

defeated the Kurus – the deed was that hero's; I did not do it, father. It was he who with his arrows put to flight Kṛpa son of Śaradvat, Drona, Drona's son Aśvatthāman, Karṇa the Sūta's son, and Bhīṣma. And in that battle he addressed the prince Duryodhana, mighty as the lord of an elephant-herd, but now fearful in defeat: "Heir of Kuru, I do not think you will be safe in Hāstinapura. Exert yourself if you want to save your life! You will not escape by fleeing, king, so make up your mind to do battle; if you conquer you will enjoy the earth, and if you are killed you will attain heaven!"

Then tiger-like King Duryodhana turned back. Surrounded by his aides, he stood on his chariot shooting arrows like thunderbolts and hissing like a snake. At that my hair stood on end and my legs were paralysed, father; but then, strong as a lion, that young man blew the Kuru force apart with his arrows as if it were a mass of clouds, and after driving off that chariot-force he laughed at the Kurus, O king, and took away their clothes. Alone that hero rounded up those six chariot-fighters, as an angry tiger in the forest rounds up grazing deer.'

'Where is that strong-armed hero,' asked Virāṭa, 'that god's son of great renown, who has won back for me on the battlefield the cattle seized by the Kurus? I wish to see and to pay honour to the mighty son of a god who has saved for me both you and my cows.'

Uttara said, 'Father, that god's son of mighty energy vanished; but I believe that tomorrow or the next day he will reappear.'

Virāṭa did not know that the man being described, Arjuna son of Pāṇḍu, was living under cover of disguise in his own house. With the permission of the noble Virāṭa, Kuntī's son personally presented the Kurus' clothes to Virāṭa's daughter; and the lovely Uttara was delighted to receive those costly, fine garments of every kind.

Kuntī's son Arjuna had planned with Uttara in secret everything that had to be done regarding King Yudhiṣṭhira; now, bull-like hero, he and the son of the Matsya king joyfully carried it out to the letter. [65] Thus it was that, on the third day, the five Pāṇḍava brothers bathed and donned white apparel, for they had completed their vow as agreed. With Yudhiṣṭhira at their head, the mighty chariot-fighters, adorned with every ornament and radiant as elephants bearing auspicious markings,

all now went to Virāṭa's hall and sat on kingly thrones, where they shone bright as sacrificial fires on their altars.

While they were sitting there, King Virāṭa came to his hall to conduct all his royal business; when he saw the Pāṇḍavas there, glorious as blazing fires, the Matsya king said to Karṇa, who had a godlike appearance as if he were Indra the lord of the gods seated with the hosts of the Maruts, 'I understood you to be a dice-player, and I made you my courtier. So now how is it that you are richly adorned and sit on a kingly throne?'

O king, when Arjuna heard Virāṭa's jovial words, he smiled, and answered, 'This is someone worthy to sit on the throne of Indra himself! He is a supporter of Brahmins, learned in the Veda, munificent, a sacrificer and firm in his vows. This is that bull of the Kurus, Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira, whose fame pervades the world like the light of the rising sun! Like the fiery rays of the risen sun, the rays of his glory spread in all directions.'

'Ten thousand spirited elephants used to follow behind him, O king, when he lived among the Kurus; thirty thousand chariots with gold trappings and excellent horses always followed him; once eight hundred Sūta and Māgadha bards with gleaming jewelled earrings used to praise him as the seers praise Indra! Every day the Kurus and all the other kings waited on him like servants, O king, as the immortals wait upon Kubera, and in those days he exacted tribute from all the lords of the earth, feudatory and freeman alike, as if they were mere merchants, great king.'

'Eighty thousand pious Brahmin householders depended on this king, who observed his vows keenly; he looked after people who were old, destitute, crippled or lame as if they were his sons, and he protected his subjects through the exercise of *dharma*, lord. This is a prince who keeps his word in matters of *dharma*, self-control and anger – he is gracious, a supporter of Brahmins and a speaker of the truth; but Lord Duryodhana and his people chafe at his glory and prowess, and so do Karṇa and Śakuni son of Subala. His virtues cannot be counted, lord of men, for this son of Pāṇḍu is ever devoted to *dharma* and free from cruelty. So how might a bull-like prince such as this, a great Pāṇḍava king and lord of the earth, not merit a kingly throne?'

[66] Virāṭa said, 'If this is Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira, the king of the

Kurus, then which of you is his brother Arjuna, and which the mighty Bhīma, and Nakula and Sahadeva? Who is Draupadī of high repute? Since the Pāñdavas were defeated in the gambling match, nothing has been heard of them.'

'Lord of men,' replied Arjuna, 'the one who calls himself Ballava, your cook, is strong-armed Bhīma of terrible speed and valour. It was he who killed the furious Rākṣasas on Mount Gandhamādana and gathered 5 heavenly, fragrant flowers for Draupadī Kṛṣṇā;¹ he was the Gandharva who slew the wicked Kīcakas, and who killed tigers, bears and boars in the women's quarters of your palace.²

'The one who was your master of horses is Nakula, afflicter of his enemies, and your overseer of cattle is Sahadeva; these are the two sons of Mādrī, famed as mighty chariot-fighters, handsome in their alluring clothes, bull-like heroes capable of defeating warriors of every sort in their thousands.'

'O king, this maidservant, slender-waisted, sweet-smiling, with eyes like lotus petals, is Draupadī, for whose sake the Kīcakas were slain.'

'And I, great king, am Arjuna; you must have heard of me. I am 10 Kuntī's son, younger brother to Bhīma and elder to the twins. In your palace we have lived incognito, as comfortably as babes in the womb, great king!'

Once Arjuna had spoken of the five Pāñdavas, Virāṭa's son spoke of Arjuna's own valour. 'This is the man who roamed among the hosts of chariot-fighters in the midst of the enemy like a lion among deer, always killing the best of them; this is the man who shot and killed a mighty, gold-armoured elephant with a single arrow, so that it struck the earth with both tusks as it fell on the battlefield; this is the man who won back the cows and conquered the Kurus in battle, and who has deafened me in both ears with the blast of his conch!'

15 The Matsya king of mighty energy listened to Uttara's words, and then, aware that he had wronged Yudhiṣṭhira, he answered him: 'I am happy that the time has come for me to beg pardon of the son of Pāñdu! And I shall bestow Uttarā upon Kuntī's son Arjuna, if you agree.'

¹ See 3.157.

² See 4.12.26-8.

Uttara said, 'The Pāñdavas deserve worship, honour and respect. I agree that the time has come: let us pay them honour, for they are honourable and noble!'

'Yes, I too was rescued by Bhīma when I fell into the hands of the enemy on the battlefield,' said Virāṭa, 'and he won back my cows as well. It is through the valour of the Pāñdavas' arms that we have secured victory in battle, good sir. So all of us, together with our ministers, now ask pardon of Kuntī's bull-like son Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers: whatever we have in our ignorance said to the lord of men, may Pāñdu's righteous son here be pleased to forgive it!'

Overjoyed, noble Virāṭa now approached King Yudhiṣṭhira and made a treaty with him; and he presented to him his whole kingdom, including the rod of office, the treasury and the city. And the Matsya king of mighty energy repeatedly congratulated all the Pāñdavas, especially wealth-winner Arjuna; again and again he embraced Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma and the two sons of Mādrī, and kissed them on the head.¹ Virāṭa the general did not weary of gazing at them, and in his great contentment he said to King Yudhiṣṭhira, 'I felicitate you all on your safe return from the forest, and on completing your difficult task without being discovered by your wicked enemies! As for this kingdom of ours and whatever other wealth we own, let the sons of Kuntī accept it all without hesitation! And let the wealth-winner, the ambidextrous Arjuna, accept Uttarā, for he is the truest of men and will be a fit husband for her.'

Hearing these words, Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* looked at Kuntī's son the wealth-winner; and Arjuna, seeing his brother look at him, addressed the Matsya king: 'O king, I accept your daughter, but as my daughter-in-law, for it would be fitting to form an alliance between us, the truest of the Matsyas and the truest of the Bhāratas.'

[67] Virāṭa said, 'Best of the Pāñdavas, I am giving you my daughter; why do you not wish to accept her as your wife?'

'While I lived in the women's quarters,' replied Arjuna, 'I saw your daughter all the time, and both in private and in public she trusted me like a father. She is fond of me and respects me as a dancer and an expert singer, and always thinks of me as her teacher. Since I lived for a year in

¹ Literally 'smelt the head', a standard form of affectionate greeting in ancient India.

her company after she reached marriageable age, O king, it would be natural for you or others to harbour suspicion; therefore, pure, highly disciplined and self-controlled as I am, it is for my son that I request you for your daughter, lord of the earth, and thus I establish her purity. I do not see that suspicion can attach to her whether as your daughter or my daughter-in-law, whether as regards my son or my self; thus her purity will be established. O afflicter of your enemies, I fear to make an unsuitable union and I fear impropriety, so I accept your daughter Uttarā as my daughter-in-law.

‘Lord of the peoples, my strong-armed son Abhimanyu is sister’s son to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. He is himself like the son of a god, and Kṛṣṇa loves him; a mere boy, he is skilled in weapons. He would be a fitting son-in-law for you and husband for your daughter.’

10 Virāta said, ‘What I have heard befits Kuntī’s son the wealth-winner, the best of the Kurus, who is so constant in *dharma* and wise! O Pāṇḍava, let whatever you judge should be done be done at once. All my desires have been brought to fruition if Arjuna is to be my kinsman!'

Even as the prince of kings spoke these words, Kuntī’s son Yudhiṣṭhira gave his assent to the union, according to the agreement between the Matsya and the Pāṇḍava; and then he and King Virāta sent word to all their friends and to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, O heir of Bharata.

Now that the thirteenth year of their exile was complete, the five Pāṇḍavas prospered in Virāta’s city of Upaplavya; and while they were dwelling there Arjuna Bībhatsu sent men to fetch Kṛṣṇa the stirrer of men, and Abhimanyu, and many of the Daśārhas, from the country of Ānarta. The kings of Kāśi and Śibi, who were friendly with Yudhiṣṭhira, arrived together with their two armies, lord of the earth, and Drupada of mighty ardour brought another army, along with Draupadī’s heroic sons, Śikhaṇḍin, who had never suffered defeat, and the unconquerable Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the best of all those who bear arms. All these army-commanders were sacrificers, and generous to Brahmins; all were skilled with every kind of weapon; all were brave and ready to die in battle.

When the Matsya king, the best upholder of *dharma*, saw them all arrive, he was delighted to be giving his daughter to Abhimanyu. Once the princes had arrived from every direction, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva came

there, along with Balarāma the plough-bearer, who was garlanded with forest flowers, Kṛtavarman son of Hṛdika, Sātyaki, Anādhṛṣṭi, Akrūra, Sāmba and Niśatha; and those afflictors of their enemies brought with them Abhimanyu and his mother. Indrasena and the other servants all arrived together after spending the year elsewhere,¹ bringing the Pāṇḍavas’ well-appointed chariots; numerous Vṛṣnis, Andhakas and Bhojas of incomparable power followed radiant Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, that tiger-like Vṛṣṇi, with ten thousand elephants, a million horses, a hundred million chariots and a billion footsoldiers.

25 Kṛṣṇa bestowed as wealth upon each of the noble Pāṇḍavas women, jewels and garments. Then the wedding of Matsya and Pāṇḍava was celebrated in the proper manner. Conches, kettledrums, horns and war-drums sounded in the Matsya king’s palace to mark his alliance with the Pāṇḍavas; wild animals of many kinds were slain, and so were hundreds of domestic beasts fit for sacrifice; various intoxicating liquors were served; singers, storytellers, actors and heralds attended to praise the guests, along with Sūta and Māgadha bards.

30 Now the finest women of Matsya arrived, led by Sudesñā. Beautiful from head to foot, they wore gleaming jewelled earrings; those ladies were fair of complexion, lovely and well adorned, but Draupadī Kṛṣṇā outshone them all in beauty and fame and glory. In their midst was Princess Uttarā, adorned for her wedding; they led her forward as though she were the daughter of great Indra. On behalf of his and Subhadrā’s son, Kuntī’s son the wealth-winner then accepted Virāta’s daughter of flawless limbs. The great king Yudhiṣṭhira son of Kuntī too was standing there, as handsome as Indra, and he likewise accepted her as his daughter-in-law.

35 After accepting her, Kuntī’s son Arjuna had noble Abhimanyu’s wedding rites performed in the presence of Kṛṣṇa the stirrer of men. King Virāta gave him seven thousand horses swift as the wind and two hundred excellent elephants, together with much other wealth. Then after the wedding, Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* gave to the Brahmins all the goods that invincible Kṛṣṇa had brought: thousands of cows, jewels, clothes of every kind, fine ornaments, chariots and beds. Bull-like heir

¹ See 4.4. Indrasena is Yudhiṣṭhira’s charioteer.

of Bharata, the Matsya king's city, thronged with joyful, well-fed folk, shone as if at a great festival.

PERSEVERANCE

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[1] After Abhimanyu's wedding, the Pāñdavas and their chief allies assemble. Kṛṣṇa addresses them all; he reminds them that the Pāñdavas' exile was achieved by deceit, but states that none the less their only desire is to win back their rightful kingdom. A war between the two factions would cause great destruction. He proposes that an envoy should be sent to Duryodhana to persuade him to return Yudhiṣṭhira's half of the kingdom to him.

[2] Kṛṣṇa's brother Balarāma agrees with this plan, but he warns that the envoy must adopt a humble tone: Yudhiṣṭhira chose of his own free will to gamble with Śakuni, an expert at dicing, and Śakuni did nothing wrong in defeating him. Sātyaki is enraged to hear this, [3] and announces that Balarāma's words betray his own cowardice. Yudhiṣṭhira was deceived by people he trusted, and the challenge came from them: why should he now show humility? The Kauravas are falsely claiming that the Pāñdavas were recognized before completing their period of exile. They deserve death in battle, and this should be their fate if Yudhiṣṭhira does not regain his kingdom at once.

[4] Drupada agrees that force is likely to be necessary, and that Duryodhana does not merit a gentle approach. The Pāñdavas and their allies should hasten to send envoys to all the other kings to secure their support before Duryodhana can do likewise. Drupada also proposes that his own household priest should be sent as an envoy to Dhṛitarāṣṭra. [5] Kṛṣṇa approves this plan, whilst pointing out that good relations should be maintained with the Kauravas until Duryodhana actually refuses to make peace. He then leaves for Dvārakā.

Yudhiṣṭhira, Virāta and Drupada now prepare for war, summoning many kings to come to their aid, and a large force gathers. When Duryodhana learns

of this, he too assembles his supporters. Drupada sends his household priest to the Kauravas, [6] giving him careful instructions. Duryodhana will certainly refuse to return Yudhiṣṭhīra's kingdom to him, but the priest should seek to convince others of the rightness of his cause: this will lead to dissension among the Kaurava faction, giving the Pāṇḍavas an opportunity to complete their military preparations. The priest sets out.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[7] After Kṛṣṇa and Madhu's heir Balarāma had left for Dvārakā with all the Vṛṣnis and Andhakas, and with the Bhojas in their hundreds, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son King Duryodhana kept himself informed about the Pāṇḍavas' doings by means of envoys sent to act as spies. When he learnt that Kṛṣṇa heir of Madhu had left, he set out for the city of Dvārakā with excellent horses swift as the wind, taking only a small force of men. And on the very same day the son of Kuntī and Pāṇḍu, wealth-winner Arjuna, also set out at speed for that lovely city of Ānarta.

5 The two tiger-like heirs of Kuru reached Dvārakā; they approached, and saw Kṛṣṇa lying asleep. Then as Kṛṣṇa Govinda slept, Duryodhana entered there and sat down on a splendid seat at his head. After him high-minded Arjuna, the wearer of the diadem, entered; he stood at Kṛṣṇa's feet, bowing and joining his hands together.

When Kṛṣṇa the Vṛṣni awoke, the first person he saw was the wearer of the diadem. He welcomed the two of them and paid them due honour; then the slayer of Madhu asked them the reason for their visit. At this Duryodhana, laughing a little, addressed Kṛṣṇa: 'Sir, be pleased 10 to grant me your help in this coming war! For you bear the same friendship towards me and towards Arjuna, just as we, heir of Madhu, share an equal relationship with you. Now I was the first to approach you today, slayer of Madhu, and the virtuous, observing precedence, favour the first to arrive. You, O stirrer of men, are by far the best of the virtuous on earth today, and so are ever honoured: maintain the way of the virtuous!'

15 Kṛṣṇa replied, 'I have no doubt, sir, that you approached me here first; however, it was Kuntī's son the wealth-winner whom first I saw, O king. Since you were the first to approach, but he was the first to be seen, I shall give help to both of you, Duryodhana. But the saying goes that the

youngest should be asked to choose first, and so Kuntī's son the wealth-winner deserves the first choice. I have a great force of a hundred million cowherds, strong as myself, known as the Nārāyaṇas, battle-hardened warriors all; let these soldiers, unconquerable in warfare, belong to one side, and I myself will join the other, though I shall lay down my weapons and not fight in the battle. So choose one or the other of these, son of Kuntī, whichever you find the more pleasing, for according to dharma you have the first choice.'

When Kuntī's son the wealth-winner heard Kṛṣṇa's words, he chose Kṛṣṇa Keśava, though he would not fight in the battle. Duryodhana was delighted to have gained a thousand thousand warriors, and to learn that Kṛṣṇa was excluded from fighting; having acquired an entire army in this way, the prince of fearful strength now went to see mighty Balarāma. He told him in full the reason for his visit; but then Balarāma Vāsudeva spoke these words to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son: 'Tiger-like hero, you should remember everything I said earlier during Virāṭa's wedding festivities; I spoke to restrain Kṛṣṇa lord of the senses for your sake, heir of Kuru, repeatedly insisting, O king, that we share an equal relationship to both sides. But Kṛṣṇa Keśava did not agree with what I said, and I cannot distance myself from him for so much as a moment; therefore I have determined, in view of Kṛṣṇa's position, that I will help neither the Pāṇḍavas nor Duryodhana. You are born in the lineage of Bharata, which is honoured by all the princes: go and fight according to the Kṣatriya dharma, bull-like heir of Bharata!'

Hearing this, King Duryodhana now embraced Balarāma the plough-bearer; knowing that Kṛṣṇa was excluded from fighting, he considered the victory as good as won. Next, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son went to see Kṛtavarman, and Kṛtavarman gave his army to him. Surrounded on all sides by that terrible army, Kuru's heir returned home, rejoicing himself and bringing joy to his friends.

30 After Duryodhana's departure, Kṛṣṇa now asked Arjuna the wearer of the diadem, 'What did you have in mind when you chose me though I will not fight?'

Arjuna answered, 'You could kill all of them, sir, there is no doubt of that; and I too can kill them unaided, highest lord. You have fame in this world, sir, and glory will be yours; and I too seek glory. That is

why I chose you. I have always hoped that you would be my charioteer – be pleased to grant this long-held wish, sir!

35 ‘It befits you, son of Kuntī,’ said Kṛṣṇa, ‘that you wish to compete with me. Let your wish be fulfilled: I shall be your charioteer!'

Kuntī's son Arjuna was delighted. Along with Kṛṣṇa, he now returned to Yudhiṣṭhīra, accompanied by the best men of Daśārha.

[8] King Śātya of Madra, having received Yudhiṣṭhīra's envoy, sets out to join him with a vast army. Hearing that he is on his way, Duryodhana hastens to prepare for him wonderful accommodation where he is treated with every honour. Śātya assumes that this is Yudhiṣṭhīra's doing; when he learns that Duryodhana is responsible he grants him a boon, and Duryodhana chooses Śātya himself as his general. Śātya now continues on his way to Upaplavya, where the Pāṇḍavas are staying, and tells Yudhiṣṭhīra what has happened. Yudhiṣṭhīra assures him that he acted properly, but asks one favour of him. When Karna and Arjuna meet in battle he will have to serve as Karna's charioteer; he should act so as to protect Arjuna by sapping Karna's fiery energy. Śātya agrees to do this, and to help Yudhiṣṭhīra in any other way he can. He counsels him not to give way to sorrow, and observes that even Indra and his consort had to suffer unhappiness.

INDRA'S VICTORY

[9] Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to hear the story, and Śātya narrates. — Tvaṣṭṛ hates Indra, and he creates the three-headed Viśvarūpa. One of Viśvarūpa's mouths repeats the Vedas, one drinks liquor, and the third seems to swallow the whole world; he is a mighty ascetic. Indra recognizes Viśvarūpa's austerities as a threat to his own supremacy, and he sends Apsarases to seduce him, but they return in failure. Indra now hurls his thunderbolt at him; Viśvarūpa falls, slain, but his fiery energy remains undiminished. Indra persuades a carpenter to cut off his three heads; he does so, and three species of birds issue from the three mouths.

Tvaṣṭṛ is furious to hear of Viśvarūpa's death; he creates the demon Vṛtra to kill Indra. Vṛtra and Indra battle fiercely; Vṛtra swallows Indra, but Indra escapes when he yawns, and the battle resumes. Indra is unable to withstand Vṛtra, and in despair the gods go to Viṣṇu.

[10] Hearing the pleas of Indra and the other gods, Viṣṇu tells them to placate Vṛtra and bring about peace between him and Indra; once this has been done, Viṣṇu will enter Indra's weapon, thus allowing Indra to slay Vṛtra. The gods and seers go to Vṛtra and urge peace on him; he agrees, but only on condition that he is not to be killed by Indra or the other gods with anything wet or dry, made of stone or of wood, sword or thunderbolt, by day or by night. After much thought, Indra finds his chance: he hurls a mass of sea-foam at Vṛtra when it is twilight, and Viṣṇu enters the foam and kills Vṛtra. There is great jubilation, but Indra is now burdened by the sin of falsehood in addition to his earlier crime of slaying the Brahmin Viśvarūpa. He hides in the waters; there is drought, and the gods, having lost their king, are seized by fear.

[11] The gods decide to make King Nahuṣa their king. When he objects that he lacks sufficient power, they grant him the ability to appropriate the power of any being that he sees. This boon undermines his virtue, and when he sees Indra's wife Śacī he lusts after her. She flees to Brhaspati for protection, and he promises to prevent her coming to harm. Nahuṣa hears of this and is furious. [12] The gods seek to persuade him to stop pursuing Śacī, but he is unmoved by their words, and they agree to bring her to him. When they arrive at Brhaspati's house to fetch her, Brhaspati refuses to hand her over. He advises that she should go to Nahuṣa and ask him to allow her more time, and she agrees to this. She visits Nahuṣa.

[13] Nahuṣa asks Śacī to become his wife. She replies that she wishes to have time in which to find out what has happened to Indra; after that she will be his. Then she returns to Brhaspati's house. The gods now ask Viṣṇu how Indra may be freed from the sin of Brahminicide; Viṣṇu answers that he must sacrifice to him with a horse sacrifice. The gods go to Indra, and the horse sacrifice takes place; Indra's sin is distributed amongst trees, rivers, mountains, the earth and women. Indra returns to his former strength, but, realizing that Nahuṣa is still too powerful for him to overcome, he disappears once more. Śacī appeals for help to Upaśruti, the oracle goddess.

[14] Upaśruti promises to take Śacī to Indra. She leads her through forests and mountains to a lake on an island in the ocean: Indra has entered the fibre of a lotus stalk there. Śacī praises him and tells him of Nahuṣa's deeds; she urges him to kill Nahuṣa. [15] Indra answers that Nahuṣa cannot be overcome by valour, but that he has a plan: Śacī is to ask Nahuṣa

to come to her in a carriage drawn by seers, and then she will be his. She carries out his instruction; delighted, Nahuṣa yokes the seers, while Śaci implores Bṛhaspati to make haste and find Indra.

Bṛhaspati offers an oblation and sends the Fire god to search for him. Fire does so, but cannot find him; however, he cannot enter the waters and refuses Bṛhaspati's command to do so. [16] Bṛhaspati praises Fire and assures him that he may safely enter the waters. Fire does so, and finds Indra hidden in the fibre of a lotus stalk. Now Bṛhaspati goes to Indra, accompanied by the gods, Gandharvas and seers. He praises Indra, who grows in strength and asks what task he is to perform; Bṛhaspati tells him of Nahuṣa's wickedness. Kubera, Yama, Soma, Varuṇa and the Fire god agree to join forces with Indra in return for a share in the sacrifice.

[17] At this point Agastya appears and announces that Nahuṣa has been overthrown. He had given the wrong answer on a point of Vedic learning, and had also touched Agastya's head with his foot; Agastya therefore cursed him to wander the earth for a thousand years in the form of a great snake.¹ All beings now congratulate Indra on his good fortune.

[18] Indra mounts his elephant Airāvata and returns to the three worlds. Angiras honours him with hymns from the Atharvaveda; Indra gives him the boon that his name Atharvāngirasa will be preserved in the Atharvaveda, and that he will have a share in the sacrifice. Then he reigns happily. — Now Śalya assures Yudhiṣṭhira that, like Indra, he will regain his kingdom and see his enemies destroyed. He repeats his promise to help Yudhiṣṭhira by sapping Karna's fiery energy.

[19] The Sātvata warrior Sātyaki joins Yudhiṣṭhira with a mighty army, as do Dhṛṣṭaketu of Cedi, Jayatsena of Magadha, and the Pāṇḍya king. With the forces of Drupada and Virāṭa, Yudhiṣṭhira has seven armies at his disposal. Duryodhana receives the support of Bhagadatta, Bhūriśravaś, Śalya, the Bhoja king Kṛtavarman, Jayadratha of Sindhu, Sudakṣiṇa of Kāmboja, Nīla of Māhiṣmatī, Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, and the five Kekaya kings; he has control over eleven armies, and Hāstina-pura is too small to contain them all.

[20] Drupada's household priest is received with proper honour by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma and Vidura. He lists the wrongs done to the Pāṇḍavas. Their inheritance

¹ For the story of Nahuṣa's eventual release from this curse, see 3.175–8.

went to the Kauravas, who made attempts on their life and then cheated them out of the kingdom they had gained for themselves; then they had to endure exile in the forest and in the city of Virāṭa. All this they have put behind them: their only desire is reconciliation without war, and the return of what is rightfully theirs.

[21] Bhīṣma supports the priest, but Karna angrily interrupts him: the Pāṇḍavas are now ignoring the terms imposed on them after the gambling match, and Duryodhana will not yield a single foot of land to them. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra speaks in praise of Bhīṣma's words and announces that he will send the Sūta Samjaya as an envoy to the Pāṇḍavas.

[22] Dhṛtarāṣṭra briefs Samjaya on his mission. The Pāṇḍavas have no faults and many virtues, and Duryodhana is a fool to hate them as he does. Yudhiṣṭhira is supported by mighty warriors from all over the earth, including the invincible Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Samjaya is to treat the Pāṇḍavas with all civility and to say whatever will help avert a war.

[23] Samjaya visits the Pāṇḍavas in Upaplavya and conveys to Yudhiṣṭhira Dhṛtarāṣṭra's good wishes for them. Yudhiṣṭhira replies with similar good wishes for the Kauravas, but then he turns to the feud between the two factions, and he asks whether the Kauravas recall the occasions on which the Pāṇḍavas have shown their great might as warriors. [24] Samjaya assures him that Dhṛtarāṣṭra is grieved by the wrongs done to the Pāṇḍavas, and that their military prowess has not been forgotten. He is sure that Yudhiṣṭhira will be able to achieve peace. Then he announces that he bears a message from Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

[25] The Pāṇḍavas and their allies gather to listen to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's message, and Samjaya greets them all. He says that Dhṛtarāṣṭra hopes for peace; the Pāṇḍavas should not start a war, which would cause terrible destruction.

[26] Yudhiṣṭhira replies. No one wishes for war, but the Pāṇḍavas have a just cause. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is enjoying every luxury and favouring his wicked son; there is no way that both factions can prosper when the Kauravas have taken the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom and aspire to total domination. The Pāṇḍavas are mighty, and they are full of anger; they will not tolerate Duryodhana's continued evildoing. The wrongs of the past are forgiven, but the kingdom must be returned.

[27] *Samjaya answers that the evil of war should be avoided at all costs – even the cost of Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom. He advises Yudhiṣṭhira to practise self-control, and not to give himself up to fulfilling the desire for possessions and sensual pleasure. If he is now going to wage war, what was the point of his years in exile? He could have fought instead of going to the forest: his allies would have backed him, and he would have been in a stronger position than he is now. But in fact Yudhiṣṭhira follows dharma, and he should continue to follow it by not fighting now.*

[28] *Yudhiṣṭhira agrees that nothing is higher than dharma, but he argues that dharma in times of trouble¹ is different from normal dharma. Only the wise can give counsel as to the proper course of action in such cases, and he will abide by the advice of Kṛṣṇa.*

[29] *Kṛṣṇa states that action is more important than anything else: it is action that maintains everything in the world. No alternative to war is open to Yudhiṣṭhira, and it is a part of the dharma of a king to go to war against those who seize land. The Kauravas' behaviour in the assembly was abominable, especially towards Draupadī. He then announces that he himself will visit the Kauravas and try to negotiate an honourable peace. If he fails, there will certainly be war.*

[30] *Samjaya now bids farewell to Yudhiṣṭhira. Yudhiṣṭhira lists the members of the Kaurava faction and asks Samjaya to greet them individually on his behalf. For Duryodhana there is an additional message: Yudhiṣṭhira's dharma will enable him to destroy his enemies. Duryodhana's desire to rule supreme over the Kurus has no justification, and he must either return Indraprastha to Yudhiṣṭhira or fight. [31] Samjaya should appeal to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma and Vidura to achieve peace, and he should tell Duryodhana that the Pāṇḍavas have forgiven his past wrongs, but now they must have what is rightfully theirs. Indeed, five villages will be sufficient for the five Pāṇḍava brothers; to grant them just that much will avert war.*

[32] *Samjaya returns to Hāstīnapura, where he greets Dhṛtarāṣṭra and conveys Yudhiṣṭhira's greeting to him. Then he upbraids Dhṛtarāṣṭra for the evil that he has done: the Kauravas will be destroyed by it. Dhṛtarāṣṭra has fallen under the sway of his own sons, and has favoured untrustworthy advisers over trustworthy; as a result he will lose his kingdom. Finally, Samjaya says that he will deliver Yudhiṣṭhira's message before the assembly in the morning.*

¹ *Āpaddharma*, dealt with at length at 12.129–67.

[33] *Dhṛtarāṣṭra summons Vidura. He tells him that since Samjaya's visit he is disturbed and unable to sleep, and he requests Vidura to discourse on dharma.*

Vidura speaks of wisdom and folly, and of things that are grouped in ones, in twos, and so forth, up to tens. Then he describes the qualities of the virtuous man, concluding with advice that Dhṛtarāṣṭra should repair the damage done to his good name by returning the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom to them. [34] He describes the behaviour of the wise king, who never acts without considering the consequences, and who takes care to maintain the good opinion of his subjects. He stresses the importance of controlling one's senses and avoiding bad company and abusive talk. Dhṛtarāṣṭra fails to see that his sons' hatred of the Pāṇḍavas has subverted their judgement; it is Yudhiṣṭhira who should inherit the kingship.

[35] *Vidura praises honesty, and tells how the Dānava demon Virocana was once asked by his wife Keśīnī whether Dānavas or Brahmins were superior. He maintained the superiority of the Dānavas, but then the Brahmin Sudhanvan arrived and gave the opposite opinion. They agreed to stake their lives on the issue, and, at Sudhanvan's suggestion, they went to Virocana's father Prahrāda for a ruling. Prahrāda ruled in favour of Sudhanvan, who rewarded his honesty by sparing Virocana's life. Dhṛtarāṣṭra should not speak untruth for the sake of land: in the absence of truth, no other virtues can exist. The Pāṇḍavas treat him as their father; he should treat them as his sons.*

[36] *Next Vidura quotes the advice once given by Atri's son to the Sādhyā gods: one should not speak maliciously or falsely. He adds that there are many ways in which a noble family may be destroyed, and counsels control of the senses. Dhṛtarāṣṭra says that he has treated Yudhiṣṭhira badly, and that Yudhiṣṭhira will now kill all his sons. Vidura replies that peace can only be attained through knowledge and discipline. United, kinsmen support each other; disunited, they meet with destruction. Dhṛtarāṣṭra must bring peace between his sons and the Pāṇḍavas.*

[37] *Vidura lists the seventeen kinds of foolish men. A king's true friend is one who gives him good but unwelcome advice. Together, the hundred Kauravas and five Pāṇḍavas can rule the earth, but the Kauravas are like a forest and the Pāṇḍavas like the tigers that live there: there can be no forest without the tigers, and no tigers without the forest.*

[38] Now Vidura speaks words of wisdom on a variety of topics. He concludes by blaming Dhṛtarāṣṭra for forsaking the Pāṇḍavas and entrusting the kingship to Duryodhana: soon he will see him lose it. [39] Dhṛtarāṣṭra objects that he cannot abandon his son. Vidura replies that the wicked should be avoided, and kinsmen should be supported. Dhṛtarāṣṭra should give the Pāṇḍavas a few villages; with them as allies he will prosper. After more words of wisdom, he warns Dhṛtarāṣṭra to treat Pāṇḍu's sons and his own equally.

[40] Vidura continues with his wise sayings, ending with the dharmas of the four classes of men. Yudhiṣṭhīra cannot perform his proper Kṣatriya dharma, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra should set him on the right course. Dhṛtarāṣṭra answers that he accepts what Vidura has said, and that in his mind he favours the Pāṇḍava; but whenever he sees Duryodhana his opinion changes back again. Fate is all-powerful, and human effort vain.

[41] Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks if Vidura has left anything unsaid. Vidura replies that the immortal seer Sanatsujāta will speak to him about profound matters that Vidura, as the son of a Śūdra mother, cannot talk of. He mentally summons Sanatsujāta, who appears.

SANATSUJĀTA

[42] Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Sanatsujāta why he maintains that there is no death. Sanatsujāta answers that distraction is death; one should cease to desire the fruits of one's actions, for death results from passion. He describes the perfect Brahmin: a man free of exertion, accepting no gifts, who makes no display of his religious practices or his learning.

[43] Sanatsujāta states that asceticism is more effective than Vedic learning in saving a man from evil. He lists the forms of behaviour that damage asceticism, and those that strengthen it. Questioned by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he says that there are many Vedas, but only one absolute truth; the true Brahmin is he who, firmly based in truth, sees brahman. [44] He describes the way to attain brahman by disciplined study with a teacher. Brahman cannot be described: it has no properties, but it is the basis of the entire universe. [45] Brahman springs from the primeval seed that is perceived as the eternal blessed one by those who are adept at Yoga. The man who sees his own self in all beings does not sorrow.

WAR AND PEACE

[46] Dawn comes. The Kauravas and all their allies assemble in the hall. The gatekeeper announces Saṃjaya, who enters, declares that the Pāṇḍavas send their greetings to all, and prepares to deliver their message.

[47] Saṃjaya reports what was said by Arjuna: if Duryodhana does not return the kingdom to Yudhiṣṭhīra, he is asking for war with a mighty army, and when he sees the Pāṇḍavas and their allies ranged against him he will come to regret it. In particular, glorious Kṛṣṇa, victor over men and demons, is giving Arjuna his help; and Arjuna himself is ready to use his weapons to annihilate the Kauravas. Duryodhana is suffering from delusion; he should follow the advice of Bhīṣma, Kṛpa, Drona, Aśvatthāman and Vidura.

[48] Bhīṣma speaks of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the divine seers with whose help the gods succeeded in defeating the demons: they are Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, and they cannot be defeated. He accuses Duryodhana of listening only to the base Sūta's son Karṇa, to Śakuni and to Duḥśāsana. When Karṇa objects, Bhīṣma contemptuously points out that, for all his boasts, Karṇa has achieved nothing. Drona too argues for negotiation with the Pāṇḍavas. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra ignores the two elders and addresses Saṃjaya. This is the moment at which the Kauravas lose all hope of life.

[49] Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya about Yudhiṣṭhīra: whose counsel does he listen to? Saṃjaya replies that his rule is absolute. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then asks about his forces; Saṃjaya swoons at the question, but recovers and lists the mighty warriors ranged against the Kauravas.

[50] Dhṛtarāṣṭra says that he is particularly fearful of Bhīma, and describes his awesome qualities as a fighter. The Dhārtarāṣṭras and their allies stand no chance against him. But he adds that he himself is in thrall to fate, and cannot stop his sons from pursuing the disastrous course they have chosen. [51] Next he speaks of Arjuna, who has defeated the very gods: with Gāndīva for his bow and Kṛṣṇa for his charioteer he is utterly irresistible. [52] Finally he praises the valour of Yudhiṣṭhīra's allies, and the uncompromising virtue of Yudhiṣṭhīra himself. If the Kauravas elect to fight against him, destruction is inevitable.

[53] Saṃjaya agrees with Dhṛtarāṣṭra's assessment, but retorts that his wisdom has not prevented him from falling under Duryodhana's sway: he has connived in every wrong that his son has done the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana must now be

restrained; there is no point in Dhṛtarāṣṭra's bemoaning the Pāṇḍavas' strength as though there were nothing he could do.

[54] Duryodhana speaks: the Kauravas are capable of defeating their enemies. When the Pāṇḍavas went to the forest, they gathered allies round them and spoke of attacking Dhṛtarāṣṭra to regain their kingdom. At that time, the advice of Drona, Kṛpa, Bhīṣma and Aśvatthāman was that the Pāṇḍavas did not have the strength to defeat the Kauravas; now they are much weaker, and the Kauravas are completely confident of their ability to beat them. As for Bhīma, Duryodhana himself is more than a match for him. The Kaurava warriors are mighty, and the Pāṇḍavas are outnumbered.

[55] Now Duryodhana asks Saṃjaya about Yudhiṣṭhīra's preparations for war. Saṃjaya answers that all the Pāṇḍavas have made ready, and are sure that they will triumph. At Duryodhana's request he describes the Pāṇḍavas' horses.

[56] Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya to list the allies of the Pāṇḍavas, and Saṃjaya does so. Each of the Pāṇḍavas and their supporters has been assigned particular Kaurava warriors to fight and kill, and Saṃjaya lists these also. Dhṛtarāṣṭra laments: in his view no one can withstand the might of the Pāṇḍava forces. Duryodhana asserts that he and his men are quite capable of defeating them, but Dhṛtarāṣṭra retorts that he is speaking like a madman. He asks Saṃjaya who is inspiring the Pāṇḍavas; Saṃjaya answers that it is Dhṛṣṭadyumna, who has sent a message of his own warning the Kauravas to make peace or face death.

[57] Now Dhṛtarāṣṭra urges Duryodhana to return Yudhiṣṭhīra's kingdom to him and to avoid warfare. But Duryodhana is intent on performing the sacrifice of battle, from which he says he will return triumphant; he will not yield a speck of land. Dhṛtarāṣṭra renounces him and predicts that he and his men will be slaughtered by Bhīma.

[58] At Dhṛtarāṣṭra's request, Saṃjaya describes his meeting with Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, and relays the message that Kṛṣṇa sent: the Kauravas have no hope against Arjuna. [59] Dhṛtarāṣṭra tells Duryodhana that in his judgement the Pāṇḍavas will be the victors in a war: they have support amongst the gods, and Arjuna is invincible. Once again he argues for peace.

[60] Duryodhana, enraged, replies that the gods will not meddle in human affairs, and claims that he himself has powers greater than theirs. He will defeat and destroy all his enemies.

[61] As Dhṛtarāṣṭra addresses Saṃjaya once more, Karna interrupts to boast of his own prowess. Bhīṣma retorts that Arjuna is greatly his superior and will

defeat and kill him. Karna announces that he will not fight for as long as Bhīṣma lives, and leaves the assembly.

[62] Duryodhana continues to maintain that he, Karna and Duḥśāsana will prevail over the Pāṇḍavas. Vidura responds with two parables. Two birds, caught in a fowler's net, succeeded in escaping by flying away with it, but then they quarrelled with one another and perished; quarrels among kinsmen lead to ruin. And honey-gatherers in the mountains fell to their deaths attempting to gather some particularly wonderful honey; Duryodhana likewise has eyes only for his goal and does not see the impending catastrophe.

[63] Dhṛtarāṣṭra reminds Duryodhana of the might of the Pāṇḍavas and their allies, and urges him to pay heed to his elders, who all caution against war.

[64] Then he asks Saṃjaya what Arjuna said after Kṛṣṇa had spoken. Saṃjaya answers that he sent his greetings to the Kauravas, but warned that he would kill them if Yudhiṣṭhīra's kingdom was not returned to him.

[65] The assembly now breaks up. Dhṛtarāṣṭra privately asks Saṃjaya for his own estimate of the relative strength of the two sides. Saṃjaya insists that Vyāsa and Gāndhārī must also be present before he will speak. [66] Then he gives his opinion. Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa have taken their present births out of choice. Kṛṣṇa is the supreme lord of all, and where he is, there is victory.

[67] At Dhṛtarāṣṭra's request, Saṃjaya speaks further about Kṛṣṇa's divinity and his own devotion to him. Dhṛtarāṣṭra tells Duryodhana that he should take refuge in Kṛṣṇa, but Duryodhana refuses obdurately; Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī both give him up for lost. On Vyāsa's advice, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya how to attain ultimate peace through Kṛṣṇa; Saṃjaya preaches the control of the senses.

[68] Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks to hear the names of Kṛṣṇa and their meanings, and Saṃjaya tells them to him; [69] Dhṛtarāṣṭra now praises Kṛṣṇa as supreme lord.

[70] Meanwhile, Yudhiṣṭhīra turns to Kṛṣṇa for help. He lists the wrongs that have been done to him and his family, and laments their decline into poverty. War will be terrible, but it is the Kṣatriya dharma; he wishes neither to give up his kingdom nor to destroy the Kuru line, and he asks Kṛṣṇa's advice. Kṛṣṇa announces that he will travel in person to the Kauravas in an effort at peace.

Yudhiṣṭhīra attempts to dissuade him, but Kṛṣṇa insists, and Yudhiṣṭhīra wishes his mission well.

[71] *Kṛṣṇa says that he is sure the Kauravas will not agree to peace; they have behaved shamefully and deserve to die, especially Duryodhana. He himself will go and attempt to make peace, but he will also observe the Kauravas' preparations for war; he has no doubt that war will come.*

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[72] 'Slayer of Madhu,' said Bhīma, 'you should speak to them in whatever way may lead to peace among the Kurus. Do not threaten them with war! Duryodhana is resentful and always in a fury; he is proud, and hates what would be for his own good, so he should not be addressed sharply. Deal with him in a spirit of friendship! Wicked-hearted by nature, he thinks like a thief; he is overcome by the intoxication of absolute power, and he is conducting a feud against the Pāṇḍavas. He is shortsighted, and harsh and abusive in his speech; his valour is exercised cruelly and his anger is long-lasting. He is unbidable, a wicked man who loves deceit. He would die rather than accept defeat, and he will never change his mind. I think, Kṛṣṇa, that to achieve peace with such a man will be supremely difficult!

'He opposes even his friends, for he has abandoned *dharma* in favour of falsehood: whatever his friends say or think, he acts against it. In thrall to anger, he follows his own base nature, pursuing wickedness as naturally as a snake that has been struck with sticks. You know well Duryodhana's army, his character, his nature, his strength and his valour. Once the Kauravas and their sons were peaceable, and so were we: we and our kin used to rejoice like the gods! But now the Bhāratas will be consumed by Duryodhana's anger, slayer of Madhu, as the forests are consumed by fire at the end of the cold season.

'It is well known that there have been eighteen kings who exterminated their own kin, their friends and their friends' kin. The demons were prosperous and seemed to blaze with fiery energy, but when in time their *dharma* was subverted, then Bali was born. Similarly among the Haihayas was born Udāvarta, among the Nīpas Janamejaya, among the Tālajaṅghas Bahula, among the Kṛṣṇis the haughty Vasu, among the Suvīras Ajabindu, among the Surāṣṭras Kuśarddhika, among the

Balīhas Arjaka, among the Cīnas Dhautamūlaka, among the Videhas Hayagrīva, among the Mahaujases Varapra, among the Sundaravegas Bāhu, among the Dīptākṣas Purūravas, among the Cedis and Matsyas Bāhu, among the Pracetas Br̥hadbala, among the Indravatsas Dhāraṇa, among the Mukutas Vigāhāna, and among the Nandivegas Śama. These were the base men born at the end of an age of the world to defile their lineage, Kṛṣṇa.

'So too for us Kurus at the end of the age fate has prepared this Duryodhana, this base and wicked man, to put our lineage to the torch. This is why you should speak gently and softly to him in accordance with *dharma* and the proper making of wealth. Let your words agree largely with his own wishes; let them not be fierce, for his own valour is exercised fiercely. Kṛṣṇa, all of us will be subservient to Duryodhana, and follow him humbly, if the Bhāratas may thereby escape destruction! Act, Vāsudeva, so as to bring about a state of neutrality between us and the Kauravas, so that disaster may not befall the Kurus. Say to the aged grandfather Bhīṣma and the other courtiers, "Let there be brotherhood among the brothers! Let Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son be tranquil!"

'This is what I say. The king himself approves it, and Arjuna too has no wish for war, for there is great compassion in Arjuna.'

[73] Strong-armed Kṛṣṇa Kēśava burst out laughing when he heard Bhīma speak these unprecedentedly mild words: it seemed to him like finding a mountain that weighed little or a fire that was cool. So Balarāma's younger brother Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, the bearer of the bow Śāringa, addressed Bhīma as he sat there brimming with mercy, hoping to inflame him like a wind fanning a fire. 'At other times, Bhīma, it is war that you applaud, and you long to crush the cruel sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra who revel in killing. You do not sleep, afflicter of your enemies, but lie awake, face down, always speaking terrible, bellicose, hurtful words. Consumed by your own fiery rage, you exhale deeply, Bhīma, troubled at heart like a smoking fire. You lie on your own, roaring like a weak man oppressed by a heavy burden, so that some who do not understand even think you are mad. You run about uprooting and bending trees like an elephant, Bhīma, roaring while you trample the earth with your feet. You take no pleasure in the company here, son of Pāṇḍu; you remain alone, never greeting anyone by

10 day or by night. You sit in solitude, smiling for no reason or seeming to weep, and sometimes you sit for long spells with your head between your knees and your eyes closed. Always you are seen to frown repeatedly and lick your lips, Bhīma. All this is the result of anger.

‘You used to say, “As the sun with its rays is seen rising bright in the East, and as it disappears in the West, forever circling, so I tell you this truthfully, and I shall not break my vow: I shall attack the resentful Duryodhana and kill him with my club!” In the midst of your brothers you used to lay your hand on your club and swear this truly; yet today, afflicter of your enemies, your mind is resolved on peace!

15 ‘Ah! Now that the time of war draws near, you seem to see reasons to oppose war where no such reasons exist – is this fear that you are feeling, Bhīma? Ah! Sleeping and waking you see hostile portents, son of Kuntī, and this is why you seek peace. Ah! Like a eunuch you have no hope of finding any manliness within yourself; you are overwhelmed by despair, and so your mind is altered. Your heart trembles, your mind is depressed and your legs are paralysed; this is why you seek peace. It is said, son of Kuntī, that the mind of a mortal is inconstant and capricious, like the seeds of the kapok tree dispersed by a strong wind, 20 and indeed your mind is now so altered that I feel I am hearing human speech from a cow! This will cause the hearts of the other Pāñdavas to sink as though they were shipwrecked.

‘This is a great marvel to me – as great as if a mountain should start to move – that you should speak such words, words so unlike Bhīma! Consider your own deeds, heir of Bharata, and the lineage into which you were born; arise, cast off despair, O hero, and be firm! This weariness does not befit you, foe-tamer: a Kṣatriya obtains nothing that he does not seize with might!’

[74] When Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva spoke to him in this manner, Bhīma, ever angry and unforbearing, rushed up to him like a spirited horse and spoke at once: ‘Invincible one, you completely misjudge my intention! By disposition I am utterly devoted to war, and my valour is true; you have dwelt with me long, prince of Daśarha, and you know my mettle. Or rather you do not know me: you are like a shipwrecked man swimming in a lake, and that is why you attack me with such unfitting words – for

how could anyone who knows me as Bhīma speak as unfittingly of me as you do, heir of Madhu?

‘So I shall tell you something, lord of the Vṛṣnis, of my manliness and unmatched might. To praise oneself is not at all a noble thing, but your intemperate words have wounded me, so I shall speak of my own strength.

‘Behold these two worlds, Kṛṣṇa, the heaven and the earth, where all these beings have existed; immovable and infinite, they are the origin and dwelling-place of all. If these two were suddenly to clash together in fury like two rocks, I would use my two arms to hold them apart, together with all their creatures, the moving and the still! Behold this space between my arms like iron bars; I know of no man who could free himself once he was held there. If Mount Himālaya, the ocean and Indra himself, wielder of the thunderbolt and slayer of Bala, were all three to exert their strength together, they could not rescue the man whom I had overpowered! If all the Kṣatriyas were to string their bows to attack the Pāñdavas, I should fight them and trample them into the ground with the sole of my foot!

‘Invincible one, you cannot fail to recognize my valour: I have conquered kings and brought them into subjection. But if you truly do not know me, O stirrer of men, I who am like the brilliance of the rising sun, then you shall come to know me in the dense press of battle! Why have you been berating me with harsh words, sinless one, as though pricking a wound? I have spoken as I think, but you should know that there is more to me than this, and when the day of slaughter comes, you shall see me in the press of battle putting to flight elephants, chariot-fighters and horsemen; you and all the world shall see me furiously slaying bull-like Kṣatriya heroes and dragging the very best among them! The marrow has not run dry in my bones, and my heart does not tremble; I feel no fear even if the whole world turns on me in fury. But, slayer of Madhu, for friendship and for no other reason I show mercy and endure all these torments, lest otherwise our Bhārata people should perish.’

[75] The blessed lord said, ‘I spoke as I did from affection and because I wanted to know what was in your mind – not to scold you or to show off my learning, not because of anger or doubt. I know your greatness,

I know the strength that is yours, I know your deeds, and I would not insult you. Son of Pāṇḍu, I see a thousand times more good in you than you see in yourself: with your kinsmen and friends you befit the lineage of your birth, Bhīma, honoured as it is by all the kings.

‘But those people who seek to understand¹ the doubtful distinction between fate and human effort, O wolf-belly, can never reach any conclusion, for the very thing that leads to success in a man’s doings may also lead to his destruction: human action is by nature doubtful. Actions may be regarded in one way by wise men skilled at foreseeing unwanted outcomes, and yet turn out quite differently, like the currents of the wind. An action carried out through human effort may be well planned, well performed and properly accomplished, and yet be thwarted by fate. But likewise a fated action, something not carried out by humans, may be frustrated by human effort, heir of Bharata, as happens with cold and heat, rain, hunger and thirst. And a man whose being is constrained by fate may none the less opt to carry out some different action, and fate does not prevent him from doing so; we see the same characteristic here.

‘Son of Pāṇḍu, there is no course that this world can take other than action. Understanding this, one should continue on one’s way; the results will come from a combination of destiny and human effort. He who continues to act with this understanding is neither distressed by failure nor elated by success. This is all I was trying to express, Bhīma: that in war with the Kauravas one should not imagine that success is certain. If misfortune should occur in such a case, one should not fall into utter gloom, and surrender to despair or exhaustion. This is why I spoke to you as I did.

‘In the morning, son of Pāṇḍu, I shall approach Dhṛtarāṣṭra and strive to bring peace without abandoning your cause. If they make peace, I shall win boundless fame, your desire will be achieved, and they will attain the highest good fortune. But if the Kauravas remain unmoved and reject my words, there will certainly be war and terrible doings as a result. The burden in this war will be laid upon you, Bhīma; Arjuna must also bear the yoke, and the two of you must carry the others along.

¹ Literally ‘who wish to know the course of’.

If war comes, I shall be the charioteer of Arjuna Bībatsu, for this was his desire – it is not that I do not wish to fight. Wolf-belly, this is why, when I felt doubtful about your thinking, I assailed you with manly words to kindle your fiery energy.’

[76] Now Arjuna speaks. He tells Kṛṣṇa to act in whatever way he considers fitting. [77] Kṛṣṇa answers that he will do what he can; but he cannot control fate, and he does not expect peace.

[78] Nakula’s view is that Kṛṣṇa should act as the occasion demands; a gentle approach will be wise, since no one could fail to be intimidated by the threat posed by the Pāṇḍavas and their allies. He is optimistic that Kṛṣṇa will succeed in bringing peace. [79] Sahadeva, by contrast, favours war, in order to avenge the wrong done to Draupadī in the gambling match. Sātyaki supports him, and there are cries of approval at his call for battle.

[80] Now Draupadī speaks. She is grieved to hear Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma seeking peace, and she applauds Sahadeva and Sātyaki. She maintains that Duryodhana clearly only desires peace if he can retain the Pāṇḍavas’ kingdom; Kṛṣṇa’s mission is therefore pointless, and war is the right course of action. Her own humiliation at the hands of the Kauravas deserves to be avenged, and if Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna will not fight, her sons will. Seeing her weep, Kṛṣṇa assures her that soon she will see the Kaurava women weeping. He will carry out his mission, but if Duryodhana does not concede he and his allies will be destroyed, and the Pāṇḍavas will be restored to their fortunes.

[81] Kṛṣṇa has his chariot prepared, and he and Sātyaki mount. Good portents appear, and seers honour Kṛṣṇa. He sets off; the Pāṇḍavas and their allies follow him for some distance. Then Yudhiṣṭhira urges Kṛṣṇa to comfort Kuntī and greet the elders, and Arjuna vows that if Duryodhana fails to concede he will kill the Kaurava Kṣatriyas; his words prompt Bhīma to utter mighty roars. Now Kṛṣṇa departs. On the way he meets a party of great seers headed by Rāma Jāmadagnya; they are visiting earth to watch him conduct his mission. Rāma wishes him well and promises to see him again in the assembly.

[82] Kṛṣṇa travels on, accompanied by a strong force. Wherever he goes, marvels occur. He passes through Śālibhavana and reaches Vṛkasthala, where he spends the night. [83] Learning that Kṛṣṇa is approaching, Dhṛtarāṣṭra makes ready to greet him with great honour, and he has Duryodhana prepare the finest accommodation at Vṛkasthala; but Kṛṣṇa ignores it.

[84] Dhṛtarāṣṭra tells Vidura of his plans for honouring Kṛṣṇa. He lists the rich gifts he will give him, and gives orders for Duḥśāsana's house to be made ready for him to stay in. [85] Vidura replies that Dhṛtarāṣṭra is acting from dishonest motives in treating Kṛṣṇa so lavishly; but he will not succeed in winning his allegiance away from the Pāṇḍavas. Instead, Dhṛtarāṣṭra should offer him what he seeks: a just peace. [86] Duryodhana agrees that Kṛṣṇa will remain loyal to the Pāṇḍavas, and he opposes giving him any gifts. Bhīṣma urges Dhṛtarāṣṭra to agree to Kṛṣṇa's proposals for peace, but Duryodhana insists that he will never share the kingdom, and speaks of taking Kṛṣṇa captive. Dhṛtarāṣṭra rebukes him, and Bhīṣma utters a furious condemnation and then walks out.

[87] The next day Kṛṣṇa arrives; he is met by all the townsfolk and all the Kauravas except for Duryodhana. He goes to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's house and exchanges greetings with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his allies. Then, after spending some time in friendly talk with them, he goes to see Vidura. [88] Next he visits his father's sister, Kuntī. She asks after the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, contrasting their former glory with their present woes and praising them highly; she grieves specially for Draupadī. She blames her father for having her adopted by Kuntibhoja, and gives Kṛṣṇa messages to pass on to all the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa comforts her with their greetings and promises that they will soon triumph over their enemies.

[89] Now Kṛṣṇa visits Duryodhana, whom he finds in company with Duḥśāsana, Karna and Śakuni. He is greeted in the proper manner and offered a meal, which he refuses: he will not eat with them until he has succeeded in his mission. He urges Duryodhana to give up his hatred of the Pāṇḍavas, and announces that he will stay with Vidura. The seniormost Kauravas try to persuade him to accept their hospitality, but he will not do so.

[90] After the evening meal, Vidura tells Kṛṣṇa that his mission is not a wise one, for Duryodhana and his supporters are determined to keep the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom: they will ignore his words. [91] Kṛṣṇa answers that he knows well what is in the minds of Duryodhana and the others, but he must still do what is right by trying honestly to bring peace.

[92] In the morning Kṛṣṇa is driven with great ceremony to the assembly. He enters, and is received with due honour. The seers arrive from heaven; they are greeted and given seats. Then Kṛṣṇa sits down, followed by all the assembled rulers. All eyes are on Kṛṣṇa: there is silence.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[93] When all the kings were seated in silence, Kṛṣṇa of the gleaming teeth began to speak in a voice like the sound of a drum. Madhu's heir fixed his eyes upon Dhṛtarāṣṭra as he spoke, but his voice resounded throughout the entire assembly, like a thundercloud at summer's end. 'Heir of Bharata, let there be peace between Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas without putting the warriors to work! This is what I have come to strive for. There are no other words that I can say for your welfare, foe-taming king, for you already know all that is to be known. This Kuru lineage stands today foremost among all the kings, O prince, for it is rich in Vedic learning and virtuous deeds, and excels in every good quality: heir of Bharata, the Kurus are distinguished for their mercy and kindness, their compassion and lack of cruelty, and for their uprightness, forbearance and truth. When such a lineage as this maintains such greatness, king, any unworthy act would be unfitting, especially if occasioned by you – for you, O truest of the Kurus, are chief among those who prevent the Kurus from acting falsely, whether towards friends or strangers.

'But, heir of Kuru, your boorish sons, led by Duryodhana, have turned their backs on *dharma* and the proper making of wealth. Greed has seized their hearts and they have abandoned all rules of behaviour. They are acting with cruelty towards their own leading kinsmen: you know this, bull-like heir of Bharata. This is why this most dreadful disaster has arisen amongst the Kurus; if you take no heed of it, it will destroy the earth. And yet it can be mitigated if you so wish, bull-like heir of Bharata, for I do not think that peace is difficult to achieve in this case. Peace depends on you, lord of the peoples, and on me: restrain your sons, and I shall restrain the others, heir of Kuru. After all, prince of kings, it is for your sons and their followers to obey your command, and it is also greatly to their benefit to abide by your authority. And what benefits you benefits the Pāṇḍavas too, O king, as they await my instructions while I strive to bring peace.

'Examine the matter in all its aspects, lord of the peoples, and then act: let the Bhāratas be united behind you! Practise *dharma* and the proper making of wealth under the protection of the Pāṇḍavas, lord of men, for such heroes cannot be overcome by any hostile effort; if the noble Pāṇḍavas protect you, not even Indra with the other gods

could defeat you, never mind mere kings! If you had on your side not only Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa, Karna, Vivīṁśati, Aśvatthāman, Vikarna, 20 Somadatta, Bāhlika, the kings of Sindhu and Kalinga, and Sudakṣīṇa of Kāmboja, but also Yudhiṣṭhīra, Bhīma, the ambidextrous warrior Arjuna, the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, Sātyaki of great ardour, and the mighty chariot-fighter Yuyutsu,¹ then who would be so perverse as to fight against them, bull-like heir of Bharata? With the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas together, foe-slayer, you will attain sovereignty over the world and, moreover, you will be unassailable by your enemies. And so, lord of the earth, those lords of the earth who are your equals, and even those who are superior to you, will become your allies; and you, protected on all sides by sons, grandsons, brothers, fathers and friends, will be able to live in happiness. If you grant all these Pāṇḍavas esteem and honour as you used to, lord of the earth, you will enjoy the entire earth, for together with them as well as your own people, heir of Bharata, you will defeat all other enemies: this is wholly to your advantage! Afflicter of your enemies, you will enjoy the earth that they themselves will win for you, if, with your sons and ministers, you will just unite with them.

‘However, great king, if there is war, great destruction will take place; and if both sides are destroyed, what *dharma* will you see in that? Tell me, bull-like heir of Bharata: what happiness will you gain through the 30 slaughter in battle of the Pāṇḍavas or of your own mighty sons? Both the Pāṇḍavas and your own warriors are all brave, expert in arms and eager to do battle: protect them from this great danger! Let us not see all the heroes on both sides, Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas alike, destroyed in battle and struck down by chariot-fighters from their chariots. O truest of kings, the kings of the earth have assembled; in thrall to anger, they will slay all creatures here! Protect the world, king – let all these creatures not perish! Heir of Kuru, once you return to your natural state deliverance will follow. These rulers are pure, generous, modest, noble, well born and mutually supportive: protect them from this great danger, O king!

¹ Yuyutsu is Dhṛitarāṣṭra’s illegitimate son (for his birth, see 1.107.35–6): he is well disposed towards the Pāṇḍavas (e.g. 1.119.39–40). When Yudhiṣṭhīra gives the warriors an opportunity to change sides before the great battle begins, Yuyutsu is the only one to do so: he transfers his allegiance from Duryodhana to Yudhiṣṭhīra (6.41.88–95). However, this has not yet happened, so his inclusion in the second half of Kṛṣṇa’s list is rather odd.

‘Let these lords of the earth meet together in goodwill, take food and drink together, and then return each to his own home, dressed in fine robes and garlanded, bull-like heir of Bharata; let them do honour to one another and give up their resentments and feuds, O afflicter of your enemies! Your life is drawing towards its end; let that affection which you used to bear towards the Pāṇḍavas be yours once more, today and forever, bull-like heir of Bharata. It was you who raised them when they were fatherless children; now protect them along with your sons, as is proper, for it falls to you to look after them, particularly at times of disaster. Bull-like heir of Bharata, do not ruin both your *dharma* and the proper making of wealth!

‘The Pāṇḍavas send you greetings and propitiations, O king, and they say to you, “At your command we and our followers suffered misery: we passed these twelve years in the forest, and a thirteenth year incognito in a populous place. Certain that you, our father, would stand by the agreement, we ourselves did not break it: our Brahmins know this. So, bull-like heir of Bharata, stand by your agreement with us, for we have stood by it, and after our endless torments we wish to regain our share of the kingdom. Please combine *dharma* with the proper making of wealth to help us! We endure these many torments because we recognize you as our elder, so you should act towards us like a father or mother. The behaviour of both elders and pupils is very important, heir of Bharata, because if we take a wrong path it is for our father to set us right. Set us on our path, O king – and likewise set yourself on your own road!”

‘Your sons also speak thus to this assembly, bull-like heir of Bharata: “Among these courtiers who know *dharma*, any unworthy act would be unfitting. Wherever *dharma* is slain by *adharma* and truth by untruth before men’s very eyes, the courtiers of that place too are slain. If *dharma* is wounded by *adharma* and seeks refuge in an assembly, and the courtiers there do not cut the dart out from it, they too are wounded; *dharma* brings them down as a river brings down the trees growing on its banks!”

‘These are men who hold *dharma* in their thoughts, who sit in silence reflecting on *dharma*, and what they have said is truth, *dharma* and justice, bull-like heir of Bharata. What answer can you give them other than to grant what they ask? Let the lords of the earth who are seated together

here in the assembly first ponder on *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, and then speak if I am telling the truth! Release these Kṣatriyas from the noose of death, bull-like Kṣatriya; make peace, best heir of Bharata, do not fall prey to anger. Give the Pāṇḍavas the share they have inherited, as is right, and then, your aims achieved, enjoy pleasures with your sons, afflicter of your enemies!

‘You know that Yudhiṣṭhīra Ajātāśatru always abides by the *dharma* of the virtuous, and you know how he behaves towards you and your sons, lord of men. You tried to burn him, you cast him out, and yet once again he now turns to you. You and your sons banished him to Indraprastha, yet while he lived there he gained mastery over all the princes and made them subject to you, O king – he never infringed your authority. This is how he was conducting himself when Subala’s son Śakuni, who wanted to rob him of his lands and wealth and grain, committed the worst of frauds against him; yet even on reaching that state, and seeing Draupadī Kṛṣṇā dragged into the hall, Yudhiṣṭhīra of immeasurable greatness was unshakable in maintaining the Kṣatriya *dharma*.

‘As for me, heir of Bharata, I seek what is best for them and for you. Do not cut all beings off from *dharma*, happiness and the proper making of wealth, king! Your sons believe what is harmful to them to be wholesome, and what is wholesome, harmful; in their greed they have gone too far. Restrain them, lord of the peoples! The foe-taming sons of Kuntī stand ready to obey you or to fight you; take your own stand on what will be best for you, O king!’

All the princes applauded this speech in their hearts, but not one of them was prepared to speak a word.

DAMBHODBHAVA

[94] The kings are reduced to silence by Kṛṣṇa’s speech, but Rāma Jāmadagnya speaks: he tells the story of the mighty king Dambhodbhava. — Dambhodbhava boasts that no one can match him in battle, till the Brahmins tell him that Nara and Nārāyaṇa can do so. He visits them on Mount Gandhamādana, where they are performing austerities, and challenges them; they repeatedly assure him that a hermitage is no

place for a fight, but he insists. Nara then picks a handful of reeds; when Dambhodbhava begins to shower arrows on him he renders them harmless and throws the reeds, which pierce all Dambhodbhava’s troops, till Dambhodbhava falls at Nara’s feet. — Rāma points out that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are Nara and Nārāyaṇa. He advises the Kauravas to make peace with them.

MĀTALI

[95] Next Kānya addresses Duryodhana. He urges him to make peace, and tells the story of Indra’s charioteer Mātali. — Mātali has a daughter Gunakeśī, for whom he wishes to find a husband. Convinced that there is no one suitable amongst men or immortals, he sets out to search the underworld realm of the serpents. [96] On the way he is joined by Nārada; the two visit Vāruna together, and Nārada shows Vāruna’s world to Mātali.

[97] Nārada shows Mātali the underworld city of Pātāla, inhabited by demons and certain extreme ascetics. He asks whether Mātali approves of anyone there as a husband for his daughter, but he does not. [98] Next Nārada shows him Hiranyaśālī, the golden city of demons, but Mātali will not marry his daughter to one of the enemies of the gods.

[99] Nārada shows Mātali the realm of the great birds, enemies of the serpents. [100] Then he shows him the seventh subterranean region, that of Rasātala; here lives Surabhi, the mother of all cattle and source of the ocean of milk that was churned by the gods and demons.¹ [101] Finally he shows him the city of Bhogavatī, home of the great serpents. Here Mātali selects the serpent Sumukha, grandson of Āryaka, as a husband for Gunakeśī.

[102] When Nārada proposes the match to Āryaka, he is hesitant: Garuḍa has killed Sumukha’s father and vowed to kill Sumukha also. But Mātali insists; he takes Sumukha to Indra, who confers long life on him. [103] When Garuḍa hears of this he remonstrates angrily with Indra and boasts of his own great strength. Viṣṇu asks him to support his right arm; Garuḍa collapses under its weight, and asks pardon for his arrogance. —

¹ See 1.15.

Karna tells Duryodhana that he too should not take on the superior might of the Pāṇḍavas, but Duryodhana is unmoved.

GĀLAVA

[104] Nārada warns Duryodhana against stubbornness, and tells the story of Gālava. — The god Dharma takes the form of Vasiṣṭha and visits Viśvāmitra, who is performing austerities, to ask him for food. Viśvāmitra prepares food, but in the meanwhile Dharma is fed by others; when Viśvāmitra brings food to him, he tells him to wait. Viśvāmitra waits motionless for a hundred years till Dharma returns; pleased, the god raises Viśvāmitra from his Kṣatriya rank to that of Brahmin.

Viśvāmitra now gives his student Gālava leave to depart; Gālava annoys Viśvāmitra by repeatedly asking what gift he should give him, and finally Viśvāmitra tells him to bring eight hundred white horses with one black ear each. [105] Gālava, emaciated with anxiety, wonders how to fulfil his teacher's command. He is deciding to approach Viṣṇu for aid when Garuḍa appears and offers to help him.

[106] Garuḍa asks Gālava which direction to take him in. He describes the East, [107] then the South, [108] the West [109] and the North. [110] Gālava asks Garuḍa to take him to the East, but the great bird's speed terrifies him. He blurts out his problem, and Garuḍa promises to help; they will return home after resting for a while on Mount Rṣabha.

[111] On Mount Rṣabha they are fed by the Brahmin woman ascetic Śāṇḍilī and fall asleep. When Garuḍa awakes he finds that he has lost his wings: Śāṇḍilī, aware of his idea of carrying her before Prajāpati, has used her power to remove them. He succeeds in placating her, and she restores his wings. Now Garuḍa and Gālava return home; they meet Viśvāmitra, who tells Gālava that he must hurry to fulfil his promise.

[112] Garuḍa proposes that Gālava should approach King Yayāti for help. He takes Gālava to Pratiṣṭhāna, introduces him to Yayāti, and explains his problem. [113] Yayāti explains that he is no longer as wealthy as he once was; however, he cannot send a petitioner away empty-handed, and he gives Gālava his daughter Mādhavī, who is destined to found four dynasties: by offering her as a bride to other great kings he will be able to

GĀLAVA

obtain what he seeks. Gālava accepts her and offers her to the Ikṣvāku king Haryaśva.

[114] Haryaśva has only two hundred black-eared white horses, and asks to be allowed to father one son on Mādhavī in return for these. Mādhavī explains that, thanks to a boon, she will become a virgin once more after giving birth. She advises Gālava to give her to Haryaśva and to three other kings: in this way he will gain all the horses he needs and she will bear four sons.

Haryaśva's son Vasumanas is born, and Gālava now goes with Mādhavī to King Divodāsa. [115] Divodāsa is happy to accept Mādhavī on the same terms as Haryaśva: she bears him a son, Pratardana. [116] Next Gālava visits King Uśinara and proposes that he father two sons on Mādhavī in return for four hundred horses. But Uśinara has only two hundred to give, so he restricts himself to one son. Mādhavī gives birth to Śibi.

[117] Garuḍa congratulates Gālava on his success; when Gālava reminds him that he is still two hundred horses short, Garuḍa tells him of the origin of the black-eared white horses: originally there were a thousand, but only six hundred survive. He recommends Gālava to present his six hundred horses to Viśvāmitra together with Mādhavī. Gālava does so, and Viśvāmitra begets Aṣṭaka on Mādhavī. Now Gālava sends her back to her father Yayāti and bids farewell to Garuḍa.

[118] Yayāti¹ holds a svayamvara for Mādhavī, but she rejects all the many suitors who attend, and chooses the forest instead; she lives an ascetic life there. Yayāti lives for thousands of years, but then dies and goes to heaven. He looks down on the other celestials, and is punished by ceasing to be recognized. [119] Condemned to fall from heaven, he requests that he may fall among good people. He arrives in the midst of a sacrifice being performed by Mādhavī's four sons; when he identifies himself and reveals what has happened to him all four offer him their own merit. He refuses, but then Mādhavī herself appears and tells him who they are. He accepts their merit, together with half of hers. Gālava arrives and offers him an eighth of his ascetic power.

[120] Yayāti's celestial form is renewed. Now Vasumanas bestows on him

¹ Chapters 118–21 tell a variant version of the story found at 1.81–8.

the fruit of his generosity, forbearance and sacrificial rectitude. Pratardana gives him his martial glory; Śibi gives the rewards of his truthfulness, and Aṣṭaka those of his sacrifices. Yayāti rises from the earth, [121] and returns to heaven, where he is welcomed with joy. He asks what led to his earlier fall; Brahmā answers that it was his pride. — Nārada concludes by warning Duryodhana against pride and advising him to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[122] 'Blessed Nārada,' said Dhṛtarāṣṭra, 'it is exactly as you say, and I too share your desire, but I am powerless!'

Then, heir of Bharata, he addressed Kṛṣṇa: 'Keśava, you have spoken to me of heavenly and earthly considerations, and of questions of *dharma* and justice. But I do not have freedom of action, son. What is being done is not pleasing to me, so, strong-armed Kṛṣṇa, highest lord, do please strive to win over my foolish and undisciplined Duryodhana! This would be the greatest act of friendship on your part, O stirrer of men.'

So Kṛṣṇa, expert in *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, turned to the resentful Duryodhana and spoke sweetly to him. 'Duryodhana, truest of the Kurus, hear what I have to say: it is particularly apposite for you and your followers. You are wise and well born, rich in Vedic learning and virtuous deeds, and excelling in every good quality: you should act well in this matter. The course you are considering, son, is one that would be pursued by the wicked and low-born, the cruel and shameless. In this world we see that the way of the virtuous is consistent with *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, bull-like heir of Bharata, 10 while that of the wicked runs contrary to both; yet more than once we have seen you take this contrary path. *Adharma* such as this, and the consequences it brings, are terrible and will cause great loss of life. Many times, heir of Bharata, infamous acts have been done at your instigation. It is by shunning this harmful course that you will achieve the greatest good for yourself; you will also, O afflicter of your enemies, free yourself from the wicked and infamous deeds of your brothers, servants and friends.'

'Tiger-like hero, bull-like heir of Bharata, the Pāṇḍavas are wise,

brave, resolute, self-possessed and learned in the Veda: make peace with them! This would be beneficial, lord of the peoples, and it would be pleasing to wise Dhṛtarāṣṭra, grandfather Bhīṣma, Drona, sagacious Vidura, Kṛpa, Somadatta, wise Bāhlika, Aśvathāman, Vikarṇa and Samjaya, as well as to most of your kinsmen and friends, O afflicter of your enemies. What is more, son, the safety of the entire world resides in peace.

15 'My son, you are modest and well born, learned and devoid of cruelty; abide by the instruction of your father and mother, bull-like heir of Bharata, for they say that the best course is what a father instructs. When utter disaster strikes, everyone remembers his father's instruction. Reconciliation with the Pāṇḍavas is what your father wishes, and his ministers agree with him; best of Kurus, let his wish be yours also.

20 'When a man hears his friends' counsel but does not act upon it, its consequence is to burn him as though he had eaten a snake-gourd. If he procrastinates, and fails through folly to act on excellent advice, his undertakings come to nothing and he suffers remorse; but if he acts on excellent advice as soon as he receives it, giving up his own earlier opinion, he thrives happily in this world. The contrary man, who refuses to accept what is said by those who wish him well, and heeds only contrary advice, falls into the power of his enemies. When anyone rejects the opinion of the virtuous and instead adopts that of the wicked, his friends soon find themselves lamenting the calamity that has overtaken him. He who dismisses his best counsellors in favour of inferior ones meets with terrible disaster from which there is no rescue; if anyone consorts with wicked people, behaving wrongly and never listening to his friends, favouring strangers and despising his own folk, the very earth curses that man, heir of Bharata.

25 'But you have quarrelled with the heroic Pāṇḍavas, and now you seek the help of others who, bull-like hero, are boorish, incapable fools. What man on earth but you would reject his kin, mighty Indra-like chariot-fighters all, in hopes of help from others? From birth you have always abused Kuntī's sons, and yet the Pāṇḍavas have never shown you anger, for they abide by *dharma*; wronged from birth, my strong-armed son, Pāṇḍu's sons of great renown have none the less acted well towards

you. And you too should act in just the same way, bull-like heir of Bharata, towards your own leading kinsmen: do not fall prey to anger.

'The wise link their undertakings to the three aims of human life.¹ But if the three aims cannot be achieved together, men follow *dharma* and the proper making of wealth; and if all three are separated out, the wise man follows *dharma* and the middling man the proper making of wealth, while the fool makes the worst choice and follows pleasure. If, through sensuality and greed, a man abandons *dharma* to seek pleasure and wealth through improper means, that man perishes; anyone seeking pleasure and wealth should also practise *dharma* from the outset, for neither wealth nor pleasure is ever found away from *dharma*. Indeed, lord of the peoples, they say that *dharma* is the one means to achieve the three aims, because he who uses that means to seek them prospers as swiftly as fire in a dry thicket. But you, my son, are using improper means to seek sovereignty, mighty, glorious and renowned amongst all kings; and a man who treats wrongfully those who act well towards him cuts himself down as one cuts down a forest with an axe, O king. Heir of Bharata, one should not vex anyone in the three worlds who is ready to give up his life – not even a rather common person, so how much less those bull-like sons of Pāṇḍu! But the man in thrall to anger loses his judgement, for everything that grows great is cut back; see the proof here, heir of Bharata!

'Alliance with the Pāṇḍavas will be better for you than alliance with wicked folk, my son, for if you establish friendship with them, you will achieve all your desires. At present, truest of kings, you enjoy the earth that Pāṇḍu's sons have conquered, and yet you turn your back on the Pāṇḍavas themselves and seek help elsewhere. You hope to prosper by granting power to Duḥśāsana, Durviṣaha,² Karṇa and Śakuni son of Subala; but these are not your equals in knowledge, *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, nor do they equal the Pāṇḍavas in valour, heir of Bharata. Indeed, you and all these kings together are incapable of looking at furious Bhīma's face in battle. And this whole princely force that stands close by, son – Bhīṣma, Drona, Karṇa and Kṛpa,

Somadatta's son Bhūriśravas, Aśvathāman and Jayadratha – all of these together could not fight against wealth-winner Arjuna, for, once roused to anger, Arjuna cannot be defeated even by all the gods and demons, Gandharvas and men. Do not set your heart on war!

50 'Show me a single man in this whole princely force who would go home safe and sound after meeting Arjuna in battle – what will you gain by destroying all these people, bull-like heir of Bharata? And let me show you the one man whom you must defeat to gain victory, the one who in Khāṇḍavaprastha defeated gods, Gandharvas, Yaksas, demons and serpents;¹ what mortal could fight him? You know, too, of the great and marvellous battle between one and many at the city of Virāṭa;² that in itself is sufficient demonstration! Arjuna, the mighty hero whom you hope to defeat in this battle, is unconquerable, unassailable, victorious, invincible! And who, including Indra himself, could challenge Kuntī's son when he advances against him with me for his second? The man who could defeat Arjuna in battle would be able to lift the earth with his two arms, to burn all these creatures with the fire of his anger, to hurl the very gods down from heaven!

55 'Behold your sons, your brothers, your family members and kinsmen: let them not perish on your account, O truest heir of Bharata! Let the Kauravas survive, let the lineage not come to an end; do not become known as the infamous destroyer of the line, lord of men! The mighty Pāṇḍava chariot-fighters will install you yourself as prince regent and your father King Dhṛtarāṣṭra as sovereign. Do not despise the fortune that is ready to come to you, my son: if you give the Pāṇḍavas their half, you will attain great fortune. Make peace with the Pāṇḍavas; follow your friends' advice; if you establish friendship with them as your allies, you will enjoy long prosperity!'

60 [123] Next Bhīṣma son of Śaṅtanu, who had listened to the words of Kṛṣṇa Keśava, addressed the resentful Duryodhana, O bull-like heir of Bharata. 'Kṛṣṇa has spoken to you from his desire for peace between friends. Reflect on what he has said, son: do not fall prey to anger. If you do not do as the noble Keśava says, you will never achieve good

¹ *Dharma*, the proper making of wealth, and pleasure: see 1.56.16 and note.

² One of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons.

¹ See 1.214 ff.

² See 4.48–62.

fortune or happiness or prosperity. The strong-armed hero has told you, my son, of the making of wealth in accordance with *dharma*. Pursue that goal; do not destroy all these creatures, O king! Amongst all kings the fortune of this Bhārata lineage blazes the brightest, and yet you are going to destroy it through your wickedness while Dhṛtarāṣṭra still lives! Rejecting in your malice the truthful and beneficial words of Keśava, your father and wise Vidura, O best heir of Bharata, you will deprive of life yourself, your ministers, your sons, your cattle, your kinsmen and your friends. Do not destroy the line! Do not take the wicked path of the base and evil-minded! Do not hand your aged parents over to grief!

In thrall to anger, Duryodhana exhaled deeply again and again. Now 10 Drona addressed these words to him. 'Keśava has told you, my son, of *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, and so has Bhīṣma son of Śamtanu; approve what they say, lord of men! Both men are wise and intelligent, self-controlled and learned in the Veda; both wish you well. What they have said is to your benefit, so accept it, afflicter of your enemies! Have the great wisdom to follow the advice of Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma, and not to act on that of fools. These men who are urging you on never act in your interest; they will tie the hostility of others round your neck in battle. Do not slay all the Kurus, and all your own sons and brothers! You should know that any force containing Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva 15 and Arjuna is invincible. Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma are your friends, son, and the words they have said to you here are the truth. If you do not accept them, you will regret it later, heir of Bharata! Arjuna is even greater than Rāma Jāmadagnya has said,¹ and not even the gods could resist Kṛṣṇa son of Devakī. But, bull-like hero, what is the use of speaking to you here of happiness and welfare? You have heard it all: now do as you wish, for I cannot say anything further to you, truest heir of Bharata.'

When Drona had finished speaking, Vidura the chamberlain fixed his eyes upon Dhṛtarāṣṭra's resentful son Duryodhana and said, 'Duryodhana, bull-like heir of Bharata, I do not grieve for you. But I do 20 grieve for these two elders, Gāndhārī and your father, who will live unprotected with you, an enemy, for their protector. When their friends and counsellors lie slain they will be as helpless as birds whose wings

¹ See 5.94.

have been cut off, and they will travel this earth as beggars, lamenting that they had for their son such a wicked, evil destroyer of his line!'

Now King Dhṛtarāṣṭra addressed Duryodhana as he sat with his brothers, surrounded by kings. 'Duryodhana, heed the words of noble Kṛṣṇa and accept them, for they are entirely well-meant and offer you security for all time. With Kṛṣṇa here for our tireless ally we shall achieve our most dearly held aims amongst all other kings! In full accord with Keśava, my son, approach Yudhiṣṭhīra and bring about total prosperity and welfare for the Bhāratas! Vāsudeva is your auspicious river-crossing, son; use him to reach the holy confluence. I think the moment has arrived: Duryodhana, do not let it pass! If you spurn Keśava when he seeks peace and argues your cause, there is no way for you to avoid overwhelming defeat.'

[124] When Bhīṣma and Drona had heard what Dhṛtarāṣṭra had to say, they spoke in his support to the disobedient Duryodhana. 'Until Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna don armour, until the bow Gāndīva stirs into motion, until Dhaumya¹ offers up this enemy force into the fire of the Pāṇḍava army, until the mighty Bowman, modest Yudhiṣṭhīra, gazes in fury at your army – till then let slaughter pause! Until we see the mighty Bowman, Kuntī's son Bhīma, stationed among his troops – till then let slaughter pause! Until he delights the soldiery with his manoeuvres, until he severs the heads of elephant-fighters in battle with his hero-slaying club as though they were the fruits of a tree in the season of ripeness – till then let slaughter pause! Until those experts in arms Nakula, Sahadeva, Prṣṭa's heir Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Virāṭa, Śikhaṇḍī and the son of Śiśupāla arm themselves and shoot so rapidly that they overrun us like crocodiles overrunning the great ocean – till then let slaughter pause! Until fierce vulture-feathered shafts fall upon the delicate bodies of kings – till then let slaughter pause! Until great iron arrows, shot swiftly by far-shooting expert bowmen of note, strike our warriors' breasts, smeared though they are with sandal and aloe, adorned though they are with pearl necklaces and medallions – till then let slaughter pause!'

'Let Yudhiṣṭhīra lord of *dharma* hold you with both arms as you bow your head in greeting; in token of peace, let the elephant-like king, so

¹ The Pāṇḍavas' household priest.