

7. A Good And Peaceful Death Is Coveted By All Saintly People

Do you know why you have been given your intelligence? It is not to be used for the purpose of accumulating wealth. Intelligence has been given to you so that you may realise that all that you see around is a very temporary and transient phenomenon.

Pavitratma Swarupas, Students! Boys and Girls,

Man is like a seed. As the seed sprouts and then becomes a plant, finally becoming a tree giving you fruit, so also man should grow and blossom and should put out flowers of peace and distribute those flowers to the rest of the world. Man has two aspects of his life. One relates to his livelihood and the other to the ultimate

objective of his own life. The former is the ability to get one's livelihood and relates very much to the material world whereas the latter relates to the spiritual world. But today man develops capacities in the former aspect to be able to eke out his livelihood but does not have the capacity to seek out the objective of his life. The spiritual world and the material day-to-day world cannot be two separate worlds. When we talk of the capacities to suit this world, we mean the capacity to acquire all the conveniences to give comfort to this body. What we do in this world, what we see around us, and what we do to keep our body healthy are all called the ability related to this world. If we want to describe this briefly, we can say that this is the capacity related to the external world.

There is another aspect which can be briefly described as the inner world. But unfortunately today, from the time that we get up to the time that we go to bed again, all our efforts are directed to accumulating the capacities relating to this external world. Whatever we do relates to our daily lives and what we see around us. However, it is not possible to think of the day-to-day world without thinking of the internal or spiritual world, just as we cannot develop external vision without the help of the inner vision. Religious texts of all categories have been teaching people how to promote

and how to develop this inner vision. Most religious texts have always been teaching methods and paths related to the spiritual world.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has not been making a distinction between the external and the inner vision and has been saying that both of them have to be studied together. This spiritual text has been teaching us that whether you stress on the external vision or the inner vision, the ultimate objective is the same. There is also a small story which has been given as an example for this. Let us take the case of a woman who carries a pot filled with water on her head. She will be talking and joking along with other women and is quite free as she walks along. Yet she takes great care of the pot of water on her head.

As in the above analogy, while we live in the normal world taking things lightly as they come, we will have to take great care of the spiritual aspects as well. We cannot forget them. Whatever work and task you may undertake, if you have your attention on divinity, then God will take care of you.

There is one more example for this. A mother will put the baby to sleep. After the baby is asleep, she will go to the first floor and will be attending to her work. All the while, her attention will be on the baby, and her

thought is always about when the baby will get up. Even if she is engaged in urgent and pressing work, her attention will be on the baby and as soon as she hears the cry of the baby, she will come running. She will not stop to consider in what *raga* (tune) and *tala* (tempo) the baby is crying. Just as the mother comes running from her work as soon as she hears the baby crying, so also, if man cries to the Lord from the depths of his heart, even if the Lord is busy, he will come out of his place and help the devotee. God does not ask what path this devotee is adopting or what bhajans are being sung by him, etc. But he will only look at the sincerity with which the devotee has cried out.

God is all-powerful and can melt even stony hearts, yet he will not undertake to do so. But man has the strength to correct his path by the *Purusharthas* (Goals of life—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*), and so God will expect that man should first set right his thoughts by his own efforts. In this context, man should not go on arguing about God's capacity but should examine his own capacity and use it to set things right. God behaves like a human being when he comes amidst them, understands the psychology of the behaviour, and investigates the manner in which he can change the minds and hearts of men.

In the battle of *Mahabharatha*, Bhishma was in a ferocious condition. During the first nine days of the war, Dussasana and Duryodhana went to Bhishma on one particular day and asked why they have been suffering defeat after defeat practically every day and had not seen victory even on one day. Bhishma realised that he was then in the service of the King and said, “Yes I understand your difficulty, I will bring you victory in the war tomorrow.” Dussasana then suggested to Bhishma that the objective should be to capture and kill the Pandavas rather than just to secure victory over them in the war.

In that context, Bhishma promised that before the sun rose the next day, he would kill the Pandavas. The Pandavas came to know of this and realised that the promise made by the grand old man would indeed be fulfilled by him. Anyway, the Pandavas had no alternative, and they were preparing themselves to be killed by the grand old man who brought them up. This news came to be known to *Droupadi* as well. She could not sleep or eat her food and she was terror-stricken.

The dark night had set in. In the whole drama, Krishna also had a part to play, and he was thinking of how to bring the *Purusharthas* to operate and change the minds of people. Bhishma realised that he had

made the promise in the excitement of the moment. He was fully aware of the greatness of the Pandavas and their qualities and was much agitated. He could not eat his food and was moving from one place to another. However, Krishna was divine and he knew what was happening on both sides, and he knew the difficulties on both sides.

Droupadi, anticipating the terrible future, came to Krishna, touched his feet and sat down. Then Krishna said, “Sister, do not get excited. Do what you can and I will do the rest.” Although this assurance was given, being a woman, she was very agitated. At midnight, when all were asleep, Krishna came to *Droupadi* and said, “Simply follow me and do not ask any questions.” It was dark and it was the battlefield. *Droupadi* did not want to be recognised and so she covered herself with a cloth.

In the battlefield, there were no mansions, and they were living in small improvised tents. However, the place where Bhishma was living was quite a big place. In the dead of night, Bhishma was wondering how he was going to fulfil the promise that he made and perform the act of killing the righteous and good-natured Pandavas, who were indeed very brave. He was anxiously moving about hither and thither. Krishna

noticed this opportunity when Bhishma was very excited and agitated, and he signalled to Droupadi that she should leave her shoes behind, as the shoes of wealthy women in those days made a great deal of noise and could be heard even from a long distance, and go and fall at Bhishma's feet. She was only following Krishna's orders. She left the shoes at one place, covered herself, and quickly ran inside and fell at Bhishma's feet and begged him to save her husbands' life.

Because of his inherent good qualities, Bhishma immediately reacted without a thought and blessed her by saying, "May you remain a *Sumangali* (married woman with her husband alive) for a long time!" To *Droupadi*, the assurance coming from Bhishma that for a long time she would be a *Sumangali* with living husbands was quite enough. Bhishma had made the promise that he would kill the Pandavas before the sun rose the next day and also assured that *Droupadi* would remain a *Sumangali* for a long time to come, and now it was for Bhishma to fulfil one or both of these promises.

At that moment, when Bhishma saw that the person whom he thus blessed was *Droupadi*, he was in utter confusion as a conflicting situation had risen. The conflict which troubled Bhishma was which of these promises was he going to fulfil. At that moment,

Bhishma asked her who gave her this plan of action, for she certainly could not have come alone, at the dead of night, with this grand plan.

At that time, Krishna, the master architect of the whole plan, came inside with a cloth bundle in his hands. Bhishma expressed his pleasure at seeing Krishna and said that this plan was drawn up by Krishna in order to save his devotees and that Krishna was the only person who could save even Bhishma from the conflicting situation. At this moment, he noticed the cloth bundle in Krishna's hands and asked what the bundle contained. When the bundle was opened, it was seen that it contained the shoes of *Droupadi*. In demonstrating his grace and love, God will be prepared, not only to help his devotees, but even to carry the shoes of his devotees if it became necessary. At this unparalleled grace shown by Krishna, *Droupadi's* eyes were filled with tears and she asked, "Is it not sufficient that you have been taking care of our lives? Is it not sufficient that you made a plan for my husbands to be spared instead of being killed the next day? Did you have to carry my shoes which have no value at all?"

Is Krishna doing all these things as God on earth? These are being done by him to show what one human being must do to another human being at a time of

need. Man alone can demonstrate the kind of relationship that should exist between man and man. So he was conducting himself like a human being. That *prema* is the very basis for one's own life has been demonstrated by Krishna.

Bhishma fully understood this *leela* of Krishna and came to the conclusion that whatever he might do, the Pandavas will not be subjected to any harm. But he did not make any attempt to get out of his promise, as he was a great adherent of truth. On the next day he went to the battlefield with all his determination to fulfil the promise that he had made. On that day, the battle was very fierce and the Pandava army ran helter-skelter, but because of the divine grace of Krishna, the Pandavas were able to save themselves. The evening came and Bhishma fell down. Krishna had to play all this drama to demonstrate that one's physical and mental strength are not very important, and it is the divine strength that was real strength.

The day when Bhishma fell down was the tenth day of the battle. From that day till the eighteenth day of the battle, Krishna was conducting various events of the battle, but Bhishma was lying on the bed of arrows which he made for himself. After the last day of the battle, the victorious Pandavas came to Bhishma. The

kind of battle that took place, at that time, was subject to its own rules and code of conduct in accordance with the times. The battle took place 3138 years before the advent of Christ. The war in which Bhishma took part was for nine days, and the period for which he was on the bed of arrows was fifty-eight days. These two together constitute a total of sixty-seven days. After this, the Pandavas along with *Droupadi* went to see Bhishma and had his *darshan*.

Lying on the bed of arrows, Bhishma showed great affection to the Pandavas and preached to them what has since come to be known as the *Shanthiparva*. In that context, while Bhishma was preaching the code of conduct relating to peace in the *Shanthiparva*, *Droupadi* had some thought in her mind; and she laughed loudly and attracted everyone's attention. The Pandavas thought this to be very inappropriate, and they did not like *Droupadi* laughing in this manner in the presence of the elders. Bhishma was all-knowing and he knew the thoughts that were passing in the minds of the Pandavas. In order that an appropriate explanation might be given to the Pandavas, Bhishma asked *Droupadi* to come closer to him. He blessed her and said that she would remain a *Sumangali* for long and went on to say that she would not do anything without good reason. He asked her to explain why she laughed so that her husbands might know the answer.

Droupadi addressed Bhishma in great reverence and humility and asked Bhishma, “At the time when I was humiliated in the court of Duryodhana, you never spoke of any code of conduct; and at the time when my husbands were banished into the forest for twelve years and were to live incognito for one year, you never preached any code of conduct. You are now teaching the *Shanthiparva* to the Pandavas who are the very embodiments of *dharma*. Why are you now teaching this to the people who do not need to be taught? This should have been taught to Duryodhana and his accomplices. Such a thought came to my mind and I laughed. Not only this, in the court that day Dharmaraja lost in the game of Dice and also lost when he placed himself as the stake. Then he offered me as the stake. It was then decided that the Pandavas were to go to the forest and I was humiliated. Was this *dharma*? You are an embodiment of *dharma* and right conduct. Do you think that on that day, after losing himself in the game, Dharmaraja had the right to bid me? I was married to five husbands, and in that context, belonged to all of them. If only one husband wanted to bid me, was that right? At that time, what had happened to all your professed adherence to right conduct.

Secondly, Dharmaraja offered me as a stake, after he lost himself in the wager. He had no right to do this.

On that day itself, I questioned whether Dharmaraja lost himself first and then offered me as a stake or whether he offered me as a stake first and then lost himself. You did not give me an answer then. What had happened to all your right conduct at that time? Today, when there is no need at all, you are preaching all this to the Pandavas. This, indeed, is a laughing matter and has induced laughter in me.”

While Bhishma was lingering between life and death, the fact that *Droupadi* was arguing so vehemently and asking inconvenient questions upset even Dharmaraja. Bhishma, however, laughed loudly and praised *Droupadi* for asking such questions and said that the answers to such questions would be of great importance to the coming *Kali* age and asked the Pandavas to calm down. Bhishma said, “For many years, I had been serving evil kings and sinners and had been living on the food that they had given me. Therefore, all the rights and *dharma* in me were submerged. As a result of the arrow that struck me from your husband’s hand, all the evil blood has flown out and now the *dharma* that had been submerged has come up; and I am preaching the need for good conduct.”

From this *Shanthiparva*, preached by Bhishma, we have to learn the lesson that if anyone promotes

himself with the help of money accumulated by bad and evil ways, then the good in him will be submerged by the bad blood in him. It is in this context that Krishna had taught that the pot in which you cook, the material which you use to cook, and the food itself should all be clean.

In this dialogue, Bhishma had taught to the world that there can be evil in the food that you take. From the food that we take, come the thoughts. From the thoughts that are generated in us comes the action. From our actions, will come our good and our bad. After giving the appropriate lessons to the Pandavas, Bhishma gave up his life.

The day before that was an auspicious day because on that day the sun commences his northward journey. That day is also called *Ratha Saptami*. The previous day to Bhishma's death, *Ratha Saptami*, was a sacred day; and on that day, all the Pandavas came near him and he performed the rituals to his forefathers. On the next day, he gave up his life. But at this time, according to our *panchangas* (almanacs) we think that Bhishma died on an *ekadasi* (eleventh day of the lunar fortnight) and we call it the *Bhishma Ekadasi*. Actually this is not correct. The day on which Bhishma died was an *Ashtami* (eighth day), and the prevailing star was Rohini. Krishna was also born in the star on Rohini. Thus, Bhishma

died on a day similar to the day on which Krishna was born.

Also, that was the beginning of a very auspicious period in the year. They regarded that day to be very auspicious for a death. Bhishma had waited for fifty-eight days in order that the sun might start its northward journey. He was thinking of the Lord on all those days and was waiting for an appropriate time to die. In this aspect, Bhishma taught to the world that the time of death was more important than the time of birth. More than being born on an auspicious day, it is to be coveted that one dies on an auspicious day and time as well. If one dies like that, rebirth will be a good one.

Today, we all want a good birth, but we are not seeking a good death. The inner meaning of a good birth is to enable one to have a good death. We must recognise the truth that all the *sadhana* that we do is not for the sake of a pleasurable life but for a good and peaceful death. All the great saints and *yogis* direct all their prayers towards aspiring for an easy and good death, and they pray that they be enabled to merge into the Lord easily. Our attempts should be directed to the objective of ultimately merging with divinity. This is the sacred lesson that is contained in the *Shanthiparva*, and it is my hope that you understand this and put it into practice.