

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

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Transcribed from eighty-eight classes
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ॐ नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरं चैव नरोत्तमं
देविं सरस्वतिं व्यासं ततो जयमुदीरयेत्

*om nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya naram caiva narottamam
devim sarasvatim vyāsam tato jayamudīrayet*

The epic Mahabharata is also called Jaya. May one begin one's study of Mahabharata. How may one begin this epic Jaya, which is a *kāvya*, poetry, and which is also *itihāsa*, historical? Having offered one's salutation, *namaskṛtya*, to Lord Narayana, may one begin.

Narayana itself, that word, the name, indicates the one who is the ultimate end of a *nara*. *Naraḥ* is a human being, the one who has the freedom to do - to do wrongly and to do rightly. He has that freedom. Therefore, the human being, or anyone who is like a human being, who enjoys that freedom, the individual *jīva*, in that incarnation, gathers new *karma*. Thereby the life of the *jīva*, through varieties of incarnations caused by different sets of *karma*, perpetuates his or her own life. *Jīva* is not a he or she, understand. The *jīva's* life gets perpetuated. Therefore the *jīva* is called *naraḥ*.

The human being, being the predominant being, as a result of the various incarnations responsible for the perpetuation of the *jīva*, by gathering *adṛṣṭa karma*, *pun̄yapāpa*, is called the *nara*. *Na rīyate iti naraḥ*: he is the one who never comes to an end. If the person, the *jīva*, comes to know about himself, comes to realize the self, then also *naraḥ*, *na rīyate*. Then he is *nitya*. So either way there is no end for this fellow. He is *narasya ayanam*, *narāyaṇam*. *Ayanam* means that which is the end, and it also is the path, the *gati*, the way, *uttarāyaṇa*. The Northern Solstice is also called *uttarāyaṇa*. Southern Solstice is called *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*. Both the path and the goal are called

ayanam. Thus there are different ways they give meaning for *narāyaṇa*. We can look into the etymological meaning of these words.

Nārāyaṇa is the Lord's name, the one who is the ultimate end of a human being. It is a very beautiful word. This Narayana himself *namaskṛtya*. Narayana in the Mahabharata is in the form of a *nara* and also as Krishna, *narottama*. *Narottama* means the most exalted of all men. Krishna was in the form of a human being. He was born and brought up with a lot of difficulties. He never really had anything to boast about in his life. Honestly. If he had been merely a human being, he might have had a lot of core issues. Core issues here means he was deprived of his mother and father. He grew up in a cowherd village, and there were all kinds of problems – he was not an ordinary boy. But he was an extraordinary person – therefore no core issues. Understand, he was an *avatāra*. There will be more about this later; I will definitely talk about the meaning of *avatāra*.

This *narottama*, *śreṣṭha*, the one who is most exalted, walked like any human being, like any mortal, but was at the same time different. Lord Narayana himself, in the form of Krishna, is presented in the Mahabharata by the author Vyasa. Narayana is called by saying *naranārāyaṇa*. When you do *namaskāra* to Narayana you do it to all, but you also do it particularly to Narayana who is in the form of blessing, in the form of Krishna. Then, again, to *naraḥ*, to Narayana in the form of Arjuna. Arjuna and Krishna go together. They achieve a lot of things together. The combination is very important because the *nara*, Arjuna, is taught by the Lord Narayana that the *narottama*, the Lord, is not separate from me. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says, "The one who knows me is non-separate from me." All the *naras* have to relate to *narottama* and then to discover the identity, and that is the topic of the Vedic teaching. *Nara narottama* is the topic here. Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita says to Arjuna, "Hey, Arjuna, know that I am the *kṣetrajña* in all the *kṣetra*." The physical body and the entire field of objects, anything you objectify, can be taken as *kṣetra*. That one who knows the *kṣetra*, who is conscious of the *kṣetra*, is called the self, the *ātmā*, the *kṣetrajña*.

This is the setup. Narayana says, "The one who knows this body is called *kṣetrajña*, the *jīva* who is a *naraḥ*." And who is he? *Narottama*. "Hey, Bharata, Arju-

na, understand that the *kṣetrajñā* is not separate from me. He is in fact me. *Kṣetrajñāṁ mām viddhi*; Understand the *kṣetrajñā* as myself." What a thing to say, that in the *kṣetrajñā* there is no difference because the *kṣetrajñā* is myself. There is only one *kṣetrajñā*. And all other, all *kṣetras*, are objects of knowledge. Consciousness is the nature of *ātmā*, and there is no second consciousness. That *ātmā*, *kṣetrajñā*, is non-separate and is only one.

This is the *aikyam*, but it does not mean joining together. This *aikyam* means all that is there is one, one without a second. This *aikyam* is what is revealed in the *śāstra*, in the Mahabharata, all over. Even in the beginning we will see Vyasa talks about this *aikyam* everywhere.

Until this *aikyam* is known and assimilated, life is a drama. All the dramatics you see in life - what drama life is. Until one knows, life is a big drama, a play. There are any number of people in the cast. The world becomes a stage, and we all play roles, and for each there is a confusion as to which is the person and which is the role. The role and the person are rolled into one. Therefore in the drama of life you will find all this: wars, battles, problems, egos, attachment, pride, humiliation and more. But then finally, "all's well that ends well" if through all this drama we are able to recognize that *nara* and *narottama* are one.

Arjuna is an accomplished *nara*, a man of *dharma* and of success. There are two types of dharmic people. Some are good because they are not courageous enough to be bad. These are basic, simple people. In common language and in fact, some of them may be called *sādhus*. They are incapable of committing a mistake: even if he wants to do it he cannot do it. They are cowards, too timid to cross the borders. Then there are those who do all those things. We are talking about one who is well-accomplished, successful in life, adored by people, whose entire Kuru family was adorned by the presence of Arjuna. Because of that one person the whole family gains a name. We will see that at one point in the epic, Duryodhana goes away thinking that he is better off having Krishna's fierce army on his side rather than having a non-combatant Krishna. Duryodhana thinks he has gotten the better of Arjuna by choosing the support of Krishna's army. There is a mischievous smile on Krishna's lips that only Krishna knew. With that smile,

of course, Krishna turned to Arjuna and said, "Hey, you had the chance to choose, to gain victory. Why did you choose me? You are the loser in this." Arjuna smiled, he laughed and said, "What are you saying? I know what I have got. All that I want is you. This is enough. I have chosen you because I know victory is mine. I know when you are there, where *nara* is there, where the *narottama* is there, victory will be there. I do not care whether I win or lose as long as you are with me. People through history will of course remember you, because you are Lord Krishna, but I will go along with you. People will remember me as well. In fact, as *pārtha*, as *nara*, and you as *pārthasārathi*, my charioteer, they will have to remember me first."

The Lord and the *jīva* have to be remembered here. Arjuna is to be remembered but for whom we would not have the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita is the pendant in the necklace of Mahabharata's one hundred thousand verses. It is in the middle of the Mahabharata. It is because of the Gita that *nara* and *narottama* is so important. Arjuna is remembered here as the symbol of the human being - a fine, versatile, accomplished human being committed to *dharma*. He had his own weaknesses, but he could not do wrong. He had achieved the level that a human being can accomplish in *saṁsāra*. Just as Arjuna could, everyone who can accomplish that level can thereafter accomplish everything. Therefore let Arjuna be remembered.

The author, Vyasa, is remembered and venerated. Sarasvati is the goddess of knowledge. That effulgent being is to be remembered here, because all that is in Mahabharata is nothing but Sarasvati. There is so much Sarasvati here: it is all knowledge. Whatever knowledge humanity has gathered over generations is all here. In the four Vedas all that is said is, in essence, here. The book itself is knowledge alone. Vyasa is the author, so named because he could expand everything. From one simple value he could create an expansive story. He could expand a topic, and he could also put it briefly. Look at his Brahmasutras: *athāto brahmajijñāsā*; he goes to the next line. *Janmādyasya yataḥ*; almost before you have heard it he goes to the next line: *śāstrayonitvāt. Tattusamanvayāt; ikṣaternāśabdām*; he has gone to the next *sūtra*. He can put everything together in a small *sutra*, or he can present the same thing in the vast tapestry of this epic. That is called mastery. He covers the whole subject matter of the Veda.

Shakespeare was praised for his mind once described as the platform of the world. He understood the human emotions so well. The world of the platform means the world of humanity, the human world. Shakespeare had a grasp of emotions. He had the gift of expressing emotions in his characters and in their words and in his plots and in his places. He was a great plot creator. Everything will be going along well and, in one turn, everything is a mess. That skill with making plots is something amazing. Ramayana too is all plots, all drama. Kaikeyi and Manthara, suddenly the coronation of Rama is stopped, and without that there would be no Ramayana. The drama is all in the story, in the plot, something changes; life has all those twists and turns. One fall and dramatically everything changes; that's the drama of life. It is all plot. Otherwise there is no *masala*. All difficult situations are *masala*. *Masala* is spices. Chop, chop, chop; what would it be without spices? All colorless.

That is Vyasa, the great plotmaker. Through all the plots he has to convey the message. Two things are there, one is *dharma*, the other is *mokṣa*, self-knowledge. *Dharma* and *jñānam*, and as in real life certain things are required – politics, logistics *et cetera*. Whatever in real life happens, that is presented in the verses, sometimes in an exaggerated fashion. That is how poetry is. It has to be exaggerated. In Indian movies there has to be a tree and this fellow has to go around and around it singing, while the girl is singing somewhere nearby in a pitch no human being can sing. In real life no one goes around a tree singing a song. But it has to be there, without that there is no Indian movie. Any Indian movie they make without this loses its shirt. There must be a little bit of exaggeration; they take a leaf from Mahabharata.

All the classical sentiments, humor, everything, is in the verses. All kinds of emotions you can see. Vyasa is the one who can expand. That is his name. Salutations unto him. After that alone one should begin this Jayam. There is some question as to whether Vyasa himself composed this beginning. Did he ask us to do *namaskāra* to him? It is not like that. Therefore this is an introduction to Mahabharata. It tells how this Mahabharata has come into this world. Vyasa wrote Mahabharata, but it is told by Vaishampayana to Janamejaya, who is conducting a major ritual, *yāga*. That is how it begins. Vaishampayana talked to Janamejaya. This great epic written by Vyasa is told by another person. You must remember that

setting for this part of it. It begins like this:

om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya

om namaḥ pitāmahāya

om namaḥ prajāpatebhyaḥ

om namaḥ kṛṣṇadvaipāyana

om namaḥ sarvaviḥnavināyakebhyaḥ

This perhaps came a little later in time. This all came from the palm leaves. You must remember when you are reading anything like this, anything ancient, it was all written on palm leaves. You must imagine how it has all come to us in this form. On palm leaves alone these were all printed. The fellow who is copying writes every stroke, and he wants to see it is all copied before the teacher has a heart attack. There are one hundred thousand verses. To make even one copy is not an ordinary undertaking. That was the only printing available. That is why if you give a book away it is gone for good. It will not come back to you. You give your daughter in marriage and she is gone. That's it. She has gone to that family and all its problems. If things go well, you do not hear anything. If things do not go well, you will of course hear every day. Money is like that too; given money does not come back either. You should never give your money to somebody to make money for you. Nobody is going to do that.

To be continued...

From the EDITOR's desk...

*Arsha Vidya Newsletter is regularly publishing various reports from Arsha Vidya related organisations. In order to encourage and accommodate these reports following points are suggested, in view of the fact that **Vedanta related articles** from Arsha Vidya Swamijis and Swaminijis are given prime importance.*

- ◇ *Reports should reach Editor (Ramachandran) avgnl2014@gmail.com well in advance preferably before 15th of the respective month.*
- ◇ *Reports, ideally, **should not exceed more than one page**. Accompanying photos, if any, will only be put in the wrapper pages (based on the availability of printing space).*
- ◇ *Camp reports feedback from participants, if any, also to be accommodated within one page report.*
- ◇ *Diacritical marks corresponding to Sanskrit terminology should be compatible to ITRANS transliteration scheme.*
- ◇ *Reports are to be given both in **word as well as in pdf format**.*