

The Mahabharata

Of

Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa

BOOK 17

Mahaprasthanika-parva

Translated into English Prose from the Original Sanskrit Text

By

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1

Om! Having bowed down unto Narayana, and to Nara, the foremost of men, as also to the goddess Sarasvati, should the word “Jaya” be uttered.

Janamejaya said: “Having heard of that encounter with iron bolts between the heroes of the Vrishni and the Andhaka races, and having been informed also of Krishnas ascension to Heaven, what did the Pandavas do?”

Vaishampayana said: “Having heard the particulars of the great slaughter of the Vrishnis, the Kaurava king set his heart on leaving the world. He addressed Arjuna, saying, O thou of great intelligence, it is Time that cooks every creature (in his cauldron). I think that what has happened is due to the cords of Time (with which he binds us all). It behoveth thee also to see it.

“Thus addressed by his brother, the son of Kunti only repeated the word Time, Time! And fully endorsed the view of his eldest brother gifted with great intelligence. Ascertaining the resolution of Arjuna, Bhimasena and the twins fully endorsed the words that Arjuna had said. Resolved to retire from the world for earning merit, they brought Yuyutsu before them. Yudhishtira made over the kingdom to the son of his uncle by his Vaisya wife. Installing Parikshit also on their throne, as king, the eldest brother of the Pandavas, filled with sorrow, addressed Subhadra, saying, This son of thy son will be the king of the Kurus. The survivor of the Yadus, Vajra, has been made a king. Parikshit will rule in Hastinapura, while the Yadava prince, Vajra, will rule in Shakraprastha.

He should be protected by thee. Never set thy heart on unrighteousness.

“Having said these words, king Yudhishtira the just, along with his brothers, promptly offered oblations of water unto Vasudeva of great intelligence, as also unto his old maternal uncle and Rama and others. He then duly performed the Sraddhas of all those deceased kinsmen of his.

The king, in honour of Hari and naming him repeatedly, fed the Island-born Vyasa, and Narada, and

Markandeya possessed of wealth of penances, and Yajnavalkya of Bharadwajas race, with many delicious viands. In honour of Krishna, he also gave away many jewels and gems, and robes and clothes, and villages, and horses and cars, and female slaves by hundreds and thousands unto foremost of Brahmanas. Summoning the citizens. Kripa was installed as the preceptor and Parikshit was made over to him as his disciple, O chief of Bharatas race.

“Then Yudhishtira once more summoned all his subjects. The royal sage informed them of his intentions. The citizens and the inhabitants of the provinces, hearing the kings words, became filled with anxiety and disapproved of them. This should never be done, said they unto the king.

The monarch, well versed with the changes brought about by time, did not listen to their counsels. Possessed of righteous soul, he persuaded the people to sanction his views. He then set his heart on leaving the world.

His brothers also formed the same resolution. Then Dharmas son, Yudhishtira, the king of the Kurus, casting off his ornaments, wore barks of trees. Bhima and Arjuna and the twins, and Draupadi also of great fame, similarly clad themselves in bark of trees, O king. Having caused the preliminary rites of religion, O chief of Bharatas race, which were to bless them in the accomplishment of their design, those foremost of men cast off their sacred fires into the water. The ladies, beholding the princes in that guise, wept aloud. They seemed to look as they had looked in days before, when with Draupadi forming the sixth in number they set out from the capital after their defeat at dice. The brothers, however, were all very cheerful at the prospect of retirement.

Ascertaining the intentions of Yudhishtira and seeing the destruction of the Vrishnis, no other course of action could please them then.

“The five brothers, with Draupadi forming the sixth, and a dog forming the seventh, set out on their journey. Indeed, even thus did king Yudhishtira depart, himself the head of a party of seven, from the city named after the elephant. The citizen and the ladies of the royal household followed them for some distance. None of them, however, could venture to address the king for persuading him to give up his intention.

The denizens of the city then returned; Kripa and others stood around Yuyutsu as their centre. Ulupi, the daughter of the Naga chief, O thou of Kuntis race, entered the waters of Ganga. The princess Chitrangada set out for the capital of Manipura. The other ladies who were the grandmothers of Parikshit centered around him. Meanwhile the high-souled Pandavas, O thou of Kurus race, and Draupadi of great fame, having observed the preliminary fast, set out with their faces towards the east.

Setting themselves on Yoga, those high-souled ones, resolved to observe the religion of Renunciation, traversed through various countries and reached diverse rivers and seas. Yudhishtira, proceeded first. Behind him was Bhima; next walked Arjuna; after him were the twins in the order of their birth; behind them all, O foremost one of Bharatas race, proceeded Draupadi, that first of women, possessed of great beauty, of dark complexion, and endued with eyes resembling lotus petals. While the Pandavas set out for the forest, a dog followed them.

“Proceeding on, those heroes reached the sea of red waters. Dhananjaya had not cast off his celestial bow Gandiva, nor his couple of inexhaustible quivers, actuated, O king, by the cupidity that attaches one to things of great value. The Pandavas there beheld the deity of fire standing before them like a hill. Closing their way, the god stood there in his embodied form. The deity of seven flames then addressed the Pandavas, saying, Ye heroic sons of Pandu, know me for the deity of fire.

O mighty-armed Yudhishtira, O Bhimasena that art a scorcher of foes, O Arjuna, and ye twins of great courage, listen to what I say! Ye foremost ones of Kurus race, I am the god of fire. The forest of Khandava was burnt by me, through the puissance of Arjuna and of Narayana himself. Let your brother

Phalguna proceed to the woods after casting off Gandiva, that high weapon. He has no longer any need of it. That precious discus, which was with the high-souled Krishna, has disappeared (from the world).

When the time again comes, it will come back into his hands. This foremost of bows, Gandiva, was procured by me from Varuna for the use of Partha. Let it be made over to Varuna himself.

“At this, all the brothers urged Dhananjaya to do what the deity said. He then threw into the waters (of the sea) both the bow and the couple of inexhaustible quivers. After this, O chief of Bharatas race, the god of the fire disappeared then and there. The heroic sons of Pandu next proceeded with their faces turned towards the south. Then, by the northern coast of the salt sea, those princes of Bharatas race proceeded to the south-west. Turning next towards the west, they beheld the city of Dwaraka covered by the ocean. Turning next to the north, those foremost ones proceeded on. Observant of Yoga, they were desirous of making a round of the whole Earth.”

2

Vaishampayana said: “Those princes of restrained souls and devoted to Yoga, proceeding to the north, beheld Himavat, that very large mountain.

Crossing the Himavat, they beheld a vast desert of sand. They then saw the mighty mountain Meru, the foremost of all high-peaked mountains. As those mighty ones were proceeding quickly, all rapt in Yoga, Yajnaseni, falling off from Yoga, dropped down on the Earth. Beholding her fallen down, Bhimasena of great strength addressed king Yudhishtira the just, saying, O scorcher of foes, this princess never did any sinful act. Tell us what the cause is for which Krishna has fallen down on the Earth!

“Yudhishtira said: O best of men, though we were all equal unto her she had great partiality for Dhananjaya. She obtains the fruit of that conduct today, O best of men.”

Vaishampayana continued: “Having said this, that foremost one of Bharatas race proceeded on. Of righteous soul, that foremost of men, endued with great intelligence, went on, with mind intent on itself. Then Sahadeva of great learning fell down on the Earth. Beholding him drop down, Bhima addressed the king, saying, He who with great humility used to serve us all, alas, why is that son of Madravati fallen down on the Earth?

“Yudhishtira said, He never thought anybody his equal in wisdom. It is for that fault that this prince has fallen down.

Vaishampayana continued: “Having said this, the king proceeded, leaving Sahadeva there. Indeed, Kuntis son Yudhishtira went on, with his brothers and with the dog. Beholding both Krishna and the Pandava Sahadeva fallen down, the brave Nakula, whose love for kinsmen was very great, fell down himself. Upon the falling down of the heroic Nakula of great personal beauty, Bhima once more addressed the king, saying, This brother of ours who was endued with righteousness without incompleteness, and who always obeyed our behests, this Nakula who was unrivalled for beauty, has fallen down.

“Thus addressed by Bhimasena, Yudhishtira, said, with respect to Nakula, these words: He was of righteous soul and the foremost of all persons endued with intelligence. He, however, thought that there was nobody that equalled him in beauty of person. Indeed, he regarded himself as superior to all in that respect. It is for this that Nakula has fallen down. Know this, O Vrikodara. What has been ordained for a person, O hero, must have to be endured by him.

“Beholding Nakula and the others fall down, Pandus son Arjuna of white steeds, that slayer of hostile heroes, fell down in great grief of heart.

When that foremost of men, who was endued with the energy of Shakra, had fallen down, indeed, when that invincible hero was on the point of death, Bhima said unto the king, I do not recollect any untruth uttered by this high-souled one. Indeed, not even in jest did he say anything false. What then is that for whose evil consequence this one has fallen down on the Earth?

“Yudhishtira said, Arjuna had said that he would consume all our foes in a single day. Proud of his heroism, he did not, however, accomplish what he had said. Hence has he fallen down. This Phalguna disregarded all wielders of bows. One desirous of prosperity should never indulge in such sentiments.”

Vaishampayana continued: “Having said so, the king proceeded on. Then Bhima fell down. Having fallen down, Bhima addressed king Yudhishtira the just, saying, O king, behold, I who am thy darling have fallen down.

For what reason have I dropped down? Tell me if thou knowest it.

“Yudhishtira said, Thou wert a great eater, and thou didst use to boast of thy strength. Thou never didst attend, O Bhima, to the wants of others while eating. It is for that, O Bhima, that thou hast fallen down.

“Having said these words, the mighty-armed Yudhishtira proceeded on, without looking back. He had only one companion, the dog of which I have repeatedly spoken to thee, that followed him now.

3

Vaishampayana said: “Then Shakra, causing the firmament and the Earth to be filled by a loud sound, came to the son of Pritha on a car and asked him to ascend it. Beholding his brothers fallen on the Earth, king Yudhishtira the just said unto that deity of a 1,000 eyes these words: My brothers have all dropped down here. They must go with me. Without them by me I do not wish to go to Heaven, O lord of all the deities. The delicate princess (Draupadi) deserving of every comfort, O Purandara, should go with us. It behoveth thee to permit this.

“Shakra said, Thou shalt behold thy brothers in Heaven. They have reached it before thee. Indeed, thou shalt see all of them there, with Krishna.

Do not yield to grief, O chief of the Bharatas. Having cast off their human bodies they have gone there, O chief of Bharatas race. As regards thee, it is ordained that thou shalt go thither in this very body of thine.

“Yudhishtira said, This dog, O lord of the Past and the Present, is exceedingly devoted to me. He should go with me. My heart is full of compassion for him.

“Shakra said, Immortality and a condition equal to mine, O king, prosperity extending in all directions, and high success, and all the felicities of Heaven, thou hast won today. Do thou cast off this dog. In this there will be no cruelty.

“Yudhishtira said, O thou of a 1,000 eyes. O thou that art of righteous behaviour, it is exceedingly difficult for one that is of righteous behaviour to perpetrate an act that is unrighteous. I do not desire that union with prosperity for which I shall have to cast off one that is devoted to me.

“Indra said, There is no place in Heaven for persons with dogs. Besides, the (deities called) Krodhavasas take away all the merits of such persons. Reflecting on this, act, O king Yudhishtira the just. Do thou abandon this dog. There is no cruelty in this.

“Yudhishtira said, It has been said that the abandonment of one that is devoted is infinitely sinful. It is equal to the sin that one incurs by slaying a Brahmana. Hence, O great Indra, I shall not abandon this dog today from desire of my happiness. Even this is my vow steadily pursued, that I never give up a person that is terrified, nor one that is devoted to me, nor one that seeks my protection, saying that he is

destitute, nor one that is afflicted, nor one that has come to me, nor one that is weak in protecting oneself, nor one that is solicitous of life. I shall never give up such a one till my own life is at an end.

“Indra said, Whatever gifts, or sacrifices spread out, or libations poured on the sacred fire, are seen by a dog, are taken away by the Krodhavasas. Do thou, therefore, abandon this dog. By abandoning this dog thou wilt attain to the region of the deities. Having abandoned thy brothers and Krishna, thou hast, O hero, acquired a region of felicity by thy own deeds. Why art thou so stupefied? Thou hast renounced everything.

Why then dost thou not renounce this dog? “Yudhishtira said, This is well known in all the worlds that there is neither friendship nor enmity with those that are dead. When my brothers and Krishna died, I was unable to revive them. Hence it was that I abandoned them. I did not, however, abandon them as long as they were alive. To frighten one that has sought protection, the slaying of a woman, the theft of what belongs to a Brahmana, and injuring a friend, each of these four, O Shakra, is I think equal to the abandonment of one that is devoted.”

Vaishampayana continued: “Hearing these words of king Yudhishtira the just, (the dog became transformed into) the deity of Righteousness, who, well pleased, said these words unto him in a sweet voice fraught with praise.

“Dharma said: Thou art well born, O king of kings, and possessed of the intelligence and the good conduct of Pandu. Thou hast compassion for all creatures, O Bharata, of which this is a bright example. Formerly, O son, thou wert once examined by me in the woods of Dwaita, where thy brothers of great prowess met with (an appearance of) death. Disregarding both thy brothers Bhima and Arjuna, thou didst wish for the revival of Nakula from thy desire of doing good to thy (step-) mother. On the present occasion, thinking the dog to be devoted to thee, thou hast renounced the very car of the celestials instead of renouncing him. Hence. O king, there is no one in Heaven that is equal to thee. Hence, O Bharata, regions of inexhaustible felicity are thine. Thou hast won them, O chief of the Bharatas, and thine is a celestial and high goal.”

Vaishampayana continued: “Then Dharma, and Shakra, and the Maruts, and the Ashvinis, and other deities, and the celestial Rishis, causing Yudhishtira to ascend on a car, proceeded to Heaven. Those beings crowned with success and capable of going everywhere at will, rode their respective cars. King Yudhishtira, that perpetuator of Kurus race, riding on that car, ascended quickly, causing the entire welkin to blaze with his effulgence. Then Narada, that foremost of all speakers, endued with penances, and conversant with all the worlds, from amidst that concourse of deities, said these words: All those royal sages that are here have their achievements transcended by those of Yudhishtira.

Covering all the worlds by his fame and splendour and by his wealth of conduct, he has attained to Heaven in his own (human) body. None else than the son of Pandu has been heard to achieve this.

“Hearing these words of Narada, the righteous-souled king, saluting the deities and all the royal sages there present, said, Happy or miserable, whatever the region be that is now my brothers, I desire to proceed to. I do not wish to go anywhere else.

“Hearing this speech of the king, the chief of the deities, Purandara, said these words fraught with noble sense: Do thou live in this place, O king of kings, which thou hast won by thy meritorious deeds. Why dost thou still cherish human affections? Thou hast attained to great success, the like of which no other man has ever been able to attain. Thy brothers, O delighter of the Kurus, have succeeded in winning regions of felicity. Human affections still touch thee. This is Heaven. Behold these celestial Rishis and Siddhas who have attained to the region of the gods.

“Gifted with great intelligence, Yudhishtira answered the chief of the deities once more, saying, O conqueror of Daityas, I venture not to dwell anywhere separated from them. I desire to go there, where

my brothers have gone. I wish to go there where that foremost of women, Draupadi, of ample proportions and darkish complexion and endued with great intelligence and righteous of conduct, has gone.”

The end of Mahaprasthanika-parv