, were burnt to death.

The whole country was plunged into sadness. Dhritarashtra wept bitterly in 'sorrow'! His mind was like a deep lake, warm with concern for the Pandavas at the surface, and cold with cunning delight at the depth to see that his sons would now be unopposed to run the kingdom.

The event was a bit too much for Kunti to bear. She went to Veda Vyasa for solace. What words of comfort could he offer? "Accept and bear everything. Joy and sorrow are part of life. You do not know the destiny of your sons. Be brave, Kunti, don't lose heart."

Episode 9:

The Pandavas Enjoy Some Peace!

After their well-executed escape from the "wax-palace", the Pandavas sought shelter among the Brahmanas who lived in the forest. As far as the country was concerned they were burnt to death. That message went around like wild fire. Even the forest dwellers got the news. Bhishma was wild with fury when he heard of what had taken place. The

Pandavas found a poor Brahmin family with whom they sought shelter. But how do five lions live incognito in the dwellings of mice!

It was Bhima's duty to go for Bhiksha daily for the Pandavas. He had such a huge appetite that it was hard for him to get sufficient food. He would eat one half, and give the other half to his mother and brothers!

One day Bhima went to a home for Bhiksha. The lady was weeping. Her husband was shouting, "Alas! today it is our turn to satisfy the hunger of the demon Bakasura. Our family will have to be sacrificed." Bhima was then told the whole story of how this demon Bakasura had made captive this entire village of poor Brahmins, by demanding that everyday one family should sacrifice itself and become his food. The villagers lived in terror of Bakasura.

Bhima had other ideas on that day. He told the villagers to fill the carts with food for the demon. He will take the day's offering himself and deliver it to the demon. Halfway through the journey Bhima felt very hungry. He ate most of the food himself. He even drank whatever was in the carts. [Acharyaji made us all laugh at this point when he said, "But he did not touch the wine!"]

When Bakasura saw Bhima coming he gave out a roar of delight, "My food is coming in a cartload today!" Bhima stopped before this tyrant of a demon. Bhima then caught hold of this Bakasura and smashed him up into pulp! He then put Bakasura's body into the cart and took it back to the forest village of the Brahmanas. Bhima went to his mother and reported to her what had happened. Kunti Mata was very disturbed at the news. She said to Bhima: "O Bhima, you have made a big mistake. Who can kill Bakasura? Now you will become the talking point in this village. Duryodhana's spies will hear of it, and they will know that we are hiding here. What have you done, Bhima?"

Lions cannot live long in a prison! That was the end of the Pandavas' peaceful stay.

Episode 10:

Draupadi's Swayamwara

The Pandavas were on the move again. Soon they came to know of a Swayamwara at which the daughter of Drupada, Draupadi by name, was to be given in marriage. They knew Drupada as their close ally, so they were very keen to go and attend this Swayamwara. Drupada was the King of Panchal Disha. They joined the procession of Princes who were hopeful of winning the hand of Draupadi, a beautiful and very noble-minded Princess.

Among the various kings and princes who had gathered there were Duryodhana and Karna. Even Krishna had come because Draupadi was a cousin of His.

In a Kshatriya Swayamvara, all the suitors are checked out for their strength, prowess and valour, and only the best is taken.

Arjuna's concentration was world-renowned. Even in his Gurukula days he had enormous capacity to concentrate and focus. Drona's students often complained to him that he had an unfair partiality towards Arjuna. Dronacharya's reply was that they will soon come to know why.

Dronacharya set up a surprise test for them all. He made a parrot out of cloth, with eyes painted on it, and set it up on a tall tree nearby. Calling all his students one by one, he asked them, “What do you see?” No one else knew what question was being asked nor what the replies were. He called Bhima first. Bhima said, “I see you, Arjuna, my brothers....” That was enough; Dronacharya asked him to go and sit down. Duryodhana came next, and he also said he saw various things, and was asked to sit down. After all had come for their turn and failed, Arjuna was called up last.

“What do you see, Arjuna?”

“I see the eye of a bird.”

“Do you see the parrot?”

“I see the eye of a bird.”

“Do you see the branches of the tree around it?”

“I see the eye of a bird.”

“Then **SHOOT**, Arjuna! You will never miss.”

Arjuna was so focused that nothing would distract his attention. His whole mind was on the target that he was set. He saw nothing else. That is why Dronacharya had a special place for him in his heart. For the same reason it was Arjuna who was given the divine vision in the *Geeta* because there was a purity in his heart which was very rare.

Needless to say Arjuna won the hand of Draupadi by fair means. The successful Pandavas returned home to give the news to Kunti Mata. On entering, they said from the doorway, “Ma, look what we have brought for you today.” Kunti was busy in the kitchen and, without turning to see, she said, “O share it equally among all of you.”

This is how Draupadi became the wife of all the Pandava brothers!

Episode 11:

The Pandavas Settle in Indraprastha

The old King Dhritarashtra, came to a compromise and gave the Pandavas a place deep in the forests in a remote part of the kingdom. The Pandavas thrived there. Very soon the place became very prosperous. A new city was built there named Indraprastha. In it the Pandavas built their super-special palace which exceeded the “wax” palace in wonder, but not in treachery. The Pandavas invited their cousins to come to visit this charming palace.

Duryodhana, Karna, Shakuni and Duhshasana were among the group that paid a visit. The palace had a magical charm. Things appeared in it that were not there, and things that were there appeared unreal. This confused any visitor. It was just innocent fun to a visitor to the palace.

Duryodhana, as he walked through, came to a wall which he could see right through. He dashed into it but there was no serious injury – just the fun. Then there was a lowered floor area. As he stepped down into it he found that it was a pool of water. It was too late to stop . . . he fell straight into it. The women in the palace laughed out in fun. Instead of taking

it in jest as intended, Duryodhana could not tolerate the insult of being ridiculed by a woman. He became angry. He stormed out of the palace and returned to Hastinapur.

The intention grew in his heart to destroy the Pandavas totally. Impelled by Fate, as it were, the Pandavas and Kauravas were being drawn into conflict. Veda Vyasa at that moment predicted to Yudhishtira that there would be a blood-shed. It was unavoidable.

Episode 12:

The “Gambling Match”

Man is usually caught in any one or more of the following traps:

i) **Lust:** woman; even a spy can be spied upon by a woman. To train a spy is big business in a crooked world of intrigue and selfishness. Even in the Cold War, many spies were trapped by setting women on them.

ii) **Wine:** the property of wine is to ‘open’ up a man’s tongue. Give a man alcohol and he will start telling all his secrets.

iii) **Gambling:** This evil ruins a man utterly. It sucks him into a world of make-belief where he thinks he is always going to win the next round. Ultimately, he goes on losing and shamelessly gives away all he has.

Yudhishtira, the Lord of Dharma, was himself given this role in the *Mahabharata*. What could be more ironical! The Lord of Dharma himself succumbing to this weakness? It teaches a great lesson – these vile habits are no respecters of one’s honour. They get hold of *anyone* and bring them to ruin, to a state of shamelessness.

This is what happened in the episode we are about to read.

Duryodhana had a cunning that could out-fox any fox! He gathered his close allies together – Duhsasana, Shakuni and Karna. That was his plotting team. Vidhura had to be kept as far away as possible (Vidhura was Dhritarashtra’s brother, the Kauravas’ uncle). When the plan was ready, they went to the King for his “thumb-print”.

“Son, what is it you want?” asked Dhritarashtra.

Duryodhana explained at length the embarrassment of visiting the Pandavas’ palace at Indraprastha. “You see how they tortured me? You see how the ladies laughed and mocked at me? How can I bear all these insults? Father, we are going to invite them (the Pandavas) for a game of dice, and entertain them in return.”

Nothing else was discussed; everything was well understood. Dhritarashtra gave the permission for the game to take place. Somehow Vidhura smelt some mischief and tried to stop it, but the King said, “Even kings require a pastime to relax. Don’t see problems where there is joy, Vidhura.” Vidhura was ordered to go away and not be present for the game.

Yudhishtira accepted the invitation. Fate laughed and gave a cruel smile!

As expected, Yudhishtira proved no match for a cunning Shakuni who played with loaded dice. Yudhishtira lost game after game. With each game he lost his shame, too. He began staking anything he could clutch. All the gains that the Pandavas had made at Indra-

prastha were gambled away in the twinkling of an eye. Then came the moment of weakness that was to write itself in history for its utter insanity. It deserves an episode all its own.

He was an embodiment of Dharma, yes – but a human embodiment. He fell . . . now there was just tragedy after tragedy after tragedy in the lives of the Pandavas.

What could have made Yudhishtira accept the gambling match?

- i) An inherent weakness for the game.
- ii) The tendency of the Kshatriyas to accept a challenge.
- iii) His own decision to respect his father's wishes.
- iv) Fate, moving inexorably towards an inevitable war.

Episode 13:

The De-Robing of Draupadi

In this land of Dharma, for such a thing to happen is most shameful. Acharyaji said, "It has always been the most painful portion for me to relate, but a narrator cannot skip a page of history. I have to tell it, so I am telling it. But I don't like telling it."

Yudhishtira had already wagered his palace, his kingdom, his brothers – they were now slaves of Duryodhana. Yet there was no sign of stopping the game. One more round, another great loss – this was the sequence, until finally, there was really nothing left to wager. Only Vidhura and Bhishma were worried as to what was going to happen next. Everyone else was completely caught up in the fever of gambling.

The cynical Shakuni dared to suggest the unsuggestible: "You still have Draupadi."

Dhritarashtra could have stood up and said, "Enough is enough – Stop it!" But he was blind to all ethics by now. He also had lowered himself to his sons' level, if he had not already been there.

Not a single person in the crowd raised a voice of protest. They could not bring themselves to challenge the wager. It was as if Fate had sealed the lips of everyone present. Where were the wise ones of India at that moment?

Shakuni's heart was palpitating as he prepared to throw the dice. Shakuni won! Duryodhana's circle roared with a lusty joy which was deplorable to witness. A lusty man does not realize how horrible he appears to others. As the Kaurava camp rejoiced at this spectacle, there was silence in the camp of the Pandavas – yes, the brave Pandavas were in stone silence!

Then Duryodhana fanned the flames of anger further by announcing, "Is it not true that all the Pandavas belong to us? Then don't their clothes belong to us, as well?"

Karna applauded the move to take away all the upper clothes of the Pandava brothers. The cruel Duhsasana said, "Draupadi also belongs to us. Go and fetch Draupadi!"

Yudhishtira who was emperor barely hours ago, stood powerless to say anything. It was Vidhura who shouted, "Stop it! Stop it! Don't bring destruction upon yourselves."

Duryodhana stuck to his intention and asked Vidhura to stay out of it.

Duryodhana sent the order to have Draupadi brought before the assembly. Draupadi refused to come. “Go and ask Yudhishtira if he lost me before he lost himself?” The messenger came back. He was asked to fetch Draupadi to the assembly and then her question will be answered. Draupadi stood firmly for her right to protect herself. Again she refused to go. Duryodhana then ordered Duhsasana to go and drag Draupadi to the assembly.

This was how Draupadi was already humiliated before even coming there. And none of her husbands raised a finger to come to her protection. They were all tongue-tied.

Then Karna said the most horrible thing of all: “Duhsasana, Draupadi’s clothes belong to Duryodhana.” Hearing that, Duhsasana began tugging at Draupadi’s sari.

There was a stunned silence from the assembled people. Most people turned their faces down. Others who were wicked by nature, saw this as an excitement. Draupadi in the middle of the assembly saw that she was alone, and no one present there would help her. She called for Krishna to come to her aid, while holding on to her sari desperately. Duhsasana’s physical force was too much for her. Eventually she raised both her hands to the heavens, calling for Krishna in desperation.

The whole of India shuddered; the Himalayas quaked! A miracle had to happen –

As Duhsasana pulled her sari, more and more sari kept emerging from within Draupadi. There was no end to the sari. Duhsasana was getting tired drawing the sari; it was heaping up in the centre of the hall. Yet the supply was unending. Duhsasana was struck – with amazement at first, then with *FEAR*. Draupadi was saved by her utter surrender to the Lord. When no earthly power could come to her aid, help came from her Lord and Master, Sri Krishna.

The incident teaches us what the litmus-test of Dharma is: “Ask your heart what is right.” Clarity was lost in the midst of the turmoil in the Sabha. No one could think straight.

Bhima was a very innocent, ‘heart-felt’ and straightforward person. He called his brother Yudhishtira aside after the whole drama and said, “Brother, look at what has happened to us! Even professional gamblers will not give their *harlots* as wager and you took the noble daughter of Drupada to this low situation!” He then asked Sahadev to bring fire and burn Yudhishtira’s fingers. Then he continued, “I have taken a vow that I will kill Duhsasana and drink his blood. Sahadev here will kill Shakuni, Arjuna will kill . . .”

That was unsaid, for suddenly Dhritarashtra woke up and shouted, “What has happened to the most pure woman?” It was he that could have stopped all this drama. Now remorseful, he called Draupadi and gave her three boons. Draupadi only asked that her husbands be released with their weapons. Dhritarashtra said, “Done, Draupadi, ask for one more boon.” Draupadi said, “No, I will not ask anything more. Dharma is my husbands. This is sufficient.”

Then Dhritarashtra himself said, “Take back the entire kingdom of Indraprastha and Yudhishtira can rule there as before.”

The dangers of falling prey to lust, envy, gambling and addiction are highlighted in this incident. Surrender to God at times like this is also highlighted. When Draupadi gave up the last traces of her ego and held up both her hands, the Lord ran to her aid, and saved her from the molestation by others.

Today, India raises her hands in salutation to a daughter like Draupadi.

As Acharyaji closed the episode he repeated his earlier words, “This is one portion in the *Mahabharata* I find most difficult to tell. I have told it, and it has made me sad.”

“Acharyaji – what a blessed soul! What finesse, what sensitivity our Acharyaji has to tell this amazing story! What a saint we have in our midst!” – These were the actual words of one of the students immediately as Acharyaji finished this thrilling episode.

Acharyaji ended this dramatic story with an event in Draupadi’s life:

Krishna had once cut His finger. Rookmoney ran around looking for a cloth. Draupadi just tore off a piece of her sari and used it to cover the cut. It was a spontaneous act of love. That day she had given the Lord just a small part of her sari. The Lord returned the favour with an unlimited supply to save her modesty!

Episode 14:

The Twelve Years in Exile

As much as Dhritarashtra had relented and admitted his fault, given back the Pandavas their freedom and kingdom, Duryodhana was unrelenting. Before the Pandavas had got back to Indraprastha, he approached the King and said words that bear out a painful truth: “*Even as snow does not leave the top of Mt. Everest, Wickedness does not leave a wicked person.*”

Duryodhana said to the King: “With so much difficulty we got all this organized. Now you have undone everything. If you hit a cobra once, he will always come back with renewed revenge. Father, let us call him back for a decent game of dice. [Has there ever been such a thing!] This time there will only be one stake – ***the loser gets banished for twelve years and has to live incognito in the thirteenth.***”

Dhritarashtra, who was completely ruled by the wickedness of his son, was merely a rubber-stamp in his hands. The Pandavas had barely reached Indraprastha after such a traumatic experience, when they received the fresh invitation.

Fate was working a double shift!

Yudhishtira went again, but not because of weakness for dice. This time it was out of a sense of ‘resignation to Fate’. Shakuni won – his ‘dice’ obeyed him once again! The Pandavas were destined to go into exile.

Shakuni’s Dice: There is a bit of history behind the hatred Shakuni had for the Kuru race as a whole. A long, long time ago, when Bhishma was still a young prince, he had gone to conquer the Gandharva kingdom, from where Gandhari (the present Queen) and her brother Shakuni hailed. He arrested the king and all his sons and put them into a dungeon and annexed the country. He took away Gandhari for Dhritarashtra. The arrangement for the food of the prisoners was deplorable. Rice was thrown at them, and the quantity was insufficient. The King said to his sons, “Look, if we all eat it, no one will survive. Let one eat – Shakuni – and the rest of us will accept death bravely. Shakuni as survivor will revenge this

deed.” Shakuni’s whole family died. From their bones Shakuni made his ‘dice’, saying, “I will put an end to the Kuru dynasty with this dice. It will obey me always.”

Vidhura: Dhritarashtra called his brother, Vidhura, and asked him to narrate how the Pandavas left. Vidhura reported, “Yudhishtira had his head and face covered with a cloth. Bhima looked at his hands with impatience. Arjuna went scattering sand grains behind him. Nakula and Sahadev were vexed with anger. Brother, people are all saying that the Pandavas have been cheated. I say again to you that Duryodhana should be banished from this kingdom. He is at the heart of this conflict.”

Alas! no one was prepared to listen to Vidhura’s advice. He remained the lone voice on Dhritarashtra’s conscience. Dhritarashtra asked him to go permanently and join the Pandavas; his first choice would have been to destroy Vidhura, but some brotherly feeling stopped him from doing that.

The Pandavas’ Travels: Twelve long years stared the Pandavas in the face. They were years of preparation – preparation for the inevitable war that was to come. During this time the Pandavas travelled the country, not always together, and gained much valuable experience. They also met great Rishis, received their blessings, received divine weapons from them, received boons that would prepare them mentally for the war.

They began by going to Dwaraka, the kingdom of Sri Krishna, which was being attacked by King Shalva. The Yadavas had all escaped to the forest with Krishna. In the forest Krishna spent a few days consoling the Pandavas, especially Draupadi, who opened her heart to Him for consolation from her bitter experience.

Bhima was itching to fight with Duryodhana, but was controlled by the others to remain quiet. He said, “When I see Draupadi, I recall what Duhsasana has done and it makes my blood boil.”

Veda Vyasa came to them and gave them much strength. He had predicted an inevitable war. So his advice was that they should prepare for it. He told them where to go to get weapons and support. He told them the important ‘Astras’ to get and from whom.

Arjuna went to the Himalayas and spent a long time there. He meditated on Lord Shiva. In an incident involving the shooting of a wild boar simultaneously by Arjuna and Lord Shiva, Arjuna was blessed with the Pasupati Astra from Lord Shiva. Other weapons were also given to Arjuna by Lord Shiva.

Bhima’s Encounter with Hanuman: Meanwhile, Bhima had an interesting encounter in meeting Hanuman, his brother. He was looking for a certain flower which Draupadi wanted. In the search he came across a huge tail which he had to cross. The tail belonged to Hanuman. Hanuman said, “Just jump over it.” Bhima could not do that as it was prohibited to cross over a living being. Besides, who did this monkey think he was! Bhima threatened him, “I have to get the Avantika flower. You had better let me cross.” He tried to pick up the monkey’s tail but failed. He could lift a mountain, he could uproot trees but he could not lift this monkey’s tail! He felt humiliated. Hanuman mocked at him teasingly, “What kind of a son of Vayu are you? Come on, just lift my tail and you can go.” Then Bhima knew that this was no ordinary monkey. Hanuman revealed who he was, “I am Hanuman, your elder brother. I wanted to meet you.”

Bhima listened to all the glories of Lord Rama and forgot about the flowers for Draupadi. He asked Hanuman to show him the form in which he jumped across the ocean.

Hanuman expanded himself into a huge mountain. He then suddenly took his normal form and gave a tight hug to Bhima. Bhima found that, when he was released from Hanumanji's embrace, his strength had increased a hundredfold!

Hanuman then blessed Bhima and told him that he will sit in front of Bhima's chariot on the flag in a small form. He said that when Bhima blows his conch, he will also blow his and that will send terror through the hearts of the enemies. He predicted that victory was certain for the Pandavas. Hanuman then disappeared.

Bhima remembered his flowers, picked them and ran to Draupadi, narrating to her all that had happened.

The lesson from Bhima's experience is that difficulties will always be there in life, but one has to bend and overcome them wisely. We must allow difficulties to polish us, so that we can face bigger challenges.

The Kauravas Routed by Gandharvas: While the Pandavas were making the best use of their exile, the wicked Shakuni was itching to see how they would be suffering. Strange – the wicked cannot enjoy even their leisure for too long! Shakuni was saying to Duryodhana, "I want to go and see how they are suffering." Such is the heart of the wicked.

Dhritarashtra would not allow them to go anywhere near the Pandavas. Karna then gave the pretext that their cows were in Dvaita Vana (where the Pandavas were), and that they would go to tend them. They had work to do. For this Dhritarashtra agreed. Their real purpose was just to see the Pandavas suffer.

The Kauravas went to set up their camp at Dvaita Vana. They found that Chitrasena, King of the Gandharvas, had already settled there. The Kaurava troupe attacked them. Chitrasena defeated them. The Gandharvas gave a good beating to Duryodhana and his party. Bhima was happy to get this news. He asked Yudhishtira if he could go to help Chitrasena to finish the Kauravas off now itself.

Yudhishtira, who was Dharmaraj himself, had to pacify him. He said, "When an outside party attacks us, remember we are not 5 but 105!" He meant that against an external enemy they should still see the Kauravas as their own brothers. Such was Yudhishtira's heart. He sent Bhima and Arjuna to go and get Duryodhana and the others released from Chitrasena's army. Duryodhana, totally humiliated by this act from the Pandavas, was released. His pride was injured. He wished he had died, but Bhima saved him.

Duryodhana's Request to Durvasa: At this time, one day Durvasa visited Duryodhana, who took very good care of the Rishi. He did a great job of looking after the Rishi and his entourage – but he had an ulterior motive.

Durvasa, being pleased with the service, gave Duryodhana a boon.

Now we see how cunning Duryodhana was. He wanted to get this boon from Durvasa so that he could destroy the Pandavas. This is what was on his mind. He asked Durvasa to pay a visit to the Pandavas; to go there at an odd time, when they have just had lunch; to go there with a large group of his followers. His objective was that the Pandavas would then be unprepared for Durvasa's visit, and would incur his wrath, and the Rishi would then curse them.

"Crookedness personified" was Duryodhana!

Draupadi welcomed the Rishi and his group warmly, washing the Rishi's feet. The Rishi said, they would just go to the river for their bath and come back for meals. Draupadi knew her husbands were not in a position to provide anything. She called upon Krishna, who came immediately. His devotee called Him.

Imagine Draupadi's frame of mind when Krishna said, "I am hungry, give me some food"! Draupadi did not have anything. Krishna asked her to look inside the pot carefully. Under the rim of the pot there was one grain of rice. Krishna put this in His mouth, and chewed it for a long time, as if He was having a large meal. After the meal He even belched, much to Draupadi's consternation.

Then He asked to call Durvasa's party. Draupadi had surrendered to Him, so she was no longer concerned what would happen. When the guest party came, they were not hungry anymore. The Rishi said, "We are feeling so full, we will just move on. We bless you with joy and happiness."

This is when Draupadi realized how Krishna rescued her. If He eats anything, it is for all. He is the Life in all lives. If we feed Him, everyone gets fed. In this way we learn from Draupadi's surrender that the Lord takes care of us in ways we cannot imagine.

Episode 15:

The Thirteenth Year Incognito

With a month remaining before the thirteenth year was to begin, the Pandavas had begun to think of where to hide. Where would an elephant hide in a small hut? All the Pandavas and Draupadi herself were superhumans – how were they going to remain incognito?

One day the Pandavas were very thirsty. Nakula climbed a tree to spy some water. He went there to drink. A voice from the sky told him to answer his questions before drinking. Nakula ignored it and drank. He dropped dead. One after the other the Pandavas met the same fate, until it was Yudhishtira's turn. He humbly obeyed the voice and answered all the questions. The voice then revealed its identity. "I am Yama Dharmaraj. I was testing your humility. You need to be very humble if you wish to remain incognito. You have learned the lesson. Ask me any boon."

Yudhishtira asked for Nakula to be revived. Lord Yama asked why him. Yudhishtira said because then there will be a son surviving from each of their two mothers, Kunti and Madri. This was Yudhishtira's sense of fairness at work. Lord Yama was very pleased. He brought to life all the brothers, and blessed them that they will go through the year unrecognized, as long as they remained humble.

King Virat Gives Them Refuge: Yudhishtira wished to select a virtuous king with whom to spend the last year. They decided to go to King Virat of the Matsya kingdom.

All the Pandavas took various jobs in the palace of the King. Yudhishtira himself became the courtier in the palace. "I will help to relax the King and play games with him."

Bhima said, "I am good at cooking. I will ask for work as the cook. My name will be Balal."

Arjuna had a problem. He had been converted to a eunuch due to a curse. He said, "I will be in the inner apartments of the Princess. I will teach Uttara Kumar singing and dancing."

Nakula said, "I will serve at the horse stables."

Sahadev said, "I will serve at the Goshala (cowshed)."

Draupadi said, "I will be safe where I will not be seen by men. (This was because she was exceptionally beautiful, and that may cause problems if men came to trouble her.) I will serve the Queen herself."

King Virat consented to all these newcomers and their roles.

Draupadi in Trouble: Things were going quite well until Kechaka, Virat's brother-in-law, the Queen's brother, one day saw Draupadi and at once got attracted by her beauty and wished to marry her. Draupadi warned him, "Look, I have five strong husbands. They are Gandharvas and very powerful." She also told the Queen to ask Kechaka to keep away from her.

One day Kechaka went to his sister and said, "If I do not get your handmaid, my heart will break. Draupadi sternly replied, "I warn you again, this is a dangerous request. Give it up." Draupadi sought Bhima's help. Bhima disguised himself as a woman and slept in Draupadi's apartment. Kechaka came there that night, inflamed with desire for Draupadi. In the dark, he placed his hand on 'Draupadi's body'. Bhima jumped up at once and fought with Kechaka. He smashed him into pulp.

News went to Duryodhana of the killing of Kechaka. Duryodhana knew that only Bhima could kill the mighty Kechaka and only the beauty of a Draupadi would have charmed him. He suspected that the Pandavas were in hiding in the palace of the Matsya kingdom. There was now under a month to go before the incognito period was to end.

Were the Pandavas going to survive the hunt which Duryodhana was organizing, unknown to them?

Duryodhana Attacks Matsya: Duryodhana lost no time. He obtained the help of a friendly neighbouring King, asking him to attack Matsya from the south entrance. King Virat would be drawn to defend the south. Then he will attack the north entrance easily. If the Pandavas are there, they are sure to protect the country. They will then be discovered.

King Virat was alerted to these developments. He asked for advice from his courtier. Yudhishtira was ready with the right kind of help. He informed the cook, the stable-boy, and the cow-tender and took them with him to accompany the King to the southern gate. Arjuna, who was called Brihannala, could not be taken as he was now a 'woman'.

While this group went to protect the south, news came to Prince Uttara that the north was being attacked by Duryodhana. Uttara was boasting in front of the ladies that he could handle the north himself but did not have a charioteer. Draupadi told Uttara Kumar, "Your dance teacher is a very good charioteer. Ask her to help you." Brihannala was approached and accepted the duty.

Uttara's boast back-fired on him; he now became scared. He tried to avoid the battle. Brihannala would have none of it. She grabbed Uttara and placed him into the

chariot and rode off to the north. The real Arjuna then spoke to Uttara, “Our thirteen years incognito exile ended yesterday. Uttara, do you know who I am?” Arjuna revealed his identity. “Climb up that tree. You will find all my weapons in that cloth bundle hanging from it. Go and fetch it.”

Thus, with his weapons, Arjuna single-handedly rode out to defend the north gate, with an assured Uttara beside him. When he saw Bhishma and Drona also stationed there, he shot arrows which fell at their feet in prostration to them. He then routed Duryodhana’s army alone. Arjuna asked Uttara to collect the clothes of the unconscious soldiers as his trophy and proof of victory.

Then he returned with a stunned Uttara. The cry was raised by King Virat when they returned, “Victory to Uttara Kumara! Victory to Uttara Kumara!”

Thus the 13 years of exile ended successfully, with an exciting battle in the bargain!

Episode 16:

Krishna’s Peace Mission

Duryodhana made a desperate bid at the end to prove that he had discovered the Pandavas before the thirteen years were completed, but it was futile; the elders Bhishma and Drona confirmed that the Pandavas had remained incognito till the very last day.

The Pandavas then went to Upaplavya where Bhagavan Krishna and Balarama were. All of them had a good discussion together, and it was decided to send an emissary to King Dhritarashtra. They all agreed that Drupada’s emissary, a Brahmana, would be the right person. The message was plain and simple: “Dhritarashtra, the 13 years are over. Give the country back to the Pandavas.

The emissary was refused point blank to be given anything. The Pandavas learnt bitterly that a quiet enemy can be more dangerous than a noisy one who openly declares his stand. Dhritarashtra was always two-faced in his dealings. He was one person without Duryodhana, and another when with him. No one could tell where he stood on any matter. Dhritarashtra had sent the following message, via the emissary, which appeared conciliatory but was filled with greed and hostility:

Dhritarashtra: “Dhritarashtra gives his love to all of you. His sons, he admits are very wicked and will not listen to him. But you, Yudhishtira, will listen to him. You, being noble, kindly do not ask for your country back.”

It was at this point that Sri Krishna stepped in to negotiate for the Pandavas. They sent a message back to Duryodhana:

Yudhishtira: “We do not want to split the country. We do not want any country, although he had offered half of it. We are Kshatriyas. We will do our duty to serve one country. Just give five villages for us to live.”

This was indeed a magnanimous compromise from Yudhishtira. He had put the unity of the country first. Dhritarashtra said to Duryodhana that it should be accepted. However, it was Karna who stepped in with a point-blank refusal:

Karna: *“That is out of the question. Give them a little and they will attack us from there.”*

At last, the Pandavas decided to send Lord Krishna Himself, knowing that He was neutral in His stand. Lord Krishna went as a humble messenger. The Kauravas tried to win Him over with royal treatment, gifts, etc. Krishna was not interested in these. He said, “I am here only as a messenger. I will not accept anything. Show me the house of Vidhura, I will stay with him.”

Both Shakuni and Duryodhana took Sri Krishna to Dhritarashtra. Krishna spoke to King Dhritarashtra:

Krishna: *“You are the person who has the power to guide the nation. History will speak for itself. You will be blamed if you make a wrong decision now. Give the Pandavas the five villages they are asking for. It is already a huge compromise from asking for what is their due, which is the whole country.”*

The wicked always say that they have done nothing wrong. It was the same with Duryodhana. He would not accept any blame for anything. He was adamant:

Duryodhana: *“I will not give them even that land which can be covered by the point of a needle!”*

Saying that, Shakuni, Karna, Duhsasana and Duryodhana staged a walk-out. Sri Krishna then advised Dhritarashtra:

Krishna: *“To avoid the destruction of the entire race, abandon Duryodhana, exile him, or imprison him, but do not support him!”*

Instead, Duryodhana returned to arrest Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna said, “Arrest Me if you can.” He then showed His Vishwa Roopa form. Even the blind Dhritarashtra saw it and folded his hands. “Hey Bhagavan, I have seen and it is enough even once. Bhagavan, please take away my eyes now.” But Duryodhana and his group were untouched. They could not see it. It now became clear that Krishna’s Peace Mission had failed.

There will be WAR!

Episode 17:

The Choice – Krishna or His Army

Duryodhana was very keen to get a larger army than Yudhishtira. He sought victory through numerical supremacy at all costs.

An example of how Duryodhana operated is given here:

King Shalva, the brother of Madri, had the largest army, fifteen miles long. He was taking his army to join the Pandavas. On the way, Duryodhana arranged for his entire army to be well fed and well served. Shalva thought that this help was coming from Yudhishtira and wanted to give some presents in return. Duryodhana came to meet him instead. Shalva was in a quandary. “What can I do for you?” Duryodhana said, “Well, if you are pleased with our hospitality, you can join us.” Shalva said, “Yes”, but he wanted to see the Pandavas.

When he met with Yudhishtira, he was told, “You have given your word. You can remain with Duryodhana. We will not need you.”

The above example illustrates the radical difference between the two leaders.

The same test came up again when the leaders Arjuna and Duryodhana went to Sri Krishna for His support. Duryodhana was anxious to get Krishna’s army, the **Narayana Sena**, for the war. He went in with Arjuna into Krishna’s chamber. Krishna was asleep. Duryodhana sat on the golden chair behind Sri Krishna’s head; Arjuna sat humbly at the feet of Sri Krishna, on the floor. When Krishna awoke, His eyes fell on Arjuna first.

Duryodhana spoke first, “Krishna, I came first. Kindly give me whatever I ask for.”

Sri Krishna, the all-knowing Lord of the Universe, replied, “But I saw Arjuna first. He shall have the first preference. You can choose either Myself unarmed, or My army. I shall not fight in this war.”

Arjuna humbly asked for Sri Krishna. To him the Lord was all he wanted, He was more important than His army. Duryodhana was thrilled at this choice of Arjuna. He was overjoyed that he will now have the entire Narayana Sena on his side, and Arjuna will have a defenceless Krishna.

At that point Balaram told Duryodhana, “You are the idiot, Duryodhana. You do not know that wherever my Brother is, there will be victory.”

Episode 18:

Karna & Kunti

Kunti Tells Karna of His Birth: Sri Krishna advised Kunti to call her son, Karna, to her and tell him the truth about his birth. He also said that in doing so, she should ask for his forgiveness. Karna was surprised that he was getting a call from the Queen of the Pandavas, from King Pandu’s wife. That is the only relationship he had with the Queen.

Kunti then told Karna the whole truth about how it came that he was born as Surya Devata’s son. When she finished, Karna was in tears, “Mother, why have you hidden this from me for so long?”

Kunti also was in tears for her eldest son’s misfortune. “You are my eldest son, the eldest among the Pandavas.”

And they both wept again. Karna was filled with sorrow, “Why did you not tell me this before? Now how can I leave Duryodhana when it was he that protected me from all the taunts of the Pandavas in childhood. I have given my word to Duryodhana.”

Kunti Mata asked only one thing, “Son, please don’t kill any of the Pandavas.” Karna gave her this promise, with the exception of Arjuna.

Kunti and Karna then wiped their tears once again.

“Mother, please do not tell this to anyone else, at least till the war is over.”

GEETA DHYANAM

Meditation on the Bhagavad Geeta

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गीताध्यानम्

GEETA DHYANAM

by Sri Madhusudana Saraswati (9 Verses)

MEDITATION on the Geeta

EVERY TEXT BEGINS WITH an auspicious *Mangalacharan*. What text is there more auspicious than the Bhagavad Geeta! These nine verses, composed by the well-known **Sri Madhusudana Saraswati**, as a prelude to the study or reading of the *Bhagavad Geeta*, have all the elements of the perfect Mangalacharan to this great scripture.

This text has the following qualities to be a Mangalacharan for the *Geeta*:

- i) It contains all the 3 types of **Mangalacharan** or Invocation, i.e. Vastu Niradesh Roopa, Namaskara Roopa, and Ashirvada Roopa;
- ii) It speaks of the 3 types of **Vighnas** or obstacles that we encounter in life, i.e. Adhyatmika, Adhibhautika and Adhidaivika;
- iii) It contains the **Anubandha Chatushtaya** or the fourfold information which connects us to the main text, the *Geeta*. These four are the Adhikari, the Vishaya, the Prayojan and the Sambandha.
- iv) It offers a salutation to one's **Guru**;
- v) It offers salutations to God, the **Supreme Brahman**.
- vi) It encapsulates the deep desire or yearning for liberation, i.e. **Mumukshutwa**.

Another special feature of this *Geeta Dhyanam* is that it is studded with magnificent metaphors and similes, especially taken from the lifestyle of Bhagavan Krishna's childhood days – among the cows of Brindavan, alongside the sacred Yamuna River, with the ideal surroundings of luscious green vegetation, ponds, colourful and fragrant flower beds, blooming lotuses, nectarine honeycombs, and so on.

In contrast to this most splendid, beautiful and heavenly setting as a backdrop to this divine scripture, is the scene of battle on the plain of Kurukshetra. Indeed, it was in the very midst of this battlefield that this greatest of divine dialogues took place.

This completes a perfect blend of metaphors ranging from the rich beauty of Nature to the arena of struggle and strife which is man's lot throughout his life on earth.

The First Milestone:

The first lecture, covering this verse, was delivered by Pujya Guruji, Swami Tejomayanandaji himself. Guruji had specially made time to be present for the launch of this text, the highlight of the Sandeepany Vedanta Course. Acharyaji then took up the relay stick and ran the rest of the distance, despite his severe physical ailment.

A Tribute from the Students: Before we present the material studied, on behalf of the students themselves, we offer our sincerest salutations to our Divine Teachers, whose

selfless act of service in teaching us this jewel among India's rich spiritual heritage, is graciously appreciated. May we as students prove ourselves to be worthy of receiving such a divine gift of knowledge!

Even as they have reached the peaks of attunement with Brahman, may we, too, endeavour to strive our utmost along the same arduous path which has eternal Bliss as its furthest point and sweet, fragrant flowers of virtues lining the route all the way.

Following in their illustrious footsteps, may we also consider all the obstacles, thorns and pitfalls of the journey as so many filling stations along the route, necessary to take us further onward on this spiritual journey!



LORD GANESHA

Verse 1:

Salutations to Mother Geeta

ॐ पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयम्
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्ये महाभारतम् ।
अद्वैतामृतवर्शिणीं भगवतीं अष्टादशाध्यायिनीं
अम्ब त्वामनुसन्दधामि भगवद्गीते भवद्वेशिणीम् ॥१॥

ōṃ pārthāya pratibōdhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇēna svayam
vyāsēna grathitām purāṇamuninā madhyē mahābhāratam |
advaitāmṛtavarśiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādaśādhyāyinīm
amba tvāmanusandadhāmi bhagavadgītē bhavadvēśiṇīm ॥1॥

1	<i>Om. Paarthaaya prati-bodhitaam bhagavataa, naaraayanena swayam,</i>	<i>Om. With which Partha (Arjuna) was enlightened, O Mother Bhagavad Geeta, by the Lord Narayana Himself;</i>
2	<i>vyasena grathitaam puraana muninaa, madhye mahaabhaaratam;</i>	<i>And which by Vyasa, the ancient sage, was incorporated in midst of the Mahabharata;</i>
3	<i>advaita amrita varshineem bhagavateem, ashtaadasha adhyaayineem,</i>	<i>The philosophy of Advaita, showered nectarine-like, by Divine Mother, in the form of 18 chapters;</i>
4	<i>amba tvaam anusandadhaami bhagavad, geete bhavadveshineem.</i>	<i>Upon Thee, O Blessed Mother, I constantly meditate. O Bhagavad Geeta, you are the destroyer of Samsara.</i>

1 Partha: this is Arjuna; it refers to the Adhikari or fit student for whom the *Geeta* is written. The Lord Himself teaches the *Geeta* directly to Arjuna.

Pratibodhitaam: This indicates the Sambandha as it relates the goal to be achieved with the text, expressing that it will enable the student to also gain enlightenment as it helped Arjuna.

Bhagavataa: The verse is addressed to “Mother Geeta”; there is reverence in regarding the scripture as the Divine Mother. A mother stands for nurturing and always caring for her children no matter what sacrifices she has to make. Even if her child is in the ditch, the mother will bend down and pick it up, not concerned about getting dirty in the process. In like manner, the *Bhagavad Geeta* is our Mother who cares only to remove the dirt in us which clouds our understanding.

2 Vyasa took the main message that Krishna intended to teach on the battlefield, and elaborated and systematized it by presenting it in the form of 18 Discourses. This was his great contribution to mankind. Vyasaji composed Krishna’s message in the form of “the Divine Song”. Thus his contribution is duly acknowledged.

The teaching is also universal, hence Vyasa may be called a *Jagatguru*, that is, a Guru for the whole world, irrespective of one's religious background. Thus all the main features of an Invocation have been seen to exist in this opening verse.

Puraanamuninaa: "the ancient sage (Vyasa)"; stands for the Guru or Teacher who is also revered in this verse. The great Teacher, Vyasa, wrote this text for the benefit of all mankind, thus fulfilling his role as the perfect teacher of the path of wisdom and enlightenment.

3 Advaitaamritavarshineem: This is the Vishaya or subject matter that is dealt with in this book. The great philosophy of non-dualism or Vedanta, the height of the Vedic teaching is taught in the Geeta. It stands also for the *Vastu Niradesh Roopa Mangalacharan*.

4 Anusandadhaami: "I constantly meditate". It is necessary to go on reflecting on the thoughts of the *Geeta* in one's mind in order to assimilate its meaning thoroughly.

Bhagavadgeete: This word becomes the *Namaskar Mangalacharan*, by which the *Geeta* is adored as well as saluted and revered.

Bhavadveshineem: This indicates the Prayojan or purpose of the *Geeta*. The knowledge contained in it will enable us to cross the ocean of Samsara or constant round of births and deaths. This is termed as liberation or Moksha, and is the central purpose of these teachings.

Samsara is the worldly existence which represents the effects of ignorance. These effects take three forms, namely *Adhyatmika*, *Adhibhautika* and *Adhidaivika*. These are three afflictions which man suffers in Samsara. Hence, '*Bhavadveshineem*' also stands for the three afflictions, mentioned in the introductory remarks above.



Verse 2:

Salutation to Sage Vyasa

॥२॥

नमोस्तु ते व्यास विशालबुद्धे
फुल्लारविन्दायतपत्रनेत्र ।
येन त्वया भारततैलपूर्णः
प्रज्वालितो ज्ञानमयः प्रदीपः

॥2॥

namōstu tē vyāsa viśālabuddhē
phullāravindāyatapatranētra |
yēna tvayā bhāratatailapūrṇaḥ
prajvālītō jñānamayaḥ pradīpaḥ

1	<i>namah astu te vyaasa vishaala buddhe</i>	<i>Salutations unto thee, O Vyasa, Of mighty intellect;</i>
2	<i>phulla aravinda aayata patra netra;</i>	<i>like the full-blown lotus tree are the <u>petals</u> of Thy eyes;</i>
3	<i>yena tvayaa bhaarata taila purnah</i>	<i>By whom, the Mahabharata <u>oil</u> filled to the brim</i>
4	<i>prajvaalintah jnaana- mayah pradeepah.</i>	<i>with Knowledge and wisdom, was lighted – the <u>Lamp</u> that symbolizes knowledge.</i>

The word Vyasa has the root ‘as’ in it, which means to divide, compile, differentiate, or gather together. Vyasa is a title given to one who does this kind of work with texts. Sri Vyasa had compiled all 4 Vedas, in order to ensure that the Parampara of knowledge continues in India. This is why he is called Veda Vyasa.

1 Vyasa: This verse is especially dedicated to the Teacher and author of the *Geeta*, Sri Vyasa, in whose pure mind the whole teaching of Krishna was reflected in crystal clear form, exactly as taught by Krishna. Vyasaji never rested – he wrote continuously for the benefit of man. He also created a system by which the knowledge would spread from generation to generation.

2 The Lotus Flower: Once again a simile is used to express the greatness of the Guru. It is the lotus flower, which stands for beauty and purity. The lotus rises out of muddy waters, it is unaffected by its environment of origin. It is free from all taints in it. Its beauty is inherent, and is due to the nectar of knowledge which is to be found deep within itself.

3-4 Sri Vyasa was extremely dexterous in this work. A fitting proverb used for such a hardworking scholar is “one who burns the midnight oil”. This simile is actually used here to refer to the magnanimous work done by Vyasaji in writing the *Mahabharata*.

The *Mahabharata* is the oil. When it is lit, the light produced is the knowledge it bestows. The oil is also “filled to the brim”, indicating that this light will go on burning for thousands of years, always lighting the path of ignorant man.



Verse 3:

The Beloved Divine Krishna

प्रपन्नपारिजाताय तोत्रवेत्रैकपाणये ।

ज्ञानमुद्राय कृष्णाय गीतामृतदुहे नमः

॥३॥

prapannapārijātāya tōtravētraikapāṇayē |

jñānamudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītāmṛtaduhē namaḥ

||3||

1	<i>prapanna paarijaataaya,</i>	Who is the “ <u>Tree of Fulfillment</u> ”, i.e. the bestower of desires for those who take refuge in Him;
2	<i>totra vetra eka paanaye;</i>	Who holds a <u>cane</u> (flute) in one hand (to drive home the herd of cattle under His protection);
3	<i>jnaana mudraaya krishnaaya,</i>	And the Jnana Mudra or symbol of Knowledge (in the other); to Thee, O Krishna! –
4	<i>geetaa-amrita duhe namah.</i>	Who has milked the <u>nectar</u> of the Geeta – my salutations!

A verse has been dedicated to the hero of this text, the Lord Himself, who delivered this message. As symbolism runs throughout this Geeta Dhyanam, this verse is no exception, having four similes running through it, one in each Pada, like a relay of similes!

1 Paarijaataaya: the “*tree of fulfillment*”. The Lord fulfills the wishes of all who seek refuge in Him, even if it is only for the shade He offers. What would He give to those who surrender to Him? The Parijaata tree is also called the Kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree.

2 Totra Vetra: This is the cane-stick that is used to drive cattle in the fields. It was a flute in the case of Krishna. The flute has become a symbol of total self-surrender. Just as the hollowness of a bamboo stick (cane) produces the sweet sound, so also when the devotee empties himself of egoism, the Lord draws him to His lips and plays the sweet music of pure deeds through him.

3 Jnana Mudra: This is another famous symbol used for meditation. The Jnana Mudra is represented by holding the thumb and the index finger tips together and keeping the other three fingers side by side pointing downwards with the palms facing up. The back of the palms are then placed on the respective knees during meditation.

This position symbolizes the union of the Jeeva with Brahman by completely transcending the three Gunas (the three fingers pointing down). The Gunas are the threads that form the fabric of life. The three fingers can also be taken to represent the three bodies, namely, the gross, subtle and causal bodies, which are transcended by the meditator.

4 Duhe: “*milk*”. This is a simile which we are going to elaborate on as an extended metaphor in the next verse...

Verse 4:

The Cow, Cowherd & Milk of Geeta

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः ।

पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत्

॥४॥

sarvōpaniśadō gāvō dōgdhā gōpālanandanah |

pārthō vatsah sudhīrbhōktā dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat ||4||

1	<i>sarva upanishadah gaavah,</i>	<i>All the Upanishads are cows;</i>
2	<i>dogdhaa gopaala nandanah;</i>	<i>The <u>milkman</u> is the cowherd's son, Krishna;</i>
3	<i>paarthah vatsah sudheeh bhoktaa,</i>	<i>Paartha (Arjuna) is the <u>calf</u>; men of purified intellect are the <u>enjoyers</u>;</i>
4	<i>dugdham geetaa-amritam mahat.</i>	<i>the milk is the supreme <u>nectar</u> of the Geeta!</i>

Simile of “The Mother Cow”:

1 The Mother Cow is a fitting simile to represent knowledge. In the India of ancient days as well as today, the cow plays a key role. It is a very gentle animal, a picture of patience and tolerance. It is also a picture of service and self-giving. It provides milk in abundance not only for her calf but also for her cowherd's family. All these features of the simile are brought out in this verse.

2 One of the most common pictures depicting Sri Krishna shows Him standing beside the cow, playing His flute. This pastoral scene inspired the present verse.

Krishna was raised in the household of Nanda, a cowherd in Brindavan. His task was to take the cows to the pastures, using His flute to drive them (as described in the last verse). All day He would spend with the cows in the field. This represents being in touch with the knowledge of the Upanishads throughout the day. By tending the Upanishadic cows in this manner, with all love, they were ready for milking by the afternoon. When He returned with them in the late afternoon, it was time for the milking. The cows can just be pictured with swaying udders almost bursting with milk!

3a First to feed on the milk is the calf. That barely tickled the udders. There was milk enough for the whole household and beyond it. The whole village would come and take their share. Arjuna was one who took the “first drink” like the calf. He received the Geeta on behalf of all mankind. And all humanity is still drinking it as thirstily as ever.

3b What is so special about this milk? It is rich with the pure nectar of the knowledge contained in the Geeta! That is what makes it so sweet and health-giving. Men of purified intellect enjoy it most. However, all who drink it, become purer than before.

4 Each family is free to treat the milk the way they wish. Some simply drink a full glass of it neat; others churn it and produced butter; others produce curds which is little Krishna's favourite. He would even go to those houses and ‘steal’ it from their pots!

In the same way, the milk of knowledge called the *Geeta* is used by each person in the way it appeals to him. Some chant it, some are thrilled by its philosophy, some are inspired to fight against Adharma, and some simply want to contemplate on the Almighty

Lord. The milk is suitable for people of all tastes, i.e. all levels of understanding. The *Geeta* quenches everyone's spiritual thirst.



THE COW SIMILE

Verse 5:

Salutations to the Avatara

वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम् ।

देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम्

॥५॥

vasudēvasutaṁ dēvaṁ kaṁsacāṇūramardanam |

dēvakīparamānandaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ vandē jagadgurum

॥5॥

1	<i>vasudeva sutam devam,</i>	<i>To the divine son of Vasudeva;</i>
2	<i>kamsa chaanura mardanam;</i>	<i>To the destroyer of <u>Kamsa and Chanura</u>;</i>
3	<i>devakee paramaanandam,</i>	<i>To the supreme joy of <u>Devaki</u>;</i>
4	<i>krishnam vande jagad gurum.</i>	<i>To Sri Krishna the world <u>Teacher</u> – I offer salutations!</i>

Here the Avatara-hood of Krishna is highlighted. An Avatara is the descent of God for the ascent of man.

1 & 3 The reference to Krishna’s father, Vasudeva, and His mother, Devaki, draws our attention to His birth in *flesh and blood* in a human body like all of us. Being an Avatara means the Lord Himself comes down on earth and takes up a physical Form that has some very gigantic purpose to fulfil. All the drama of taking birth, living through childhood, growing up and taking one’s education etc, is to be understood in the words “joy of Devaki” and “son of Vasudev”.

2 What was the purpose for which Krishna was born?

The destruction of the vile king Kamsa and his henchmen such as Chanura is one of those reasons for coming down as an Avatara. In Sri Krishna’s own words: “Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an upsurge in unrighteousness, then I embody Myself.” (4.7)

The Lord continues: “For the protection of the virtuous, for extirpation of evil-doers, and for establishing righteous rule on a firm footing, I manifest Myself from age to age.” (4.8)

4 The other major reason is, of course, this very book called the *Geeta*. It is the great need of man to have a systematic presentation of this divine message to rekindle the spirit of man. That is a huge task. It would seem that the Mahabharata war had this single purpose in mind high up on its spiritual agenda.

A entire next verse is dedicated especially to this Great War which had such a huge impact on the generations of humanity to come, to this very day . . .



Verse 6:

The River of Battle

भीष्मद्रोणतटा जयद्रथजला गान्धारनीलोत्पला
शल्यग्राहवती कृपेण वहनी कर्णेन वेलाकुला ।
अश्वत्थामविकर्णघोरमकरा दुर्योधनावर्तिनी
सोत्तीर्णा खलु पाण्डवै रणनदी कैवर्तकः केशवः ॥६॥

bhīṣmadrōṇataṭā jayadrathajalā gāndhāranīlōtpalā
śalyagrāhavatī kṛpēṇa vahanī karṇēna vēlākulā |
aśvatthāmaṣvīkarnaghōramakarā duryōdhanāvartinī
sōttīrṇā khalu pāṇḍavai raṇanadī kaivartakaḥ kēśavaḥ ||6||

1	<i>bhishma drona tataa jayadratha jalaa, gaandhaara-neelotpala,</i>	<i>With Bhishma and Drona as its <u>banks</u>; Jayadratha as its <u>water</u>; with the King of Gandhara as a blue <u>water-lily</u>;</i>
2	<i>shalya graahavatee krpena vahane,</i> <i>karnena vela-aakulaa;</i>	<i>With Shalya as the <u>shark</u>; Kripa as the <u>current</u>; and Karna as the <u>breaker</u>;</i>
3	<i>ashvatthaama vikarna ghora makaraa, duryodhana-aavartinee,</i>	<i>With Aswatthama and Vikarna as the terrible <u>crocodiles</u>; and Duryodhana as the <u>whirlpool</u> in it;</i>
4	<i>sah utteernaa khalu paandavaih rana-nadee, kaivartakah keshavah.</i>	<i>Indeed the <u>crossing over</u> of such a River of battle (was achieved) by the Pandavas only because they had Krishna as their “Ferry-Man”!</i>

This is the metaphor which symbolises the Mahabharata War and heralds the *Geeta*. It has been the subject of many a debate: How could a peaceful message like the *Geeta* be delivered in the middle of a battlefield? Does it propagate peace or war? This question has captured the imagination of many commentators on the *Geeta*. Every Hindu household is sure to have the picture of Krishna and Arjuna in a chariot in the middle of the two armies.

An Extended Metaphor: The River of Battle

This is no ordinary river. It is a river in flood, the water hurtling down in whirlpools, gushing in anger, as it were. We are seeing it from the perspective of the Pandavas:

1 The Kaurava forces have highly skilled warriors: The chief Kaurava commanders, Bhishma and Drona are the two banks of this river. They are there to ensure that every member of their eleven armies does his job by remaining in the river.

The river is no doubt not a friendly place to be near. Yet, what do we see in it? A beautiful blue lotus flower! Could it be true? Yes, the King is Dhritarashtra, and like a diplomat he appears sweet in manners but is very cunning and deluded within. No one knows where they stand with him. He is blind, blind with delusion and confusion.

2 Some of them are sharks in midstream, like Shalya; some are the swift currents that swirl in the waters, like Kripa; the fiercest soldier among them, Karna, stands out as the breaker, the highest wave clearly visible amidst the smaller waves, by its height as well as the white foam that froths over it; and there are numerous rocks against which the waters crash with a thunderous roar.

3 In this River of Battle there are crocodiles beneath the surface who are waiting for the innocent victim. Cunning and crookedness are the slogans of war. And where is Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas, to be seen? He is the terrible whirlpool which sucks the opponent deep into the water, to be mauled there by the crocodiles and the sharks.

4 Trying to cross such a river in full spate is what the Pandavas have to do. Their very big advantage is that their helmsman is none other than Lord Krishna Himself. Of all people, He should know everything about the fierce struggle of crossing such a swollen river. After all, did He not have to cross such a river when He was not even a day old? And that, too, in the dead of night, and in stormy weather!

With that supreme advantage, the Pandavas do succeed in crossing this River of Battle. They conquer the dark forces of evil represented by Duryodhana and restore the river to its normal state of tranquillity and calmness.



Verse 7:

The Geeta as a Lotus Flower

पाराशर्यवचः सरोजममलं गीतार्थगन्धोत्कटम्
नानाख्यानककेसरं हरिकथासंबोधनाबोधितम् ।
लोके सज्जनषट्पदैरहरहः पेपीयमानं मुदा,
भूयाद्भारतपङ्कजं कलिमलप्रध्वंसिनः श्रेयसे

॥७॥

pārāśaryavacaḥ sarōjamamalaṁ gītārthagandhōtkāṭam
nānākhyānakakēsaraṁ harikathāsambōdhanābōdhitam |
lōkē sajjanaṣaṭpadairaharahaḥ pēpīyamānaṁ mudā,
bhūyādbhāratapaṅkajaṁ kalimalapradhvamsinaḥ śrēyasē ||7||

1	<i>paaraasharya vachah sarojam amalam geetaa, artha gandha utkatam,</i>	<i>The words of the son (Vyasa) of Parasara, emerge out of water as the immaculate Geeta, with its sweet and <u>fragrant</u> meaning;</i>
2	<i>naanaa aakhyaanaka kesaram hari-kathaa, sambodhana aabodhitam;</i>	<i>The Geeta's many similes are its inner, soft <u>petals</u>; together the message of Lord Hari comes through as the entire blossoming flower.</i>
3	<i>loke sajjana shat-padaiah ahah ahah, pepeeyamaanam mudaa,</i>	<i>The <u>good men</u> in the world, like six-footed <u>honey bees</u>, day by day drink (its nectar) with their hearts full of joy;</i>
4	<i>bhooyaat bhaarata pangkajam kalimala pradhvamsi nah shreyase.</i>	<i>May this <u>LOTUS</u>, the Geeta of the Mahabharata, safely emerge out of the imperfections of Kali Age, and come to us producing our supreme good!</i>

Extended Metaphor: Lotus in a Pond

The purity of the lotus flower has made it a favourite among poets for use as a symbol for spiritual unfoldment. In this verse the poet imparts his own unique slant to the metaphor. Here we relish another taste of the poet's art . . .

1 The Birth of the Lotus:

i) **Vachah**: the “words” of Sri Vyasa are the seed from which a very special lotus flower is to emerge into the brightness of day.

ii) **Sarojam**: “born out of water”. The immaculate and spotless (**Amalam**) lotus of the Bhagavad Geeta emerges out of water that is rather muddy (see 4 for the full interpretation of ‘muddy’). A lotus is well known for its pristine purity, however dirty or muddy may be the water it grows in.

iii) **Gandha**: “fragrant”. The delicate fragrance of the lotus represents the inner significance of the thoughts contained in the *Geeta*. It is these thoughts that capture the passing reader. They touch a chord in his heart and he gets entranced by the freshness and sweetness of what he reads.

2 The Flower Blooms:

The lotus flower itself stands for the elevating message of the Bhagavad Geeta. From the depths of the waters of Vyasaji's words, arises the beautiful vision of life which has the power to destroy our ignorance.

iv) **Aakhyaanaka**: "*examples, narratives and stories*". These are represented by the petals of the flower. Each petal adds further to the composite beauty of the whole lotus. The Geeta is studded with exquisite similes by which Lord Krishna is able to drive home His message (**Hari-Kathaa**).

v) **Aabodhitam**: "*fully blossomed*". All the petals of similes together make up the whole lotus in full blossom. The entire flower then represents the grand message of the Lord to Arjuna, a message that concisely gives the essence of the spiritual life.

3 Humanity Quenches Its Thirst:

vi) **Sajjana**: "*good, spiritually inclined men*". Those who are devoted to a study or even just a chanting of the *Geeta* are now being described. They are like bees – not just ordinary bees but the "six-footed" species who are most eager to produce honey. Virtuous men are like these bees, as they come to approach the lotus of the *Geeta* for nectar.

vii) **Pepeeeyamaanam**: "*thirstily drinking the nectar*". There is the nectar that sits deep inside the roots of the stamens of the lotus. It is very sweet and promises immortality to one who drinks it. It is drunk by the virtuous to their heart's content, and full of joy!

4 The Drinkers Get Liberated:

viii) **Kalimala**: "*the defects of this Kali Yuga*". The virtuous men desire to be emancipated from this world of sorrow. In this Iron Age, unrighteousness is especially on the rise. The circumstances are very unfavourable for spiritual progress. It is very difficult to steer through the web of temptations out there in the "Kali" world.

ix) **Nah Shreyase**: "*Our supreme good*". In spite of the odds stacked against them, those who take refuge in the teachings of the *Geeta*, and who long to come out of the clutches of Maya or delusion which holds them firmly to the wheel of Samsara, by drinking the nectar from the *Geeta*, they grow in spirituality and eventually become liberated from Samsara. They become Immortal. They come to recognize their true spiritual nature.

Such is the irresistible attraction of this exquisite lotus flower called the *Geeta*!



Verse 8:

Miracles of His Grace

मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्गुं लङ्घयते गिरिम् ।

यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्दमाधवम्

॥८॥

mūkaṁ karōti vācālaṁ paṅguṁ laṅghayatē girim |

yatkṛpā tamahaṁ vandē paramānandamādhavam

॥8॥

1	<i>mookam karoti vaachaalam,</i>	<i>That which makes the <u>dumb</u> eloquent;</i>
2	<i>panghum langhayate girim;</i>	<i>by which the <u>cripple</u> crosses a mountain;</i>
3	<i>yat-kripaa tam-aham vande,</i>	<i>That Divine Grace do I salute.</i>
4	<i>paramaananda-maadhavam.</i>	<i>That Supreme Bliss is Madhava (Krishna).</i>

Spiritual transformation is very mysterious. It is measured in a totally different way from worldly success. Miracles have been wrought in the lives of seekers who have intense faith in the teachings of the *Geeta*. If we approach the *Geeta* reverentially she will bestow upon us Her Grace. Amazing will be our own transformation from ordinary sensual life to deep, spiritual life.

1 What sort of miraculous things happen? It can make a dumb man eloquent. Nothing is impossible for Divine Grace. It is equally true that for one who is proud of his talents and does not see them as God's gifts to him to remember Him, his eloquence can be snatched away and he can be made dumb! That, too, is possible; and that, too, has to be taken as a Grace. The *Geeta* only wants us to transform our lives spiritually.

2 The cripple can cross mountains. And, as above, it can work the opposite way for someone who is too egoistic of his talents. In the latter case, a healthy climber can be made into a cripple! These are mysterious ways in which the Lord's Grace operates.

3 The Divine Grace is not an aspect of God; *it is no different from God*. That is why the poet specifically offers his highest salutations to the Grace as he does to the Lord.

4 This line confirms what has just been said about the status of Grace. It is none other than God in action in our lives, wanting to give us a little push along the arduous path leading to Him. Understanding the workings of Grace, the devotee experiences supreme Bliss at every turn.



Verse 9:

The Gods and Yogis

यं ब्रह्मा वरुणेन्द्ररुद्रमरुतः स्तुन्वन्ति दिव्यैः स्तवैः
वेदैः साङ्गपदक्रमोपनिषदैः गायन्ति यं सामगाः ।
ध्यानावस्थित तद्गतेन मनसा पश्यन्ति यं योगिनो
यस्यान्तम् न विदुः सुरासुरगणा देवाय तस्मै नमः ॥९॥

yam brahmā varuṇēndrarudramarutaḥ stunvanti divyaiḥ stavaiḥ
vēdaiḥ sāṅgapadakramōpaniṣadaiḥ gāyanti yaṁ sāmagaḥ |
dhyānāvasthita tadgatēna manasā paśyanti yaṁ yōginō
yasyāntam na viduḥ surāsuragaṇā dēvāya tasmai namaḥ ||9||

1	<i>yam brahmaa varunendra-rudra-marutah, stunvanti divyaiḥ stavaiḥ,</i>	<i>Whom the Creator Brahmaji, Lord Varuna, Indra, Rudra and the Marutas invoke with their divine hymns;</i>
2	<i>vedaiḥ sah anga pada-krama upanishadaiḥ, gaayanti yam saamagaah;</i>	<i>Who, by the Vedas with their Angas, by the Pada, Krama & Upanishadic methods, is invoked by the singers of the Sama Veda;</i>
3	<i>dhyaana avasthita tad-gatena manasaa, pashyanti yam yoginah,</i>	<i>Whom, through perfect meditation, with their mind absorbed in the Goal, the Yogis see (or realize);</i>
4	<i>yasya antam na viduh sura-asura ganaah, devaaya tasmai namah.</i>	<i>and whose limits are not known by the hosts of Gods and Demons – to That Supreme God do I offer salutations!</i>

In this closing verse of the *Geeta Dhyanam*, salutations are pouring in from all quarters of admirers of the *Geeta*. There is an ordered sequence in these salutations. The *Geeta* appeals to three main types of people:

1 Rulers and Administrators: from Brahmaji the Creator (Ishwara) down, all rulers are included in this category. The Devatas – Varuna, Indra, etc – are born for the task of governing in accordance with God’s laws. They are each given a portfolio in the Divine Government. Just as we chant the praises of the Lord when we pray, these Devatas also do the same. They also feel the need to obtain the Lord’s help and Grace in attending to their duties.

2 Seekers of Knowledge, the Learned: Those who wish to get knowledge and then teach it to others. As the *Geeta* contains the complete knowledge of all aspects of life, its scientific study can itself bring benefits to people who approach it to learn more about their essential nature.

3 Yogis and Meditators: This category of people comprises those who benefit the most from studying the *Geeta*. These people make big sacrifices beyond the reach of the ordinary person, such as:



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- i) Foregoing the married life and living as celibates;
- ii) Practising renunciation of their desires by living as simply as possible with the bare minimum as their needs; and
- iii) Making spiritual Sadhana their main programme for the day, i.e. aiming to be full-time practitioners of Sadhana.

This category is given special attention by Sri Krishna. In the Geeta they are always held up as the role models for others to emulate.

There are other types of devotees also who devote themselves to the Geeta for various other reasons, but they need not be mentioned separately. All of them find some comfort and solace in the divine words of the Lord.

4 This Lord who is thus worshipped by the above three types of devotees, is in the plane of the Absolute, beyond Maya. All the categories of people from the Gods to the Demons, including all the beings who are embodied here on earth, have no idea about the limitless nature of this Supreme Being.

The only exceptions are the God-realised sages who have merged into that highest Consciousness by dint of their intense spiritual Sadhana as mentioned in category 3 above.

Om Tat Sat!



KRISHNA & RADHA