

generous to Brahmins, lay on your shoulder his right hand, marked with standard, elephant-goad and banner, O bull-like heir of Bharata; as you sit before him, let him massage your back with a hand dyed with red lac and bearing jewels on fingers and palm. Let strong-armed wolf-belly Bhīma, whose shoulders are like the trunks of *śāla* trees, embrace you, bull-like heir of Bharata, and greet you with mild words in token of peace. Receive the greetings of the other three, Arjuna and the twins, and greet them lovingly in turn, prince, kissing them on the head.<sup>1</sup> Let the lords of men shed tears of joy to see you reconciled with your brave Pāṇḍava brothers. Let universal prosperity be proclaimed in the capitals of the kings; enjoy the earth in brotherly affection, and cast off your sickness!

[125] Duryodhana had listened to these unwelcome words in the assembly of the Kurus, and now he replied to strong-armed Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva of great renown. 'Keśava, please consider before you speak like this. You single me out for harsh denunciation without reason, slayer of Madhu, because of the Pāṇḍavas' expressions of devotion to you; but do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of both cases before your constant censure? You, the chamberlain Vidura, the king, Drona the Teacher and grandfather Bhīṣma all denounce me alone among all the princes; and yet I am not aware that I have committed any offence. All you gentlemen hate me, and so do all the kings, and yet, foe-taming Keśava, however hard I think I cannot bring to mind any wrongdoing, neither extreme nor even trifling.

'Slayer of Madhu, the Pāṇḍavas were happy to start gambling, and Śākuni won their kingdom from them: how am I to blame for this? As for the wealth the Pāṇḍavas lost in that match, I agreed its immediate return to them; and it is no fault of mine, best of victors, that the invincible sons of Kuntī were beaten at dice and exiled to the forest.  
10 So what crime is alleged that they should have fallen out with us, their foes? Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas are weak, and yet they seem to delight in being our enemies. What have we done? For what sin do the Pāṇḍavas and Śrīñjayas wish to kill the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra?

'No fierce word or deed can frighten us or cow us here – not even

<sup>1</sup> See 4.66.23 and note.

fear of Indra. And I know of no follower of the Kṣatriya *dharma* who could defeat us in battle, foe-crushing Kṛṣṇa. Slayer of Madhu, not even the gods can defeat Bhīṣma, Kṛpa, Drona and their troops in battle; how much less Pāṇḍu's sons? If we follow our *dharma* in battle, heir of Madhu, and in due course meet death by the sword, our gain will be heaven itself. And for us Kṣatriyas, O stirrer of men, our chief *dharma* is indeed to lie on the battlefield on a bed of arrows; so if we achieve a hero's bed in battle without bowing before our enemies, that will be no grief for us! Which of these well born men who live by the Kṣatriya *dharma* would ever bow so in fear before anyone, thinking to save his life?

"One should strive, one should not submit," said Mātaṅga, "for manliness consists in striving; when evil times come, better even to break than to bend before anyone." These words are prized by men who pursue their own welfare. A man such as I should bow only before *dharma* and before Brahmins, with no thought for anyone else, and should behave so as long as he lives. This is the *dharma* of the Kṣatriyas, and this has always been my own opinion. So as long as I live, Keśava, they will never again get their hands on that share of the kingdom that was formerly agreed by my father. And as long as King Dhṛtarāṣṭra survives, either we or they must lay weapons aside and live in subservience, heir of Madhu. My kingdom cannot be given away. If it was formerly given when I was dependent on others, this was done through ignorance or fear, O stirrer of men, and I was a mere child at the time. Never again, lord of the Vṛṣnis, will the Pāṇḍavas get their hands on it now! From now on, for as long as I survive, strong-armed Keśava, not even as much land as one might pierce with the tip of a sharp needle will be surrendered by us to the Pāṇḍavas!"

[126] Kṛṣṇa the prince of Daśarha laughed. Eyes wild with fury, he addressed these words to Duryodhana in the assembly of the Kurus. 'You shall have your hero's bed – rest assured, you shall have it! Stand firm with your ministers: there will be a mighty battle. Since you believe, fool, that you have committed no offence against the Pāṇḍavas, let these lords of the earth hear the whole tale!

'You were consumed with rage at the noble Pāṇḍavas' good fortune, and so you and Śākuni son of Subala undertook this ill-advised gambling

5 match, heir of Bharata – how else could your kinsmen, superior men who are honoured by good folk and honest in their dealings, have joined with a crook in such wickedness? Gambling with dice, my wise son, brings discontent and destruction even to the virtuous; among the wicked, it leads to discord and disaster. And so you, along with men of good deeds but evil outcomes, unthinkingly accomplished this terrible disaster that started with a gambling match.

‘Who else but you could insult the wife of a kinsman, and speak to her as you spoke to Draupadi after bringing her to the hall? The Pāṇḍavas’ queen is well born, endowed with good character, and more precious to them than their own lives, and you abused her so!

10 All the Kurus know how Duhśāsana addressed Kuntī’s sons in the Kuru assembly when those afflicters of their enemies had to go into exile. What man of virtue could act in so unworthy a fashion towards his own kin, men of proper conduct, free from greed and constant in virtue? The words used again and again by Karna, Duhśāsana and yourself were the words of cruel men, ignoble and harsh.

15 You tried your best to burn them with their mother in Vāraṇāvata when they were boys, but your efforts were not successful. The Pāṇḍavas then spent a very long time living in hiding with their mother in a Brahmin’s house in Ekacakra. You attempted to destroy them using poison, snakes<sup>1</sup> and every kind of trick, but your efforts were not successful.

‘This is how you have always thought of the Pāṇḍavas and treated them falsely, sir; how can you be free of fault towards Pāṇḍu’s noble sons? Many times you have cruelly acted towards them as no one should act, a false and ignoble man, yet today you make yourself out to be quite the opposite.

‘Time and again peace has been urged on you by your mother and father, Bhīṣma, Drona and Vidura, but you do not make peace, prince. There would be great gain in peace for both you and Kuntī’s son, and yet it does not please you: what can this be but weakness of judgement?

20 If you act against your friends’ advice, king, you will find no safety. What you are doing is wicked and infamous!’

<sup>1</sup> Literally ‘snake-contrivances’ (*sarpabandhais*). See 1.119.36–41.

While the Daśārha prince was addressing these words to resentful Duryodhana, Duhśāsana spoke in the assembly of the Kurus. ‘King, if you do not make peace with the Pāṇḍavas of your own free will, it seems to me that the Kauravas will bind you and hand you over to Kuntī’s son. Bhīṣma, Drona and your father will hand the three of us – Karna the Cutter, you and myself – over to the Pāṇḍavas, bull-like hero!’

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s son Duryodhana heard his brother’s words, he rose and, hissing like a mighty snake, he strode angrily out, ignoring Vidura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the great king Bāhlika, Krpa, Somadatta, Bhīṣma, Drona and Krṣṇa the stirrer of men. All these the evil-minded, shameless man ignored, boorishly abandoning all rules of behaviour, a proud man despising those who deserved his respect. And when his brothers saw the bull-like man stride out, they and their ministers followed him, and so did all the kings.

30 Seeing Duryodhana rise in the assembly and stride out angrily with his brothers, Bhīṣma son of Śamtanu spoke. ‘When a man abandons *dharma* and the proper making of wealth in favour of fury, his enemies soon laugh at his downfall. This wicked Dhārtarāṣṭra prince is ignorant of right procedure; full of false pride of kingship, he is in thrall to anger and greed. I think that all these Kṣatriyas are now ripe for death, O stirrer of men, for in their folly all the princes and their ministers have followed him.’

35 Hearing Bhīṣma’s words, the heroic prince of Daśārha, lotus-eyed Krṣṇa, addressed all those who remained, headed by Bhīṣma and Drona. ‘Great is the fault of the Kuru elders, that they do not forcibly restrain this king who exercises his sovereignty so foolishly. O foe-tamers, I think the time has come for this, and if it is done, all may yet be well! Listen if you please, sinless Bhāratas, to the beneficial words I shall speak before you because I am well disposed towards you.

‘The old king of the Bhojas had a evildoer of a son, a man without self-control; seizing the sovereignty from his father while he still lived, he gave himself over to anger. This man, Kamṣa son of Ugrasena, was abandoned by his kinsmen. For the welfare of our relatives I cut him down in a great battle; then we and our relatives paid honour to Āhuka Ugrasena, and made him king to bring glory to the Bhoja Kṣatriyas. By

abandoning one man, Kamsa, for the sake of the line, all the Yādavas, Andhakas and Vṛṣnis prospered and thrived, heir of Bharata.

40 ‘And when arrays were formed and weapons were brandished in the war of the gods and demons, the supreme lord Prajāpati spoke, O king; when the worlds were riven and on the point of destruction, heir of Bharata, the blessed god of creation, who had brought those worlds into being, said, “The demons, the Daityas and Dānavas, shall be defeated, and the celestials, the Ādityas, Vasus and Rudras, shall prevail. In this war, gods, demons, men, Gandharvas, serpents and Rāksasas shall contend together and slay one another.” Having come to this conclusion, the supreme lord Prajāpati then addressed Dharma: “Bind these Daityas and Dānavas and hand them over to Varuṇa!” Then on the supreme lord’s instruction, Dharma bound all the Daityas and Dānavas and gave them to Varuṇa; and Varuṇa, the lord of the waters, bound them with Dharma’s bonds and with his own, and still he carefully guards those demons in the ocean.

‘In the same fashion, you should bind Duryodhana, Karna, Śakuni son of Subala and Duḥśasana, and hand them over to the Pāṇḍavas. “Give up one man for the sake of the family; give up one family for the sake of the village; give up one village for the sake of the kingdom; give up the earth for the sake of yourself!”<sup>1</sup> O king, bind Duryodhana and make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, and the Kṣatriyas shall not perish on your account, bull-like Kṣatriya!’

[127] After hearing what Kṛṣṇa had to say, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra hastened to speak to Vidura, expert in *dharma*. ‘Brother, go and fetch Gāndhārī here! She is wise and far-sighted, and with her I shall win over my evil-minded son. If she can calm the wicked, scheming prince, we may yet follow the advice of our friend Kṛṣṇa; by speaking appositely she may yet show this fool the way, though he is overwhelmed with greed and surrounded by evil companions. She may be able to allay this huge and dreadful calamity that Duryodhana is causing us, and bring us unfailing welfare for years to come!’

When Vidura heard King Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s words, he obeyed his command and fetched far-sighted Gāndhārī. Then Dhṛtarāṣṭra addressed

<sup>1</sup> See 1.107.32 and note.

her: ‘Gāndhārī, this wicked son of yours disobeys my commands, and in his greed for sovereignty he is likely to forfeit both sovereignty and life! Boorishly abandoning all rules of behaviour, the fool and his wicked associates have left the assembly, rejecting the advice of their friends.’

Princess Gāndhārī of high repute listened to her husband’s words; then, seeking the highest good, she answered, ‘Speedily bring him here, this sick-minded son of mine who craves a kingdom! Kingdoms cannot be governed by boors who violate *dharma* and the proper making of wealth. But you yourself are greatly to blame here, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, since in your fondness for your son you followed his judgement, despite knowing his wickedness; so it is that now, gripped by desire and anger, he is pursuing the path of delusion, O king, and you cannot turn him away from it however hard you try. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is receiving his reward for conferring kingship on a wicked, puerile, ill-led, greedy fool.

‘How could a man of sense connive at division amongst his own kin? Yet you are divided from your kin, and your enemies will overpower you. Great king, when misfortunes can be overcome by treating one’s kinsmen with friendship and generosity, who would choose instead to resort to violence against them?’

Now, commanded by both Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana’s mother, Vidura the chamberlain brought the resentful Duryodhana back to the assembly. He re-entered the hall to hear his mother’s words, eyes copper-red in anger, hissing like a snake. Gāndhārī saw him enter there, her son who had set out on a wrong path, and she spoke apposite words of reproach. ‘Duryodhana my boy, listen to what I say: I speak for your welfare and that of your followers, and for your happiness in the future.

‘If you make peace, you will show honour to Bhīṣma, your father and me, and also to Drona and your other friends. My wise son, a kingdom cannot be gained, maintained, or enjoyed merely by the exercise of one’s will! Bull-like heir of Bharata, the undisciplined man will not enjoy a kingdom long; it is the self-controlled, intelligent man who can guard a kingdom. Desire and anger distract a man from his purposes: it is by defeating these two enemies that a king conquers the earth. How the wicked seek this great rank of sovereignty over the lords of the earth; yet they are unable to maintain it, for he who seeks what is great must keep his senses under the control of *dharma* and the proper

ster his ministers and his enemies will not be in vain. disciplines his senses, who masters his ministers, who  
ers, who acts resolutely and after due deliberation: he  
n fortune favours most. Like two monstrous fish held  
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t; allowed to thrive, desire and anger put the gods in  
who would follow them, and they seal the entrance to  
ie heaven-bound man. But the king who truly knows  
desire, anger, greed, hypocrisy and pride can claim the  
1. If a king seeks *dharma*, the proper making of wealth,  
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ises; but if he is overcome by desire or anger and acts  
s own folk or others, he will have no friends.

are united and wise; they are foe-crushing heroes.  
, son, you will enjoy the earth in happiness. What was  
n of Śamtanu and the mighty chariot-fighter Drona  
and Pāṇḍu's son Arjuna are invincible. Turn for help  
ong-armed Kṛṣṇa, for if Keśava is well disposed, he  
spiness of both sides.

ejects the counsel of wise and learned friends who  
gives joy to his enemies. My son, there is no good in  
no scope for the proper making of wealth; how can  
There is not always even victory. Do not set your  
n Bhīṣma, your father and Bāhlika gave the sons of  
O most wise foe-tamer, it was because they feared  
you see the fruit of that gift, in that you enjoy the  
afe for you by those heroes! Foe-tamer, give Pāṇḍu's  
theirs, if you and your ministers wish to enjoy the  
the earth's kings. Half the earth is enough for you

day you have inflicted humiliation on them for thirteen years: enough!  
End it now, my wise son, for it thrives on desire and anger. Karna, this  
ever-wrathful Sūta's son who seeks your gain, is no match for the sons  
of Kuntī, and neither is your brother Duḥśāsana. When rage has taken  
hold of Bhīṣma, Drona and Kṛpa, Karna and Bhīma, wealth-winner  
Arjuna and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, all of your subjects will surely be no more.  
Son, do not give way to resentment and wipe out the Kurus! The whole  
of the earth will feel the slaughter caused by you and the Pāṇḍavas.  
And you are a fool to think that Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa and the others  
will fight with all their might: that will not happen now. For to men of  
such self-control, considerations of kingship, affection and rank apply  
equally to you and to the Pāṇḍavas, but *dharma* outweighs all of them;  
and if they were to sacrifice their lives in battle under the constraint  
of having accepted King Dhṛtarāṣṭra's bread, they would not be able to  
look King Yudhiṣṭhīra in the eye. In this world, son, we do not see men  
acquiring riches through greed; so give up your greed and be tranquil,  
bull-like heir of Bharata!'

[128] But the Kaurava ignored these significant words spoken by his  
mother, and furiously returned to the company of his undisciplined  
friends; he left the hall and consulted King Śakuni son of Subala, who  
knew the ways of the dice. And this was the plan agreed by Duryodhana,  
Karna, Subala's son and Duḥśāsana: 'Before Kṛṣṇa, this stirrer of men,  
can act rapidly with King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhīṣma son of Śamtanu to take  
us captive, we ourselves should capture that lord of the senses by force,  
just as Indra forcibly captured Virocana's tiger-like son Bali!<sup>1</sup> When the  
Pāṇḍavas hear that Kṛṣṇa the Vṛṣṇi has been seized, they will lose their

<sup>1</sup> In most versions of this story it was Viṣṇu in his incarnation as the Dwarf, rather than Indra, who overcame Bali and confined him to the underworld, but references also exist to a direct conflict between Bali and Indra. See also 12.216–18.

making of wealth. The senses, when controlled, allow intelligence to prosper as fuel does a fire. But when they are untamed, they can even kill, as untamed, unbroken horses may kill an incompetent charioteer upon the road.

'If a man attempts to master his ministers without first mastering himself, he will fail helplessly, the master of neither self nor ministers. But if first of all he conquers the self as though it were a country, his attempts to master his ministers and his enemies will not be in vain. The man who disciplines his senses, who masters his ministers, who punishes offenders, who acts resolutely and after due deliberation: he is the one whom fortune favours most. Like two monstrous fish held in a fine-meshed net, desire and anger within a man's body will tear his wisdom apart; allowed to thrive, desire and anger put the gods in fear of the man who would follow them, and they seal the entrance to heaven against the heaven-bound man. But the king who truly knows how to conquer desire, anger, greed, hypocrisy and pride can claim the earth for his own. If a king seeks *dharma*, the proper making of wealth, and the overthrow of his enemies, he should be constantly engaged in restraining his senses; but if he is overcome by desire or anger and acts falsely towards his own folk or others, he will have no friends.'

35 'The Pāṇḍavas are united and wise; they are foe-crushing heroes. Joined with them, son, you will enjoy the earth in happiness. What was said by Bhīṣma son of Śaṃtanu and the mighty chariot-fighter Drona is the truth: Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍu's son Arjuna are invincible. Turn for help now to tireless, strong-armed Kṛṣṇa, for if Keśava is well disposed, he will act for the happiness of both sides.'

'When a man rejects the counsel of wise and learned friends who wish him well, he gives joy to his enemies. My son, there is no good in war, no *dharma* and no scope for the proper making of wealth; how can it bring happiness? There is not always even victory. Do not set your heart on war! When Bhīṣma, your father and Bāhlika gave the sons of Pāṇḍu their share, O most wise foe-tamer, it was because they feared discord; and today you see the fruit of that gift, in that you enjoy the entire earth, made safe for you by those heroes! Foe-tamer, give Pāṇḍu's sons what is rightly theirs, if you and your ministers wish to enjoy the allegiance of half of the earth's kings. Half the earth is enough for you

and your ministers to live; follow the advice of your friends, heir of Bharata, and win fame!

'The Pāṇḍavas are glorious and self-controlled, intelligent and disciplined. If you fight them, son, you will lose great happiness. Rein in the anger of your friends, and rule your kingdom as you should, granting the sons of Pāṇḍu their share, bull-like heir of Bharata. Day by day you have inflicted humiliation on them for thirteen years: enough! End it now, my wise son, for it thrives on desire and anger. Karṇa, this ever-wrathful Sūta's son who seeks your gain, is no match for the sons of Kuntī, and neither is your brother Duhśāsana. When rage has taken hold of Bhīṣma, Drona and Kṛpa, Karṇa and Bhīma, wealth-winner Arjuna and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, all of your subjects will surely be no more. Son, do not give way to resentment and wipe out the Kurus! The whole of the earth will feel the slaughter caused by you and the Pāṇḍavas. And you are a fool to think that Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa and the others will fight with all their might: that will not happen now. For to men of such self-control, considerations of kingship, affection and rank apply equally to you and to the Pāṇḍavas, but *dharma* outweighs all of them; and if they were to sacrifice their lives in battle under the constraint of having accepted King Dhṛtarāṣṭra's bread, they would not be able to look King Yudhiṣṭhira in the eye. In this world, son, we do not see men acquiring riches through greed; so give up your greed and be tranquil, bull-like heir of Bharata!'

[128] But the Kaurava ignored these significant words spoken by his mother, and furiously returned to the company of his undisciplined friends; he left the hall and consulted King Śākuni son of Subala, who knew the ways of the dice. And this was the plan agreed by Duryodhana, Karṇa, Subala's son and Duhśāsana: 'Before Kṛṣṇa, this stirrer of men, can act rapidly with King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Bhīṣma son of Śaṃtanu to take us captive, we ourselves should capture that lord of the senses by force, just as Indra forcibly captured Virocana's tiger-like son Bali!<sup>1</sup> When the Pāṇḍavas hear that Kṛṣṇa the Vṛṣṇi has been seized, they will lose their

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spirit and their will, like fangless snakes. For this strong-armed hero is the comfort and strength of all of them, and once the boon-granting bull of all the Sātvatas has been seized, the Pāñdavas and Somakas will be stripped of their resolve. So we should bind rapid-acting Keśava here and now – let Dhṛtarāṣṭra cry all he will – and make war upon our enemies!'

Now Sātyaki, who was wise and could read gestures and expressions, soon came to know of the wicked plan of these wicked, scheming 10 men, He therefore set out with Hṛdika's son Kṛtavarmā, and told him, 'Muster the army with haste, and wait at the gate of the hall, armed and with troops arrayed, till I can inform tireless Kṛṣṇa of this.'

Heroic Sātyaki entered the hall like a lion entering its mountain cave, and told noble Keśava of the plan; and then he spoke to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura, informing them of it with the hint of a smile: 'These fools want to commit an act far removed from *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, something virtuous men would denounce – but there is no way 15 they can achieve it! Soon these deluded, wicked idiots, overwhelmed by desire and anger, in thrall to rage and greed, will combine together to try to capture lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa here, like children or dull-witted men trying to catch a blazing fire in a cloth.'

When far-sighted Vidura heard Sātyaki speak these words, he addressed strong-armed Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the Kuru assembly: 'Enemy-afflicting king, time has run out for all these sons of yours who are preparing to commit an act that is both infamous and impossible. We are told that they want to combine together to overpower lotus-eyed 20 Kṛṣṇa by force and take him captive! This tiger-like hero is unassailable and invincible. If they attack him they will be no more, like moths flying into a flame; for if the stirrer of men wishes, he can dispatch all of them to the realm of Yama as they struggle against him, like a furious lion slaying other beasts. But Kṛṣṇa here would never commit any blameworthy act; the invincible, highest lord would never deviate from *dharma*.'

After Vidura had spoken in this fashion, Kṛṣṇa Keśava fixed his eye upon Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and addressed him while his friends all listened together: 'If these raging men seek to restrain me with might, or I them, 25 then allow it, O king. I could curb them all despite their fury, but I would never commit any wicked or blameworthy act. In their greed for

the Pāñdavas' possessions, your sons will lose their own; if this is what they want, Yudhiṣṭhīra's goal is accomplished! Here and now I could subdue them and those who follow them, heir of Bharata, and hand them over to Kuntī's sons – what would be wrong in this? However, here in your presence I shall not undertake any such blameworthy act at the prompting of anger or wicked reasoning, great king. Let it be as Duryodhana desires: I accept all his terms, heir of Bharata.'

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard this, he said to Vidura, 'Quickly bring here this wicked Duryodhana who so covets the kingdom, together with his friends and ministers, his brothers and followers! Perhaps I may be able to set him on the right path.' So Vidura the chamberlain brought the reluctant Duryodhana back to the assembly again, accompanied by his brothers and in the midst of all the kings. Then King Dhṛtarāṣṭra spoke to Duryodhana, surrounded as he was by Karna, Duhśāsana and those kings: 'You cruel man, devoted to wickedness and associated with people of base conduct! You have conspired with your wicked associates to attempt a wicked deed, an act both impossible and infamous, that virtuous folk would denounce, something that only a fool such as you would embark on to defile his lineage! I am told that you have conspired with your wicked associates to capture lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa here, who is unassailable and invincible. Even the gods under Indra could not overpower him, but you are so stupid that you want to seize him, like a child who wants the moon! You do not know Keśava: he cannot be withheld in battle by gods or men, Gandharvas, demons or serpents. You cannot seize the wind with your hand, you cannot touch the moon with your hand, you cannot support the earth on your head, and you cannot seize Keśava by force!'

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra had finished speaking, Vidura the chamberlain fixed his eye upon the king's resentful son Duryodhana, and said, 'The monkey king named Dvivida<sup>1</sup> once covered Keśava with a huge shower of rocks at the gate of Saubha; with every effort he battled to take Madhu's heir captive, but he could not capture him. This is the man you want to seize by force! At Nirmocana, six thousand mighty demons

<sup>1</sup> Dvivida was one of the monkeys who took Rāma's side in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; the story of his attempt to capture Kṛṣṇa seems not to appear elsewhere.

bound him with bonds, but they could not capture him. This is the man you want to seize by force! At Prāgjyotiṣa, Naraka and his Dānavas could not capture Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. This is the man you want to seize by force! In childhood too, the infant Kṛṣṇa slew Pūtanā,<sup>1</sup> and he held up Mount Govardhana to protect the cows,<sup>2</sup> bull-like heir of Bharata. He slew Ariṣṭa, Dhenuka and mighty Cāṇūra, Aśvarāja and Kāṁsa the evildoer, Jarāśamda, Vakra, the heroic Śiśupāla and Bāna; many kings he has slain in battle. He triumphed over King Varuṇa and Agni the god of Fire, both boundlessly powerful, and he defeated Indra himself when he stole his coral tree.<sup>3</sup> As he lay upon the one great ocean he slew Madhu and Kaitabha,<sup>4</sup> and in a later birth he also slew Hayagrīva. He is the maker, but he is not made; he is the cause of all human effort. Whatever Vāsudeva desires he achieves without exertion. You do not know Kṛṣṇa Govinda, the invincible, terrible in valour like an angry snake of deadly venom, an unconquered mass of fiery energy! If you assail tireless, strong-armed Kṛṣṇa, then, like a moth flying into a flame, you and your ministers will be no more.'

[129] After Vidura had spoken, heroic Kṛṣṇa Keśava, the slayer of enemy hosts, addressed Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son. 'Foolish Duryodhana, you mistakenly believe that I am alone, and so you hope to overpower me and take me captive. But here before you are all the Pāṇḍavas, and the Andhakas and Vṛṣnis too; here are the Ādityas, Rudras and Vasus, along with the great seers!' With these words Keśava the slayer of enemy heroes laughed aloud; and as noble Vāsudeva laughed, the gods themselves issued forth from his body, fiery, lightning-bright, each no larger than a thumb. On his forehead was Brahmā, on his breast Rudra; the world-guardian gods appeared on his arms, and Agni emerged from his mouth; the Ādityas were there, and the Sādhyas, Vasus and Aśvins, likewise the Maruts with Indra, and the All-gods; Yaksas, Gandharvas

<sup>1</sup> A female Rākṣasa who tried to kill him by sucking him at her poisoned breast.

<sup>2</sup> Kṛṣṇa held this mountain aloft for seven days with his little finger to shelter the people and cattle of Vṛndāvana from storms sent by Indra.

<sup>3</sup> The *pārijāta* was one of five trees produced at the churning of the ocean of milk (see 1.15-17) and taken by Indra to heaven; Kṛṣṇa stole it from him.

<sup>4</sup> See 3.194.

and Rākṣasas could also be seen. On two of his forearms there appeared Balarāma and the wealth-winner: to the right was Arjuna with his bow, and to the left Balarāma with his plough. At Kṛṣṇa's back were Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhīra and the two sons of Mādrī, while the Andhakas and Vṛṣnis led by Pradyumna brandished their mighty weapons at his front. In Kṛṣṇa's many hands could be seen all his own weapons, blazing as he brandished them: his conch, discus and club, his spear, bow and plough, and Nandaka his sword. From his eyes, nose and ears fiery flames issued forth in every direction, smoking most fearfully, while rays of light like sunbeams shone from the pores of his skin.

When the kings saw this terrible form of noble Keśava, they closed their eyes in their fear, save for Drona, Bhīṣma, sagacious Vidura, noble Samjaya and the ascetic seers; to them the blessed stirrer of men had granted divine vision. And at the sight of this great marvel performed by Madhu's heir on the floor of the hall, heavenly drums sounded and a shower of flowers fell; the whole earth shook, and the ocean was convulsed. Heir of Bharata, the princes were utterly astounded.

Then the foe-taming, tiger-like hero withdrew that form of his, that wonderful, brilliant, divine perfection; and taking Sātyaki and Hṛdika's son Kṛtavarma by the hand, the slayer of Madhu took leave of the seers and left. Then in the midst of the uproar that had broken out, Nārada and the other seers also vanished and went their ways, which was a great wonder. The Kauravas and the kings, seeing that Kṛṣṇa had set out, followed the tiger-like hero, as the gods follow Indra of a hundred sacrifices; but Vāsudeva of immeasurable greatness paid no heed to that whole group of kings, and strode forth like a smoking fire.

Now Dāruka appeared with Kṛṣṇa's great chariot: it was bright, decked with small bells, splendid with lavish gold, swift, and loud as thunder; full of fine gear, it was covered by a brilliant tiger-skin and surrounded by a guard-rail, and to it were harnessed Sainya and Sugrīva. The mighty chariot-fighter Kṛtavarma son of Hṛdika, a hero much honoured among the Vṛṣnis, now likewise appeared mounted on his chariot. Foe-taming Vāsudeva had his chariot ready to leave, when the great king Dhṛtarāṣṭra addressed him one more time. 'You see, stirrer of men, how much power I have over my sons; all is known to you, tormentor of your enemies, nothing is hidden. Please do not

harbour suspicions of me; what I desire and strive for is peace among the Kurus, but you have seen the state in which I find myself. I have no evil intentions towards the Pāṇḍavas, Keśava — you heard the words I spoke to Duryodhana. The Kurus and the kings of the earth all know that I have made every effort to strive for peace, heir of Madhu!'

Then strong-armed Kṛṣṇa spoke to King Dhṛitarāṣṭra, Drona, grandfather Bhīṣma, the chamberlain, Bāhlika and Kṛpa: 'Gentlemen, you have seen what happened in the Kuru assembly: how a boorish fool repeatedly rose to leave in anger. However, King Dhṛitarāṣṭra declares himself powerless. I beg leave of you all; I shall return to Yudhiṣṭhira.' With these words the bull-like hero Vāsudeva set out on his chariot, followed by mighty bowmen and heroes among the Bhāratas: Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa, the chamberlain, Dhṛitarāṣṭra, Bāhlika, Aśvathāman, Vikarna and the mighty chariot-fighter Yuyutsu. And even as the Kurus watched, he left in his great, bright chariot decked with bells to see his father's sister Kuntī.

[130] Kṛṣṇa tells Kuntī of Duryodhana's refusal to make peace, and asks what word to take to the Pāṇḍavas. In reply, she gives him a message for Yudhiṣṭhira: he should maintain his royal dharma.

#### THE INSTRUCTION OF VIDURĀ'S SON

[131] Kuntī cites the story of Vidurā and her son. — The Kṣatriya lady Vidurā scolds her son Saṃjaya, who is lying in misery after a defeat by the king of Sindhu. She urges him to get up and show courage, [132] telling him to live up to his name ('Victory'). The family has fallen upon hard times; he must follow the Kṣatriya code and slay his enemies. [133] Saṃjaya complains at his mother's harsh words; she continues to urge him to do battle and gain victory. He argues that he does not have the resources to fight; she insists that he must act, [134] tells him to show no fear, and reveals the existence of hidden wealth. Saṃjaya is stirred to action by her words, and achieves all that she has told him to do.

[135] — Now Kuntī gives Kṛṣṇa messages for Arjuna, Bhīma, Draupadī and the twins. Kṛṣṇa leaves and sets out in his chariot. Karna travels with him for some distance, and the two men have a long discussion.

[136] Bhīṣma and Drona make another attempt to persuade Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas, pointing out that there are many unfavourable portents. [137] Duryodhana appears downcast, but says nothing. Bhīṣma and Drona continue to speak against war.

#### PERSUADING KARNA

[138] Dhṛitarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya what Kṛṣṇa said to Karṇa as they rode together in Kṛṣṇa's chariot, and Saṃjaya describes the conversation to him. — Kṛṣṇa tells Karṇa that his birth makes him the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, and offers him the kingship. His five younger brothers and their sons and supporters will all joyfully acknowledge his sovereignty.

[139] Karṇa answers that though he is Kuntī's son, and thus a Pāṇḍava, he was abandoned by his mother; his true parents are Adhiratha and Rādhā, who took him in and brought him up.<sup>1</sup> Duryodhana too has treated him with favour, and he cannot now change his allegiance. Kṛṣṇa must not let Yudhiṣṭhira know Karṇa's story, since he would then reject the kingship, and Karṇa would hand it to Duryodhana. Instead, Yudhiṣṭhira will triumph; the coming battle will be a great sacrifice of Kṣatriyas officiated over by the Pāṇḍavas, and it is Karṇa's prayer that those who die will gain heaven.

[140] Kṛṣṇa smiles to hear Karṇa's refusal, and remarks that the Pāṇḍavas are certain of victory. The coming battle will usher in the Kali Age. He tells Karṇa to arrange for it to begin on the coming day of the new moon, and assures him that all who die fighting will reach heaven. [141] Karṇa says that all portents indicate disaster for the Kauravas, and that he has dreamed of Yudhiṣṭhira's victory. He expects that he will next meet Kṛṣṇa in heaven. The two men embrace and part.

[142] — After the failure of Kṛṣṇa's mission, Vidura tells Kuntī of his fears

<sup>1</sup> This is strange: Karṇa has never been told the story of his birth, which was previously referred to by the Sun as a secret that he could not yet know (3.285.9, 3.287–92). The encounter with Kuntī in 5.142–4 reads like the expected revelation scene, and the present sequence in which Kṛṣṇa tries to persuade Karṇa seems like a (rather clumsy) later insertion.

for the future. She agrees that no good can come of the approaching war, and says that she will try to change Karna's mind, since she is in fact his mother. She goes to the bank of the Gaṅgā, where Karna is praying to the Sun, [143] and tells him that he is her son, not a Sūta; then she invites him to take up his rightful position as eldest among the Pāṇḍavas.

[144] The Sun speaks to confirm the truth of Kuntī's words and to urge Karna to act as she suggests. But Karna will not change sides, for he says that Kuntī has never behaved to him like a mother, and his allegiance is to the Kauravas. He does promise Kuntī that he will not kill Yudhiṣṭhīra, Bhīma, Nakula or Sahadeva. However, either he will kill Arjuna or Arjuna will kill him; thus Kuntī will still have five sons.

[145] Meanwhile Kṛṣṇa returns to the Pāṇḍavas in Upaplavya. He informs them that Duryodhana has rejected his counsel, and Yudhiṣṭhīra asks how the senior Kauravas reacted to this. In answer, Kṛṣṇa says that Bhīṣma narrated the recent history of the Kuru line up to Pāṇḍu's succession, emphasizing the validity of the Pāṇḍavas' claims and urging Duryodhana to give them half the kingdom. [146] Then Drona continued Bhīṣma's narrative by describing how Dhṛtarāṣṭra received the kingship from Pāṇḍu; he counselled Duryodhana to follow Bhīṣma's advice. After Drona had spoken, Vidura pleaded with Bhīṣma to act to prevent the coming calamity, and Gāndhārī spoke of the justness of Yudhiṣṭhīra's cause.

[147] Kṛṣṇa continues with an account of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's words: he reminded Duryodhana of figures from earlier history who had been disinherited for one reason or another despite being the eldest son, just as happened to himself. Then he appealed to Duryodhana to give half the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas.

[148] Kṛṣṇa concludes his report by describing how Duryodhana took no notice of all these pleas, but simply ordered preparations to be made for battle. He tells Yudhiṣṭhīra that he himself made further efforts to avert war by conciliation, threat and inducement, but without success. Now the only course of action is to punish the wrongdoers with death on the battlefield.

#### MARCHING TO WAR

[149] Yudhiṣṭhīra gives orders for the disposition of his troops. He has seven armies, led by seven great generals, and he asks his brothers which of them

should be the commander in overall charge. Sahadeva opts for Virāṭa, Nakula for Drupada, Arjuna for Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Bhīma for Śikhaṇḍīn. Yudhiṣṭhīra himself decides to leave the choice to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa agrees that any one of the generals would be equal the task, and urges that the troops be arrayed for battle: war is inevitable, and victory certain. They march forth, leaving Draupadī in Upaplavya, and encamp in Kurukṣetra.

[150] Meanwhile, Duryodhana too gives the command for preparations to be made for war, and announces that they will march the next day.

[151] Yudhiṣṭhīra questions Kṛṣṇa once again about Duryodhana's response to his mission. Kṛṣṇa answers that Duryodhana heeded neither him nor Bhīṣma and Vidura, listening only to Śakuni, Karna and Duḥśāsana. War must follow. Yudhiṣṭhīra orders the troops to be arrayed for battle, though he remains deeply unhappy at the prospect of fighting his revered elders.

[152] The next morning, Duryodhana orders the disposition of his eleven armies. He has a vast force, splendidly equipped.

#### THE INSTALLATION OF BHĪṢMA

[153] Duryodhana approaches Bhīṣma and asks him to accept overall command of the Kaurava forces. Bhīṣma agrees to do so on the condition that either he or Karna will be the first to fight. Karna responds by swearing that he will not fight while Bhīṣma lives. Duryodhana now installs Bhīṣma as commander; there are grim portents. Now the Kauravas march out and encamp in Kurukṣetra.

[154] When Yudhiṣṭhīra learns that Bhīṣma has been appointed to the command of the Kauravas, he asks Kṛṣṇa to assemble the generals of the various armies fighting for the Pāṇḍavas. They come before him, and he installs Dhṛṣṭadyumna as his commander. Balarāma arrives; he announces that he cannot bear to see the coming destruction, and is therefore going on a pilgrimage to the sacred bathing-places on the river Sarasvatī.

[155] Now Rukmin, the mighty Bhoja king and wielder of the bow Vijaya, arrives together with his great army. Still smarting from Kṛṣṇa's abduction of his sister Rukmini and his subsequent defeat at Kṛṣṇa's hands, he offers his assistance to the Pāṇḍavas, claiming that if Arjuna is overcome by fear on the battlefield he will kill his foes for him. Arjuna laughs at him; he then goes to Duryodhana and makes him a similar offer which is similarly rejected.

[156] Dhṛtarāṣṭra requests Saṃjaya to tell him everything that happens in the coming conflict. Saṃjaya agrees to do so.

### ULŪKA'S MISSION

[157] Saṃjaya begins his narration to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. — Duryodhana sends Śakuni's son Ulūka to the Pāṇḍavas to deliver a taunting message. [158] Ulūka comes before the Pāṇḍavas and delivers Duryodhana's taunts; [159] the Pāṇḍavas are enraged. Seeing that Bhīma is barely able to contain himself, Kṛṣṇa advises Ulūka to leave quickly and inform Duryodhana that he has carried out his task, and he adds a further message from himself warning Duryodhana that he faces destruction at the hands of the Pāṇḍavas. [160] Arjuna adds his own message to Duryodhana: he will slay Bhīma. Ulūka returns to Duryodhana and tells him what has been said; Duryodhana orders his troops to be arrayed for battle.

### THE REVIEW OF THE MAJOR AND MINOR WARRIORS

[161] At Yudhiṣṭhīra's command, Dhṛṣṭadyumna leads the Pāṇḍava forces out. He assigns to each of his own chief warriors a named Kaurava opponent.

[162] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya what Bhīma did after his installation as commander, and Saṃjaya relates everything to him. — Bhīma tells Duryodhana to put aside fear and to trust in his knowledge and experience. Duryodhana asks Bhīma to name the major and minor warriors in the Kaurava force. Bhīma proceeds to list them, commenting on the merits of each one: Duryodhana and his brothers, Bhīma himself, Kṛtavarman, Śalya, Bhūriśrava, Jayadratha; [163] Sudakṣīṇa, Nīla, Vinda and Anuvinda, the five Trigarta brothers, Duryodhana's son Lakṣmaṇa and Duḥśāsana's son, Dāṇḍadhāra, Bṛhadbala, Kṛpa; [164] Śakuni and Aśvatthāman — for all Aśvatthāman's prowess Bhīma does not think highly of him — Droṇa, Paurava, Kṛṇa's son Vṛṣasena, Jalasandha, Bāhlika, the Rākṣasa king Alāyudha, Bhagadatta; [165] the brothers Acalā and Vṛṣaka, and Kṛṇa — Bhīma says that he considers Kṛṇa worth no more than half a warrior.

Droṇa agrees, and Kṛṇa is enraged. He urges Duryodhana to rid himself of

Bhīma, whom he accuses of trying to sow dissent in the army, and vows that he will not fight until Bhīma is dead. [166] Now Bhīma becomes furious, and rounds on Kṛṇa. Duryodhana calms him and asks him now to name the major and minor warriors in the Pāṇḍava force. Bhīma speaks of Yudhiṣṭhīra, Bhīma, whom he reckons worth eight warriors, and the twins. Then he describes Arjuna's incomparable skills as a fighter. The assembled kings become dejected.

[167] Bhīma continues his review of the Pāṇḍava force: Draupadī's sons, Virāṭa's son Uttara, Abhimanyu, Sātyaki, Uttamaujas, Yudhāmanu, Virāṭa, Drupada; [168] Śikhaṇḍīn, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Dhṛṣṭadyumna's son Kṣatradharman, Dhṛṣṭaketu, Śikhaṇḍīn's son Kṣatradeva, the Pāñcāla and Kekaya kings, and others of the Pāṇḍavas' allies; [169] Rocamāna and Purujit, and Bhīma's Rākṣasa son Ghāṭotkaca. Bhīma says that he will do battle against all the warriors whom he has named, save for Śikhaṇḍīn, who was previously a woman.

[170] Duryodhana asks Bhīma to tell the reason why he will not kill Śikhaṇḍīn, and Bhīma narrates the story. — After the death of his father Śaṃtanu, Bhīma consecrates his half-brother Citrāṅgada as king, and when Citrāṅgada dies he consecrates his younger brother Vicitravīrya. Anxious to secure a bride for him, Bhīma then attends the svayamvara of the three princesses of Kāśī, Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā. In front of all the assembled kings he abducts the three girls on his chariot, challenging anyone to stop him. He easily beats off their attack, and carries the princesses to Vicitravīrya in Hāstīnapura.

[171] The wedding has been arranged when Ambā, the eldest princess, tells Bhīma that she is already betrothed to King Śalva,<sup>1</sup> and asks him to release her. [172] He does so, and she travels to Śalva, but the king rejects her because of her abduction by Bhīma. She pleads with him, but he is unyielding. He tells her to return to Bhīma.

[173] Determined to have her revenge on Bhīma, Ambā consults some ascetics, requesting them to instruct her in the performance of austerities. [174] The ascetics advise her to return to her father, but she is not willing to do so. At this point

<sup>1</sup> Not the demonic king of the flying city of Saubha killed by Kṛṣṇa at 3.23, but a human king of the same name ruling a terrestrial city of the same name.

her grandfather, the royal seer Hotravāhana, arrives; he tells her to visit Rāma Jāmadagnya, who will help her.

[175] Now Rāma's friend Akṛtavrāṇa appears, bearing Rāma's greetings to Hotravāhana. Hotravāhana tells him Ambā's story, and Ambā adds that she intends to take her grievance to Rāma. [176] Akṛtavrāṇa asks whether Ambā's grievance is against Bhīṣma or against Śālva; she asks him to judge which of them is to blame, and he names Bhīṣma. She says that she wants Bhīṣma killed in battle. Rāma arrives, and, when the greetings are done, Ambā is introduced to him. He hears her story and agrees to help her by persuading either Bhīṣma or Śālva to change their conduct, but she insists that what she desires is Bhīṣma's death.

[177] Rāma says that he will only fight at the request of a Brahmin; Ambā continues to insist that he kill Bhīṣma. Akṛtavrāṇa reminds Rāma that he had once sworn to slay any Kṣatriya who defeated all the other Kṣatriyas together; this Bhīṣma has done. Rāma now agrees that if he cannot persuade Bhīṣma he will fight him. He sets off in search of Bhīṣma, [178] then sends a message to him. Bhīṣma at once travels to see him. Rāma tells Bhīṣma to take Ambā for himself, but Bhīṣma refuses; he agrees to fight Rāma at Kurukṣetra.

[179] Bhīṣma obtains the blessing of his stepmother Satyavatī and then sets out majestically for Kurukṣetra. Here his mother the river Gaṅgā appears in human form and tries to prevent the fight, but neither combatant will withdraw.

[180] Bhīṣma tells Rāma that he must fight from a chariot, and Rāma appears in a celestial chariot driven by Akṛtavrāṇa. After the initial formalities, battle begins. The two men shower each other with arrows and wound each other badly; Rāma swoons, and Bhīṣma, bitterly regretful at having hurt his teacher, ceases fighting. The sun sets.

[181] Next morning the battle resumes. Once again Rāma and Bhīṣma shower one another with arrows; then both resort to celestial weapons. Bhīṣma is rendered unconscious, and his charioteer bears him away from the battle, but then he recovers and returns to the fight. He falls Rāma with the Fire Weapon, but Rāma too recovers. The two continue to fight until sunset.

[182] The fighting continues the next day. Rāma hurls a variety of terrible weapons at Bhīṣma, but Bhīṣma succeeds in warding them off and showers Rāma with arrows. Rāma responds with a celestial weapon that covers Bhīṣma and his chariot with darts; Bhīṣma pierces Rāma with yet more arrows. Both men are badly wounded when sunset brings their combat to an end.

[183] In the morning Rāma and Bhīṣma resume their fight. Rāma's arrows kill Bhīṣma's charioteer and then fell Bhīṣma himself, to the joy of Rāma and his followers. Bhīṣma is tended by eight Brahmins; he regains consciousness to see that his mother Gaṅgā has taken charge of his chariot. He tells her to go and takes control of it himself, then falls Rāma with an arrow. Bad portents appear, but nightfall ends the day's battle. The next day it resumes, and it continues for twenty-three days.

[184] At night Bhīṣma prays for the gods to show him how to defeat Rāma. Then in a dream he sees the eight Brahmins who had tended him; they assure him that he is under their protection, and advise him to make use of the Sleepmaking Weapon.

[185] The battle continues the next morning. After a fierce exchange of arrows, Rāma attacks Bhīṣma with the Weapon of Brahmā; Bhīṣma counteracts it with a second Weapon of Brahmā, and the two Weapons collide, provoking a cataclysmic fire. Bhīṣma now prepares to use the Sleepmaking Weapon, [186] but Nārada tells him that the gods do not want him to use it, and the eight Brahmins concur. Bhīṣma withdraws the Weapon. Rāma's ancestors now come and urge him to cease the fight, but he refuses; Nārada and a group of ascetics likewise urge Bhīṣma to stop fighting, but he too refuses to do so. In the end, Rāma's ancestors compel him to lay down his Weapon. At the bidding of the eight Brahmins, Bhīṣma approaches Rāma; the two are reconciled. Now Rāma summons Ambā.

[187] Rāma tells Ambā that he can do no more for her, and advises her to seek Bhīṣma's protection, but she refuses. Rāma leaves, and Bhīṣma returns to the city and tells his mother what has happened. He has spies report on Ambā's doings. What he learns worries him greatly: she resorts to extreme austerities at various sacred places. Gaṅgā visits her and asks what she hopes to achieve, and Ambā replies that she wishes to be reborn in order to destroy Bhīṣma. To protect her son, Gaṅgā curses her: if she is reborn, it will be as an ill-favoured river. But Ambā persists with her austerities. In the course of time she becomes the river Ambā in Vatsabhūmi with one half of her body; but through her ascetic merit she remains a young woman with the other half.

[188] Ambā continues her austerities until Śiva appears and grants her a boon. She chooses to defeat Bhīṣma, and Śiva tells her that she will kill him after being reborn as a great warrior in King Drupada's line. Ambā now makes a pyre and burns herself on it, vowing Bhīṣma's destruction.

[189] Meanwhile, Drupada, childless, requests a son from Śiva to avenge

himself on Bhīṣma.<sup>1</sup> Śīva grants him a daughter who will become a son. His queen gives birth to a girl; they bring her up as a boy named Śikhaṇḍīn.

[190] When Drupada's daughter Śikhaṇḍīn grows up he worries what to do with her; his wife advises him to trust in Śīva's promise and find a wife for the girl. Drupada marries Śikhaṇḍīn to the princess of Daśārṇa; soon the deception comes to light, and the Daśārṇa king, Hiranyavarman, sends a furious message to Drupada threatening to kill him and all his family.

[191] Drupada attempts to conciliate Hiranyavarman, and consults his queen, claiming to have acted in ignorance of his child's true sex. [192] The queen accepts responsibility for the deception. Drupada informs his ministers of the true state of affairs and has the city prepared against attack. Full of shame, Śikhaṇḍīn enters a forest and fasts. The Yakṣa Sthūṇākarna offers her a boon; she asks to become a man.

[193] Sthūṇākarna agrees to a temporary exchange of sexes with Śikhaṇḍīn; once the king of Daśārṇa has been appeased they will exchange back again. Śikhaṇḍīn now returns to the city with the good news. Hiranyavarman's envoy arrives to challenge Drupada to battle; Drupada sends his own envoy back to Hiranyavarman inviting him to have Śikhaṇḍīn's maleness verified. Hiranyavarman sends young women to do so; they report that he is indeed a man, and Hiranyavarman joyfully resumes his friendship with Drupada. Meanwhile Kubera<sup>2</sup> comes to visit Sthūṇākarna, who hides from him; when Kubera learns from his attendants what has happened, he curses him to remain a woman for ever. The other Yakṣas plead with him to mitigate the curse, and he agrees that Sthūṇākarna will regain his own sex once Śikhaṇḍīn has died in battle. When Śikhaṇḍīn comes to honour his agreement with Sthūṇākarna, Sthūṇākarna tells him of the curse, and he returns home in joy. Under Drona's tuition he becomes a great warrior. — Bhīṣma concludes the narrative by repeating that he will not fight Śikhaṇḍīn, since he was once a woman.

[194] Duryodhana asks how long it would take Bhīṣma to wipe out the forces of the Pāṇḍavas, and how long it would take Drona, Kṛpa, Karna or Aśvatthāman. Bhīṣma answers that he could do it in one month. Drona gives

<sup>1</sup> In his translation, J. A. B. van Buitenen (p. 555) correctly notes that 'as there is no particular reason for Drupada to hate Bhīṣma, this is probably borrowed from Drupada's effort to beget a son to kill Drona: [1.128,] 1.155'.

<sup>2</sup> The god of the Yakṣas.

the same answer. Kṛpa says that he would need two months, Aśvatthāman that he could destroy the Pāṇḍava forces in ten days. Then Karna claims to be able to achieve this in five days, and Bhīṣma laughs scornfully at him.

[195] When Yudhiṣṭhīra hears of this exchange he asks Arjuna how long it would take him to wipe out the forces of the Kauravas. Arjuna replies that with his Pāśupata Weapon he could do so instantaneously, but that this would not be proper. However, the Pāṇḍavas and their allies are mighty warriors, and they will prevail.

[196] The Kaurava forces march forth and encamp in the West of Kurukṣetra.

[197] The Pāṇḍava forces too march out.

## BHĪŚMA

THE CREATION OF THE CONTINENT OF  
JAMBŪ

Janamejaya spoke:

[1] How did those heroes fight, the Kauravas, Pāñdavas and Somakas,<sup>1</sup> and the noble princes who had come together from many countries?

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

Hear, lord of the earth, how those heroes, the Kauravas, Pāñdavas and Somakas, fought on Kurukṣetra, that place of asceticism. The mighty Pāñdavas came to Kurukṣetra with the Somakas and advanced against the Kauravas, for they were eager for victory. Accomplished Vedic scholars all, they revelled in warfare, hoping for victory in combat, but prepared for death on the battlefield.

5 Advancing towards the unconquerable army of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Duryodhana, they encamped with their troops on the western side, facing East. Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira had tents by the thousand erected in the proper manner beyond Samantapañcaka. It seemed as if the whole earth had been emptied, stripped of men and horses, chariots and elephants, leaving only the children and the elderly behind; for the force which had assembled was as great as the area of Jambūdvīpa<sup>2</sup> on which the sun shines, truest of princes. Men of every complexion, they overspread an area of many leagues with all its provinces and rivers,

1 Strictly a subgroup of the Pāñcālas, but often used to refer to the Pāñcālas as a whole.

2 One of the great continents of earth: see chapters 6-11 below.

mountains and forests. Bull-like hero, King Yudhiṣṭhira commanded foodstuffs of every kind for them and their beasts, and established for them a variety of passwords to identify the speaker as an ally of the Pāñdavas; as the time for battle approached, Kuru's heir also equipped them all with tokens of recognition, both *noms de guerre* and insignia.

When Dhṛtarāṣṭra's high-minded son saw the massed standards of the Pāñdavas, he and all the allied kings drew up their array against the Pāñdavas. The Pāñdava warriors rejoiced to see Duryodhana in the midst of a thousand elephants, surrounded by his brothers and with a white umbrella held over his head. They blew their great conches and beat kettledrums in thousands; and the Pāñdavas and brave Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva were delighted in their hearts to see their troops so full of joy. Then the tiger-like heroes Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna stood on their chariot and blew their divine conches to inspire their troops; but the Kaurava warriors and their beasts pissed and shit themselves when they heard the combined sound of Pāñcajanya and Devadatta. When other creatures hear the sound of a lion roaring, they are filled with fear; so it was with Duryodhana's army at that time.

20 Dust was stirred up from the ground, until nothing could be made out – the sun itself disappeared, enveloped in the dust of the armies – and rain-clouds poured showers of flesh and blood, drenching all the troops, which was a great wonder. Then a wind arose; close to the ground it was full of small stones with which it pelted the troops, but it dispersed the dust.

25 The two armies stood prepared on Kurukṣetra then, O king, like two heaving oceans, full of great joy to be going to war; the meeting of those two forces was wonderful, like that of two oceans at doomsday. The whole earth had been emptied by the Kurus' mustering of those armies, leaving only the children and the elderly behind.

Next the Kauravas, Pāñdavas and Somakas agreed terms and established rules of engagement, O bull-like heir of Bharata: that on cessation of hostilities mutual goodwill should be duly restored as formerly, with no further resort to guile; that if a verbal attack were made, any counter-attack must also be purely verbal; that one who had withdrawn from the midst of the battle must under no circumstances be killed; that chariot-fighter should be matched against chariot-fighter, elephant-rider against

elephant, horseman against horse, footsoldier against footsoldier only, 30 heir of Bharata; that blows should be struck with regard for propriety, courage, strength and age, and after issuing a challenge, but never against someone unsuspecting or in distress; that if anyone were engaged in fighting another, or were distracted or facing away, or had lost weapon or shield, he must under no circumstances be killed; likewise that heralds, guides, weapon-bearers, drummers and conch-blowers should not be struck under any circumstances. Having agreed these terms, the Kauravas, Pāṇḍavas and Somakas gazed at each other in profound amazement. Then the noble, bull-like heroes took up their places; they and their troops alike were glad at heart and full of joy.

[2] Now as the dreadful battle approached, the blessed seer Vyāsa who was watching by dawn and by dusk, Satyavati's son, best of experts in the Veda, the all-seeing grandfather of the Bhāratas who knew past, present and future, spoke privately to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra son of Vicitravīrya as he grieved in torment and considered his sons' wicked ways:

'O king, time has run out for your sons and the other lords of the earth; they will meet in battle and slay one another. As their time runs out and they perish, heir of Bharata, remember that time will take its course and do not give your heart over to grief. But if you wish to see it come to pass in the battle, lord of the peoples, let me grant you sight; observe this war!'

'Truest of Brahmin seers,' answered Dhṛtarāṣṭra, 'I have no wish to see the killing of my kinsmen. But through your fiery energy may I hear in full about this war.'

Since he did not wish to see the battle but wished to hear about it, generous Vyāsa, lord of boons, granted a boon to Samjaya: 'O king, Samjaya here will describe this war to you; everything that comes to pass in the battle will be visible to him. And, equipped with this divine sight, O king, Samjaya will relate the war to you. He will know it all; overt or covert, occurring by day or by night, Samjaya will know everything, even what people are thinking in their hearts. Weapons will not harm him, fatigue will not trouble him; this son of Gavalgana will emerge living from the warfare. O bull-like heir of Bharata, I too shall spread the fame of these Kauravas, and of all the Pāṇḍavas. Do not grieve! This was destined long ago, and you should not grieve

over it: it could not have been prevented. Where *dharma* is, there is victory!'

After speaking these words, the blessed grandfather of the Kurus addressed strong-armed Dhṛtarāṣṭra once more: 'O king, in this war there will be great destruction, for today I see these portents of danger. Hawks, vultures, crows and storks, as well as jungle crows, are flocking in multitudes on the edges of forests; these carrion birds are delighted, for they foresee a savage conflict in which they will feed on the flesh of elephants and horses. With their cry of "Khaṭākhatā!", cranes, terrible heralds of danger, are flying high overhead towards the South. Every day, both by dawn and by dusk, heir of Bharata, I see that the sun as it rises and sets is obscured by clouds shaped like headless bodies;<sup>1</sup> three-coloured, with red and white edges and black necks, and flashing with lightning, these bars of cloud cover the sun at twilight. I have seen that the sun, the moon and the stars all blaze by day and by night, so that night cannot be distinguished from day; this betokens destruction. During the full-moon night of the month of Kārttika the light of the moon was so faint that it could not be seen, for it was the colour of fire, and the sky was the same colour.'

'Brave princes, kings and the sons of kings, heroes with arms like iron bars, will lie slain, covering the earth! Every day I hear at night a dreadful sound in the sky, as if a hog and a cat were fighting.<sup>2</sup> Images of deities tremble and laugh; they vomit blood from their mouths, sweat, and fall to the ground. Drums sound without being struck, lord of the peoples, and the great chariots of Kṣatriyas roll forward without horses to draw them. Cuckoos, woodpeckers, blue jays, cocks, parrots, cranes and peacocks utter terrible cries; hundreds of swarms of locusts appear at daybreak like mounted warriors bearing arms, insignia and shields. Both dawn and dusk blaze as if the horizon were on fire, and there have been showers of blood and bones, heir of Bharata.'

'Even Arundhatī, who is famed and honoured by virtuous folk

<sup>1</sup> These clouds are sometimes identified with Rāhu, the demon of the eclipse beheaded by Viṣṇu: see 1.17.

<sup>2</sup> The editor of the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, S. K. Belvalkar, points out that these sounds are said to be made by meteors that forebode calamity.

throughout the three worlds, has put Vasiṣṭha in the shade;<sup>1</sup> Saturn is afflicting the Rohinī constellation, O king, and the mark on the moon has disappeared. There will be great danger! Thunder can be heard, terrible and unceasing, though the sky is cloudless, and steeds weep and shed teardrops.'

[3] Vyāsa continues to enumerate portents of doom, and tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra to consider how universal destruction may be avoided. [4] Dhṛtarāṣṭra replies that he believes destruction to be destined; the warriors who die in the battle will achieve glory in this world and bliss in the next. Vyāsa responds that it is indeed time that both destroys and re-creates the worlds; however, the killing of kin is a sin, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra should strive for peace. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra explains with regret that his sons will not obey him. At Dhṛtarāṣṭra's request, Vyāsa lists the happy characteristics of those warriors who are assured of victory; but he adds that there can be no military action without loss.

[5] Vyāsa now leaves. Dhṛtarāṣṭra observes to Saṃjaya that vast numbers of kings and warriors have assembled at Kurukṣetra to fight for possession of the earth, and asks for a full description of the countries and cities they have come from. Saṃjaya begins to describe the properties of the earth, listing the various kinds of creatures: all arise from the earth and return to it at their deaths. Whoever owns the earth owns everything, and so kings kill each other for it. [6] He lists the elements and their properties: earth is the foremost of them. Then he describes the circular cosmic island Sudarśana, [7] the different continents it contains and the beings who inhabit them.

[8] At Dhṛtarāṣṭra's request Saṃjaya describes the continents to the north and east of Mount Meru. The eastern continent contains an enormous jambū tree from which it gains its name; [9] Saṃjaya describes the different divisions (varṣas) of Jambūdvīpa.

[10] Dhṛtarāṣṭra requests a detailed description of Bhāratavarṣa, the division over which the great battle will be fought. Saṃjaya enumerates the mountains, rivers and peoples of Bhāratavarṣa. If Earth is well treated she yields endless riches; therefore the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas are struggling to possess her. [11] He

<sup>1</sup> Arundhatī, wife of the seer Vasiṣṭha, is an exemplar of devotion to her husband. Like the other great seers, Vasiṣṭha is also a star in the Great Bear: he is Mizar, and Arundhatī is the associated minor star Alcor. Now, uncharacteristically, Alcor is outshining Mizar.

completes his description by telling Dhṛtarāṣṭra of the four ages, Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali, and their characteristics. The Dvāpara Age is drawing to its end, and will soon give way to the degenerate Kali Age.

## THE EARTH

[12] Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya to describe the ocean, the other continents (dvīpas), and the heavenly bodies. Saṃjaya agrees, and gives a brief description of the ocean followed by an extensive description of Śākadvīpa. [13] Then he describes Kuśadvīpa, Śālmalikadvīpa, Krauñcadvīpa, and the heavenly bodies.

## THE SERMON OF THE BLESSED LORD

[14] After witnessing the first phase of the battle, Saṃjaya returns to Dhṛtarāṣṭra to report on what he has seen. He tells him of the death of Bhīṣma, who has been killed by Śikhaṇḍin.

[15] Deeply grieved, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks to hear how the mighty Bhīṣma could have been killed. Who were his protectors on the battlefield? Bhīṣma had defeated even Rāma Jāmadagnya in battle; to have slain such a man, Śikhaṇḍin must be an incomparable warrior. His death is a disaster for the Kauravas. Dhṛtarāṣṭra repeatedly demands to know how it happened. [16] Saṃjaya answers that he will tell Dhṛtarāṣṭra everything that he has seen, whether with his own eyes or through the powers given him by Vyāsa. Then he begins his narration.

— Duryodhana assigns Duḥśāsana to the task of protecting Bhīṣma, especially against Śikhaṇḍin. The next morning the two vast armies are arrayed for battle; Bhīṣma heads the Kaurava force.

[17] Bhīṣma addresses all the kings who are allied to the Kauravas, urging them to carry out their dharma as Kṣatriyas by fighting to the death. The fearsome Kaurava army advances. [18] The din is overwhelming, and the weapons and other gear flash like lightning or fire. The force that Bhīṣma leads is enormous.

[19] Yudhiṣṭhira asks Arjuna to array the Pāṇḍava troops in a suitable formation, and Arjuna chooses the Thunderbolt array. Then he gives the order to advance. The Pāṇḍava force too is huge and magnificent. Grim portents appear.

[20] — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya to describe the two opposing armies in greater detail, and he does so. — Both forces are great and fearsome; the Kauravas face west, the Pāṇḍavas east. The Kaurava army is full of mighty heroes and greatly outnumbers the Pāṇḍavas; but the Pāṇḍava army is invincible since it is led by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.

[21] When Yudhiṣṭhīra sees the force ranged against him he becomes despondent, but Arjuna reassures him: where dharma is, there is victory; where Kṛṣṇa is, there is victory. [22] Yudhiṣṭhīra rides in a splendid chariot attended by Brahmins pronouncing blessings. Arjuna's is covered with bells and gleams with gold; it is driven by Kṛṣṇa. The sight of Bhīma is enough to terrify the Kauravas. The two armies confront each other.

[23] **The Bhagavadgītā.**<sup>1</sup> — Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya what happened next, and Saṃjaya relates. — Duryodhana surveys the two armies and declares that his is the superior force. Bhīṣma roars a lion-roar, and the Kauravas sound their drums and trumpets; the Pāṇḍavas reply with blasts on their conches. Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to halt the chariot between the two armies so that he may observe all who are about to fight. When he sees so many of his kinsmen gathered there, he loses his will for battle and sits down, casting aside his weapons.

[24] Kṛṣṇa upbraids Arjuna for his unseemly weakness, and Arjuna asks him for guidance. Kṛṣṇa answers that he should not grieve, for the life of embodied beings has neither beginning nor end. They simply pass through one existence after another; how then is it possible to kill? Even if Arjuna believes in birth and death, he has no cause for grief, since the born are sure to die and the dead to be reborn. Arjuna should obey his dharma, which is to fight. If he does not do so he will achieve ignominy, whereas by fighting he will gain either heaven through death or earth through victory. The way of the Vedas is diffuse and dominated by the pursuit of earthly desires; better to act with detachment, unconcerned for the fruit of the action. The man who frees himself from desires gains peace of mind.

Samjaya spoke:

[25] Arjuna said, 'If you consider that intellectual attitude is more important than action, O Kṛṣṇa Keśava, then why do you direct me

<sup>1</sup> The *upaparvan* (sub-book) of Kṛṣṇa's sermon starts at chapter 14 and contains not merely the text of the *Bhagavadgītā* but also the context in which it was delivered. The sermon itself extends from chapter 23 to chapter 40.

to perform a terrible action? I feel that you confuse my intellect with words that are contradictory, so tell me decisively one single way for me to attain what is best.'

The blessed lord replied, 'I have long maintained that in this world there are two schools of thought, sinless one: Sāṃkhyā philosophers follow the discipline of knowledge, and yogīs follow the discipline of action. A man does not achieve freedom from *karma* by not undertaking actions, or attain perfection by mere renunciation; for no one can remain even a moment without performing actions — everyone is forced to perform actions by the three qualities that derive from nature.<sup>1</sup>

'The person who controls the faculties of action,<sup>2</sup> but who continues in his mind to dwell on their objects, is deluded; they call him a fraud. But the person who restrains the sense organs with his mind, Arjuna, and who then undertakes the discipline of action with the faculties of action, is detached; he is the man of distinction. You should perform your regular actions, for action is superior to inaction, and through inaction not even your bodily life can be maintained. Excepting action for sacrificial purposes, action enslaves this world; son of Kuntī, that is the purpose for which you should perform actions, but without attachment to their results.

'Long ago, after creating human beings and the sacrifice, Prajāpati declared, "Through this you shall procreate; let this be your wish-granting cow. Prosper the gods with this, and let the gods prosper you. Prospering each other, you shall attain the highest good; for if you prosper them through sacrifice, the gods will grant you the pleasures you desire, whereas the person who enjoys their gifts without giving in return is no more than a thief. The virtuous eat only sacrificial leftovers; they are freed from all their sins. But the wicked cook for themselves, and what they eat is sin."

'Creatures exist through food; food arises from rain; rain exists through sacrifice; sacrifice arises from action. (You should know that action originates from *brahman*, and *brahman* from the Eternal, so that

<sup>1</sup> A reference to Sāṃkhyā philosophy: see 3.203, and chapters 35–6 below.

<sup>2</sup> As opposed to those of cognition. The faculties of cognition are eye, ear, tongue, nose and skin; those of action are hand, foot, anus, genitals and voice.

*brahman* is present in all of these, and is always installed in the sacrifice.) This is how the wheel is set spinning;<sup>1</sup> the one who does not keep it spinning in this world lives in sin, delighting in the senses. Son of Kuntī, his life is worthless. But the person who delights in the self, who finds satisfaction in the self, who is contented with the self alone – there is nothing he needs to do. It matters not to him whether a thing is done or not done in this world, and he has no dependence of interest in any creature.

‘So you should always perform with detachment the tasks that have to be done, for by performing actions with detachment a man attains the highest good; it was through action that Janaka<sup>2</sup> and others achieved perfection. You should act, too, with the very maintenance of the world in view. What the good man does, other folk do also: he sets the standard, and the world follows it.

‘For myself, son of Kuntī, there is nothing in the three worlds that I have to do, since there is nothing to be attained that has not been attained. I simply engage in action, for if I did not engage tirelessly in action, people would do nothing but follow my path, son of Kuntī. These worlds would collapse if I did not perform actions, and I would be the cause of social disarray – I would slay these human beings. As the ignorant act in their attachment to action, heir of Bharata, so the man of knowledge should do, but with detachment, to achieve the maintenance of the world. He should not cause intellectual confusion in those who are ignorant and attached to action; the man of knowledge should favour all actions, while acting with discipline himself.

‘Truly all actions are performed by the three qualities of nature, though the person who is deluded by the sense of “I” thinks that he is the agent. He who truly knows the distribution of the qualities and their actions understands that even the qualities are subject to the qualities, and he remains detached, strong-armed hero; but those who are deluded about the qualities of nature become attached to the actions

<sup>1</sup> The circle forming the ‘wheel’ is closed by the implied final statement, ‘Action exists through creatures’.

<sup>2</sup> King of Videha and father of Sītā (see the story of Rāma, 3.257–75), Janaka was a model of royal piety.

of those qualities. The one who knows all this should not disturb the slower-witted folk who do not know it.

‘Entrust all actions to me, focus your mind on the universal Self, rid yourself of hope and personal concerns, cast off your sickness, and fight. People who always follow this teaching of mine faithfully and uncomplainingly are freed from *karma*; but you should know that those fools who complain and fail to follow my teaching, deluded in every aspect of their knowledge, are lost.

‘Even the man who does have knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature, for creatures follow their nature: what is the use of suppressing it? Located in every object of every sense are love and hate. One should not fall into their clutches, for they are one’s enemies.

‘Better one’s own *dharma* ill-done than the *dharma* of another well performed. To die in achieving one’s own *dharma* is good; the *dharma* of another is dangerous.’

Now Arjuna asked, ‘So what impels a man to commit sin, Vṛṣṇi prince, seeming to force him even against his will?’

The blessed lord replied, ‘It is desire, it is anger. It arises from the quality of *rajas*, Passion, and is voracious and very wicked: know it for the enemy here. As a fire is obscured by smoke, a mirror by dust, an embryo by its caul, so this world is obscured by it. The knowledge of the knowledgeable man is obscured by it, for it is his eternal enemy, an insatiable fire in the shape of desire, son of Kuntī. Its home is said to be the senses, the mind and the intellect, and it uses these to delude the human being by obscuring his knowledge. So first of all, bull-like heir of Bharata, you should control the senses in order to rid yourself of this wicked thing that destroys knowledge of every kind. It is said that the senses are highly developed. But the mind is higher than the senses, and the intellect higher than the mind; that which is higher than the intellect is he.<sup>1</sup> This being so, strong-armed hero, you should think of that which is higher than the intellect, compose yourself, and slay your invincible enemy in the shape of desire.

[26] ‘Long ago I proclaimed this imperishable discipline to Vivasvat;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The self.

<sup>2</sup> A name for the Sun god; the great-grandfather of Manu, the first man: see 1.70.

Vivasvat declared it to Manu, and Manu told it to Ikṣvāku, and so, transmitted in succession, it came to be known by the royal seers. But over a long period of time, afflicter of your enemies, this discipline was lost on earth. This is the ancient discipline which I have proclaimed to you today because you are my devotee and my friend, for this is the greatest mystery.

‘Your birth was recent,’ said Arjuna, ‘and Vivasvat was born long ago; how am I to understand this, that you proclaimed it in the beginning?’

5 The blessed lord replied, ‘I have had many former births, and so have you, Arjuna; I know all of them, but you do not, afflicter of your enemies. Although I am unborn and imperishable, although I am lord of all beings, I assume my own nature and take on existence through my illusory power, for whenever *dharma* lapses and *adharma* increases, heir of Bharata, I create myself; to protect the virtuous, destroy the wicked and restore *dharma* I take on existence in age after age.

‘The person who knows this truth about my divine birth and actions does not find rebirth when he casts off his body, Arjuna; he finds me.

10 Many have put aside passion, fear and anger, filled themselves with me and taken refuge in me; purified by the austerity of knowledge, they have attained my own state. As people turn to me, so I accept them; in every way human beings are following my path, son of Kuntī.

Those who want their actions to succeed in this world offer sacrifices to the deities, for in the world of men success follows action swiftly. The four classes of society were created by me, according to the distribution of the qualities and their actions; you should know that this was my act, and yet I am actionless and imperishable. Actions do not pollute me, for I have no desire for the fruits of actions; he who recognizes that 15 I am so is not enslaved by his own actions. The ancients who sought release knew this too, and they performed actions; therefore you too must perform actions as the ancients did long ago.

‘Even the seers are perplexed about what is action and what inaction, so I shall explain action to you; when you know it, you will be freed from evil. It is necessary to know about action, to know about wrong action, and to know about inaction: the way of action is hard to understand.

The one who can see inaction in action and action in inaction<sup>1</sup> is wise among people; he performs all actions with discipline. If all his undertakings are empty of desire and will, the wise call him a man of learning, for his *karma* is burnt away by the fire of his knowledge. If he gives up all attachment to the fruits of his actions, and is ever satisfied and free from dependence, then even if he engages in action he in fact does nothing at all. If he rids himself of hope, controls his mind and gives up all possessions, performing actions only with the body, he incurs no sin. If he is content with whatever he happens to get, passing beyond the pairs of opposites,<sup>2</sup> remaining free of jealousy and retaining equanimity in both success and failure, then even though he acts he is not enslaved. If he attains detachment and freedom, fixes his mind on knowledge and acts for the purpose of sacrifice, all his *karma* is dissolved.

‘The offering is *brahman*; the oblation of *brahman* is offered up by *brahman* into the fire of *brahman*. He who meditates on the ritual as *brahman* will indeed attain *brahman*. Some *yogīs* undertake sacrifice as an act directed to the gods, while others offer up sacrifice itself, sacrificing it in the fire of *brahman*. Some offer up hearing and the other senses into the fires of restraint, and others offer up sound and the other sense-objects into the fires of the senses. Some offer up all the actions of their faculties of action and those of their breathing into the fire of self-control and discipline, kindling it with knowledge; other seekers, men of keen vows, sacrifice property, asceticism, discipline, or Vedic study and knowledge. Some who follow the way of breath-control offer up exhalation into inhalation or inhalation into exhalation, constraining the course of both; others restrict their eating and offer up exhalation into exhalation. Every one of these understands the sacrifice, and the sacrifice destroys the sin of all of them. Those who partake of the nectar of immortality that is the leavings of the sacrifice find the eternal *brahman*; but he who does not sacrifice loses this world – how much more the next, truest of Kurus?

1 i.e. the person who understands that not every action affects *karma*, while failure to act may affect it.

2 Happiness and unhappiness, etc.

‘Thus sacrifices of many kinds are made into the mouth of *brahman*;<sup>1</sup> you should know that all of them arise from action, and knowing this you will be set free. The sacrifice of knowledge is superior to that of property, afflicter of your enemies; son of Kuntī, all action, without exception, is brought to completion in knowledge, so you should know it. If you humbly question them as you attend upon them, the men of knowledge who see truly will teach their knowledge to you. Once you know it you will not return to delusion, son of Pāṇḍu; through it you will see all beings within yourself, and then within me.

‘Even if you are a worse sinner than all other sinners, the boat of knowledge will be sufficient to ferry you across all wickedness. As a fire once kindled reduces its kindling to ash, Arjuna, so the fire of knowledge reduces to ash all actions,<sup>2</sup> for there is no purifier on earth to match knowledge. Once perfected by discipline, one finds it in time within oneself; the man of faith, intent upon it and in control of his senses, gains knowledge, and once he has gained it he at once achieves supreme peace. But the ignorant unbeliever, full of doubt, perishes; the doubter loses this world and the next, and his happiness. Wealth-winner Arjuna, actions do not enslave the self-controlled man with the discipline to entrust all his actions to me and the knowledge to destroy all his doubts. So use the sword of knowledge to destroy this doubt that ignorance has planted in your heart; take up this discipline and arise, heir of Bharata!’

[27] Arjuna asks whether it is better to act or to renounce action. Kṛṣṇa replies that action is the superior course, for renunciation cannot be attained without yogic actions, which lead to *brahman* and do not create karma. The learned man is impartial, seeing no distinction between different beings; detached, with his senses controlled, he attains oneness with *brahman*.

[28] Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that true renunciation is detached action, not non-action. The yogī is self-sufficient and full of equanimity; he engages in steady contemplation, and this leads him to oneness with Kṛṣṇa, so that he sees both himself and Kṛṣṇa in everything. Arjuna comments that it is difficult to control

<sup>1</sup> This probably refers to the fire, through which the offering reaches its intended recipient.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. all karma.

the mind in such a way; Kṛṣṇa insists that none the less it can be done. If a yogī does not entirely succeed, he still attains a very high rebirth in which he can strive once more to perfect his Yoga and achieve release.

[29] Now Kṛṣṇa reveals that as well as a material nature he has another, higher nature which is the basis of the universe; he is the essential property that makes each being what it is, but only his devotees can perceive this truth; all others are lost to illusion. Of devotees, the highest are those with the knowledge, acquired only after many rebirths, that Kṛṣṇa is everything; these few attain him directly. Others worship different deities, unaware that when these grant their wishes it is because Kṛṣṇa ordains it. Such people become true devotees only when they have rid themselves of their bad karma and delusion.

[30] Kṛṣṇa explains that the person who dies thinking of him attains him; Arjuna should therefore fight, keeping him always in mind. Once anyone attains Kṛṣṇa he experiences no further rebirth. The entire universe is subject to cyclic emergence from the unmanifest and reabsorption back into it; but the unmanifest itself undergoes no change. It is where those people go who have escaped from rebirth; it is Kṛṣṇa’s own highest dwelling; it is the supreme being.

[31] Kṛṣṇa now announces to Arjuna the royal mystery which leads to release from rebirth. As supreme being he cyclically creates and reabsorbs all creatures, but he acts with detachment. His devotees worship him with the sacrifice of knowledge which, unlike the Vedic sacrifice, brings an end to rebirth; but even rituals devoted with faith to other deities reach him. Arjuna should perform every act as an offering to him; those who do this attain release, however base their origins.

[32] Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that not even the gods know his origin, since, like all other creatures, they themselves originate from him; those who understand this attain Kṛṣṇa himself. Arjuna asks to hear more, and Kṛṣṇa answers that he is the foremost being in every category, the seed of all beings without which nothing can exist; with a part of himself he supports the entire universe.

Samjaya spoke:

[33] ‘What you have told me as a kindness to me,’ said Arjuna, ‘this highest mystery known as the universal Self, has dispelled my delusion. You have told me in full how beings come into existence and how they cease to exist, and you have told me too, lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, of your own imperishable greatness. Now I desire to see your godly form, just as

you have described yourself, highest lord and supreme god. If you think that I will be capable of looking upon it, lord of Yoga, show me your imperishable self!

5 The blessed lord replied, 'Behold my various divine forms, son of Kuntī, in their hundreds and thousands, with all their different colours and shapes! Behold the Ādityas, Vasus and Rudras, the Aśvins and the Maruts;<sup>1</sup> behold many wonders never previously seen, heir of Bharata! Behold here today within my body the entire universe with all its creatures, moving and still; and behold whatever else you wish, Arjuna Guḍākeśa! But you will not be able to look upon me with these your own eyes, so I grant you divine sight. Behold my godly Yoga!'

With these words, O king, Hari Kṛṣṇa the great lord of Yoga revealed 10 to Kuntī's son his supreme godly form, with its many mouths and eyes, its many heavenly ornaments, its many raised weapons and its many other wonderful sights, wearing heavenly clothes and garlands, anointed with heavenly perfumes: god infinite and all-seeing, in whom all marvels reside. If the light of a thousand suns were to rise all at once in the sky, it would be like the light of that great one. Then Pāṇḍu's son beheld in the body of the god of gods the entire universe in all its many subdivisions. The wealth-winner was filled with amazement, and the hair rose on his body; he bowed his head, joined his hands together, and addressed the god.

15 'I see the gods within your body, O god, and all the distinct classes of beings; I see Lord Brahmā on his lotus seat, and all the seers and divine serpents. I see you everywhere, infinite in form with your many arms and bellies and faces and eyes; I see of you no end, middle or beginning, lord of the universe, universal in form. I see you bearing diadem, club and discus, a mass of fiery energy blazing in all directions. I gaze at you with difficulty, for all around you is the radiance of fire or sun, but measureless.

'You are the Eternal, the supreme knowable entity; you are this universe's ultimate abode; you are imperishable, the protector of perpetual *dharma*; I believe you are the everlasting being. Without beginning or middle or end, infinitely potent and infinitely strong, with sun and

<sup>1</sup> Groups of deities.

moon for your eyes and the blazing fire for your mouth, I behold you scorching this universe with your fiery energy; for this world that lies between heaven and earth, with the whole horizon, is pervaded by you alone.

20 'The three worlds are set shaking, great one, to see this wonderful, terrible form of yours, for yonder the hosts of the gods are entering you, some of them fearfully extolling you with hands joined together, while throngs of great seers and Siddhas pronounce benedictions and praise you with mighty praises. Rudras and Ādityas, Vasus and Sādhyas, All-gods, Aśvins and Maruts, ancestors, Gandharvas, Yakṣas and demons in multitudes, all gaze at you amazed. Strong-armed one, seeing this mighty form of yours, with its many mouths and eyes, its many arms and thighs and feet, its many bellies, its many dreadful fangs, the worlds are set shaking, and so am I. When I see you touching the sky, blazing in many colours, jaws gaping, huge eyes ablaze, my very soul quakes, O Viṣṇu, and I lose all courage and tranquillity; at the mere sight of your mouths, bright as doomsday fire and full of dreadful fangs, I lose my bearings and know no comfort. Show mercy, lord of gods, abode of the universe!

25 'And there are all Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons alongside the hosts of their allies, the lords of the earth, and Bhīṣma, and Droṇa, and that Sūta's son Karna, and with them our own leading warriors, all rushing into your terrible mouths with their dreadful fangs. I can see some caught between your teeth, their heads smashed. Like numerous river-currents that rush towards the one ocean, those heroes of the world of men enter your flaming mouths; like moths that fly ever faster to destroy themselves in a blazing flame, the worlds hurry ever faster to their destruction in your mouths. With your flaming jaws you lap up complete worlds and devour them whole; your terrible splendours fill the entire universe with fiery energy till it is scorched, O Viṣṇu. Tell me, who are you with your dreadful form? Honour to you; show mercy, best of gods! I wish to know who you are, O primal being, for I do not understand what you have set out to do.'

30 The blessed lord replied, 'I am Time, the destroyer of worlds, fully developed, and I have set out here to bring the worlds to their end. Even without your presence in battle, all these warriors arrayed in opposing

ranks will cease to be. So arise and gain glory: conquer your foes and enjoy your prosperous realm! I myself slew these long ago; be the mere instrument, ambidextrous warrior. Drona and Bhīṣma and Jayadratha and Karna, and the other heroic warriors too, have been killed by me; kill them! Do not be dismayed. Fight! You will conquer your enemies in battle.'

35 When he heard Kṛṣṇa Keśava speak these words, Arjuna the wearer of the diadem trembled; he joined his hands together, paid honour and bowed, and spoke once again to Kṛṣṇa, stammering in his fear: 'Lord of the senses, it is right that the singing of your praises delights the universe and fills it with love; terrified Rāksasas flee in all directions, and all the hosts of Siddhas bow before you. And why should they not bow to you, O great one? You are the first creator, more venerable even than Brahmā; O infinite lord of the gods, abode of the universe, you are the Eternal, the existent and the non-existent, and what is beyond both. You are the primal god, the ancient being; you are this universe's ultimate abode; you are that which knows and that which is to be known, the highest resting-place; in your infinite form you pervade the universe. You are the Wind god, Yama, Fire, Varuṇa, the moon; you are Prajāpati and Brahmā the great-grandfather. Honour, honour to you a thousand times over, and then honour to you yet again! Honour to you from before and from behind; honour to you from all sides, O you who are all. Infinitely potent, immeasurably valiant, you bring all to completion, and so you are all.'

40

45 'If, thinking you a friend, I have spoken too strongly through heedlessness or affection – "Hey, Kṛṣṇa Yādava, my friend!" – not knowing of this your greatness; or if in jest I have done you dishonour, invincible one, when we were amusing ourselves, or lying, or sitting, or eating, whether alone or in company; then I beg your forgiveness; you are measureless! You are the father of the entire world, moving and still; you are its preceptor, revered and venerable. No other is your equal, never mind your superior, in all the three worlds, for your power is matchless! So I bow and prostrate myself and beseech your grace, worshipful lord: please pardon me, O god, as a father his son, a friend his friend, or a lover his beloved. I have seen what was never seen before, and I feel the hair rise on my body; my mind is shaken with fear. Let me see, O god, that

other form of yours; show mercy, lord of gods, abode of the universe! I wish to see you just as before, bearing diadem, club and discus; O thousand-armed god of universal form, assume that four-armed form of yours!'

The blessed lord replied, 'Because I am well disposed towards you, Arjuna, I have used my own Yoga to show you this supreme form of mine, full of fiery energy, universal, infinite, primal, which no one but you has ever seen before. Not through the Vedas, or sacrifice or study, not through the giving of gifts, not through rituals or fierce austerities could anyone other than you, Kuru hero, see me in such a form in the world of men. Do not be dismayed or bewildered to see this form of mine, awesome as it is; become once more fearless and happy at heart, and behold here that other form of mine!'

With these words to Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva showed him once more his own normal form; the great one comforted the frightened man by assuming once again his gentle aspect. Arjuna said, 'Seeing this gentle human form of yours, stirrer of men, I have come to my senses and am again myself.'

The blessed lord replied, 'This form of mine which you have seen is most difficult to see; even the gods constantly long to see this form. Not through the Vedas, not through austerities, not through the giving of gifts, not through sacrifice can I be seen as you have seen me. But, Arjuna, afflicter of your enemies, through undivided devotion I can be truly known and seen so, and so entered into. The one who performs actions for me, who holds me highest, who is devoted to me; the one who is free from attachment and bears no enmity towards any creature – he is the one who comes to me, son of Pāṇḍu.'

[34] Arjuna asks whether devotion to Kṛṣṇa or worship of the unmanifest is the better way. Kṛṣṇa replies that both ways lead to him, but that the way of the unmanifest is the harder. If possible Arjuna should fix his mind on Kṛṣṇa; failing all else, he should at least give up concern for the fruits of his actions. The faithful devotee who achieves this, and who is composed and full of equanimity, is dear to Kṛṣṇa.

[35] Kṛṣṇa discourses on the Sāṃkhya philosophy, speaking of the body and its properties, knowledge, brahman, the individual self and the three