

**Mahābhārata**  
**As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati**

*This is the eighth part of the serial article, continuation from March 2024 newsletter.*

In the meantime the snakes began biting Bhima. As each snake bit him, Bhima became a little more conscious, a little more conscious, a little more conscious - because the venom of the snakes proved to be an antidote for the *kālakūṭa* poison. This is how it is with a venom to a venom, a homeopathic treatment. Similar treats similar. With that venom this venom is gone. Soon Bhima was up. He thought, "Nobody is going to be able to tie up Bhima with creepers." The ties fell apart like a weak t-shirt. Then Bhima saw the snakes, and this made him angry. He killed all the snakes, one-by-one, except a few who escaped and made their way to *nāgaloka* down below. Remember, it is all story. It is a drama of *karma* really.

The more I look into this I find the whole Mahabharata is just an illustration of the force of *karma* – how one's own past *karma* catches up in this life. The first chapter, which we have omitted, tells why every character is born. Why Yudhisthira is Yudhisthira. Why Bhima is Bhima. Why Draupadi is Draupadi. Everything is one big drama of *karma*. Vyasa tells us of the force of *karma*, interacting with *dharma*, and through that, therefore, the implication - follow *dharma*. The other side of the coin of *dharma* is *karma*. Because it catches you up if you go against it. *Dharma* and *karma* go together. When, in the analytical books, Jaimini's *mīmāṃsāśāstra*, they analyzed the entire *karmakāṇḍa* of the Veda, the introductory *sūtra* is neither *athāto karmamīmāṃsā* nor *karmajijñāsā*. The *sūtra* is *athāto dharmajijñāsā*. Later also, in the Gita, Lord Krishna does not say, "*sarvakarmāṇi parityajya*," he says, "*sarvadharmān parityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja*." Because *dharma* is *karma*. But when you say *dharma*, what kind of *karma* should it be? That is the question. That is all included there, in Mahabharata, in Gita. Therefore *dharma*, the word, is used, and *adharma* will naturally come. Once you know the *dharma*, the *adharma* naturally becomes clear. The whole Mahabharata is the life of a family, no doubt history. But this historical account of certain events is poetically presented

to reveal *karma* and *dharma*.

The king of snakes was Vasuki. The snakes who had escaped Bhima excitedly told Vasuki, "Look at this guy Bhima. Again and again we bit him and all he did was wake up. Each bite just made him stronger. Then he was up, and he destroyed almost all of us. You should see this guy. He is somehow different." Vasuki went and saw for himself the majestic Bhima, and Vasuki as though fell in love with Bhima. Vasuki, king of snakes, asked his minister to bring jewelry and precious gifts for Bhima. The minister suggested that Bhima was not going to like jewelry and he was not going to wear earrings. The one thing the snakes had for Bhima was an elixir that would give strength to the one who drank it. They decided to give mighty Bhima the elixir that would make him grow even stronger. Vasuki had the elixir brought, and he told Bhima, "You take one cup and you will have one-thousand-elephant strength." It may have been an exaggeration, but definitely he would have elephant-like strength.

"Is that so," said Bhima, and he took one cup and he took another cup and he took another cup and he took another cup until he said he could not take any more and he could not talk any more. He took it all, to the neck. Then he fell down and fell asleep and slept for eight days after these seven cups of elixir. Elephantry, camelry, cavalry, infantry, and chariots – that's what composed the military. This elixir would prove very useful when Bhima dealt with military elephants. Elephants can make chutney out of anything, but Bhima could make chutney out of elephants. He was a person of enormous strength.

Eventually Bhima awoke and looked around and asked, "Where am I now?" Then he remembered where he was and where he was from. He went back to Hastinapura and told the story to his ecstatic family. Bhima said it was a good thing that had happened, because he had downed seven bowls of elixir. He described his new strength as that of seven thousand elephants plus the few he had before, and the elixir had tasted good too. Now Duryodhana and his gang were in for trouble. With so much strength, when you do something wrong, when your

*karma* is against you, it proves to be good for the other person, for your rival. Thus the poisoning had worked against Duryodhana, and he came to know that Bhima was alive. Duryodhana assumed there would be a problem, a response for what he had done to Bhima, but there was no response from the Pandavas. There was no problem because Vidura had told the Pandavas not to even talk about the incident. Vidura knew that challenging Duryodhana could become the basis for a major fight right now. He knew the Pandavas were not ready for a fight. He advised them to just keep silent, to treat it as though nothing had happened. Kunti saw the wisdom in this, so that is how the Pandavas behaved.

Duryodhana was all simmering fire inside, the fire of envy. He continued to think how he could get rid of the brothers. That was all he thought. It became an obsession, really. In the meantime, Bhishma pondered how to further educate his grandsons. They had learned everything that Sukha and Krpa had for them. Bhishma looked for a qualified person to teach the already-skilled boys the finer points of weaponry and dharmic warfare. This teacher would not be an ordinary person.

What happened was the Pandava boys and the Kaurava boys were playing with a ball, a solid ball made out of fibers and cloth. In the villages today they have these. String is tightly knitted over the surface of the ball, and that makes it very solid and hard. They played with the ball until it flew into a well and got stuck and the game had to stop.

A Brahmana was standing there watching what was happening. When he asked why they had stopped playing, the boys told him the ball had fallen into the well and sunk. He asked, "Why don't you get it out?"

The boys asked, "How can we get it out?"

"Don't you have bow and arrows?" asked the Brahmana. These are all princes, you know. "Can't you use your bows?"

"How do you get a ball out of deep water with an arrow?" they wondered.

*To be continued...*